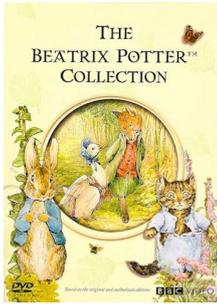


Exploring the English Lake District in the Footsteps of Beatrix Potter

Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) was an English author, illustrator, mycologist and natural historian. She is known worldwide for her delightful series of children's stories with famous anthropomorphic characters such as: Peter Rabbit, Squirrel Nutkin, Jemima Puddle Duck, Benjamin Bunny, Mr. Tod, Mrs. Tiggy Winkle and Jeremy Fisher – all with a distinct personality and celebrating the British landscape and rural lifestyle.



Potter's 23 small format books with quality illustrations continue to sell globally in 35 languages with the stories being retold in song, film, ballet and animation.

Beatrix Potter is intimately associated with the Lake District, the area that not only inspired her to write many of her tales beloved by generations, but also the area she made her home, farmed and sought to preserve. In the Lake District she is just as well-known as a well-respected farmer and conservationist who did much to preserve the unspoilt natural beauty and traditional farming. In the Lake District, several interesting tours cover the cottages and farms associated with the famous tales, walks and countryside life of Beatrix Potter.

The area surrounding the 1840's Wray Castle near Lake Windermere is where Beatrix Potter enjoyed several school holidays since 1892 as a child from London making many interesting sketches of the landscape. In 1893, the family holidayed at Lingholm returning for the next twenty summers. Beatrix loved Derwentwater and explored Lingholm watched squirrels in the woods and rabbits in the vegetable gardens of the big home.

However, it is Hilltop, her farmhouse and home in village of Sawrey near Ambleside, which is associated most with Beatrix Potter and till date the most popular. Hilltop was purchased in 1905, with income from the sale of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902). Beatrix loved the landscape and visited the farm often to discuss its set-up with farm manager John Cannon. The traditional cottage garden here is easily recognised as the garden in the *Tale of Tom Kitten*. Many other stories were based in and around Hilltop.



Before her death, Beatrix asked for Hilltop to be kept as a museum to her (it was opened to visitors in 1946). Almost a time capsule of her amazing life, Hilltop has several of her favourite possessions like furniture, original artwork and furnishings. Every room contains a reference to a picture in a 'tale'. Visit the farm, explore the English cottage garden – a haphazard mix of flowers, herbs, fruit and vegetables or browse through the Beatrix Potter gifts on sale.

Hilltop is presently owned by the National Trust (a conservation organisation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland). As a small house it has a timed-ticket system to avoid overcrowding and to protect the interior. Visitors may sometimes have to wait awhile. Do not miss the children's garden trail during holidays.

Besides Hilltop, Beatrix purchased additional farms to preserve the unique hill country landscape of the Lake District. Post marriage in 1913 to William Heelis, a solicitor from Hawkshead, she purchased Castle Cottage, near Sawrey, bigger and more convenient than Hilltop (her next Lakeland base) starting her life as a farmer for over three decades. The office of William Heelis situated in a 17th century townhouse (with substantially unaltered interiors) at Hawkshead is now the National Trust's Beatrix Potter Gallery with original sketches, watercolours and book illustrations for children stories as well as artifacts and information relating to her life and work.

In 1913, Beatrix Potter also purchased Lindeth Howe which eventually became the home of her mother. Now, an award winning hotel it offers country accommodation in its 36 rooms set amidst mature gardens and fine dining in its restaurant serving locally sourced and seasonal produce. The lounges and bar have photos and mementos of Beatrix and her mother by her brother Rupert and old letters written by Beatrix.

The Armit Library near Ambleside, opened in 2011 with a generous grant from The Beatrix Potter Society, has a large collection of natural history and archaeological watercolours and drawings besides an excellent new display on Beatrix's life. For children, the **World of Beatrix Potter in Bowness on Windermere with its** changing exhibition brings Potter's characters and settings to life. Here videos narrate her life story and connections with the National Trust.



In 1923, Beatrix bought Troutbeck Park Farm and became an expert in breeding Lakeland's own Herdwick sheep winning many prizes at country shows, attending exhibitions and judging them. Incidentally, Beatrix was the first woman to be elected president-designate of the Herdwick Sheepbreeders' Association, which flourishes till date.

In 1930, she bought 4,000 acres of the Monk Coniston Estate with the scenic lake of Tarn Hows amidst tranquil setting. Further down the road with spectacular views into Yewdale was where her next property the Yew Tree Farm, a wonderful example of local architecture was purchased. This farm was the setting for the much acclaimed Hollywood film Miss Potter (2006) starring Renee Zellweger and Ewan McGregor. The purchase of Penny Hill Farm along the delightful River Esk in Eskdale, far removed from her other properties, continued Beatrix's aim of preserving rural farms and ensuring that the practice of fell farming remained unspoiled for future generations in the Lake District. The money came through the sale of her books written between 1902-1918.

Beatrix Potter is credited with preserving much of the land now comprising the Lake District National Park. On her death in 1943 at Castle Cottage, in her will, she left 14 farms, her flocks of Herdwick sheep and 4,000 acres of land to the National Trust making her one of its biggest benefactors ever. Rightfully, the Trust's 2005 Swindon headquarters are named 'Heelis' in her honour.

By Ilika Chakravarty

Academy of Business Management, Tourism and Research, Bangalore, India
27 Hazeltree Croft, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7XS, U.K.

ilika_c@yahoo.com

Date: 2011-08-29

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-explore-the-lake-district-with-beatrix-potter-tours-article1587>