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American travelers who have already seen much of Britain often have ignored the borders, windy moorland at the neck of the island. This sparsely-populated frontier between England and Scotland rolls through about 80 miles between Berwick (pronounced Bear-ick) on the east coast and Carlisle on the west, generally following a military line drawn by the Romans between ancient adversaries nearly 2,000 years ago. That was only the beginning of centuries upon centuries of horror haunting a bleak land open to the 20th century visitor, battles and betrayals told through scores of ruined castles, abbeys, and massive stone walls. You find no glitzed theme parks in the borders, no swank hotels or tours to gimmicky made-up castles with costumed natives guarding souvenir shops. And few chain stores in these little towns. Even fewer banalized malls and fast food franchises. Instead, borderers offer mostly rough-and-ready accommodation and hearty staple food at prices about one-third down from touristy norms. Add to that an open welcome that reminds you of going home. Perhaps that's what you are doing. Armstrong...

Bell... Burn... Dodd... Elliot... Graham... Hall... Johnstone... Little... Maxwell... Nixon... Ridley... Robley... Scott.... These are some of the greatest names of the borders, and unless your Scandinavian family borrowed one of them, your ancestors bearing these names likely came from this barren fought-over land. In fact, these were names of some of the most nefarious border rivers, as they called themselves. Between about 1450 and 1600, bands of these families and others from either the English or Scottish side of the border robbed and feuded from their great stone fortresses, claiming allegiance to neither king nor lawman, but only to their family laird. The lowland reivers are not as famous today as the highland clans, but they were as courageous and as fearsome, their lives a web of castles and kings, hangings and raids, intrigue and kidnapping, and justice meted out by lawmen called wardens who often also were themselves reivers. It is a story of the Old West three centuries in advance. Visitors to the moors of the reivers can trace their paths through a raggedly beautiful, baleful vista



Lindisfarne Castle on Holy Island offers a dramatic view of the North Sea. Beaches in this area are open to swimmers in the summer.

of wild hills and muddy copses pocked with black-faced Scottish sheep and redoubtable stone peels. The “peel” tower is a kind of castle, but smaller, built for a reiver clan to resist assaults of other families or the law. Many late-medieval peels, like Smailholm, six miles from Kelso, Scotland, and family castle of the Pringles, are intact and

open to the public. Others, like the 13th century Hermitage near Newcastleton, were strongholds not of the families but of the wardens who tried to control them and history documents a bloody trail of hideous torture and extinction of life there. “Everyone who’s been there say they get a feelin’ about the place,” stated the stout

teashop waitress in Bellingham nearby. Of course, that’s old news. Castles are always supposed to be haunted. As the wind stings your face whistling down the massive block fortress from across the empty moors, the chill you feel at Hermitage may just be the cold. Or it may not be. Reivers fed hatred, hatred fed wars, and the great border castles and abbeys suffered the most. Before 1603, when Scotland and England united under King James, the border was most strategic of demarcations, and some 100 castles guarded from both sides. These royal sentinels of medieval power now stand mostly in skeletal ruins, evocative reminders of what once happened here. Some are intact, and many are open to the public. It is easy to visit a dozen castles in a long weekend if you are traveling by car, the best way to visit the borders. But kings and nobles played only part of the lore of the borders. The wall built by Roman emperor Hadrian in A.D. 122 runs 73 miles from Irish Sea to North Sea. Some of the once 20-foot high stone is gone, and the rest has been beaten down by the ages to more of a high

fence. But an interpretive center near the excavation of Housesteads, a second-century fort just at the wall's geographic center near Haydon Bridge, describes vividly how Romans lived in Britain. Whom did they wish the wall to keep out? This was before Scotland was Scotland; likely Roman legions quarreled against the Picts. The barbarian tribe painted their bodies in gaudy colors and attacked naked, even in winter. No wonder Romans believed a wall to be necessary. Christianity was brought to Northumberland and northern England in the 7th century, at Lindisfarne. The ruined priory and well-preserved castle of Lindisfarne rise from the sea on Holy Island south of Berwick, accessible by a causeway open only during low tide. Here Lindisfarne's monks established one of the greatest scriptoriums in the Christian world, 400 years after the Romans, but still 600 years before the reivers. The Lindisfarne Gospel, illuminated about A.D. 800, is on display at the British Museum in London. It is one of the most famous documents of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, a religion reaching back to Jesus, but still apparently quite different from what we call Christianity today. A pilgrimage to the border abbeys might follow the plan of King David I of Scotland (1124-1153). This king tried to bring prestige and order to his country by founding four abbeys, at Jedburgh, Kelso, Melrose, and Dryburgh. These began as centers of monasticism, an ascetic way of life then in vogue which requires Christians to live simply and chastely,

renouncing worldly pleasures. Monks of these abbeys would rise at 2:30 a.m., pray in the unheated stone chapel until sunrise, and spend the day in prayer or manual toil. They could not speak except in the "parlour," (French: "parler," =to talk) and were seldom allowed to see their families. It seems one society's cult is another's great religion. The abbeys soon gained power and riches from the pilgrims or locals who paid to save their souls. Wealth begat arrogance and tempted greed. The great medieval border abbeys were put to ruin during wars of the 1500s, leaving melancholy memorials to a pain-wracked age next to the ancient castles and walls. For the thoughtful adult traveler anxious to avoid the banality of modern marketing, the borders offer a site for quiet meditation and reflection. Practical Information: The borders begin about 60 miles from Edinburgh, or about five hours by train from London. While facilities are modest, the smaller towns nevertheless have tourist offices, hotels, and B and Bs. For information write the Scottish Borders Tourist Board, Municipal Buildings, High Street, Selkirk TD7 4JX, U.K.