American travellers who have already seen much of Britain often have ignored the borders, a 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 two cities, one of which later became the Roman fort of Bosovmund. The fort just at the wall's geographic center near Haydon Bridge, Housesteads, a second-century fort, is one of the foremost tourist attractions in Britain. 

The high ground in this rugged terrain is held by the A696, which is often impassable because of large rocks. The road runs 73 miles from Irish Sea to North Sea. Some of the once massive block fortress from both sides. These royal sentinels of medieval power now stand mostly in skeletal sentinels, and some 100 castles guarded by the powerful monarchs of England and Scotland. Many of these sites 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 border. In fact, these were names of some of the most nefarious border reivers, as they called themselves.

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 border. But kings and nobles played only part of the love of the borderers. 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 Hadrian 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 tribes painted their bodies in gaudy colors and attacked naked, even in winter. No wonder Romans believed a wall to be necessary. Christianity was introduced to Northumberland and northern England in the 7th century, at Lindisfarne. The ruined priory and well-preserved chapel of Lindisfarne rise from the sea on Holy Island south of Berwick, accessible by a causeway only during low tide. Here Lindisfarne’s monks established one of the greatest scriptoriums in the Christian world, 400 years before 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.

The abbey soon gained power and riches from the pilgrims or locals who paid to save their souls. Wealth begat arrogance and tempered greed. The great medieval border abbey buildings 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 traveller anxious to avoid the banality of modern marketing, the borders offer a site for quiet meditation and reflection.

Practical Information: The border around Berwick 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.

The province of Quebec might be called a poor man’s Europe. Or Europe for beginners. It has an exchange rate, but the currency is still dollars and cents. It has a foreign language, but nearly everybody also speaks English. It’s road signs read French, but practically all the French in Quebec are French Canadians. Yet to cast Quebec and its two main cities, Montreal and Quebec City, into the fable of “Europe 101” for U.S. travelers is just a beginning. Montreal, and provincial capital Quebec City, about 150 miles apart, and some 1,700 from Fargo-Moorhead claim a distinct North American culture of their own, a sometimes startling melange of French and English on an American plate.

Quebec City, elder of the two, is one of North America’s oldest settlements, established 12 years before the Pilgrims sailed. Thoroughly French, for another century and one-half North America’s premier commercial and military capital built fortifications to fight off British opportunism until finally capitulating in 1759. The conquers, fearing further attacks, added to the fortifications. Visitors still may visit the citadel and stone walls. Montreal was settled a little later, in 1642, and was at first the less important of the two French colonies. Big ships then could not reach past Quebec City up the shallow St. Lawrence. But Montreal did play a major role in the French trade. It was home to many of the voyagers who paddled Minnesota’s Boundary Waters for the majority of the 17th and 18th centuries. Montreal, too, attracted the British, who gained it finally along with Quebec just before the American Revolution. Less known is that revolutionary rebels from the American colonies also conquered Montreal—for six months America ruled this Canadian city, in hopes the French too would revolt against King George III. They didn’t.

That common history so important to our own nation makes these two cities more than just a bit of Europe. And 200 years of British-French tension explains the almost schizophrenic bilinguals today. No shop or street signs can be in English, according to provincial law, despite that a strong minority of residents call English their mother tongue.


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

A standard headline about Quebec City

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