

First lady



JULIA BRADBURY looks forward to meeting some old and new friends at this year's NFOL

IT'S NEARLY here! The Club's annual National Feast Of Lanterns (NFOL) rally takes place at the end of August and I'm really excited to be attending for the first time.

I've been told by so many people – including my Presidential predecessor David Bellamy – that NFOL is what the Club is all about, full of happy campers and that great family vibe the Club is so famous for.

The event also gives me the chance to reunite with our resident Eat Local expert Ali Ray for some more fun in the kitchen. We'll be doing more cookery presentations as we did at the Caravan and Camping Show in Birmingham earlier this year, and I can't wait to see what Ali's got lined up. We're both very passionate about food, so I'm really looking forward to seeing what she – and maybe we – can come up with.

One of the things that most impresses me is that whether Ali's cooking on a campsite or in a field she knows no limits and never lets herself be hampered by the location or lack of utensils. As a result her recipes are inventive and exciting, making the cooking a great experience for all the family.

It's about as far removed from traditional camp food as you can get, and while I love my bangers and beans as much as the next person, it's a treat to try something a bit different.

Speaking of which, in this issue of the magazine Ali shows another side to her talents by trying her hand at paddleboarding, a sport I've been lucky

enough to do on a couple of occasions.

The first time I tried it was in the unlikely setting of the Cambridge Fens. I'd been doing a story on eel-catching nearby, and was given a quick five-minute lesson before taking my life in my hands and paddling out into the marshy waters.

Everyone in the crew was petrified because I was just wearing my regular clothes, so if I fell in it would have made great TV but probably not the sort we'd intended.

Thankfully I managed to stay upright and I absolutely loved it. I tried it again in the Caribbean with the right gear and despite falling in a few times I had a fantastic time. I'm very envious of the skills of the experts and even more in awe of surfers who can catch and ride the biggest of waves. Rutland (the county where I spent large chunks of my childhood) may be landlocked but I grew up next to Rutland Water so I've always had a healthy appreciation of water sports and I look forward to witnessing Ali swap her ladle for a paddle!

Back on dry land, I've been back to my roots lately, returning to the Peak District (I went to school in Sheffield) to film for my new ITV series. My dad joined me for the trip, and it was great to revisit some of the places he used to take me walking and which started my love affair with the outdoors.

We were really lucky to enjoy wonderful sunshine and balmy temperatures. My dad said he hadn't

seen weather like it in 15 years – here's hoping we enjoy more of that during the summer camping season.

Riding high

It was an absolute thrill to be at Scarborough Club Site to ride across the finish line with the Club's zealous cyclists at the end of their gruelling Cycle-Camping Challenge. I'm glad I didn't have to do the whole route myself! They managed to brave 420 miles in six days from their starting point in Wantage in Oxfordshire – the spot where the Club held its inaugural meeting.

It was a fantastic effort by everyone, and a terrific way to celebrate National Camping and Caravanning Week (NCCW).

The Club has a tremendous historic connection with cycling, going right back to the days of its founder, Thomas Hiram Holding, and marrying the two hobbies together for this year's NCCW was a perfect way to celebrate that heritage as well as encourage people to take part in our favourite pastime.

It was a well-deserved stiff Pimms all round after that marathon effort, to help forget the stiff legs!

