

JULIA BRADBURY sums up a busy few months of camping, travel... and smashing up the odd caravan

First lady



HELLO AGAIN one and all. Doesn't time fly? Here we are at the October issue of the magazine, our summer has passed us by and soon we'll be looking at golden leaves and feeling the first nibbles of Jack Frost.

My summer buzzed by in a blur of travel, filming for an exciting new series across Europe, meeting some walking buddies in the South Downs National Park and trying out some interesting and quite different tents in London.

The last few months have seen me visit Portugal, Spain, France and Ireland, filming content and interviews for a new ITV show that will be on air early next year.

The series combines travel, property and DIY, and sees me scouring Europe (and the UK) for property bargains that can be snapped up for a modest budget – £10,000. The series will showcase locations, offer great tips and show inspirational ideas about how to teach yourself DIY, upcycle old furniture and recycling materials to create affordable and desirable holiday homes.

As part of the show, my on-screen friend and design partner Max McMurdo (who you'll probably know from shows such as *Amazing Spaces*) and I smashed up a 1980s Sprite XL caravan so that Max could convert it into a funky mobile holiday space – something you lot will really appreciate I think. We had bit of fun with the sledgehammers but you'll have to wait to see the finished result. His ideas are space saving and clever.

The filming also gave me my first taste of the type of rest stop known as a French Aire. The crew and I were on the road just outside Paris and needed fuel and food so we pulled over into what we thought would be a service station. As it turned out it was full of caravans and motorhomes parked up, their owners cooking lunch and enjoying an en-route break. We thought trying to muscle in on someone's barbecue would have been a bit rude so we carried on our way but how wonderful to see the French catering so well to the touring 'fraternité'.

Walking anywhere in the world is invigorating but you don't have to hop on a plane to find good scenery. I've also been out and about with Ramblers Walking Holidays this summer, retracing a walk from my show, *Best Walks With a View*.

This was in the glorious South Downs of Sussex along the coast by Eastbourne, Beachy Head and Birling Gap, quite close to Normans Bay Club Site. You may recall the magazine's feature on the walk around the time it was broadcast (March 2016 issue).

Hopefully you'll have seen the Club is also now publishing a series of circular walks from its Club Sites (www.myccc.co.uk/walkingroutes),

which I wholeheartedly recommend if you need to blow off the cobwebs and feel the value of fresh air and good exercise.

They all start and finish at Club Sites, so you don't need anything

to enjoy them other than your own two feet and the desire to explore.

I had a camping first this year too, trying out an inflatable-tube tent – an Outwell Concorde 5SA – in June when we had our annual 'camping in the garden' event, which is something most of my neighbours take part in.

If tent poles get completely up your nose then an inflatable-tube tent is the answer for you. The downside is that they're quite a hefty bit of kit but the technology is great and it's relatively easy to set up, sturdy and feels really secure.

Of course the kids absolutely love it and we had lots of tent envy (no-one else had an inflatable) although there was a gorgeous old Volkswagen campervan, which obviously beats everything else hands down!

I also had the experience of being suspended in a Tentsile tent above the Thames for the launch of National Camping and Caravanning Week in May so I've certainly had my fair share of experiences involving innovative tent designs. It'll be interesting to see what tent manufacturers come up with next. Look out for a feature in next month's issue about what's new in 2018's tent line-up.

Meanwhile, I feel like I'm ahead of the curve and I can see why more and more people are going down the inflatable route!

Enjoy your camping.

