

FIRST LADY



Club President **Julia Bradbury** reflects on the growing popularity of our countryside and why we all value it so greatly

There's something about the countryside... I don't know if you've noticed it, but everyone seems to be having a love affair with our gloriously bucolic hinterlands at the moment?

The countryside has really struck a chord in recent years with the public consciousness. As a camper you may think that's a load of old tosh - you've always loved it, right? But nearly 83 per cent of the population live in towns and cities and more of us than ever are engaging with it; whether it's visiting farms on open days, attending country-themed shows and fairs (such as the Countryside Live show coming up at the Great Yorkshire Showground on 19 and 20 October - more about that later) or buying food and gifts made in our rural communities, the popularity of all things countryside appears to be at an all-time high.

I spent a fair few years presenting Countryfile on BBC1, a show that is regularly watched by more than six million people every Sunday evening, and which has now spawned a pair of annual live events in the north and the south of England. Before this year, more than a quarter of a million people had passed through the BBC Countryfile Live gates since the event began in 2016.

So why this growing enthusiasm for all things rural? I don't think anything has changed in the public mindset especially, but I do think the countryside has become more inviting and programmes such as Countryfile, Countrywise on ITV, walking series, and shows about things like lambing have highlighted the beautiful landscapes and allude to enviable rural lifestyles. It's no secret that farmers are under pressure to make their land work harder for them than ever before, so opening up to the wider public seems to make absolute sense. Why not pop a glamping site on that field-with-a-view, or turn that old shepherd's hut into a romantic weekend hideaway?

Independent producers, designers and artists, operating from a tiny smallholding in some cases, are being given a platform to get their usually fabulous handcrafted wares in front of millions of fresh eyeballs. And we, the Great British public, are understandably lapping it up, all the while increasing our awareness and appreciation of what goes on in our rural communities and the value they bring to our nation.

And we campers help. The ever-increasing popularity of camping has helped farmers and



Aren't we, through the very act of camping, simply trying to satisfy some deep-held desire to reconnect with the countryside and all its idyllic, charming ways?

landowners make the decision to create campsites on their land because they know it's a diversification that has a very good chance of successfully generating new income. We're a vital source of livelihood all year round. And aren't we, through the very act of camping, simply trying to satisfy some deep-held desire to reconnect with the countryside and all its idyllic, charming ways?

With the controversial parting of ways with Europe potentially just days away now, it's also important to be ready to support our countryside and all the people that make it their place of business. And we can do that simply by continuing to place ourselves in amongst it all, whether it's on a farm, in a field, behind a rural pub - you name it. We can contribute to the longevity of our beloved countryside, ensuring it carries on providing for us and giving us the wonderful holidays we all enjoy.

Here's a good way to connect. I mentioned the BBC Countryside Live Event being held in Harrogate, Yorkshire, this month. It takes place at the Great Yorkshire Showground on 19 and 20 October and there will be loads of things going on to keep the rurally curious happy.

It's a family-friendly traditional country show where you can see livestock up close, enjoy live entertainment, find out who has the best pigeon (yes, really) and even drive a digger, so if it's been a while and you feel like a date with the countryside is long overdue then why not come along and rediscover it? I'll be there all weekend so come and say "hi" and we can wallow in outdoor loveliness together.

I'm pleased I'll be able to see many of you at the National Feast of Lanterns in Dorset. If you're reading this after the event, I hope you enjoyed it! For the rest of the month I'm going to be filming two new very exciting television projects but I'm afraid in true TV secrecy form, I'm not allowed to tell you what they are! I'll tell you more in 2020. Really, 2020, it's nearly here!

Last but not least, I should say a fond farewell to Robert Loudon, the Club's former Director General who has now retired. Robert was among those who sparked my interest in the Club and paved the way for me to hold the honour of being its President, so I owe him a huge thank you and wish him all the best in his retirement.

As ever, enjoy your camping! 