



Jules Hudson

COUNTRY ESCAPE

Filming for *Escape to the Country* takes Jules all over Wales and the Borders, where he finds a landscape that has inspired so many, including him

I'm often asked what makes me tick. Some would assume it's the business of creating, or the countryside, history or houses, and all certainly play their part. But in truth my overriding passion is the feeling of being inspired, from whatever source. Over the last few weeks, filming for *Escape to the Country* has taken me far and wide across Wales and the Borders, where once again I've learnt much that I didn't know before. From the coast of Ceredigion to the mountains of Snowdonia and the Malvern hills, it's been a fascinating time.

On the coast near Aberporth I discovered a relatively new statue to Caranog, a sixth century saint. The grandson of King Ceredig after whom the county is named, he was expected to accede to the throne but instead dedicated himself to Christ, shunned the court and set up shop at Llangrannog. Here it is said he lived in a cave and built one of several churches. As I gazed at his bronzed face looking out across the bay, I couldn't help but be moved by this man who'd put his faith above all other things.

The following day I met the enterprising family who now run the New Quay Honey Farm. Having given up their modest 40 strong dairy herd, they now care for some 30 million bees that thrive in the unique microclimate along the coastal strip. 30 million! Who'd have thought it?

In Snowdonia we were as ever beguiled by Cadair Idris and the coast around Dolgellau, as we revelled in one of the hottest weeks of the year so far. High up in the mountains with views across Cardigan Bay towards the Llyn Peninsula, nothing could disturb the sound of birdsong as this year's lambs gambolled about in some long overdue sunshine. This magical, timeless and dramatic region is one of my all time favourites, and this was the perfect time to see it.

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Meanwhile, in a very wet Worcestershire, I was given a unique insight into the subterranean wartime world of the Drakelow tunnels. Built at the start of the war in 1941, by its end some 4.5 miles of tunnels had been constructed to house a secret engineering plant for Rover, making Merlin engines to power Spitfires and Lancasters. No one knew just how much rich red sandstone had been removed, but you could have driven a bus through any one of these now dark and spooky caverns. No surprise then that during the Cold War it housed another secret, a nuclear bunker that would have been the hub for whatever was left of the regional government, should somebody have pressed the button. The scale of the undertaking and the fervour with which it was carried out in the bleak early days of the Second World War was extraordinary, as was the fact that its changing roles remained secret for so long.

Finally, in the Malverns as the weather cleared, I walked out across the old Iron Age hill fort at British Camp in the footsteps of Edward Elgar. It was here that he mused over the words and music that so many of us now know so well, and that have in many ways helped romanticise and inspire our view of Britain's history and landscape. It really had been quite a month, and as I took stock and looked out westward towards Herefordshire and Wales beyond, I could have sworn that I heard the great composer whispering in the wind.

Land of Hope and Glory? Oh yes, it certainly is.

JULES HUDSON was born in Essex but stayed in Wales after studying archaeology at Lampeter University. He has worked in television since 1996 and is a member of the *Countryfile* team, but is best-known as the leading face of *Escape To The Country*. He moved back across the Border in 2012, to Herefordshire.

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