

**T**HIS will be a great surprise for Arthur!" declared seven-year-old Sidney, waving the brochure as we trooped through the gateway of Crich tramway museum.

Arthur looked anxious. Being only four, he prefers familiarity to surprises. He trotted nervously down the path – and there was his surprise! The Tardis! Tall, blue with a light at the top, it was standing casually by the roadside just like all police boxes used to do. Arthur, a devoted Dr Who fanatic, jumped for joy.

Of course, when Dr Who began in the 1960s, those tall, dark blue objects were a common sight on Britain's roadsides, which is partly why the Doctor chose one for his magical home. Now, they have all disappeared – except at Crich. The museum is in the form of a reconstructed "village" and it boasts the kind of street furniture most people have only seen in the movies. Its long cobbled street is adorned with vintage bus stops and curly-topped gas lamps. Ancient trams rattle up and down every few minutes and an STD phone box in the ornately tiled pub takes 10p pieces – it really works, too!

There is also a vast shed crammed with all kinds of working trams, repair workshops, a lively museum rigged up like an Edwardian trade fair, an excellent playground, an indoor soft play, a jolly Edwardian teashop and more.

After a session of imaginary encounters with Dr Who, we took a tram out of the village area and up into the open countryside. Disembarking, we picked up the woodland sculpture trail, with giant ants, mazes and huge mysterious heads – all of them climbable – and so meandered back to the Tardis again.

I hadn't been sure how two townie boys would really react to a spell in the country, with no Toys R Us, no McDonald's and – well, not all that many roads, even. We were determined to try. We got up one morning at six and dragged them out into a radiant dawn to a walk through the heavenly National Trust parkland right on the doorstep of our accommodation in Ilam.

Through the misty, alpine-style village and up in the hills we went, with dew sparkling on the grass and the sheep silhouetted against morning mists. The constant soundtrack of their Cyberman versus Dalek battle did not add a great deal to the experience, it is true, but they loved the wide, rushing river so typical of the Peaks, and became addicted to playing Pooh-sticks from a little hump back bridge that we found.

There were, of course, plenty of places to explore; the Peaks is prime walking country. At well-signed Middleton Top, an old winding engine stands atop a hill. One hundred and fifty years ago, locomotives would have decoupled from the trucks at the bottom and the winding engine would "wind" the trucks up the steep slope via strong cables. Then, the trucks would be reattached to locomotives and continue on their way. The steep track down the hill runs through a marvellous section of thick woodland and caves, perfect for scrambling around and having battles in, and the pit where the wheel had worked provided ample opportunities for adventurous play.

The weather wasn't good for us, but the Heights of Abraham,



# Countryside adventures

**Jenny Woolf takes her townie children to the Peak District to experience the real country**

near Matlock Bath, was another big success. A sparkling, modern cable-car transports visitors to the top of the huge limestone cliff, where the attractions are child-friendly but not trashy: a top class Punch and Judy, a huge playground and kids' fitness circuit, all kinds of information about rocks and fossils and tours of two stunning caves which have been tourist attractions since the 18th century. They are not for the claustrophobic; but were more welcoming than they had been in the 18th century, we learned, when the guides would "accidentally" blow out their candles within the bowels of the earth and demand extra money to guide visitors back to the surface again.

There are plenty of attractive country towns to explore in the Peaks, and any number of places to eat, but we took a particular fancy to the child-friendly Florist's Cafe in Ashbourne market square. Here, the kindly owner brings out piles of comics and games for young diners and the food is attractive to kids without being unhealthy. Better yet, when we visited the charity shop at the bottom of Ashbourne town, we discovered a whole bundle of Dr Who action figures at just 20p each.

The big commercial attraction of the district is Alton Towers, but we thought the boys were too



young for it. However, Drayton Manor park turned out to be an excellent place to break the trip back to London. In Tamworth, South Staffs, it is a generally bright and clean little park, with a good selection of traditional rides and a whole Thomas Land of not-too-scary rollercoasters and drop-rides featuring the Troublesome Trucks and Cranky the Crane. Nothing about Dr Who, but we decided that the excellent

Haunted Mansion would be just the place for the Doctor to encounter some Zombies.

Well, really, what more could you ask? Action figures, winding-engines, cable-cars, scary caves, the Tardis and now a Haunted Mansion. Even though the Peak District lacks the retail opportunities of Brent Cross and Peckham, we decided that this trip had been an enormous success.



Tardis of fun .. the children were delighted to find the only original police box left in England (left). Above, enjoying the rides at Drayton Manor.

## FACTFILE

- ❑ Crich Tramway Village: [www.tramway.co.uk](http://www.tramway.co.uk)
- ❑ Heights of Abraham: [www.heightsofabraham.com](http://www.heightsofabraham.com)
- ❑ Drayton Park: [www.draytonmanor.co.uk](http://www.draytonmanor.co.uk)
- ❑ Accommodation: The YHA has many family friendly hostels in the Peak District: [www.yha.org.uk](http://www.yha.org.uk)
- ❑ For more information, visit [www.visitpeakdistrict.com](http://www.visitpeakdistrict.com)