



KING OF THE CASTLE

They says an Englishman's home is his castle, and STAN CULLIMORE certainly won't be disagreeing too hard, after a foodie weekend in deepest Somerset that brought out the Bear Grylls in him. Well, almost...

HE'S ALRIGHT, THAT Bear Grylls, but a bit too extreme for my tastes. I'm all for heading off into the countryside and doing a bit of foraging, but I don't want to end up sleeping under a hedge and I don't want to drink anything out of a snakeskin. Ever.No, if

I want to do a bit of survival training, I want to do it in style. I want to eat well and I want to live well. In a castle, for instance.

Which is why I recently set off from Bristol, drove southwest for an hour and parked up next to the moat of my very own castle. For the weekend anyway.

Stogursey Castle is in deepest, darkest Somerset, east of the Quantocks, and if you're looking for a fairytale destination to sharpen your survival skills, it's damn near perfect. It's even got a ghost living under the kitchen stairs, allegedly. The place belongs to The Landmark Trust, which has a whole load of brilliant and kooky buildings on their books, available to rent by the week or weekend. You can choose from over 190 historic places throughout Britain and in France and Italy, taking from one to 16 people. The accommodation includes follies, castles, towers, banqueting houses, cottages and other historic buildings.

STAN CULLIMORE is a Bristol-based writer, broadcaster, part-time musician (he used to be in the chart-topping '80s band The Housemartins, pop-pickers!) and full-time foodie

Stogursey Castle is awesome: it sleeps four, has walls three-foot thick, arrow holes where the windows should be and a cutesy little kitchen that looks like something straight out of a 1970s glossy mag. But in a nice way.

The whole effect is as if someone spent a shed load of cash and time making the entire experience authentic but cosy.

Anyhow, that was accommodation sorted. Now it was time to get down to the serious business of foraging. I didn't take any food with me; I'd decided that I would live off what I could find locally instead.

Yes, there was a village store five minutes walk away, but that wasn't much use to a hardened foodie like myself. So I cast my net wider and came across Blackmore Farm Shop. This was more like it. They had a world of local cheese on offer and most of it was mighty fine. I should know, I bought enough of it.

When you're trying to survive on the fat of the land, cheese is one of your five-a-day. My personal faves were the Sharpham Rustic with chives and garlic, a semi-hard cheese made with unpasteurised Jersey cow milk. That and the Applewood Smoked cheddar

Address book

- www.blackmorefarm.co.uk
- www.thehoodarms.com
- www.somersetfarmhouse.co.uk



Ex-Housemartin Stan, left, and his teeny tiny castle

dusted with paprika. It certainly brought a smoky glow to things when I grated some over the evening's pasta bake.

The next day I decided to treat myself to a stroll on nearby Kilve beach. It's a sort of watery graveyard for dinosaurs, filled with large rocks and mud – but, more importantly than that, it's also home to The Hood Arms at Kilve.

I'd heard that the landlord does a great line in food and fires and real ales. So I sat in front of the fire, had a pint of Otter and followed it up with something from the specials board – in my case, a plate of freshly grilled sardines.

They came with a ragout of sautéed potatoes, baby gem lettuce, chorizo and plum tomatoes – and it was all excellent fare. Well done, that landlord.

On the way home I came across the Somerset Farmhouse Shop and stashed the ingredients for an English breakfast in my rucksack. The highlight of next morning's fry up was the locally produced black pudding. It was generously built, firm but yielding, with a succulent and savoury warmth to it. Perfect.

But I actually found myself stumbling across the culinary highlight of the weekend when I went for a stroll around the moat. There I found an apple tree surrounded by windfalls. I took a bite and found they ate well.

When I got them back home to the gaff, I added some local honey bought from a cottage outside the village and made 'Castle Crumble' for pudding. Now that's what I call foraging, Mr Grylls. ■

❖ For more information about Castle Stogursey, go to www.landmarktrust.org.uk