



THE HEIGHTS OF ABRAHAM, DERBYSHIRE'S OLDEST VISITOR ATTRACTION, CELEBRATES TWO MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

A year of celebration is now underway as Derbyshire's oldest visitor attraction, The Heights of Abraham, marks two 'milestone' anniversaries in the same year of its 237-year history.

This May celebrates the 'Golden Anniversary', 50 years since the Pugh family arrived at the run-down, hilltop estate, and started to restore and completely transform it to become the thriving and unique visitor attraction that it is today.

In April it will be 40 years since the launch of the alpine-style cable cars, marking their 'Ruby Anniversary'. The flight in the cable cars forms an integral part of the visitor experience, making the short, steep ascent to the summit of Masson Hill, where a different world of magnificent views and deep magical caverns awaits, which has been enchanting visitors to the Peak District since 1787.

Nowadays the family-friendly attraction welcomes visitors to enjoy the two illuminated show caverns, breathtaking views from the estate's vantage points, living history exhibitions, woodland trails and adventure playgrounds. It's an educational and inspiring day out which encourages visitors of all ages to appreciate the area's natural beauty from a different perspective, from the mountain-like Peaks to the depths of the mineral-rich show caverns, a fascinating insight into the area's geology and social history.

It is five decades on since the spring of 1974, when Andrew and Vanessa Pugh spotted an intriguing business opportunity advertised for sale. It was described in the classified ads of The Daily Telegraph simply as 'the most unusual business - a place with woods, caves and a house'. On their first visit, the hilltop estate captured both their hearts and imaginations, inspiring them to immediately seize the opportunity for not only a new business venture but a completely new lifestyle, as they moved from London up to Derbyshire, a region which was new to them.

This was the start of a lifetime's work of revitalising the estate, demonstrating the Pugh's vision, innovation and their loyal commitment, both to the historic importance of the project, and the county of Derbyshire, its tourism and local community. The journey began with an initial ten years of major restoration, including upgrading the old pathways, renovating neglected buildings, including the Victoria Prospect Tower, and improving access to the ancient caverns enhancing their original 'show' status.

At the end of this initial development phase, the visitor attraction was steadily gaining popularity, yet Andrew and Vanessa were still seeking something to really set their attraction apart. A stroke of inspired genius, along with a healthy dose of grit and determination led to the installation of its 'signature' cable car system in 1984. This mode of transport was pioneering in the UK at that time, attracting much publicity and media attention. The original cable car system, installed during the mid-80's, had new cabins in 2004, and has a continuous programme of engineering updates every year.

The estate's evolution is a constant journey, and this year the Great Masson cavern boasts an enhanced illumination experience, bringing an array of rainbow colour to its dramatic interiors, whereas the Rutland cavern has a characterful tour guide in full period costume, bringing to life tales from the Victorian era of tourism in the area to amuse guests. Recently added in 2022, is a willow sculpture trail, featuring heritage-inspired aspects such as miners and local wildlife, with installations by the sculptor, Caroline Gregson.

It was during Georgian times, as mining in the caverns came to an end, that owners of the estate diversified and built a pleasure garden to attract visitors who travelled from near and far to take the spa waters of Matlock Bath. The estate's two great caverns were a marvel to these curious travellers and the ex-miners became tour guides for the wealthy tourists. Visitors even included Royalty and the great 'Romantics', the poet Lord Byron, and his friends Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley. The hillside estate, which had been re-invented with exotic gardens and serpentine paths had donkeys carrying visitors from the resort town up the steep incline to the summit. Thankfully the cable cars now offer a much more comfortable ride to the top of Masson Hill, to take in the picturesque views over the Derwent Valley, which Lord Byron referred to fondly as 'Little Switzerland'.

Whilst those magnificent views have altered little over the past centuries, today's visitors enjoy a multitude of added attractions alongside the show caverns, ensuring that there is plenty to keep the whole family entertained. A popular spot is the 'Vista' restaurant with its balcony area, perched almost 1000 feet/554 metres above sea level, its vantage point offers diners a meal with a view, and the unique venue can also be hired for private events, such as birthdays and anniversaries. The Terrace café specialises in locally made cakes and hot beverages, and The Tavern holds the oldest beer license in the Matlocks', homage to the C18th when hard-working lead miners socialised here after their shift. Visitors browse the gift and 'Rock shop', selling souvenirs and speciality items such as gemstones, fossils, and jewellery, some pieces featuring the local 'Blue John'. Several multi-media exhibitions explore the social and cultural history, geology and reveal the white-knuckle inducing installation project of the cable cars. There are adventure playgrounds, woodland walks and pathways to enjoy, along with several garden vistas, mindfully created to complement the views and natural wildlife of the Derbyshire Peaks.

The Heights of Abraham has much to celebrate this year, being the second most popular attraction in the area after Chatsworth House and Estate. The Golden and Ruby anniversaries will be marked by new stunning lighting effects in the Great Masson Cavern, new exhibition displays, anniversary themed decorations and a programme of seasonal and celebratory events including concerts, live actors, and themed historic events. The attraction welcomes visitors of all ages, is family and dog-friendly, and dogs are even welcome to ride the cable cars (receiving their own free ticket).

The season opens with a Chinese New Year themed half term week and a dancing dragon display adds to the theatre of the opening day on 10th February, with fortune cookies and lanterns galore (themed opening week runs until 18th February). Other seasonal events include:

Derbyshire Half Term – February 17th – 25th

Easter Holidays – ‘A Day Out fit for a Prince or Princess’ and Easter Egg Hunt – March 30th – April 2nd

Cable Cars 40th anniversary party day – April 21st

Victorian Weekend with living actors and live musicians – May 6th – 8th

May Live Music Weekend – May 18th – 19th

Punch & Judy Show – summer holidays, 20th July – 1st September

Halloween Fun – October half term, weeks w/c 10th and 17th (taking into account different regions’ school holidays)

Divali Celebration of Light – 1st – 3rd November

For more details, see our What’s On page, with a link here: [What's On \(heightsofabraham.com\)](https://www.heightsofabraham.com)

Open daily 10th - 26th February, then Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays (Long weekends) only until 18th March, then daily from 22nd March to November 3rd, 2024. Open from 10.00am until 4.30pm, or later, depending on the time of year.

www.heightsofabraham.com



HEIGHTS
of Abraham
Cable Cars, Caverns & Hilltop Park Est. 1787



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