

# A Caravan TO THE CASTLE

By Tom Bentley | Photos by Beth Kirby



Airstreaming in the UK and Airstreaming in the US—can't be much different, right? Well, for one thing, trailers in the UK are called “caravans,” so there's a touch of that “divided by a common language” cliché. But camping is a joy no matter on which bank of the pond you hitch your rig. And while we may have spectacular national parks over here to invoke your sense of wonder, it's hard to argue that parking next to a palace or two doesn't have its appeal.

Don't take my word for it: Beth Kirby has spent significant trailer time in those stateside grand national parks, and significant caravan time around some of England's stately manor houses. She and her husband Miles put some miles on their first Airstream, a new 2005 Bambi CCD, while they were California-based, doing extensive travel to many national parks. Living in San Diego, they went to Yosemite quite frequently on long weekend trips.

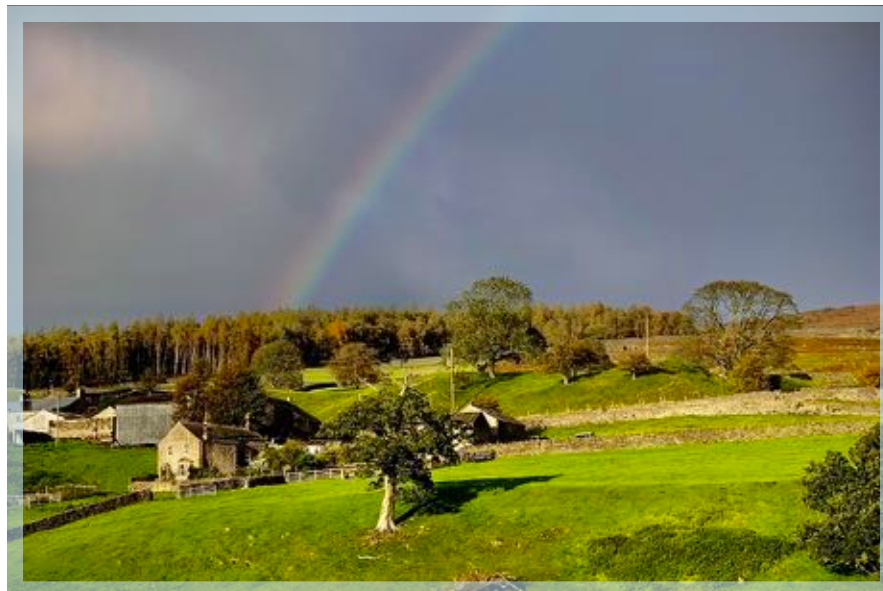
Beth, a painter and sculptor, met her husband in England as a junior-year-abroad university student, but they lived in the U.S. for 20 years. Moving back together to England in 2013 didn't quench their fancy for another Airstream, but it took years later, the right moment—and some happy chance—to hook them up not only with a shiny caravan but also with some genial caravanners.

The Kirbys connected with Mark Hutchinson and Erin Wynsong, who were selling their 2008 684 Airstream in Cornwall. After the invitation to spend a couple of “try before you buy” nights in the 684, a purchase—and a new friendship—began. So friendly it was that when the Kirbys were on the way back to Surrey, Mark and Erin texted them from Cornwall, where they were doing their regular camping in their own new Airstream...and a week later, the Kirbys arrived, 684 in tow.

**ABOVE:** A stylish caravan of Airstreams enters Chatsworth Park in the Peak District. Stone walls are a typical border feature on the dales.

**INSET:** Beth and her father, Phil, in the Peak District in central England.





Airstreamers being swappers of tales, the Kirbys convinced their new friends, who had always had their trailer towed to where they stayed, to get out on the open road with them—a caravan of caravans, so to speak. All were lucky enough to have made the Cornwall trip in July 2020, during a window in the coronavirus lockdown. But before their proposed collective trip though the UK countryside, the Kirbys made a two-week trailer jaunt with Beth's father.

"We went to Wales first," says Beth. "Then we went to the Yorkshire Dales, which is in the northwest of England, 270 miles from our house. The Dales are strikingly beautiful, with roads twisting through fields of sheep divided by hand-stacked stone walls," she says.

The Dales are also home to Bolton Abbey, where the Kirbys camped. "That gave us the opportunity to enjoy our modern aluminum shell along the river, with stunning walks to the ruins left behind from King Henry VIII's disillusionment with the monasteries," says Beth. Disillusioned Henry was: he closed all the monasteries in 1539.

The stays on the bulk of this trip were in The Caravan and Motorhome Club sites that the Kirbys are a part of, where members get priority bookings and special deals.

Many of the parks and camps throughout the UK are simple, without a lot of greenery dividing spaces, but the benefits of parking near a castle, an Abbey ruin, or a major city offer a convenience which cannot be overlooked.

The Kirbys heard about a pop-up campground near Blenheim Palace, where Winston Churchill grew up, whose tickets included a tour. England has no shortage of those estates-in-waiting, as Beth expresses about the trip after Blenheim: "And then from there, we went to another stately home in the Peak District, called Chatsworth Park. The Duke and Duchess of Devonshire still live here, but you can tour the grounds and portions of the house. It is a really stunning location. Actually, that campground was quite lovely as well."

Chatsworth Park, passed down through sixteen generations of the Cavendish family, houses ancient artifacts as well as modern art by artists such as Lucien Freud and Jacob van der Beugel.

There was another lockdown travel opening in October of 2020, and that's when, with the Kirbys in the lead with their 684, they shepherded Mark and Erin with their own Airstream on an 11-day trip to many of the locations, minus Wales, that the Kirbys took with Beth's father.

There were some scrapes, literally, when going through an ancient stone arch on the way to Bolton Abbey, Mark and Erin scraped their Zip Dee awning, but nothing worse. "It was literally millimeters close on the sides," says Beth. The Kirbys scraped the belly of their own 684 on their earlier trip, where, on a peaked stone bridge, they ground the underside of the trailer. England's narrow roads are generally tough on towed vehicles, even with the narrowed width for Euro-Airstreams.

There were some booking scrapes as well, because UK campground bookings don't allow campers to pre-book an actual space. "It's first-come-first-serve, so when you arrive there, you have to drive around the whole camp to find one you like, and which is also a nightmare with two couples, because we wanted to try and be close together," she said.

And as Beth explained, trailering—er, caravanning—in the UK doesn't have the brightest reputation. People towing trailers are a bit frowned upon on the roads. But because Airstreams are still relatively rare in the UK, Beth

**OPPOSITE:** A rainbow over the Yorkshire Dales. Miles, Mark, Beth, and Erin, with Branston in The Gower, Wales. A tight squeeze through Bolton Abbey Arch.

**BELOW:** Built in the early 1700s, Blenheim Palace was home to Sir Winston Churchill.


**INSET:** A happy dog in Cornwall.








says many people rubberneck them in the campgrounds, particularly when they were traveling together with Mark and Erin in tandem. "Airstreams are iconic and lovely to look at," she says.

They hope to soon test how the Airstream turns heads in France, as the Kirbys are booked to go to an Airstream rally in Jaulny, France. They can drive the 684 directly onto the train that crosses beneath the English Channel. Before that, they'll make a local trip over to where a little skirmish called the Battle of Hastings occurred, visit the Gower Peninsula in Wales, and take a couple more jaunts to Cornwall. But no matter where they travel, if they do it with their shiny trailer in tow, they will always be King and Queen of the road with their mobile manor. 

A pint with a view of Robin Hood's Bay, located in the North York Moors National Park.

# Colin Hyde Trailer Restorations

*If your Airstream's original axle is over 20 years old, Colin Hyde has your new axle!*

 Axles are made by Industrial Axle, a subsidiary of Dexter Axle, and Colin Hyde has been appointed the **sole National Distributor** of Industrial Axle for Airstreams.

Each Industrial Axle torsion axle is **custom-built** to fit your trailer & its intended use, including proper size, load ratings, & mounting brackets. All axles come with **shock brackets** welded in place. Torsion axles are also available for 40s & 50s Airstreams that originally came with leaf-springs.

Please contact Colin Hyde Trailer Restorations either by email at [info@colinhydetrailerrestorations.com](mailto:info@colinhydetrailerrestorations.com), or by phone at 518-566-4400



**Torsion arm angle** can be specified for either the original profile or a lifted stance. And if you would like to go even higher, we offer a **Lift Kit** that could be purchased additionally and installed at the same time as your new axle to add a few more inches.

**Complete assemblies are available**, including drum brakes or optional disc brakes.

**Easily installed by do-it-yourselfers** or by a local repair shop.

**Starting at \$600** plus reasonable shipping.

Colin Hyde, WBCCI 1936, a VAC and TCT member, and a Panel-Pro on the Vintage Airstream Podcast for 16 years! Tune in at [www.TheVAP.com](http://www.TheVAP.com)

## Over 20 Years of Experience Specifying Axles