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It's Wye we all should pop by

Leaving the canoe at home, Alan Thompson enjoys a riverside rest

There are two ways I have experienced the beautiful, meandering River Wye in Herefordshire. The first was with my younger son on canoeing weekends with fellow members of the Paddleplus club from Leicester's Outdoor Pursuits Centre.

Accommodation was a two-man tent in a field with limited facilities. Great fun with a great crowd and the memories will last a lifetime.

Four years later, my wife and I were guests of the Wilton Court Restaurant with Rooms, which nestles alongside the Wye, close to a picturesque bridge over the river leading into the historic town of Ross-on-Wye.

I remember looking longingly up at the Wilton Court with aching arms one day as we finished a 10-mile paddle under the very same bridge – but never thought I'd stay there.

Its distinctive Elizabethan ar-



chitecture overlooks a magnificent riverside frontage.

It offers cosy rooms and outstanding food – much of it locally-sourced – and is an award-winning hotel ideal for a weekend break.

It's also home to an intriguing collection of decorative curios and objets d'art collected by owners Helen and Roger Wynn, from their time living and working in the Far East.

Its 10 refurbished bedrooms, which overlook the river or gardens, are en suite, with flat screen TVs/DVD players with

Freeview, free Wi Fi, hair dryers, alarm clock radio and tea and coffee tray.

The majority of rooms have king or super king beds and each room is decorated with William Morris or Sanderson wallpapers and fabrics with beams and fireplaces dating from the 16th century exposed in the original part of the building.

Wilton Court's walls groan under the weight of framed awards won over the years for its food and accommodation.

It has recently been Highly Commended by the AA and awarded five yellow stars for its accommodation, as well as two rosettes for its food and a special award for its breakfast.

And the food certainly was excellent, served in the lovely spacious and airy Mulberry restaurant.

The Mulberry and Riverview restaurants at the Wilton Court take pride in using sea-



HISTORIC: Wilton Court Hotel, Herefordshire, and, left, one of the luxurious rooms

sonal local produce from the many small producers and farmers in the surrounding countryside. Local apples, pears, beef, pork and lamb all feature alongside ciders, organic apple juices and artisan cheeses.

The fillet of Herefordshire beef I enjoyed at dinner was as succulent as anything I'd ever tasted.

My wife's pan-roasted garlic and mint marinated Welsh lamb was similarly melt-in-the-mouth delicious.

The area is awash with outstanding beauty spots and historic locations to explore including the extensive Wye Val-

ley, the Forest of Dean, cathedral cities, Hay-on-Wye and Tintern Abbey.

Wilton Court has a rich heritage of its own, having once been a magistrates court.

The Riverview Restaurant and bar was once the scene of courtroom battles while the magistrates returned to their room on the first floor.

Host Helen took time to ensure everyone staying there – and the place was pretty full – got the most from their stay.

As I was packing up the car I spotted a group of the many canoeists paddling downstream on the Wye and I gave them a nostalgic wave.

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ALAN stayed for one night on a bed and breakfast basis.

Prices for a double occupancy range from £125 to £165 with suites from £165 to £185.

The market menu served daily is £12.95 for one course at lunch, two courses for £14.95 and £17.50 for three courses. At dinner two courses cost £27.50 and £32.50 for three courses.

Wilton Court Restaurant with Rooms, Wilton Lane, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire.

Call 01989 562569 or visit:

www.wiltoncourthotel.com