

## Going to San Francisco

**Elizabeth Norman** rode a tandem down the Pacific Coast with **Charlotte Barnes**

**O**ne new tandem and one new passport, both unsullied by evidence of travelling. There was only one thing to do – book a month off work and go somewhere fabulous. My captain and I settled on the Pacific coast route from Seattle to San Francisco, riding through September.

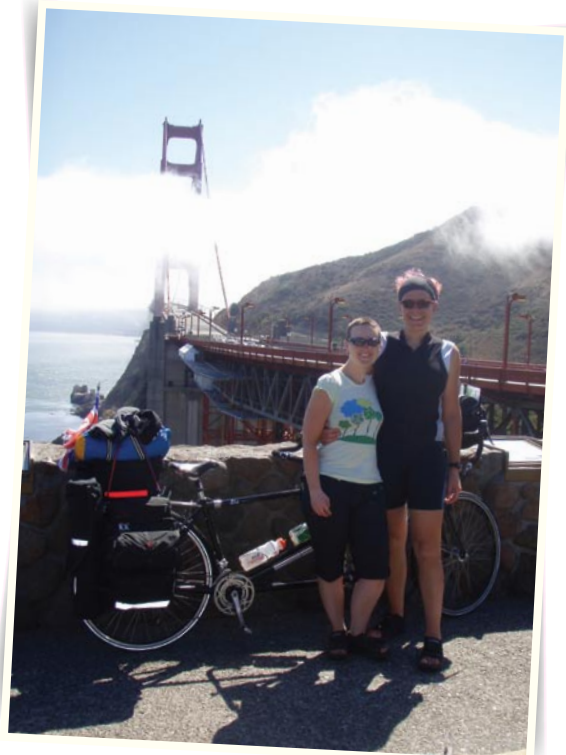
We had bought the S&S-couplings-equipped tandem five months before from the incomparable JD Cycles in Ilkley. We'd never ridden it fully laden until we set off into Seattle's early morning rush. After an experimental wobble round the car park, we decided we'd survive after all and headed out. We followed the route inland as far as Portland, Oregon – a cycling mecca, which I fell in love with instantly. Out there, Brooks saddles are a fashion statement, so we fitted right in with the hipster crowd.

From Portland we headed out to Florence on the coast, and from there followed the coastal Highway 101 down to San Francisco. The route is dauntingly hilly in places – in fact, it reminded us of cycling in Wales – and we discovered that with luggage, we couldn't cover distances that we're used to doing in the UK whilst unladen. This wasn't a problem; we got to stay at more of the hiker-biker parks, which in the evening transformed into cyclists' pow-wows, where raccoons sit and listen to the exchanged tales of derring-do, and then steal your porridge oats while you sleep.

By coincidence, there was a not-for-profit bike project convention in San Francisco the week that we were there, so there were lots of other cyclists on the road. The

scenery was amazing, and the weather got steadily warmer as we headed south. The traffic was courteous – quite a difference to cycling in some areas of the UK.

We reached San Francisco and crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, leaving us several days to sight-see, eat, and sample the local micro-brews. Everyone who disappears, said Oscar Wilde, can be seen in San Francisco. I can quite see why.



## Himalayan crossing

**John Ashwell** led a CTC tour through the world's highest mountains. And he's going back

**O**nce part of Tibet, Ladakh is now India's most northern state. Isolated from the rest of India by the massive bulk of the Greater Himalaya it still has more in common with Tibet. China has remodelled Tibet, but Ladakh holds out and is home to a relatively undisturbed Buddhist culture. Cut off from the rest of the world during the winter months, the villages have preserved an almost medieval way of life.

Most of today's travellers arrive by air and in so doing deprive themselves of the opportunity to experience the truly remarkable landscape that holds Ladakh in isolation. For the cyclist it is better to start low and ascend slowly, acclimatising as you go. This way you will fully appreciate the incredible and unique landscape that has kept Ladakh frozen in time.

Starting in Manali we spent two days enjoying the cool air and lush mountain scenery and then set off to ascend the 53km relentless climb to the summit of the Rohtang La, passing into a land beyond the monsoon with a rainfall similar to the Sahara.

Above the tree line the massive peaks have been eroded into incredible shapes and the light on the mineral rich scree slopes and the unbelievable blue of the sky are a photographer's delight. This land belongs to the hardy Tibetan nomadic herders. This is splendid isolation on a massive scale.

Over the next eight days we crossed several passes over 4,000 meters, sometimes higher than Everest base camp, including the Taglang La which heralds your traverse of the Greater Himalaya.

For details of the 2009 version of this tour, visit [www.cyclingholidays.org](http://www.cyclingholidays.org).

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