



# Get away with **CTC**

Winter is the perfect time to plan your big cycling holiday for next summer – and CTC can help. CTC tour leaders **Sheila Simpson, Colin Langdon** and **Doug Stoddart** have some suggestions

**S**tudy the brochures and spread out the maps: it's time to think about where your cycling holiday will be next year. Whether you want an organised trip or you'll do it yourself, CTC is your one-stop shop. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours offers not-for-profit cycling holidays, designed and organised by fellow cyclists, with new destinations each season. They range from traditional CTC tours – such as a dozen riders cycling through Switzerland with their luggage – through to Easter short breaks, European sunshine holidays or an expedition across the Himalayas.

Tours can be based at a villa or hotel, with a choice of several daily distances and optional rest days, or moving-on, some with an accompanying vehicle to transfer luggage – and even tired riders! Most accommodation is in 2- or 3-star hotels but each year there are budget camping and hostel holidays, some devoted to mountain biking. We even have a

chateau holiday specifically aimed at families with children. To find out more, visit [www.cyclingholidays.org](http://www.cyclingholidays.org) or phone 0845 045 1121 to request a brochure.

If you prefer to travel by yourself, log on to the members' section of the CTC website ([www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk)) where you will find dozens of 'how to do it' information sheets from 'Get into Cycle Touring' to information on taking your cycle by air. (We've referenced a few of these in this article.)

CTC also has details of hundreds of cycle routes in the UK and throughout the world that have been ridden by members, ranging from Australia to Zimbabwe. See [www.ctc-maps.org.uk](http://www.ctc-maps.org.uk).

To help plan your trip, we have a directory of 'overseas touring correspondents', willing to help you with local advice, and our Cyclists Welcome guide to accommodation, refreshment stops and cycle shops in the UK. If you're not online, call the CTC for details: 0844 736 8450.

Above: Not the Alps but still Tour de France country, this is the descent of the Col d'Aubisque in the Pyrenees



## TOUR DE FRANCE COUNTRY: SHEILA SIMPSON

As summer arrives in the French Alps so do the cyclists, who come in search of the superb scenery that the Tour de France flaunts every year on television. Popular areas are the Southern and Central Alps, which are remote from large cities and have low traffic volumes.

Your easiest access with a bike is by European Bike Express, to either Orange or Valence, and then touring eastwards, where you will find plenty of accommodation in the ski resorts and, at lower levels, summer camp sites and small family hotels.

The season opens in June in Provence on that famous outpost of the Alps, Mont Ventoux. Riders who fancy that they are fit follow the Tour route and climb from Bedoin whereas those wanting an easier ride ascend from Sault. Most stop for a photo at the memorial of British Tour rider, Tommy Simpson.

### Alpine highs

Ride east from here and you enter the Alpes de Haute Provence where the cycling centre is the unusual Mexican enclave of Barcelonnette. This little town supports two cycle shops, both kept busy lowering the gears of the unwary. There is a secret to cycling in the Alps: if you are not a top Tour rider, you need to gear low and ride steadily, taking time to study alpine flowers, watch the marmottes and eagles, and photograph the spectacular views.

Of the seven major climbs from Barcelonnette, the three most spectacular are: the Cime de la Bonette (2,802m), claimed to be the highest tarmac through-road in Europe and featured regularly in the Tour; the Col d'Allos (2,247m), a pretty little ride with the luxury of a Napoleonic refuge serving meals near the summit; and the Col de la Cayolle (2,326m), which offers gorges, an ancient inn, and the wonderful flora and fauna of the Mercantour national park.

By July, the Isere region of the Central Alps has warmed up and cyclists move further north, many basing themselves for a week in le Bourg d'Oisans before riding the Marmotte, one of the classic cyclosporitif events. The Tour rarely misses this area and cycling aficionados more than double the little town's population in July, filling the Hotel de Milan, opposite



The two bike shops in the little town of Barcelonnette are kept busy lowering the gears of the unwary

the cycle shop, and camp sites at the foot of the infamous Alpe d'Huez.

Alpe d'Huez is not the most scenic but gives access to the beautiful Col de Sarenne. From here you can complete a circuit by making a breath-taking descent to the Lac du Chambon, then up from le Freney onto a dizzy balcony road, to emerge at la Garde, a great vantage point when the Tour climbs Huez. You can sit outside the restaurant here and watch the race pass, whilst the rest of the clientele turn their back on the famous riders and follow the race on TV!

Whether the Tour visits or not, the cols are a playground full of happy cyclists every year – the magnificent Croix de Fer, Lautaret and Galibier are all above 2,000m and are accessible from le Bourg d'Oisans to the ordinary cyclist who gears low and pedals steadily.

## Ride there in 2010

**LET US TAKE YOU THERE** France, Ventoux to Alpe d'Huez & Vercors (Ref: 1031), 3rd-19th July, guide price £1,350. This is a leisurely Alpine tour, moving on every other day in spectacular scenery, with plenty of 'rest' days to do the classic climbs or laze and look at the mountains.

**DO IT YOURSELF** Useful CTC information sheets are: inf05 Cycling in mountainous areas; inf19 Transporting a cycle to and in Continental Europe; frinf1 Travelling in France on French railways; frinf3 Tour de France route information; fr57 French Alps – Dauphine and Savoie.



Photos: Ben Searle (main), S. Simpson, D. Stoddard, C. Langdon & Gwilym Jones

## THE END TO END: COLIN LANGDON

Land's End to John O'Groats is the classic UK long distance tour, whichever way you do it. The End to End (E2E) is an epic trip through the length of mainland Britain, and the right route will show you some of the best of the country's scenery. It's a challenge too, but one that's within the capabilities of most cyclists.

It's traditional to start from Land's End, reputedly because 'that's the way the prevailing wind blows', but in the summer winds are lighter and can come from any direction. As the hills in Cornwall and Devon are harder than those in the north, it's easier to do the E2E starting at John O'Groats.

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There is a wide range of different routes available and CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours leaders have their own refined, well-researched and documented favourites. Running the tour over a number of years significantly improves the route and the instructions, providing you with well-proven navigation details.

It is possible to do the E2E as a tour in as little as seven days. Your route will depend on how much time you have, how fit you are, your choice of accommodation and any places you want to visit on the way. If you have more time, it's worth selecting a nicer route that avoids traffic.

Getting to and from the 'Ends' can be tricky. Land's End is 10 miles from Penzance but the town is reasonably well served by rail services that carry cycles. John O'Groats is trickier with only a few trains to and from Wick and Thurso each day (only one on a Sunday), all with limited capacity. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours organised trips solve this problem for you using a chartered bus.

It can be difficult to secure bookings yourself for so many consecutive days in widely different places. On an organised trip, of course, you do not have the hassle of booking your own accommodation.

### Riding at your own pace

A question that E2E organisers are asked frequently concerns the speed of cycling. Will the guest be able to keep up? It's seldom a problem because the group usually splits up into smaller groups while on the road and you end up cycling with other people going your own speed. If you're really lacking fitness or ride particularly slowly, it's worth training for the ride beforehand or considering a trip with shorter daily mileages. In fact, all riders can benefit from more time on the bike, to get more comfortable with being in the saddle day after day.

All in all, an organised trip with CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours takes all the hassle out of cycling this epic journey and provides you with a comfortable trip with good company. And it will probably be cheaper than arranging it yourself. If you're doing it yourself, it's worth savouring – many of those who have done it in two weeks wish they'd taken three.

### Ride there in 2010

**LET US TAKE YOU THERE** Land's End to John O'Groats (Ref: 1012), 15th May-2nd June, guide price £1,495. This popular tour keeps costs down by using value-for-money hostel, motel and hotel accommodation. It still has full vehicle support. With a longest day of 80 miles and many hills, it is designed for the more experienced road cyclist.

**DO IT YOURSELF** CTC's End to End Information Pack ([www.ctc.org.uk/endtoend](http://www.ctc.org.uk/endtoend)) is free to CTC members (£12.50 to non members). You can download it from the website or send an A4 SAE with 76p of stamps and your membership number to CTC Touring Dept, Parklands, Railton Road, Guildford GU2 9JX. The pack includes three detailed routes and lots of advice on doing the trip.



Above: Tour leaders will have found all the good tea stops, and there's usually time to take in the views





## Ride there in 2010

**LET US TAKE YOU THERE** *North Wales MTB* (Ref: 1006), 29th April-3rd May, guide price £148. This is Paul Rogers' four-day holiday for competent mountain bikers, based at Llanrwst. *Peak District for beginners* (Ref: 1053), 24th-26th September, guide price £109. Paul Rogers' skills building course for beginners. *South of France* (Ref: 10s2), 5th-12th June, guide price £495. Fixed-based cycling with Doug Stoddart, for beginner to intermediate riders.

**DO IT YOURSELF** Useful information sheets are: xe100 through xe145 (a variety of off-road routes in England); xs1 Off-road around Fort William; xs2 Off-Road in Scotland - Pentland Hills, Glentress & Traquair Forests near Edinburgh; xw10-xw20 (off-road routes in Wales); and infl4 Taking a cycle by air (for biking abroad).

## MOUNTAIN BIKE HOLIDAYS: DOUG STODDART

One of the great pleasures of mountain biking is just getting away from the traffic and riding somewhere rugged, remote and beautiful. If you're plotting your own routes, however, it's hard to know in advance what a trail will be like – how enjoyable, how technical, and so on. When you're on holiday you want reliably good rides.

One option is to visit a trail centre; another is have a fixed-base holiday and depend on knowledgeable local guides. Someone like Paul Rogers. Paul is an experienced mountain biker, trained technical leader, and CTC guide.

He's running a holiday for beginners in the Peak District in September. The aim is to build your skills gradually, on a variety of surfaces and in spectacular scenery. You'll also have a group of fellow off-road students to share the laughs with.

For more experienced mountain bikers, Paul is also running a four-day holiday in North Wales, taking in dedicated technical trails such as the Marin Trail as well as byway/bridleway trails amongst the beautiful local hills.

### Explore your skills or the scenery

Chris Juden, CTC's technical officer, has led different kinds of mountain biking trips in Spain. 'I'm perfectly happy to take pictures of people riding down steep rocks, but prefer to ride around them myself,' he says. Chris enjoys getting to the more out of the way places within easy reach of these fixed-based centres.

For the more challenging stuff Chris headed out to Alora on a trip with Seasonally Unadjusted ([www.seasonallyunadjusted.com](http://www.seasonallyunadjusted.com)), where there was a heavy emphasis on technique in a challenging environment. On another trip to the Pension Castellas ([www.mountainholidays-spain.com](http://www.mountainholidays-spain.com)), the focus was less on the technical skills and more on just accessing Spain's wonderfully rugged Marina Alta area by bicycle – and relaxing.

For any mountain biking holiday, you just need a nice



It's hard to know in advance what a trail will be like – unless you use knowledgeable local guides

spot where there's a network of interesting trails. We've been offering fixed centre road-biking tours from our villa in France for a number of years, and now that the locals have constructed 12 mountain bike trails we're going to add them to our tour list in 2010.

The lumpy limestone geology means it's never dull and the routes are nicely graded from green to black, with lots in the middle, so there is plenty of choice for all tastes. More details will appear on [www.cyclingholidays.org](http://www.cyclingholidays.org).

Above: Mountain bike trips can focus on either the technical challenges or the touring



Whenever there's a better form of transport available, you simply fold up your bike and use it



## FOLDING BIKE TOURING: COLIN LANGDON

Folding bikes can be used for point-to-point cycle touring just like other bikes, but they also open up other possibilities. With a folder, the holiday can be more about touring and exploring and less about the actual cycling. Whenever there's a better alternative form of transport available you simply fold up your bike and use it, whether that's a train, bus or ferry. It is up to you to decide what 'better' means; for me 'better' changes with the weather, wind, time of day and distance.

CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours is the original operator of folding bike tours and we usually have one or two trips in each year's calendar. One is always in the UK. Foreign trips are planned for the next few years.

You can do these trips with any folding bike. It can be tricky using some public transport if you have a folder that doesn't fold fast and into a compact, easily-carried package. You should take a bag or cover for your bike just in case you encounter a 'job's-worth'. If you do embrace the 'folding tour' ethic then a machine that looks like luggage is the sensible option. I have seven folding bikes but there are only three I would use for this style of tour: one of my two Birdys or my rather elderly Cresswell. A Brompton is suitable too, if you are happy to ride it the distances you want to do.

### Let the train – or bus – take the strain

You can pick your own theme for a folding bike tour and with a little research find quite innovative ways of making connections and speeding up journeys. There are lots of towns and cities that have multiple stations on different railway lines where it can be difficult to make a rail connection unless you simply cycle between the stations.

There are some not so obvious connections as well: St Albans to Hatfield is not very far and can save a rail trip into and out of London. Stratford-upon-Avon to Evesham removes a diversion via Birmingham for some destinations.



The folding bike solves the problem of getting from public transport to the attraction you want to visit – even buses don't go everywhere when you want them to, and yes, you can take your folder on most bus services with ease. On one tour we managed to get eight people with their bikes into a minibus together with a couple of other passengers.

Your choice of accommodation is unrestricted as well. There's no anxiety about where your bike is parked. You simply take your bike into your room with you – though I would recommend checking in first and then going back for your bike.

If you decide to try out a folding bike tour with CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours the only thing you need, apart from a suitable folder, is a sense of humour. Tours can get hectic but they are always good fun.

Above: There's no anxiety about your bike, either at your accommodation or on public transport

## Ride there in 2010

**LET US TAKE YOU THERE** North West England, *Folding Bikes* (Ref: 1037), 23rd-27th July, guide price £435. A moving-on trip using folding bikes, trains and buses to explore the North West of England, staying in hotels and carrying own luggage.

**DO IT YOURSELF** For some ideas, look at the details of previous CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours for folding bikes at [www.foldingbiketours.co.uk](http://www.foldingbiketours.co.uk). Useful CTC information sheets include inf06 *Where to cycle in Britain*, and any of the general touring information sheets.