



WORDS & PHOTOS NEIL WHEADON & PAUL ROGERS

# GOOD COMPANY

CTC Cycling Holidays are led by volunteer enthusiasts: CTC members like you. Tour leaders **Neil Wheadon** and **Paul Rogers** describe what they do and why

## NEIL WHEADON

I've just returned from a cycling reunion in Derbyshire. There were ten families, including mine, and as we munched our way through dinner it struck me that it was CTC Cycling Holidays that had brought us all together. Each family decided that they'd like to go cycling with a bunch of complete strangers in 2006.

I've been a CTC tour leader since 2003, when our children were much younger. I'd already organised many Tandem Club events and it was a natural step to do so for

**“WE START TOGETHER,  
THEN EACH CYCLE AT  
OUR OWN PACE”**

CTC. That first holiday took place on a local campsite in Cheddar in the heat of July. Seven families came and toured the surrounding tea shops. I added a May event by popular demand, then a French chateau week two years later.

I love cycle touring and have visited more than 40 countries. Every year, as well as the family tours, I run a tour just for adults, travelling to places such as Norway, China, India, Slovakia, and in particular America. Having worked on summer camps and spent over a year of my life there, I feel that this diverse country is hugely underestimated as a cycling destination. Last year, 14 of us tackled the mountains of Colorado (pictured above).

Organising four holidays a year for nearly 150 people is time consuming;

there is a huge amount of planning involved. In some respects, I have made a rod for my own back, because I get something like a 90% return rate – and who wants to go to the same place year on year?

I'm a veterinary surgeon by profession but decided ten years ago that I'd enjoy life more by working part time and cycling as much as possible. The holidays I run are an extension of my own love of travel. They need to be prepared in a far more meticulous way, however, with detailed maps, route sheets and lots of local information. Not everyone wants to cycle as a tightly knit peloton; they need space to explore and enjoy their trip. Typically we start together, then cycle at our own pace, meeting up at points on the way.

I take small groups. A dozen or so people is compact enough for everyone to fit around >



**FEATURE**  
CTC Cycling  
Holidays



“ALL OF THEM ARE HOLIDAYS THAT THE LEADER WANTS TO GO ON. IT’S WHY WE DO IT”

› the dinner table and chat about the day. Most participants want to experience the country we are visiting rather than doing lots of miles, and so I try to average 45-50 miles a day.

In the future I plan to lead more long haul tours. Slovenia, Yellowstone and South Africa need exploring. As for the family tours, our children are growing up quickly now. So if you have a spare week and want to meet 11 more cycling families from all over the UK, I’d love to hear from you!

The reunion group I mentioned earlier are all firm friends now. Two of them are doing a 600km audax together, two more are riding the Pennine Cycleway together, and we’re all looking forward to meeting up again next May. I can’t wait.

**PAUL ROGERS**

Some people have their best cycling experiences travelling alone, and a few are famous for their intrepid solo journeys. But I think cycling is best shared. My favourite part of any cycling holiday is the company of new friends. That’s why I organise tours for CTC.

I ran my first cycling holiday – a mountain biking trip – in the Peak District in 2005. Now I run at least two mountain biking long-weekends each year, for no other reason other than that I look forward to them and always enjoy them greatly.

Many of these weekends are based at a hostel in North Wales. People travel from all corners of the UK, often from considerable distances, to get muddy and – given that it’s Wales – quite likely wet. They’re from all walks of life and their ages have ranged from 14 (a teenager who was with his father) to 73. The 73 year old ran rings around the rest of us with his fitness!

On the first night of these holidays, I greet a collection of nervous individuals, most of whom have come alone. After four days of riding in fabulous scenery, with laughter, groans, screams of exhilaration and the odd



**Top left** Paul Rogers’ North Wales MTB Weekend  
**Above** One of Neil Wheadon’s popular family cycling tours  
**Left** Paul Rogers in the Himalayas

bruise, I wave goodbye to a happy group of people, no longer strangers but friends. Many of them stay in touch with me and with each other. I’ve made some lifetime friends along the way.

My wife Maxine and I have taken part together and separately in many CTC holidays, both as leaders and participants. Next year we will be organising a tour that we enjoyed as participants two years ago, a trip to Kerala in India. We feel privileged to be doing it. Not only is India a vibrant, stunning country full of warm and welcoming people, but we know from experience that we will be travelling with a terrific bunch of cycling companions.

Like the holidays that Maxine and I have been involved with, other CTC Cycling Holidays range from weekend breaks to full-

blown expeditions in far flung places. All of them are holidays that the leader (or leaders) wants to go on: that’s why they’re doing it! Unlike other tour companies, who employ staff to run holidays, CTC tour leaders devise and run the holidays themselves.

There are lots of CTC members who are already organising weekends away for friends and local groups. It’s not a big step to do the same thing for CTC Cycling Holidays. If you’re interested, there’s lots of help available, plus a strong administrative system to ensure you are steered in the right direction, and financial protection in place (as you would expect from any professional holiday organisation). You still get to enjoy the cycling holiday that you’re leading, of course, with the added pleasure that you’re helping other people to enjoy themselves. ☺

**JOIN US**

For information about CTC Cycling Holidays in 2012, including those that Paul Rogers and Neil Wheadon are running, see the advert on the preceding pages or visit [cyclingholidays.org](http://cyclingholidays.org). If you’re interested in becoming a CTC tour leader, email [info@cyclingholidays.org](mailto:info@cyclingholidays.org) or speak to Heather on 0191 273 8042.