



ALL WIGHT ON THE NIGHT

Phil Beed and six friends took a ferry across the Solent for an island ride

THE ISLE of Wight's well-signposted cycle route is a staple day-ride for cyclists living in the Solent area. It's also a great night ride! Seven of us took the evening ferry, arriving in Fishbourne at 11pm. It was a warm and muggy night with thunderstorms forecast. Near Bembridge, we could see lightning at the other end of the island. A text message from a friend informed us of tropical rainstorms in Yarmouth.

By 1am, the storm had passed to the west and the risk of a wet ride was over. In Upper Ventnor, the group spread out as we headed towards our support campervan and our first brew stop. Looking back to check that John was still following me, I heard him shouting, a clatter, and then swearing. As we picked him up, he told us a badger had run across his path and knocked him off his bike.

Blackgang was our first real climb and descent. Then we followed the route inland, meandering through the island's lanes and villages. As it got lighter, we could see that we were heading west, and we soon emerged back on the coast near Brook for our second brew stop.

It was every man for himself over the route's two biggest hills to Freshwater. We then regrouped and rode to Yarmouth for an early breakfast. Suitably fortified, we tackled the last 20 hilly miles to Fishbourne and got the 8.30am ferry.



Destination Dunkirk

Barrie & Anne Whittamore rode across the Low Countries on a sentimental journey

In May 1940, my wife's father, then 19, got on his bike and rode from his home in La Louvière in Belgium to Dunkirk, with the invading German forces hot on his heels. A destroyer took him to England where he enlisted. Seventy-five years later, Anne and I followed his route as best we could.

We took our Bromptons on Eurostar to Brussels and, after a short stay in La Louvière, set off for Geraardsbergen. We followed the Canal du Centre, passing the huge 19th century boat lifts, and headed into the rolling Wallonia countryside through Mignault and Soignies. From Geraardsbergen, we picked up the Flanders Fietsroute 6 to Ypres, using beautifully-detailed 1km-to-2cm maps. They took us through the Flemish Ardennes via river paths and minor roads, scattered farms and lovely surprise views.

We spent the night in Avelgem, courtesy of a local antique dealer, in a superbly furnished flat, complete with bronzes, prints, classical statues and the largest bed I've ever seen. Our largely traffic-free route continued to follow rivers and canals and, after passing through Menin and visiting a number of war cemeteries, we rode through the Menin Gate into Ypres.

We left the Fietsroute at Ypres but



there are a number of good cycle routes to Dunkirk, and we finally joined the Canal de Bergues right into the city. Our last morning saw us travelling the 12 miles to the ferry port in driving wind and rain. This was the most difficult part of the route as the cycle path was intermittent and left us, at times, dicing with juggernauts.

We'll never be sure of Anne's father's exact route but we must have cycled (and walked a bit) through the same countryside. We felt that we were with him in spirit throughout the 160 miles to the coast.



A NEW ZEALAND E2E

Andrew Dickson avoided the UK winter by touring NZ in January and February

MY PLAN was to cycle from Cape Reinga at the top of New Zealand's North Island to Bluff at the bottom of South Island. These locations mark the north and south ends of Highway 1, but I intended to wander through the country following local advice. I wasn't ever disappointed. Having arrived in Auckland, my trip also took in the Coromandal Peninsula, Rotorua, Tongariro National Park, Wellington, Mount Cook National Park, Dunedin, and Christchurch.

I mostly camped. New Zealand is currently developing a network of trails using old railway tracks and quiet roads, and I managed to take in several, including: the Hauraki, Rimutaka and Otago rail trails; the Te Ara Ahi trail; and the Whanganui River trail. All were manageable on my fully-laden Dawes Ultra Galaxy.

Roughly the same size as the UK and with a population of 4 million, New Zealand is a country full of interest, with dramatic and varied coasts, wonderful forests, rugged mountains, glaciers, hot springs, interesting ferries, and undoubtedly a sense of adventure. Maori heritage is very much in evidence.

I started in mid January and spent nine weeks covering 3,500 miles.

China in winter

Katherine Liver's cycle tour from Australia to the UK saw her reach China in February...

There was a fresh layer of snow on the ground, our drinks bottles contained unappealing blocks of ice, and I was wearing every item of clothing that I had with me. Despite all this, my toes were still cold. China is a pretty cold place to be in February. This was compounded by the high altitudes.

The descents were particularly fresh. So much so that I'd started to enjoy pedalling up more than freewheeling down. I dreaded the prolonged periods of icy cold, the nose-numbing wind. Climbs almost guaranteed I'd be toasty warm by the top. Often, upon seeing a sign alerting us to a descent, my cycling companion George and I would look at one another, and one of us would mutter: 'Well, you gotta go down to go up!'

You might think that we would have adjusted to the cold conditions after spending day after day in them, but it was constantly on our minds and in our conversations. We couldn't help reminding each other just how cold it



was, rolling out the same phrases day after day. It would go something like this.

'Cor blimey, it's cold.'

'It is fresh. You're not wrong.'

'Positively Arctic out here today.'

'Pretty brisk, eh?'

'Sharp, I'd say.'

'Christ, it's nippy.'

'I'll tell you what it's not: it's not bloody warm.'

Then one of us would escalate things, saying how we'd give our right arm for just five minutes next to a radiator. The other would up the ante with talk of bonfires. With neither available, we kept moving.



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