



Frank hired a bike, avoiding airline charges and hassle



PASS OF THE CATTLE

Lucy Coyne took an early season ride around the Applecross Peninsula

Fifteen minutes into my ride around the Applecross Peninsula, I come across a stationary gritter with a snowplough. Donald the driver is looking for a large spring that's dropped off it. It's an inauspicious start but it's a glorious day. The coast road here is nearly always within sight of the sea, with lumpy, mainly treeless, expanses beyond the thin, meandering tarmac strip. To the west are the Hebrides, to the east Inverness, and north is water.

Grazing sheep lumber slowly out of the road as I pass. It's a ride of climbing, then swooping down around bends, cruising along high above the sea, and cycling past still, dark inland lochs. The sky is clear and I can see for

miles. Buildings are scattered about the landscape: small tumbledown stone crofts, untidy farms, and smart holiday cottages. There is no one about.

On the crest of a hill, a herd of matted, russet-coloured Highland cattle raise their long horned heads, peering at me through their tangles. The farmer appears, scattering feed onto the mud.

Further along, on the eastern side of the peninsula, the route is more hilly and wooded. It's now cloudy and cold. Near the Applecross Smokehouse at Kenmore, I meet Johann and Erin, Belgian cyclists who are riding the peninsula the other way round. Feeling tired, I eventually get to the real challenge: Bealach Na Ba (The Pass of the Cattle). It's 1-in-5 in places, and I creep slowly upwards into a headwind. The frequent 'passing places' are my breathers. Here, a trail of cars grinds by.

Near the top, a dark silhouette waves beyond final Z-bend crash barrier. It's Johann. We agree that, either way round, the climb to this point is hard, but looking out over the snow-capped ranges and silver sea beyond, it's worth it. We high-five, part, and whizz our separate ways down. I'm freezing but it's been a fabulous cycling adventure.



Lucy and Belgian cyclist Erin celebrate at Bealach Na Ba's summit

Winter in Menorca

FRANK BURNS HEADED TO THE MEDITERRANEAN, HOPING TO ESCAPE THE JANUARY COLD

The weather charts said the average January temperature in Menorca was 12-14°C.

Wrong! I had never felt so cold in my life. What I hadn't bargained for was this icy weather front from Siberia, which would break snowfall records in eastern and southern Spain and have the Sky team in Mallorca training in a blizzard.

Did it spoil my week? Well, any self-respecting stalwart of Cycling UK will relish the opportunity to regale friends with the challenges and hardships they had to endure, but the reality was I did enjoy my week. I'm ticking off all the major islands around the UK, in the Mediterranean, and in the near-north Atlantic. Riding Menorca took me one step further.

Besides, I'm always eager to discover bits of hidden history. In Menorca, I looked for evidence of the British occupation of the island in the 18th century. I found plenty: a road named after the first British governor; locals drinking gin as their aperitif; the Cami de Cavalls (the bridleway established by the British around the island to patrol it); and more.

Instead of boxing up my own bike, I hired a very nice carbon road bike locally. It cost no more than a budget airline charge for sports equipment.





Toasting a successful trip with a shot of whisky at the finish

GREENWAY GETAWAY

Geoff Saunders and his friend Andy rode the Avenue Verte on folding bikes

At Gare du Nord, Andy took 20 seconds to flick his Brompton into its riding position, then watched with disdain as I produced spanners to assemble my 'folding' bike, a less portable Viking Safari. Twenty minutes later, I grinned at Andy and we were off, heading to Dieppe on the Avenue Verte.

We'd done the British leg already, riding from London to Newhaven over a number of day trips. The perils of small wheels on off-road tracks had quickly become evident. Andy had taken a minor tumble, his wheel trapped in a rut. Other stages had involved ice, threatened snow, plus construction work that required bike carrying. But by Newhaven, things had picked up.

For the French section, we'd taken a Sunday Eurostar from London. Leaving Paris, the route was industrial until we



reached the Seine. (Some weeks later, Paris, and the Avenue Verte alongside, was flooded.) Our first night's stop was at Maison-Laffitte, where we parted company with the river.

Monday started damp but we enjoyed the route across the woods and fields to join the river Oise, even though it wasn't always Brompton-friendly. Near Cergy, we missed the signs, but thanks to my iPhone we found a section of old railway, and made good progress until we crossed farmland mud. We hurried on towards our night at Gisors, fantasising about our evening meal.

The rain cleared overnight, and we again followed a railway and quiet roads to Forges-les-Eaux and another enjoyable meal. From there the AV is a surfaced former railway to Dieppe, leaving us time to enjoy the route and our lunch. Then it was onto the ferry, passing hitchhikers wanting a ride in cars.

Back in London, our AV odyssey was complete. Would I recommend it? Unhesitatingly.

Our Scottish C2C

ANNE SMILLIE AND FIVE COMPANIONS RODE 112 MILES ACROSS SCOTLAND

As a long-time fan of Josie Dew's cycling adventures, I realised a dream recently when five enthusiastic ladies, Pat, Eunice, Jackie, Muriel and Susi – all from Cycle Ayrshire (formerly Ayrshire CTC) – joined me to cycle from Annan to Musselburgh over three days.

Travelling by train to Annan, we started the ride at the old Solway Viaduct embankment. Soon we were cycling past places we had only read about: Brydekirk, Hoddomcross, St Mungo's. By the time we reached Applegarthtown Church, the sun came out. Duly refreshed and refuelled, we continued on to our B&B at Moffat.

We knew day two would be hard as we would be pushing pannier-laden bikes up a steep, stony path to reach the A701 and the Devil's Beef Tub. A beautiful autumn morning saw us taking to the Old Edinburgh Road with enthusiasm. Did we pack light enough? Would we manage the climb? Yes! We reached the summit, which had a lovely rainbow above and a stupendous view of the Annan Valley below, then descended to Peebles, our second stop.

Our last day took us along the beautiful Tweed Valley Railway Path and up to the summit of the Moorfoot Hills. The views over the Forth spurred us on to the finish, where we had a malt whisky toast and a fish supper. Perfect.



Share your story

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