



Brian's finish near Cerbère



Crossing the Firth of Forth

Britain

E2E the other way

Adam Birchall and family rode from John o' Groats to Land's End

WHAT BETTER FOR A FAMILY

adventure than cycling the length of the UK? We (Adam, Liz and 13-year-old Joseph) decided to ride JOGLE over three weeks in the summer, and spent last winter planning and booking.

We went north-to-south as we live in Cornwall so we'd be cycling home. Our route was based on the Sustrans guide, with adjustments to reflect past experiences and preferences. We used one-way van hire to Inverness, the bike transport service from Inverness onwards, and a fair few Premier Inns. Daily distances were around 50 miles. We rode by ourselves, without support – just us, our bikes and our panniers.

There were many memorable moments. In Scotland: the emptiness of Sutherland; the massive infrastructure of a wind farm near Lairg; 13 miles of cycle-path heaven downhill from Drumochter to Pitlochry; and cycling over the Forth Bridge.

In England, there was the steepness of Deep Dale; searing heat over the top of Bowland; seeing an otter in the River Irwell; passing Old Trafford as we traversed Manchester; the canals and heritage railways of the Midlands; the Strawberry Line to Cheddar; Exmoor in the late afternoon sun; the delights of the Tarka Trail; and a welcome from friends and family (and Camborne Youth Band!) at Land's End, to the surprise of us and passing tourists alike.

Co-op sandwiches and sheltered churchyards sorted out many lunch times. We had no punctures and no breakdowns, just a huge sense of achievement – especially for Joseph.

France

A French end-to-end

Last September **Bryan Hopkins** cycled 900 miles across France, from Brittany to the border with Spain on the Mediterranean

My route was from Pointe St Mathieu in Brittany to Cerbère, the last French town on the Mediterranean coast. My wife Helen drove our campervan following my route, which meant that I didn't have to carry the usual touring paraphernalia and could take routes that would be difficult on a heavily laden bicycle.

Working on an average of about 60 miles a day, it took 15 days. Doing the journey in September meant that we followed the sun as the northern European autumn advanced.

I crossed Brittany, then the Loire, and headed south along the Atlantic coast, following Eurovelo 1 as far as Royan. After that I headed inland along the Dordogne Valley, then turned south to cross the edge of the Massif Central before dropping down to the Mediterranean near Narbonne. I then followed Eurovelo 8 along the coast to my final destination at Cerbère.

Along the Atlantic coast I saw plenty of bikepackers but I didn't see any after heading inland. The few days I spent crossing the

Massif Central were tough but magical: forested landscapes criss-crossed by deep gorges, with hair-raising descents and long, long climbs.

Crossing a country on a bicycle is a special experience. You feel the landscape alter. The air on your skin changes when you arrive at the coast. Your leg muscles tighten as you move from flat, coastal cycling to hilly terrain. Your mental state changes from exhilaration when descending quickly to meditation as you slowly climb.

It was an unforgettable experience. I used the ride to raise money for World Bicycle Relief, a charity that promotes bicycle use in low-income countries. You can donate, if you wish, at bit.ly/WBR-bryan-hopkins.

Backup enabled
Brian to travel light

