



Laos, just after Kiewkacham



## Scotland

### Wind in our wheels

**Andy Bebington** recalls a stormy CTC tour in the Scottish Borders

**"I CAN'T BE** accelerating – I'm freewheeling uphill!" Michelle said. But she was. It was September 2011 and we were on the CTC Holidays and Tours Scottish Borders trip, based at Bonchester Bridge and led by Tony Gore. Hurricane Katia had crossed the Atlantic and was scheduled to hit us midweek with very strong south-westerly winds. Some of the party decided against riding, but I led a group south on the B6357, into the wind and rain, to a lunch stop in Newcastleton.

Heading south, the hill protected us from the worst effect of the howling wind; it was only when we crossed the ridge that it hit us in all its fury. One lady was reduced to tears, struggling to pedal at all at 3mph downhill, until one of the gents got in front of her and acted as a windbreak.

Nine or ten of us rode that day, and I had to apologise to the ladies running the Newcastleton café as we were cascading water from our clothes, our helmets, and our bags. I mopped the floor for them, by way of reparation.

The whole object of the exercise, the reason for plotting that route, was to join the B6399 just after lunch. This led us to ride a four-mile minor road on the way back to the hotel – a SW-NE road throughout its length. It crossed a burn after perhaps 500 metres, so I was able to point out to Michelle that if she looked back, she could see the hill that she was being blown up.

A short ride and a vigorous one – but very definitely a memorable one!

## Around the world

# Holidays of a lifetime

CTC Holidays and Tours leader **Neil Wheadon** reflects on 17 years of organising cycling trips

**P**ompei: what a place! For two 17-year-old cyclists covering Europe in a month, it was looking like a highlight. We camped close, woke early, and cycled to the entrance. 'Closed' because, yes, it was Monday, the day that Italy shuts. From that moment forward I turned into a planner.

For me, CTC Holidays started in 2004. I'd used Broadway House in Cheddar for a tandem rally but now seven families lined up from all over the UK, waiting to explore the Somerset countryside. The next year they all returned – and a few more besides.

Buoyed by this, I took a group to Norway, then Nova Scotia, guiding more folks through fabulous places. One rider, Linda, would come every year from then to now. The families grew and others enquired, so a second May week was born, followed by a château week. Finally, I turned my wheels to roads and tracks, exploring every continent except Australasia and Antarctica, guiding innumerable cyclists.

However, it was always more than this – much, much more. Behind every tour lay groups of friends who

would stay in contact with not only CTC Holidays but also each other. In reality, I had turned into a facilitator, bringing together like-minded individuals and families who would not only meet on tour but would remain in touch throughout the year.

This year I have toured several times with folks that I have met thanks to CTC Holidays, and I have learned how intertwined our lives have become. It was with sadness that I read about the final CTC Holidays tour in October this year. However, the spirit and friendships live on and will continue long into the future. And for that I have to thank the holiday company, which will remain in many people's memories.

Châteauneuf-sur-Charente in southwest France





Near Tarbert, North Harris, on the hilly road to Stornoway



Dan (rear) also pushed his tourer down some hills

## England & Scotland

### Halfway north

**Mark Green** rode the first 400 miles of the Great North Trail

**HAVING CYCLED KING** Alfred's Way earlier in the year, I asked my pals Dan and Terry if they fancied giving the Great North Trail a go. They did. We settled on Derby to Edinburgh: half the total route, with 400 miles over seven days.

We set off in early October, planning to stay in pubs and B&Bs. Our worries about taking 'too much bike' were proved false on day one: mine and Terry's adventure bike rigs, with Jones bars and huge 29er tyres, were perfect. Dan's decision to take his faithful touring bike with semi-slick tires was a noble mistake – one that would lead to many timid descents and even pushing downhill!

The off-road sections were varied and included flat, gravel trails, deep moorland bogs, and steep riverbed sections strewn with loose rock. The technical uphill sections were very slow and, as a result, we finished most days rumbling along hillsides in pitch darkness, thankful of every lumen we had.

On the section between Hawes and Alston we needed a plan B, as Great Dun Fell loomed before us in the gloom and we realised that the ascent over Tyne Head Moor would be too difficult in the dark. A campsite in Dufton took us in.

It was a hugely demanding but rewarding week. The geology slowly changed as we headed northwards. We felt honoured to ride through moorland valleys entirely empty of roads, buildings, and people. Next up, Edinburgh to Cape Wrath!

## Scotland

# A Hebridean journey

*Fifty-five years after his first unsupported tour, John Chaplin explored the Western Isles*

**H**aving bought a Surly Disc Trucker during lockdown, I visited the Outer Hebrides and the Isle of Skye in August. This was my second unsupported tour, the first being during the World Cup in 1966 at the age of 13. It's never too late!

Loaded with panniers and camping gear, I cycled to London to catch the overnight sleeper from Euston. I caught another train to Oban, then camped overnight nearby and caught the ferry to Castlebay, Barra, at the southern end of the Hebrides.

There began my two-week tour, which took in 11 islands and four more ferries. Some of the islands are connected by causeways. There is a

waymarked route called the Hebridean Way (185 miles), which guides you all the way from Vatersay to the Butt of Lewis. I mainly followed this but with additional diversions, not least to the beautiful Uig Sands on Lewis.

The islands are all different in their geography so you get a chance for some flat riding as well as some very good climbs. The scenery is breathtaking, with high hills, moorland, white sandy beaches, and many sea and freshwater lochs. The Hebrides are rich in culture too, with prehistory sites like the Callanish Standing Stones and a more recent history of fishing and blackhouses. Crofts are still worked.

After enjoying the Hebrides, I caught the ferry from Harris to Uig on Skye and spent three days cycling to Armadale in the south for the ferry to Mallaig. Skye was different again: very green and lush, but with the magnificent Cullins on view. I had my only wet day of the trip on Skye, though I had plenty of headwinds.

After 12 days on the islands, it was back to the mainland and a short train journey to Fort William, where I caught the Caledonian Sleeper south.



Camp site at Borve on the Isle of Barra



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