

Previous pages: Sculptures in Keflavik. The town is only 47km west of the Icelandic capital, Reykjavik

Right: Loch Tay. Not exactly the Great Lakes but the biggest in Perth and Kinross – and way less tacky than Niagara Falls



small places I had never heard of. Then suddenly, above the flat landscape, rose a cluster of ugly, high-rise buildings. I had reached Niagara Falls.

NORTH ATLANTIC DRIFTING

There is no denying the spectacular nature of the falls themselves. They are truly a wonder, best enjoyed from the Canadian side of the border. Impressive for their sheer size and force, and illuminated in ever-changing colours by night, this would be a highlight of any trip. Yet the human development nearby is really tacky. Think Blackpool on steroids.

After a rest day I was ready for the final USA section, the Empire State Trail. It took me and my friend Simon (who joined me for a week) right across New York State to the bottom of Manhattan Island. It was very pleasant, attractive and mostly traffic-free riding along the Erie Canal and then the mighty Hudson River. The final morning was especially memorable as we cycled towards the skyscrapers of New York City, finishing within sight of the Statue of Liberty.

Except it wasn't the end for me. One overnight flight later I was in chilly Reykjavik, Iceland, where I needed completely different cycling clothes. My plan was to cycle right across the north of the country, via the Arctic Circle, to the eastern tip. I hadn't reckoned on the Icelandic wind. Even in September it was brutal. There is no shelter here



from the elements, and only one road to follow, which takes all types of traffic. It is a different world in every sense.

I was fine until the second afternoon, when I reached a mountain pass. That is when my golden rule was broken. It stopped being enjoyable. Honestly, I have never experienced wind like it on a bike. I was scared. I was also leaning at 45 degrees just to stay on. After another morning of the same thing, I bailed and headed for the Republic of Ireland. It was an easy decision.

Heading north into Northern Ireland, I made the last passenger ferry of the year from Ballycastle to Port Ellen on Islay, off Scotland's south-west coast, where a straight line drawn from New York to Dull makes landfall. I had to dodge some cataclysmic Atlantic storms but managed to enjoy four glorious days of cycling through Scotland, arriving in tiny Dull for lunch on 12 October, exactly 10 years after the first celebration of its pairing with Boring. The only man left in Dull from those earlier days was there to meet me, 4,546 miles from Boring. I had joined these tedious twins in one of the most interesting journeys of my life. ●

Interesting differences

Perhaps the biggest difference about cycling in North America is its sheer size. I cycled eastwards for more than 3,000 miles in recognisably the same country. Spaces between places are also huge out west. Roads are longer, straighter and wider, and you are mostly cycling on a broad shoulder. But you need it: the many trucks are huge and they don't slow down!

There were two other big differentiators between the USA, Iceland and Scotland. Firstly, food. My time away made me appreciate the quality and diversity you get eating out in the UK. Secondly, weather. I learned that I prefer 100°F heat to horizontal Icelandic winds. I didn't even try to brave the Scottish autumn storms – I might have drowned!