



The Moray Coastal Trail



**Belgium**

**On the cobbles**

**Louise Bell** rode the pavé of the Tour of Flanders sportive – in the pouring rain

**AT DOVER, THE** start of our bikepacking trip to the Tour of Flanders, we covered in the face of the roiling brown sea. We would be facing a 40kph crosswind during our ride from Dunkirk to Kortrijk for the sportive the following day...

We joined the melee at about 10am the next morning: 16,000 people vying for space on wet, slippery cobbled tracks with 20% gradients. We were nervous as the first challenge, the Koppenberg, loomed out of the driving rain. "I'll walk this one", I said.

But the novelty of walking in a sportive wears off. We climbed everything else thrown at us – nine climbs in total, and last of all the Paterberg, our redemption for taking the easy route up the Koppenberg.

The next day the pros took over. The buses of the women's team were accessible in a way the men's World Tour teams are not, and we cycled freely among the cycling greats. Team Jumbo Visma left their bus and rolled to the start, with us following.

On our final day the sun shone at last. The wind still raged but miraculously turned 180 degrees and became a cross-tailwind that blew us all the way back home.

We had taken a beating. Our bikes were filthy and gritty. But we grinned as we boarded the ferry and shared our adventures of cobbles, chaos and calamitous weather. We would never fear cycling in the rain again.



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**Scotland**

**Powering through the Highlands**

An off-road e-bike tour demands plenty of juice, as **John Whittle** and his friend Rob discovered

**W**e'd read about the Moray Triangle,

a 220km circular route from Aviemore with 1,550 metres of climbing, in Travellers' Tales in the Oct/Nov 2022 issue of Cycle. But could we complete it on our e-mountain bikes?

It looked like it might push us to the limits of our 635Wh batteries.

The run down from Aviemore via Grantown-on-Spey to our first night at Craigellachie (70km with 420m of ascent) was a delightful combination of forest track, singletrack, ex-railway line and quiet roads. Nothing too technical and a perfect cycling day.

The sole fly in the ointment was a diversion requested by route managers for cyclists to avoid 'vulnerable' terrain and to use the quiet road on the north side of the Spey from Cromdale. This included a large, very steep hill. Yet we finished the day with range to spare.

Our second day down to Findhorn via Lossiemouth (73km, 591m) began with a tough, rough climb, followed by a long descent on a poorly signed track and partially built muddy path to coffee and cake in Fochabers. We crossed the Spey



near Spey Bay, encountering miles of forest trails surfaced with trillions of bum-numbing, golf-ball-sized pebbles.

After a recuperative lunch in Lossiemouth, and with about 30% charge left, we set off along a glorious cliff-top track to Burghead. The

'Burma Road' through the huge sand dunes of Roseisle Forest led to ice cream and sympathy at a chuck wagon in a shaded car park. After more empty, beautiful coastal riding and more shingle, we arrived at our B&B at the Findhorn Community as my battery (and bottom) cried 'enough!'

The third day back up to Aviemore (75km, 550m) included the notorious 36km off-road climb of the Dava Way (380m!). Besides weight, wind, temperature and tyre pressures, e-bike range responds poorly to rough surfaces. So the last day boded ill.

I cracked and asked for a recharge at our lunch stop in Grantown, while Rob, ever the stoic, set his chin upwards to home. From Boat of Garten things went very quiet. He finally ran out of power just as we pedalled into our guesthouse car park.