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Misty Glen Kendrum



Glaciers created lowland ponds

## Scotland

# Ranging far on eMTBs

Electric mountain bikes aren't just for trail centres, as **John Whittle** and his friend **Rob** proved

**H**ow practical is mountain 'touring' on an eMTB? Rob [68] and I [72] were keen to find out. As an initial test last June, we tackled an overnighter from Callander to Killin via Glens Kendrum and Dubh and back via Glens Ogle and Ample: 80km and 1,150m of ascent, using cycle routes and MTB-only tracks.

E-bike range is a combination of surface, weight, ascent, weather, tyre type and pressure. Using Bosch's calculator, my 500Wh Scott was at its theoretical limit for day one; Rob's 625Wh Scott could make it easily. The return was within easy reach of both.

From Callander, NCN 7 was smooth gravel along the side of Loch Lubnaig to Kingshouse (aka Mhor 84), where we had coffee and flapjacks. A rough climb to the misty pass between Kendrum and Dubh led to a tricky, steep descent to a potentially dangerous ford – we crossed with 'walk assist' – down the east bank, then via the old railway line to the summit of Glen Ogle. Sadly, the chuck wagon that serves food in the car park was closed. In warm rain and midge clouds, we sped down into Killin. After 4.5hrs, I had 4km of battery assistance remaining.

Having shared a battery charger, we reversed our route the next morning before joining the famous descent to Lochearnhead. Glen Ample was the highlight of our journey. It has a just-rideable track that crosses several shallow fords and climbs steadily through wild country. Once across the col we enjoyed the descent to a café on the shores of Loch Lubnaig. After a short section of main road, we rejoined NCN 7 to return to Callander. After 3.5hrs of riding, I had 18km left.

Rob and I have now done over 5,000km of eMTB riding across northern England from our homes in Cumbria, much of that off-road – including the lovely Alnwick Classic, a Cycling UK sponsored ride. This year we're doing The Sandstone Way: 193km in four days, with three stops to sleep and recharge.



## Herefordshire

# Ice age cycling

Explore geological history by bike with **Ian Fairchild** and **Mike Brooks's** app

**LANDSCAPES TELL STORIES** of the ice age. Everyone knows about the U-shaped valleys and arêtes (sharp mountain ridges) of upland landscapes, but the lowlands are just as fascinating. A great place to combine finding out about the ice age with a good day out on the bike is western Herefordshire, which was invaded by glaciers from Wales near the end of the last ice age about 20,000 years ago.

Hummocky landscapes are dotted with ponds where ice melted. Strange valleys, often dry, were cut by meltwater under the ice, and the major rivers of the Wye and Arrow cut gorges as they had to find new courses when the ice retreated. A 60-mile loop west of Hereford through rolling hills and mostly on quiet lanes takes you through this landscape.

To do it justice we've broken it into 30-mile circular trips, including off-road options. You can download the app – which is free – and the same material is on the website [iceageponds.org](http://iceageponds.org). These aids help you see the landscape in different ways. Photographs are overlaid with features that can be seen. The contours of the land are brought into sharp relief with LIDAR images. Best of all, it helps you feel at one with the scenes you are travelling through.

Ian's favourite section is the deserted Noke Lane by the Arrow Valley, which emerges from a landscape that combines an incised valley, rolling hills, and secret ponds.





Not far from Rhayader

Mid Wales

# Elan Valley explorers

*The lanes and cycle tracks around these Welsh reservoirs make a great family break, as Richard Scrase discovered*

**H**ave you ever taken a shower or flushed a loo in Birmingham? We've just cycled around your water supply – some 80 miles away in central Wales – and we promise we didn't take a swim in it either.

Just to the south and west of Rhayader, the dams, reservoirs and 73-mile aqueduct of the Elan Valley were built 100 years ago to supply clean water to Birmingham. It was an epic feat of civil engineering that's set within an area of outstanding scenic beauty. Now the water takes around two gravity-driven days to run from Wales to Birmingham.

Today, the dams, reservoirs and surrounding hills provide some lovely

cycle routes, much of it off-road. We camped a few minutes' ride from a visitor centre just below the Caban Coch Dam, the lowest of the sequence of four dams built into the Elan Valley.

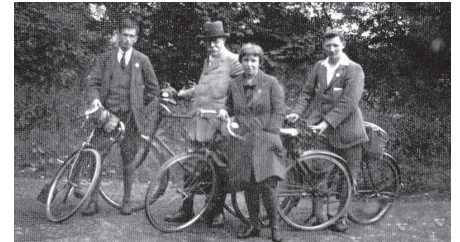
The visitor centre was vital for our holiday. I could charge up our electric car at one of the charge-points nesting behind the building, and more importantly, the playground next to it was the beacon of fun and reward for our youngest at the end of a hard day's riding around the valley.

A railway line was constructed in 1893 as the building work for the dams began. This railway moved workers and materials up and down the valley, and much of our riding was on the bed of this railway. This meant an easy route, views, and little worry about traffic.

In three day rides we explored most of the easily-accessed Elan Valley area. We split a Lost Lanes route in two to travel north around the reservoir behind Craig Goch Dam and over the hills to Rhayader, and then the next day rode south on quiet roads in another circle that touched Rhayader. On the last day we climbed up to the Claerwen Dam and pretty much freewheeled back.



Lunch stop, 2022 (Below) 1926



Scotland

# A century of cycling

*Ian Nicol of Fife & Kinross CTC describes their centenary ride*

**THIS YEAR IS** the centenary for Fife and Kinross CTC, which was inaugurated in 1922 as Fife District Association. To celebrate Walter L Browne and the other pioneers of the group, we prepared a circular ride into Kinross-shire, starting and ending in Burntisland.

Many of the minor roads across Fife and Kinross familiar to our founding members are still available for us to ride today, and the route used as many of them as possible. Members from neighbouring and historically-linked Cycling UK groups, Lothians and Tayside, joined us to help commemorate all the folk who have cycled with us over the years.

On 23 April, a group of 14 cyclists set off in bright sunshine with a steady easterly breeze to tackle the hills leading away from the coast. It made for a chilly if energetic start. Others joined along the way. By the time we stopped for lunch at Lochore Meadows Country Park, our ranks had grown to 23 riders plus several social attendees. At the lunch stop there was a centenary birthday cake, which was cut for us by Sarah, Walter's granddaughter.

Our calendar of ongoing centenary events, including our dinner in October, is here: [cyclinguk.org/local-groups/fife-kinross](https://cyclinguk.org/local-groups/fife-kinross)

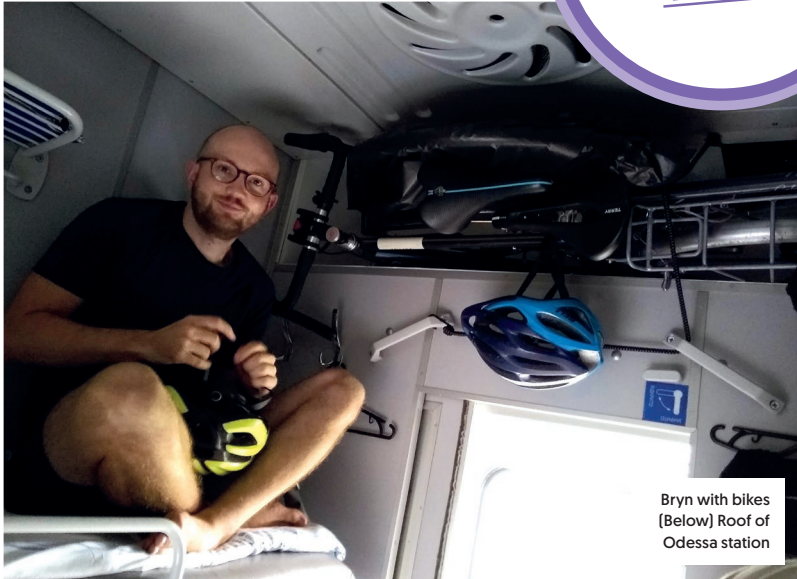


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Bryn with bikes  
(Below) Roof of  
Odessa station



With medals at  
the finish

## West Country

### The Great Weston Ride

Last year **Sue Hoddell** relished being able to take part in a mass ride again

**THERE IS A CERTAIN** law that says the day of any significant bike ride will be the wettest or the hottest of the year. Given the choice, I would go for the hottest – and this is what we got for the Great Weston Ride, a charity ride from Bristol to Weston-Super-Mare.

We decided to take the bus transfer from Weston-Super-Mare to Bristol so that at the finish we could collapse with a beer and a burger. After collecting our event numbers at Ashton Gate, we were bunched together and set off in small groups. Mainly quiet roads took us out toward the airport and then sent us circumnavigating the Chew lakes.

The first stop was a pub at the base of the only significant climb, allowing us to fill up on coffee and cold drinks. Fully refreshed, we set off up a steady climb, in and out of the shade and finally onto Burrington Combe, where we admired the views.

After the climb came the whooping delight of the downhill. The Somerset Levels beckoned. As the actual distance from Bristol to Weston-Super-Mare is only about 24 miles and we were doing 57, there was plenty of meandering around small lanes and quiet villages. Déjà vu was a common experience. Finally the signs for Weston-Super-Mare appeared and we followed the backroads towards town.

The final approach paralleled the seafront, then turned us into the welcome area where we were greeted by cowbells and applause.

Medals collected, it was time to rehydrate properly with a beer and kick back in what remained of the glorious afternoon. It was wonderful to be back riding with groups of friends and fellow cyclists again.

## Eastern Europe

### Ukraine by train

**Bryony Nicholson** recalls the Ukrainian couple who helped get them on a train home in 2019

**A**fter months cycling across Europe, we were ready for the final leg of our journey: travelling home by train with two bikes. Odessa station slumbered under a heavy July sky. We had been told by everyone – the ticket office, Ukrainian railways, online – that we could take our bikes on this train.

The guard took one look at us, held up a hand and declared: "Impossible!"

This was the only train that would take us across Ukraine to Poland; the only route that would get us home in time for our friends' wedding. With some gesticulating, my partner Bryn negotiated access to the train, while I optimistically set about removing luggage from both bikes.

Minutes later, Bryn leapt from the train followed by a lively young Ukrainian man, who introduced himself as Ivan and declared himself a keen cyclist. He returned to the guard, seamlessly switching from English to Ukrainian.

"He says we can try!" Ivan said. And so we began. Ivan scooped up panniers and ferried them to the compartment, while Bryn and I dismantled the bikes.

Mila, Ivan's wife, set about rearranging their modest belongings, and we squeezed all our luggage into the compartments beneath the lower bunks.

Bike wheels, each encased in a bin bag, were flung to the upper bunks.

Finally, we carried the dismantled bikes themselves past the begrudging guard. After 20 minutes, of sweating, cursing, grumbling, adjusting, pushing and pulling, we managed to shove the two bikes into a gap above the carriage aisle.

Triumphant, we sat down to share the food and drinks we had brought, and spent the night teaching each other card games. A new friendship formed as our train trundled across Europe.

*Postscript: Mila has left Ukraine and is in Poland with their son. Ivan is still there. They are seeking donations to support Ukrainians who remain: [zrutka.pl/en/pomocukrainie#](https://www.zrutka.pl/en/pomocukrainie#)*

