ONE CYCLIST, 874 MILES, 15 PUBS, 20 PINTS, 21 DAYS IN THE HOWLING RAIN...

Real ale drinkers will travel the length of the UK to make sure they get a decent pint, which is literally what cyclist Peter Mackay did in what must be the most epic pub tour we’ve come across – from John O’Groats to Lands End by bike.

It had never been my intention to make the journey a real ale tour of mainland Britain. At no stage did I book accommodation. Between four and five pm in the afternoon I started to look for a place to stay and was surprised to find that at almost every stop there was excellent quality locally brewed cask conditioned ale available. This surely must be a monument to the success of CAMRA. Alas the places I was able to visit were but a small sample of the promising looking hostelries I passed en route. Cycling is a great way of working up a thirst but one has to wait until the day’s journey is finished! Drunken drivers are unfortunately all too common but drunken cyclists are quite rare, as they tend not to live very long.

Starting from John O’ Groats on a breezy June day I made good progress to Wick where I encountered a strong south westerly wind that made hard riding through Helmsdale, Brora to the SUTHERLAND ARMS, Old Bank Road, Golspie where I was treated to an excellent pint of Red Cuillin from the Isle of Skye brewery. The following morning the wind had moderated somewhat making a much easier passage over the Dornoch & Moray Firths to Inverness where I picked up National Cycle Route 7 to Carrbridge. Pausing overnight at the CAIRN HOTEL, Main Road, Carrbridge I was treated to a pint or two of An Teallach Ale from Ullapool. The next day was what the weather...
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the Drumochter Pass to Blair Atholl and
the old A9 through Newtonmore, over
involved some of the steepest climbs of
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the route took me along the borders of
Wales through Shrewsbury, Ludlow &
Leominster to Hereford where I entered
the territory of the Wye Valley Brewery.
At the Merton Hotel, Commercial
Road, Hereford, I had the difficult
decision of choosing between the HPA
or the Butty Bach so I tried both. As
if to make up for the foul conditions
of yesterday the weather had changed
overnight. I was treated with sunshine
to enjoy the beauty of the Wye Valley
past Tintern Abbey to Chepstow. Here
I picked up Cycle Route 4 across the
Severn to Clevedon where I spent a
few nights with friends before tackling
the easy cycling of Somerset Levels to
Bridgwater. At this point the character
of the country changed with frequent
steep hills as I skirted the eastern edge of
Exmoor to Tiverton and a pint of Bass at
the Tiverton Hotel on Blundells Road.
A steep climb the following morning
took me out of Tiverton along the
B3137 and the B3220 to Eggesford
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2. A steep climb the following morning took me out of Tiverton along the B3137 and the B3220 to Eggesford Station and then on minor roads between Exmoor and Dartmoor to Hatherleigh. Entering Cornwall I proceeded down the A39 to Camelford. Here the St Austell owned DARLINGTON INN, Fore Street, Camelford, provided a famous brewpub in Pitlochry. After checking in I parked my bicycle in the brewery and headed for the bar and a pint of Braveheart.

The next day I had a relatively short run of 47 miles to my home in Blackford where at The BLACKFORD HOTEL, Moray Street, I was treated to a pint of the celebrated Killellan Ale (the Champion Beer of Great Britain 2005) from the Houston Brewery of Renfrewshire.

After a few days rest at home I resumed my southward journey with a short trip of thirty miles to Grangemouth and a pint of Abbot Ale with a meal at the EARL OF ZEITLAND, the local Wetherspoon’s, on Bo’Ness Road. From Grangemouth I passed through Whitburn and then crossed a bleak area of moorland before entering the beautiful Scottish Border Country near Peebles. Ten miles further on I reached the small town of Innerleithen where, at the TRAQUAIR ARMS, enjoyed a few pints of Bear Ale, brewed at nearby Traquair House in an 18th century brew house using the original oak vessels.

The next day was one of the two wettest days of the journey and also one that involved some of the steepest climbs of the ride over the border hills through Ettersby Forest, past the Eskdalemuir weather station to Langholm.

Later in the afternoon the rain eased off a little and I was able to enjoy the rest of the days ride to Brampton where I was greatly cheered by a pint of Brampton Ale at the RED LION in Chatsworth.

Road. As it to make up for the dreadful weather of yesterday the sun emerged from the clouds at about 11am and the remainder of the day was warm and sunny. Initially the route took me alongside the Pennines to Appleby, over Ravensworth fell and a splendid run down through Orton to Tebay.

Passing over the railway and under the motorway there followed a steep climb and pleasant ride to Sedbergh in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Here I was able to soak in a hot tub to ease tired muscles and replace lost liquid.

The route took me along the borders of Wales through Shrewsbury, Ludlow & Leominster to Hereford where I entered the territory of the Wye Valley Brewery.

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forecasters call ‘showers with sunny spells’ that for a cyclist means that you are soaked one minute and roasted the next. However in spite of this I made good progress down Cycle Route 7, passing briefly at the CAIRNGORM BREWERY in Aviemore where I purchased a bottle of the intriguingly named Sheepsaghger. The route took me on minor roads and dirt tracks down the old A9 through Newtonmore, over the Drumochter Pass to Blair Atholl and Pitlochry. Here I headed up the hill to the MOULIN HOTEL a famous brewpub in Pitlochry. After checking in I parked my bicycle in the brewery and headed for the bar and a pint of Braveheart.

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