

The big one

Colin Weaver went to France's Semaine Federale with 14,499 other cyclists

The Semaine Federale is a week-long cycling rally similar to the CTC Birthday Rides but much larger in scale, with 14,500 registered participants in 2007. British riders make up 350 of that number, and three of these were Jean, Peta and I from East Kent, who took the European Bike Express to Perigueux in the Dordogne to join in.

Perigueux really welcomed all the cyclists who'd come for the week's activities. There were brightly painted old cycles or wheels attached to lampposts and in shop windows. Regional newspapers produced colour supplements detailing the previous day's ride, with details of the current day to help locals avoid queueing behind a continuous stream of thousands of riders. The Semaine had a section of motorcycle Gendarmes attached to it to help with traffic congestion at key points.

The organisers did a fabulous job with the multiple campsites, providing immaculate facilities. Catering was first class both at the Permanence (Ride Headquarters) and every 30 miles on each of the several arrow-marked routes provided for us to experience every day. *Accueil* (welcome) sites had tented seating areas for hundreds of people, live or recorded music, plus refrigerated soft drinks or beer plus a varied food selection.

Highlights of the week were a picnic at Brantome on the River Dronne for 7,000 where we watched kayaks bouncing themselves over a shallow weir, and the final Sunday parade, in club or national dress groups, for 10km around closed roads through the centre of Perigueux. That provided a memorable way for the local population to say goodbye and for the cyclists to thank the people of Perigueux for their patience and good humour.



An easy Chase

Tony and Maureen Johnson cycled through autumn leaves in Staffordshire's Cannock Chase

Early autumn is a wonderful time to spend a couple of hours exploring Cannock Chase Forest by bicycle. The leaves are just beginning to turn. We first started cycling on Cannock Chase about 50 years ago, and it is known by some local cyclists as 'cycling heaven'. The trails and tracks of the Chase are natural, not made-up roads, and with the exception of a few marked mountain bike trails and a few short climbs all are easy to ride on any type of bicycle. You don't have to be super fit either.

Freewheeling out of the

forest centre car park and strongly resisting the aroma of bacon sandwiches being cooked in the café, our ride started. Within 100 yards, we were riding on the Chase tracks, which soon had us dropping down into lower gears. With a firm grip on both brakes we slowly descended to the Stony Brook ford and paused to take photographs of the wooden bridge that spans the waterfall.

Then, following the track that runs parallel upstream to Stony Brook and glancing into the thickets now and then for a sight of the green woodpecker that frequents this area, we stopped, this time to rest awhile on one of the seats next to the Fair oak fishing pools.

After taking a few more photographs it was time to return to the forest centre car park because we wanted to cycle around the nearby Cannock Chase Sculpture trail. The displays around the trail are mostly biodegradable and are usually the work of local artists or groups. The trail is fairly flat and suitable for all cyclists of any age or ability.

And yes, after riding around the sculpture trail our next stop was the café.



NEXT ISSUE

DROPPING THROUGH YOUR LETTERBOX IN TWO MONTHS:

LOCK IT, DON'T LOSE IT
How to prevent bike theft in town

TOURING ON A SHOESTRING
Epic touring made affordable

CLASSIC TOURER
Dawes Super-Galaxy on test

MOUNTAIN BIKING IN CYPRUS
Better than the Canary Islands?

Cycle wants your Travellers' Tales. Write or email the editor - details on page 80 - to find out what's required.