

Battle of Normandy ride

Cecil Newton revisited the Normandy towns he'd seen as a soldier in 1944

The ferry took me to Ouistreham with my bike. The plan was to follow the route that my regiment – the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards – had taken in 1944. It was at Ver-sur-Mer that I unexpectedly found myself cycling in the war, on a discarded army folding bike, after our mission to successfully capture the blockhouse at Gold Beach King Red Sector. It had made my day.

Sixty-two years later, I cycled up the hill of Mont Fleury to Creully, a few miles inland, which was liberated on the 6th June 1944 by the regiment and the



Green Howards. At the foot of the hill and below the imposing chateau walls there lies our memorial to the 176 killed during the campaign in north west Europe

Country lanes led me to Cristot, which we had reached on 11th June, 1944. Verrières, a hamlet, was my stop for the night. There's a memorial to nine of my friends killed on 14th June 1944 at the crossroads. Today my route south to Villers Bocage and Aunay-sur-Odon was along a labyrinth of country roads. There was some stiff pedalling and (pushing) to get to Le Plessis Grimoult through the beautiful Forest of Valcongrain, which was the site of bitter fighting before the enemy was chased eastwards. From Aunay the road to Thury Harcourt in Suisse Normande is, luckily, downhill all the way.

Returning northwards I headed for Tessel where on 26th June 1944 the regiment, with three other regiments, attacked south down the valley of the 'Le Bordel'. It was likened to a battle in World War I. A plaque on the church and the name Rifleman E Wills scratched on the base of the church tower are the only clues to what happened on that day, the memory of which is locked in the peaceful fields in that valley.

Back at Ouistreham the on-board computer showed 248 kilometres and I returned to the UK with memories of a pleasant ride and of those desperate days in 1944.

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Bikes built from parts everyday folk leave behind

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Cyclists argue for and against

100 MILES OFF-ROAD IN WALES
Riding the Trans-Cambrian

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

The Antrim coast

Alex and Christine Wilson and their friend Morag explored Northern Ireland

The summer of 2007 was wet and we arrived in Coleraine in torrential rain. The bus had brought us and our bikes – most in Northern Ireland seem cycle friendly (see www.translink.co.uk). We then had a Monsoon cycle ride out along the coast to a fabulous hostel in the village of Downhill. This was now the official start point for a tour that we'd used public transport to shorten, because of the weather.

The weather was still a bit iffy but dry enough for the most part to enjoy a leisurely cruise through Coleraine, Portstewart and Portrush. We stopped often, notably at the Bishop of Derry's Palace at Downhill, Dunluce Castle at Portbalintrae, and – a 'must do' for us Scots – the Bushmills distillery.

After Bushmills, everything turned rosy. With the sun on our faces and the wind in our backs, the scenery just got better and better. Getting off the main A2 as often as possible onto much quieter roads we viewed cliffs, sea stacks and natural arches surrounded by turquoise sea and white sand beaches. The Giant's Causeway is one of Ireland's most spectacular natural features and The Carrick a Rede rope bridge a delight, but don't look down if you are faint-hearted. From Ballycastle you can take a ferry to Rathlin Island, where it's worth visiting the west lighthouse to see seabirds swarming around spectacular cliffs.

Back on the mainland we continued east and south into Antrim Glens country. This picturesque coastline is known as the Magpie Coast. Not because of birds but due to the striking bands of white chalk and black volcanic basalt strata in the cliff faces and headlands. Our final day was an exhilarating downhill from Glenariff to the coast and an easy cruise to Larne, arriving just as the heavens opened yet again and summer returned to its normal pattern for 2007. We really felt that we had stolen the few best days.

