

## 900k on the NSCR

Cathy and Neil Kay cycled the North Sea Cycle Route – or at least some of it

**T**he first thing to know about the North Sea Cycle Route (NSCR) is that it is long. To misquote a famous book: 'You may think it's a long way to the Post Office, but that's peanuts to the NSCR.' It's 5,889km. Much of that is on tracks travelling across all the countries that border the North Sea.

Our plans were vague. We booked ferry tickets from Newcastle to Amsterdam and from Stavanger back to Newcastle two weeks later. The idea was to plan the route itself as we went along. Our first shock was realising that Stavanger was in Norway! Cathy had been boycotting the country due to its whaling policy. Secondly, we realised we needed to cheat.

We had done a bit of cycling in Britain so the 2,269km here could go. Sweden seemed like an unnecessary diversion so it went also. Finally, the route through Germany seemed unnecessarily twisty, so out it went. This was a

holiday not an athletic achievement!

Holland was fun. Even as a cycle instructor, I had no idea where to cycle or where to look. Cycle routes go in all directions and every variety of bike speeds along. No searching for little blue signs, but which of the six do I follow? Groningen, a bit off the route, is a cyclist's heaven. Not for them a few Sheffield stands round the side of the station car park. They have a purpose-built, manned, underground bike park holding over 4,500 bikes!

In comparison, Denmark was wild and deserted. Endless rolling dunes, powerful winds and ever-present German camper vans. Norway was like a fairyland. You expected an elf to pop from behind a rock at any moment. We even watched beach volleyball at 58 degrees north.

A fantastic route with rarely a car in sight. I just wonder what the foreign visitor will make of the British section.



## Canadian rail trails

Stuart Cook discovered ideal cycling conditions on Vancouver Island

**I**t was a cyclist's paradise, my son said, after moving to Victoria, on Vancouver Island, off the west coast of Canada. I decided to take a bike and explore. The shuttle bus from Vancouver airport to Victoria takes bikes and the ferry offered views of seals and killer whales.

The defunct 'Galloping Goose' railway, running from the Vancouver Island capital of

Victoria, is now a super cycle-trail, a mix of tarmac and hard-pack. A ride north, for 20 miles up past Sidney to the island ferry port, has superb views of the Pacific, scattered with tiny wooded islands. The cafes in Sidney are a pleasure, and strong coffee is served with pride.

Cycle traffic is dense nearer town, and whereas in the UK my 50 mile jaunts at 17-18mph rarely pick up anyone except keen sporting cyclists, over there many a guy (and gal), commuting on a laden sit-up-and-beg, would jump onto a passing wheel and attempt to overtake.

Where the trail crosses roads, via zebra crossing marks and give-way signs, no local cyclist slows, or even looks! I could not bring

myself to try, but neither did I ever meet a motorist who didn't stop well back. Very different from the UK! Rules there say that the less-used route at a crossroads gets stop signs, and on some road crossings the bike path gets priority, with halt signs on the road.

Travelling west out of Victoria the same old railway winds 35 miles into forest and lakes, though never far from habitation. This is more undulating but is even more picturesque.

On wet days a 90p bus fare gets you anywhere within about 40 minutes journey time of Victoria, with bike racks on the front of most buses. You do have to remember to tell the driver you want the bike, just before getting off. Otherwise they set off and leave you, with your bike proudly displayed up front.



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