



Cyber cycling

Internet forums like CTC's own add another dimension to cycling club life. **Steve Rowley** explains the attractions

According to my wife, who is rarely wrong, I am obsessed with cycling. My healthy obsession is thanks to the internet – forums to be precise. My introduction to cyber cycling occurred in May 2005 when I took part in a Friday Night Ride to the Coast organised by Simon Legg of Cheam and Morden CTC. Several people on the ride were members of the forerunner of the forum I now belong to. On returning home I logged on to discover a warm, vibrant community of like-minded souls who have helped expand my cycling horizons.

An internet forum is a website made up of boards where topics of a similar nature are grouped together. Each topic is called a thread. Threads are effectively conversations and participants have their say by typing a post. Most forums allow you to read posts without becoming a member; this is referred to as lurking. Becoming a member is simple. You do not have to use your real name; most don't. Moderators uphold standards and resolve problems. There are many cycling forums; the CTC's own is excellent. Lurk on a few and join one or more that feel comfortable.

Why bother? My membership of Yet Another Cycling Forum (YACF) has made my cycling richer. If I am bored I can log on and take part in a lively discussion about issues of the day. If there is something wrong with my bike I will have an answer in minutes. If I fancy a ride on Sunday there will be another member close by at a loose end. A good forum is like a traditional bike club – a place to chat, an exchange for advice, a depository of hard won knowledge, somewhere to get inspired and to inspire.

As with everything, you get out what you put in. For example, via the forum I help organise a weekly Wednesday evening ride to a different local pub. A small amount of organisational effort has taken me along deserted lanes to undiscovered pubs with nothing but my fellow forum members and startled wildlife for company. We have met locals like Shadow the Rottweiler at The Swan in Little Totham who carries a cannon ball around in his mouth. Plus we consume locally brewed beer, home pickled eggs and



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other delights including wasabi flavoured nuts from Braintree!

It was on one such Wednesday evening ride that I mentioned an eco pub with micro brewery and campsite just across the border in Suffolk. It was quickly agreed that this sounded like a heavenly destination for an overnight cycle camping expedition. However, it might have been the beer that suggested we should go in mid-January. A thread was created and ultimately about 15 people in 11 tents had a fantastic time.

Forums are like real communities in every sense. I have made true friends, some of whom I will never meet, others I cycle with most weeks. Like real communities,

forums can offer light relief and many a belly laugh, but they also offer tangible support. Last year a forum member's husband battled long and painfully with cancer; the support given via the forum was unstinting. When the inevitable happened forum members travelled from around the UK ensuring there were bikes and lycra in the funeral cortege.

Cyclists have always clubbed together and forums are just an extension of this spirit. A traditional club or CTC member group can be enhanced by an online forum and some forums act as if they are clubs. For example, YACF was awarded a trophy by Audax UK for being the 'club' with the most number of riders in the 2009 London-Edinburgh-London event.

Communication binds cyclists together; it has since the earliest times. It doesn't matter whether you're chatting to your fellow cyclists over beans on toast in a café or online. Both are great.

Some popular cycling forums:

CTC forum - www.ctc.org.uk/forum

Bike Radar - www.bikeradar.com/forums/

Road.cc - www.road.cc/forum

Singletrack - www.singletrackworld.com/forum/

Yet Another Cycling Forum - www.yacf.co.uk