

We need you!

Cycle wants your Travellers' Tales. Write or email the editor – details on page 78 – to find out what's required.

TRAVELLERS' TALES

Joining the fold at last

A FOLDING BIKE HAS BEEN THE PASSPORT TO ADVENTURE FOR 79-YEAR-OLD BERYL LEECH

LOTS OF people tell me that they used to enjoy cycling. When I ask why they don't today, they tell me about traffic, hills, and aches and pains.

I can sympathise as I could never swing my leg over a saddle, and in my seventies I struggled even to mount my Dawes ladies bicycle. By then I had a new friend who had a Bike Friday folder. I realised that my problems could be solved by having a folding bike. We could easily travel by car, bus or train, and so find quieter routes in Europe without troublesome traffic or hills.

Many folding bikes have adjustable-height handlebars so that you can easily change your position on the bike – a useful option when those limbs begin to ache. I chose a folding bike with 20-inch wheels and seven gears. It is just as nice to ride as my 'big' bike was. By having a rack on the back, I can carry luggage in panniers.

For the first time in my life, I have experienced cycle touring – in England, France, Belgium and Holland. Our journeys are by train to the ferry ports of Harwich, Dover or Portsmouth. We do not do the speed of the young, who sail past us occasionally, but we cover quite a reasonable distance and enjoy the countryside and the wildlife.

This year we cycled from Gloucester to Richmond Park, a distance of 220 miles. Touring and cycling long distances is an activity I have only taken up in the last six years and, gosh, do I enjoy it! This year I shall be 80, and I am already planning more adventures.

The Coast to Coast trip went so well that Edward, now 12, is hoping to ride from Land's End to John o'Groats this year

Beryl Leech took up cycle touring at the age of 73, when she swapped her conventional bike for a small-wheeled folder



School holiday C2C

Eleven-year-old Edward Willis rode the Sustrans Coast to Coast route with his father, Mike

The Sustrans C2C route was my first big ride. We set off on 24 July, after I had broken up from my last year of primary school. We had our photos taken in Whitehaven, dipped our wheels in the Atlantic, and set off. Our first destination was a campsite at Lorton, where there was a scarecrow festival. There were some great entries.

The next day consisted of quiet yet bumpy lanes, cycle paths (the old Keswick railway line was excellent!), and the A66. We arrived quite late at an amazing campsite at Mains Gate Farm near Lazonby.

I was dreading the next day: we had to climb Hartside Pass. I was expecting a busy

A-road climb with lots of cars and motorbikes screaming past. But it is a nice climb with a brilliant view, and you start halfway up so you don't even ride the steepest part. Best of all, there is a café at the top. After a cup of tea and a bacon sandwich, we flew down the descent to Leadgate, avoiding the roadkill on the way.

We then dropped into Garrigill. We climbed out of the valley and into Nenthead, and then climbed yet again – out of Nenthead, entering County Durham – before descending into the next valley to Allenheads. We were seeing more and more mine workings and quarries in the area as we went. We flew down the final descent

to Rookhope, where we had a lovely meal in the pub with fellow C2C cyclists. At the camping area of the B&B, we were bitten by midges.

The last day consisted of Crawleyside Bank and cycle paths. Crawleyside Bank was a steep but enjoyable climb. Then it was pretty much all downhill via The Waskerly Way (another ex-railway) to Roker Pier in Sunderland. We passed some of the sculptures on the way and stopped to take photos of the best. Our favourite was 'The Old Transformers'.

We arrived at the end to be greeted by family and an ice-cream van. I felt really happy. I want to cycle the End to End in 2012.





Tandemming to the Mediterranean

John and Ann Cave cycle-toured from Bilbao to Bordeaux to Beziers – and beyond

Cycling onto a ferry to Europe was something I always wanted to do. A planned trip along the Canal du Midi in France gave me the opportunity. We took the train from Cumbria to Southampton, and then followed a cycle route to Portsmouth. We were the only cyclists with about 50 motorbikers embarking on the ferry to Spain.

The route into Bilbao took us along the river, right into the centre to our hotel. We spent a day here, then went to the coast and headed towards France. The Spanish roads were very good and pothole free! We followed advice and took a train along part of the busy

section of coast road to Hendaye, avoiding San Sebastian. After that, we would be on cycle paths for much of the rest of the trip.

We headed north, enjoying mixed weather. The route was straightforward and quiet. Seaside towns were open early in the season, and there was always somewhere to stay and eat. After a week we were in Arcachon, where we met up with friends.

We all set off for Bordeaux and the start of part two of our trip. We followed the Roger Lapebie cycle path from Bordeaux, and then on along the Canal du Lateral all the way to Toulouse. The route was clear to

follow and we easily found accommodation, though many sites were not yet open.

Onto the Canal du Midi and the surface changed from tarmac cycle paths to very narrow tracks that would be interesting in the wet. We continued on, with good weather and enjoyable riding. We saw a few other cyclists, some runners doing the equivalent of a marathon a day, and some canoeists in paddling coast to coast. The final stages towards the Mediterranean were busier and people were very friendly and helpful. Finally, we picked up the Bike Express in Montpellier for our return.

Note the S&S couplings on the tourer. It doesn't need to be split for a ferry or the European Bike Express coach, but can come in handy for other forms of transport



John and Ann travelled out on the ferry to Bilbao. After crossing into France and riding the Canal du Midi, they caught the EBE home

Around the British Isles

NICK HAND TOURED 6,324 MILES AROUND THE COASTS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

ON A holiday in Cornwall, I wondered how long it would take to get back to the same point if I just carried on cycling along the coast. A year later, I set off from my home in Bristol to do just that: cycle 4,541-miles around Wales, Scotland and England. I cycled clockwise, because I liked the idea of being a little nearer the sea. That was the summer of 2009, and to complete the journey I cycled 1,783-miles around the Irish coast the following year.

One of the books about journeys that has inspired me is Laurie Lee's 'As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning'. I really like how Lee tells the story through the people that he meets along the way. This was the main inspiration behind my idea to record and photograph people living and working on the coast. I called the journey Slowcoast and I set up a website so that people could follow my progress on the bike – I had a gizmo that uploaded my exact route.

I carried quite a bit of kit with me and edited and uploaded little photofilms I made as I went. I reckoned the first journey would be close to 5,000 miles in total. I planned to cycle 50 miles a day and to do an interview about every other day. I liked the roundness of the figures — 50 miles a day, 100 days, 50 photofilms.

I was privileged to meet some amazingly talented folk who are working in traditional and new crafts – as well as the cyclists I met on the road. People tell me of exciting journeys further afield, but I can't think of anywhere better to explore than our own beautiful islands.

For more about Nick's trip, including details of his book, visit slowcoast.co.uk.

DROPPING THROUGH YOUR LETTERBOX IN TWO MONTHS:

RIDE TO THE PIES –OFF-ROAD
CTC's first mountain bike sportive

SEGREGATION V INTEGRATION
What boosts utility cycling best?

TESTED: 29ER BIKES IN 2012
Acceptance at last? Expedition bike, hardtail and full-suspension

CLIPLESS PEDALS, PART 2
Pedals for mountain biking, touring and commuting

NEXT ISSUE