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TRAVELLERS' TALES

An Australian C2C

ANDREW DICKSON RECALLS HIS 4,000-MILE CROSSING OF AUSTRALIA LAST YEAR

ON 21ST August, I dipped the bike's wheels in the Indian Ocean at Fremantle. That's spring in Australia, so I was hoping things wouldn't get too warm. The plan was to cross Australia and take in as many cities as possible. As I was using a tourer, my route would stick to surfaced roads.

I travelled solo, mainly wild camping so I could stop at almost any spot. I ended up pitching my tent at coastal headlands, beaches, rainforest and eucalyptus woods, mostly under gloriously clear, star-studded skies.

After reaching Kalgoorlie, I headed south to Norseman and then east for the 12 days it took to cross the Nullarbor Plain. Ceduna saw me leave Highway 1 for the more scenically pleasing coastal route round the Eyre Peninsula. After using the ferry to cross the Spencer Gulf, I made my way to Adelaide for the first of my rest stops. It was then onto Melbourne, mainly following the coast on the splendid Great Ocean Road.

Canberra was next, with the odd hill north of Cann River making this leg a little more challenging. The route to Sydney brought my only mechanical mishap: a broken chain. North of Sydney and things started to warm up, but sticking mainly to the coast helped keep things pleasant enough. North of Australia's most easterly point at Cape Byron and the Gold Coast holiday resorts, I arrived in Brisbane to dip my wheels in the Pacific Ocean on 24th October.

I had a great time with no bad experiences and no punctures. I also had the pleasure of being invited to stay overnight by people I met. Conditions were ideal; the only three days of very wet weather saw me in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney.

Details of my trip are online at bikingcrossaustralia.blogspot.co.uk



River Tauber roaming

Riverside cycle paths in Germany let you ride gently back in time, as Joan Green explains

I'm in my seventies now and can't ride up mountains and over tracks like I used to. But I still love touring, especially in Bavaria. By using the Rhine, Main and Danube cycle paths, I can have just as good a time as when I was younger.

The Rhine Valley is scenic but noisy. Huge barges chug up and down the river day and night. Busy railway lines run along both sides and main roads flank the railways. The cycle paths are jammed in between. On one holiday, I turned off the main artery, where the River Tauber joins the River Main at Wertheim, and for no particular reason chose to cycle a path

up the valley of the Tauber. How lucky! It was wonderful.

There are wooded hills and winding valleys reminiscent of the Welsh Borders or the Wye Valley. The dedicated cycle paths are for the most part perfectly surfaced and gently undulating, and there is no main road through the valley to carry the noise of trucks. It has the tranquillity of England 50 years ago.

The Tauber River rises near Rothenburg and ends at Wertheim, where it enters the Main. The route around Rothenburg is quite hilly, but the hills are short. Rothenburg is a walled medieval town of 6,000 or so people in a state of perfect preservation,

damage from the Second World War having been repaired.

Each year, during the first weekend of September, the townspeople organise a historical festival with markets, street tableaux, craft exhibitions, a torch-lit procession, music, and dancing. The townsfolk dress in period costume, ranging from the year 1000 to 1800.

Beyond Rothenburg, the route continues for another 100km and can be extended even further. Every three for four kilometres, the path leads through villages well supplied with campsites, hotels, B&Bs, shops and cafés. It's ideal.



Two months after leaving the west coast, Andrew arrived at Australia's most easterly point



Following riverside cycle paths, it's possible to enjoy mountain vistas without riding over them





64 years ago...

Hugh Foulstone recalls his first cycle tour, a week camping in the Lake District in 1949

At 17 and 16, Brian and I decided to take a week to tour the Lake District. Neither of us had been there before, but we had a pre-war Cycling touring guide book and a ½-inch Bartholomew's map of the Lakes. We had joined the YHA and booked our overnight stops well in advance. These cost 7/6 [37½p] each at this time.

We had one pair of panniers between us, to be carried in turn, plus a saddlebag each.

In 1949, there was very little traffic on the roads as the motor industry was still trying to recover after the war. It was ideal for cyclists! We stayed at Ingleton, Coniston

Copper Mines, Ennerdale, a luxury B&B at Braithwaite, and more hostels in Troutbeck, Penrith and Ingleton again.

Our route took us up Wrynose Pass, which was unsurfaced at this time and had a gradient of 1-in-4. We had to push. We tried to freewheel down the 1-in-4 slope on the other side, with stones shooting out in all directions, but gave up. So we walked down to Wrynose Bottom, forking right at Cockley Beck Bridge to head up Hardknot Pass, soaring above us. More loose stone and more pushing!

At Ennerdale, we couldn't find the hostel. We were about to ask some hikers

who were coming the other way when we realised we were outside the gates. We washed in a stream that night, with hurricane lamps to guide us to our beds.

At Ambleside, we cheated a bit and took a steamer down Lake Windermere to Bowness. Brian went for a row on the lake, despite being a non-swimmer. It went fine until a tired swimmer tried to heave himself into the boat and nearly upset it. Even now, more than sixty years later, Brian still remembers the swimmer with horror. He can swim now, however!

It was a memorable first cycle tour.

All around our island

IN THE WETTEST SUMMER EVER, JAMIE J SPENT FOUR MONTHS CYCLING AROUND THE COAST OF BRITAIN

CYCLING AROUND the coast of the UK can't be done. Not quite. There are not enough roads or tracks running parallel to the sea. Farmland also gets in the way, and then there are those vast areas owned by us all but managed exclusively by the Ministry of Defence. I gave it my best shot, pedalling 6,194 miles in just over four months on a fully-laden, too heavy to lift, £350 Dawes Mojave.

I'm not yet sure if I actually enjoyed myself. I was relieved rather than elated to cross the finishing line. Memories of the misery induced by the challenging climbs and descents of South West England remain.

I was lucky with the weather, though. While my home town flooded twice, I was baked on the west coast of Scotland. I was only halted in my tracks for two days by the late September deluge whilst making my way along Cardigan Bay.

There were some real highlights too: the deserted beaches of Sandwood Bay at Cape Wrath; the amazing wildlife at Newburgh estuary; an idyllic morning spent drying out at Aberdour; and overwhelmingly courteous motorists.

Over the trip I had only four punctures, but needed two new tyres and one rear wheel. My pannier rack cracked near Aberystwyth, though I was fortunate to receive an excellent free service, about half way into the trip, from Dave the volunteer mechanic at Middlesbrough's superb Cycle Centre.



Jamie's sunny pitch at Sandwood Bay, on the far north west coast of Scotland



It was a soggy summer overall, of course. This is Jamie enjoying the beach at Bournemouth



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