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# TRAVELLERS' TALES



## South to the sun

GEOFFREY JOBBINS CELEBRATED HIS RETIREMENT BY CYCLING TO THE SOUTH OF FRANCE WITH HIS WIFE

**THE PLAN** was to cycle from our home in Staffordshire all the way to Provence. I planned a route that took us as directly as possible to Folkestone, and in France we rode south from Calais, keeping to the east of Paris and eventually following the valley of the Rhône south to the sun. We left home on a cold and rainy July morning, but by the time we arrived in Folkestone we had put our jackets away and were using sunscreen.

In northern France, we rode through cold rain, past vast military cemeteries. We had our first rest day in Semur-en-Auxois, 11 days and 650 miles from home.

Five days later we had another rest day, lounging in well earned sunshine by the hotel's pool, another 320 miles and one puncture further from home.

We were now in the Rhône valley, and had an easy couple of days riding south to the Camargue, followed by a day's sightseeing in Arles. We rode on over the Luberon to Apt for a few days rest and recuperation, and then north through the Vaucluse mountains to Pont-St-Esprit

The last day's riding in France was an exhilarating sprint down the N7 to Orange, where we were picked up by the European Bike Express for the journey back to the UK. We left the bus at Trowell services on the M1 and spent the night in a local pub, ready for the last ride of the tour. It was a typical English summer's day: wet and chilly. We arrived home 30 days, 21 hotels and 1,400 miles after we left, feeling proud and much fitter.



## A yarn in Provence

Last July, Paul Whitehead swapped UK rain for Mediterranean sun and the Tour de France

On Friday 13th July, three of us flew to Toulouse with our bikes in CTC flight bags, happy to escape Lancashire's monsoon season. We followed the Canal du Midi, reaching Carcassonne the next afternoon for the Bastille Day fireworks. Then on Sunday we cycled to Limoux to watch Wiggo and Le Tour depart.

A hilly few days followed as we took in Les Châteaux de Lastours, the magnificent Millau

Viaduct, the Gorges du Tarn, Mont Aigoual, Florac and the Ardèche before our first 'rest day': an 18-mile canoe trip from Le Pont d'Arc to St Martin.

In our second week, we visited the Aven d'Orgnac caves en route to Le Pont du Gard. Our next stop was Avignon's famous bridge, followed by a 71-mile round trip to Mont Ventoux. The last few miles to the Ventoux summit are 1-in-10 but they felt even steeper in the heat. We spent a

couple of hours at the top before stopping off to see the Tommy Simpson memorial on the fast descent.

The Mistral wind pushed us on to a dry Fontaine-de-Vaucluse and east to the Gorges du Verdon. On the final three passes between Castellane and the Côte d'Azur, we ran out of water. There were no shops or fountains, so like the Tour de France riders of old we did a 'bar raid': two full bottles of chilled water each – and they were free!

On our penultimate day, we rode to Monaco, cycling around the Grand Prix circuit.

As we flew back into Manchester the next day, we were met with torrential rain.

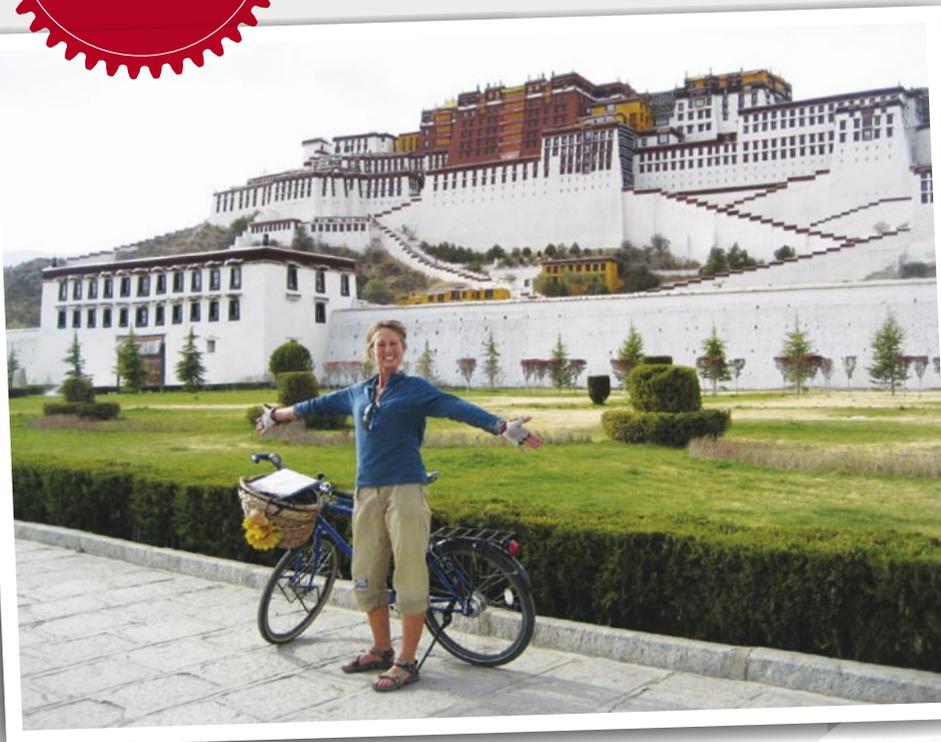


After cycling steadily south through France, the Jobbinses caught the European Bike Express home



The fortified city of Carcassonne is well worth a visit if you're in the Languedoc-Roussillon region





## The Celtic Trail

MARGARET WESTHEAD SPENT EASTER ON A FOUR-DAY SUSTRANS-ROUTE TOUR OF SOUTH WALES

**WE PICKED** up the Celtic Trail in Swansea and followed it west. The route has two alternative routes to Carmarthen; we took the coast route outwards. We were impressed by the 22 miles of traffic free cycle path on this section. It followed a disused railway line across the Gower peninsular and gave lovely views out to sea. The only disadvantage was the headwind!

On the second day, we decided to turn the headwind to our advantage and put the bikes on the train to Haverford West. We then followed the trail eastwards to Tenby. The route took us along miles of traffic-free cycle path and narrow country lanes with hedgerows bursting into life with spring flowers. We found a nice B&B, and ate out that night at the pub where Dylan Thomas got drunk and left behind his manuscript for *Under Milk Wood*.

Day three saw us following the route back to Carmarthen. We wondered how the trail would get us round a headland at Saundersfoot, only to find it went through its own tunnels in the cliff to emerge at Amroth next to the beachside café – just in time for elevenses.

On our final day, we took the alternative route from Carmarthen back to Swansea. This went past the National Botanic Garden of Wales. From there, we climbed for a few miles but then found ourselves on another disused railway line. This stayed on the hilltops before descending all the way to Llanelli.

## Cycling Full Circle

At 51, Astrid Domingo Molyneux decided to set out on a cycle tour around the world

**WHAT BETTER** way to kickstart my second half-century than by cycling solo round the world for two years? World touring is not only the province of macho males in their mid-twenties; middle-aged mums in mid-menopause also deserve a look in. Which is how I found myself setting off in May 2008 to do exactly that, returning home after two years (minus two days), 20,000 miles and 28 countries.

In September 2005, I had casually picked up a book in a charity shop: *A Bike Ride* by Anne Mustoe, a middle-aged headmistress who

had cycled solo round the world 20 years previously. By the end the book I was thinking, 'I'd like to do that,' followed by, 'Well, if she can do it, why can't I?' So I did.

As much as anything, this was a journey of faith; I felt I had God's blessing. Even so, my plans weren't all plain sailing. The hardest thing was acknowledging the understandable concerns of family and friends for my safety and well-being – whilst steadfastly ignoring them.

Apart from the personal challenges of such a venture, I wanted

to see for myself the goodness of ordinary people, to redress the balance of the sensational negativism of the media. And I was not disappointed. The world is a beautiful place and so are the people in it. That's not to say there is no dissatisfaction, frustration, helplessness, ugliness, sadness, sorrow. It is that, despite all these, the instinctive desire of the vast majority of people is to demonstrate kindness to one another.

*Astrid's book, **Cycling Full Circle**, can be ordered from her website [www.cyclingfullcircle.com](http://www.cyclingfullcircle.com).*



Astrid crossed Turkey in the winter when it was cold. She was on the road for two years all told



Much of the Celtic Trail through South Wales follows traffic-free cycle paths



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