

FEATURE
2014 Giro
d'Italia

Main photo
The Antrim coast
is ideal for touring
after the Giro
departs
Below
Mark Cavendish on
the front in Arezzo,
Italy, in the 2012 Giro

PHOTOS CHRIS JUDEN & ISTOCKPHOTO

IN THE PINK?

The 2014 Giro d'Italia starts in Belfast. Might this help catalyse cycling there?
Dan Joyce spoke to Tim Edgar, CTC's Cycling Development Officer for the city

Above: Chris Juden



The first *maglia rosa* of 2014, the pink leader's jersey of the Giro d'Italia, will be awarded in the capital of Northern Ireland, where the first two stages start and finish. It's a coup for the city. But what will the impact be of the race in the weeks and months after this grand tour has moved on?

Helicopter shots of the peloton traversing the countryside are always good publicity. 'RCS, the Italian owners of the Giro d'Italia, loved the Irish roads, saying that they are some of the best they have seen,' said Tim. 'They're seldom straight or flat, meandering through a landscape of small hills to the next town or village. It's also a small country, so tourists can cycle and see a lot even on a short stay.'

As proof of this, stage two of the race goes

from Belfast up to the north coast, passing by the Giant's Causeway, and back again down the Antrim coast.

TV, TOURISM, AND TRY-OUTS

'The TV coverage should show off our beautiful countryside and landmarks, inspiring future visits,' Tim said. 'The Giro is estimated to return about £10m for a £2.5m initial investment. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board expects 140,000 visitors, based upon available beds in hotels and B&Bs.'

There is hope that the media focus on cycling will encourage ordinary people to get on their bikes, to improve their health or simply to get from A to B. CTC is involved in this legacy work.

'It should offer a landmark opportunity for change,' said Tim. 'CTC will be partnering with Belfast City Council at the Giro Festival

to celebrate all things cycling and Italian. "Try it" cycling sessions will be available to locals and visitors at the festival hub. Restaurants will offer pizza, Italian coffee and biscotti.'

This carnival atmosphere will be complemented by practical cycle hire promotion. 'Trial public cycle hire bikes and docking stations will be set up by prospective suppliers of public cycle hire schemes during the Giro weekend,' Tim said. 'CTC sits on the Public Cycle Hire project board, representing the needs of cyclists and prospective cyclists. [After the race] we will continue to work with the council and other board members to promote engagement and active travel behaviour change.'

GETTING KIDS ON BIKES

The Giro also represents an opportunity to promote cycling to children, for leisure and for cycling to school. 'A schools resource pack has been adapted and is being made available to more than 280 schools neighbouring the Giro route,' Tim said.

Children are enthusiastic about cycling to begin with. CTC has evidence of this first hand in Northern Ireland, having begun a partnership with Belfast City Council in 2010 to run CTC's Bike Club project. Youth cycling groups were set up across >



the sectarian divide, on The Falls Road (a largely republican area) and the nearby Shankill Road (largely loyalist).

'The Falls and Shankill Roads of Belfast have a notorious association with the troubles in Northern Ireland,' Tim said. 'Both areas have high levels of deprivation, and the outcomes for young people tend to be poor – in terms of education, health, employment and social behaviour.'

Yet both Bike Clubs have been a great success. 'The Falls Park Bike Club is led by council parks outreach officer, Michael Culbert,' Tim said. 'He's an enthusiastic character who wanted to provide cycling activities alongside their varied park programmes with schools, sports clubs and community groups.' And he did exactly that.

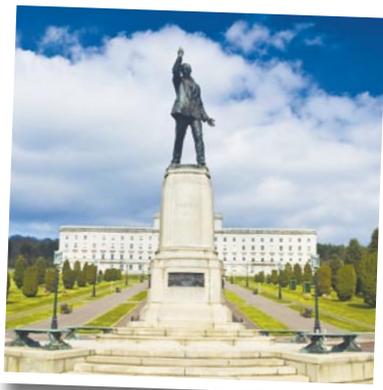
'The Shankill Area Project Bike Club is led by Mark McBride, a senior youth worker with Belfast Education and Library Board. Mark works with Noel Maguire, who is passionate about what mountain biking can do for young people, since it's something they really enjoy. The Shankill club beat their first-year target of working with 300 young people in four months.'

PLANNING YOUR NI RIDES

If you're travelling to Belfast to watch the Giro in person, it's worth bringing a bike. As soon as the race caravan has departed, you can explore the roads that the pros raced on – and much more. I asked Tim where he'd recommend visiting by bike, for anyone who had a day or two to spare.

'Definitely head for the Dromara hills, and ride through the foothills and into the Mourne Mountains. The author CS Lewis once said of this area of natural beauty: "I felt a giant could walk around from the next hill at any moment." The landscape partly inspired the Chronicles of Narnia.

'If you have another day, get the train – or cycle like the professionals – from Belfast to Portrush. Ride along the Giant's Causeway coast towards Bushmills, home to that famous whiskey. Enjoy the views across White Park Bay, then carry on to Ballycastle, Murlough Bay, and Torr Head, the closest point to Scotland. Then head back down the Antrim Coast road to Larne.' 🌟



Above
Expect helicopter shots of the Giant's Causeway as stage two passes by
Below
Edward Carson's statue at Stormont is an ideal vantage point for the team time trial

WATCHING THE GIRO

THE FIRST THREE stages of the 2014 Giro d'Italia take place in Ireland: the first two wholly in Northern Ireland, and stage three crossing the border into the Republic of Ireland.

STAGE 1 on Friday 9 May is a 21.7km team time trial through Belfast. It starts in the Titanic Quarter in the city centre and heads out along Newtonards Road and Upper Newtonards Road to Stormont. It then returns the way it came until it nears the River Lagan. Crossing that, it heads south on Oxford Street, looping around to finish on Donegall Square North.

STAGE 2 also starts and finishes in Belfast but is 218km long. The race heads inland to Antrim and then north towards Portrush. There's an intermediate sprint at Bushmills, then the race comes back down the Antrim coast, with Category 4 climbs at Cushendall Road

(125.9km) and Knocknagullagh (194.4km).

STAGE 3 is 187km, from Armagh to Dublin. It snakes over Category 4 climbs at Markethill Summit (32.1km) and Fews Forest (51km) in Northern Ireland, before heading south and crossing the border into (and through) Dundalk. There's an intermediate sprint at Castlebellingham (97.3km), then it's on to the finish in Dublin via Balbriggan.

Tim Edgar says: 'For the team time trial, I'm heading to Carson's statue which stands in front of the Northern Ireland Assembly building at Stormont. Not because of its notable location, but because it's the steepest part of the course with a long 10% climb. That should slow the teams down enough for me to savour the fact the Giro is on home soil!'

For more details, visit girostart2014.com