



PHOTOS ROB AINSLEY, JASON PATIENT, CTC CAMBRIDGE

CAFÉ TO CAFÉ



Good cafés are more than fuel stops; they're part of the social fabric of cycling. **Rob Ainsley** peruses the menu for success

Cafés: we all have our favourites. I like the quirky ones: the Doncaster back garden on the Trans Pennine Trail (Threeways café, Braithwaite); the unstaffed 'honesty box' one in a church hall in Blacktoft, west of Hull; the fantastically remote, welcoming Crask Inn, on the single-track A836 in Scotland's far north...

But what defines a cyclists' café? These days, it seems, you can't open a city-centre bike shop without it being, in quotes, a 'cycle café': a modern hybrid where you can get your wheel trued en route to work, enjoy a barista espresso, and update your Facebook status.

WORKSTANDS AND CAPPUCINOS

The archetype of the nouveau urban chic is Look Mum No Hands! in central London, which opened on Old Street in spring 2010. The weekday winter afternoon I visit, it's packed with stylish-casual professionals of young-family age talking about metropolitan things in various languages. The café is decorated with bicycle bits; upmarket bike-pattern wrapping paper is on sale; snazzy, high-design cycling mags (Boneshaker, Rouleur) are there for browsing. A screen shows recent bike

racing over an alpine range. Cool pop-rock plays. Tablet-surfers enjoy £2.80 cappuccinos and artisan pork pies. And – discreetly – there's a workshop too.

Two early-twenties women tell me they're regulars, the cyclist one because it's 'friendly and easy to park', the non-cyclist one because it's 'great for working'. That would please the co-founder Sam, who chats to me between organising repairs. He wanted an inclusive place that welcomes all sorts of cyclists: 'There's something about cyclists that makes the place inherently friendly,' he says. 'I wanted to offer a workshop with a relaxed social side – somewhere you could easily park and not feel like a weirdo because you've arrived by bike. They show football in pubs, so I wanted to show the Tour!' He and his colleagues spent years waiting for a suitable site, and LMNH has a courtyard with racks for dozens of bikes – a rarity in London.

CITY CAFÉ-SHOPS

LMNH isn't alone, and other 'cycle cafés' have their own character. In Islington, Micycle offers a coffee-garden and bike wash. Nearby Cyclelab targets the sporty city worker, selling bespoke fruit juices alongside mid- to top-range road bikes. Just



Main photo: jason@cycling-images.co.uk

off Piccadilly Circus, Rapha sells exclusive, high-cachet cycle clothes to the affluent, alongside posh cakes, coffees, and bike films on HD screens; even the toilets boast Rapha-branded gels and unguents.

Over the river in south London, Cycle PS in Kennington fixes three punctures each morning for commuters on the CS7 cycle superhighway, who sip proper coffee while they wait. The company's friendly Camberwell branch addresses a more studenty market, opening late and selling inexpensive premium draught lager; the chirpy, beanie-hatted young guy in charge, Harvey, jokes that he has to be 'mechanic, barista, pizza chef and manager!' >



In the photo

- 1** The Dalesman Café in Gargrave, North Yorkshire
- 2** Cyclelab, in central London
- 3** Cycle PS's Kennington branch, in south-central London



2



3

FEATURE
Cyclists' cafés

In the photos

4 The celebrated Eureka café has been a refuelling hub for cyclists for over 80 years
5 Roadside pitstops, like Adam's café on the A143, offer good portions and good value

4



Why did all of these set up as cycle-cafés, rather than just cycle-shops? All told me much the same story: because they can offer something the large chains such as Halfords and Evans can't: a distinct atmosphere, a hyper-local experience, individual attention. Somewhere you'd keep cycling back to. All are keen to welcome first-time commuters, particularly women.

The new style is neither restricted to London, nor that new. Mud Dock café in Bristol has been going since the last century; C2C riders can celebrate finishing in Newcastle at The Hub near the Millennium Bridge; in my local York, Your Bike Shed has just opened with its own take on the workshop/café mix, with pictures on the wall simulating what the Tour de France peloton will look like this summer.

CLUB-RUN CAFÉS

But if your idea of a 'cycle café' is more tea-and-cake in a village on the club run, don't worry: the traditional style is still going strong. Half a country away in the Wirral – just north enough of Chester to get you warmed up on a chilly weekday morning – I visit a very different, more traditional, sort of place. Brown 'local attraction' road signs point to an unprepossessing hut by a middle-of-nowhere roundabout with Formica tables, gingham PVC tablecloths, HP sauce and ketchup. On sale are gloves, leggings, spares and cleaning agents... even a few inviting-looking road bikes. This is Eureka, a hub for local club cyclists since

1928. It's still thriving.

The first rider to arrive, around 9.15am, is Ann, a triathlete who's been cycling two years. 'I love the friendly, supportive atmosphere here,' she says. From 9.30am a steady trickle of road bikes of various ages arrives, and by 10am the place is packed out with around 70 cyclists – and *only* cyclists: a blur of yellow and red tops and lycraed legs, to the benign din of a dozen conversations on everything from the day's route to football to gossip to politics. I chat easily and equably about all sorts, to all sorts from (as I later discover) CEOs to long-term

“BY 10AM THE PLACE IS PACKED WITH AROUND 70 CYCLISTS – AND ONLY CYCLISTS”

CYCLISTS WELCOME



ONE OF CTC'S oldest membership services was identifying and brokering suitable refreshments and board from hostleries across the land. Many were identifiable by the cast iron 'Winged Wheel' CTC logo mounted on the wall.

The successor to this service is Cyclists Welcome, soon to have a revamped website: cyclistswelcome.co.uk. Cyclists Welcome is a searchable online database listing a wide range of cyclist-friendly establishments – B&Bs, hostels, hotels, bike shops, cafés and cycle hire operators.

Visit cyclistswelcome.co.uk if you're planning a trip. Or recommend your favourite establishment for a free listing.



unemployed. As cyclists, we're all equals.

There are several rides for half-a-dozen clubs starting here today, some with predetermined routes, others to be decided. Five dozen mugs of tea are simultaneously generated by three staff, plus a variety of cakes, baps, beans on toasts, and the odd full English. Most riders are 60-plus, but there's vibrant, smiling energy everywhere. If this is what retirement is like, bring it on.

Anne Peek (a cyclist, of course) runs the café. (There's also a cycle shop down the road; they sponsor promising young local cyclists.) After the last rider departs, around 11am, she can talk in the lull before the lunch-slot returnees. 'It's the cyclists who make the café,' she says. 'A nice friendly place to meet and chat.' Most people come in for a fuelling snack – 'beans and a spare' (beans on toast), or home-made soups and cakes.

WELCOMING CYCLISTS

Such places boost local economies. Back-of-a-napkin guesses suggest that if 50,000 riders each weekend spend an average of £5 each, that's £10m a year; the actual figure may be many times that. Not much compared to roadbuilding budgets maybe, but it all goes into real people's pockets, and an annual 'rural business grant' of that magnitude would be rightly celebrated.

But their importance goes beyond that. 'Cafés are not merely a refuelling stop,' says Nigel Deakin, a stalwart of Cambridge CTC. 'They're the pegs on which to hang a ride.' Typically, when they're planning a route, the first decision is the café stops: 'Without at least one, a circular bike ride would be empty.' An all-day Sunday ride might start at 9am, stop about 11am for morning coffee, take lunch around 1pm, and stop for afternoon tea about 4pm.

'One of the things that makes a good café,' says Nigel, 'is the feeling that we are welcome.' That's strongly reflected in the opinions on cafés of cycling chums I consult. Abundant, convenient cycle parking – perhaps next to outdoor tables so you can keep an eye on the bikes – matters too. Twenty minutes to half an hour seems the right sort of break: long enough for a rest but not so long you start to seize >

FAVOURITE CTC CAFÉS

THE EXPERTS on cycling cafés in any given area are CTC Member Groups; some even list good cafés on their websites. We asked all Member Group secretaries to pick their favourites; many thanks to those who did.

SCOTLAND

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY The Green Tea House
Moniaive, green-teahouse.co.uk

GLASGOW Strathaven Tea Room
12-16 Common Green, Strathaven, Lanarkshire, ML10 6AF

GRAMPIAN Flora's Shop & Restaurant
Crossroads, Cullerlie, Westhill, Aberdeenshire, AB32 6XB

HIGHLAND Velocity Café and Bicycle Workshop
1 Crown Avenue, Inverness, IV2 3NF, velocitylove.co.uk

TAYSIDE The Hamelt Tearoom
The Square, Letham, Angus, DD8 2PZ

WALES

CHESTER & NORTH WALES Tilly's Coffee Shop
Bunbury Lane, Bunbury, Cheshire, CW6 9QS

PEMBROKESHIRE FREEWHEELERS Castlemartin Community Café
Community Hall, Castlemartin, Pembrokeshire, SA71 5HN, castlemartincommunitycafe.co.uk

SWANSEA & WEST WALES Caffi Cynnes
Coalbrook Road, Pontyberem SA15 5HU

EAST MIDLANDS ALFRETON The Tor Café
Derby Road, Cromford, DE4 3RP

COVENTRY Hatton Locks Café
Canal Lane, Hatton, Warwickshire, CV35 7JL, hattonlockscafe.co.uk

DERBY AND BURTON Beth's Kitchen
Breedon Priory Garden Centre, Ashby Rd, Breedon on the Hill, DE73 8AZ, breedon-priory.co.uk/Beth-s-Kitchen.html

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND Beehive Honey Pot Tearooms
Rosliston, Derbyshire, DE12 8HZ, beehivefarm-woodlandlakes.co.uk

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE Stonehurst Family Farm & Museum
Loughborough Rd, Mountsorrel, Leics, LE12 7AR

EASTERN BEDFORDSHIRE Southill Village Tearoom
55 High Street, Southill, SG18 9JB, southillvillage-tearoom.co.uk

CHELMSFORD The Blue Egg
Braintree Road, Great Bardfield, Essex, CM7 4PY, theblueegg.co.uk

PETERBOROUGH The Old Barn
Mill Lane, Wadenhoe, Nr Oundle, PE8 5XD, theoldbarnatwadenhoe.co.uk

SUFFOLK The Diner at Bentwaters
Bentwater Parks, Rendlesham, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 2TW, thedineratbentwaters.co.uk

WEST NORFOLK Norton Café Bar
Holt Road, Little Walsingham, Norfolk, NR22 6BP, http://www.walsinghamanglican.org.uk/hospitality/refectory_catering.htm

LONDON

SOUTH WEST LONDON Bike Beans Cycle Café
5B Rectory Lane, Ashtead, Surrey, KT21 2BA, bikebeans.co.uk

NORTH EAST

TEESSIDE Stamps Coffee House
107 High St, Great Ayton, North Yorkshire

NORTH WEST

EDEN VALLEY The Old Smithy Tea Room
Caldbeck, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 8EL

FYLDE The Barn
The Square, Scorton, Near Garstang, Preston, Lancashire, PR3 1AU, plantsandgifts.co.uk

PEAK AUDAX The Old Smithy
Church Street, Monyash, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1JH, oldsmithymonyash.co.uk

SOUTH MANCHESTER Woodbine Café
18 Castleton Road, Hope, S33 6RD, woodbinecafe.freereserve.co.uk

TWO MILLS (THE WIRRAL) Eureka Cyclists' Café
Two Mills, Parkgate Road, Woodbank, Chester, CH1 6EZ, eurekacyclistscafe.co.uk

SOUTH EAST

ARUN & ADUR Queen's Head
The Hollow, West Chiltington, Pulborough, RH20 2JN, queensheadsussex.co.uk

CHILTERN HILLS Café in the Woods
Wendover Woods, St Leonards Road, Wendover, Bucks, HP22 5NF, cafeinthewoods.co.uk

EAST SUSSEX Wesson's Café
High Street, Horam, East Sussex, TN21 0ER, wessonscafe.com

OXFORDSHIRE Waterfront Café
Benson, Wallingford, Oxon, OX10 6SJ, waterfrontcafe.co.uk

FEATURE
Cyclists' cafés

In the photos

6 Chic urban café Look Mum No Hands, on Old St, London
7 Your Bike Shed in York



up. Cyclist-friendly ambience is the key, rather than quality of food and drink.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF CAFÉ

Nigel cites four main types of café stop. There's the roadside transport café, typically catering to both motorbikers and cyclists, with low prices – £5 gets you more than you can probably eat.

Then there's the classic modern (and pricy) coffee shop, where £5 buys a coffee and a cake from the wide ranges of both. Proprietors are aware of how much of their Sunday custom comes from groups of cyclists and give them a warm welcome.

There's the urban greasy spoon, typically in small towns. These will also serve fried breakfasts, though cyclists might be more likely to order beans on toast.

And fourth, for decades CTC Cambridge has visited country pubs for a pre-ordered fixed-price tea (tea, coffee, sandwiches and cakes). 'When I first rode with CTC in the late 1990s,' says Nigel, 'we had a pub tea like this almost every week.'

There are still other sub-types: National Trust places (pricy); volunteer-run cafés, often with a church connection (cheap and popular); cafés in forestry parks, accommodating mountain bikers...

One difference among cycle cafés of all kinds, I think, is how the patrons arrive. Those where cyclists turn up in the car with the bikes on the back don't have the same buzz as cafés like Eureka. A post-ride refreshment stop is subtly different from a 'destination' café.

So what makes a cycle café? For me, it's one that people cycle to. What makes a good cycle café? One that's worth cycling to. The new, chichi urban cycle café may grab media coverage, but the old-style places to build into your ride are still out there to enjoy. ☺

FAVOURITE CTC CAFÉS continued

PORTSMOUTH Village Shop & Tea Room devon/the-orangery-restaurant/20/
Compton, West Sussex, PO18 9HA
southdowns-tearoom.co.uk

READING The Avenue Restaurant
The Avenue, Lasham, Alton, Hants, GU34 5SU avenuenurseries.com

SOUTH BUCKS Waterfront Café
Benson, Wallingford, Oxon, OX10 6SJ
waterfrontcafe.co.uk

SOUTH BUCKS MIDWEEK Jenny Wrens
28 Market Sq, Winslow, Bucks, MK18 3AB

SWALE Beano's Café
12 North Lane, Canterbury, CT2 7EB

WANTAGE Saddleback Farm Shop
California Farm, Brightwalton, RG20 7HR
saddlebackfarmshop.co.uk

WEST SURREY The Dabbling Duck
Middle Street, Shere, Surrey GU5 9HF
thedabblingduck.uk.com

SOUTH WEST BATH Allington Café
Allington Bar Farm, Allington, Wiltshire, SN14 6LJ allingtoncafe.co.uk

BLACKMORE VALE Wheathill Garden Centre Tea Rooms
Wheathill Lane, Milborne Port, Sherborne, DT9 5EY wheathillgardencentre.co.uk

CYCLE BRISTOL Banwell Castle
Banwell, Somerset, BS29 6NX
banwellcastle.co.uk

DEVON The Walled Garden
Church Cottage, Dunsford, EX6 7AA
churchcottagedunsford.co.uk

EXETER Orangery Restaurant
South Town, Kenton, Exeter, Devon, EX6 8JE houseofmarbles.com/about/family-fun-

STROUD VALLEY The Lockkeeper's Café Bar
Wallbridge, Stroud, GL5 3JS lkcafebar.co.uk

WEST MIDLANDS HEART OF ENGLAND Hatton Locks Café
Canal Lane, Hatton, Warwickshire, CV35 7JL hattonlockscafe.co.uk

WOMBOURNE Halfpenny Green Airport
Crab Lane, Bobbington, Stourbridge, DY7 5DY wolverhamptonairport.co.uk

YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER EAST YORKSHIRE World Peace Café
Buddhist Centre, Kilnwick Percy, Pocklington, YO42 1UF
worldpeacecafeocklington.org.uk

HUDDERSFIELD & DISTRICT Cornerhouse Café
4, Station Rd, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, HD9 1AB thecornerhouse@btconnect.com

SHEFFIELD DISTRICT Longnor Craft Centre
Coffee Shop, Market Square, Longnor, SK17 0NT longnorcrafs.co.uk

YORK Seaways Café
Fridaythorpe, York, YO25 9RX
seawayscafeFridaythorpe.co.uk

AFFILIATED GROUPS
BIKEFITSURREY.CO.UK Bike Beans Cycle Café

5B Rectory Lane, Ashted, Surrey, KT21 2BA bikebeans.co.uk

SOTONIA CC Dandys Ford Fishery & Tea Rooms

Dandys Ford Lane, Sherfield-English, nr Romsey, Hants, SO51 6DT