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TRAVELLERS' TALES



WATERSHIP UPS AND DOWNS

Winchester CTC's cycling season starts in January, as Ian Douglas explains

THE WATERSHIP DOWN is a 108km (67 miles) challenge in Hampshire that has been run every year since the mid-1980s, with only one interruption; snow and ice forced its cancellation in 2010. This year, it dawned dull and drizzly on Sunday 12th January but 120 cyclists set off from the Jubilee Hall in Kings Worthy, ready to shake off any winter torpor.

From Kings Worthy, the cyclists made their way west of Andover, then to the first of the day's major climbs at Chute Causeway in Wiltshire. They then went briefly into West Berkshire, before returning to Hampshire for the final test of the day, the Watership Down climb that the event is named for. Then it was back to Kings Worthy.

The Watership Down is not a race but an individual challenge. It's a must-do event for many local Winchester CTC members, and others come to do it from further afield. Other Winchester CTC members helped with the organisation and dispensed hard-earned mugs of tea and slabs of cake to returning riders.

The event is organised by Sue Coles, Winchester CTC's secretary, who says: 'The terrain is challenging, and this combined with winter weather means that those completing the event can feel very proud of themselves.'

Like other CTC Member Groups, Winchester CTC offers a wide range of rides throughout the year from half day easy rides to longer, faster rides.

For details see winchesterctc.org.uk



A laid-back End to End

For his first ever cycle tour, Geoffrey Searle chose the E2E and a folding recumbent

By the end of day two, 130 miles into our supported End to End trip, we were all enjoying the July heatwave but I was the only one without a sore backside. I was riding a folding armchair: a secondhand Bike Friday SatRday recumbent, whose laid-back seat and rear suspension gave me a relaxed and comfortable ride. My average speed, like that of the three new friends I found myself alongside, was only 11mph. But what was the hurry? We had all day and the sun was shining.

As this was my first ever cycle tour, I decided to have the organisation done

for me. Peak Tours provided a friendly and efficient service, including luggage transfer. The 1,000-mile route stayed off main roads as far as possible, with lovely stretches along quiet country lanes and cycle routes. The price of beautiful scenery is sweat. 'Every time we turn off the main road, we go uphill!' Brian said.

As the friend I had booked with was much quicker than me, I relaxed with my new slower-paced fellows and quickly dropped into the routine: breakfast, pack, briefing, cycle, lunch, cycle, finish, unpack, shower, supper, sleep – in 15 different beds.

I started preparing

for the trip three months before, doing rides in the New Forest every weekend. I put some unnecessary hills into my daily cycle to work, and even did a race with the British Human Power Club. I also had to prepare the bike – choosing the tyres, modifying a carrier, and rebuilding the transmission. It was worth it to have such a comfortable bike, which I could put into a bag and take onto the train as luggage.

My wife has now bought a folding Airnimal to keep up with me, and the house is filling with maps, train schedules and plans. As soon as we can dump the kids, Europe here we come!



Geoffrey's secondhand Bike Friday SatRday combined relaxed riding with ease of transport



January drizzle didn't dissuade 120 cyclists from taking part in the Watership Down



Talking Turkey

Jill and Peter Seaman cycled 2,700 miles from their home in the Midlands to Istanbul

WE HAVE always wanted to visit Istanbul, so in 2012 we decided to cycle there. Retirement meant we could be away for three months, allowing for a leisurely pace and plenty of sightseeing.

We left the Midlands in July, met friends at Box Hill to watch the Olympic road race and then carried on to Dover. From Calais we spent one night in France, then cycled through Belgium, Luxembourg, Southern Germany and Austria. Our route through Hungary took us south of the capital; we were keen to visit Budapest, so left most of our luggage at a friendly hotel and took the

train for a two-night city break. From the Hungarian border we followed the Danube through Croatia, Serbia and Romania, then cycled south-east across Bulgaria and into Turkey.

This was our biggest tour and we had concerns before we left. How would we fare in the countries east of Austria – all of them new to us? How would we cope with a trip of 2,700 miles? These worries proved to be unfounded.

We rode at the same comfortable pace we've used on shorter trips: an average of 40 miles a day with at least one day off a week. We met helpful

people everywhere but were amazed by the friendliness and hospitality in Turkey and Serbia. We camped most nights for the first half of the trip and had no problem finding good value accommodation from Hungary onwards. We were glad to keep in contact with friends by email (nearly everywhere had free wi-fi) but we loved making the journey and had no pangs of homesickness.

Having seen so much en route, we did wonder whether Istanbul would be an anticlimax. We needn't have worried: the city was stunning and a fitting end to our journey.



Jura explorers

ROBERT HOPKINS AND HIS FRIEND ALLAN TOOK THE EUROPEAN BIKE EXPRESS DEEP INTO FRANCE

AFTER A COUPLE of cycling holidays to the south of France and Spain using economy flights, my cycling pal Allan and I decided we wanted a more hassle-free way to travel. So we booked onto the European Bike Express for a week in the Jura region of France.

A comfortable 14-hour journey saw us arrive in Beaune at 2.30am. It was not worth finding accommodation for such a short night, so we hit the road. By the time we stopped for croissants at a local boulangerie, we'd covered 50 miles.

We were near Champagnole then and the road was starting to climb. Fields of wheat became vineyards and then deciduous forest. The Jura is an important area of forestry and there were piles of timber everywhere. We entered Switzerland at the Vallée de Joux, a landscape of lakes and mountains. It is also a centre for watch-making factories.

Switzerland's holiday season seemed to be over by the last week of August, and many cafés and restaurants were closed. So we were glad to return to France, which seemed more vibrant. We rode through a spectacular gorge descent into Morez. We stayed two days, leaving the bikes for a 200-metre rock climb in a quarry.

After Morez, we cycled through the Jura 'lake district' towards Lons-le-Saunier. For a wild swimmer like me, this was an absolute delight with crystal clear lakes and total solitude. Our final day's ride was back into the wheat fields of Bresse. After another beautiful wild swim, this time in the River Doubs, we returned to Beaune for our return coach home. We will definitely travel like this again.



▶ The Jura region is far enough south in France that even the end of August is plenty warm enough

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COASTING ALONG
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