
WHERE: The Yorkshire Dales

START & FINISH: Leeds & Harrogate

DISTANCE: 118 miles

PHOTOS: Alamy, Welcome to Yorkshire, Chris Bailey



GREAT RIDES

A REET GRAND DEPART

*Seven years after the Tour de France last visited Britain, the 2014 edition kicks off in Yorkshire. **Dave Barter** decided to preview stage one in person*

Stage one of this year's Tour de France snakes from Leeds to Harrogate via the Yorkshire Dales. On the run-in to the finish, the race will pass the birthplace of CTC: the St George Hotel on Ripon Road, where in 1878 Stanley Cotterell formed what was then the Bicycle Touring Club. If ex-CTC President Phil Liggett doesn't mention that in his race commentary, there could be trouble!

CTC backed Yorkshire's bid for the 2014 Grand Départ from the start. Mark Cavendish and Bradley Wiggins added weight to it, and the Dales landscape needed only race director Christian Prudhomme flying above it in a helicopter to set out its stall.

Stage two is a long, hilly run from York down to Sheffield, taking in the iconic climb of Holme Moss, while stage three is a shorter flat one from Cambridge to London, providing a showcase for the sprinters. We can expect hundreds of thousands of spectators cheering from the roadside in the first week of July. What will the route itself be like? How hard are those hills that the professionals will make look so easy? I decided to find out.

On windy moors... baht 'at

A Sunday morning in late March: a lone traffic warden paid me little attention as I pushed off from Leeds Town Hall, following main roads out of town towards Harewood. The road climbed. My heavy, road-tired cyclo-cross bike immediately felt like a mistake. One that, not having a team car, I'd

have to live with. Town centre traffic lights provided an additional frustration. As a law-abiding cyclist, I was compelled to stop on red; the peloton will simply breeze through.

After fighting my way out of Leeds, the first real scenery appeared at Harewood with expansive views over Wharfedale. The ancient Harewood Castle remained stubbornly out of view as the route cut west towards Otley. The castle appears in a striking watercolour painted by Joseph Turner in 1798, but since then the surrounding trees have grown up unchecked.

The peloton will enjoy the next 25 miles as they speed upon flat wide main roads through Otley and on towards Ilkley. They have the benefit of each other to shelter from the wind, and the roads will be theirs, uncluttered with car drivers on Sunday morning jaunts. I found little to love in this section. A strong headwind reminded me of the vulnerability of the lone cyclist, and speeding traffic proved more than just an annoyance. A far better cycling experience could be had by following the canal path of NCN 66 to Bingley and then using minor roads to skirt Hawksworth Moor. Obviously you'd never get a peloton down a towpath – not without half the field taking an early bath.

I consoled myself in the hope that I'd spot one of Otley's five morris dancing teams. But no bells, garlanded hats or clacking sticks were to be seen on this bleak Sunday morning. Ilkley signalled the end of the flatness but not the soulless main road.



- (Opposite) Yorkshire's hills aren't high but riders may be surprised at the gradients on some of them
- (Above) Log your own attempt on the stage before or after the pros to understand just how fit they are





● (Left) Yorkshire cyclist Malcolm Elliot making the region's undulations look easy

“BUTTERTUBS PASS MIGHT SOUND LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF TOLKIEN’S SHIRE, BUT IT HAS SUFFERING WRITTEN ALL OVER IT”

» I climbed up to Chelker Reservoir, still into the wind, swearing quietly.

Up and down dales

The stage began for me properly as I descended into Skipton town centre and skirted the war memorial statue. A 20-foot high plinth carries a bronze figure of Winged Victory with a depiction of a man breaking his sword at the bottom. As I was feeling poetic, the icons seemed apt: a single rider will assume the position of stage victor while others will break over the hills to come.

I climbed out of Skipton and into the scenery. The route left major roads behind and embraced the beauty of the Dales. At Threshfield, I met the River Wharfe, which had clearly been responsible for carving out the valley that narrowed and twisted the road below my wheels. Having no need to focus on a wheel in front, I was free to enjoy the landscape in a way that the racers won't. Looking around, I could see the tiny figures of climbers clinging to the overhanging heights of Kilnsey Crag.

I relaxed a little in my fight against the headwind before stopping for tea and sandwiches at the Cottage Tea Room in

Kettlewell. Score another point to me: it was far more civilised than energy bars snatched from a musette. The rest stop was necessary as the first classified climb of the day was close. Kidstones is almost two miles long, with an average gradient of 7%. It's one of those horror story hills that saves its steepest gradient – 16%! – for the top. The sprinters will be nervous here as the climbers might stretch their legs for the first time in the Tour. I had the wind directly in my face and a solo ascent took me nine minutes; the pros will be over in under five.

Bishopdale valley provided brief respite before another sharp climb up to Aysgarth, where I'd hoped to pick up at least a whiff of Wensleydale cheese, which is native to the region. First crafted by 12th century Cistercian monks, the cheese is still made today. I could have done with some – or anything, really – to provide a bit more of a calorie buffer. Riding along by the River Ure, I was contemplating a right turn at Hawes that would signal the hardest climb of the day.

Buttertubs Pass might sound like something out of Tolkien's Shire, but it has suffering written all over it. It's long, at nearly

Le Tour up close

» The route will be packed with fans, so get there early to choose your spot. The climbs are a good place to spectate but space will be limited and roads will be closed to traffic early on race day. Cycle up and take food, water, and warm clothes.

The race organisers are providing 17 'spectator hubs' on the route that are free to enter and include big screen race coverage. These are great options for those wanting to soak up the atmosphere of the day whilst not missing out on any of the action. See letour.yorkshire.com/stage-1/allhubs.

CTC have teamed up with HF Holidays to provide a full Tour de France experience. It involves race spectating, guided rides, and speakers, and it takes place over four days. Watch out for a review in the next issue.

CTC members can take advantage of a 10% discount at the Vélofest Tour Festival, based at Kilnsey Park Estate in the Dales. See velofest.co.uk, and use code CTC10 when booking.

Many farms alongside the route will be temporary campsites for the weekend. Some areas, such as Kidstones, are providing big screen coverage. See kidstonescamping.co.uk.

If you want to make a week of it, CTC-affiliated Ilkley Cycling Club is running a TDF Festival of Cycling from 28 June-6 July. It includes a sportive on 29 June, which takes in much of the route while avoiding some of the main roads. See ilkleycyclingclub.org.uk and click on the 'Le Tour' link.





● (Left) The race will go up Holme Moss on Stage 2, as it heads through the Peak District to Sheffield

● (Below left) Chris Froome is less likely to be in yellow in the UK than a sprinter who can climb, such as Peter Sagan



» 3.5 miles, and has sections that exceed 20%. There's even an evil false summit just before the true top. The Buttertubs of the name are a set of deep limestone potholes near the road that legend has it were used for keeping butter cool. There was nothing cool about me as I sweated over the summit, 70-odd miles in my tired legs. I had just enough energy to hold on throughout the twisting decent into Muker.

Limestone landscape

Swaledale was carved from limestone by glaciers, and this stone has been used to construct barns that are visible in almost every field. The peloton won't notice them; they'll be too busy gearing up for the final climb of the day. I hit this at Grinton, after ten undisturbed miles of pleasantly scenic riding.

The climb is a similar length to Buttertubs, and equally foreboding given the miles ridden to reach it. Mist shrouded the climb and I ascended in glorious solitude – with exactly zero curiously-dressed spectators running alongside shouting. I inched my

way round the bends, wondering when the summit would come. Eventually, it did.

At the crest, with no radio in my ear to guide me, I assessed my situation. Thirty eight miles left to go and, according to a wizened roadman I'd met at the top, flat all the way to Harrogate. The previous 80 miles and 8,000 feet of ascent had robbed me of any desire to make a break for the finish. I was just looking to get there. As for the Tour, I suspect this is where the chase for the breakaway will begin.

I pointed my wheels down the A6108 and headed towards Ripon. I was worried that this section would echo the ride out of Leeds with featureless A-road riding. However, the River Ure had seen to that, forcing the road to twist and turn through a set of small hamlets with enough backdrop to keep the will to ride alive.

I crossed the river after Masham, which was deemed a 'Peculier' in Medieval times and thus allowed jurisdiction over its own affairs. Theakston's Brewery was founded in Masham. Hence the name of Theakston's Old Peculier beer – something I could

Fact File: TOUR DE FRANCE, STAGE ONE

WHERE: Leeds to Harrogate

WHEN: Saturday 5th July 2014

DISTANCE: 118 miles (190.5km)

ASCENT: 8,700 feet (2,651m)

TERRAIN: Mixture of busy main and narrow winding valley roads. Three categorised climbs

CONDITIONS: All well-surfaced roads (a fringe benefit of the Tour coming to Yorkshire)

START: Leeds Town Hall

FINISH: Harrogate, The Stray (York Place)

I'M GLAD I HAD: Lots of food, warm jacket for summit of climbs and descents

I WISH I'D HAD: A sub-20lb carbon fibre race bike, a support car, a peloton to draft behind

FURTHER INFO: Official Tour site: letour.yorkshire.com

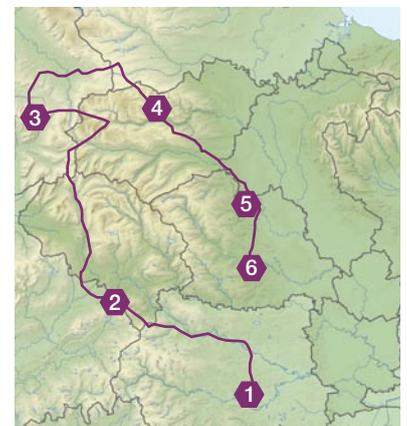
YORKSHIRE INFO: yorkshire.com

START INFORMATION, LEEDS:
bit.ly/RBTHTe

FINISH INFORMATION, HARROGATE:
bit.ly/1uYH586

GPS LOG: download Dave's GPS tracklog from ctc-maps.org.uk/routes/route/2571

TDF STAGE 1



- | | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1) Leeds | 4) Leyburn |
| 2) Skipton | 5) Ripon |
| 3) Buttertubs Pass | 6) Harrogate |



● (Left) Sprinter Marcel Kittel has said that Yorkshire's narrow roads and dry stone walls could be 'dangerous' for the peloton

“IT SHOWCASES ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AREAS OF ENGLAND, WHILST INJECTING THE DRAMA OF THREE CATEGORISED CLIMBS”

» enjoy at the finish if I wanted, instead of, I don't know, beetroot juice or colostrum or whatever.

No sprint finish today

My riding pleasure notched down a level on reaching Ripon, as the route gathered pace on the A61 for the final 12 miles. The sprinters will relish the fast, wide, flat approach to the finish. I hated the relentless traffic. Perusing the map, I realised that there were a number of unclassified roads that would have made a far better alternative. Reaching the town centre, I looked forward to a final flat run in to Harrogate. This was not to be: Ripon Road is a short, steep climb of nearly 6%. I cursed it, as will the lead-out trains.

The official route finishes along Parliament Street in Harrogate. I was forced to turn off due to the one-way system and was thus denied an official sprint finish. I collapsed into a heap on The Stray and contemplated

the route that I'd ridden.

It's a perfect showcase for a Tour de France stage. Fast, wide roads at the start to allow a breakaway to form, whilst letting the pack riders compose themselves for the hills to come. A long middle section that does Yorkshire justice, showcasing one of the most beautiful areas of England whilst injecting the drama of three categorised climbs. Finally, a fast flowing run back to the finish to facilitate a spectacular chase for the line. The pros and television commentators are going to love every minute.

As for the amateur, there are better routes: the A61 is a road to avoid, and a full flavour of the day's riding can be had by forgetting Leeds/Harrogate and heading west from Pately Bridge instead. Then you can suffer the climber's curse of riding harder roads than the Tour. Join the official route at Threshfield, then leave it at Ripley for a return to your start. ●



Brian Robinson: WELCOME TO YORKSHIRE

» Brian Robinson became the first British stage winner of the Tour de France in 1958. An ambassador for the Tour de France in Yorkshire, and still a regular rider aged 83, we caught up with him on his own Yorkshire sportive in April.

‘This is something I never dreamed would happen in my lifetime. We have a top notch team and have won the Tour twice.

‘I know all the roads. They show off Yorkshire, but can also shake up the peloton. The initial climbs into the Dales might not worry them, but the descents and some of the bridges might. The pull past Grinton Youth Hostel could be a deciding point, with the sprinters' teams having to work hard to get back before the finish.

‘Stage 2 is my back yard. I still have one of the fastest times up Holme Moss (6 minutes and 5 seconds), but the last 50km has some stinkers. Look what happened when the Tour of Britain went over the Strines. You might not win the Tour in the first two days, but you can lose it.’