



## UNFORGETTABLE FRANCE

*Janet Rogers toured northern France with Arun & Adur CTC clubmates*

I STARED into the elephant's eyes. It was not the wildlife encounter I had expected, not on a cycling holiday in France. Two members of our group of five had returned from an exploration of the upper reaches of the River Rance with tales of camels and lions. And here there were elephants, grazing in a roadside field. They were hoovering up dry grass with their trunks and stuffing it into their mouths, refuelling for their circus act.

We cyclists had something in common with the elephants. We had been grazing too, refuelling as we travelled 350 miles from Caen to St Malo and up the peninsula to Cherbourg. In monsoon conditions, we'd sheltered in a tunnel on a disused railway track and crunched our way through oat-and-nut bars. Grazing had become a necessity in the barren Normandy countryside. Where were the cafés to provide nourishment for hungry cyclists?

We cycled past endless fields of maize, their emerald tongues lolling in the sunshine. And with our minds distracted with thoughts of food, we pondered at length the question: where do cornflakes come from?

By dusk we were tired of grazing. We sought a true French culinary experience, and found a country restaurant with net curtains and flies and a four-course set menu. On our last night, however, we ate in a lovely restaurant and feasted on mussels, crème brûlée, and wine. The men lapsed into techno babble and lulled us with talk of sprockets and noodles until our eyes glazed over.



When the clouds cleared, the scenery was still spectacular

## Off-season Scotland

*In late October, Bridget Clark explored the west coast of Scotland by ferry and bike*

It was a dark and stormy late October morning when five mature Sustrans Rangers gathered to catch the ferry from Ardrossan to Brodick to start our five-ferries adventure. Instead of one fast-paced summer day, we took three days to explore Arran, Kintyre, Cowal and Bute.

On the ferry from Ardrossan, the rain clouds parted to reveal blue sky. We climbed the String road over the spine of Arran, and enjoyed stunning views of Kintyre in the setting sun along the west coast to Lochranza Hotel, where we indulged in hot baths, real ale and good food.

The next cool morning, our porridge and full Scottish breakfast kept us warm on the sunny deck of the ferry to Claonaig, on Kintyre, as we sailed

through calm waters away from the stunning Arran mountain backdrop.

We briefly diverted along the coast to explore Skipness Castle, then followed NCN 78 to Tarbert for lunch, followed by a ferry to Portavadie on the Cowal peninsula. After a brief nosy around this remote luxury marina, we followed NCN 94 around the coast to our night's stop in Kames Hotel.

Another hearty breakfast helped us up the steep hill from Tighnabruaich in dreich weather, but we were well rewarded by a fabulous, atmospheric view over the famous Kyles of Bute. Then it was a fast downhill to Loch Riddon, where we left NCN 75 to hug the mirror-surfaced loch to Strone Point. We went back to Colintraive Hotel for lunch, before hopping over to the Isle of Bute. It was a gentle ride along

the coast, shadowed by inquisitive seals and startled herons. Then we watched the Rothesay ferry come in.

We cycled a total of 86 miles and ascended 4,750 feet during our scenic three-day tour. Two of the Rangers rode electric bikes. The five ferries cost about £16 each in total, using a 'hopscotch' ticket.



Two of Bridget's group used electric bikes



There are various Camino routes. A mountain bike is a good option on many

## 5 WHEELS BY THE DANUBE

*David Collinson was inspired on tour by CTC members Mike & Rhona Copp*



Mike and Rhona invented their articulated 'tandem'

# Won't take the easy Way

*Mary Ann Hooper hired a mountain bike and rode part of the Camino de Santiago in Spain*

Women are traditionally coy about their age. Not me. I was nevertheless surprised, on a high and remote part of the Camino de Santiago north of Madrid, to be asked my age by a young Spanish cyclist. When I said 70, he exclaimed and asked if he could take my photograph. So now I am immortalised in his traveller's tale as that old English woman, off-road on a bike at 1,800 metres.

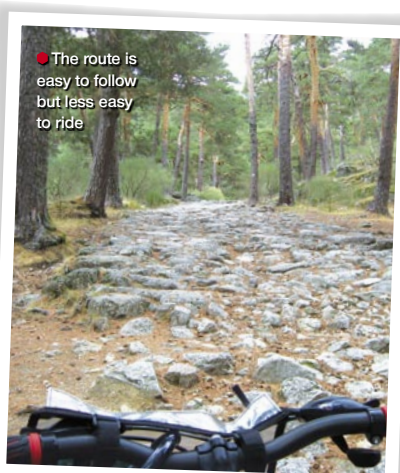
I reckoned I deserved his accolade. I'd set off in the morning on my hired mountain bike from the village of Cercedilla (1,200 meters) for the 30km ride to Segovia. Gaining the final 450 metres to reach the pass of La Puerta de la Fuenfria meant walking my bike up a steep, rough trail, which was Roman and then 18th century Bourbon. More recently, it was declared one of the Camino de Santiago pilgrim routes. I was overtaken by one cyclist, and he had his bike over his shoulder.

The young man who asked my age had come from the other direction on easier slopes, but the track was still covered with a lethal mixture of loose and fixed rocks. I was determined not to fall, still suffering the effects of coming off my bike before, so I walked

a lot of this stretch.

I went through lofty pine woods, which thinned until the spire of Segovia's cathedral emerged in the distance. I passed a herd of cows with bells clanging. Then I dropped gently onto purple-and-green, cyclamen-studded meadows. I eventually joined the course of a buried Roman aqueduct, which emerged and soared to a height of 28 metres as it crossed the city.

My day ended with the sight of ancient Segovia's Alcazar fortress, bathed in the lustrously golden evening light.



The route is easy to follow but less easy to ride

HAVING ENJOYED cycling the Danube in 2013, from Ulm to Regensburg, I thought it would be good fun to continue along it from Passau to Vienna.

Our party of 15 assembled in the lovely city of Passau on the Sunday evening for the first time, ready to go out for a meal together. I was surprised to see one of our party in a wheelchair and thought to myself, 'That will slow our progress along the route.'

I think that Rhona, wife of Mike in the chair, must have read my mind. She said: 'Don't worry. It will be articulated when we start.' I wondered just how that would work.

After lunch on Monday, we were fitted with the bikes we would use for the ride. I was interested to see the articulated wheelchair. Mike had a handcrank attachment for his wheelchair, and his chair was attached to Rhona's bike by a long rod with reused car steering-joints at each end. Rhona would ride and push Mike as he cranked the hand grips. The result was they travelled at the same speed as the rest of the group, even up to 15mph at times. This was entirely their own invention and it had taken them on travels they would never have been able to make otherwise.

They were a lovely, determined couple who were not prepared to let the result of Mike's accident spoil their enjoyment of life.



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