



Vélo vacation

La Tranche sur Mer in France is fantastic for family cyclists, says Neil Wheadon

Few summer holiday destinations allow you to leave the car untouched for a week in an environment where the bicycle is king. But halfway down the west coast of France in the Vendée region, we stumbled upon La Tranche sur Mer, which is just such a place. The town centre is restricted by bollards to essential vehicles only, and signs tell everyone that it's pedestrians first, then bikes, and finally cars through the tiny lanes around the town.

Cycling along the coast is a joy. You dip in and out of the pine forest, which lies just behind the sand dunes. A short ride inland takes you away from the coastal plain into more hilly, pastoral terrain.

Throughout the town and its environs are kilometre upon kilometre of cyclepath, much of which is single-use and incorporates the French west coast cycleway. So you can potter to the boulangerie or go for a far longer ride, traffic free. There is a relaxed feeling as everyone weaves effortlessly around each other with no need for speed or lycra.



It makes it a great destination for a family holiday, for La Tranche sur Mer has the most superb set of sandy beaches. To the east by the port, you can hire a modern windsurfer, to the far west try kite surfing, or in the middle try a Malibu board. In between these beaches are areas reserved for traditional beach activities. There is plenty of accommodation from campsites to self-catering, so for a family like ours who enjoy other activities as well, the area is absolutely ideal.

DAY TRIP TO BRIGHTON

CTC's Kay Lakin had reservations about riding 52 miles on the Great Tour

DID I WANT to take part in the Countrywide Great Tour? My initial reaction was: 'No way!' I'd only recently begun cycling again and wasn't sure I could manage the stage from Rye to Brighton. But colleagues Cherry Allan and Susan Keywood changed my mind. Cherry commutes daily by bike and Susan is a leisure cyclist, but like me they hadn't ridden this far in a day before. So we were all in the same boat.

We had a month to prepare so began cycling together two or three times a week, doing up to 70 miles in total. I was still nervous on the day of the ride. Apart from the hills ahead, I'd never cycled in a large group before. However, we received a nice welcome from the tour leaders, the local mayor and even the town crier. The ride started well.

Until the first hill! I thought that I wouldn't reach the top, never mind finish the ride. But I did. After that, the coastal scenery was wonderful, and looking out across it kept me going. I loved coming down the road the other side of Beachyhead. What a view!

Cherry told me afterwards that she'd been nervous too. 'I was really worried that I'd have to give up at Eastbourne,' she said. 'The talk of fearsome hills got to me. But, in the event, I enjoyed all of it.'

It was a similar story for Susan. 'I imagined hardly being able to walk the next day,' she said. 'But I didn't really ache. Maybe it's a testament to how easy pedalling a bike really is?'

For more details about the Great Tour, see thegreattour.co.uk.





50KM AUDAX, AGED SIX

Jo Whitehead describes the event her son Samuel rode alongside his dad, Paul

IN SEPTEMBER, Samuel became the youngest rider to complete the New Forest Autumn 50km Challenge. He spent months training for the event in his own way: riding his Islabike through the woods and back roads of Hampshire, running around with water pistols and sticks, and going out with his dad on a childback tandem.

Samuel's presence caused a stir at the start in Lymington, but he had no problem keeping up with the group for the first few miles. Then he settled down to his own pace.

After a pit stop in Buckler's Hard, it was back on the road. Samuel dealt confidently with the traffic in Beaulieu, and by Lepe it was time for lunch.

That had to include an ice cream; it was a hot day and Samuel needed the energy for the return journey. There was a short, sharp hill to get back to Buckler's Hard, but Samuel got out of the saddle and danced his way on the pedals to the top.

The last few miles flew by. Paul and Samuel dropped down the final hill into Lymington, clocking 24mph. Father and son crossed the line with big, proud smiles on their faces. As well as successfully completing the event, Samuel raised £500 towards cochlear implants for Widja Deysel, a two-year-old profoundly deaf girl from South Africa. (For details, see bit.ly/geartohear.)

An off-road C2C

Darren Lumbroso & eight CTC Reading club-mates rode from St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay

We began our six-day, off-road traverse of England at St Bees in weather more reminiscent of St Tropez than Cumbria. Our party of nine comprised a couple of walking wounded, one of whom had recently had a tooth removed and another who'd broken his collar bone just four weeks previously. Thanks to laser treatment, he was back on his bike and zooming past me just as quickly as ever.

For the first three days of the journey, we followed Wainwrights' footsteps and then joined up with the Pedal North route. Our navigation relied heavily on three GPSes, which worked most of the time. It was frustrating on the occasions when the GPS instructions seemed to override the brains of the operators.

At one point, we spent an hour stumbling around a hillside, miles from any tracks, with our destination in sight and the use of a traditional paper map being studiously avoided. This inspired me to compose a song, in the style of The Fall, entitled 'GPS Man', which



went as follows:
'G-G-GPS man, G-G-GPS man, He's a poor route selector, He's got the wrong vector, His device is in decline, He won't take heed of the signs, He can't read a map, His sense of direction is... etc'. I am considering sending these lyrics to their lead singer, Mark E Smith, because he has an antipathy to electronic gadgets, which might help them appear on his next album.

After 250 miles and 9,000m of ascent we all arrived intact at Robin Hood's Bay, with the sun still shining and just enough time to dip our wheels in the sea before cycling up the 1-in-3 slope in time to get our lift home.



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