



CYCLING THE STEPPE

John and Pat Ashwell of CTC Cycling Holidays led a tour of Mongolia

MONGOLIA IS the size of Western Europe but has the population of Manchester. It is the last undisturbed grassland on the planet. Nomads have moved home and herds in rhythm with the seasons here for over 1,000 years, laying down a network of migratory trails that beg to be cycled.

You could ride for 3,000km without crossing a surfaced road or skirting a fence, passing through a great diversity of landscapes: pure desert, arid steppe, river valleys, mountains and grasslands. The logistics of such a journey are eased by the hospitality that is embedded in the nomadic culture. Wherever there is a ger (better known in the UK as a yurt), there is guaranteed hospitality.

We started deep in the Gobi desert and finished in Mongolia's spiritual centre, Karakorum. Getting to the start was an adventure in itself. We flew in a small aircraft to an unfenced airstrip in the Gobi. The bikes were transported ahead by road and track. Wild camping and overnighting in the occasional ger camp, we rode the Gobi on hard-packed gravel, walked up and scrambled down passes in the Khangai Mountains, followed trails through the grasslands, waded through several rivers, and arrived exhilarated in Karakorum in time to experience the Nadaam festival.

For more, see comebiking.com or cyclingholidays.org.uk.

Touring back in time

David Ramsden built a Victorian replica and rode it 500 miles for a veteran-cycle event

My bike is a replica 1879 Lawson Bicycleette. I built it three years ago after seeing another replica owned by Cally Callomon in a coffee-table book. It so happens that Cally also organises the Suffolk Trudge, a ride for old machines. A trip to the event promised to make a good late summer holiday. We took the best part of a week to get to Suffolk, camping out where we could along the way. My partner Yvonne carried the camping gear on her sensible bike.

We stayed in Goole, then followed the quiet road beside the Trent to Gainsborough. Back roads took us to Lincoln and we reached Boston via a beautiful ex-railway cycle track. More navigating of back roads by pages torn from a cheap road atlas took us east, avoiding King's Lynn and Swaffham, to Watton. We arrived a day early for the ride, took a rest from cycling, and enjoyed a day out in Lowestoft by train.

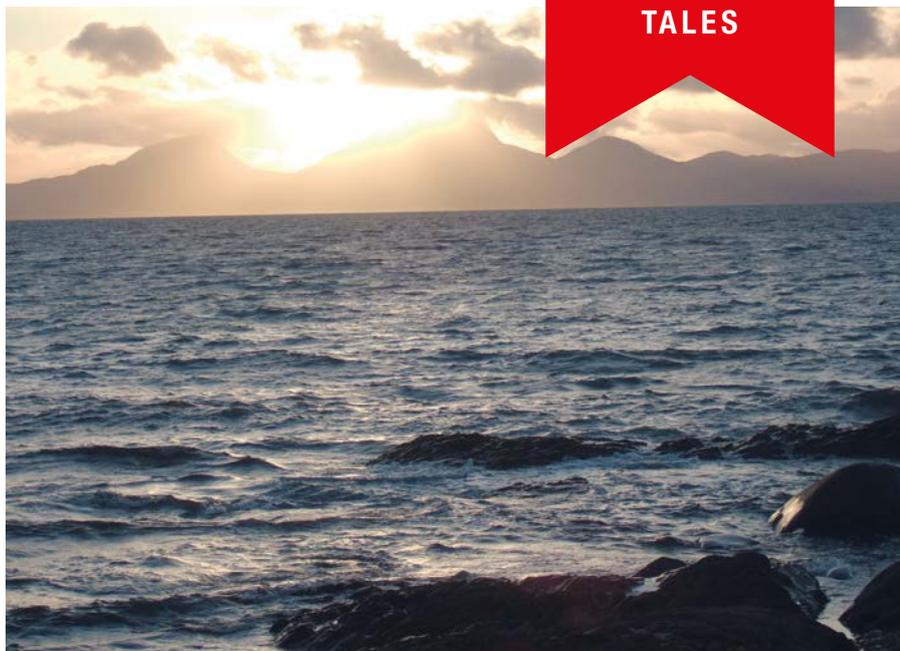
The Suffolk Trudge was full day's ride with 29 cyclists on machines built as early as 1896. At the lunch stop, I had a go on Cally's Lawson and he on mine; they were very different. Both are heavy and take a bit of effort. At one point in the trip, I questioned my sanity. But I soon



recovered. Had the weather not stayed fine for the entire 500 miles, it may have been a different matter.

We rode home by a slightly different route, taking in Castle Acre and camping with permission on the bank of the River Welland at Fosdyke. Having been warned of a high tide, we stayed up late under a beautiful red moon to make sure we were safe. North of Gainsborough, we again camped by the riverside. The Aegir, the Trent's tidal bore, woke us in the night with its roaring and sloshing. We were 12 inches from a soaking!





THE NATIONAL 400K AUDAX

Mike Wigley of Audax UK describes what it's like to ride 400km in 24 hours

THE NATIONAL 400k is a special event: 240 miles in 24 hours. I last did it in 2014. What a ride! We set off for Cumberland in warm sunshine and wove along the valleys of the Tees and Swale, before turning north at Ripon, along the Ure and into Wensleydale. The sun blazed as we rode through towns still decked with Tour de France bunting. We ticked off Masham, Leeming, Aysgarth, and Hawes.

From Sedbergh, we took an ancient drove road to Shap, then to Penrith. As dusk fell I got soaked in a downpour. But I'd come prepared with spare clothes and was able to change before a sumptuous meal at a village hall near Wigton, which marked the turn.

I'd ridden mostly solo thus far but joined groups for the night section. We made good speed to Brampton, then hauled ourselves up to Slaggyford, where there was more hot food and a chance to sleep for those who wanted it and a starry sky for those who didn't.

On we climbed through remote and cobbled Alston, past the snow poles of the Yad Moss, and across the roof of County Durham. Next came a glorious swoop to Middleton in Teesdale. Leaving the romantic ruin of Barnard Castle, we crossed the Tees at the lovely bridge at Whorlton, just as harvesters began whirling chaff into the pearly dawn light.

For details on the 2016 event, see aukweb.net.

Loch and awe

Tim Rumley and his companion cycled from Ardrossan to Oban in early spring

Is April is too early to cycle tour in Scotland? It may be cold but at least it is midge free. And despite the single digit temperatures, the sun shone for most of our trip.

We took the CalMac ferry from Ardrossan harbour to Arran. A short hilly ride ended in a wild camp outside Lochranza. We had decided to reverse the Sustrans Oban to Campbeltown route (NCN 78) to take advantage of prevailing south-westerlies. Frustratingly, we had north-easterlies.

A second morning ferry took us to Claonaig on the Mull of Kintyre, where we set off for Campbeltown. There were some stiff climbs but splendid views across to Arran. We camped in the Machrihanish beach dunes.

We deviated from the Sustrans route and took the quiet A83 road up the western coast of the Mull of Kintyre, but the headwinds continued to blow. We formed a two-cyclist peloton and made good progress to Kennacraig. Camping north of Kilberry, the sunset between the Paps of Jura was a delight.



Our route then took us to Moine Mhor and the Dunadd hillfort, the birthplace of the Scottish nation, then onto the stone circles and cairns of Kilmartin. From here, we had a gravel detour to Carnasserie Castle. We found a spectacular wild campsite on the side of the aptly-named Loch Awe.

The morning sun melted the frost on the tents but our water bottles were frozen. Oban wasn't far, which was just as well as the weather worsened. Horizontal snow, hail, and rain hindered our progress for the last 12 miles, as did a herd of long-horned Highland cattle ambling on the road. Our warm beds in Oban were well deserved.



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