



Gorge-ous challenge photos by Joolze Dymond



All finishers received a certificate at the end of the challenge

A gorge-ous challenge

TONY UPFOLD TAGGED ALONG ON AN ANNUAL RIDE FOR BEGINNERS IN BRISTOL

It's not that long, doesn't rise that high, and apart from a short 16% section, isn't even that steep. But Cheddar Gorge is one of the UK's iconic cycle climbs. There seemed no better excuse to tackle the 2.5-mile, 500ft ascent than by signing up for the Get Gorge-ous Cycle Challenge on 2 July.

Organised by Cycle Bristol CTC, the event aims to help adults to rediscover the joys of cycling. Get Gorge-ous is all about 50s. It's a 50-mile ride, there were nearly 50 taking part and the majority were aged over 50 – and female. They had been building up towards the big day since February.

I rode with the third of four groups. The pace was leisurely, the stories inspirational. There was Francoise, who dedicated the ride to her late sister. There was 26-year-old Rachel, who sold her car in January to commute to work by bike because it's healthier and greener. Alongside Rachel was her mum's best friend Sue, a tandem rider who wanted to do more solo cycling.

The sense of achievement on their faces at the top of Cheddar Gorge meant far more to me than ticking off another climb on my own bucket list. And the best thing of all? They've been bitten by the bicycling bug!



CHANNEL HOPPING

Geoff Searle and his wife enjoyed a Petit Tour de Manche, despite mixed weather

The ferries dictated the shape of our brief tour of Brittany and Normandy. Our first stop, after a barrel-rolling catamaran journey from Poole to Guernsey, was St Peter Port, where we had a swift drink. Then we were off to St Malo, where we overdid on shellfish.

Next morning, shepherded by our new SatNav, we followed the signposted route to Cancale. We caught glimpses of Mont St-Michel occasionally. The weather closed in, turning from drizzle to monsoon, and emptying us damply into a roadhouse at Beauvoir. When the torrent subsided, we picked up Veloroute 40, which runs along minor roads and disused railways. It goes all the way to

Paris, but we stopped overnight at Ducey.

We were going to travel north via St Lô, but the look on the receptionist's face when I suggested we might cycle across through the bocage – which makes Cornwall look like Norfolk – made us reconsider. We followed V40 further east before tracking north at Mortain. The Tour de France was passing nearby so we met many French roadies. At Vire, we struck west to Percy.

Day two had been wet, cool and long, and at the end of it my wife had tendonitis in her ankle. We had 80 miles to ride on day three, but she did not complain, even when forced to pedal with one leg or pressing with her heel on the pedal. Happily the weather turned in our favour. We unfolded our free Manche tourism veloroute maps to plot an easy course to connect to the off-road cycle route from Coutances to La Haye du Puits – where there is only one hotel. It's clean, cheap, and beyond parody.

The final day was a short but testing run through undulating countryside before a long glide down to Cherbourg. After a late lunch of moules frites, we caught the ferry back to Blighty.



A converted mill in Ducey provided a lovely overnight stop



Wyoming's wide open spaces and (below) camping by Montana's Harrison Lake

Three months headed east

SANDY D FRANKLIN AND HUSBAND **TIM** CYCLED COAST TO COAST ACROSS AMERICA

On a fine summer's day on the Pacific coast of America, we dipped our wheels in the ocean and set off east. To cope with the heat, we broke camp by 5.30am each day, hugging every centimetre of roadside shade.

As we approached the Rockies, many mountain ranges lay ahead, with names I had known since childhood. First, the Bitterroot Range. Then the Blackfoot river made famous by the film 'A river runs through it', followed by days along the Lewis and Clark trail.

Once through the Badlands National Park, created by massive erosion and weathering, came the Prairies. They were beautiful, with gentle undulating waves of wheat, grasslands, and sunflowers stretching for miles.

After Minnesota, a glacier-sculptured landscape led to the mighty Mississippi River and Wisconsin from where an old coal-fired steamer, the SS Badger, took us across Lake Michigan.

We detoured into Ontario for Niagara Falls, then it was back to the mountains. First the beautiful Adirondacks followed by the Green mountains in Vermont, then the White Mountains and Appalachians of New Hampshire. All offered fabulous cycling, with the autumn colours just emerging.



CENTURY RIDING

This June, **Julie Rand** took part in South West London CTC's Triennial Veterans' ride

I'm riding along a busy country lane in Surrey on the squeaky bike I use for commuting, my audax bike being indisposed. The rain is falling in biblical torrents, bubbles forming as it splashes into the puddles at the roadside. I can just about make out my cycling companions as they round the next bend yards in front of me, a blur of bright colours in the gloom. I'm taking part in a century ride for over-50s. This is meant to be fun, I remind myself. Then I get my second puncture.

But by the afternoon, the downpour stops, an apologetic sun shows its face again and, after a very brisk 40 miles post-lunch, I start to believe that I will make it back to base before the 12-hour

time limit expires. This is in no small part due to the support of my new riding friends, who kindly wait for me at every junction. They might be older – at 55, I'm the youngest in my group – but they're extremely fit, their steely calves testament to the many riding miles they've amassed. All of them ride good quality road bikes.

The Tri-Vets rides are part of Cycling UK tradition and date back to 1928. As the name suggests, they take place every three years throughout the country, and participants can test their stamina over 100 miles or 100km. The oldest finisher in South West London's 100-mile ride is an 82-year-old, a near-90-year-old dropping out at lunchtime due to the severe weather.

By late afternoon, the gorgeous, rose-strewn Surrey villages seem to be whizzing by – I've never ridden so far, so fast! – and we complete the last mile together. The welcome sight of more cake than even hungry century riders can do justice to is our reward, as well as an enormous sense of pride and satisfaction.

I just hope I'll be fit enough to tackle the next Tri-Vets ride in 2019!

Share your story

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