

Off-road cycling is beginner-friendly and has huge benefits



Right: Sam Jones

## Off-road campaigning

# MAKING TRACKS

Welsh Government proposes increased access in line with Trails for Wales, and there's a new trail network in Surrey. **Sam Jones** reports

**C**YCLING UK'S RIDES OF Way report, published in February, outlined the vast economic and health benefits of off-road cycling. It gave us a better understanding of who rides off-road, where they ride, and what they want, and also the benefits from and barriers to off-road cycling.

It's enabled us to bring qualitative evidence to our discussions with landowners, and it's already starting to bear fruit. A great example is the partnership work we are undertaking with Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Surrey County Council.

### BLAZING TRAILS IN SURREY

We've jointly identified and mapped five new routes on bridleways suitable for novice riders, offering over 80km of off-road fun and freedom. Each route has been designed to dovetail with well-known existing routes, including parts of the North Downs Way.

**“We're not calling for a right to cycle everywhere”**

The route information will be available to download via the AONB and council websites.

The five routes link local landmarks and recreation spots with pubs and villages, in order to benefit the rural economy. They're primarily aimed at leisure cyclists; off-road utility cycling will be addressed in a future development of traffic-free commuting links.

Our work with Surrey Hills AONB and Surrey County Council on the new routes has shown there is an appetite for more off-road cycling among landowners. Surrey Hills AONB Director Rob Fairbanks said: 'Although the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is already a popular cycling destination, working with Cycling UK on trail identification and management means that we can safely get even more Surrey residents and visitors cycling more often and enjoying the Surrey Hills.

The staff and volunteers at Cycling UK are a fantastic resource and great fun to work with!

Surrey is only the start. We've already been meeting with local authorities and National Parks from Hampshire to Yorkshire.

### ACCESS ISSUES

Following our last off-road update, a small number of members did write in to express

their concerns about our campaign to increase access for off-road cycling. We've not been able to reply to every response individually but we do take such concerns seriously. That's why a big part of our campaigning has been making sure we engage not just with the landowners but also other user groups, such as the British Horse Society (BHS) and Ramblers.

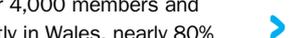
These discussions are ongoing as we hammer out the details, but as evidenced by our joint appearance with these groups at a House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee hearing in January, there was no conflict, only consensus, as we discussed the challenges of balancing environmental issues with expanding rural tourism.

It's worth reiterating that we're not calling for a blanket right for people to cycle everywhere. Yet Cycling UK does believe there is an opportunity for national governments in England and Wales to open up more of the rights of way network for cycling.

This was very much the basis for our Trails for Wales campaign in 2015, which was backed by over 4,000 members and supporters. Currently in Wales, nearly 80%

### Rides of Way

Download a copy of our off-road report from [bit.ly/cyclinguk-ridesofway](http://bit.ly/cyclinguk-ridesofway)





Left: Dan Joyce

There's scope for even more cycling in the Surrey Hills

of the rights of way network is forbidden to cyclists and horse riders, with similar restrictions also existing in England.

Following our campaign, and ongoing discussion with the Welsh Government, a new consultation was launched in June that recognises both the benefits and opportunities that would come with changing these restrictions.

**WALES ON THE RIGHT PATH**

This new consultation, titled 'Taking forward Wales' sustainable management of natural resources', looks to understand and address some of the challenges Wales will face as a result of Brexit. Part of the solution, for natural resources, could be increasing access. The Welsh Government has thus proposed: 'To enable cycling and horse riding on footpaths to occur under the same conditions as those provided for cycling on bridleways under section 30 of the Countryside Act 1968.'

Cycling UK Chief Executive Paul Tuohy



The new leisure routes link up with villages and pubs

welcomed this momentous step in our off-road access campaigning. 'This is a landmark move towards increasing the opportunities for cycling, health and tourism,' he said, 'and it shows a commendable and forward-thinking approach that we have come to expect from the Welsh Government.'

Cycling UK welcomes many of the Welsh Government's proposals, such as the creation of a statutory access code to reinforce responsible behaviour. There are others we're concerned about, such as a proposal that would allow people to drive their cars or ride their horses along tarmac tracks that it would be illegal to cycle on. Overall, however, this is a hugely encouraging consultation, and a sign that our original Trails for Wales campaign was literally on the right track.

At the time of writing, we're still going through the 98-page consultation and drafting our response to it. We want our response to be as collaborative as possible, as we want everyone be able to enjoy access to the countryside.

However positive the Welsh Government's proposals are, they are by no means a sure thing. Trails for Wales' success so far was built not just on our well-developed policy position but also on the wider backing of our members and supporters. Come mid-August we'll be looking to repeat this successful combination, and hope that together we can help make a more accessible Wales for everyone.

For more details, visit [cyclinguk.org/campaign/trails-wales](http://cyclinguk.org/campaign/trails-wales).

**Quick releases**

**LEADERSHIP IN MOUNTAIN BIKING**

Cycling UK has joined forces with Mountain Bike Coaching UK (MBCUK) and the Mountain-Bike Instructors Award Scheme (MIAS) to boost the MTB guiding industry across Europe. A new qualification in Mountain Bike Leadership is being launched under the banner of the Association of British Mountainbike Guides (ABMG). This new accrediting body, which is part of the European Organisation of Mountain Bike Instructor-Guides (EO-MTBInG), supports mountain biking leaders in the UK by adding credibility and authority to the leaders' training and assessment process. The accreditation also aims to boost consumer confidence so that participants have peace of mind when booking a mountain biking trip in Europe. For more, see [bit.ly/cycle-abmg](http://bit.ly/cycle-abmg).

**CYCLE TO WORK DAY**

Cycle to Work Day is on 13 September. It encourages adults across the UK to get on their bikes and give cycle commuting a go for one day. It's also a way of celebrating those who are already passionate cycle commuters. You can pledge to ride to work that day at [cycletoworkday.org](http://cycletoworkday.org), and there are prizes up for grabs.

**TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT**

Since our update on #TooCloseForComfort in the last issue, we're pleased to report that 35 police forces across the UK are rolling out our close pass mats and conducting education and enforcement operations. You can check to see if your local force is one of these at [cyclinguk.org/campaign/toocloseforcomfort](http://cyclinguk.org/campaign/toocloseforcomfort).





Come and meet other members and share ideas

Conference

# BIG BIKE CELEBRATION

Our members' get together is in Birmingham on 7 October. **Matt Mallinder** explains what – and who – you can expect there

**J**OIN US IN Birmingham on 7 October for our Big Bike Celebration – our third members' conference, where we'll be celebrating great examples of events, campaigns and projects that helped Get Britain Cycling over the last year. As well as showcasing our own members' and volunteers' achievements, this year we'll be extolling and learning from other grassroots projects across the UK.

Birmingham is fast becoming a hotbed of cycling. There are lots of community projects, a really proactive council, and now a new West Midlands mayor who has put cycling at the heart of his policies. Mayor Andy Street has been invited to speak. Others invitees are long-distance rider Lee Cragie, who's just taken part in the 2,750-mile Tour Divide, and Chris Boardman MBE, Olympic gold medallist, commentator, and founder of Boardman Bikes.

We'll also be welcoming representatives from inspirational community clubs, and we'll be reflecting on our own initiatives, such as our first Women's Festival of Cycling, our Challenge Ride Series, our Rides of Way off-road advocacy work, and more.

In the conference's workshops, we're inviting you to share your own experiences and learn from others. Before the event starts at 11am, there will be a leisurely cycling safari through Birmingham, highlighting recent infrastructure improvements and visiting cycling projects.

For the latest details and to register for this free event, visit [cyclinguk.org/Cycling-UK-AnnualMembers-Get-Together](http://cyclinguk.org/Cycling-UK-AnnualMembers-Get-Together).

## VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Nominations are open now for Cycling UK's Volunteer Awards 2016-2017. The winners – along with the winners of the Tourist Competition – will receive their awards at the Big Bike Celebration. The categories are: Best Campaign; Best Group Achievement or Cycling Event; Best Community Project; Young Achiever of the Year; and Best Cycling Achievement.

You can nominate your own club or Member Group, or any individual who deserves recognition. Complete a nomination form at [cyclinguk.org/cycling-uk-volunteer-year-awards-2017](http://cyclinguk.org/cycling-uk-volunteer-year-awards-2017). You can read about previous years' winners there. To request a paper nomination form, call 01483 238300.



World cycle tourer Stephen Fabes (L) at the 2016 event

Quick releases

### SPACE FOR CYCLING RIDES

Local volunteer campaigners organised 12 bike rides around England as part of Cycling UK's Space for Cycling campaign this year (in Birmingham, Bradford, Greater Manchester, Derby, Huddersfield, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, Leeds, Liverpool, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield and St Albans), as well as another four in Scotland (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness) as part of the related #WalkCycleVote campaign. The West Midlands ride was particularly successful. Organised jointly with the Bike West Midlands Network (chaired by David Cox), it was attended by all of the local Metro Mayoral candidates. Crucially, the winning candidate – Andy Street, the former boss of John Lewis – promised to spend at least £10 per person annually on cycling.

### HEELS TO WHEELS

More than 30 women attended Heels to Wheels, the first women's cycling day organised by Cycle Ayrshire, Kilmarnock Active Travel Hub and Killie Blue Belles. Activities included led cycle rides, e-bike try-outs, Dr Bike health checks, talks, a 'bling your bike' competition, coffee, cake, reflexology, and artwork from the Tour of Ayrshire. For more details, see [cycleyrshire.co.uk/htw.php](http://cycleyrshire.co.uk/htw.php).

### GOWER CYCLING FESTIVAL

Twenty-one led rides around and beyond the Gower Peninsula are on offer from 12-19 August, thanks to the Gower Cycling Festival and CTC Swansea. The festival is based at the Dunvant RFC where there is camping. There is a £5 registration fee (children free). For details, visit [gowercyclingfestival.org](http://gowercyclingfestival.org).

### WHEELS FOR ALL REWARDED

Marlow Riders cycling club, which organises the Red Kite Ride sportive, presented a cheque for £9,000 to Marlow Wheels for All at its recent AGM. Wheels for All provides adapted bikes for children and adults – see [cycling.org.uk/wheels-for-all/](http://cycling.org.uk/wheels-for-all/).