



Riaz (centre): 'A rose between thorns,' Paul said



Most of the TPT is off-road

Singletrack for starters

RIAZ RASHID WAS ONE OF SEVERAL BEGINNERS ON AN OFF-ROAD WEEKEND IN WALES

We paused to take the sea air in Conwy after a morning enjoying dramatic coastal views, not to mention the climbs and descents that had presented them. There were 20 off us, mostly seasoned cyclists of the sensible and clean 'road' variety – clearly a different breed to the dirty mountain bikers we were becoming. We were ready to face the challenge of the Marin Trail in North Wales, being equipped with rugged bikes and in some cases knee pads. It's easy to label challenges as awesome and inspiring, but these off-road trails were certainly that.

The newbies, including myself, were quickly brought into the fold by the regular riders who had signed up for another CTC Cycling Holidays tour run by Paul Rogers. The group gelled from the moment we gathered at the bunkhouse in Llanrwst on Thursday evening, looking forward to the long weekend. There was good balance of men, women, and different ages.

So why had I decided to join this fixed-base holiday? It's an amazing feeling to do something that frightens you, heightens your senses, and brings you back to nature. Then there's that feeling of being 12 years old again and having that freedom that only two wheels can bring.



High above Conwy Bay

TRANS PENNINE TRUNDLE

Cycle campaigner **Simon Geller** took the Sustrans route from Southport to Hornsea

We are the Sheffield Slobs, an informal riding group whose rides are as short and easy as we can make them. But once a year we do a longer ride. In 2016, we chose the Trans Pennine Trail.

From Southport, we took the lovely old Cheshire Lines route. In Aintree, we diverted from it to the beach at Crosby to see the amazing Anthony Gormley 'Another Place' installation. Then we joined the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, passing the Stanley Dock Tobacco Warehouse, the largest brick building in the world. We emerged on the waterfront by Liverpool's 'Three Graces' – the Liver building, the Cunard building, and the Port of Liverpool building.

Back on the main route, we headed south on a green corridor before turning east, leaving the Loop Line to follow the Mersey inland through pleasant parkland. The last section followed the canal to Warrington, home of Cycle Facility of the Month and 20's Plenty.

Next day, we set off for Manchester. It was lovely and flat at first, passing through Tame Valley Country Park. The route then climbs over the Pennines using Saltersbrook, one of the packhorse routes used to bring salt over from Cheshire. A rapid descent got us to Wortley, where we stayed overnight and were regaled with tales of the Dragon of Wantley (Google it!).

The next day we drifted down the Dearne Valley to the outskirts of Doncaster, passing the former Earth Centre, then made our way north on trails and quiet roads. Strawberries could be bought at the roadside.

Some Trans Pennine Trail volunteers from Hull guided us through their city, showing us the preparations for Hull City of Culture on the way. Thanks, guys! We finished at Hornsea, where I've never had better fish and chips.



Another Place to park a bike

To support the trail, visit transpenninetrail.org.uk/friends/



Beyond the Arctic Circle

NORTHERN SIGHTS

Sandy D Franklin overtook spring on her cycle tour to Norway's Nordkapp

Spring comes late to northern Norway, but when it arrives there's no better place to be. We arrived in Tromsø in late May to cycle to Nordkapp, the northernmost point of mainland Europe, and then on to Kirkenes on the Norway/Russian border.

With tulips and daffodils in bloom, the sea sparkling under a blue sky, and street cafés packed with people soaking up the sun, it felt Mediterranean. Marine smells filled the air, sunlight bounced off snow-covered mountains, rafts of eiders bobbed by the shore, and waterfalls were in full spate from the spring melt.

From Tromsø, we cycled over the Lyngen Alps with their saw-toothed peaks, crossed fjords by ferry, and drank in the glaciated features of this



Arctic landscape. The next four days we cycled under cloudless skies in temperatures touching 18 degrees, with ascents leading us onto snow-covered Arctic plateaux. We stayed on charming campsites, enjoyed the midnight sun, and passed herds of reindeer and roads lined with lupins. We saw goosanders, mergansers, red-throated divers, and once a sea eagle perched so close we could almost touch it.

Cycling towards Havøysund, the temperature plummeted. We took the ferry to Honningsvåg, avoiding the 7km tunnel to the island where Nordkapp is located. A notice warned of weather changes from Siberian heat to Arctic cold in minutes – and didn't we know it! Riding onwards to Nordkapp was a wild, tough ride, but standing on the cliffs on the edge of Europe, it was another dream realised. We were as far north as we could go.



On the Vennbahn in Belgium

Biking in times of Brexit

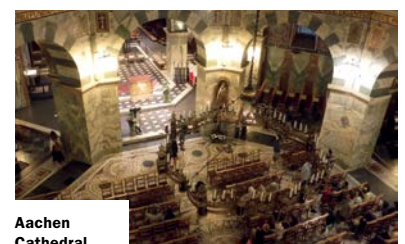
GEOFF SAUNDERS AND HIS WIFE ENJOYED A BARRIER-FREE TOUR THROUGH EUROPE

In spring 1945, when my father crossed from Holland into Germany, no one checked his passport. When my wife Virginia and I crossed the same border 71 years later, we were delighted to have the same experience.

Following the Brexit vote, we set off for a 'biking without borders' visit to Europe. After an overnight crossing to the Hook and a train to Maastricht, we pedalled east along quiet Sunday tracks. Then at Lemirs, a gap in a hedge, a small marker, and a plank-bridge led us unseen into Germany. A short ride further brought us to Aachen, Charlemagne's former capital of a united Europe. The beautiful cathedral, dating from those times, should not be missed.

From Aachen, the Vennbahn leads south using a former railway awarded to Belgium at Versailles. This well-surfaced cyclepath leads into the Eifel Mountains, climbing at an easy gradient. Along the way are lovely villages, such as historic Monschau.

Descending from the Eifel, we left the Vennbahn to slip into Luxembourg at Vianden and followed the Sure river, weaving our way across the border bridges – coffee in Germany, lunch in Luxembourg. Where the Sure joins the Moselle, we turned north to Trier, an ancient city near the limits of the Roman Empire that once united Europe.



Aachen Cathedral

Share your story

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