

## Comment &amp; interviews

# CYCLE SHORTS

**THIS MONTH** A NEW OUTDOOR PARTNERSHIP, SCHOOLS DISCOURAGING CYCLING, AND A MEMBERSHIP SURVEY



Right: Neil Wheadon

Neil leading a tour in Germany

## Local Hero

## NEIL WHEADON

Neil has been a tour manager for CTC Cycling Holidays for 18 years, leading trips for hundreds of families.

**Dan Joyce** caught up with him

**L**IKE EVERYONE WHO manages and leads tours for CTC Cycling Holidays, Neil Wheadon does it not because it's his job but because he wants to: he's a volunteer. He's a Cycling UK member organising trips for other members like you. That's what gives CTC Cycling Holidays, a fully-bonded holiday company, its unique flavour.

'No other cycling holiday company works like CTC Cycling Holidays,' Neil said. 'Every year, over 80 holidays are conceived, planned, and run by nearly 50 volunteers. Each is a little different because it has the character

of its manger running through it – and the manager deals with you from start to finish. There is incredible diversity. You can find anything from a camping trip through France to a supported tour through the Himalayas.'

Neil is currently planning cycling holidays in Japan, Bangkok, and Bhutan, and regularly returns to Norway (see last issue) and America's Pacific North West. 'I love mountain and coastal scenery,' he explained. However, it's his family holidays that he's best known for, having run them for 18 years.

'My first dedicated family cycling holiday

was in 1999,' he said. 'It was based in Cheddar, and seven families came along to enjoy the Somerset Levels and Wells. After the second year, when everyone came back, it was clear that we had something special. We'd become an extended group of friends. Many families are still in contact not just with me but with each other.'

Neil began organising tours for other families because he was a family cyclist himself. 'I cut my teeth organising Tandem Club national and international events,' he said. 'With upwards of 500 cyclists, and including 80 children, these events provided the template for a great family holiday. I wanted to offer that through CTC, as Cycling UK was then, having joined in 1997.'

The successful family cycling template, Neil suggested, is fairly simple. 'Be realistic, make it interesting, and ride with other families. If you say to your children that you're going to cycle 30 miles, they might roll their eyes. But if they could cycle those 30 miles with friends their own age, stop at a boulangerie part way, and finish the day in a swimming pool or playing rounders, it'd be different. That's what's made these holidays successful.

'They've all been memorable. My greatest compliment came from one father who had secured funding to set up a local theatrical group, with the aim of bringing the community together. He said that in these holidays, I had created something that he couldn't.'

The children who've been on the holidays are testimony to their success. 'The vast majority are still cycling,' Neil said. 'Many have gone on to great things: one was Scottish Junior Indoor Champion, and others have taken up racing. Many have continued to use a bike for regular rides; our son, for example, rode 12 miles each day to school and back. He's taken his Islabikes Luath 700 to Oxford. It was presented to him by Isla herself when we toured Ludlow, and it's his pride and joy.'

**The CTC Cycling Holidays website is [cyclingholidays.org](http://cyclingholidays.org)**

### Stay in touch

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