



Details

- **Where:** York and its outskirts
- **Start/finish:** York, North Yorkshire
- **Distance:** 31 miles over three days
- **Pictures:** Melissa Viney





MELISSA VINEY & MARK HENNESSY

Melissa is a journalist who lives in London – as does Mark. That's where they usually cycle together.

Great Rides

SPACE FOR CYCLING

A sociable tandem and a route map of the Solar System cycle route helped create a stellar weekend of cycling in York for **Melissa Viney and Mark Hennessy**

We're travelling faster than the speed of light, shooting past Mars and Jupiter. Our craft is a side-by-side quadricycle, our velocity scale speed: we're 'cycling the solar system' on the York to Selby cycle track (NCN Route 65). Annotated models of the planets punctuate a 6.4 mile section of what was once the East Coast main line. Since it's a rail trail, it's flat. This helps because my co-rider Mark is disabled. A brain injury in 2008 left him unable to walk unassisted.

Like many disabled people, Mark finds cycling easier than walking. If only there were more accessible routes! In London, where we both live, he owns a side-by-side tricycle. It's immensely sociable but easily balked by cycle track barriers, and it's hard to cart around to ride further afield; neither of us drives.

That's where Get Cycling – just a two-hour train journey away in York – came up trumps for us.

DAY ONE: SPACE FOR CYCLING

Get Cycling hires, sells, and adapts all kinds of bicycles, and specialises in disability cycling. When we arrive, founder Jim McGurn gives us a Roam Twinbike and a map of the local cycle routes, and off we go. We both have pedals but the gears and steering are on my side.

The sun is out and we're on our way to Neptune. Almost immediately, we're flummoxed by a fork in the track. Local cyclist Guy, who campaigns for sustainable

Do it yourself Inclusive cycling

Cycling UK has supported more than 40 Inclusive Cycling Centres across England as part of a Big Lottery funded project. For more information, visit cyclinguk.org/community-outreach/inclusive-cycling-network.

If you want to try out adaptive bikes in York with Get Cycling, meanwhile, visit getcycling.org.uk. York is easy to get to by train. LNER services will even carry conventional tandems (booked as two bikes).

travel on behalf of Travel York, puts us right and hands us a detailed cycle map of the city.

Further along, Mark has to dismount as I manhandle the cumbersome quadricycle through a barrier. We may be figuratively travelling faster than the speed of light but on earth, unlike outer space, there are gates and railings to negotiate.

Once through the gate we're away – flying, so to speak – wind in our hair, sun on our faces, delighted, free. Each of the planets we pass along the route has a nugget of information printed below it. Did you know that a day is longer than a year on Venus? Or that Jupiter has 57 moons?

We turn back just before Pluto. Even at a scale of 575,872,239 to 1, our trip across most of the solar system and back will amount to 12 miles. That's enough for us on our first day. The quadricycle takes some serious pedalling.

Next day we're up early. We're planning to do the 'pink route' on our map. It goes to Beningbrough Hall, nine miles away. The ride starts well: lovely quiet cycling beside the River Ouse, and then over the newly cycle-friendly Scarborough bridge – cycle-friendly, that is, until you get to the other side.

I'll let Mark take up the story...

DAY TWO: TO ME, TO YOU

Having crossed Scarborough Bridge, we have to navigate another barrier. I say 'we' in the loosest sense, as it involves me holding onto a wall while Melissa and a helpful passer-





Main photo: Mark by the River Ouse, near the railway station
Bottom: York Minster

Go Dutch
The Netherlands' vast cycle network is ideal for inclusive cycling:
cyclinguk.org/great-rides-netherlands

Fact file
Side by side

- **Distance:** 31 miles total, averaging 10 each day.
- **Route:** Day 1, Solar System route from York to Naburn. Day 2, Beningbrough Hall route as far as Skelton. Day 3, Osbaldwick route.
- **Conditions:** Hot sunshine and, aside from some impenetrable barriers, good cycle tracks. Above all, flat.

• **Accommodation:** Airbnb

• **Bike used:** Roam Twinbike quadricycle loaned by Get Cycling.

• **Maps/guides:** Blue, pink, and orange routes suggested by Get Cycling. Plus Travel York map and Google Maps. To explore further, use Sustrans' NCN map #28, Yorkshire Wolds, York & The Humber.

• **I'm glad I had...** My smartphone, for when we got lost (Melissa). A capable, able-bodied companion to navigate the barriers (Mark).

• **Next time I would...** Like a more comprehensive, accessible-cycling map (Melissa). Go in summer to make the most of the daylight (Mark).

• **Further info:** Wheels for Wellbeing, wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk. Disability resources, ableize.com. Sustrans, sustrans.org.uk.

▶ by manoeuvre the quadricycle. This looks as awkward as getting a wardrobe down a flight of stairs, but they manage. If you're a disabled cyclist, it helps if your companion is fit and able and has a gung-ho attitude!

We continue alongside the River Ouse. Manicured front gardens give way to flat countryside with wide open horizons. Then a potential argument rears its head: the map suggests we go one way, common sense another.

Luckily we get it right. But after negotiating cattle grids and other man-made barriers, we encounter one that the Twinbike can't pass. The alternative route is via a narrow cycle path on a pavement, with the traffic of the A19 thundering past on one side and thick hedgerows exfoliating my skin on the other.

We plough on and come to the garden centre at Skelton. As Melissa takes a well-earned nap, I reflect on the journey that has led me to this point. I decided to buy a side-by-side cycle after hiring one at local park. I love the feeling cycling gives of rapid movement under my own steam. The only downside for me, as a misanthrope, is the extra attention a side-by-side cycle attracts!

Back to Melissa...

DAY THREE: CYCLING FOR ALL

To make sure we don't get stuck or lost again, Get Cycling's Jim McGurn provides us with a guide for our last day. Peter knows that part of the cycle track we'd planned to use is being dug up. So instead we head along quiet roads, through old, almost too-perfect villages.

We turn off the road and onto Route 66 (not that one), which takes us through Derwenthorpe, an impressive eco-village development in the village of Osbaldwick, equipped with biomass boilers and fantastic insulation. It was funded by the

Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, Joseph Rowntree having been born in York.

It's hot. We stop for lunch in St Nicks Nature Reserve before heading back into central York and to our rendezvous with Jim McGurn. He's a nice man who clearly cares about cycling, especially accessible cycling. He and his wife should know: of their five grown-up children (both fostered and born to them), three have special needs. McGurn saw that the cost of accessible cycles was a major impediment, so Get Cycling began visiting Holland, buying up used accessible cycles to renovate, making them more affordable for clients.

The Get Cycling headquarters is close to the riverside cycle track. While this is convenient, McGurn is aware of the access issues for wide bikes like our Roam Twinbike. He plans to create a map that will show exactly where tricycles and quadricycles can go. He also wants to increase the range of disability cycling holidays in the UK, currently at practically zero.

"I think York is missing a trick," says McGurn. "It should be branding itself as the cycling city. That should be its calling card."

We have a bit of time before our train back to London, so we turn the quadricycle around and return to the river. Fortune smiles on us again: we come across a little ice-cream boat moored by the cycle track. As we sit enjoying our cornets, we feel the autumn sun on our faces. It's been a wonderful break. ●

i More info
Fancy cycling the Solar System yourself? Visit:
york.ac.uk/solar/
itravellyork.info/cycling

