



Riding from sea level to 626m – almost there!



Gillian at Land's End last September

Scotland

Bealach na Bà by electric bike

70-year-old **Robert Skipworth** enjoyed a power-assisted ride up one of Britain's best climbs

On Father's Day 2019 I found myself in the Scottish Highlands at the summit of the renowned pass to Applecross, Bealach na Bà. My wife Joyce and I were supporting our son Richard's North Coast 500 ride. He was cycling in memory of his son, Alex, who tragically died aged three weeks at Glasgow Children's Hospital the year before.

"You might like to have a crack at the Bealach, Dad?" Richard said when he announced his NC500 attempt. My heavy and old but recently e-converted Claud Butler Voyager would be my steed. The e-bike conversion kit manufacturer, Cytronex, advised me to lower the maximum power of the motor to 80% to avoid front wheel spin and to lengthen the battery life.

Even with the conversion, the climb would be a challenge for the bike and for my arthritic knees. I was also awaiting surgery on a dislocated collarbone, which thankfully didn't affect my cycling ability.

In the months following I trained on the less testing hills of Sussex, shedding a stone in weight. On the day

of my ride, Richard and his friend Tim departed Inverness on their 107-mile initial leg over Bealach na Bà while I made a start on the climb before they arrived. I used the battery sparingly until I reached the steepest section below the hairpins. From there I caught sight of Tim and Richard working hard below.

I arrived at the summit viewpoint with 40% battery remaining, shortly before Richard and Tim. The reward was a superb view across to Ardnamurchan, Eigg, Rùm, and Skye, followed by an exhilarating descent to Applecross. I stopped for a cup of tea while the lads ploughed on to Shieldaig.

Robert with Richard, who still had far to ride, at the summit



England

To Land's End, post-lockdown

Gillian Sheath cycled from the north of England to its SW tip

AFTER THE PANDEMIC restrictions eased last year, I decided to cycle from my home in Cheshire to Land's End. Social distancing measures were still in place but you could stay in someone else's home. So I phoned friends and family and managed to secure 15 nights of bed and breakfast. I planned my route with an AA Road Atlas, looking at places about 50 miles apart.

I set off for Land's End on 3 September, cycling via Shrewsbury, Stourbridge, Birmingham, Worcester, Bristol, Clevedon, Taunton, Budleigh Salterton, Totnes, Lostwithiel, and Penzance.

On the back of my bike, I had a small poster stating 'Land's End for Alzheimer's Research'. I was stopped many times and given money. Once, while cycling uphill, a passing motorist gave me a £5 note. It was like receiving water on the Tour de France! People were so kind. I was tooted, waved at, and applauded. Other cyclists found it hard to believe I was cycling with my own luggage, with no support vehicle, and that I was a retired woman.

I have happy memories of my two weeks on the road: no punctures; generous people; sunshine; birdsong; my first sight of the sea; the marvellous view of St Michael's Mount; mist turning to sun; cows; flowers; and tea and cake in local cafés. Friends I hadn't seen for years were so generous in providing meals and comfy beds. I also raised £2,200 for Alzheimer's Research in memory of my mum.



On the beach at St Davids in the August sunshine



Woodhead Reservoir in north Derbyshire

England

Over the Pennines

With sun forecast, **David Gladman** took an *impromptu* tour

ONE OF THE benefits of being retired is the ability to do things at the drop of a hat. In 2019, seeing an Indian summer forecast for late September, my friend and I decided to go for a short, easy-to-organise tour. After a full five minutes of discussion, we settled on five days riding the Trans Pennine Trail from Southport to Hornsea.

Our only plan was to get a train to Southport, then work it out as we went. It worked brilliantly. We spent gloriously sunny days crossing the country on mostly flat, traffic-free tracks, trails, and back roads. Our nights were spent in a collection of budget hotels, all within a mile or so of the signed route, and spaced fewer than 50 miles apart. That was the range of the pedelec that one of us was riding.

The Trail itself took us through or close by Liverpool, Widnes, Stockport, Penistone, Doncaster, Selby, and Hull. More important than the towns was the fantastic countryside; Longdendale Trail must take first prize for scenery. The terrain was mostly flat, although the Woodhead Pass felt *hors categorie* to this 70-year-old!

We navigated mainly using a Garmin Tour, but the signage was clear. On the downside, we did find a couple of places where bikes had to be cajoled up steps using grooved ramps.

The moral of the story? Never miss an opportunity to get out and ride!

Wales

Touring by the book

Richard Scrase and his family went exploring Wales's 'lost lanes' last summer

The moment campsites in Wales re-opened, we were off. I borrowed a friend's campervan, strapped our bikes on the back, and packed Jack Thurston's guidebook, *Lost Lanes Wales*.

Our first stop was Llanelli. As we pulled into the campsite, they asked: "Are you self-contained?" The site was open but the facilities were not. As I had not yet bought a bucket, we spent the first night in a hotel.

The next day was route 19, 'Seaside seduction', a gentle ride on a seaside path from Llanelli and then alongside a tiny canal to the castle at Kidwelly. My four-year-old daughter rode some of this on her Islabike. When she was tired, she sat in her child seat, her bike lashed

across the panniers of my wife's bike.

Next was St Davids, where we stayed on one of our favourite campsites, and part of the 'Celtic coast' route. The weather was glorious so we only rode a few miles of Jack's route. Mostly we stuck to the beach.

Beached and bleached out, we left to camp in Llandovery. In the morning we drove to Llanwrtyd Wells, the start and finish of another 18-mile easy ride ('Watery Wales'). This was my favourite ride of the holiday: lonely lanes with little traffic, varying views, gentle climbing, then streams and waterfalls on the way downhill.

We went through Hay-on-Wye into England and found a tiny riverside campsite on the Wye. The next day the weather was changing, and none of us fancied the slog up to Gospel Pass, part of 'Around the Black Hill'. Instead we drove to the top and my wife and son freewheeled down while I drove.

We stopped at the Half-Moon Hotel to regroup and admire Llanthony Abbey. Later, with the children sleeping and the campsites we had hoped to use still shut, we headed home. We'll be back to try some of other rides when we can camp without a special bucket!



Taking a break at Beulah, near Llanwrtyd Wells



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