



HARRY LYONS & CELIA PARKER

Cycling UK members whose tours have included North and South America, Europe, and Asia

Bikes folded nearby, we sat in the mid-morning sunshine at a café in Roscoff, Brittany. Behind us was a group of animated young people with cabin cases, who were smoking and drinking. It was only when one of them gave a cheery “Hello” that I realised that they were the crew from the overnight ferry we’d caught from Plymouth. Having arrived at 6.30am, we’d already explored the town centre and a local beauty spot before settling down to a beer and brunch ourselves.

My partner Celia and I were on a new adventure, aiming to cycle the small roads of the Brittany coastline from Roscoff to Saint-Malo, across Normandy to Caen, then take a train to Paris and the Eurostar home. The pandemic had disrupted our plans to cycle Route 66 from Los Angeles to Albuquerque so we’d used our holiday money to buy customised Bromptons with Rohloff hubs and disc brakes. They were certainly special but how would they cope with a two-week tour?

TICKETS TO RIDE

We felt pretty smug cycling to our local station, folding the bikes and shouldering our two pieces of luggage for a journey on the Elizabeth Line to Paddington. We were even more smug when we did the same thing to board a GWR train to Plymouth, avoiding the need to reserve one of the (maximum) four bike spaces available on its intercity trains.

Our luggage was minimal. We each had a front bag, plus a trunk bag for the rear carrier. Celia seemed to carry more in her 14-litre front bag than I managed

in my 25-litre one. But our limited luggage capacity meant no camping gear. We were taking a chance on early-season hotel availability.

Check-in at the Brittany Ferries terminal was straightforward, and we boarded with foot passengers, the bus dropping us next to a lift on the car deck. On board, the bikes were safely stored in the ship’s luggage locker.

The ferry’s dawn approach to Roscoff was lovely. As the medieval town was still asleep, we decided to explore a little. We cycled along deserted roads to the Pointe de Perharidy, a peninsula with beautiful wild beaches and great views across the bay to the distant town.

Back in Roscoff, after an early check-in at our hotel, we were ready for a beer and a sandwich. The café favoured by the Brittany Ferries crew was a good choice, facing a harbour from which small ferries (vedettes) ran boat trips to the nearby Île de Batz. It was €10 return, dogs free and bikes €16. It was worth taking our bikes with us to explore the island... and get lost, despite its small size. There’s a spectacular botanic garden on the Île de Batz – and another on the mainland, just up the road from the ferry terminal.

Before we left Roscoff we had somewhere we had to see: the Maison des Johnnies & de l’Oignon de Roscoff, a small museum telling the story of the bike-riding ‘Onion Johnnies’, with their strings of onions that they delivered to British households. It brought tears to our eyes.

BIKING THROUGH BRITTANY

Next day we set out on small lanes for Morlaix, keeping the sea in view where possible. It was a pleasant ride past fields spiky with artichokes, and we arrived at the port in time for lunch. The approach along the river was scenic, as was Morlaix itself, located in a



Custom Bromptons

We were lucky to obtain singlespeed Bromptons during the pandemic bike drought. They were delivered directly to Ben Cooper at Kinetics in Glasgow for modification, getting new forks and rear triangles to accept disc brakes, Rohloff hubs and Gates belt drives. Tyres are 50-305 Schwalbe Big Apples.

The bikes coped with some rough terrain and, complemented by Ergon Comfort handlebar grips, were comfortable on tarmac. I went for a SON hub dynamo. Celia didn’t due to the extra weight and (admittedly minimal) drag. Supply chain problems meant that we ended up with Magura hydraulic disc brakes, which I don’t like. There’s virtually no adjustment and they’re less easy to repair roadside than cable discs. kinetics-online.co.uk