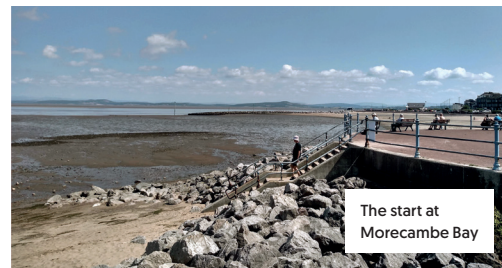




Not all of the route is off road



The start at Morecambe Bay

England

Way of the Roses

After her exams, **Jude Wilkinson** rode coast to coast from Morecambe to Bridlington

THE WAY OF THE ROSES takes in the diverse landscapes of the Forest of Bowland, the Yorkshire Dales and the Yorkshire Wolds. On my approach to Settle, the scenery shifted completely. The open moors of Bowland gave way to dry stone walls and a gorge-like valley, which snaked its way from Austwick to Wharfe and finally Settle.

If you've ridden the route, you'll remember the climb out of the town. Over a mile at 7.3%, most of the elevation gain is in the first third, which probably averages over 20%. I was determined to get up without walking, a task made easier by having mountain bike gears.

As I reached the top, though, I realised that I had consumed all my water. There were no shops nearby except back down the hill. I pulled into a village and trundled up to a man painting his cottage door.

"Excuse me, I'm sorry to disturb you, but I've run out of water."

"Run out of water, have you?" replied a broad Yorkshire accent. "Well, give me the bottles, then."

"Thanks, it's kind of you. It's quite the climb up there. Absolutely brutal in this heat."

"I used to run up it."

He disappeared inside the cottage and returned with my bottles refilled, along with a handful of bananas.

"Here you go. Lots of road cyclists come through the village, hordes of them. Anyway, have a banana, sit down on the bench over there. Take two minutes, enjoy yourself."

Amused at the specified length of time, I used the full two minutes before setting off to find a camp site.

Spain

Wedded to adventure

The 1,250km Sendero Histórico is challenging off-road route across northern Spain. **Tom Goldsmith** rode it

It was a winter's evening when I chanced upon the GRI route in Spain, which runs between the Picos and the Mediterranean. Here was a European off-road trail offering adventure and challenge reminiscent of the brilliant Rough-Stuff Fellowship Archive. But I could also package it as a holiday for, secretly, I was searching for a beautiful setting to ask my girlfriend to marry me.

The GRI (or Sendero Histórico) is a 1,250km remote trail across northern Spain linking important historical sites. We took the published hiking route as inspiration, adapting it to fit our 11-day timetable and riding east to west between Girona and Bilbao for ease of access from the UK by plane and ferry. A real charm for us was no record of a previous route attempt by bike.

We set off armed with a walking guidebook (our thanks to Terry Hayes and Cicerone Press) as our only source of local knowledge. The scenery was beautiful and the terrain was varied, with fast dirt roads, sinuous singletrack and attritional hike-a-bike. We crossed rivers, explored abandoned mountain villages, napped in church doorways and sampled copious bocadillos. It was hard, but it was also an adventure.

Having no expectations of what might be around the next corner also meant nothing could disappoint us.

As Bilbao approached, our hunger to trailblaze a new cycle route gradually melted away. Instead, everything was in the discovering.

The trip exceeded our wildest bikepacking dreams, and we'd pushed well outside our comfort zones. Our bodies and kit both took a hammering on the extreme parcours. The experience will linger long in the memory, and I hope prompt some thoughts as to your own cycle touring 'bucket list' criteria. Adventure is in the eye of the beholder.

And the marriage proposal? Dear reader, she said yes.



Packing light was important



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