

Cycling journalist

GUY KESTEVEN

*The guidebook for Marcher Castles Way is being written by **Guy Kesteven**, a cycling content creator who began exploring by bike with York CTC Easy Riders many years ago*



My main involvement with Marcher Castles Way is as writer of the guidebook and creator of the route experience videos. As that involves riding the route before writing it up, I'm also the on-trail 'sense checker'. That can often be a very scratchy, stingy, pushy, backtrack-and-try-another-option process. It's crucial to making sure the published route is a really enjoyable experience, however, and pre-riding means I can hopefully bring the route to life in the guidebook.

I work with Kieran Foster, who is a master at unlocking rights-of-way puzzles, working with local authorities, dodging main roads and maximising bike path/traffic-free time. As an unashamed map addict and ride deviser, I'll help wherever I can. It's not just a case of joining up scenic and historic highlights. We make sure that there are plenty of stopover/resupply points and that car-free access to the start and finish is as easy as possible.

Creating an overall feel that matches the landscape for each route and that has a consistent skill/fitness/challenge level is crucial to rider experience and trust. That inevitably means a lot of toing and froing on potential routes, and it's frustrating if you have to shelve a really promising section because of

ongoing negotiations or because 100 metres of a 5km section is impassable. But when the route is launched and the positive feedback starts flooding in, it's worth all the squinting at screens and getting stuck in brambles to make the end result work.

I started working with Cycling UK on the King Alfred's Way project because my background as an archaeologist/historian and subsequent career as a cycling content creator was a neat fit to such a storied route. It's been great to follow that up, creating content for West Kernow Way, Rebellion Way, Traws Eryri and Marcher Castles Way. Riding several hundred kilometres across wild terrain in all weathers is also a great way to test bikes and equipment, too, which is what my main 'job' is.

From a personal level, I love helping people rediscover lost routes and escape traffic, noise and pollution to find a wonderful sense of escape and freedom. The 'secret' rough-stuff sections that seemed to teleport you magically away from traffic or built-up areas were always my favourite part of heading out with the York CTC Easy Riders on my 5-speed racer as a kid. It's great to be able to pass on that baton through the guidebooks and videos. It's also inspired my wife and me to start our own 'Pedalling Past' YouTube channel featuring short 'Time Travel Gravel' routes between historic and scenic highlights.

Obviously it's nothing new. People have been exploring the countryside on bikes for two centuries, and some of the trails on the Cycling UK routes are probably at least 10,000 years old. And gravel bikes are just a hybrid of traditional touring bikes and modern mountain bike technology.

What you ride, how long you take and whether you wild camp or go five star on the routes that we create doesn't matter. What does matter is that you have an adventure that suits you and that opens your mind to even more possibilities. Whether that's trying another Cycling UK route like Marcher Castles Way or being inspired to get a map out and plan your own ride, I'm really proud to be a small part of that. ●

Get the book, see the films!

The Marcher Castles Way guidebook hadn't been published when Cycle went to press but, if you download the GPX file of the route from cyclinguk.org/marcher-castles-way, we'll email you when it's available. You can also watch Cycling UK's video of the new route on the site. Additionally, Guy has produced a three-part, in-depth guide to the route on his YouTube channel. Visit youtube.com/GuyKesTV/videos



Right: Robyn Furrado. Top right: Guy Kesteven