

**Clockwise from below:** Mountain bikes are better suited to the route's rockier bridleways, like this one near the Long Mynd. Climbing up out of Knighton to Offa's Dyke. Ironbridge is one of the many villages you can refuel at on Marcher Castles Way



Newtown, we cut the corner and stayed on the Jack Mytton Way, heading north to Church Stretton. There were big views, chatty locals and traffic jams caused by herds of cows.

We arrived at the Kinton Escapes campsite as dusk was falling. The campsite's lovely yurts had their own fire and were illuminated by almost 100 candles. Stars popped into view above us and the Milky Way was clearly visible. The campsite owner told us that this area was one of the only places in the south of the UK with no light pollution. It was a serene place to spend the night.

### UP AND DOWN THE LONG MYND

On the final day we were woken by the sound of rain on the tent. We groaned, knowing we had two big climbs to do in the stormy weather. We pulled on our wet weather gear and set off. It wasn't long before we were faced with several brutally steep climbs. Back to pushing!

Very slowly, we inched upwards towards the top of Stiperstones National Reserve and the Long Mynd. As we climbed, the weather closed in, surrounding us with heavy white fog. Apparently there are spectacular views off the top, but you'll have to go and see for yourselves if it's true.

The long climb through heather, gorse

**“ We whooped as we descended, crossing streams, water bars and rocky sections, enjoying not having to pedal ”**

and bracken was fun, however. It felt wild and remote, as though we were climbing a proper mountain pass. The top of the Long Mynd felt very exposed, but also exciting. You could imagine medieval Welsh warriors emerging from the mist.

The descent to Church Stretton was fantastic. We plummeted down on a trail that winds through a steep gorge that in September was purple and yellow with heather and gorse. We whooped as we descended, crossing streams, water bars and rocky sections, enjoying not having to pedal. Church Stretton had a good choice of cafés, ample reward for our earlier hill-climbing efforts.

On the final



stretch back to Shrewsbury we passed Caer Caradoc, a huge, mysterious fort that local legend says was the site of the last stand of the Welsh legend Caratacus against the Roman conquest of Britain. It's a magnificent site, and a great final nod to the mountainous, mythic landscape we'd ridden through over the last few days.

We made it back to Shrewsbury thoroughly wet and muddy but happy. Riding Marcher Castles Way had been a spectacular and challenging adventure, leaving us with tired legs and full hearts. ●



View from Brown Clee Hill, Shropshire's biggest hill