



Both come in at about 700 miles. Well, they do on paper. But cycling isn't generally done on paper and straight lines don't often lend themselves to convenient, traffic-free cycling.

Once I had these two longest lines – and four coastal destinations – in place, the rest more or less selected themselves. North to south (Beadnell to Barton-on-Sea) and west to east (Holyhead to Sutton-on-Sea) were easily and accurately fixed by following the grid lines on OS maps. The others were chosen by directly linking together places that made the best opposing end points (for which just a little angular licence was permitted).

I was pleased that my line WNW sliced right across the Isle of Man and on through Belfast to end at Derry/Londonderry, a journey which could all be seamlessly linked together by ferries. The opposing ESE end point is Sizewell nuclear power station on the Suffolk coast, a huge, hulking golf-ball-shaped full-stop. A SSW to NNE line ran from Beer in East Devon to Saltburn-on-Sea, while my WSW to ENE line linked Tenby with Flamborough Head, near Bridlington. As well as being beautiful, these were all definite, end-of-the-road places – in the nicest possible way.

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These extremities, I felt, needed to be joined together – along with whatever unlikely and unsung places lay in between. They might not all be obvious choices to visit but I had found the perfect excuse for seeing them. And that is a wonderful thing in a country where surprises wait around every turn. Even the most mundane places have the capacity to serve up something



Top to bottom: NNW, day seven: beach at Durness, near the north-western tip of Scotland. Day one while heading SW: Ironbridge, which is also part of Marcher Castles Way. WNW, day one: Ashton Canal towpath, Greater Manchester. NNW, day one: Sid's Café, of Last of the Summer Wine fame, in Holmfirth



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