



Left: South, day two: Lower Slaughter in the Cotswolds
Below: SW, day three: approaching Ilfracombe in Devon on PS Waverley, an historic paddle steamer that makes a once-a-year journey from Porthcawl in South Wales

Above right: WSW, day four: the seaside town of Tenby in Pembrokeshire

Right: NNW, day four: footbridge over the River Tummel in Pitlochry in Perth and Kinross, Scotland

Below right: WNW, day five: Umbrella Street in Belfast, Northern Ireland



along my 16 spokes where we would meet and have a full day off together, properly exploring a new town or city. Ironbridge in the Severn Gorge – 80 conspicuously hilly miles from home – was the first of these delightful stops.

FINDING MY BEARINGS

So began five months of exploring the UK by bike in a whole new way. It was, almost without exception, a delight. In a year when the British weather was getting bad press, I believe I got wet just four times. Admittedly the first occasion, in Cornwall, was a spectacular drenching before I had even reached the coast once, so I bailed for the day (almost literally). Atlantic storms and cycling don't mix, and I have a rule I always abide by: if it isn't fun, I stop. Otherwise I enjoyed many weeks of wonderful cycling weather and beautiful, quiet cycling through mostly very pretty, and

sometimes quite stunning, countryside. I was rarely disappointed and often thrilled.

The first part of any ride away from my house was often the trickiest. As the months went by, it got harder to find suitable routes from home that I hadn't already used. Like spokes on a wheel, the further I got from the middle, the more distance I put between the different rides. But when you live in rugged country like I do, keeping your lines apart close to home is difficult. Often the best routes available would also be fiendishly hilly on day one.

On a few occasions, I rode out on a sunny afternoon to get such an early section out of the way, then got a train home from somewhere about an hour's train ride away, returning to resume my journey after sleeping in my own bed. This helped keep the costs down and took me on some unlikely train journeys. On other nights, further from home, I stayed in pubs and hostels, or with

SW, day five: Charlestown harbour on the Cornish coast

