

**JOEL STOKOE**

Joel is a Cycling UK member who lives in Cyprus

Great Rides

SPRINGTIME IN CYPRUS

The Mediterranean island provides fantastic cycling in the shoulder seasons. Cycling UK member **Joel Stokoe** enjoyed a road bike tour there in late March

Pedalling uphill for 12km to gain 500m had clearly taken it out of me. The waitress at the coffee shop at Pano Panagia in the Paphos mountain range didn't ask whether I wanted a sweet treat but rather which one. As I ate, I pondered the cycling in Cyprus. It's a beautiful, friendly country, drenched in sun and filled with millennia of history. This spot, leading directly into Cedar Valley, was road cycling heaven: peaceful roads; plentiful trees, birdsong and wildlife; and outstanding views.

My home tour of Cyprus was a long time coming. I finally realised that, as much as I thought I'd ridden a lot here, I really hadn't. And while I'd often gazed wistfully at photos of far-flung places, I'd neglected what was on my own doorstep.

For this tour, I wanted to ride new roads and have time to appreciate the places I was visiting, rather than trying to fit in as much as possible. A friend helped me plan a route for late March, and I booked accommodation and packed my bikepacking bags. I didn't carry a lot but needed to be prepared for changeable weather; storms can hit year round.

MINES, CHURCHES AND MOUNTAINS

The cosmopolitan town of Larnaca was a fitting place to leave from. I pedalled along Finikoudes seafront in the early morning, with bars, restaurants and cafés on one side, beach and sea opposite. Anyone else out at this time was likely searching out coffee, a national pastime.

Riding north I passed through several former mining villages, such as Mitsero. (Search 'Mitsero murders!') Cyprus has a long history of mining. One school of thought is that it derives its name from the Sumerian word for copper. Scars in the

Getting there

There are daily flights from the UK to Cyprus, landing in Paphos or Larnaca. Return flights in the shoulder seasons can be from £100 up to £300, with luggage as an additional cost. Flight times are around five hours.

There is also a ferry from Greece, so for those who love slower travel, it's possible to avoid flying. Find out more from the man in seat 61: seat61.com/Cyprus. Other suggestions are on Rome to Rio (rome2rio.com).

Finally, for those with maximum time, desire for adventure and the legs, the EuroVelo cycle network can take you to Athens, approximately 10km from the ferry port. For details, see en.eurovelo.com.

landscape were scattered around: mounds of earth brought from below; holes now filled with discoloured water; abandoned machinery; and a huge, rusting pit-head frame.

Cycling into the Troodos Mountains, I made sure to visit the remote Byzantine church of Panagia tis Asinou. It's renowned for its 12th century murals and is one of a number of UNESCO heritage sites. The Marathasa Valley is a stunning area, full of traditional villages and photo opportunities. For cyclists, it is almost entirely up or down. Riding up the valley requires 14km of climbing, so taking a picture is a great excuse to take a breather! The village of Pedoulas is easily identifiable thanks to a 25-metre cross in the village. Religion is important here: there are 12 churches for a population of 139.

Crossing the valley on perfect S-shaped roads lined with orchids, I viewed Kykkos Monastery and the burial place of Cyprus's first president, Archbishop Makarios III. It is easy to see the appeal of spending eternity in this spot, surrounded by pine-covered peaks and valleys that are alive with birdsong.

DRINKING IT IN

Aiming for the coastal town of Polis took me through the Paphos Forest, where I hoped to see mouflon, the wild sheep which are the symbol of Cyprus. One website claimed this was the most beautiful road in the country. Under the shade of trees it was cold in March. The café at Stavros tis Psokas sold such lovely hot coffee that I had two.

I left Polis via sad, desolate villages such as Androlykou. The population never recovered following the inter-communal issues of the 1950s and then the conflict with Turkey in 1974. By 1976 ▶