

Rail & bus Lincs

Using folding bikes and public transport, **Susanna Thornton** and her 88-year-old father explored the landscapes and historical buildings of Lincolnshire

A cycling holiday. With your dad. Are you sure that's a good idea?" my friend said over the phone. "How old is your dad now?"

"He's 88," I said.

"And are you really going on folding bikes? It doesn't sound very comfortable..." I mumbled something about how great Dad's new folder was.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Grantham," I said, brightly. Which also didn't help. Each time we say we are planning a cycling adventure, people say, "Are you sure? Why not use a car?" and so on. And Dad isn't a lifelong cyclist. He got a bike when he retired. He uses it for local errands and 10-mile spins for pleasure. But I was pretty sure we could do up to 15 miles each day.

That's enough for a great cycling holiday. We'd

tootle around with three or four planned stops each day, with time for impromptu breaks. To get out to the areas that we wanted to see, we would use trains and buses. Hence the folding bikes.

Tickets to ride

My plan was a four-day exploration of Lincolnshire. It's one of "the least known and least appreciated" English counties according to writer Simon Jenkins, who says this region of the North-East between the Humber and the Wash offers "a rare opportunity of seeing unsung treasures in an uncluttered landscape".

"Sounds brilliant," said Dad. "Let's go."

So then there was the question of where to stay. My friend had a point about Grantham. Even the Visit Lincolnshire website concedes that the town is "industrial". But you can get to Grantham by direct train from both Stockport (for Dad) and London (for me). Local rail services can take you out of town in four directions, and it's also a hub for buses.

I arrived at Grantham station on a sunny morning in late summer, and chatted with staff while waiting for Dad to arrive. When I say I'm on a cycling trip with my dad, people often react by thinking about their own father, how he is or was, their relationship, often a great mix of feelings. Dads are important.

"Oh, here he is!" cried the lovely lady from the ticket office, when Dad stepped off his train with his bike. She gave him a little hug. He was taken aback, but took it in his stride and hugged her back. It was such a nice way to arrive. "Aw, have a lovely time!" she said, as we waved and pedalled away.

Our first ride was to Belton Estate, a National Trust property north of the town. We cruised along a path by the River Witham, following National Cycle Network route 15, passing bandstands, bowling greens and tennis courts. The horse chestnuts by the river were just starting to turn. Late summer is a lovely season. My Brompton felt great and Dad was loving his new Btwin. At Harrowby Mill, we crossed over a bridge and stopped to watch the water.

Having reached Belton, we crunched along the drive through the deer park with the place to ourselves apart from a flock of sheep, which scattered as we approached. Belton House is a 17th-century mansion that was used as the stately home of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in the 1990s' TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. At the Stables Café, we got free coffees for having arrived by bike, and two huge flapjacks. Then we

