



Left and below left: Setting off on the three-day Hostel Hop event around the Cairngorms
Below: Crossing a river in Glen Tromie on the first day of the trip



Photos: the Adventure Syndicate

Lee Craigie Adventure Syndicate founder

THE ADVENTURE SYNDICATE was formed in 2015 with the aim of encouraging more women and girls to ride bikes. A small collective of proficient female bike riders had had enough of being told by social media channels and the marketing departments of the cycling industry that riding bikes was a serious and complicated business – one where sleek, lithe men in Lycra with chiseled jawlines gritted their perfect teeth against extreme gradients in grim, high-alpine weather.

Trip advisors

There were lots of positive comments from the Cairngorms ride. Here are two of them.

“Feeling so lifted to have connected with so many wonderful women who seem to get me and have been so relatable. I can now go home and push myself harder to ride further from home and see new places with new confidence.”

– Lois

“Isn’t it brilliant to get together with like-minded, strong, extremely capable and inspiring women?”

I managed so much more than I thought possible this weekend and I’m so glad I took on the challenge.”

– Becky



This narrative suggested that in order to belong to this exclusive cycling community, you had to be willing to suffer and usually to suffer solo. But the founding members of the Adventure Syndicate (who were no strangers to suffering themselves) were concerned that, while this might appeal to a few aspiring bike racers, it did nothing to promote the joy and the community to be found in cycling.

The bike industry’s answer to our concerns was to make men’s apparel smaller and add pastel colours to make women buy it. Shorter, slower rides with cake incentives were thrust at women in the hope they might like to join their boyfriends on a rest day. No sweating, no bulging thigh muscles.

The problem was that there were very few non-male voices in cycling at the time. Female cycling was being distilled down and represented as a caricature. We needed real women – a range of them in different shapes, sizes and colours – to express the reasons they loved to ride bikes so that other people, whatever their gender, could see that the cycling space was a diverse and welcoming one where you only had to discuss gear ratios if you really wanted to.

For over a decade we have been

running events, talks and workshops that aim to tell bike-related stories full of humour and fallibility that anyone can relate to; adventurous stories that inspire connections with oneself, others and our natural world.

Our latest event involved a three-day circumnavigation of the Cairngorms. These were challenging, long days of remote mountain bike riding that participants had to navigate themselves, ending at comfortable hostel accommodation where food was shared and friendships consolidated. In this way self-reliance was encouraged but so was camaraderie. Fourteen women ranging in age from their 20s to their 60s turned up to this event because we dispelled any myths about needing to be superheroes with all the right kit to take part. Every one of them proved themselves more heroic than the guys in those cycling ads.

The other interesting outcome of our storytelling is the growing number of men who appreciate the alternative narrative we offer. We get messages from lots of men wanting to be part of the fun, and so now many of the events we run (although always female led) are open to any gender.

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