



Following the swallows

Where: Spain
Who: Becci May
When: May 2025

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In May I flew to Valencia with my Kinesis gravel bike. I had done a lot of cycle touring before Covid on my Thorn tourer but had sold that, deciding to travel lighter.

The skies in Spain were full of swallows. On seeing the mural in the photo, it occurred to me that they were on a journey back to the UK, just like me. I was riding across Spain to Bilbao. I had plotted a 485-mile route with around 20% of it on vías verdes, the Spanish network of disused railway routes.

I climbed to over 1,000m, mostly on the gravel track of a

vía verde, through Aragon with its churches, castles and quiet, hilltop villages. Then I rode through flat farmland, past verges full of wildflowers and fields full of poppies, where I heard and saw bee-eaters, golden orioles and birds of prey. I continued across the high plateau into Castilla y Leon, where I saw storks, nightingales and larks. The swallows seemed to appear when I felt tired and in need of some encouragement.

I rode into the Basque Country beside vertical cliffs, with eagles and vultures circling overhead. Emerging from a couple of tunnels, I was hit by tremendous views and the sound of cowbells and different birds. It felt alpine in terms of the landscapes and the chalet-style houses. I followed river valleys to La Arena, the beach west of Bilbao. It was so lovely to end this journey at the Atlantic.

The next day I boarded a Portsmouth-bound ferry, where I'm writing this. Back home I'll see swallows again, maybe the same ones!

Terrier on tour

Where: South-west England
Who: Mark Siddall & family
When: February 2025

As a family we love bike touring but we also love our Border Terrier, Biddy. So we take her with us. Recently, we enjoyed a five-day tour from home in Quedgeley, cycling up the canal to Stroud and then on to Cirencester.

From Cirencester we rode to Chippenham, Badminton and on to Wotton-under-Edge, where we found a local pet shop full of treats for our cycle-touring terrier. It was then all downhill to the Severn Estuary plain and home turf.

Biddy rides in a purpose-made dog basket on the rear pannier rack of one of our two Circe Helios tandems. Because we rode during February half term, she wore a body fleece to keep her warm. It takes a little more effort to find dog-friendly accommodation and there is usually a small premium (typically £10) to pay, but it is cheaper than kennels.

Biddy stands up in her basket to take in all the sights and sounds, so she gets plenty of exercise. As a reward, we stopped one last time on the final leg at her favourite playing field, where she sprinted after her frisbee, catching it mid air. It really is a dog's life.

