



The UK has made some progress in terms of cycle paths, but many segregated routes are disjointed and can be impassible for the less able, with rough surfaces, gates and other obstacles. As an able-bodied 23-year-old, I can cope with these issues when riding. Disability means that my dad, Martin, can't.

The amazing cycling infrastructure and culture of the Netherlands is why we have been to the country many times since Dad bought his trike there in 2014. Knowing the progressive nature of his condition, we decided to do a bigger tour while we still could. In June 2024 we took a two-week trip. We visited five different areas and explored each of them by bike and trike. Dad uses a wheelchair, so we stayed in hotels with accessible rooms and drove between the different locations.

"I've always been very active," Dad says. "I was a windsurfing instructor and I kayaked, sailed and enjoyed mountain biking. My steady physical decline due to Becker muscular dystrophy has meant saying goodbye to the water sports but cycling has remained a constant. Determined to keep cycling when I became a father, I bought an electric bike in 2002, before the e-bike revolution. When I tried out and decided to buy a trike at a specialist bike shop in Haarlem, near Amsterdam, I saw just how accessible cycling could be."

The Netherlands has an amazing network of 29,000km of leisure cycling routes, in addition to lots

more cycle infrastructure. Signage is excellent. Every few kilometres, a numbered node directs you to subsequent nodes, and these numbers can be strung together in a list using the Fietsknoop ('bike node') app or one of the big maps you pass along the way. Plotting a route is as simple as writing a sequence of numbers on a piece of paper.

Red tarmac rules

Our first stop was a Van der Valk hotel in Cuijk, outside Nijmegen. It was easy to ride into the city on the adjacent cycle highway: a four-metre-wide red tarmac path with a dashed centreline. We stopped at an impressively large cycle bridge over the River Maas, which had so much space for both cyclists and pedestrians. We also crossed the river on a simple chain ferry that carries pedestrians, cyclists and cars.

The primary reason for our trip to Cuijk was to explore across the border to the German town of Kleve. As well as being linked by roads, they are connected by a cycle track alongside a historic railway. We were inspired by watching a ride on the same route on the Bicycle Dutch YouTube channel.

It was a fascinating ride that took us past small villages in both countries. Arriving in Kleve, it was interesting to see another country with decent cycle infrastructure – although it wasn't to Dutch standards. We found a lovely forest path to take us back into the Netherlands. We rode under pine trees and dappled sunlight, and there were regular intersections →

Main photo: Martin in the Biesbosch National Park, shot from the observation point
Inset: Martin on a cycle bridge over the River Maas, Nijmegen