

for someone with limited mobility. There were no barriers. Someone on a mobility scooter could go all the way from Utrecht city centre to the forest, along paths without interruption.

Hilversum is a town north of Utrecht. On one of the routes, the road for cars disappears into a tunnel while the cycle route continues uphill at street level, before sending cyclists into a tunnel of their own. In fact, Alexiatunnel is a stacked tunnel: the cycle path sits above the road, and both are underneath the train and bus lines.

We ate our lunch at the multi-use intersection of four roads. It was compelling to watch the smooth and consistent flow of cars and bicycles, in this instance sharing space but always with unparalleled awareness of one another, and no aggression or frustration at all.

Beaches and dikes

Heading west to the city of Dordrecht, we were keen to explore the Nationaal Park De Biesbosch. Along with other cyclists, we took a river ferry to the gorgeous wetland area, which is the largest freshwater tidal zone in Europe. It's otherwise accessed by small roads open only to service traffic. On our return, we

stopped in Dordrecht's ancient town square for afternoon tea, surrounded by leaning, old merchant houses.

Our final destination was historic Middelburg. It's the largest town on the island of Zeeland, in the south-west of the country, and it's full of listed buildings. We enjoyed exploring the town and appreciated the two-lane canalside cycle track that joined Middelburg with the port town of Vlissingen. The variation of users was brilliant to see. Fast road cyclists, commuters, elderly couples chatting, joggers, dog-walkers,

“The cycle highway was a four-metre-wide red tarmac path with a dashed centreline”

cargo-cycle riders, children and tricyclists were all prevalent. At Vlissingen we were surprised to discover that even the tops of lock gates were part of the coastal path, and they were completely accessible for Dad's trike.

Heading northwards towards the EuroVelo 12 North Sea Cycle Route, we joined one of the longest and widest cycle tracks we had ever seen, by the beach and along a high 'dijk'. Vast swathes of cycle racks were positioned either side of the path for beach visitors. The islands are connected by the Oosterscheldekering storm-surge barrier. This flood defence, with huge closable barriers, is part of the Delta



Above: Cycling towards the beach on Zeeland
Below: The flood defence at Neeltje Jans connects the cycle track and road to this artificial island

Works created after the disastrous 1953 floods. It connects cyclists and motor traffic (segregated, of course) to an artificial island called Neeltje Jans. This island is well serviced by quiet roads and many cycle paths, and occupied by a myriad of wind turbines and a theme park.

The Netherlands is an ideal destination for any touring cyclist, but especially those with limited mobility, less confidence or an unusual cycle such as a trike. Segregated cycle paths run everywhere and are smooth and predictable, enabling you to ride and chat without jousting with cars. Cycling in this environment, Dad is at the absolute peak of his freedom and independence. That's worth so much to me. ●

Want to try a trike? Cycling UK's Inclusive Cycling Experience offers free taster sessions and non-standard cycle loans for those with disabilities. cyclinguk.org/inclusive-cycling-experience



Getting there

With our adapted Peugeot Rifter car, Le Shuttle (leshuttle.com) is the easiest way for us to get across the Channel. It's a 35-minute trip and Dad and his wheelchair don't have to get out of the car, which would involve unloading the cycles. The return crossing cost us £278. The drive from Dorset to the tunnel terminal took about three hours, and the drive from Calais to our first hotel near Nijmegen another four hours.