



**H**ow many times can a group of cyclists stop for coffee on a ride? We were going to find out. On the first day of our trip,

sun high in the sky above us, we were already on our fourth.

“I can’t believe we’ve only managed 17 miles,” said Sven. “That can’t be right!”

“We’ve been riding for hours,” Claire added.

Harley, our coffee-finder-in-chief, savoured his flat white and frowned at the Garmin. Somehow we’d spent more time sipping than cycling. We were seriously behind schedule. Perhaps, I thought, this route was going to be more challenging than we had anticipated.

#### Chalk hills and woodland

Royal Chilterns Way is the seventh route in Cycling UK’s Adventure Series. It’s around 280 kilometres long, weaving a helix shape around the Chilterns. It starts in Reading, heads north and calls in at a number of towns along the way. Max Darkins, one of the route’s designers, told me that this was deliberate. He wanted the route to have a variety of access points, so riders could break it down easily if they wanted to. After all, not everyone has the time or energy to tackle 280km and 3,500 metres in one go.

The route consists of three loops, with the southernmost – around 70km long – starting and finishing in Reading. The middle section is roughly 100km, and has various access points, including High Wycombe and Princes Risborough. The final, northern loop travels 100km through Wendover, Amersham and Berkhamsted. In total, the route passes 13 train stations and two London Underground stations. It is therefore easy to split up the route

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and ride it over several weekends, or just do one sample loop. The aim of this, Max said, is to help make the route more accessible to those who are new to off-road riding and multi-day adventures.

I rode Royal Chilterns Way with a group of six friends over the August bank holiday weekend. It was boiling hot and hadn’t rained for months, so the grasses were bleached yellow and the exhausted trees were already dropping their leaves. These conditions made the trails on the route dry, dusty and fast, although the bumpy bridleways did speak of deep mud in the wetter months.

The dry nature of the trails meant we whipped around the route in three days. We rode a mixture of bikes: hybrids, gravel bikes and hardtail mountain bikes. Gravel bikes are perfect for this route as we encountered nothing hugely technical. However, some of the steeper sections and roots do make it useful to have wider tyres and lower gears, which not all gravel bikes are equipped with. —>

Below: Buckmoore Farm Shop, near Princes Risborough. There are lots of places to refuel on Royal Chilterns Way



Photos: Robyn Furtado