

Touring training

Father and daughter Graham and Mollie Hunt had a short break in the Cotswolds

What a cracking four-day mini tour of the Cotswolds! It was part of my 15-year-old daughter Mollie's training for her planned End-to-End next year. And it was my first tour in more than 20 years.

We didn't get away until lunchtime, so the first day was basically over the hill and across the valley to Brize Norton. We both loved the hill down into Wantage, and the B&B and pub dinner were both great, although it was a bit noisy with the jets.

Next day was a bumpy and twisty ride though the

Cotswold lanes, stopping off at Burford and Bourton on the Water, on the way to Alderton, just beyond Winchcombe. The chippy was shut so we had to make do with salad from the Co-Op for dinner. The hill into Winchcombe was great too – though this time we used the brakes.

On day three, we rode down into Cheltenham. The hill out towards Cirencester goes on forever, but the rest of the route was great, including a very welcome lay-by tea bar. We followed Sustrans route 45 out of Cirencester, going through parts of



Gloucestershire I last visited more than 40 years ago. Our first (and only) puncture of the trip was on that route 45, on a bit of old railway line.

Our final B&B stop was south of Cricklade, near Purton. The landlady was really impressed with a teenager on two wheels. On the last day, we headed back to Newbury over the Marlborough Downs. Two

hills up for every one down didn't seem fair, and it tipped with rain from Chilton Foliat.

Overall it was a fantastic four days. I gained four pounds from start to finish. Mollie says it's pure muscle and nothing to do with the chocolate, nuts, cakes, pub meals and full English breakfasts that kept us going.

Roll on the next training session!

Peddars Way, our way

Nigel Bell and two friends followed an off-road trail to the Norfolk coast

We were approaching Castle Acre. It's a pretty little village that boasts an 11th century priory in addition to its eponymous fortification. It also has a ford.

'Are you giving it a go then, Gavin?' Joe asked. He was joking, but before we could stop him (not that we would or could have) our friend launched his bike into the stream. He *almost* made it to the other side, but he was literally out of his depth. Finally, he came to a halt and toppled over sideways. When he surfaced he had sheepish grin on his face and several pints of water in his trousers.

Impromptu ducking and punctures apart, the rest of our journey along the Peddars Way went without incident. The path follows the route of a Roman road and runs from Knettishall in

Suffolk to Holme-next-the-Sea on the Norfolk coast. It's the best part of 50 miles long, and the attraction for us was that much of it can be cycled off-road. Going north, the first half of the route is almost entirely flat: a mixture of forest tracks and minor roads. After that it's gently rolling hills and grassy tracks nearly all the way to sea.

It was a beautiful day when we rode it and we were surprised by how few people we saw. The fields and hedgerows were bursting with life: hare, rabbit, deer, lapwing and even a cuckoo or two. This was the English countryside at its best and surely cycling is one of the best ways to see it.

The light was fading when we reached the end. Just enough time to push our bikes onto the beach and take a few photographs before we headed off to the pub for a well-earned pint.



Cycling by numbers

Amanda Morris and John Spencer enjoyed an extended family tour of Belgium and France

Starting with the number seven – the age of our son, Tom, when we took him on his first cycle tour in Belgium and France. We wanted to visit the grave of Tom's great-great grandfather, who had fought in the First World War. As we love cycling it made sense to go by bike. This is how the five of us (Tom, his parents, and grandparents) found ourselves following a series of numbers across the Belgian countryside on three solo bikes and a tandem.

The Belgians make it really easy to get about, as cycle routes in the Westhoek have numbered 'nodes' – you just follow the arrows to the next number on your route. The magic numbers took us along quiet residential routes, often on our own segregated paths where cars had to give way to us at junctions. We variously travelled through towns with road systems designed for sharing and alongside tree-lined canals all the way to Bruges.

Ten miles from the port to Dunkirk itself increased our first day's mileage to 60, 20 more than Tom had cycled before. This day was a test of Tom's stamina and grit – and he passed with flying colours.

Tom enjoyed the week: the chats (particularly when Daddy was gassing to haul the tandem, four panniers and him up a



hill); the merry banter; the regular snack and café stops. The trip inevitably took in cemeteries and battlefields as it wound its way across the mostly flat terrain.

By the week's end, Tom had ridden 230 miles with a smile on his face. He was up early, late to bed and chirpy as you like. We are pleased to say that it was 10/10 for Tom's first tour – a really good introduction to family cycle touring. Now to plan next year's trip: only 51 weeks to go!

London to Singapore

You're never too old to set out on a grand tour, says Ivan Sharpe, who crossed Europe and Asia

At the age of 55 I was made redundant, and used this as the catalyst to set off and travel the world. My route was simple: just keep heading eastwards till my feet got wet.

After loading up my bicycle and trailer, I set off from Tower Bridge on a fine spring morning. Holland, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Russia soon passed under my wheels and I found myself entering Central Asia and the unknown.

I was now in the deserts of Kazakhstan and following the ancient Silk Route. The next 2,000km took me past the Caspian Sea, the Aral Sea, Baikonur Cosmodrome, and on to the border with the Orient itself.

China proved to be completely different from anything I had

expected. I had three months to explore it from the deserts of west, along the Great Wall, to the mountains of the central and southern regions. It is a vast country and it would take years to see it all.

Winter arrived a month early and I had given my heavy warm clothes away, so I reluctantly had to turn south. Next came Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and finally Singapore. I had reached the end of the world and got my feet wet at last!

I had floods in Europe, a heat wave in Russia, sand storms in Central Asia, snow in China and steamy humid heat in SE Asia. But my cherished memories are of the people I met on the way.



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