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# TRAVELLERS' TALES



## ADRIATIC EXPLORING

Ced Renison and five friends from Devon ferried their bikes between Croatian islands

**WE KNEW** the rules: car ferries are fine for bikes, but the enormous catamarans only take bikes at the captain's discretion. This one to Korcula wouldn't. So we cycled off past the lavender fields to catch a friendlier ferry, which took us past Brac and back to the city of Split – where we succeeded in catching a different ferry to Korcula...

On arriving in Croatia, we had struggled with the heat, even in May, and the hills. But we soon acclimatised and found the roads quiet and well surfaced. We cycled over Krk, Cres, Losinj, Rab and peaceful Pag. Most Croatian islands were deforested for the Venetian fleet, and on Pag, the Bora wind had left little soil. Pag's fascinating limestone supported little but wild flowers.

On the mainland, history back to Roman times was evident in the cities of Zadar and the narrow streets of Sibenik and Trogir. In Split, the corridors of Emperor Diocletian's palace are used as streets! We had taken a ferry to Brac, where we climbed and descended to reach the Adriatic's most iconic beach: Bol, with its famous white marble. We had then taken a ferry to Hvar – which is where I began this account.

Our final hostel was in Dubrovnik, where the ageing owner couldn't recollect receiving the parcel we had sent ahead containing our return flight bike bags. 'What package?' It turned out that he'd opened it, thinking that the CTC plastic flight bags were freebies to use in his garden!

## Rail-trail touring

When Jenny Dale visited her sister in New Zealand, they rode the Otago Central Rail Trail

**A**s a cyclist who regularly commutes 20 miles a day through an urban landscape littered with hidden dangers (I've been knocked off twice on my way to work), the thought of cycling 150km off-road was very appealing. Even more appealing was the fact that I would be leaving the chilly UK February weather to arrive in New Zealand's late summer.

My sister Kate and I decided to cycle the Otago Central Rail Trail over three

days. This trail is the site of an old railway that started construction in 1879 and meandered through 150km of beautiful South Island countryside. It was built to link the old gold mining towns, and eventually closed in 1990, when it was taken over by the Department of Conservation.

Borrowing my brother-in-law's bicycle was not such a great idea. If I had the sense to bring my own saddle as well as my own helmet,

the three days' riding would have been a lot more comfortable. However, I mostly managed to ignore the discomfort as the scenery and slow pace of life more than made up for it.

We struggled to hear the sound of a car engine during three days of cycling in glorious sunshine. We seldom saw one either, although the trail occasionally crosses a narrow country road or pauses at little towns.

We stopped often to listen to the sound of birds, sheep and distant, trickling rivers. For anyone going to New Zealand, I thoroughly recommend taking the time out to do this, or one of the other cycle trails in this amazing country.



The Devon cyclists averaged 35 miles a day over three weeks but, says Ced, 'We ascended the height of Everest.'



The memorial to the Hyde rail disaster: 21 passengers were killed and 47 injured on the Otago Central Railway in 1943





## Any bike will do

PHIL AND VIVIENNE ELY RECALL THE FRENCH TOUR THAT GOT THEM HOOKED ON CYCLING

**SIX YEARS** ago we became members of our local athletics club, who suggested we join 20 others touring Brittany. As non-cyclists, the prospect was daunting. A trial expedition seemed wise. I bought a Raleigh from our local dump while my wife borrowed a hybrid. Our small rucksacks carried tools, tubes, clothes and pages torn from a French motoring atlas. We left the car at Newhaven and took the afternoon ferry to Le Havre, where we found a romantic room at the Railway Hotel.

The next morning we climbed the busy hill out of Le Havre, heading towards Dieppe. Then just past the airport, we found a cycleway that was unmarked on our motoring pages! Our first experience of cycling in France had begun: car-free lanes across cliff tops and valleys.

We had lunch – moules et frites with a cool dry white wine – in Etretat and stayed overnight in Fecamp. Our second night in St Valery en Caux was short: we woke at 5.30am to the crashing of pipes as the market set up in the square below. We were on the road by 8.30am and covered the 40km to Dieppe in good time for the Newhaven ferry. We were now hooked on cycling.

We've since cycle-toured Europe on many occasions. Sadly, the triangular route we did is no longer possible: the Newhaven to Le Havre ferry stopped running in 2008. But you can easily return to Dieppe or Le Havre by train.

## Autumn gold

Last October, Graham Hunt and daughter Jo toured the New Forest and the Isle of Wight

**FOR THIS** mini-tour with daughter number four, I had invested in clippy pedals – theoretically to make it easier for me but in practice to provide Jo with entertainment. We took a Sustrans route down the Test Valley, then went cross country towards Lyndhurst. Our first night's stop was at Lymington. It was half term so was a bit like Bethlehem. Ten 'sorry, but no' phone calls later, we found room at the inn.

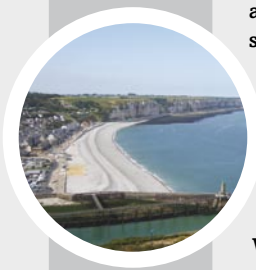
After a breezy ferry to Yarmouth next morning, we rode to the Needles, revelling in the sunshine. We blitzed along the Military Road with the wind on our backs, had lunch at

Brighstone, and took a very muddy path to Godshill – which meant a soft landing when I fell victim to my clippy pedals. The B&B at Sandown let us in despite our muddy clothes. Then we lost pounds of pennies on the slot machines on the pier and had a surrealistic round of indoor mini golf.

We arrived too early at Bembridge windmill the next morning. Later we had more clippy pedal experiences; East Cowes skatepark isn't designed for touring bikes in the rain, we decided. We encountered our steepest climb coming out of Gurnard, then booked ahead to the

B&B in Brockenhurst. It tipped with rain on the ferry, but we were in the nice warm lounge. Fellow guests at the B&B couldn't believe that a 17-year-old girl was about to embark on another 55 miles home the next day.

Our last day started with the sight of deer, right next to the 'Beware Deer' road sign. Sustrans routes and quiet lanes took us home. Attempting the canal towpath was a mistake: I was pinned to a muddy nettle bed by a laden bicycle. But it was a great trip, with gorgeous autumn colours and wildlife to marvel at throughout. We covered 190 miles in four days.



▶ Cross-Channel cycling trips are an ideal introduction to touring, although Newhaven to Le Havre is no longer possible



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