



## SOUTH ACROSS SPAIN

*Paul Taylor and a pal spent three weeks riding a Spanish end-to-end*

TO CELEBRATE my 60th birthday, we wanted a LEJOG-style challenge. This was how we found ourselves in Santander on a wet but mild evening in April. We headed along the coast to Punta de Estaca de Bares, the most northerly part of Spain. There were challenging climbs and the weather was cool and damp, but the views of idyllic bays surrounded by hills full of eucalyptus trees were ample reward.

After leaving Bares, our first rest day was at Santiago de Compostela. Many pilgrims have arrived on foot at this historic city over the centuries. More recently, they've been joined by an ever-growing number of cyclists.

Santiago de Compostela was where we started to head south. Some days we were on long straight roads crossing the Spanish plains, but Salamanca, Seville and Jerez were splendid and we saw lots of wildlife, in particular storks nesting on church towers and pylons.

Our accommodation was a mix of hostels and modest hotels costing between 25 and 55 Euros for two. All welcomed cyclists. Often they also offered a three-course evening meal, including wine, for an additional ten euros each.

After three weeks on our bikes, we finally arrived in a hot, sunny Andalucia and the town of Tarifa, the most southerly point of mainland Spain. We had problems booking our bikes on the train back to Santander so hired a car instead.

## A happy birthday

*Frank Burns was in Penrith in Cumbria for this year's CTC Birthday Rides*

Penning these thoughts while I am still drawing breath after the Birthday Rides means I am catching the heat of the moment. The pulse rate is still raised and the glow is still being felt... The Birthday Rides drew about 350 mile-eating cyclists to Penrith, where we were hosted by Newton Rigg, the agricultural college on the outskirts of town.

Nestling between the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District, this was the perfect setting for mixing the rolling contours of valley and coastal riding with the more challenging offerings of steep mountain passes.

There was a wide variety of routes, ranging from 10 to 80 miles, all painstakingly prepared by local CTC members. There was something for everyone, from the fast guys who wanted to get in the miles and storm the passes, to those who wanted shorter, more leisurely rides. Especially pleasing was the sight of a wheelchair cyclist going out on rides with a group.

For most of the week, I headed off with buddies to do the longer rides. They were tough, and included



several climbs of 25% (Red Bank, Blea Tarn and Honister). At 20%, The Struggle lived up to its name too, rising steeply to the top of the mist-shrouded Kirkstone pass.

The routes into the Yorkshire Dales were no less spectacular. I will never forget the disappointment of finding the pub restaurant at Garsdale Head closed, but that was quickly compensated by the 11-mile fast descent into Kirby Stephen, where, ravenous by 3pm, we found a plethora of eateries.

If you have dithered about trying out the Birthday Rides, I would recommend them heartily. Watch out for news of the venue in 2016.





## TOUR DE RUHR

*Brigitta von Rekowski found Germany's mining heartland regenerated and bike-friendly*

**EACH YEAR**, my husband Andrew and I pick a region in my home country of Germany to explore by bike. Germany is cycle-friendly: cycle paths are everywhere, with good sign-posting, and although cycling is popular it does not feel over-crowded.

This year we used our folding bikes to explore the Ruhr area (Ruhrpott), once Europe's mining hub. Now almost all the collieries (Zechen) are closed, but in contrast to the UK many sites have been preserved or transformed into cultural attractions. The Ruhr area has lots of parks, woodland and waterways too.

We based ourselves near the Ruhr river, cycling about 450km in nine day-trips. Sometimes we took a train part of the way. Riding from east to west took us from the earliest gallery mines, in lovely rural valleys, to the recent coal-and-steel industrial areas.

The Zeche Zollern in Dortmund is rightly nicknamed the 'pit with panache', with beautiful art-nouveau buildings. Bochum has the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum, the world's most important mining museum and a renowned research institution. The tour of a replica mine was a highlight.

Essen is the stronghold of Ruhr industry. Once the world's most productive, the Zeche Zollverein is known as the most beautiful mine in the world. It's now a centre for creative industries and arts.

More information is on our website [www.crayfisharow.org](http://www.crayfisharow.org).

## Oban to Aberdeen

*John Greenhalgh and Stephen Woods took a spectacular trip across Scotland*

**O**ban to Aberdeen is an obvious coast-to-coast journey, although it's not an 'official' route and doesn't have its own guidebook. Don't let that stop you: it passes through stunning Highland scenery. Two of us from the Lancashire Road Club did the trip in five days.

We took a circuitous route through Glencoe and Glen Nevis, then continued east at Spean Bridge, passing Loch Laggan towards Newtonmore and Kingussie. The back road to Aviemore was a wonderful escape from the main roads.

The next section through Tomintoul, the highest village in Scotland, and passing by the Lecht Ski Centre through to Braemar, was easily the most difficult. It reaches over 2,000 feet. The reward for this effort is an easy finish along Royal Deeside, passing Balmoral Castle, to the final destination of Aberdeen. Taking the South Dee Tourist Route is the best way to finish this ride.

We are both in our late sixties and used 'retro' touring bikes with rear panniers. We stayed at excellent SYHA Hostels in Oban, Glencoe, Glen Nevis, Aviemore, Braemar and Aberdeen.



Where possible, we used B-roads and minor roads, although the A-roads are very quiet and in good condition. We encountered beautiful lochs, mountains and much wildlife.

Over the five days, we covered 313 miles, riding just over 60 miles each day. We gained over 15,000 feet of elevation and burned over 18,000 calories. Since we rode from west to east, the wind was at our backs.

Both Oban and Aberdeen are easily accessible by rail. ScotRail and Virgin Trains were very helpful with the transportation of our bikes.



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