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TRAVELLERS' TALES



Riding the Ridgeway

Jane Hall and her children went rough-stuff touring on England's chalk hills last half term

We live near the eastern end of the Ridgeway, the 'oldest road in Britain', and I'd always fancied riding it, following in the footsteps of countless people over thousands of years. In the October half term holiday, I gambled on the weather and headed west to start the ride at Overton Hill in Wiltshire with my three children, Alice (14), Rob (12), and Tom (9).

The first half of the Ridgeway is byway and bridleway, over the top of the chalk downs, passing ancient hill forts and Stone Age burial chambers. We decided to do this part in one day without stops for

sightseeing, but the views are awesome, with plains stretching for miles to both sides. We rode 70km along the high ridge, to drop down to Streatley on Thames, where we stayed at the small, friendly youth hostel.

The rest of the Ridgeway runs through the Chiltern beechwoods and much of it is footpath. We made up a route – partly the Swans Way and mostly the Icknield Way, old bridleways that cross and often combine with the Ridgeway to its end at Ivinghoe Beacon. We were glad we'd allowed two days for this; the paths were muddy, poorly marked, and sometimes unrideable.

We were riding with a mix of cyclo-cross, hybrid and mountain bikes, and even the mountain bike struggled. Good humour prevailed – lifting bikes and pushing through muddy bogs funny.

Fortunately our overnight stop was at a farm, and mud-splattered cyclists did not faze the owners. Lunch stops in the picturesque villages of Watlington and Wendover were lovely, and the three-day ride was fantastic. The children proved that they can achieve almost anything when fuelled with enough hot chocolate and fruitcake.

A power of good

A PEDELEC HELPS MARGARET HAYDAY KEEP UP WITH CYCLIST HUSBAND DEREK

AN ELECTRIC bike has changed our lives. I introduced Margaret to club cycling shortly after we met, when she was 62. Margaret had never been into sports or exercise of any kind in her life, only cycling to work. She found hills and headwinds a big problem, and our rides together were short.

Several veteran riders in our local CTC group had fitted electric motor kits to their cycles so that they could keep doing the rides they were accustomed to. This inspired us to try out a couple of pedelecs.

We hired two for a Sunday ride around the South Downs. We set off through the lanes and found it great fun as we were able to keep together and have a social ride. We caught a group of lycra-clad cyclists and left them pushing into a headwind! Climbing Duncton Hill was easy: we worked only as hard as we wanted.

Three weeks later, we hired an e-bike for Margaret while I rode my carbon road bike. Margaret found that she could maintain an excellent average speed, and she had to wait for me at the top of Duncton Hill. Two days later we bought her an e-bike.

That e-bike has now completed over 700 miles in two months, with rides up to nearly 50 miles. The battery is removed and charged overnight ready for our next ride together. Now we can both cycle with our local CTC group and meet friends on mid-week rides.

Margaret is enjoying her newfound freedom, and if the time comes that I start dreading hills or headwinds, I will have no hesitation in joining her on an electric bike.



▶ With a pedelec, the extra energy supplements your own, so you still get to pedal



▶ Getting out into the country is easy with the right electric bike. Long day rides are possible



French End to End

Margaret and John Westhead spent three weeks riding from the Med to the Channel

Most people who ride coast to coast across France travel from the Channel to the Med. Time constraints and the European Bike Bus timetable made it easier for us to tackle it the other way around. Also, we could have the satisfaction of cycling all the way home. So we took the bus to Narbonne, and after a day lounging on the beach at Gruissan, packed our panniers and headed due north.

We soon found out why the usual route is north to south. On the first day we climbed to over 600 metres, and the next week followed a similar pattern: long, slow ascents

(our highest point was 999m) and furious descents into fantastic gorges. We crossed the Tarn, Lot and Dordogne rivers. The scenery was stunning but progress was slow and we worried that we wouldn't make the ferry at Caen.

Then we started to spend more time going down than up, and life got easier. One day, we noticed strange bike sculptures appearing alongside the roads in the villages. We were on the route of one of the Tour de France stages: I recognised the town hall at Ecuielle from the television coverage.

In the end, we managed to have two days off and became

normal tourists. One was in Amboise, where we went around the Leonardo da Vinci Chateau, and one was in Caen itself. Here, John indulged his passion for chess with a visit to the French chess championships, where he played a Russian émigré and won!

The canal-side route from Caen to the harbour at Ouistreham was interesting to us because John's father had been in the merchant navy in the war and had talked about sailing into Caen. We stopped for a drink at the café at Pegasus Bridge, where 1940s music was playing.

United States C2C

ANDREW DICKINSON REALISED A DECADES OLD DREAM TO CROSS THE USA



Andrew was self-sufficient, although he did end up riding with the supported Biking Across Kansas event for four days

DECADES AGO I decided I wanted to cross the USA by bike, and last year I finally did it. I cycle-camped from Makah Bay on the Pacific to Virginia Beach on the Atlantic, covering over 4,000 miles in two months. I rode on my own: the journey was also in memory of my wife Aileen, and to raise awareness of dementia in all its forms.

Whilst I'd planned a basic route, I left the details flexible to allow for changes in the weather, local advice, and mechanical issues. I passed through 11 states: Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky and Virginia. I cycled over the Olympic, Cascade, Rocky and Appalachian mountain ranges; and passed through Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

The most memorable aspect of the whole trip, however, was the attitude of all the people I met. Everyone was just so friendly and helpful. Strangers invited me to stay overnight in their homes. I was made especially welcome by the staff of the Adventure Cycling Association in Missoula.

I'd been warned numerous times about the dangers and hazards I'd encounter with wildlife, with traffic and in urban areas. I also had concerns about my 59-year-old legs and lungs being up to the trip. Yet I encountered none of these problems. 'Go for it!' is all I would say to anyone thinking of a similar trip.

My diary of the trip is at bikingacrossusa.blogspot.com.



Bike sculptures at the roadside were signs to Margaret and John that the Tour de France had been through

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NEXT ISSUE