



Photos: Thomas Hogben, James Robertson & Getty Images

Above: Jenny at the start in Berlin. **Bottom:** On the road, averaging 156 miles each day

Jenny Graham

Cycling UK member Jenny Graham is the fastest woman to cycle around the world. She told **Victoria Hazael** how it's changed her life

After 124 days, cycling an average of 156 miles each day, Jenny Graham returned to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin in October, breaking the world record for the fastest woman to cycle around the world.

"I feel, although the pedals have stopped, I'm still on the journey," said Jenny. "I'm still doing interviews about it and my life is changing because of it."

When she returned from her record-breaking four-month trip, Jenny handed in her notice for her job at the Council. She left it at Christmas. She's decided to make a living riding her bike and inspiring others to have cycling adventures of their own.

"I am taking the opportunities now. I've been asked to speak at lots of events, and I'm taking on a new role as a Co-Director of the Adventure Syndicate, encouraging more women and girls. I was content on my bike throughout the journey; I liked the ease of being on the road and only having basic

About Jenny

Jenny is a Scottish cyclist who used to work in the The Highland Council's children's services. She's now Co-Director of The Adventure Syndicate.

needs to look after."

What started as a quest to see how far she could go gathered momentum. Jenny's journey was followed by more than 100,000 people watching her GPS dot move over 18,000 miles around the world.

As the Adventure Syndicate is affiliated to Cycling UK and Jenny a Cycling UK member, the charity supported her by answering Jenny's press enquiries. She sent us video messages along the route, and in turn many Cycling UK members sent her messages of encouragement.

A long road home

"I still haven't got my head round completing it," said Jenny. "Sometimes I'm on my bike in Inverness and it just takes me back to crossing Canada or Mongolia. I'm still looking at pictures, videos, and hearing stories from my family and friends about their adventures following me and coming to meet me at the end."

Jenny is home in Inverness with her son now. "It was so lovely seeing him again. ▶



My Cycling



Above: Jenny carried all her gear on the self-supported trip.
Left: With Steven Shand

Trip highlight: Mongolia

Jenny made video diaries, recording her highs and lows. After a month on the bike, she was blown away by the Mongolian people. "Kindness is part of the culture. People have been stopping me and passing biscuits out of their car windows. I wondered if I looked desperate – like I can't look after myself – but no, they're just so, so kind. One day a lady opened up her café early for me because I arrived in a state – I'd slept in a cow-poo cesspit in a thunderstorm – and she opened up her shop early to give me coffee. Then a lassie in the supermarket offered for me to stay with her family."

▶ When I came back he was a 20-year-old man – he managed so well without me. He thought he was fine, as every day people were asking about me; it was massive part of his life. But he didn't realise until I got home safely that he'd been worried, and he had a huge sense of relief. My family have been brilliant. They never asked me not to do it. They were all so supportive."

It can be hard to adjust when you return from an adventure, but Jenny is happy to be home. "It was lovely, like I'd never been away. I was in chaos when I left, the process of planning and trying out kit, changing things on my bike again and again. The house was full of kit. I recently found a shoebox of things I was going to take with me but, in the end, didn't. Opening that up brought me right back to before I left, when I didn't know if I'd do it."

Jenny received the City of Inverness Medal at a ceremony in November. Inverness' provost, Helen Carmichael, made the award at a civic reception in Inverness Town House. Jenny also presented Velocity Café in Inverness with Cycling UK's 'Cyclists' Café of the Year for Scotland' certificate.

Thinking back, looking forward

Reflecting on the trip that changed her life, Jenny said: "The end was a really hard time. It was an emotional last 12 days coming through Europe, and I was becoming aware of the size of the interest in the trip. Lee Craigie was drip-feeding me information to get me back to the real world, as I'd just been concentrating on riding my bike."

Back in the UK, Cycling UK was coordinating

Jenny's media interviews. She had a busy schedule in the week after she broke the record. From sitting on the BBC Breakfast sofa to chatting on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, Jenny explained again and again that she was just an ordinary girl who hated PE at school and that, when she was a teenage mum, didn't have time, confidence, or the inclination for adventures. Then little by little, with the right encouragement and support, she was able to take time for herself to explore the Scottish Highlands and eventually find out she was far more capable than she thought.

"I spent a week in London, staying in my sister's house alone, and cycled around London talking for an hour at time. Then I would come back, flop on the bed, and not be capable of talking to anyone else. Mentally it was a buffer to get my head around what had happened. Different questions made me think about the trip and start to process how I'd got there."

The response has been huge. "I've had people get in touch in person or via social media saying I've helped them to get out cycling," said Jenny. "I think that's part of being an ordinary person who pushes boundaries and barriers. They went cycling because they knew I was out there riding all day and sometimes all night! Feedback had the same effect on me. Having that support was and is a real morale booster; I never felt alone." ●

Further info

To find out more about Jenny's journey, visit the Cycling UK website:

cyclinguk.org/tags/jenny-graham

