



Milltir Cerrig in the Berwyns



Fiddler's Green Fishermen's Memorial

North East

Fog on the Tyne

The Loire was off-limits – the Tyne wasn't. Mike Ward toured it

I WAS MEANT to be cycling down the Loire but Covid-19 put a stop to that. Enter the Tour de Tyne. Vive la différence!

Armed with a flask of coffee and yesterday's leftovers, I headed east from Newcastle. There wasn't a breath of wind. I eased down from Seaton Sluice to Tynemouth, then upriver on the much-travelled Hadrian's Way.

After 50 miles I lunched at the Roman settlement of Corbridge. The day was young and my legs felt good. Could I still do 100 miles? Eighty-one miles in, I stopped at Kirkley Café, which was buzzing with cyclists.

At the start of stage two, destination Wark, my legs felt heavy. Should I continue? Then I spotted a left turn on the map and found a divine spot all to myself on the banks of the North Tyne. Legs now singing, I returned happily to my car.

After a rest day, a four o'clock alarm heralded the drive to Wark to resume the tour. Passing through a misty valley en route, my day was made.

On the Reivers Cycle Route in the wilds of Northumberland, I came across a cattle grid, cows, and a sign on a gate urging me to stay at home. I amended my route but didn't go home, not just yet. The sun broke through as I combined two stages and took the rollercoaster route round Kielder Water. Glorious views were stored on my phone. I returned to the car, then home, elated.

England & Wales

Yarmouth to Barmouth

Maxine Rogers and husband Paul rode east to west across England and Wales

For a few days this September an east wind was forecast, and we saw an opportunity just too good to miss. Two days later we were in a one-way hire car, heading with our bikes for a drop-off in Great Yarmouth. But this was a semi-locked down country and the Great Yarmouth hire depot was closed for the duration so the car had to go to Lowestoft! What else would go wrong? Nothing, as it turned out.

We rode to Norwich during the remainder of that day, a short flat ride to a delightful city. The next day was the biggie: 103 miles seemed quite a test for me and my e-bike. To go the distance, I had to nurse the battery and range extender carefully. That strong tailwind was a massive help!

We had three more days of delightful riding, skirting through parts of seven English counties and two Welsh ones. We watched the landscape change from huge fields of arable farmland and wide skies to small fields of livestock, with hills and woodland. Pigs and horses gave way to cows and sheep; knapped-flint

buildings to churches of limestone and sandstone.

On our last day we set off from what seemed like an industrial sculpture of cherry pickers parked in a yard beside our hotel. As we climbed over the barren Milltir Cerrig in autumn spectacle, the wind finally turned to hinder us. But it didn't bother us. We rode across the bridge at Barmouth sadly, knowing we'd be on a train very soon, face masks applied, our adventure over. But what an adventure we'd had, even with social distancing!

At the finish. Barmouth Bridge (p45) in background





Curbar Edge is a hill climb course. Hence the breather



The family set off on GCSE results day in August

The Midlands Home free

A short UK tour saved 16-year-old Sebastian McGrath's summer

WITH COVID-19 HAVING put paid to our annual French cycling holiday, my parents decided to take us on a trip to visit our grandparents in Shrewsbury, 180 miles from our Buckinghamshire home.

Our first day took us along cycle route NCN57 over the Chilterns via Great Missenden and Princes Risborough, reaching Thame along the Phoenix Trail. We spent our first night in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. A sunny but hard day was rewarded with a beautiful hotel and meal. Day one's terrain was mixed, like our bikes: gravel, touring, and road.

Day two was mostly plain sailing, following NCN5 through rural parts of the Cotswolds. Then disaster struck near Stratford-Upon-Avon. My rear derailleur snapped, lodging itself firmly into the spokes of the wheel and forcing me to push my bike. The beautiful, hilly views of the Cotswold were no consolation for the hour-long walk to our B&B.

The following day was better, not least because we found a bike shop that would repair my bike. Our next stop was Wolverhampton. An easy day via Redditch and the canals of Birmingham brought us to a comfortable hotel for our last night.

We reached our final destination in Shrewsbury via NCN81. I was happy to have ridden halfway across the country and would love to do it again.

Peak District

The great outdoors

When lockdown lifted, Lucy Coyne and two friends took a short tour of the Peak District

It's our first group ride post-lockdown and the world has changed. There's a lot of catching up to do. Heading up out of Sheffield into the Peak District, hills slow the flow of words. It's bright, windy, and dramatic as the view opens out. Huge billowing clouds scud across the hills. Racing shadows are dark against the sunlit fields. The city slowly disappears behind us into the haze.

The threat of rain pushes us into a beech glade at Ringinglow, where we maintain our social distance with the cyclists on the other bench, swapping route info across the intervening space. After more climbing to Stanage Edge, passing other riders brewing up in the back of a car, we whizz down into Hathersage where we stop for

our second coffee in nine miles.

Cyclists are out in force. In fact, people are in general. The roads are busy. We're all enjoying the newly legislated freedoms.

Alongside the River Derwent en route to Grindleford, we ride through a cool, green tunnel of trees, wet with a fine mizzle. We're heading for Stoney Middleton and our B&B. We arrive in the afternoon sunshine and it's bustling at the Moon Inn.

Next morning, on the A623 for the first few hundred metres, we ride amidst a car rally. It's unnerving. Dozens of souped-up, loud, fast cars roar past us, racing towards Chapel-en-le-Frith. Thankfully the Eyam turning takes us up and away. We regroup over coffee and cake before the long climb up from Calver to Curbar Gap.

Curbar Edge, towering stacks of monolithic gritstone high above us, is dramatic against the blue sky. We creep slowly up the lane to find scores of walkers, cars, and cyclists at the top. Everyone's enjoying the sunshine and the fabulous views across the Peaks.

It's time to head back towards Sheffield, our annual tour reduced to a weekend. As always, though, we have shared a mini adventure.

Escaping the busy traffic on the tops



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