



Clockwise from top left: Where it all began. The Commercial Inn today. The West Park Hotel is dotted with cycling art. Brimham Rocks. Tour de France sculpture near Ripley

INTO THE HILLS

Starting at Harrogate Convention Centre, it's a wiggle through town to an Asda car park and the start of the traffic-free Nidderdale Greenway. This rail trail leads out to Ripley and its triangular sculpture, which was erected for the Tour de France's visit in 2014.

There's little traffic on the country lanes north from Ripley, and it's undulating before a descent into the Brimham Rocks enclosure. "Cyclists are welcome on [the] main track to the visitor centre," says the National Trust website.

Leaving the site's weirdly shaped rocks, more undulations lead to Pateley Bridge. Stop for refreshments: you'll benefit from an energy boost because the road onward is a lung buster. Signs at the base of the climb warn of slow cyclists for two miles. (I felt I'd been seen.)

The destination is the compelling Coldstones Cut artwork, a monumental walled structure with a contemporary streetscape, built on the high and remote Greenhow Hill in 2010 by artist Andrew Sabin as a viewing platform over Hanson Aggregates' road-stone quarry.

Victorian cyclists had a close affinity with road stone. They wanted smooth, firm road surfaces for their new pastime. Along with the forerunner to today's British Cycling, CTC created the Roads Improvement Association in 1885, which lobbied for better roads several years before motorists took over the organisation. The cyclists' desire for good roads had been there from the start, with the proposed Bicycle Touring Club seeking to provide would-be members with national information on road surfaces.



“*All cyclists were banished after some tussled with troops. The 2nd West York Yeomanry Cavalry was in town to parade; pioneer cyclists were there to ride – and party*”

THE BICYCLE TOURING CLUB IS BORN

Better roads and the other aims of the BTC were fleshed out by three young men beneath a spreading chestnut tree in Harrogate's Spa Gardens over the August Bank Holiday weekend of 1878. On the Monday, the club's first rules were accepted by the 50 or so high-wheeler touring cyclists who were part of the larger gathering of the clans that spent almost half a week in Harrogate for the second annual North of England Meet.

Harrogate's Spa Gardens – sporting two bandstands, a skating rink, terraces and rose gardens – were at the rear of the Royal Spa Concert Rooms, or Spa Rooms. This classical-style building with Doric columns was the probable location for the club's inaugural meeting. (An early history of the club says the meeting was held in a board room but doesn't mention the venue; a linked mention of the Spa Gardens leads me to think the board room was in the Spa Rooms.) Demolished in 1939, the building's plot and gardens became exhibition

**Fact file
Astray in Harrogate**

Distance: 62km (38 miles).

Route: Start and end in Harrogate, looping out to Coldstones Cut via Pateley Bridge.

Conditions: Mostly tarmac roads, suitable for year-round cycling. Gravel track to Coldstones Cut.

Maps/guides: Route plotted on OS maps using the Outdooractive iPhone app. GPX available here: bit.ly/harrogate-ctc-ride

I'm glad I had: A drone for the spectacular reveal of Coldstones Quarry. Video by Josh Reid: bit.ly/astroy-harrogate-video

Next time I would: Pay more attention to route profiles...

Further info: thecoldstonescut.org, nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/yorkshire/brimham-rocks, Roads Were Not Built for Cars by Carlton Reid (pub. Island Press 2015).