

North Sea roving

For five weeks one summer, **Ian Toulson** followed much of the North Sea Cycle Route

In the summer of 2008 I decided to take up the challenge of riding the North Sea Cycle Route. Using the excellent website I was able to construct a route that took in most of the NSCR, making appropriate diversions in order to stay with a number of friends en route.

How wonderful to be able to set off from one's own front gate knowing that, other than ferries, the only means of transport were one's own wheels. The joy of solo travel is the frequency with which one comes into social contact with others. Guided by helpful cyclists, I was entertained by fellow travellers in motels, hostels and bars – even receiving a rare 'pick up' attempt. One chance meeting in Denmark resulted in being accommodated in a luxurious garden house in Gothenburg.

The signage varied from one country to another, as did the quality of the cycle tracks. Sometimes it was far easier to

pedal along roads. Holland, Germany and Denmark provided wonderfully flat terrain, but it always subject to the vagaries of the wind – I'd be bowling along at a good 20mph at times and later struggling to achieve even double figures. I passed small coastal villages and beautiful, swishing wind turbines, constant reminders of our efforts to harness the power of the wind.

Southern Norway's excellent coastline could be observed, at ease, from the numerous ferries that speed across the many inlets. Later, further north, excellent views were provided as one looked out from the huge bridges, one or two representing substantial climbs.



Even losing my way and finding myself in a sequence of road tunnels on the E39 did nothing to spoil the enjoyment of an excellent five week ride. And then to cycle back through the garden gate, after 3,000 miles, made my joy complete.

Ian wrote a book about his ride (£5.50 plus p&p). Email iandmj@tiscali.co.uk.

Better by bike

Sue and Geoff Lonsdale turned a visit to their daughter into a cycling holiday

Woking, Surrey: not the most exotic of cycle touring destinations. But our daughter lives there while we live at the other side of the country in Bristol. What better way to visit than to cycle there? We had the time and it was a great way to celebrate being retired. Geoff and I called it our journey of a lifetime.

On the Bristol-Bath cycleway, a well-surfaced old railway line, we made good progress. The wind had a hint of rain in it when we stopped for lunch beside the

Kennet & Avon Canal. At 23 miles, we were still a long way from that night's B&B.

It was 'capes on' from Devizes: we wore them for the next four hours. Only as we neared Newbury were we once again on dry roads. My cycle computer showed an astonishing 78 miles: the furthest I've ridden since the '70s! Our room that night resembled a second-hand market stall, with our kit hanging up to dry.

Next morning, our road map let us down and we found ourselves on the main road, with scary levels of traffic. Back in the lanes, we reached Silchester, where we sat on the old Roman wall to eat our lunch.

Our progress along the Basingstoke canal towpath at Pirbright disrupted the Forces' angling afternoon. Beside the lake at Mychett, we watched a tern diving for fish. We reached our daughter Claire's house just before she arrived home from work at six o'clock.

After a pleasant weekend off the bikes, we varied our return route. Our stopover was an old coaching inn at Marlborough, on a perfect June evening. The last day's ride was a mere 45 miles, along familiar roads. Back home, sitting in the garden, I felt as if I'd just ridden round the block, but the feeling of achievement was as great as if we'd done a world tour.



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