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TRAVELLERS' TALES



Mountain top finish

Sue Cronshaw ended her tour with the hors categorie climb of the Col du Galibier

As two middle-aged, gentle recreational cyclists and avid followers of the Tour, we stayed in Valloire this June. Our aim was to see some big cols, but we had no realistic intentions of cycling to the tops of any of them. A race by car confirmed our suspicions and we returned to base saying, 'No way can we cycle all the way up there!'

On the last day of our holiday we

started cycling early, intending to go as far as Plan Lachat, where the climb up Galibier begins to steepen. A group of walkers applauded us and we thanked them, laughing. At Plan Lachat we decided to cycle on a short distance and amused ourselves as the road kicked up by reading the 'go go go!' and 'attack!' graffiti.

Encouraged by a thumbs up from a woman on the back of a motorbike,

an 'allez!' from a passing motorist, and the donation of a banana and an energy bar from a group of ladies, we soon found ourselves at the 6km-to-go marker. We agreed to go just one further kilometre, as we did not have enough water for a longer ride.

At 5km to go, however, I started to appreciate how close we were to the top. We were soon passing the Marco Pantani memorial and finding the climb eminently within our capability. The cool breeze at this altitude was helping and we managed the final kick up with no great difficulty. Before we knew it, we had reached the top, taken obligatory photos, and were enjoying a breathtaking descent, amazed at our achievement.



The Col du Galibier is a long, long climb, but a lower geared hybrid is not a bad bike to tackle it on



Howard booked all the tickets without asking his friends. If they didn't want to go, he'd lose £4 at worst. But they did

To France for just £1

HOWARD ROBINSON TOOK A DAY TRIP WITH FRIENDS BRYAN, PETER, JOHN & MIKE

THE AD in the tabloid press seemed too good to be true: 'Travel to France for the day for £1'. It turned out to be real: P&O Ferries were offering £1 tickets for foot passengers for day returns on their Dover-Calais route, and the good news was that bikes went free! So without further ado and without consulting my four retired cycling friends, I booked five tickets for the end of March.

They were a bit taken aback, but after getting over the 6am start from Hampshire, they were all up for it. We travelled down to Dover with the bikes loaded onto three cars, then cycled down to the ferry terminal.

It was a fine sunny day but still cold at this early hour. Fortunately it was a smooth crossing, and we were soon on our way out of Calais, following canal towpaths. Our route south took us along secluded country roads through Guînes to the delightful village of Licques, where we stopped for a leisurely lunch and visited a fine Norman abbey.

We then had a bit of hill work, before heading back north via the village of Bremes. The afternoon sun was warm and pleasant and the riding became easier as the countryside flattened. We followed the St Omer canal, which took us right into the heart of Calais.

Here we had a look round the town hall and had a celebratory beer before catching our evening ferry back to Dover. We had covered about 40 miles, which had given us a taste for our week-long ride in Picardy later in the year. A long day but well worth £1!



My first ever bike tour

ERICA SIDDALL REFLECTS ON HER TOURING INTRODUCTION, A WELSH END TO END

AT THE end of May, my husband and I embarked on our first ever proper bike tour. We cycled from Bangor in North Wales down to Chepstow, riding about 40 miles a day for eight days. We started up and over Snowdonia, then through the Welsh Marches, and finally over the Brecon Beacons.

I hadn't ridden a bicycle seriously before I met my husband five years ago. We started off doing 12 milers, and somehow this has crept up to 50-milers every Saturday. Mark had been talking about doing a longer tour for some time. I was a bit worried about it but we agreed to plan a trip.

We used two OS Tour maps (1:100,000 scale), which were fine because there aren't many roads in that part of the country. We were on back roads and had them to ourselves. We stayed mostly in youth hostels, including a great YHA bunkhouse with no electricity or hot water.

Highlights included staying at Pen Y Pass, below Snowdon, and starting the next morning with miles and miles of downhill. Another highlight was the climb out of Bala, on the way to Rhayader, when we cycled down a beautiful empty valley (besides the sheep, that is).

What a super introduction to touring. If you are thinking about trying a tour for a first time, then go for it! Even now, I love thinking back on our route, and it is amazing how many details you remember from a 325-mile ride. Bring on our next tour!



Adriatic exploring

Jon and Avril Allman returned to Croatia to tour the islands of northern Dalmatia

Rolls of lino, boxes of wall tiles, a motor scooter, a concrete barbecue that took four people to lift, and our bikes: the deck of the Jadrolinija passenger ferry to Dugi otok was full as we left for the outermost island of the Zadar archipelago. The previous day we had cycled along the most densely populated islands, Pašman and Ugljan. Today the ferry took us underneath the graceful single arch bridge that links those two islands together. A large group of cyclists waved to us from above. When we first came to Croatia 12 years ago, cyclists were a rarity; now they seem

to be everywhere. Leaving the port of Sali, we soon had the road on Dugi otok to ourselves. We had lunch in the tiny harbour of Luka. The islands of northern Dalmatia are fairly flat, so it's easy to drop down to the sea and then climb back inland. And the views were sublime: across the Adriatic towards Italy to our left, and across the ridges of the many layers of islands making up the archipelago to our right, with the high mountains of the mainland in the background.

We were woken from our daydreaming by a snake crossing

the road. Somehow its serpentine trail across the road missed both my wheels, but I did start to question the wisdom of riding in sandals.

We continued north to our hotel in Božava, another sleepy harbour. After a lazy day in and out of the sea, we headed back to the mainland on the car ferry, then retraced our route on Ugljan and Pašman before heading for the Krka national park with its spectacular waterfalls. All too soon we were back in Trogir, our starting point, dismantling the bikes for the flight back to Bristol from the nearby Split airport.



▶ This bridge joins the islands of Pašman and Ugljan, off the Croatian coast



▶ Mark and Erica took the train up to Bangor, then cycled down through Wales to Chepstow. Mark carried most of the luggage



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Chris Juden tests a selection

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NEXT ISSUE