



Porlock Toll
Road route



Portobello
beach, Edinburgh

South West England

Summit to do

Ian Gawinowski has been using his holidays to tick off the best cycling climbs in Britain

Over the last couple of summers I've planned my cycling holidays to include as many of the hills as possible in Simon Warren's book, *100 Greatest Cycling Climbs*. This June I focused on those in the South West.

From my B&B in Minehead there were several climbs within a day's ride. After unpacking, I decided on a shortish 70km route that would take in climb No. 4, Porlock Hill. Although less than 5km long, it's an evil climb with some vicious switchbacks that make the legs burn. No wonder it scores 9/10 in the book.

My second day could have been a Tour de France stage: a circular route of 130km with over 2,000 metres of elevation. It went out to Lynton, looped back to Nether Stowey, then returned to Minehead. Exmoor Forest, climb No. 6, was long but easy to accomplish as it's not particularly steep. Crowcombe Combe (No. 3), on the other hand, was a killer. I crawled up the 25% gradient, getting slower and slower until I had to put a foot down. Instant disqualification, according to my own unwritten rules. I'll have to return for that one.

A fish and chip supper and a full English breakfast next morning failed

to replenish my energy reserves, so I planned a short ride of 50km and a single climb, Dunkery Beacon (No. 5). Although the hill was a challenge it was not as painful as the previous climbs so I was surprised to learn this was rated 10/10 in the book. Perhaps my legs had acclimatised to going uphill?

My final day was a car-trip further east along the coast, starting from Braunton. The climb was No. 7, Challacombe. First I visited Woolacombe, whose beach is a mecca for surfers. I watched their antics while soaking up the sun and having an ice cream. Then I had a climb to conquer. It was another seemingly near vertical ascent, and because it's a singletrack road you can't weave across the road. You must power through. I did.

Dunkery Beacon:
326 metres of
climbing in 3km



Scotland

A Scottish C2C

Leslie Stuart rode from Solway Firth to the Firth of Forth

BACK BEFORE THE pandemic, in September 2019, six of us senior citizens who cycle regularly on a Wednesday decided to do a three-day coast to coast. We took transport down to Annan and had lunch at the pier before setting off. Our final destination was South Queensferry, near Edinburgh, but the day's target was Moffat. It was a pleasant route on country lanes and minor roads.

Day two took us into the heart of the Scottish Borders. There didn't appear to be any cafés en route to Innerleithen, apart from at Peebles – by which time we'd almost be at our accommodation. So we stocked up on sandwiches from Moffat's Co-op. We were straight into a big climb over the top of Devil's Beef Tub. Fortunately it wasn't too steep, and there was a good drop down the other side.

On day three, we left Innerleithen and cycled along a valley for several miles before climbing the Moorfoot Hills. The view towards Edinburgh and the Firth of Forth was unfortunately shrouded by the rain. We carried on, first to Dalkeith then onto Musselburgh, where the sun came out. By the time we reached Portobello it was warm enough to have lunch on the promenade. The last leg of our trip took us to Leith and then to our finish at the Forth Rail Bridge, where our transport was waiting to take us back to Glasgow.

Next up we're planning to cycle the Whitehaven-to-Sunderland C2C.



The track rises to 582 metres and is rough in places



Interlaken, near the end of the six-week tour

Europe

Autumn touring

Peter Edge recalls a six-week European tour with his father

WHAT DO YOU do with six weeks, good company, and a desire to explore marvellous places? For me and my dad, Dave, in 2014, it was to visit seven European countries.

Departing from the Tyneside ferry, we soon arrived at Amsterdam, home of the bike, before heading south on enviable cycle infrastructure to Belgium and pretty Luxembourg. We followed autumnal leafy roads through the Ardennes.

Next it was 'big river' country as we arrived at the Moselle. Large barges travelled Le Pays des Trois Frontières of Luxembourg, Germany and France next to banks of ripening grapes. We continued through Alsace and Lorraine with no fixed route.

Strasbourg was one of many historic cities we enjoyed. Then we rode through the Black Forest in Germany – a wooded countryside of lynx, cuckoo clocks, and gateau. In the sunny Germany town of Freiburg we ate Italian ice cream with a German man who put us up for a couple of nights.

Switzerland soon called. First it was Lucerne, with its Chapel Bridge (Kappellbrücke) and boat-dotted lake. Then we travelled into the Alps proper via the Brünig Pass to Interlaken. This landscape of waterfalls, beneath the mountains of the Eiger, the Mönch and the Jungfrau, must be one of the most beautiful in the world.

Continuing west, we parted at Geneva. My dad returned home and I cycled on to see my girlfriend's family. It was a wonderful trip.

North Wales

The Wayfarer Pass

*This rough-stuff route across the Berwyn Mountains is a classic, as **Ben Searle** discovered*

Our cycling days together go back decades. Now living in different parts of the country, the four of us organise an annual getaway. I'd read about the Wayfarer Pass in the Berwyn Mountains as a teenager. It's an unsurfaced drivers' track that's classified as a public road.

The route was immortalised by the writings of Walter MacGregor Robinson, aka Wayfarer, and his snow-blown journey of 1919, and also by Frank Patterson's evocative pen-and-ink drawings. The imagery had stuck. High time to try it on our old-school tourers!

Shrewsbury was a convenient place to meet, with a cyclist-friendly Premier Inn by the station (bike in your room, no limits breakfast). Entering Wales, well-tended farms gave way to a more

unkempt landscape. Our route wove through tight-packed hills to Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, the start of the pass. There were scars from 4x4 use.

The track climbed quickly. The surface often consisted of large, loose stones, forcing us to walk sections. A lone red kite methodically scanned the valley. At the summit there is the Wayfarer Memorial, but we forgot to sign the Rough Stuff Fellowship visitor book in the metal box! A superb, much smoother gravel decent followed, with a vista of rolling hills ahead. We hadn't met a soul.

Flattish lanes to Bala and a midge-infested bivvy camp followed. As dawn broke, we moved on quickly. We were soon over Dôl-y-Moch, a ribbon of tarmac rising to 531 metres. Again: no traffic, murky low cloud, and a superb descent. The sun broke through as we dropped into Trawsfynydd and found the very welcoming Crossed Foxes café. The decommissioned Magnox nuclear reactor loomed ominous by the lake.

Pwllheli, the railway terminus on the Llŷn Peninsular, was our destination. Sunday's first train, direct to Shrewsbury, gave us the best chance of a stress-free return. Two bikes were booked, two bagged. It was our best ever Welsh cycling trip, and it's given us memories to savour.



A plaque on the col celebrates Wayfarer's ride



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The riders travelled light – their husbands did luggage transfers



Second wheel:
11-year-old John
Sharp

Devon

A south west century

Graham Brodie reports on South Devon CTC's 100-mile ride in August

CYCLING IS AN ACTIVITY that can be undertaken by all ages, as the annual 'Harman Hundred' ride around Devon in August demonstrated. Among the ten riders who tackled the event, there was a 73 year age difference between the youngest, 11-year-old John Sharp from Ashburton, and the oldest, 84-year-old Tony Avery from Aller.

John had already completed several longer rides and events, including the Devon Delight and Devon Dirt events locally. Tony has a vast experience in leading and undertaking cycle tours, including several trips in the USA from Oregon and across various states, and before the pandemic he led a cycle tour in the Czech Republic.

The 100-mile route was designed by Paul Harman and intended to be as flat as possible in Devon, but the course involved the ascent of Haldon via Longdown on the way out, and up Zig Zag hill from Ashcombe on the way back. The middle section of the ride was mainly through lanes around Stoke Canon, Thorverton, Silverton, Payhembury and Ottery St Mary, so was relatively flat.

There was also quite a span in the age of the bikes being ridden. Most used fairly modern, lightweight touring or racing bikes, but John Cooper from Torquay completed the event on a 1965 Royal Enfield Revelation small-wheeler.

It was the first century ride to be organised by South Devon CTC. There was also a '100 miles in eight hours' ride in September. The group's longer rides give riders a challenge to aim for.

Southern England

Queens of Wessex

Swapping road bikes for mountain bikes, **Jane John** and three friends rode King Alfred's Way

It was Karen's fault: she suggested it to Yvonne and me in the first place. "How about cycling King Alfred's Way?" Yikes. We are all road cyclists but have varying levels of experience cycling off-road. Our fourth member of the team, Nicole, is the most technically able of the group [and has the best bike!].

I borrowed a mountain bike and we started our training rides. We split the route into six legs, starting and finishing above Wantage, and booked accommodation. Our lovely husbands would do a luggage transfer each, and

by adding two taxis we were covered and could travel light.

We set off from Wantage early on a Sunday morning, at the start of what turned out to be the hottest week of 2021. Despite this it was the most fantastic, joyful journey. Cycling UK has plotted a wonderful route through beautiful countryside with some really tough climbs – such as Butser Hill.

Combined with the deeply rutted tracks and incredible heat, it certainly felt like a proper challenge. Keeping our Camelbaks and bottles topped up was a constant preoccupation. Along the way we compared notes with a few other KAW cyclists and chatted to people who seemed intrigued by our group of four women, maybe due to our combined age of 229? My overriding memory of the week is the laughter. At the top of a lung- and leg-punishing hill, collapsing in hysterics seemed to be the only option.

After six days with no mechanicals, no punctures, and all still speaking to each other, we felt justifiably proud of ourselves as we rode to the finish above Wantage, to be greeted by our transport team holding glasses of champagne.

What next? The West Kernow Way?

Learn more about King Alfred's Way: cyclinguk.org/kingalfredsway



"It was the most fantastic, joyful journey"