



Cycle routes plus scenery



No rush: Somerset in October

Europe

Austria's Lake District

*With touring in Europe back on the agenda, **Joan Bridge-Taylor** headed to Salzburg*

When restrictions on foreign travel were lifted, the only question was: where to go? Germany and Austria are ideal. They have great natural beauty, low traffic, and good cycle paths everywhere. It's a perfect destination for the young and fit, or families with children, or oldies who want to potter and enjoy the scenery.

Being retired, my partner Robin and I drove our caravan to Salzburg, the start and finishing point for a group cycle tour. Most of the areas we passed through on our way would make wonderful holiday centres themselves: Metz (marvellous cathedral), Nancy (stunning architecture), Strasbourg (ditto), the Alsace (the prettiest villages in Europe), Freiburg (great for public transport and active travel), and the Black Forest (clocks).

We managed to cycle every day on the trip down, but knew we would never keep up with our fitter friends as we both have heart conditions. We cheated on the long rides by taking ferries, trains, and buses to reduce the miles. We had time to savour the views and talk to people along the way. We

even attended an afternoon wedding reception in a restaurant, and danced at their ball in shorts and cycling shoes! In the evenings we swapped stories with our friends, joined them for dinner, and shared bottles of wine. At one hotel Rob mended and then played their broken piano.

Our route around the Austrian Lakes took in Mondsee, Attersee, Traunsee, Grundlsee, Hallstatt (for a rest-day tour of the underground salt mines), Bad Ischl, and Wolfgangsee. All the lakeside villages were crowded with coach trippers and all the woodlands around had near-deserted, beautifully-marked cycle and walking paths.

We did miss one turning when we were by ourselves, which resulted in us climbing nearly 2,000 feet, me falling off, dragging our bikes over a mound of scree, passing a herd of cows with traditional bells, then arriving at our hotel as the sun was behind the mountains. That's cycling for you: sometimes there are unexpected challenges.

The cycle touring part of our holiday over, we picked up the caravan and sauntered home.

England

Slow cycling in Somerset

*A relaxed staycation was an epiphany for **St John Livesey***

DURING THE TEN years of my metamorphosis into a MAMIL, I've done the Fred Whitton, climbed Alpe d'Huez, even managed London to Sheffield in a day (194 miles). I have cycle toured, riding the Coast to Coast and down the Rhine. But last October I discovered something different.

Airbnb suggested a cottage in Somerset as a last minute staycation. My wife Catherine and I went there with bikes, walking boots, and the intention of doing as little as possible. To fill the days, we took in some local sights: stately homes, secondhand bookshops, and cider makers. As they weren't far apart we cycled, taking our time. Slow cycling: the difference between a brisk walk and a leisurely stroll.

It was a revelation. Hills were a breeze. Elsewhere we freewheeled. We developed an alternative Strava, with kudos for stopping to admire a view/let a car pass/pick a blackberry. We even wore normal clothes, eliciting smiles and "good mornings" from the people we passed.

And Somerset was perfect. Country lanes and picture-postcard villages much like the Cotswolds but, being further from

London, quieter. We will still cycle tour, and this Saturday I will be out with my mates grinding up hills and hurtling down them. But I'm glad I've discovered that there's more than one way to enjoy two wheels.





At the summit of the Col de l'Iseran in July 1949



Magdalen Tower in the background

England

Exploring Oxford

Gareth Evans spent an autumn day in the city and its surroundings

MAGDALEN TOWER, PINNACLED

and crocketed above High Street, seems less dramatic than I remember. Below the parapet of the bridge over the Cherwell, a young man at last controls a punt in which his companion sits. Tourists and students pass, and I hear snatches of German.

From Bicester, I have ridden through chilly murk, first across flat land, ploughed earth stretching to distant hedges, then over the low hills south of pretty, stone-cottagey Islip.

Oxford bills itself as a cycling city, but the last part of the journey to this point has been fraught with traffic. The air was thick with fumes. The cycle routes were inconsistent: dying out; crossing crazily at junctions; and occupied by trees and signposts.

I watch other cyclists. They are all sorts, but incline towards the sit-up-and-beg or the mountain bike. Mostly they know where they are going, which I do not.

I take the inevitable grinning selfie and then storm Headington Hill with the aid of my discreet hub motor.

At a subway under the A40, a young man tries to squeeze his bike round a barrier just in front of an oncoming woman with a pushchair, loses balance, and looks a fool. I wait, exchanging eye-rolls with the woman.

Soon I am between fields and woods in the weak sunshine this September day. The scent of freshly-spread muck and the sight of wheeling red kites cheers my way back to the car.

French Alps

Post-war CTC touring

Now in her 90s, **Val Higgs** looks back to the CTC tours that she and other HQ staff led in 1949

When I read that CTC Holidays and Tours had been wound up, it started me reminiscing. But my memories were of decades earlier – to the first organised tours arranged by CTC after World War II.

In 1949 I was working as a shorthand-typist secretary at CTC's then headquarters at Craven Hill in West London, when it was decided that the time was appropriate to start organising group tours to the Continent. All bookings with hotels had to be made by post – in the hope that somebody would understand English! Each hotel received a typed letter together with a return-addressed envelope and an international reply coupon to cover postage.

I was working for Bill Stiles, then CTC Assistant Secretary, who was in charge of the Travel Department, so this was part of my job. In hindsight, I wonder how at the time [when we still had food rationing at home] they were able to cater for large parties of hungry cyclists – but they most certainly

did. And we were always made very welcome.

Those first post-war tours [there were four] were to the French Alps, and all were led by members of the CTC headquarters staff. As the years went by the choice of destination widened and other leaders were appointed. I led ten tours to various areas between 1949 and 1958. Now, in my nineties, I look back on a different world – a world where many country roads and mountain passes were only rough surfaced but, more particularly, a world where the roads were almost traffic free. A world without mobile phones to help you if you were in trouble.

Looking at my old photographs of the 1949 tour, I am struck by the clothing and shoes worn by the cyclists – in complete contrast to the wonderful sportswear available these days. Clothing rationing ended only in May of that year.

Thank you for stirring my memories of those long-ago days and the many friendships made.



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