

HAPPY CAMPERS

Family cycle-camping is an affordable adventure. **Louise, Jeremy and Esther Clines** explored northern England, while **David and Alexander Robb** toured the Netherlands

TODDLING TO LINDISFARNE

THE REAL question was: would it be fun? Jeremy would be burdened with 86 kilos worth of bike, trailer, luggage and toddler; I was 13 weeks pregnant; and 18-month-old Esther was used to trailer trips just 20-minutes long. Prepared to abandon our loosely made plans at any point, we set off – only to get embarrassingly lost heading out of Sheffield.

Esther's excited wakefulness and wanting 'Out!' meant that a 15-mile ride was spread across five hours. Doubts about the trip had increased by 11pm as Esther was still awake and unhappy. However, once we realised teething rather than change of routine was the problem, her medicine won us all some relief.

The next day buoyed our spirits, with quiet traffic-free cycling on the Trans Pennine Trail, alongside glittering meres

and the sparkling River Don. Progress was slow on rough sections, as Jem endeavoured not to wake a sleeping Esther. The numerous cycle gates sometimes required the unhitching of the trailer to lift, wiggle or tilt a way through.

Trailer etiquette

After a night's B&B in Doncaster, day three began on quiet minor roads and made for easier going. We arrived at the cyclist-focused Braithwaite Café for lunch and decided not to leave. Esther squealed in delight whilst 'helping' to pitch the tent.

The following day we headed for Howden. Esther settled into a pattern of two trailer-induced sleeps a day, which meant a stint of cycling each morning and afternoon. For nodding off, 'The wheels on the trailer go round and round' quickly became a favourite. Our readiness to stop, whenever and wherever, helped Esther enjoy her time being towed – the next stroke of a horse, leg stretch, or cuddle was never far away. To get moving again, we had a repeated puppet show with co-travellers Dolly, Bunny and Bug expressing their desire for Esther to return to the trailer.

Leaving the Trans Pennine Trail to cut a corner led to a frustrating dead end. We looped back, past Drax power station onto A-roads to Airmyn. There we reached a closed bridge and were relieved to find a minibus with trailer

equipped to get cyclists over the Humber, via the M62, to Howden.

On day five we clocked up 25 miles under huge skies, reaching the visual highlight at Hessle. Esther summed it up nicely: 'Humber Bridge —enormous!' Finding dinner and a bed at the bridge was a real gift. Hessle to Hornsea the next day took us through Hull and then along a rail-trail to the end of the Trans Pennine Trail. We decided the clifftop sea-view campsite merited a longer pause, and on day seven did nothing but enjoy the seaside.

The Yorkshire coast

Whilst packing up the tent, Esther would now clamber into the trailer, shouting, 'Go! Go! Daddy ride!' Once ready, we trundled up the NCN1 near the Yorkshire coast on empty back lanes. We camped at Hunmanby, had a day in Scarborough (including a pirate ship trip and chips) then ascended the rail-trail, scarred by two hard winters, for a night at Ravenscar. The view back to Scarborough Castle, Filey Brigg and Flamborough was amazing. To her delight, Esther had a go at hand-feeding lambs.

We dropped down to Whitby via lunch

"Our readiness to stop, whenever and wherever, helped Esther enjoy the trip"



Photos by Louise & Jeremy Clines



(Clockwise from top) Cycling to Hesse along the Humber. Cliffs near Berwick. The trip was a mix of smaller roads and cycle paths. Esther shared the trailer with much of the camping gear. (Opposite) Touring in the spring meant some chilly starts

Fact file
Sheffield to Lindisfarne

Route: Trans Pennine Trail from Sheffield-Hornsea. NCN 1 Hornsea-Berwick (Saltburn-Alnmouth by train).

Distance: We cycled 265 miles over 22 days

Maps: Sustrans RPN08C Trans Pennine Trail East, NN65B Yorkshire Wolds, York and Hull, NN65A Yorkshire Moors and Coast, NN14 Three Rivers, NN1C Coasts and Castles south. OS maps photographed and stored on camera.

Tent: Wild Country Family Khamsin (five-person), 8kg. Lots of space to stand up in.
Bikes: Louise – Cannondale 21 speed tourer 2007; Jem – Orbit tourer 2004, Esther – Chariot Cougar (2 seater), with adjustable suspension, various cover options for wind, rain and sun, a buggy conversion kit and a great back and head insert for sleeping.

We're glad we... Ordered eco-nappies online to be collected in various towns. Contacted all the campsites on the route in advance to check they existed, accepted tents and children, and that we could turn up without a booking.

Next time we'd... Get thicker tyres for the trailer. (Next time we'll have two children!)



(From top) The Farne Isles lighthouses have no keepers these days. The Humber Bridge. On the beach at Lindisfarne. (Below) Esther's trailer converted to a buggy to explore places such as Lindisfarne Castle

at Robin Hood's Bay. Twenty-four hours there involved taking another boat trip and sampling a classy Italian restaurant. Pushing our bikes and trailer up the half-mile bank at Sandsend to reach our camping base for nights 11 and 12 was not as dreadful as we feared. The prize, Runswick Bay, was blissful for the location, campsite, food and Esther finally gaining much more beach confidence.

With ten days left, we decided that we'd enjoy the Northumberland Coast more than continuing along NCN1 through Teeside, Hartlepool and Newcastle, so we set off on what we imagined to be a shortish journey to Saltburn-by-Sea to catch a train. The reality was four ascents we had to push on, compensated with stunning views from high tops.

At the seaside town of Saltburn, sea mist was coming in over the beach, so we wandered along the town's landscaped valley. We stayed, high up, in a Victorian-themed B&B looking across streets of chimney-crowned rooftops.

Seabirds and tidal cycling

The train ride from Saltburn to Alnmouth was eased by friendly train staff willing to help us with bikes and trailer. The gentle coastal ride to Craster was made through more sea mist. A two-night stay at Proctor Steads camping allowed us to sample local kippers and enjoy a walk to Dunstanburgh Castle, which loomed out of the fog only at close quarters.

We headed to Seahouses on day 16, enjoying sunbathed coastal vistas, whizzing along undulating country lanes and feeling that we'd finally mastered the art of sharing the singing of nursery rhymes whilst cycling uphill.

During our two days there, Esther was enthralled by a Farne Isles boat trip, sighting: a seal close up; puffins and guillemots bobbing close by; and seabirds in all directions.

On day 18 we trundled to Goswick for three nights of camping. Lindisfarne, our destination, came suddenly into sight. We sang our way through woodland, along coast and finally over grassy sand dunes. Beachcomber Campsite and Stables was heaven to Esther (and us). The 360-degree view encompassed horses, donkeys, ponies, chickens, dogs, cats, lambs, calves and a huge expanse of beach. The campsite is on the NCN1 track, with no road in sight.

So for two consecutive days, we cycled back along grass-covered dunes and over the Lindisfarne causeway. Smilingly satisfied, we explored quiet bays, the abbey, the castle and indulged Esther who had now learned to shout, 'Ice cream!'

New words abounded throughout the trip – our toddler could now say puncture, wheel, pedal, pump, hitch and Esther's Chariot. On the way home from Berwick on the train, the question that remained was not 'Will this really be fun?' but rather 'How can we tear Esther away from the trailer?'





TRAILER-CYCLING IN HOLLAND

EACH SUMMER

I try to get away to Holland for a cycle tour. Like the rest of the Netherlands, it is a great place for cycling, especially with children. I was travelling with my seven-year-old son, Alexander. We loaded up bike and trailer-cycle with camping gear, caught a train to Ipswich, and then cycled to Harwich for the overnight ferry to Hoek van Holland.

You'll see from the photos that I have fitted Alexander's trailer-cycle with a pannier rack for carrying extra luggage. This is generally dissuaded, even though there are rack mounts on this one, as the extra weight there can lead to an unstable 'tail wagging dog' situation. Since we use

the trailer-cycle panniers only for our sleeping bags, and the rack top for our sleeping mats, it's not too bad – although riding with any trailer-cycle can take some getting used to. I have mirrors fitted to my bike's handlebar so that I can see behind and check on Alexander without turning my head.

We only needed one bicycle ticket for the ferry for the bike and trailer-cycle.

Touring by numbers

Riding onto a ferry's car deck always feels like the start of a big adventure. We secured the bikes with bungee cords – better than the ferry company's scrappy old rope – and went upstairs for some well-earned sustenance. After a sleep in our cabin and an all-you-can-eat breakfast, we arrived raring to go.

Customs formalities were minimal. We left the ferry terminal and took the riverside cycle path down the side of the Nieuwe Waterweg. We followed it only as far as the Benelux tunnel to avoid going through Rotterdam. In Holland, when they build a motorway tunnel they also build a separate tunnel just for cycles! After a bit of industrial south Rotterdam, plus a short ferry trip, we arrived at Oud Beijerland in the Dutch countryside.

The Netherlands has signs just for

"Riding onto a ferry's car deck always feels like the beginning of a big adventure"

cyclists: red and white finger posts showing the shortest routes to the nearest towns and villages. These are great, but sometimes the quickest way between two towns is on a cycle path running next to a motorway. For leisure cycling, Knooppunt boards ('junction' boards) are the answer.

Each Knooppunt board has a number, with its position shown on a map of the local cycle network. The route between each Knooppunt board is very well signposted and you seldom need a map. I planned out the remainder of the day's ride by writing down on a bit of scrap paper the numbers of the Knooppunt boards we would encounter.

Car-free campsites

Our first day was a lovely 25-mile ride through the Dutch countryside. We had no problems with navigation, even when we went through a town. We camped at Nieuw-Vossemeer at a 'Natural Campsite'. A network of small, quiet independent campsites across Holland, these 'Nature Campings' are especially good for cyclists as they do not let cars on the camping field and will not turn away cyclists even



Photos by David Robb



(Left) Navigation on the cycle paths was a matter of following the Knooppunt boards, shown below left (Right) Small ferries take passengers – and bicycles – across Holland's waterways (Other photos) The flat terrain makes for easy cycling even with a fully loaded machine



if they are full. They are often on farms or smallholdings.

We met a Dutch family who recommended the campsite they had come from as being good for children. So next day we followed their list of Knooppunt boards in reverse order. Another pleasant ride led us to another Natural Campsite at Den Hout. The site had trampolines for children to play on, so Alexander spent all evening bouncing up and down using up the energy he had not used on the day's ride. He slept well!

Our tent is a small one, a Wynnster Dragonfly 2 weighing about 3kg. It needs to be small to make it easy to carry on the bike. However, it also has a large porch – essential to store our six panniers! The bikes have to take their chances outside chained to a fence or tree.

As we had only four days in Holland, we then had to start heading back to the port. We headed for Dordrecht. It was another great ride through the area where the Waal and Maas rivers meet. We were often very near the rivers but could not see them as they were on the other side of a great big dyke.

We had to use two small ferries in our journey. These small boats carry passengers and their bikes across the rivers, often saving miles round by the road. It is amazing to see them sailing

with the deck absolutely jammed with bikes. The day's end found us camping by Dordrecht Youth Hostel.

Tacking back to port

Our last day in Holland entailed a ride back to Hoek van Holland. At some point I thought we would face a slog through the Rotterdam suburbs, which I did not fancy. But on our 1:100k map, I noticed a small thread of land running between the Hartelkanaal and Brielse Meer. We decided to investigate.

After crossing a bridge over some locks, we found a grass-covered strip of land about 100 metres wide with a cycle path along the top. We cycled up the middle of a very wide waterway, away from the bustle and hassle of urban cycling. In about 10km we came to a bridge that carried us to the far side of the river and a short ride through Europort to the Maassluis ferry.

Once over the Nieuwe Waterweg, we had a short ride back into Hoek van Holland along the riverbank cycle path. That only left us to catch the overnight ferry back to home to England.

Alexander really enjoyed it and I am already planning my next trip. This time Alexander's younger brother Francis (aged five) will be on the cycle-trailer and Alexander will be on his own bike.

Fact file Western Netherlands

Distance: We cycled 200 miles over four days.

When: We went in August. As the Netherlands has similar weather to us – only windier – you could go any time.

Getting there: Our return ferry from Harwich to Hoek van Holland cost £186, including overnight cabins.

Bikes: Roberts Roughstuff tourer and an Adams aluminium Trail-a-bike

Accommodation: Natural Campsites (www.natuurkampeerterreinen.nl) cost 10-16 per night.

Maps: ANWB VVV Toeristenkaart 1:100,000 (available from www.themapshop.co.uk) are great for bike touring as they mark on all cycle paths. We used sheets Zuid-Holland and Noord-Brabant.

Language: English is widely spoken but it is appreciated if you try a little Dutch, even just a friendly 'thank you'.