



(Left and below) Neil in Slovenia. To find where he and other CTC tour leaders are going this year, visit cyclingholidays.org or see the advert on page 83.



THE TOUR LEADER

NEIL WHEADON HAS BEEN LEADING CTC TOURS FOR A DECADE. HE EXPLAINS HOW HE GOT STARTED – AND WHAT MAKES CTC CYCLING HOLIDAYS DIFFERENT

Closed.' I remember the sign vividly. At the age of 19, a friend and I were cycling across Europe and fancied walking around Pompeii. We were armed with a map of Europe, a tent, and a pair of touring bikes loaded with spaghetti but no guidebook. I wasn't aware that Italy shut on a Monday. This trip and a previous European excursion had introduced me to the joys of cycle touring, but what I needed now was a spot more planning.

Roll on 13 years and I headed to Australia on a tandem with my wife Sarah, a year-long trip. We set out in 1996, but in reality the trip had started the year before as our mailbox groaned under the weight of guides and information from the countries that we would be visiting. As I flicked through the pages and created an itinerary, I was determined not to have another 'Pompeii moment'. We didn't: we visited battlegrounds, walked trails, and were in just the right place to see orcas in the Pacific.

I'd been a member of CTC since our return to the UK in 1997, and would wistfully peruse the magazine, dreaming of places that CTC

tours went. So in 2001, we explored Rajasthan with Pete Jarvis. Two years later, we ventured to Himachal Pradesh for another of his Indian odysseys. From that point, I was hooked on the concept of leading tours for CTC. I enjoyed the cycling and doing the planning, and combined with the experience of cycling the world, it seemed only a little more effort to do this for 12

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cyclists rather than just myself and Sarah.

In 2003, I led my first tour, employing a formula I knew well (and still use): fixed centre and catering for families. This allowed me to find my feet within the organisation. It wasn't long before I progressed to moving-on tours through stunning mountainous and coastal scenery. First Norway, then tours to Slovakia, to Nova Scotia,

and back to the fabulous Norwegian fjords.

In recent years, I have taken members further afield, to India and China, and perhaps my favourite: the USA. Our world tour in 1996 had taken us through 23 states over six months, and it's a country that I love. I've led trips to New England, Colorado and Yellowstone. The latter was a new tour for CTC and it's repeated this year.

Being part of CTC and providing tours for members has been a highly rewarding experience for the past 10 years. There are over 50 tour leaders and each of us offers individual holidays that cater for a wide audience. For some, it is a ride through Spain where they understand the culture and language; for others, it's a tour that encompasses not only the cycling but the history of the area they are passing through.

For my part, many have helped and guided me – CTC tour leaders have over 1,000 years of experience between them! CTC Cycling Holidays continues to move forward, and I'm now an integral part. A group of us tested the new online booking scheme this spring, and I'm now overseeing the worldwide tour programme. So if you fancy going somewhere that we haven't yet visited, you know whom to ask! ☺