

DETAILS

- **WHERE:** UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar
- **START/FINISH:** From Liverpool to Gibraltar
- **DISTANCE:** 3,359 miles
- **PICTURES:** Gene Krasko (main photo) & Steven Primrose-Smith (others)



Great rides

HUNGRY FOR MILES

Travel writer **Steven Primrose-Smith** and three companions set off to ride from Liverpool to Gibraltar with a budget of £1 each per day



Foraged fruit was a key part of the daily diet. Everyone lost weight

How much money do we need each day to tour by bike? I think I've discovered the answer but I found it the hard way. Between 2011 and 2013, I cycled 22,000 miles around 52 capital cities in Europe (see Unicycle50.com) and had a wonderful time – a wonderful, *expensive* time. I finished the ride with a bank account emptier than an election manifesto's promises. But I wanted to do another tour. Poverty shouldn't be a barrier to touring, I thought...

There are tales of adventures done for nothing at all, but these involve either blagging, bin-diving or taking advantage of people's generosity. I wanted a self-sufficient tour that wasn't funded by others. I figured I could cycle from the north-west of England to Gibraltar and by supplementing carefully selected store-bought purchases with foraged food and deliciously fresh line-caught fish, I could do it on a budget of £1 a day. Yes, just £1 a day. Unfortunately, I knew next to nothing about foraging. Nor fishing.

GETTING STUCK IN

On the 16 June 2015, four of us – Dave, Joe, Sabby and me – assembled in Liverpool, all complete strangers. Internet advice suggests

it's not a good idea to tour with people you don't know well. The jury was out on that.

We set off under perfect skies and had our first cooked meal – porridge – in the grounds of Flint Castle on the north coast of Wales. The weather was so glorious that Dave badly burnt his legs. To make matters worse, he had a habit of smashing his pedals into his calves whenever he pushed his bike anywhere. His legs were a right mess.

Sunburn and slashed legs weren't Dave's only problem. His back wheel had collapsed the night before we set off, suggesting a cavalier approach to pre-ride maintenance. It also didn't help that his bike weighed approximately the same as a Mini Metro even without the dozens of bags strapped haphazardly to it. With his Gandalf beard, Dave was what you might call 'a character'.

The roles we would fulfil throughout the entire trip crystallised organically that first day, without discussion. Joe was our navigator and bike mechanic. Sabby with his culinary background was our chef and chief forager. I became the fixer, negotiating our nightly accommodation, usually a farmer's field. And Dave was, well, Dave.

We had each started the ride with a bagful of provisions – flour, sugar, rice, pasta and

Do it yourself

SHOESTRING TOURING

A daily budget of £1 is doable – barely! – but just adding a couple of pounds each day would improve your experience immeasurably. However, if £1 is all you have, research the range of fruit, nuts, berries, leaves and mushrooms you can forage. But don't play at this; there are plenty of things out there that can kill you or make you very unwell. To eat better than we did, learn how to fish properly. And if your adventure is UK-based, shop at the larger supermarkets. Their budget lines are 30% of the price you'd pay in Western Europe.



WE DISCOVERED THE HOLY GRAIL OF FORAGEABLES: TREE AFTER TREE OF DELICIOUS SWEET FIGS, SOME JUICY, SOME DRY AS TOFFEE



WE FOUND AN EXTRA EURO OR TWO EACH. THAT NIGHT WE WERE GONNA PARTY LIKE WE'D GOT ONE POUND NINETY-NINE!

a few flavourings – the cost of which would later be considered when calculating the trip's total. So food wasn't scarce on those first few days as we trundled down the west coast of Wales. Even better, as well as foraging various plants, our inexperienced angling knowledge landed us a few – albeit dubiously legal – fish. Life was good.

CASUALTY NUMBER ONE

Then the Welsh hills started to niggle Sabby's knee, an old injury. At the age of 35, he had been at the head of the pack for our first week, along with 21-year-old Joe. Now Sabby was falling behind. One evening west of Swansea, after cooking up a delicious fish and wild garlic frittata, he announced that he would have to quit. His knee was horribly swollen. We waved goodbye in Bristol. He was distraught: he had desperately wanted to complete this silly thing.

In between his announcement and his departure, we experienced other injuries. While riding on a cycle path through Swansea, the small drum of elderflower wine I was attempting to brew cracked my front pannier rack, jamming my wheel and sending me over the handlebars. I landed painfully on my nose and battered my ribs. Despite having to endure what looked like a horrific skin disease for several days, my injury was only superficial and the scabs were quickly discarded – just like the awful vinegar-wine I'd created.

ACROSS THE CHANNEL

With Sabby gone, the remaining three of us made it across the Channel but then cracks started to appear. As we moved through France, despite being young and fit, Joe was becoming increasingly tired. No longer leading the pack, he was frequently a mile or two behind. We were into our fourth week on the road without a rest day. To give Joe some respite, we stopped earlier and earlier each day. With no budget for entertainment, I found our quiet evenings frustrating. I'd paid so much attention to the gustatory aspects




Spending even less?
 No money? No bike?
 No problem. See bit.ly/cyclinguk-e2eforfree

of our trip, I'd totally ignored what would keep us amused once in camp. If only I'd thought to take a pack of playing cards or, given the weight that Dave seemed capable of carrying, a pool table.

I've never been entirely comfortable with wild camping. I don't mind waste ground or woods but if there's a hint that a field is in use, then I want to be away as soon as possible in the morning. Joe needed more and more sleep and was reluctant to get up early, a source of more friction. Being incredibly British, we mostly kept our grievances to ourselves, bottled up our emotions and let things simmer deep inside.

SAVED BY FIGS

Halfway through a very soggy France, we decided that fishing wasn't for us. Despite numerous attempts, we hadn't caught

anything since Fishguard, weeks ago by now, and so we freed ourselves from the traffic of the coast and moved a little inland. On a positive note, we'd been more successful with fruit, finding tons of wild strawberries, raspberries, cherries, plums, pears, apples and grapes.

By now, the mood wasn't great. The frequent wet weather was making us miserable and Joe was being pushed beyond what he could comfortably do. But waiting around would only have prolonged the tour and by now everyone wanted to get to the end as quickly as we could. There were times when the glorious scenery, especially the foothills of the Pyrenees and the Picos de Europa, made for joyous riding, but a lot of our adventure felt like an ordeal.

Things didn't improve until we started to head south from Santiago de Compostela



Above: Day 65 – Up the long hill from Cortes de la Frontera, the last climb before Gibraltar

in Spain's north west. The sun came out, and then we discovered the Holy Grail of forageables: tree after tree of delicious, sweet figs, some plump and juicy, others dried out in the heat, like chewy toffees. Just south of Cáceres one evening, we stumbled upon a picnic site that was also hosting a teenage party. The Spanish youths were bizarrely reluctant to consume the vast quantity of alcohol they had smuggled along and, after one of the girls taught Dave how to dance the flamenco, they gave us an eight-litre bucket of 50/50 red wine and cola, something that tastes much better than you'd imagine. Again, being very British, we polished off the lot. It'd been a long time since our last taste of booze.

In the final days, confident that we were actually going to make it, even the frequent bike malfunctions couldn't dent our improved spirit. The sun shone



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Left: Our evening meal at a picnic site not far from Alcantara on day 59

Below left: Day 1 – The full team (Dave, Joe, Steven, Sabby) pose at Flint Castle




brightly, but despite this being the middle of August it was a tolerable heat, and the figs were providing us with an hourly blast of sweetness. But it wasn't just Joe who was tired; by now we all were. Nine weeks without a rest day, running on fewer calories than ideal, was taking its toll. That said, our diet at this point was healthier than it had ever been. We weren't getting our five-a-day; it was more like thirty-five-a-day. And personally, I was pleased to have lost three stone of blubber that I'd been carrying around for too long.

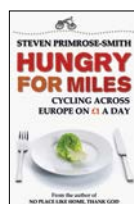
TOASTING OUR SUCCESS

On the eve of our trip's conclusion, I noticed an error in our accounting system that freed up an additional euro or two each. Unless you've lived on £1 a day for two months, it's hard comprehend what amazing joy this miscalculation induced in each of us. That night we were gonna party like we'd got one pound ninety-nine! We bought discount, surprise-meat paté, laboratory-made Spanish tortilla, and ropey Tetra Pak wine that cost 59 cents (42p!) a litre. After such a frugal adventure, that meagre selection seemed

like the most decadent meal ever.

The next morning we rolled into Gibraltar, ascended the Rock to say hello to the monkeys, congratulated each other on completing the challenge, and then gorged ourselves stupid for the next two days. It had been very tough, but we'd made it. For 66 days on the road we'd spent £66 each.

So the answer to how much money we need each day to tour is a surprisingly flexible one. It's however much you can afford, but probably not less than £1 a day (with plane or ferry tickets on top). Scrape together £180 and you could, at least in theory, tour for six months. But I'd really, really advise you to take a little bit more if you can. 



THE WHOLE STORY

The book of the adventure – **Hungry For Miles** – is available from Amazon in paperback and for Kindle. We raised money for Action Against Hunger.

Fact file

LIVERPOOL TO GIBRALTAR

DISTANCE: 3,359 miles in 66 days, an average of 51 miles per day but varying from 25 to 75.

WHEN: 16 June to 20 August 2015.

ROUTE: From Liverpool, we hugged the western coast of the UK, France, Spain and Portugal, coming inland a little in the second half of the ride when we realised we were rubbish at fishing.

CONDITIONS: Riding the coast gave a little more traffic than a carefully chosen inland route but not unbearably so. The weather was odd for summer, especially in southern Europe. We were never far from a cloudburst, and our coldest day was in northern Spain.

EQUIPMENT USED: Between us we had a range of bikes, from a Dawes Galaxy to a machine seemingly constructed from an alloy of limestone and lead.

I'M GLAD I HAD... My portable washing machine: a rubble sack I could fill with water and shower gel. Very effective when sinks are scarce.

NEXT TIME I WOULD... Take more money.

FURTHER INFO: There are loads of photos and a proper route map at RideAndSeek2015.com.

