



The Hardy Monument was erected for Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy, not the author



GRAND CANYON CYCLING

Steve Carr and his friend Guy cycled coast to coast across the southern United States

We took the Adventure Cycling Association's Grand Canyon route as part of a ride from Florida to San Francisco. It starts by climbing steadily out of the well-watered lawns and cactus gardens of Phoenix. After a big climb on Interstate 40, we reached Williams (7,000 feet) on Route 66. A late April snowstorm blew in. With typical 'big country' hospitality, our campground host invited us to camp in their clubroom.

From Williams, we went north across a gently undulating plateau, so it was all the more startling when the land disappeared and we stopped at the rim, staring at a vast wilderness of multicoloured rock towers. To get across

the canyon to the north rim is over 200 miles by road. The road takes a spectacular detour alongside the Painted Desert and the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument to cross the Colorado River at Marble Canyon. Then it climbs back up the 4,000 feet you just came down.

It's a big exposed landscape so we carried lots of water. The route passes through a Navajo Nation Reservation, where we saw the painful contrast between their proud history and a tough present reality. The Grand Canyon route continues into Utah's Zion Canyon, where we cycled along the canyon bottom and stared up at a fantastic landscape of immense rock walls.

After the canyons came Nevada's Great Basin. We crossed a cold, occasionally snowy, desert landscape of mountains and wide, arid valleys. Sixty miles or more between settlements, along with headwinds, made for tough, exhilarating cycling. Each day the sun sped over us to set behind the next range of mountains ahead. Few places give such an intoxicating sense of space.

For more, see www.wutheringbikes.org.uk/SouthernTier



In an exposed landscape with long rides between towns, self-sufficiency was key

First gear is my friend

FELICITY FROST AND PARTNER **STEVE** TOOK A HILLY ROUTE TO CATCH THEIR FERRY TO FRANCE

We live in Wimborne in Dorset, so our easiest way to France is via Poole. Last September, we cycled to Plymouth instead and got the night ferry to Roscoff. Our route was about 175 miles, using mainly National Cycle Network Route 2.

The first of many tough climbs took us up to Hardy's Monument. Exhausted, we couldn't resist climbing the tower for the fantastic views of Chesil Beach. We camped at Puncnkowle.

The weather picked up the following day and the hills got serious. Time to really try out our new Thorn Ravens' Rohloff gears. They worked well and we just kept going, reaching Sidmouth after 46 steep miles.

We took the Exmouth ferry to Star Cross, struggling to get our heavy bikes over the railway bridge, and cycled to our campsite at Ashburton via Ashcombe and Bovey Tracey.

A cold night and dewy morning meant a late start. We needed some help from the locals in Plymouth as we must have missed a few signs! We chilled out in the excellent Minerva pub for a few hours. Crashing out on the ferry, we woke to face France the next morning. It was much flatter!





Brecon Beacons bracken – uncharacteristically dry, like the weather

Photos: Pete Smith

BRECON BIKING

Neil Scarse and his 'disagreeable' friends headed to Wales for some summer sun

The Disagreeables, many of whom are Cycling UK members, are a group who cycle together most weeks along the quiet lanes of Kent, Surrey and Sussex. A couple of times a year, we go further afield. Last year, we took the mountain bikes to the Brecon Beacons. We knew the trails and scenery would be stunning, we knew the quality of the banter would be high, but we packed for a deluge. Instead of the rain, however, we experienced four days of perfect weather in an area justifiably popular with road and off-road cyclists.

Setting out early from our homes in south London, we headed for our base in Talgarth – The Tower Hotel – and stocked up on cycle maps from the Tourist Information Centre. We had an easy-paced afternoon ride at the foot of the Black Mountains.



The next day was our big ride. Starting from Brecon, we cycled along the canal before picking up the Brinore Tramroad, an early 19th century horse-drawn railway that used to run between Talybont-on-Usk and Trevil. It provided great views of the Talybont Reservoir – and a chance to catch our breath.

We had another big climb up to our lunch stop before an even longer, and this time rocky, climb to the top of Pen Y Fan. After a dramatic mechanical, which left our friend Ian with four fewer spokes, no derailleur, and the need for a quick conversion to a singlespeed, we cautiously headed back down to Brecon where a local bike shop pulled out the stops to fix Ian's bike.

The next day was another stunning and tough day in the saddle. Yet we barely scratched the surface of what Wales has to offer. Given its nice cafés and pubs and friendly locals, we're sure we'll be back – and I'll still pack my waterproof, just in case!



David arrived in Trondheim before the spring did

Portugal to Norway

FROM EARLY MARCH TO EARLY MAY, **DAVID WOODWARD** FOLLOWED THE SPRING NORTH

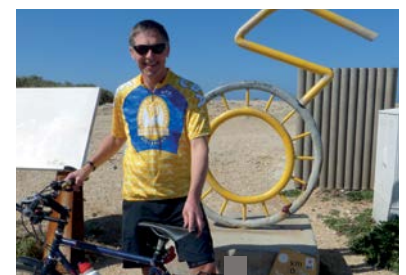
Cape St Vincent is the south-westernmost point of Portugal, and for me the start of a 3,068 mile odyssey. It would take me 286 hours of cycling on my Thorn Expedition to arrive in Trondheim, Norway. My idea was to follow the spring north, although in Norway I met ice and snow.

A quick passage through the Algarve was followed by 909 miles of inland Spain: heat, dust, deserted towns with shutters banging, significant climbing and long, exhilarating descents.

My 595 miles through France included the Ardèche, the Rhône Valley and Alsace. Staying in vineyards provided an irresistible opportunity to sample local produce.

Germany was full of cyclists, cycle paths and signed routes, but for a long-distance cyclist it proved surprisingly difficult to maintain momentum at times. A ferry took me to a rather drab Denmark, then another took me to my sixth country, Sweden. I was spellbound by the beauty of the lakes and trees, but was too early for the Vatternrundan, a 186-mile cycle ride around Lake Vattern.

The Norwegian border was marked by snow falling, frozen lakes, climbing, chilly winds and welcoming saunas.



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