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# TRAVELLERS' TALES



## Wight around the island

This summer, Dave Shambrook and family cycle-camped their way around the Isle of Wight

Living on the Isle of Wight, we're often asked if we've done the 'Cycle the Wight' annual organised day ride around the island. But trailing after hundreds of sweaty cyclists isn't our idea of fun. Instead we thought we'd have a go at our own circumnavigation of the island, visiting each of the island's extremities and camping en route.

Our first day was also our longest, heading up to East Cowes, across to Cowes on the chain ferry, and then following quiet rural lanes out to Yarmouth in the west of the island. That gave us the opportunity to tick off our first extremity

at Egypt Point. On the second day, the detour out to the Needles was hard work, but the views along the coast towards Dorset were well worth the effort. Leaving Freshwater Bay, we avoided the main road along the southern coast by heading along the Tennyson Trail over the downs – again hard going but the views on a clear day are breathtaking.

After an overnight stop back on the coast, we hit the hilliest part of the route: past the southernmost point at St Catherine's lighthouse and through Ventnor towards Shanklin. Here the gradients can border on alpine so we resorted to walking up

the worst, and relied on good brakes for the way down. Our final day started with an easier ride through Sandown towards Bembridge, reaching the last milestone at Foreland lifeboat station. After a celebratory paddle in the sea, we headed home via Seaview and Ryde.

We rode: hybrid with Deuxjohn trailer for the camping gear (Dad); Circe Helios tandem (Mum and Rachel, 5); and an Islabikes Beinn 20 (John, 8). In total we covered 75 miles and suffered no punctures. The route passes all the island ferry terminals so is an easy trip from the mainland.



8-year-old John carried his own luggage for the 75-mile trip around the island



Average temperatures for Alicante in December range from 7 degrees to a balmy 16. But snow is possible!

## A 'plane to Spain

DAVID FOSTER AND PARTNER SOPHIE FLEW TO ALICANTE FOR WINTER SUN – THEY HOPED...

**THE SLEET** was falling more heavily as we headed out of Castalla towards Ibi. The discomfort was compounded by our recent trial of the *via verde* El Maigmo. Although I've ridden extensively on dirt roads in Western Australia in the rain, I was unprepared for the clay that covered this track and our wheels. We got about 20 yards before our wheels blocked up!

Our cycling holiday in Spain was inspired by a CTC Cycling Holidays trip, which was too long for us but gave ideas of where to go. Also, Sophie wanted to see some sun. Little did we know that it was to be the coldest Spanish winter for 40 years!

That wintry day, we took the bus from Ibi to Alcoy, only to find that Alcoy and its olive groves were disappearing under more snow. We retreated, again by bus, to Alicante. We did, however, manage to get around a bit on the days before and after the snow, going by the smaller roads through Elche (should have stopped), Crevillente, Aspe and Novelda.

The other side of the snowy day in Alcoy, we stopped in a *casa rural* (rural guesthouse), picked because it was to the north east of Alicante. This was so good, with excellent food, wine, and conversation with the owner – a cosmopolitan Frenchman – that we stayed two days. We spent our last night near to the airport.

Overall, although the weather could have been better, the roads were excellent and the Spanish on them extremely polite to cyclists.



## Exmoor singletrack

IAN BOOTH HEADED FOR THE HILLS, MAKING THE MOST OF A RARE DRY DAY IN SUMMER

**THERE WERE** few opportunities this summer to have a good day's ride off-road across Exmoor. But 23rd May was too good to be true: dry, sunny, no wind, and as it was mid-week, everyone else was at work.

I set off from Exford. The first climb to Hilshead Cross, which starts on tarmac then changes to a stony track, soon had me puffing. But as I climbed, the views opened up over the Brendon Hills. Almsworthy Common provided a nice, swoopy track to the remote Aldermans Barrow.

I took one of my favourite tracks to Larkbarrow, one of the deserted farms from the 1800s when the Knights from the midlands took over Exmoor and tried to develop it. This area was also a firing range in the First World War; shell holes can still be seen in places.

A permissive path led me on to the footbridge/ford at Badgworthy Water. It's a technical descent: a steep, narrow track, with stones that jump out to trip you up! The ride down 'Doone Valley' was excellent; it's usually deserted mid-week. I rode past the memorial to RD Blackmoor who wrote Lorna Doone.

After a cafe stop in Malsmead, I buzzed along for few miles on tarmac down winding lanes, passing Oare church. Then I had a tough climb back onto the moor. I rode over South Common, then back along the Larkbarrow track towards Exford.



The ford at Badgworthy Water. RD Blackmoor set his book Lorna Doone in this valley

## Fan-Tas-tic Christmas

On holiday in Australia over Christmas, Gill Marsh and Andrew Pentelow hired bikes in Tasmania

**S**tarting from Hobart, we crossed the Tasman Bridge on a very narrow cycle track and, after a night in Richmond, reached the sea at Orford in torrential rain on Christmas Day afternoon. Having failed to make a supermarket visit, due to a sudden thunderstorm the previous afternoon, Christmas Day evening was dreary and alcohol free.

On the whole though, we avoided the rain and enjoyed some glorious sunshine and some very hot days. The east coast route northwards, through Swansea and Bicheno to St Helens,

saw us passing huge expanses of pristine, empty beaches, tempting several paddling stops. A day off the bikes allowed us to do the classic walk in the Freycinet National Park, visiting Wineglass Bay, reputedly one of the ten best beaches in the world.

Our route lay mostly along the A3, but traffic was light and the drivers generally courteous. A surprisingly large number of cars were towing boats.

Our plan to ride along the firm sand of 9-mile beach was thwarted by the retirement of the ferryman – with no exit at the end, we

were forced to stick to the main road. The scenery varied from pleasant to spectacular but was never dull. Cycle tourists were few and far between.

We saw several curious sights along the way, including a huge Santa Claus, disguising a tree on a suburban roadside verge, and a post-and-wire fence strung with hundreds of discarded shoes.

We made visits to several convict-built bridges, including the oldest bridge in Australia and the aptly-named spiky bridge. We also made detours to vineyards and fruit farms to sample the excellent local produce.

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