



Neil visits his 50th checkpoint

## CHASING CHECKPOINTS

Returnee cyclist **Neil Warwick** discovered 402 reasons to go for a ride

**A**fter a 20 year hiatus from cycling I bought myself a new bike in 2016 and quickly decided I needed a reason to ride different routes rather than the same old roads. Reading an issue of Cycle (having maintained my Cycling UK membership), I stumbled upon The British Cycling Quest.

The BCQ is in my opinion one of the unsung gems of Cycling UK's work. A network of 402 checkpoints around the country, it can best be described as 'geocaching on a bike'. Simply visit as

many or as few checkpoints as you wish, answer a question about each checkpoint to prove you've been there, and submit your answers for validation and awards. The 'competition' is free, with only a small covering charge for cards and medals. Checkpoints are as far apart as the Isle of Wight and the Shetlands.

In a year and a half of competing in the BCQ, I have visited almost 70 checkpoints and cycled around some wonderful parts of the country, mostly in the south. I'm now venturing further afield, with a two-day tour of the Isle of Wight standing out as a favourite. That's been balanced with some days to forget – getting soaked in Surrey, for example.

In pursuit of checkpoints, I've cycled steep hills in Dorset, I've cruised around the streets of London on my Brompton, stopped at countless pubs, developed a taste for real ale, met many interesting people, and visited fascinating places that I wouldn't have known existed. If you're looking for a reason to ride, then you could do a lot worse than check out the British Cycle Quest ([cyclinguk.org/british-cycle-quest](http://cyclinguk.org/british-cycle-quest)). I blog my own BCQ rides at [www.quest.nwarwick.co.uk](http://www.quest.nwarwick.co.uk).



London: home to six checkpoints

## Touring for teenagers

**SIMON CHALLAND'S** DAUGHTERS ENJOYED LYCRA-FREE RIDING AROUND LAKE CONSTANCE

**M**y wife and I both ride road bikes with friends at the weekend and use bikes to commute and shop whenever we can. Our 13- and 14-year-old daughters can ride and have bikes but rarely use them – especially with us, because 'That's so weird, dad.' So when my wife suggested a family holiday cycling round Lake Constance in southern Germany instead of the usual villa and pool in Spain, there was a mix of whoops from me and groans from the girls.

It turned out to be the perfect introduction. Apart from the beautiful scenery and picturesque villages, it's flat. My girls are fit and do plenty of sport but seem to think cycling up any incline is unnecessary exertion. It is well signposted, which is important since my family assume any dad-led expedition involves getting lost. They didn't buy my argument that 'As long as the lake's on the right, we'll be fine.'

Cycling in Germany is normal. Lots of people do it, cycle routes and roads are designed for it, and drivers treated us with respect not as the enemy. So for my girls it was safe and acceptable rather than weird. Lycra and helmets are optional, which is important to the fashion conscious.

We stayed in lakeside hotels and our luggage was conveyed for us, so no camping and little sweat were involved. There was plenty of ice cream and lake swimming. Another cycling holiday now looks a real possibility.



Casual cycling success



The shop ride is open to visitors

# CHRISTMAS CRACKER

In Spain in late December, **Euan** and **Cathie McGibbon** joined a local shop ride

**T**hree days before Christmas, we're off work and heading to the high street. Last minute shopping? Not a chance. We're going for a ride. We're cyclists in Girona at 10 o'clock on a Thursday so there's only one place to be: the Bike Breaks Girona weekly shop ride. This has become an institution over the last four years and has only been cancelled by weather a handful of times, which tells you a lot about why we're here. It's free to all and all are welcome. It's also a box of chocolates – you never know what you're going to get. We've ridden with Olympians and pros but also with a good smattering of fat lads (and lassies) at the back.

Today's Christmas ride comprises a



Coffee outdoors – in December

multinational collection of locals and visitors. There's a chill in the air as we set out across the cobbles in the old town, but when we get out of town there's warmth in the sun and the perfect blue skies and stunning winter light leave me gasping at the beauty of the scenery. The ride to the coffee stop is short but has a few sharp inclines. We settle in for a chat towards the rear – it's not a race and the 'craic' is good at the back of the pack!

Coffee in the sun is a multi-accented affair, after which the group splits, with some heading back while others go on a longer loop. We all assemble later at the shop to share festive drinks and snacks. Bike Breaks has negotiated a lunch deal at the recently opened Federal Café so, for nine of us, the conversation continues over burgers and beers.

## An Adriatic adventure

**ROB FOSTER** SPENT A FORTNIGHT TOURING THROUGH ALBANIA AND MONTENEGRO

**W**hy Albania?' asked Sue and Val. 'Well, it's very different from Western Europe, the scenery will be great, and the beer is cheap,' I replied. So we flew to Corfu with our touring bikes in September, then took the ferry to Sarandë, which is at the southern end of Albania.

The plan was to travel north to reach Montenegro, then ride up the coast into Croatia at Dubrovnik. We used small hotels and apartments, which were plentiful and good value. Our first call was to see the UNESCO ruins at Butrint. Then we rode up the 'Albanian Riviera' coast, with the Adriatic shimmering away on the left and big mountains on the right.

The ascents were tough; three tired cyclists wheezed into Dhërmi the first night. The next day's climb over the Llogara Pass was even bigger, so we persuaded a local to take us up in his pickup. The view at the summit was terrific. We then freewheeled downhill.

Leaving the coast at Fier, we headed inland to visit Berat, another UNESCO must-see. Riding to Lushnjë, we took a main road (SH4) but the Albanians, all driving large, old Mercedes, were generally considerate to us cyclists.

At the northern city of Shkodër we had a day off to visit the scenic wonder of Lake Koman. The day after we entered Montenegro, pausing to admire Lake Shkodër from a panoramic road. We ending up staying with a poet.

Further north was lovely Kotor and some very scary dark tunnels. Heavy traffic led us up the coast into Dubrovnik in Croatia.



Albania is a biodiversity hotspot

### Share your story

Touring, road riding, mountain biking, even utility cycling – we want your Travellers' Tales.

Email the editor, [cycle@jamespembrokemedia.co.uk](mailto:cycle@jamespembrokemedia.co.uk), for submission guidelines.