



Juliet cycle-camped across France in 12 days

Belgium & France

Sea to sea

Instead of flying to her friend's house in Marseille, Juliet Molteno cycled there from Zeebrugge

“Let's keep going!” This is what I had said to my partner on short cycle trips in northern France and Belgium in the past. So, as a 50th birthday present to myself, I decided to do just that: cycle across the whole of France and end up at our friend's house in Marseille. I had two weeks. My partner couldn't get the holiday, so I went alone.

After three months' planning with maps all over the living room floor, it was time to cycle from Beverley to the ferry at Hull. Cycling down the ramp at Zeebrugge, I looked down at my legs and bike and thought: “It's just you and me now: Marseille or bust!”

Temperatures were in the low 30s the entire way down, which was pretty tough in the north but got easier as the climate dried out the further south I rode.

Campsites were invariably delightful, as is usual in France. I followed canals and rivers for much of the way on traffic-free velo-routes (only some of which were paved). Climbing was mainly steady. It included all the locks on the Saône-

Marne canal to beautiful Langres and the watershed. I then rode down the Saône to the Rhone.

The ViaRhôna velo-route was a very different experience from everywhere else I cycled in France. Suddenly there were cyclists everywhere, many of whom looked like me: heavily laden and trundling. The campsite at Condrieu is reserved for cyclists and walkers, so it was absolute heaven. No car doors slamming or worries that people playing music might not turn it off.

When I arrived at our friend's house, I said to him: “There! You see: we don't live so far away after all. Just 12 days pedalling and here I am!”



Left: At Marseille
Bottom: Canal de la Marne à la Saône



Julian's first Critical Mass had a carnival feel



Nottingham

Situation critical

Julian Bentley joined a Critical Mass ride about climate change

NOTTINGHAM EXTINCTION REBELLION had organised the 'Earth Strike Critical Mass' ride. It was my first such ride, so I didn't know what to expect. There were about 60 of us, many under the age of 30 and the majority not wearing cycling kit.

Led by a sound-system bike, a sort of carnival float in bicycle form, we rode onto the inner ring road, slowing down traffic, making our presence felt and the message heard.

We were a colourful mass of pedallers, and the music gave a party-like atmosphere. Passers-by mostly smiled, waved, and cheered. Some were curious; I was asked if we were a Brexit protest. Drivers responded well, though one or two had anger issues. Experienced Critical Mass cyclists prevented impatient drivers edging in from side roads. A police cyclist and van also shepherded us.

The pace was slow, about 6-8mph, but speed wasn't the idea. We rode safely, en masse, and it was a sociable atmosphere. Reporters followed us. We even made the BBC News at One, with the tagline “Two wheeled protest in the city of cycling”.

Some people, even some cyclists, think negatively of mass bicycle rides, but this was a fun event with a serious message. It showed that getting more people on bicycles has benefits for all.



Gregory and Izaak at the Cirque de Ladoye in the Jura



Climbing cols again with a little help

France

Free and e-zee

E-bikes have opened up Stuart and Pauline Graham's touring horizons again

OUR E-BIKES HAVE given us back our cycle touring freedom. When we were in our 40s we had some great trips, our favourite being the Route des Grandes Alpes from Thonon on Lake Geneva to Menton on the Med. We're in our 70s now and had begun to look for flatter routes; we could no longer ride where we liked.

Then a year ago we bought Cube e-bikes. We rode them in the Lakes and Dales, revisiting fell tops that we hadn't managed for years. Then, in September, we returned to the Route des Grandes Alpes.

We cycled 840 miles over 25 cols. The downhill were fantastic on such stable bikes with disc brakes. We didn't use more than half of each bike's battery during the days, then charged them overnight.

We had only one day of bad weather. There were a few flakes of snow on the Col d'Izoard, and we were so cold we put everything on. The rest of the time it was perfect: warm, dry, with light winds.

Many of the people we met were amazed at what you could do on an e-bike. They thought they were just for riding around town and shopping. We took three weeks in all, cycling back via the Gorges du Verdon, then north through the Chartreuse and back to our campervan, which we had left near Annecy.

Europe

Pedalling for pangolins

Gregory Yeoman and his son **Izaak** cycled to Switzerland to raise money for WWF

Saving the biggest challenge for our final day, we turned off the undulating main road in Le Brassus and began the climb towards the Col du Marchairuz. Marked with three chevrons on the map, this climb had been playing on our minds over the previous fortnight as we headed across France towards Switzerland.

A hilly and hot day through Kent at the start had been a test, but the rolling landscape in the Pas-de-Calais and the level track along the Canal de la Marne had not troubled us. Now, however, the ridges of the Jura Mountains rose in front of us...

This was my 12-year-old son Izaak's

idea. He wanted to raise money on a ride for the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) to help their work on pangolin conservation. His idea grew into a 710-mile journey from the WWF UK office in Woking to their international office in Gland in Switzerland. His last and only tour had been a weekend along the Kennet and Avon canal two years before.

Starting up the big climb, I spotted a sign showing the height gain, so I stopped to grab a photo and indicated for Izaak to keep going. As I watched him attack the hill, climbing confidently and pulling away from me around every hairpin, a lump came to my throat. I need not have had any concerns about his ability to complete the trip. We had averaged 54 miles a day, riding through 42-degree heat as Europe was gripped by a heatwave. Now he was a real grimpeur too!

When I caught up with him at the top, Izaak had a big smile on his face – as we both did on the long descent to Lake Geneva and journey's end.



Taking a break at the top of the Col du Marchairuz



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