



In the hills above Ingram



## France Pedalling to Provence

For her club's cycling week in the south of France, **Becci May** decided to get there by bike

**CYCLING IN PROVENCE** was a delight in June. We were there for a week of riding, organised by Alton Cycling Club, after having travelled there through France in cars, trains or by bike!

One of our club members, Seb, thought: "What better way to join a club cycling week in Provence than by getting there by bike?" For those of us who joined him, that meant 14 days and 1,400km of cycling. We rode from Normandy to Angers and then up the Loire until it becomes a stream. Then down idyllic valleys in the Ardèche – the so-called Dolce Via – down to the Rhône and, at last, Provence.

Our base in Provence was a comfortable and friendly hotel in Buis-les-Baronnies, with spectacular views and access to a variety of mountain climbs (Mont Ventoux being the ultimate), multiple cols and dramatic gorges (such as the Gorges de la Nesque).

There were interesting rides in all directions from Buis. Ventoux loomed over us throughout the week, and by the end of it many of us managed to climb to the summit, which has three different ascents. The climb was followed by a treacherous windy and winding whizz down. It was 10 degrees colder at the top, and we loved feeling the warmth build on the long descent to Malaucène.

Stormy weather during the week added to the drama, with thunder, lightning and rising river levels adding to the evenings' entertainment. A fantastic week of good fun, good company and good rides.

## Northumberland

# 4-day Sandstone Way

This summer, **Jane John** and three companions cycled 120 miles off road from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Hexham

**N**o heatwave? Tick. Sandstone Way travel logistics sorted? Tick. Avon Skin So Soft packed? Tick. The four of us were ready for another off-road MTB adventure, although not a little unnerved by a previous Travellers' Tales report of 170 or more gates to open...



one else in sight, over farmland, in forests and woods, and between sparse villages. With technical descents challenging us, accompanied by plenty of whooping, perhaps it's not surprising that we don't tend to see much wildlife. There was more squawking as we found

'something nasty in the woodshed' when we put our bikes away in the Old Mortuary at Fountain Cottage B&B. All part of the welcome, apparently.

It's a fantastic route – well signed, stunning landscapes, isolated and incredibly quiet (apart from us). We didn't meet any other cyclists, just a few local walkers, on the whole route. As for the total gate tally of 123, we did only count the ones we had to open. Maybe someone knew we were coming?

We planned to split the 120-mile journey into four days of riding: Berwick to Wooler; Wooler to Rothbury; Rothbury to Bellingham; and Bellingham to Hexham, staying in pubs and B&Bs en route. The route was easily plotted using the Sandstone Way GPX file and the paper map. Our luggage was transferred by a kind husband in a campervan. He was also our backup if anything major went wrong.

Looking back at our mostly sunny photographs, I've almost forgotten the few short, sharp showers, especially as one came just before the café at Ingram. It was easily put right by a large slice of border tart and a flat white. Our spirits weren't even dampened by the lack of sleep due to the noisy Kiwi sheep shearers in Rothbury, the evidence of their celebrations hosed away the next morning...

Mostly we just rode along bridleways up and down hills with no



Hexham, journey's end



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