



Dunkery Beacon

SW England

The West Country Way

Jane John and three friends went bikepacking from the English Channel to the Bristol Channel

Last year we cycled King Alfred's Way on our mountain bikes in a heatwave and, surprisingly, absolutely loved it. This year's challenge was the West Country Way: 130 miles and 13,800ft of climbing from Plymouth to Minehead over three days, again in a heatwave. It didn't start well. One husband got stuck on the very crowded Plymouth train helping us stow our bikes. The first stop after Reading was Taunton!

Things could only get better... and they did. Some highlights included: the early morning ride out of Plymouth on disused railway tracks; the joy of second mid-morning breakfasts and the inevitable 'route advice' given to us by café locals; the welcome cool of pushing our bikes through rivers in 30° heat; and the privilege of having the national parks virtually to ourselves.

We also enjoyed: the 7.30am ride along the Two Moors Way gouged into cliffs below Castle Drogo; whooping as we made it to the top of Dunkery Beacon in the mist (disturbing couples quietly picnicking – apologies); practising our herding skills on stubborn, path-blocking cows, ponies and a pig; and the many glorious downhill swoops in the Devon and

Somerset countryside, the rewards for killer climbs.

Low points included the broom-cupboard-sized bike storage on the train, and the route across the very busy A361. The only sensible option we could find was lugging our mountain bikes along the boardwalks of the Two Moors Way footpath and humping them up over the trees holding up the boardwalk, which at least took us under the A361. We missed Cycling UK's expert route planning!

The trip provided more memories to treasure of time spent cycling with three good friends (met through Wantage Cycling UK), who all value and support each other and who know when hysterical laughter is the only option!



Sweet relief in 30°C heat

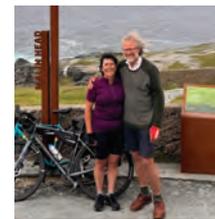


The ocean is never far away

Eire

Ireland bit by bit

Shelagh O'Riordan rode the 1,600-mile Wild Atlantic Way in stages



MY PARTNER ED and I decided to cycle Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way back in 2018. It's 2,600km (1,600 miles) up the west coast from

Cork in the south to Donegal in the north, finishing in Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland. We estimated it would take three two-week holidays.

We set off in September 2018 and cycled all the headlands of Cork and Kerry, finishing in Tarbert where a ferry goes across the Shannon to Co Clare. The highlights were the tips of all the headlands, which were so beautiful and always had few cars.

The following year we set off from Tarbert Ferry and cycled all the coast of Co Clare and Co Galway, finishing in Ballina in Co Mayo. We spent an amazing night on Aranmore, one of the Aran Islands, and saw dolphins from the ferry.

Covid put paid to the next two years, so we set off to complete our challenge last summer. We had 10 days' cycling from Mayo to Derry/Londonderry. There were occasional busy roads with no alternatives, but otherwise miles of fabulous, beautiful and sometimes very hilly roads. We stayed in B&Bs, hostels and the odd hotel. We drank many pints of Guinness and ate our weight in salmon-and-potato suppers.

Now we just need to decide whether to carry on and circumnavigate Ireland.



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