



Clockwise from top left: Canal path heading towards Bradford. McNab's Books in Barnard Castle. In the programme for Queen's Hall Arts Centre in Hexham. The finish: Berwick-upon-Tweed. Hexham's Queen's Hall Arts Centre



when I reached a gate saying I was on the Pennine Bridleway. All I could see were hills and sheep. I'd forgotten to refill the spilled bottle and had drunk my other one. Maybe food would help? I got out the rolls and squezy honey. The honey had set irretrievably solid at the bottom. Only the sheep could hear me scream.

**YOU DON'T GET THE DOWNS WITHOUT THE UPS**

I felt like the long-distance hikers I'd met camping at Crowden, all walking the Pennine Way. I sucked on my rain-infused bread and trudged the bike through puddles, knowing I'd get somewhere eventually. Never was I so happy to spot a distant road with lorries speeding down it. Farmhouses appeared. Another gate. Tarmac. A village. A bench. A phone signal. It hadn't been that far but had felt it.

I arrived just in time to get changed and into my host's car, with a bowl of pasta on my lap, to get to McNab's Books. It was a delight, with a cosy group discussing their own stories with my poems. An evening of heaven after the day from hell.

Other tour highlights included admiring wind turbines spinning while cycling towards Alnwick in an impossible headwind; recording a poem for the ethical bank Triodos on Hadrian's Wall Path; being the support

act for a cycling stand-up comedian; performing under a willow tree in Shakespeareland (very Ophelia-esque); and getting lost on the moors with a friend in Brontë country, an authentic Wuthering Heights experience.

**NO CYCLE-POET IS AN ISLAND**

That's how I'd have titled John Donne's poem if I were writing it almost 400 years later. Help for my tour came in many forms. Some venues provided accommodation. I slept on a boat, in the attic room of a historic house and a sports' changing room. I stayed with a Green councillor and an organiser of Berwick's Great Big Green Week. When venues helped, I taught free poetry sessions before gigs. I also stayed with Warmshowers and Cycle Touring Friends hosts, including a penny-farthing rider and another of Cycling UK's 2022's 100 Women in Cycling.

Adam Crowther promoted the tour on BBC Radio and Cycling Minds, a Cycling UK 2023 Volunteer Award Group, spread the word in Hexham. Family,

friends and friends of friends also provided moments of calm shelter. Quite a few local bike shops kept my temperamental front brake going until a new one was fitted in Newcastle. I cycled and performed solo, but couldn't have done that without the help of so many people. ●



'Bikey' the 18-year-old Dawes Horizon, fully loaded for seven weeks on the road

**VERSE CYCLE**  
**TURNING PEDALS INTO POEMS**  
 Tuesday 13 September, 7.30pm  
 A young poet's journey  
 Turning Pedals into Poems is Caroline Burrows' one-woman show

**ARC SU AND BOOTS ARE**  
 by David Boff  
 Weston

**Fact file**  
**Turning Pedals into Poems tour**

**Distance:** 580 miles.

**Climbing:** 24,500ft.

**Route:** Bristol to Stratford-upon-Avon, Cotesbach, Stamford, Nottingham, Matlock Bath, Holmfirth, Bradford, Barnard Castle, Hexham, Newcastle, Bamburgh, and Berwick-upon-Tweed. (I detoured to Middlesbrough for a train to Hexham due to front brake issues, and got a lift between Holmfirth and Keighley.)

**Conditions:** A heatwave, heavy downpours, strong headwinds and some pleasant summer days.

**Accommodation:** Camping, YHA, Warmshowers, Cycle Touring Friends, family, friends and friends of friends.

**Bike used:** Dawes Horizon touring bike (Bikey, also known as Old Reliable).

**Maps/guides:** Komoot. Pages from a road map of Britain. Local knowledge.

**I'm glad I had:** My dad's woolly jumper. Shimano Gore-Tex cycling boots; overshoes are never waterproof enough. A Highlander camping chair/mat.

**Next time I would:** Buy honey in a glass jar. Plan a few days at the end at a spa to recover.

**Further info:** @VerseCycle on social media.