

**STEVE BEHR**

Steve is best known as a mountain biking photographer. His website is [stockfile.co.uk](http://stockfile.co.uk)

## Great Rides

# BIKEPACKING BEGINNERS

Bivvying under a tarp isn't the only bikepacking option. Steve Behr and his friend Troy took a more easygoing off-road tour of southern England

**S**omething interesting in the south of England. That was the request of my old friend Troy, visiting from California, when I asked if he wanted to go riding. I've done many bike trips over the years but somehow a self-supported, multi-day adventure hasn't been among them. So we settled on a ride from my sister's house near Hindhead to the Isle of Wight and back via a more or less circular and mostly traffic-free route.

I had a vague idea where I wanted to go. I'd done the Shipwrights Way a few years back, a 50-mile route stretching from Alice Holt Forest near Farnham, over the South Downs and on to Portsmouth. That would get us to the ferry where we'd cross to Ryde on the eastern side of the Isle of Wight. After a couple of days there, we'd head back from Yarmouth on the western side of the island to Lymington, where we'd explore the New Forest. Then we'd follow the Test Valley up towards Winchester and pick up the South Downs Way to the other side of Petersfield. From there, King Alfred's Way would take us back across to our starting point.

**ACCOMMODATION RESERVATIONS**

To keep it comfortable, I figured we'd need to split the route into chunks of about 40 miles a day. That would let us do side trips to explore en route, take

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proper lunch breaks and still have time to relax. We weren't looking to break records; it was about having a fun trip. Although Troy was amenable to the idea, and despite both us having done so in the past, we chose not to camp. It would mean carrying extra gear, which would be harder. We'd rather spend money on B&Bs or hotels, and pub and restaurant meals where necessary.

Aside from working out the route, the hardest part was finding suitable accommodation with secure bike storage. The attraction of doing an established multi-day adventure like King Alfred's Way is that the B&Bs on such routes are set up to cater to cyclists. We were doing our own thing, so I made a bunch of phone calls checking on bike storage until we found the right combination of location, price and storage facilities. Be warned: what some people consider a safe place to leave bikes overnight isn't necessarily what you or I would consider safe!

Route planned, accommodation booked and luggage sorted, Troy and I did a test ride with the bikes fully laden. That confirmed that we'd chosen the right bikes and daily distance.

Keeping a nervous eye on the weather forecast, we waited for our mid-September departure day.

**TICKETS TO RYDE**

We met up with a friend of mine, Mike, for part of the first day's ride down the

