



MAPS NOT APPS

Direction finding proved no issue: the Way of the Roses is well signposted all the way. Except once. At Gressingham, an hour or two from Morecambe, the road was closed, impassably, with no diversion signed.

The roadworks man, evidently under the impression my bike was an Audi and my wristwatch was an Apple one running Google Maps, advised me to take A-roads to Kirkby Stephen. I consulted my 1970s Bartholomew maps, lent by a friend who insisted these were the cartography of choice then, with a scale ideal for day rides. Unfortunately the scale was too small for the detail of how to cross the river – save for a suggested ferry, clearly now unlikely.

Curses! But, as I stood looking round bewildered, I was rescued by a local cyclist out for a spin on his self-built gravel bike. Like me, he was the same age as an old person; a super chap, precisely and gently spoken, with a smart sense of humour. I followed him down back roads and farm lanes over a bridge to rejoin the route post-roadworks. We stopped on a bench for a village-shop lunch of pork pie and fizzy pop, chatted and joked, and bird spotted. It was all very 1970s.

The café stop hasn't changed, though I suspect coffee is better now and the sandwich choice more imaginative than back then. Such as in Burnsall, a delightful Wharfedale village whose friendly, local, traditional-feeling café overlooks the riverside green. I sat out the rain by browsing the local paper

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In the '70s you had to stay outside youth hostels in the rain until you were admitted at 5pm, bring your own sheet sleeping bag, and do a task such as dust the piano
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(Craven Herald & Pioneer, Voice of the Dales since 1853) whose news stories – theft of silverware from a church, cycle club rides, council rows, towpath improvements – seemed enduring, too.

One thing that has changed in the last half-century, however, is traffic. Levels have doubled since then, and it often feels like the size of vehicle has as well. The vast majority of the Way of the Roses is on little-used back lanes that are still a tranquil pleasure to ride. But several times a monster SUV occupying the width of a single-track road would come barrelling up at, or past, me, forcing me to ride on the verge.

Getting to and from either end by train proved easy. Depending on who you talk to, the nationalised British Rail era of the 1970s was either a golden age (simple fares! your bike went in the guard's van!) or awful (frequent cancellations, lateness, horrible sandwiches).

Well, I had no problems to Morecambe on the Transpennine and Northern services there. On the first I could buy my ticket in cash on the train, and have my lack of a booked bike space overlooked with a smile. On Northern, which supplied my escape train from Bridlington, bike spaces are all walk-up anyway.