



Dan waiting for an Åland Islands ferry



Scotland

Northern islands

Last summer, 78-year-old ex-Marine **Jonathan Thomson** rode across Orkney and Shetland

ON A SEVEN-DAY cycling adventure across the Orkney and Shetland islands, I joined three ex-forces colleagues to raise funds for UK veterans' mental health charity PTSD Resolution. We aimed to cycle to the northernmost road in the British Isles and back, covering over 700km.

This journey tested our grit and determination as we battled the elements, while also rewarding us with diverse landscapes and wildlife. From ancient stone circles to wartime history, Orkney's otherworldly beauty fascinated us. Crossing to Shetland brought mist and rain but the vibrant wildflowers were a heart-warming sight.

We reached our northernmost point at SaxaVord Spaceport, before turning south to Lerwick. Our final day in Shetland brought peaceful scenery and playful lambs. On Orkney, the Neolithic sites and lush green fields captivated us. Seeing dolphins on our return to the mainland was a delightful ending.

This trip allowed us to connect with history and nature while raising money for a meaningful cause. Despite challenges from the weather, each day brought accomplishment. The array of wildlife, from dolphins to ground-nesting birds, was a privilege to observe. The diversity of landscapes, from open moors to green valleys, created an unforgettable backdrop. Most special was the camaraderie between myself, Jim, Matt and Jez.

Our fourth cycle for PTSD Resolution has now raised over £100,000. This journey tested our limits but brought profound rewards.

Hoyle, Orkney – Scapa Flow to north



Finland

The longest day

Sometimes cycling touring doesn't go to plan. Dan Wynn recalls a day that was too long, too hot and too mosquito plagued...

On the cycling trips I've done, I find there's one day when you really hate your bike. Most of the time it's great but that bad day is also part of cycle touring. That day where you have to grit your teeth and ride through the hate to rediscover your love for cycling. For me that day came on the Åland Islands, halfway through a tour of the Archipelago Sea.

I was overtired and sunburned. Already 30km into the ride, the campsite was another 24km away. It was unbearably hot. I had no food or water. Then I arrived at the campsite, there in the middle of nowhere, and it was closed. It was devastating.

I huffed and puffed but no matter how hard I blew, that wooden barrier wasn't opening. So of course I did what any reasonable person would do: I blamed it all on my bike. It was as if the previous 160km and four days that it had carried me meant nothing. Then I searched my torn map and found another campsite 18km away. I would likely arrive at 10pm – even hotter, even thirstier, even more miserable.

With little choice I rode on under

the midnight sun along heat-reflecting tarmac, passing Falu red barns and mottled-brown Ayrshire cattle. Open farmland shelved away to the right, ending in an azure sea that mirrored the clear skies overhead. On my left was sparse pine forest. Feathery green needles and brittle pine cones littered the road.

A blast of decaying seaweed hit me around the next bend. It marked the bridge to Prästö Island. The map said my campsite would be opposite. To my relief it was – and it was open. I pedalled into a deserted field and wearily unpacked my tent. Resting my cramped legs in the calm evening, I began to rekindle my love for cycle travel. Then an army of mosquitoes arrived...



A break by the Baltic