

Feature

ADVENTURES FOR ALL

WITH BETTER ROUTE DESIGN AND INFORMATION, ALONG WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT, BIKEPACKING IS SOMETHING THAT ALL CYCLISTS CAN ENJOY, AS VICKY BALFOUR EXPLAINS



VICKY BALFOUR

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Over the last few years there has been an explosion of multi-day cycling routes – not least from Cycling UK. Often a mix of road, traffic-free and off-road cycling, they are making adventure cost effective and accessible for so many able-bodied adults. If you've got younger children or have a disability, however, it's easy to feel unseen by route planners.

When Cycling UK launched the Rebellion Way, I was thrilled to hear that a handcyclist on a recumbent trike was one of the inaugural riders. Finally, I felt that there might be a chance for my daughter CeCe and I to join the multi-day ride party. As a mum/support worker for a young person with disabilities, it's easy to feel left behind when other friends hop on their bikes and pedal off to explore. That one throwaway comment – that the Rebellion Way had been designed to be more accessible – lit up in my brain like a neon sign.

I immediately contacted a couple of friends who are also mums, and asked if they'd like to try three days of cycling with us in Norfolk. They agreed.

SMILES, NOT MILES

On closer inspection, even the Rebellion Way's shorter loop was still going to take about a week for us to complete towing our youngsters. We'd also miss all the beach bits with that shorter version. We weren't deterred!

Kelly-Jayne (Kell) Collinge and Phoebe Sneddon are my go-to mum adventurers. We were determined to find a way to ride at least part of the Rebellion Way. Phoebe started playing with options on Komoot, and soon we had a 'taster loop' that was approximately 30km each day. At this point we had no idea how realistic that was going to be.

Phoebe's son Torben was only seven months old, Kell's son Atlas was two and my daughter CeCe was about to turn 17. We were towing all three on trailers: Torben and Atlas in Thule and Burley models, CeCe on her Mission Cycles Piggyback trailer trike. None of us had electric assistance on our bikes. It was deep winter, with piercing sunshine, heavy frost at night and short days. Within a few hours of starting our first day we realised that we'd have to make significant changes to our route to stand any chance of progressing.

"It's OK, we can cut out Hunstanton today and just go straight to Heacham Manor," Phoebe said. Prioritising warmth and comfort, we chopped off sections of route with alacrity. The secret to inclusive bikepacking is to keep expectations

loose and remember that just being out together is what counts.

The following day we again found ourselves racing against the fading light when we pedalled through Holkham Park. As twilight replaced cold winter sun, we had our third puncture



Kell and CeCe keeping their spirits up with a mid-ride hug