

Great Rides

TODDLING
UP THE
LOIRE

The Loire à Vélo is a family-friendly route that heads upriver from the Atlantic. Sam Jones rode the first 206km with his partner and son



SAM JONES

Sam is currently wondering where to put all the luggage for his next family tour, when his son will be in a child seat

Afternoon sunlight gleamed on the waters of the Canal Maritime de la Basse-Loire. As we supped our Pelforth beers in the shade, children squeezed the last drops of enjoyment from the final day of their summer holiday, leaping from the heights of the locks 100 yards away.

The canal took 10 years to build, opening in 1892 and closing just 19 years later as merchants turned to the railways over the slower ways of barges. Now an idyll for locals escaping the larger cities of Saint-Nazaire to the west and Nantes to the east, its willow-sheltered picnic stops and undisturbed swim spots are eagerly sought.

The mouth of the Loire was once home to swarms of little grey shrimps. "Aah, les petites crevettes gris!" sighed a 30-something Frenchman nearby, soaking up the sun in his deckchair. "Sautéed in butterrrrr with garlic and rosemary!" He smacked his lips in memory of a dish his father served.

Earlier that day we'd passed huts on stilts connected to the land by narrow gangways. They had giant nets fixed to miniature cranes that would dip into the Loire

and come out heaving with shrimp. Our French friend lamented today's less plentiful catches. It was a cherished dish he wished to share with his young son, and that was why they were in Frossay.

"Your son, he should try some, too!" he said nodding to 18-month-old Cosimo, as he napped in his trailer. Before we could answer, the little lad woke and made his demands for food, water and a nappy change known. When we'd finished attending to him, our French friend and his son had disappeared, hopefully in a successful hunt for shrimp. I reattached the trailer to my bike and began a slow ride back to our campsite.

TEETHING PROBLEMS

We'd only been on the road for two days, covering little more than 70km in all. It felt like much further. Travelling and camping with a toddler will do that, especially after a trip that involved two long car journeys, an overnight ferry and two train trips (one cancelled prematurely)

to reach the start of our ride. Oh, and there was a heatwave. That was unexpected; we'd packed for cooler weather.

We've ridden with Cosimo since he was old enough for his trailer,



Those are damp trunks keeping Sam's head cool

Top: Returning to the trailer before leaving the campsite in Chalonnes-sur-Loire on the last day