

Lochranza Castle on Arran's north coast



Spokes CTC members at Ness Point, Lowestoft



Scotland

The Five Ferries route

The Firth of Clyde is perfect for an island-hopping tour, as **Sandy D Franklin** discovered in spring

It was second time lucky. Last autumn we were scuppered as storms were rolling in and the Tarbet-to-Portavadie ferry was out of action. This spring we set off again. Not to do the route as a challenge in one day or even two but four, purely to linger in these beautiful Scottish landscapes.

We started in Lochranza, Arran, and took the first ferry over to Cloanaig, Kintyre. Kilbrannan Sound was mirror calm, the landscape shrouded in mist. The ride to Tarbet was carpeted with bluebells, the fragrance mixing with the coconut-scented flowering gorse. Eider ducks greeted us at the Tarbet ferry. 'Welcome to Argyll's secret coast' said the sign in Portavadie as we set off to Bute Sound and Kames Bay, our first stop for the night, which offered breathtaking views over West Kyle.

Next morning we woke to rain but it didn't detract from the lushness of the Cowal Peninsula, the land dense with deciduous trees. A hilly day took us high above West Kyle, round Loch Ridden and down East Kyle to Colintraive for the third, five-minute ferry over to Rhubodach on Bute. Cold and wet but with a wind on our back, we soon arrived at Glenburn Hotel, Rothesay.

We woke to weak sunshine and a beautiful light over Bute, but Cowal and Ayrshire were lost in the haze. The fourth ferry took us to Wemyss Bay on the Ayrshire coast, where we rode to Ardrossan for the ferry to Brodick. The sun burned off the mainland haze, revealing rhododendrons everywhere. The route followed the



Sandy in front of the Kyles of Bute

A78 but there was little traffic. Beyond Fairlie we picked up a cycle path, nicely separated from the road, passing through woodland and fields to Seamill Hydro, our next stop.

Our final day was gloriously sunny but Arran was nowhere to be seen until we were on our last ferry. The sun then reached the island, leaving not a cloud in the sky. We rode up the east coast through Corrie, then onto Sannox and the climb over the Boguille, with jagged, granite mountains to our left. Then we descended Glen Chalmadale to Lochranza, where seals lounged on the rocks and swallows flew overhead.

Boguille road, Arran



England & Wales

Side to side

David Griffiths cycled home to Cardiff from the UK's easternmost point

NESS POINT, LOWESTOFT, is the most easterly point in the British Isles. It's only 110 miles from the Hague in the Netherlands but 310 by lanes and cycle tracks from Cardiff. That was where we, a dozen members of Cardiff-based Spokes CTC, were headed.

Our route followed the verdant Waveney Valley through Suffolk to Bury St Edmunds, then over the rolling downs to Newmarket and Cambridge. We followed the floodplain of the Great Ouse to Bedford, then crossed over the M1 to discover the dystopian future in Milton Keynes.

From there, we cycled to the dreaming spires of Oxford and up the Thames Valley, almost to its source in the Cotswolds. Finally we plummeted into the Severn Valley and crossed the old Severn Bridge back to South Wales.

Six days of cycling meant a leisurely pace and pleasant impromptu coffee and lunch stops in the many lovely villages and towns along the way. We saw little traffic, apart from in major towns. We were only held up by marvelling at the medieval wool churches in East Anglia, by the strings of thoroughbred racehorses crossing our path near Newmarket Heath, and by the GPS-guided delivery pods trundling around Milton Keynes like obedient dogs.

Our route crossed 12 OS Landranger maps and could have been extended to St David's Head. But with several septuagenarians and one octogenarian in the party, all on 'analogue' bikes, we decided that our side-to-side ride had gone far enough.