



**YOUR MOTORHOME IS PERFECT FOR EXPLORING...**

# BY BIKE

Having cycles on board can turn a pleasant trip in to a wheely great one!

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Cycling in Austria



Carol Kubicki...

... and her partner, Anthony use their Devon Sundowner to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling while exploring historical and natural environments

**F**or me, cycling is the superlative outdoor activity. I get fresh air and exercise, I'm able to travel greater distances than on foot whilst not moving so quickly that I miss interesting sights or sounds and the wheels and gears make progress effortless – at least downhill!

Whereas walking is sociable and an opportunity for a chat, it's more difficult to have a conversation with my partner when we are cycling, particularly as, uphill, he is usually somewhere on the horizon. I am left to enjoy my surroundings and to creatively daydream. I have certainly written the most amusing and engaging *MMM* travel articles in my head while cycling!

A cycling trip is the perfect day out from our 'van. In my dreams the sky is blue and I cycle along quiet trails and lanes, with the warmth of the sun on my arms and a gentle breeze in my hair. In this reverie, I am surrounded by beautiful scenery and charming villages, all with a welcoming café.

In the real world, of course, those sun-drenched days don't happen outside of my fantasies as often as I would like. However, since Sustrans got to grips with National Cycle Routes, there are now tracks across the country. A quick search of the Sustrans website or a scan of the Ordnance Survey map and I am ready to pedal!

We were cyclists in our pre-campervan days, but having the 'Blue Bus' has opened up opportunities to enjoy our bikes on holiday, as well as from home. We like to find campsites where we can cycle without moving the 'van. We have a Thule towbar-mounted rack fitted, which is convenient

and easy to use; just a few minutes' labour and the bikes are secured on the back.

Living in the northwest, the Peak District is easily accessible and has a popular network of off-road routes on old railway lines that are traffic-free. Rivendale Caravan Park, near Ashbourne, Derbyshire, is spitting distance from the Tissington Trail; 13 miles of glorious cycling are up for grabs from this elevated route with extensive views. The Tissington Trail is joined by the High Peak Trail, a further 17 miles of former railway line that winds gently towards Cromford. Together, these two routes open up great circular tours.

We planned a splendid 33-mile route following these trails to Middleton Top and then country lanes and the cycle paths around Carsington Water back to the Tissington Trail. It's a superb route, but I found that someone had sneaked in a very steep hill after the ford near Bradbourne that tested my legs to the limit.

Even if you walk the hill, this is a perfect ride for a summer's day with pubs and cafés for rest stops. Despite my sun-drenched dreams, we were there on a fine April day after some unseasonable snow, which still lined parts of the route and helped me feel like an intrepid explorer.

**RIGHT** Cycling in the pine woods near Formby

**BELOW** It isn't obligatory to wear Lycra

**BELOW RIGHT** Cycling by the coast is often easy and offers a good mix of scenery; Roadside repairs are sometimes necessary

## NATIONAL ROUTES FOR UK

Away from former railway lines, navigation can be an irritation for cyclists. You've just got through your gears and are bowling along when a road junction, with signs that don't point to anywhere familiar, means ►

## WHAT WE CARRY

- Park Multi-tool MTB3 and pliers/cable cutters
- Brake and gear inner cable
- Inner tube, folding tyre, small pump, puncture repair kit and tyre levers
- Heavy-duty hand wipes and disposable gloves
- Zip ties and chain links
- On longer trips, a cassette remover, big spanner and chain whip

## BUYING A BIKE

- Try before you buy for comfort and fit
- Expect to pay at least £400 (the upper limit is almost infinite)
- An aluminium frame will save weight on your payload compared to steel
- Bikes with interchangeable wheels and spares are helpful if you are a two-cyclist family





“In this reverie, I am surrounded by **beautiful** scenery and **charming** villages, each with a **welcoming** café”



#### TOP TIPS

- Both our bikes are fitted with rear racks to fit a rack-bag and an Ortleib pannier. I can't praise these panniers enough. They are waterproof, easy to fit and voluminous, but pack flat when not in use
- Use a water bottle and carry it in a bottle cage
- Use a head torch, which can double up as front lights for emergency use
- Helmets are compulsory for cyclists in Spain with complex exclusions
- Some countries require a rear warning board for bikes on a rear rack



*“Having a lightweight bike can often be useful”*

you have to stop and consult the map. While I might enjoy the excuse to rest, navigation is easier when the signage is cycling specific and so we seek out National Cycle Routes. The North Wales Coastal Cycle Way stretches 34 miles from near Prestatyn to Penmaenmawr beyond Conwy. Using Prestatyn as a base we took the bikes on a crowded summer train to Llandudno, cycling back along the excellent tarmac path through a continually changing backdrop of lively traditional seaside resorts and unspoilt coast. We cycled to the stunning Point of Ayr RSPB bird reserve overlooking the Dee Estuary.

Other coastal routes we rate highly are the Mawddach Estuary Trail from Dolgellau to Barmouth, along another old railway line. The route is through stunning mountain and coastal scenery and you have to treat yourself to an ice-cream in Knickerbockers ice-cream parlour in Barmouth.

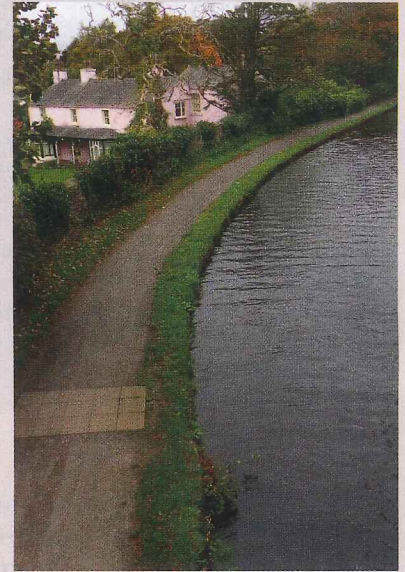
From Southport Caravan Club site, you can quickly join the Trans Pennine Trail to Liverpool and over the Pennines. We haven't

cycled that far but, turning off at Ainsdale, we headed into the tranquil pine woods, where red squirrels threaten to run under your wheels, and on to the magnificent Formby sand dunes and beach.

Canal towpaths are opening up to cycling and, along with river paths, offer flat cycling with hassle-free navigation. Further from home, the Thames Cycle Route is easily accessed from the club site at Chertsey.

Back in the north, Lancashire has championed cycling and I was keen to try out some of the local routes. Bolton-le-Sands, on the coast, proved a good starting point and eight miles along the canal found us in the attractive city of Lancaster. You can have a café stop and return the same way. We chose to continue on the signed route to Morecambe, treating ourselves to hot chocolate at the magnificently restored 1930s Midland Hotel and an ice-cream at Brucciani's before being blown along the seafront by a tailwind and rejoining the canal at Hest Bank.

Scotland is well known for its excellent



## INFORMATION

- **Sustrans**  [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk)
- **Cyclestreets** has a useful map of cycle routes and will route plan  [cyclestreets.net/journey](http://cyclestreets.net/journey)
- **Google maps** include a route planning option for cycling  [google.co.uk](http://google.co.uk)
- **British Cycling** website allows you to find your nearest bike shop, regional route guides and route planning if you register  [britishcycling.org.uk](http://britishcycling.org.uk)

**ABOVE CLOCKWISE** Keswick to Threlkeld cycle trail in autumn; Cycling by the Cinéma Éden in Cosne-Cours-sur-Loire, Nièvre, France; The Lancaster Canal tow path at Bolton-le-Sands is flat and easily navigable; The Point of Ayr and the start of the North Wales Coastal Cycle Route

**LEFT TOP** Mawddach Estuary Trail: 9.5 miles of old railway line between Dolgellau and Barmouth

mountain biking routes, but I have also found some good road cycling here. A favourite is the Machars peninsula in Dumfries and Galloway using the Garlieston Caravan Club site as a base. The quiet lanes around the gently undulating farmland take you on a historical journey with Neolithic chambered cairns, early Christian sites and more recent industrial heritage to explore.

I could continue to list favourite cycle routes we have travelled on over the years: the old railway line to Keswick in the Lake District and the tracks and lanes around Delamere Forest in Cheshire. The Manifold Trail, in the Peak District, which follows a steep-sided valley with dramatic limestone crags and caves above and has the added excitement of Swainsley Tunnel – and the perfect refreshment stop at Wetton Mill – are just more examples.

Then there is my wish list that will keep us cycling for some years to come: Caernarfon to Porthmadog; around the Wirral estuary; along the East Fife coast; the Somerset Levels and so on...

**CROSSING THE CHANNEL**

Crossing the Channel opens up all sorts of cycling and countries where cyclists are generally treated with respect and given space, making road cycling more relaxing. Whether it's cycling to the bakery, bowling along a French *voie verte* or following a route along a German river, we always find beautiful places to take our bikes.

One area that stands out is Marais Poitevin. This charming area in western France, near Niort, is a maze of tracks and lanes beside tree-lined canals and meadows dotted with picturesque cottages and attractive villages.

After booking into a campsite in Europe, I generally ask if they have information about local cycling. Many sites will have a folder of route maps, usually between 10km (6.2 miles) and 40km (24.8 miles).

However, one Italian campsite on the Tuscan coast had a collection, the shortest of which was 44km (27.3 miles) and included some up to 100km. I looked around; the campsite appeared to be full ►

## WHERE TO STAY

-  **Upper Hurst Farm**, Hulme End, Hartington, Staffordshire SK17 0HH  
 01298 687273  [upperhurstfarm.com](http://upperhurstfarm.com)  
 All year  Two adults, pitch and electric: From £23
-  **Tan-y-Fron Caravan and Camping Park**, Arran Road, Dolgellau, Gwynedd LL40 2AA  
 01341 422638  [campsitesnowdonia.co.uk](http://campsitesnowdonia.co.uk)  
 All year  Two adults, pitch and electric: From £22.50
-  **Delamere Forest Camping and Caravanning Club Site**, Station Road, Delamere, Cheshire CW8 2HZ  
 01606 889231  [campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk](http://campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)  
 All year  Two adults, pitch and electric: From £15.40
-  **Garlieston Caravan Club Site**, Garlieston, Dumfries and Galloway DG8 8BS  
 01988 600636  [caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)  
 20 March - 2 November  Two adults, pitch and electric: From £14.40
-  **La Venise Verte**, 178 Route des Bords de Sèvre, 79510 Coulon, France  
 0033 549 359036  [camping-laveniseverte.com](http://camping-laveniseverte.com)  
 1 April - 31 October  Two adults, pitch and electric: From €23.50 (£18)



*“Taking your bike on a train or a boat can be useful”*

of the usual low-season over 50s, not aspiring Tour de France cyclists. In an effort to prove my cycling ability, I rejected the shortest route. My vanity meant that we cycled over 50km that day up and down the Italian hills, in the hot Tuscan sunshine.

### WHAT'S THE KIT?

You don't need lots of gear to take up cycling, but the bike you buy will depend on the sort of cycling you want to do. I favour a lightweight hybrid that takes just 11kg from our payload. It has slightly knobbly tyres, so is perfect for both tarmac and gravel tracks.

To wear Lycra or not? I like the extra comfort that cycling shorts give when on the bike for more than half-an-hour. My partner, Anthony, finds a cycling shirt with a rear pocket useful for his specs and the map. We both find padded cycling gloves and sunglasses to keep the flies out of our eyes invaluable. Whatever you wear, dress for comfort and carry layers, as it is surprising how hot you get slogging uphill and how cool freewheeling downhill can be, even on the sunniest day.


Cycling in the rain isn't much fun and we try to avoid it as much as possible. If we are caught out, we use the same waterproof over-trousers and gaiters we have for

walking. One time we were caught in a heavy thunderstorm on a ride and sheltered under a large tree in a village street. The broom-carrying homeowner appeared and we thought he was going to berate us for using his tree. We judged too quickly; he had, in fact, come to offer us shelter from the storm.

And this brings me to my final point; never underestimate the camaraderie of fellow cyclists. They are often willing to stop and show off their expertise and may have a better toolkit than you.

You will, hopefully, avoid major breakdowns on your cycling trips – but you do need to be prepared for punctures. One unlucky day we had to stop and mend a puncture twice in what was intended to be a short afternoon trip. We learnt that a spare inner tube and a good-quality pump make puncture repair less of a drama and that a pack of hand wipes soon restores respectability.

In our 'going-out-for-the-day cupboard' in the van we keep the bike bag packed with spares, tools and cycling gloves, as well as the first aid kit, sunhats and waterproofs, all ready to quickly grab for a day out.

Remember – you can always tell the happy cyclist by the flies on her teeth. That will be me, particularly on a sunny day! 

**ABOVE** Panniers are better for full days out or in potentially changeable weather