



Newsletter September 2013

Now that the summer holidays are over, we hope that you have enjoyed the fine weather cycling and walking somewhere attractive. This month we are including two accounts of cycling holidays on the continent, both providing a sharp contrast to the provision here in the UK, by Vincent Walsh and David Beetham respectively.

Vincent Goes Dutch.....and glimpses Paradise.

On 8 August our family including two 9 year olds boarded the Hull train with our bikes at Manchester Piccadilly to catch the overnight ferry to Rotterdam. We woke the following morning in cycling heaven – aka the Netherlands. The moment our tyres touched Dutch soil a (usually) segregated cycle lane carried us from Den Haag to Amsterdam, Arnhem and Dordrecht sleeping at Stayokay (YHA) hostels, all very cycle friendly with storage and sometimes a resident mechanic.

Cycling is normal and natural involving all ages both self-propelled or being carried in a range of contraptions and extensions. Helmets and lycra are rare – and usually a means of identifying Brit tourists. Motorists defer to cyclists at most junctions. The Dutch have invested in infrastructure over decades (current level £24 per head) but two measures make a real difference – on all one-way streets there are contra-flow cycle lanes and 30kph (18.5mph) is the default speed in residential areas. Bikes are very visible – static and mobile. All public buildings, offices, stations, shopping and housing developments are provided with generous parking, generally of the wheel grabbing type but Sheffield stands are increasing.

Our ten day circuit was aided by Dutch Railways which are cheap – flat rate child fare of €2.50. Rolling stock varies in accessibility, for some there are steep steps from platform to carriage level. Cycle carriage is allowed outside weekday peak commuter times on daily payment of a €6 *Dagkaart fiets binnenland*. Places cannot be reserved but trains are so frequent that it does not matter.

Is there anything amiss in Paradise? Just get used to sharing your cycle path with mopeds. A small price to pay for living in Cycletopia.

David Goes German, on a holiday including a 3 day cycling tour.

Germany is criss-crossed with off-road cycle tracks, perhaps the longest of which stretches from Basel in Switzerland down the whole length of the Rhine to its mouth at Rotterdam in Holland. Our tour took us down a small tributary of the Rhine called the Ahr from its source in the small village of Blankenheim near the Belgian border to the point where it joins the Rhine, and then down the much larger river to Bonn. The Ahr is a narrow river, continually bending through wooded hills and gorges reminiscent of the Wye valley, until the woods give way to sloping vineyards producing a crisp Riesling wine which we indulged in on our overnight stops at the local inns on the way.

We were nine in all, including two children and five pensioners, so the pace was moderate and the distances each day modest, averaging 45 kilometres. My partner has difficulty cycling on her own, so we had hired a tandem, which proved hazardous to mount and to start, but faster than the others once we were under way. Our journey to the starting point from Bonn had involved two trains, but all regional trains are equipped with a cycling compartment capable of taking up to twenty bikes, with lifts at most stations to make transfer between platforms easier. Other notable features of cycling in Germany are not only that it is a normal mode of transport in most towns and cities, but that as many women as men cycle compared with a ratio of one to three here in the UK. This is because cycling has been made so much safer. Perhaps there are grounds here for a challenge to our own inadequate provision under equality legislation?

One-and-a-half Cheers for Manchester

This is an appropriate point to inform those of you who haven't heard that Greater Manchester has won £20m from the Government to improve cycling provision in the city region (we wrote in support of the bid along with other cycling groups). Improved routes that are particularly relevant to us because of their proximity to the Loop are: Bridgewater canal towpath from Stretford into Castlefield, with a link to Salford Quays; Ashton Canal towpath extension to Ashton town centre; on-road segregated cycleway along Wilmslow Road to East Didsbury; segregated cycleway through Stockport town centre. However this is a drop in the ocean compared with the money for new road building, not to mention the £900m Boris Johnson has available to spend on cycling in London. But be thankful for small mercies!

Other news items

- The Friends have been shortlisted for an award under the Spirit of Manchester most successful campaigns programme. This is in the Partnership category, in recognition of our work with other voluntary groups and public bodies along the length of the Loop. A short film will be made of some of our projects for the awards ceremony in late September, and to help promote ourselves and use of the Loop.
- The Friends of Debdale Outdoor Centre have been successful in a bid to the National Lottery for a grant of £10,000 to provide mountain bikes and cycling equipment for young people to use on the adjacent cycle ways (including the Fallowfield Loop).
- Sustrans have been awarded a Lottery grant in recognition of the success of the national Connect2 programme of new installations for cycling, including in our region.
- New fencing has been installed at the Sherwood Street entrance by Back on Track volunteers, and application made to the Woodland Trust for hedging to improve the look of this key entrance.
- Peter Rowley and a colleague have completed a survey of Himalayan Balsam along the Loop, and removed the main concentrations of the plant.

Forthcoming events

- **Saturday/Sunday 7-8 September:** Lara Moore of Lovelevy is organising improvement work with a young people's group at the Levenshulme old station site (Crayfield Road etc.), from 11-4 each day. Members will be most welcome to help improve this key site, which includes the community orchard. The work will involve painting, litter clearing, creating a path and installing signage for the four quadrants.
- **Monday 16 September:** Members' Meeting, 7.30 pm at the Union Chapel, Wellington Road, Fallowfield. We hope to have the North-west regional organiser of Sustrans, Eleanor Roaf, as guest speaker. Please note the date – we hope to see you there.

- **Stop Press:** There is another event scheduled for the weekend of 7-8 September, namely the annual carnival at Debdale Park. Colin Bennett, one of our committee members is organising a ride from Chorlton on Saturday 7th to meet up with the Debdale event. The start of the ride will be at 12 noon from the Metro station at St. Werburgh's, and passing Sainsbury's Fallowfield at 12.30. The ride will arrive in Gorton to watch the 'All the Fun of the Fair' themed parade enter Debdale Park, officially beginning the carnival. There will be a Civil War history re-enactment camp, including cannons, also stalls, stage show, music, fairground, food and much more. The Sailing and Outdoor Centre will be open, for those who want to try canoeing, sailing or powerboats, all at £5 or less. Or you could ride back to Levenshulme and take part in the work at the quadrants site!