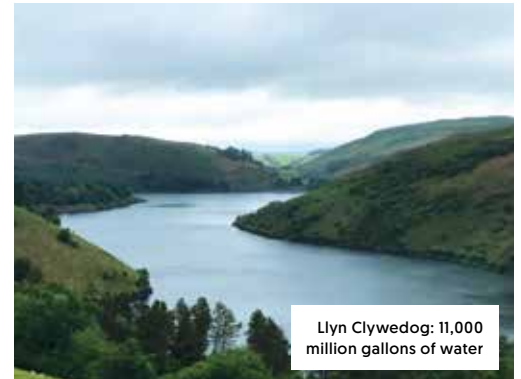




Over half the route is on greenways



Llyn Clywedog: 11,000 million gallons of water

Wales

Llanidloes loops

A five-mile limit in lockdown didn't stop **Barbara Grantham** from exploring by bike

TRAVELLING IN WALES was very different during lockdown. Government guidelines limited us to a five-mile radius of home. Fortunately I live in Mid Wales on Sustrans NCN Route 8, close to the source of the River Severn. I discovered many amazing circular routes right on my doorstep.

I've particularly enjoyed cycling to the spectacular Llyn Clywedog which, as the crow flies, is only a mile away. Various possible routes use parts of Route 8 and 81, as well as the Severn Way and Glyndwr's Way, and vary from eight to 25 miles, the longer ones taking in the full sweep of the six-mile reservoir.

My regular ride starts with a steep climb, but once at the top there is an impressive view of the dam in the distance. The route goes through gated farmland, down a steep descent and four gates, and back onto a minor road. I usually visit the 'Look Out', high above the dam. It has a superb panoramic view of the lake.

The ruins of the Bryntail lead mines are laid out below at the foot of the dam. So far I have been lucky enough to have the place to myself. It's been quiet apart the sound of the birds and the river.

The return route takes in a short bridleway and a little-used road that wends its way through a shady oak forest, finally emerging at Llanidloes.

France

L'Avenue Verte

Ruth Hill and husband **David** sampled the London-Paris route last September

"Another 'Route Barrée'! I just don't believe it!" Cycle path closures were a common problem on our way to Paris. In the end we mostly ignored the signs; a bike can usually get through.

The Avenue Verte is a largely traffic-free route between the two capitals. Yet it proved more of a challenge than we had anticipated. The terrain was varied, from fabulous smooth cycle paths on old railways to considerable climbs on country roads. Some of the off-road sections took us along the edge of arable fields.

We followed the Epte and Oise valleys through the rolling landscape of northern France. There's a choice of approach routes to Paris; we took the longer, eastern way, which offered great riding along a new cycle path to the cathedral city of Beauvais.

Another 60km took us to Senlis and its cobbled, narrow streets. That was an eventful day. We were flagged down in the forested section by a ranger: there was a tree blocking the road ahead. We couldn't get through even if we carried the bikes, we were

told. A hastily-found rough track took us round the obstacle.

We arrived in Paris via a fantastic ride alongside the River Seine, and continued along the Canal St-Denis. It was all flat easy riding.

For our return journey, we retraced our route to the split at Neuville-sur-Oise, following the shorter western route back via Gisors to Gournay-en-Bray. Then we rode to Dieppe along well-signed cycle paths.

We didn't start from London, choosing instead to cycle from home in Kent. Mostly the sun shone on us. We cycled 668km there and back over ten days. It was a great, accessible, cycling adventure.

There's also a map. Visit avenueverte.londonparis.co.uk





Michael in Carlingford, Rol. NI is across the lough

Northern Ireland

Border weaver

Michael Brennan enjoyed frictionless travel over the Northern Ireland border last summer

Before Covid-19, Brexit was top of the news agenda. I decided to cycle along the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, a line on a map in the middle of rivers and over the tops of mountains. I found myself crossing that line often, pedalling effortlessly in and out of the UK.

My start point was Muff, County Donegal, in the Republic of Ireland (Rol). I rode south along the Foyle estuary through Derry/Londonderry/ City of Derry, Strabane, Clady, and Castlederg. After 48 miles I reached Pettigo, Rol, where urban legend says you can sit in Brittons Bar in Rol and pass a pint to a customer in NI.

Next day I cycled alongside

Lough Erne through Beleek, Belcoo and Blacklion to end up in another B, Belturbet, in County Cavan, Rol. On day three, my progress was slowed by a mechanical problem with the bike so I only reached Monaghan, Rol. To continue my journey, I used a hire bike. I cycled along the border roads from Glaslough to Keady to Castleblaney, Rol, where pubs were showing the Champions League final between Liverpool and Spurs. Not much interest to this Everton fan!

Another day, another border crossing. The quiet roads of south Armagh took me through Cullaville, Crossmaglen, Forkhill, Jonesborough and Meigh as far as Newry. The frontier then runs south along the Newry Canal; I crossed it for the final time near Omeath, County Louth, Rol.

There was little to mark my border crossings. The landscape is the same. There are no border officers, no police, no official flags, no border post, no frontier discount stores. In cycling terms, there's no difference at all.

I finished my ride by carrying on to Dundalk, County Louth, Rol. I'd recommend this tour. Let's hope it remains possible to cycle so freely in future.



River Termon: NI on the left, Rol the right



Allan with his calendar of pen-and-ink drawings

Southern England

Church going

Allan Plumpton takes off his cycle-clips in awkward reverence

THE BEDS & HERTS Historic Churches Trust Annual 'Ride & Stride' began at 10am. Fortunately, the nearest church to me was just three minutes away in St Michael's village. I was its first visitor.

The ride was a loop through southern Bedfordshire and northern Hertfordshire, an area largely new to me. So I rode with a route-sheet and map in view on my handlebar.

My tour proper started north of St Albans in Flitwick, a train ride away. Taking the right road out of Flitwick station, I soon arrived at the next church, St Peter and St Paul. I parked my bike by the porch, then queued with a dozen others to sign in, grab a mug of coffee and biscuit, and gulp them down. It was quite a scrum as we emerged from the churchyard.

And so it went on throughout that day until I ran out of time at 6pm. The last church on my list – in Harlington – had already shut up shop. The visitor sheet had been pinned to the main door, however, so I was still able to record my visit. After a cuppa at a friend's house in the village, I caught the train home to St Albans.

I raised just over £300 in sponsorship, and it was an interesting day out. Historic churches can be captivating. I've made pen-and-ink drawings of many, some of which appear in a calendar of Sussex sights that I've just put together (see p56).



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