



Details

- **Where:** Yorkshire Dales
- **Start/finish:** Settle, North Yorkshire
- **Distance:** 23km
- **Pictures:** Joolze Dymond



Top: The view from Jubilee Cave, last winter
Bottom: Climbing towards Nappa Cross, Sep 2020



**HANNAH
COLLINGRIDGE
& JOOLZE
DYMOND**

Hannah is a full-time writer and ex-bike mechanic

Joolze is a pro photographer who takes her drone everywhere

Great Rides

TIME OUT

A night under the stars is an escape from day-to-day cares. **Hannah Collingridge** and **Joolze Dymond** persuaded their partners to join them

Taking a break in 2020 has been tough. Lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing have curtailed opportunities to get away, with or without a bike. At least we've been able to keep cycling. And with a bike and some bags, it's possible to have an adventure without straying far from home: a sub-24-hour overnighter (S24O) takes you out of the house (at last!) and into the great outdoors.

Joolze and I have done plenty of bikepacking but our other halves haven't been with us before. Joolze's husband, Dave, used to do hillwalking and backpacking. My wife, Norna, has a lot of lightweight camping experience – in Australia. So she's a dab hand at setting up mosquito nets and checking boots for spiders but hasn't been bivvying in Britain. There was experience, therefore, but all in the dim and distant past.

INTO THE HILLS

For our overnight trip, we wouldn't need to leave Yorkshire. We picked the Settle Loop in the Dales, with an extension towards Malham Tarn. We've ridden it before as a group. A familiar route means that you don't have to worry about other things while you get used to the handling of a loaded bike.

Whichever way round you do the loop – we did it clockwise – there's a big climb out of Settle. The planned format was: lunch before we set off; a very leisurely ride, enjoying

“
A familiar route means that you don't have to worry about other things while you get used to riding a loaded bike
”

the fine autumnal weather and limestone scenery; camp up for the evening; then ride back to Settle for a second breakfast next morning. Joolze and I had done an overnighter here in the snow last December so we already had a couple of promising bivvy spots in mind.

It is a stiff and steady climb out of Settle, the tarmac giving way to a limestone track and then to grass. Climbing is when you realise how heavy your bike is, even if you took care to take as little as possible. You need to find a sustainable rhythm. As Norna said: “There's no point aiming for your normal speed; just stick it in a low gear and tap it out. Let your mind wander and look around at the views.”

Grinding up hills seems to exacerbate any chafing. Apply chamois cream before you set off and reapply as soon as you feel hot spots starting. Take a small travel jar filled with some of your favourite brand.

Part way up the climb we stopped to have a breather and adjust the luggage on Norna's handlebar. It always takes a bit of fiddling to set up a particular bag on a particular bike just right.

What seems great in the car park needs to be trail tested. There's also the art of getting on a loaded bike, especially with a saddle pack sticking out of the back. Norna, who hasn't got the longest legs, was finding this... challenging. The rest of us were deeply supportive and laughed in empathy.



Clockwise: Handlebar rolls. Dave above Malham Tarn. Hot drinks all round



Baggage check

Seatpacks reviewed:
[cyclinguk.org/
 article/group-test-
 seatpost-bags-
 bikepacking](https://cyclinguk.org/article/group-test-seatpost-bags-bikepacking)

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

Along the Settle Loop there's a series of caves, famous for demonstrating 14,500 years of human history and 130,000 years of animal presence in the area. The finds have also helped our understanding of the post-glacial periods so it's an important site that's worth exploring. But doing so is better on foot so we continued on, past glorious views of Pen-y-ghent, one of Yorkshire's Three Peaks.

A little later we stopped for a brew. It's always good to keep the stove and supplies handy, maybe at the side of the roll bag on the handlebar, so you can stop and brew up easily. Any warm drink outside is the best thing ever. I've got a packable coffee filter, so Joolze and I can have fresh cup when we're out at the cost of very little extra weight. Dave and Norna had tea. I tend to drink brews without milk when bikepacking; fresh milk is heavy and goes off quickly, while powdered milk is the work of the devil.

A quick word at this point about mug dangling. This is where a mug is carried on the outside of a pack, where trail muck can get in and on it. Don't do it. Pack your mug in your bag and keep it clean: your guts will thank you for it. The trail is not an ideal place for stomach troubles.

We carried onwards to Malham Tarn, a rare natural lake in the limestone Dales. Usually, unless it's very wet, there isn't surface water on limestone. The rock is pervious, so water tends to be underground, carving its way below your feet. Malham Tarn is there because of a bit of Silurian slate. The water comes out of the tarn near the

road, and you can see where it disappears underground at Water Sinks. We had time to examine it as we were going to be out all night. Time moves differently on a bivvying trip.

MAKING CAMP

For the evening we found a discreet, sheltered spot, put up the tarp and shook out the sleeping bags. For food, we'd decided on dehydrated meals: heat the water, add to the pouch, and wait until it's rehydrated. It's a handy way of everyone getting something they like for tea, and you can busy yourself with other camp jobs while you wait.

Dave had treated himself to a new stove for the trip, so was busy exclaiming over how much more efficient it was than his old one. Then we dug out the cheese board... Joolze has a tiny cheese board as her luxury item on trips, complete with cheese and biscuits.

Of course you can make whatever you like over a camp stove. Just remember you've got to carry in both the food and the fuel. The good thing about a stove is that it leaves no trace. Campfires damage the ground and are serious fire hazards.

As it grew chilly, we all changed into something dry and warm. It's possible to sleep in your chamois but not pleasant. Much nicer to get changed. You'll really appreciate a warm jacket at this point. Down has the best warmth to weight ratio but synthetics are happier in the wet. Hats



Do it yourself Bikepacking basics

- Use what you have. Don't splash out before your first trip. Beg and borrow from friends.
- Keep the route and the level of riding simple. Better to under-do the first trip than to put people off.
- Take some treats for camp – biscuits, hot chocolate, etc.
- Ensure you have plenty of warm food and drink. You use more energy than you think keeping warm.

Lockdown limitations

The trip took place when 'the rule of six' applied. And now? Check cyclinguk.org/coronavirus



Top: Pen-y-ghent, from Joolze & Hannah's 2019 trip
Bottom: Hannah in her bivvy

are essential and a dry pair of socks is lovely. Pack a couple of plastic bags – they'll help greatly if your feet get wet during the day. Take off your wet socks, dry off your feet, put on your delightfully dry socks and then, if you need to leave your sleeping bag again, pull on the plastic bags before you put your feet in your shoes. Stuff that is only a bit damp will dry off if you sleep with it in your bag overnight. And if it's not fully dry, at least it's warm.

If you suffer from the cold, don't skimp on your sleeping mat. I bought a couple of Exped mats secondhand and have found them a really worthwhile investment. Norna was impressed with how comfy a good inflatable mattress can be, even if she'd had reservations about the cost at the time. Because we only had one three-season bag between the two of us, I kept on my down jacket and hat and used my summer bag.

Despite the light frost we found in the morning, no one had been too cold overnight, thanks to the combination of a sleeping bag in a bivvy bag under the tarp. You never get a good night's sleep – it's more a series of dozes until whichever bit of your ageing body decides it needs to be moved. You can tell which of your companions is asleep at any given point by who is snoring. As Joolze said, Dave had a cracking night on this trip!

BREAKFAST DEBRIEF

Dave's stove earned its keep again at breakfast, and the light frost disappeared in the morning sunshine. Since it was dry and sunny, we could

pack everything away dry for once. Then it was simply a case of reloading the bikes and rolling down to town for a second breakfast.

In the warmth of the café, we asked Norna and Dave how they'd found their overnight trip.

"It was certainly an experience!", Norna said. "I've not ridden my mountain bike for over two years, so it was a steep learning curve riding it loaded with luggage. However, despite my misgivings, it was a lot easier than I imagined. I can now see why Han raves about it so much and I can't wait to go again."

Dave said: "Joolze has always returned from her bikepacking trips tired but full of stories of the little adventures she and Hannah have been through. It brought back memories of walking and wild camping in my youth. I'm so pleased I've finally found the time to venture out with them. Looking forward to heading out again soon to play with the new kit I've treated myself to..."

So it was a successful trip. Everyone enjoyed it and we're still all speaking to each other. It will be happening again. ●

Fact file Dales bikepacking

- **Distance:** Deliberately low: 23km over an afternoon and the following morning.
- **Route:** The Settle Loop of the Pennine Bridleway, with an extension to Malham Tarn. Wide, open tracks with few tricky bits.
- **Conditions:** Cool and breezy but glorious autumn sunshine. Slight frost the next morning.
- **Accommodation:** Bivvy bags with an additional tarp.
- **Equipment used:**

Hardtails with bar rolls and seatpacks. We all had a sleeping bag, mat, and bivvy bag.

- **Maps/guides:** OS OL2 Yorkshire Dales Southern and Western.

- **I'm glad I had...** Hannah, good coffee; Norna, down jacket and hat for camp; Dave, chance to play with my new stove; Joolze, warm booties.

- **Next time I would...** Dave, not wait so long to try it; Norna, try a longer route; Hannah, take more fig rolls as everyone liked them; Joolze, make Dave sleep further away!



More info

A guide to the full Pennine Bridleway, written by Hannah and illustrated by Joolze's images, will be published by Vertebrate in May 2021. For more details about the Pennine Bridleway until then, visit the National Trails website:

nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/pennine-bridleway/trail-information

