

Weekender

Britain's top pub ride

Rob Ainsley rides 70 miles (mostly) downhill from Britain's highest pub in the Yorkshire Dales to its lowest on the north-east coast



ROB AINSLEY

Rob collects international end-to-ends and blogs about rides in Yorkshire and beyond at e2e.bike

Ah, the pub ride! How British. Often an easy-going summer evening jaunt with friends to a country inn and back. But Britain's ultimate pub ride is a bit different. The top pub – in altitude, anyway; it's in Guinness – is the Tan Hill Inn. The rugged stone tavern stands isolated, 528m (1,732 feet) up on a Yorkshire Dales moor-top, with drone-like views over the northern lowlands. I've cycled there many times. It's a grand climb up from Swaledale – and a grander freewheel down to Reeth's picnic-perfect green.

But the lowest? Debatable. I decided on Marsden Grotto, a beach-cave gastropub that's 0m (0 feet) above sea level, just north of Sunderland. It's so low that a lift takes you and your bike down from the clifftop to the water's edge.

Why that one? Because it makes a highest-to-lowest, 'ultimate pub ride' of about 70 miles. Essentially, this follows Sustrans's Walney-to-Wear (W2W) coast-to-coast route through rough-hewn northern hillsides – much of it car free on rail-trails or quiet roads. (If in doubt while navigating, follow W2W signs.) It follows the prevailing westerly, and – in principle – is downhill all the way.

Tan Hill's legendary remoteness makes it a vibrant social hub, with live music, food and accommodation. But the route is also an overview of the North East, from summits to seashores, tough farmland to gritty industry, and historic honeypots to post-industrial challenges.

And it's weekendable without a car. Train to Kirkby Stephen, cycle to Tan Hill, stay; next day cycle to Marsden Grotto, train back from Sunderland. It's a freewheeling celebration of that British icon, the pub. Cheers! ▶

Top to bottom:
Between Tan Hill Inn and Reeth. Tan Hill Inn. Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle. Sunderland

Rapha Pennine Rally
300-mile bikepacking event visits Tan Hill.
cyclinguk.org/blog/great-rides-rapha-pennine-rally

