



ROB AINSLEY

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

Cycle touring is all about different places. But I wanted to travel in time, too. In April this year I did the Way of the Roses old style. I rode the 170 scenic, hilly, back-lane miles across northern England, from Morecambe to Bridlington, on a 1978 bike, with kit of the period, doing only what we could do then.

So: no Lycra; no gadgets; toeclips not cleats; saddlebag not panniers; paper maps not GPS; call boxes not mobiles; cash not cards; a 35mm SLR camera with black-and-white film; asking strangers for local information. Hmm... what about food and drink? Lager rather than cask ale? Could I have avocados or banoffee pie? Here's how my ride through Britain's least favourite decade worked out.

BEST OF TIMES, WORST OF TIMES: THE 1970s

The 1970s' reputation is dire. A murky decade of power cuts, strikes, inflation, casual racism and sexism, dull muddy football, smoky pubs that closed in the afternoons, terrible fashion (flares! kipper ties! comb-overs!) and dog poo on pavements (sometimes, strangely, white).

But for me as a teen, it was also an exciting time, a coming of age: first romance; first disappointment in romance; first job; first sacking; first proper bike. It also saw my first ever bike tour: a weekend from Hull to York via Selby, staying in youth hostels, on my new Raleigh Clubman. It rained, we met a magician, slept on a barge and had great fun.

Could I recapture some of that excitement today? First I needed to find myself a period bike. I scanned eBay, which mostly yielded rusty shed-finds wanting massive refurbishment. I checked supermarket small ads and saw one-careful-owner old rarities. I browsed bike restorers' websites, finding meticulously reconstructed 1960s' racers costing my annual earnings, and perhaps destined for a fund manager's wall.

But at Resurrection Bikes of Harrogate, which recycles donated bikes for charity, I struck gold. Or rather, silver: a 1978 Claud Butler Jubilee in very good nick, mostly original, for £150. Reynolds 531, Weinmann centrepulls, quick-release hubs, Brooks B17, down tube shifters, large flanges (whatever they are). My test ride brought back vivid memories of Seventies' bikes: taut, springy, narrow handlebars, with the knife-edge gliding momentum of a tall, slender ice skater.

Not everything was authentic. I was quite happy to have modern puncture-resistant tyres and the triple chainset that had been added at some point. It still had the 'de luxe' rack it came with, but to modern eyes it looks as flimsy as a coat hanger. Anyway, I wanted to try saddlebag touring, and Carradice kindly supplied me with a Nelson Camper Longflap, newly made but to the traditional pattern:



a capacious Gladstone bag of a thing, strappy and accommodating.

Cycling friends lent me lights, maps and a cycling cape of the era. Lock? I vaguely remembered having a padlock and chain back then, so replicated the setup from a local hardware shop.

I was ready to set off, heading for nearly 50 years ago.

ACROSS THE NORTH

The Way of the Roses is lovely – arguably England's most popular long-distance leisure cycling route. Much of the attraction is the timeless business of quiet roads through thrilling scenery, with a pleasing balance of remoteness, café-stop villages, handsome old towns, honeypot York, and seaside resorts (with train access) at either end. Some people do it in a day; others, like me, take a more leisurely four.

For such trundlers, dawdling through the hills, classic stopovers are Settle, Ripon and Pocklington, making four consistent days of 40 or so miles.

Right, top to bottom: The 1978 Claud Butler Jubilee that Rob bought from Resurrection Bikes was over geared but otherwise good. Period Bartholomew maps weren't very useful. The Ever Ready lights were even worse. The timeless Carradice saddlebag, on the other hand, was great