



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 27 Spring 2014

www.wheelrights.org.uk

A view from the saddle

Most of us look forward to spring and getting out and about more after the wet and cold of winter. Cycling embraces a wide spectrum of uses from sport, as a transport mode for many trip purposes through to recreation, and cyclists, unsurprisingly, are a mix of mankind, not a particular breed as some would identify us. We all have our reasons for using the bicycle, and what we as cyclists share is the joy and sheer practicality of this incredible machine.

The benefits of more cycling are well known for reasons of the environment, health and well being and to the economy, and we have seen promise after promise about how the current inadequate provision for our safety will be improved, but it's still dangerous out there and the accident stats are a major barrier to many who may contemplate taking up cycling.



For me cycling is about getting about using the bicycle for ordinary everyday trips as well as the bigger outings. It's not about wearing high vis gear and a helmet, or talking about the finer points of gearing. No need to re invent the wheel, there are continental examples of what can be done to improve our safety with a will and a little finance. What we need is

more protection from injury by motorised vehicles in infrastructure provision, traffic priorities and the law. *Wheelrights* was set up nearly 20 years ago to campaign for better provision and we are still accepting the crumbs being put our way. We live on promises as yet unfulfilled. We have to do better!

I was given for Xmas three Bicycle Snob NYC books covering experiences of an American cycling kindred spirit that I immediately identified with. Written with humour, the books express my own feelings to a tee, and also brilliantly describe how we, as cyclists, can be divided into types and how the rest of the world sees us... compulsive reading if you get a chance.

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Copy deadline

Copy for the next issue should be sent to the Secretary (address below) by mid May.

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As guest editor of this edition I am pleased to include articles on some brilliant local schemes such as Ian Williams *ReCycle* and their bike powered cinema project, Mike Cherry on *BikeAbility* activities and the exciting new initiatives on cycling centres hereabouts, so its not all bad news. Also included is Dave Whitehead's epic Paris to Barcelona Ride and a letter from Denise Hunt from the Stourbridge cycling group who came to last year's festival, a great bunch who clearly enjoyed their stay. (Congratulations due to our organising committee.)

The cycling highlight of my year was a visit to Spain looking at the Vias Verdes Greenways inland between Alicante and Barcelona. They are fantastic routes but separate so travelling between routes necessitated a hire car and folding bikes. (We flew.) I went with John Grimshaw and three others, volunteering as driver (because the original one had to pull out) and with five folding bikes stowed away in the back we just fitted in. My job was to get them to the remote start points, occasionally meeting them with lunch, do some cycling in between and sort out accommodation for the night. They were cycling downhill on railway gradients so it was a cycling for softies expedition all round. You can read the account by John Grimshaw (edited) on page 6 and I can supply more detail of our trip if you ask or you can get full information of these fantastic routes in English on their website.

With Alan Watson we are putting together an article on what might make Swansea a cycling Utopia and need your input for a future article to set a target for what might be achieved by 2020, not that far away. Meanwhile see the *Cycletopia* article on page 3.

I look forward to meeting up soon on our planned rides.

Happy cycling!

David Judd

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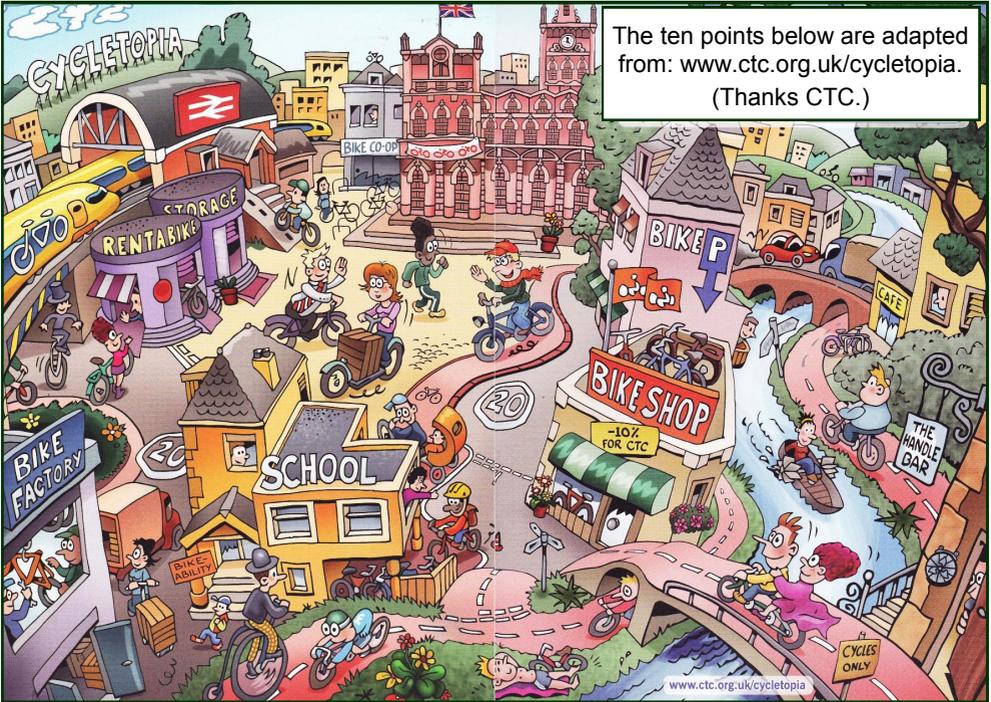
Sail Bridge Barrier



At last the offending hoops have been removed from this barrier. Cllr Nick Davies (who chairs Swansea Council's Cycle Action Progress meetings) has asked for them. So maybe they will turn up somewhere in his Uplands Ward?

Cycletopia

The ten points below are adapted from: www.ctc.org.uk/cycletopia.
(Thanks CTC.)



www.ctc.org.uk/cycletopia

Ten steps to make Swansea a Cycletopia:

1. Report potholes, etc. on www.fillthatthole.org.uk or phone 0800 132081.
2. Support *Wheelrights* with their campaigning.
3. Seek the support of other organisations such as health professionals, environmental groups and cycle-friendly councillors.
4. Identify cycling desire lines to be added to the map *Wheelrights* have prepared. See the 'Infrastructure' page of www.wheelrights.org.uk.
5. Identify the decision makers and fund holders. These are likely to be council officers, particularly in Planning, councillors and developers.
6. Take your proposals to these people.
7. Take councillors and officers on a bike ride to visualise improvements.
8. Look out for major planning developments on the back of which better provision for cyclists can be made
9. Seek assistance and/or resources from other cycling organisations, in particular Sustrans and the CTC.
10. Don't give up!

David Naylor

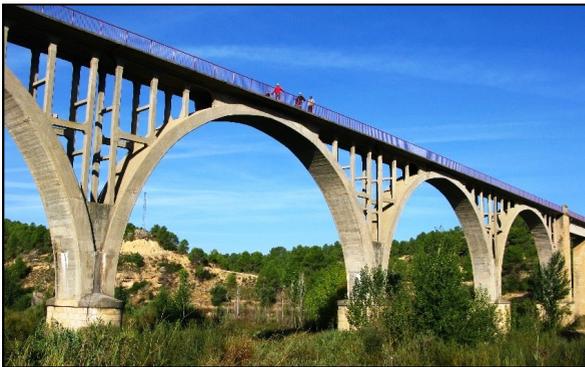
Vias Verdes - Alicante to Barcelona Maigmo – Alcoi - Serpis – Negros – Zafan

This was our third holiday cycling these magnificent greenways. We started with the Maigmo Route and I can think of no better introduction to the Spanish Greenways with deep cuttings, a series of tunnels and two magnificent multi-arched viaducts, all over ochre soils in every hue of red and yellow against a backdrop of a jagged mountain skyline.

We stayed the night at Alcoi with, at its heart, the central Plaza de Espana and its underground ribbed concrete vaulted cultural meeting hall by the renowned local architect and engineer Santiago Calatrava. We went on to see his outstanding City of Arts in Valencia. On the way we cycled down the Serpis Greenway which despite its rough surface was packed with people all out on a Festival Day – remembering the Reconquista when Christian alliances rolled back the Moors, a long campaign which left so many of the fortifications we were to meet along the route at Jerica, Morella and Alcaniz to mention just a few.

At Valencia we stayed right on the beach and cycled all day exploring the City from the garden corridor of the old river, now diverted to the west of the built up area after disastrous floods in the late 60's. All the roads cross this garden lung on their original bridges leaving the way through free from any traffic.

We wanted to cycle down two of Spain's most interesting railway paths – its longest Ojos Negros at 162 km and its most spectacular La Val de Zafan, through the limestone gorges leading through to the River Ebro. The Negros route is unusual in that it runs along a former iron ore railway which was built largely parallel to the main line (which still remains) because of their high charges. So it is possible to reach its summit – 1240m – by train and then to travel downhill for miles and miles.



Onto the route from Alcaniz to Tortosa which is almost entirely complete with the best part of 80kms on the former railway except at a single station now converted into a hotel. We should have cycled out of Alcaniz itself but had heard that a long 2 km tunnel was closed so started at the summit station – Valjunquera – for a day's ride (77 km) a route I vote to be most memorable and spectacular of any railway that I have ever seen.

To end with we stayed our last night in Barcelona, near the beach and cycled through the City to Sagrade Familia, the extraordinary and beautiful temple conceived by Antoni Gaudi.

For further information the Vias Verdes website (www.viasverdes.com) is generally excellent, with full details of the routes, history, descriptions, maps, profiles and accommodation all in English.

John Grimshaw

Gower Cycling Festival

A letter from a participant

Just wanted to offer my thanks to *Wheelrights* and the CTC for organising the *Gower Cycling Festival 2013*, which I attended with eight other cyclists from the Stourbridge Cycling User Group, a club based in the West Midlands.

Despite the wind and the rain we truly had a wonderful time, much of this down to the kindness of the ride leaders, who gave their time freely, sharing with us their intimate knowledge of the area, which included cycling routes we probably would never have found, such as those through Swiss Valley and Penllergaer Woods.

This was the first time we had cycled on the Gower and we were impressed by its breathtaking scenery. When not cycling we took the opportunity to visit local areas of beauty such as White Haven Nature reserve and Penclacwydd Wild Fowl Centre.



The Stourbridge group on the Three Cliffs ride/walk.

Initially we were drawn to the Festival because the itinerary of routes catered for a range of riding abilities from challenging hill rides to rides along gentle coastal paths. The routes chosen struck a happy balance with opportunities to socialize with the locals, enjoy scrumptious cake and coffee stops and to sample the local ales. There was something for everyone! So congratulations to all involved.

The Festival was a great success and we can't wait for next year.

Denise Hunt

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Maggie's Paris to Barcelona Bike Ride 2013

I had decided that I wanted to take on a big physical challenge in 2013, but I wasn't sure what. There was a big birthday and my sons were doing lots of exciting physical adventures and I didn't want to miss out.

In early in January I read about the Maggie's Paris to Barcelona Ride (645 miles in a week) and knew immediately that I wanted to it. I would have to raise £1700, but I knew it was an excellent cause.

The first time I met other riders was at a meeting at the Maggie's Centre in March. Some of them had been on the Paris to Swansea ride the year before and were very friendly, enthusiastic and keen. Dickie (Richard Smith) and Badger (the Wave DJ) briefed us about clothing, cleats, peleton training, energy drinks, hydration and Garmin's. It was all new to me.

I got a road bike and started training in February, gradually increasing the length of my rides - some organized, others just a few of us. As the evenings got longer there were lots of group rides around Gower and more social weekend rides to Llanelli and Burry Port. I usually came home feeling exhilarated. I had never realized how wonderful cycling could be especially with others.

The week before the ride there was a final briefing. Dickie and Badger talked about the daily itinerary, food, medication and warned about dehydration and sunstroke. Badger said that it would be a life changing experience.

Was I prepared? I felt that the training and fundraising had gone well, but what would it really be like?

On the Saturday morning we left early start for the 08.55 flight to Paris, with feelings of excitement and trepidation. After a group photo at the Trocadero we took the metro and train to our first hotel near Fountainbleau. After unloading bikes and a little ride for a swim in the river, it was time for dinner and an early night.

There were 57 riders in total, including 12 women. Ages ranged from early 20s to me the oldest (65). Some very experienced cyclists, other were nearly novices. We had been divided into 3 groups, the elite fast group, then groups 2 and 3 who in practice cycled together.

The next morning after an early carbon-loading breakfast and another group photo we were off at 8 am and really cycling in France. The daily pattern was an early start, a mid morning break with drinks and snacks, then lunch break with a substantial pasta type lunch, a mid afternoon break with more snacks getting to the next hotel in the evening.



My memories of the ride are a jumble of images. Seeing France from the saddle was so much more vivid than from a car. We started in gently rolling countryside then over the Loire to overnight in **Bourges**. Day 2 it started getting lumpy to **Limoges** on the next night. Day 3 was orchards and sunflower fields to **Brive la Gaillarde**. By day 4 it was getting much hotter as we cycled up and over the limestone plateaux and across the Dordogne and Lot rivers to **Montauban**. We were really in the south now with temperatures in the high 30s, with a very strong cross wind through vineyards, olive groves and old villages and down into Languedoc to **Carcassonne**. Day 6 along the coastal plain with views of the Med and the Pyrenees in the distance, past Perpignan, then steeply up to the Spanish border followed by 15 miles downhill to **Figueres**. Day 7, the final stretch, through hills near Gerona and eventually a late arrival into **Barcelona**.

The cycling was wonderful and the peleton training paid off, but what really made it so much fun, so enjoyable and so inspiring was the team work, camaraderie, energy, commitment, determination and support of so many people. Some people sprint on ahead up hills but others take on a *domestique* role holding back to support and encourage others. Group cycling bring out the best in people.

On the last day to see the line of cyclists stretch out in front all wearing Paris to Barcelona shirts was a moving experience. In Barcelona we were met by friends and relations and later ride shirts were presented with special mentions and thanks to the support team. Then out into the night for a very late meal at a restaurant for a final emotional celebration.

The following morning most of us were up early for the morning flight back to Cardiff and a rainy Swansea. Unbelievable! We had done it! And no injuries.

The next few days didn't feel too flat because Facebook was full of pictures, memories and catchphrases. One rider described it as one of the best weeks of her life and I can only agree. Since then we've kept in touch through Facebook, reunions and rides.

Was it a life changing experience? I was sceptical, at first, but maybe it was. I'm doing the Maggie's Paris to Swansea Ride this August - I don't want to miss out. Carpe diem!

David Whitehead



BikeAbility Wales' 10th Anniversary 2004-2014

Laura Bolton (formerly Lockwood) worked as a Sustrans assistant in David Judd's Environment Centre office, helping to develop cycle routes across South West Wales. On a work camp in Pembrokeshire they met a lady with a blind son and, since there was a tandem available (which had been donated to Wheelrights), they took it for him to try out. It was a truly inspirational introduction and it set Laura on a mission.

Laura realised that there was a total lack of cycling facilities for disabled people across South West Wales so, in her own time, she looked into schemes developed by *Wheels for All*, England and *Pedal Power*, Cardiff, two organisations which provide all ability cycling opportunities. Jointly with Wheelrights Laura acquired a shipping container and, with a selection of second hand tricycles and a couple of specialist cycles, set up at the very accommodating Ramada Jarvis Hotel (now Mercure) on land alongside their car park in Llansamlet, Swansea and so BikeAbility Wales was born in 2004.

Our slogan has always been 'Everyone Rides' and over the last ten years we have enabled people from two to ninety two years old to ride on a cycle. Whether they are confined to a wheelchair or fit and able there is a cycle that they can use and skills they can develop.

In the autumn of 2008 it was clear to Laura that the project needed to develop further so she registered *BikeAbility Wales* as a charity and we moved to Dunvant Rugby Football Club in Killay where we had more opportunity to expand and link to the National Cycle Network in Clyne Valley. Laura also wrote a number of successful funding bids which enabled *BikeAbility* to develop outreach work and to purchase a range of specialist cycles, she forged links with Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire councils and assisted Neath Port Talbot council in the setting up of their Intandem all ability cycle project .

Sadly in the spring of 2009 Laura died unexpectedly. However, she had created an organisation with a solid board of trustees and established links with a wide range of clients, schools, groups and organisations across South West Wales, so after an initial wobble the organisation has carried on developing.

Today the organisation has over 80 cycles, ranging from wheelchair transporter cycles, hand cycles and tricycles to recumbents, kick bikes and various children's bicycles. Last year we had over seven thousand visits from schools, day centres, youth groups, ethnic minority groups and individual members of the public.



BikeAbility Wales has expanded into providing cycle training, ranging from teaching complete beginners to ride both specialist cycles and bicycles through National Standards Cycle training, which was provided to 200 children and adults last year.



Ten years ago Laura had a vision to develop a Swansea cycle facility and to roll out opportunities for people of all abilities to cycle across the region. We are still striving to make this vision a reality through the Swansea Cycling Facility Group, made up of local cycle clubs, the council and the University based *WeCycle* project. On a national scale, *BikeAbility Wales* is a partner in the Wales Inclusive Cycle Forum which promotes all ability cycling across Wales.

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of *BikeAbility Wales*, you are invited to our Birthday Event at Dunvant RFC on 12th April from 11am till 3pm. We look forward to seeing you at the place where 'Everyone Rides!'

Mike Cherry
(Manager of *Bikeability Wales*)

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Bicycle Powered Cinema at *Re-Cycle*

Re-Cycle has put over 3000 unwanted bikes back on the road since 2007 at the workshop in Brynmill. About 1 in 5 of the donated bikes go to volunteers in exchange for their time, the rest are sold to keep the project running. In addition to whole bikes, supporters have donated a wide range of bicycle parts, including some electric-powered components and training stands.

In the spirit of recycling we've developed a two-bike electricity generator from these parts which puts out ample power for a projector, dvd player and sound system. For the technically minded, the 24 volt generators feed into a battery which powers an inverter via diodes and fuses. [See picture.] This gives the pedallers a moment to change over and share the load, which, for someone of average fitness is 50-100 watts.



The premiere screening was on December 3rd last year at a party to say thank you to volunteers and supporters of the project. The showroom was emptied of bikes and replaced by a small cinema set-up while the generator bikes were tucked away in a sound-proofed alcove. It was relatively easy to pedal up to minimum power, but without the cooling breeze of the road, we asked pedallers to swap over every 10 minutes – there was no shortage of volunteers, fuelled by popcorn and hot fruit punch.

A scene in the main feature 'Belle Ville Rendezvous' showed a cycle powered cinema which raised a chuckle as life began to imitate art imitating life... but soon after a particularly enthusiastic pedaller managed to trip a fuse and we had to rewind the film from the beginning again. After ironing these glitches the re-cycle bicycle-powered cinema will be ready for more screenings in 2014 – the whole unit can be transported by bike, and given a dark space and some soundproofing for the generators, can provide an entirely off-grid, portable cinema.

Check the website www.recyclesouthwales.wordpress.org or *recycle swansea* on facebook for future screenings.

Ian Williams
Director/manager
Re-Cycle South Wales



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Gowerton to Pontardulais Cycle Path

Help us campaign for its completion.

Wheelrights has pushed for completion of this cycle route for several years, but has been frustrated by slow progress. The proposed route largely follows the disused railway track, which has mostly been undeveloped, but goes over common land. When the “new” fast A484 road was completed the Council built an underpass quite close to the rail line, and suitable for a wide cycle path. However the road resulted in complicated legal issues, which is taking the Council a long time to unravel. There are now several factors which could create a momentum to push for this route, and a local campaign could help make progress:

1. The recent dualing of the train tracks through Gowerton Station resulted in a new ramped bridge, and indications are favourable that Network rail would consider using this as part of the missing link over Stafford Common.
2. The *Urban Cyclery* shop has moved into larger premises in Kingsbridge, adjoining the existing stretch of cycle path between Kingsbridge and Gorseinon. Their shop is well worth a visit and they have hopes to establish a cyclists café there, so this could be a welcome attraction on the route.
3. Swansea Council has adopted *Wheelrights’* Cycling Manifesto and its commitment to create a network which will bring a cycle route to within a mile of half Swansea’s population. This route would thus help the Council fulfil its aims.
4. Swansea Council has successfully accessed new Regeneration funding to assist communities in need, and the North of Swansea has been historically deprived of good quality cycle routes which could link up with routes to employment centres as well as to the City Centre.
5. Parts of this proposed route would form part of the Gower Way long-distance footpath, and a campaign could gain the support from the Swansea Ramblers organisation. I have made tentative enquiries and some Ramblers have expressed an interest. The recently passed Active Travel Act talks about the need to explore the creation of more shared use footpaths for walkers and cyclists.
6. Finally a local campaign could develop a long-term buy in to this route, which could help to promote it locally and develop a loyalty and commitment to maintaining and improving it into the long-term.

We could learn lessons from the community involvement in new routes which our President has achieved in North Gower and Sustrans has created around the Clydach Connect 2 project.

If anyone is interested in helping me with this please get in touch, and together we could make it happen!

Nick Guy

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Swansea Council Meetings – an update

Over the past few years *Wheelrights* has had regular “Cycling Action Progress” meetings with the Council, together with *Sustrans* and *BikeAbility Wales* reps. The minutes of these meetings are now published on the ‘Newsletters and Notes’ page of *Wheelrights* website.

The previous Cycling Action Plan is up for review this year, and we need members views about what we ask to be in the next Action Plan?

In particular we need your help in prioritising the many new ideas for routes (which are always welcome) especially as money is tight.

Recently we have proposed new cycle routes in the North and East of Swansea, which fit in with the Council’s target areas of transport poverty, but should these take precedence over our longer held aspirations?

The Council also plans to publicise their new “Underground” style map of local commuter Cycling routes. The aim is to colour brand these existing routes with new signage, which should encourage more people to dust down their bikes and get cycling! These routes, together with *Wheelrights* proposed routes, are now shown (using the Council’s colour scheme) to scale on a map on the ‘infrastructure’ page of our website.

Wheelrights have told the Council of our vision to make Swansea a Cycling City by 2020! We have the ideas and now is the time to step up our campaigning work to push for them to become a reality! I hope this excellent Newsletter can act as a trigger for us to push the Council to fulfil its Manifesto commitment to bring dedicated cycling routes within half a mile of half of Swansea’s population.

Nick Guy

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Forthcoming events

(This information and more is provided on the ‘Events’ page of www.wheelrights.org.uk .)

Adult Beginners Classes from **April to September** on
Saturdays: 12 April, 10 May, 14 June, 19 July, 30 August and 20 September.
9.30-11.30 in Civic Centre East car park click. See the ‘Novices’ page of www.wheelrights.org.uk for how to register, etc.

March

Tuesday 18 March: *Wheelrights* Meeting

7.00pm in the Environment Centre, Pier Street. All welcome. Sustrans SW Wales Manager will give a presentation on: “Sustrans and Swansea: current work and future plans.”

April

Saturday 12 April: *BikeAbility Wales*, 10th Birthday celebration

11.00am – 3.00pm Dunvant RFC.

June

14-22 June is BIKE WEEK

July

6 July: Laugharne to Swansea Dylan Thomas Centenary ride.

August 2014

9-16 August: GOWER CYCLING FESTIVAL.

Full details on www.gowercyclingfestival.org (aka ‘Cycling Festival’ page on our website). Note that we would like you to register in advance. (It is only £5.)