



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 44 Summer 2018

www.wheelrights.org.uk

Bike boost for Wales

Until recently we were bemoaning the fact that the spending on cycle infrastructure in Swansea amounted to only 25p per head of population per year. This it seems is about to change. Recent news from Sustrans is that 10, 20 then 30 million pounds is to be awarded for Active Travel in Wales over the next 3 years. This works out at £3 per head per year for



the first year increasing to just under £10 in the last, which is the recommended amount. Let's hope that Swansea gets its share!

Swansea Council are however upbeat about funding for local cycle infrastructure. So far funding has enabled them to get started at the Gowerton end of the path to Pontarddulais and to do preliminary work on the GAP (Gower Access Path across Clyne Common). A new cycle link in Landore should start soon.

The picture, taken in Freiburg, S. Germany, shows what to expect when a bike becomes a key mode of transport. Like Swansea Freiburg is a university city.

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Contents

- P. 2 Chairman's message.
Santander bike hire scheme.
- P. 3 Should I wear a helmet?.
- P. 4 Cycle Safety.
Cycle Counts.
- P. 5 Cycle Lane Surveys.
- P. 6 Guernsey Green Lanes.
- P. 7 A Grand Tour of Irish Greenways.
- P. 8 Future events.

Copy deadline

Copy for the next issue should be emailed to davidnaylor27@gmail.com by mid August.

This issue

The latest on the University's bike hire scheme is given on p. 2. On the same page our Chairman raises the touchy topic of cycle helmets. This is followed by an article by me which gives a different perspective.

On p.4 I report on a recent *Cycling UK* initiative about cycle safety, then a link to some important work our President, David Judd has done on cycle count records.

The final two articles about Green Lanes and Greenways in other lands are exemplars of what might be done in Wales.

David Naylor

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Our Chairman writes

Just back from another summer in New Zealand, where there is a campaign for 'freedom cycling' to overturn the compulsory wearing of cycle helmets. The new crusade seeks to make helmet use optional for adults but mandatory for children. This is surely perverse as which teenager would believe that helmets are cool if adults can spurn them. This is probably why so few young adults wear helmets in this country.

So is this the time to ease up on head protection?. Not if you listen to sports such as rugby which is prioritising head-injury assessment. Not if you listen to cricket where the use of a helmet dramatically reduces the chance that a hard ball can kill or seriously injure you. Not even if you look at cycle racing where it is mandatory.

One is reminded of the motor cyclists' campaign against helmets which saw them talk about the denial of their freedom to feel the wind in their hair, whilst allowing their heads to hit tarmac, concrete or steel lampposts. All of this left many bikers with appalling head injuries that the NHS had to provide life long care, sheltered workshops and aids at a terrible financial and emotional cost. Of course the Government in the 60s held firm and many many lives have been saved and improved as a result of helmets.

But would compulsory helmets result in fewer fatalities and injuries? The evidence from N.Z. is unequivocal. In the 10 years from 1980 to 1989 the average death rate for cyclists was 22 per year. In 1994 the wearing of helmets became mandatory. Afterwards, in the years between 2000-2017, the death rate dropped to 11 per year. Of course if deaths are reducing, so probably are head injuries which are not currently reported in NZ stats.

Campaigners say that cycling participation would plummet if helmets became a 'must wear'. This hasn't happened in N.Z and it wouldn't happen here as helmets are not seen as a barrier to cycling. What are seen as barriers are the lack of bike facilities and the attitude of drivers. It can't be about cost as cities like Melbourne introduced a very low cost helmet at the time they changed their law.

So, let's use our brain to protect the most vital organ we possess!

John Sayce

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Santander bike hire scheme

This scheme is due to be operational from 5 July. On that day there will be a launch at Swansea University's Fulton House Refectory on the Singleton Campus. Supporters – and they include *Wheelrights* – are invited. When known the time will be put on the 'Events' page of our website.

From 5 July 50 bikes will be available at the following five hubs (10 at each?):

- Swansea University's Singleton Campus;
- Fabian Way Park and Ride;
- Civic Centre;
- Waterfront Museum,
- Swansea University's Bay Campus.

A sixth hub is expected to be in place in Mumbles later this summer.

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Should I wear a helmet?

Based on the New Zealand evidence presented by John Sayce (See p.2.) you should. However there is evidence to the contrary so, to provide a balanced picture, let me present at least some of this.

Even though there are “lies, damn lies and statistics!” let me start with some. In countries where cycle helmet wearing has been made compulsory there has been a significant reduction in cycling. Figures I have for New Zealand are that following compulsion in 1994 cycling trips initially fell by 26%, subsequently falling further to 51%. In Australia compulsion resulted in a 36% reduction in NSW, the same in Melbourne among child cyclists, rising to 44% among teenagers. In Perth there was a 20% reduction. Overall it appears that in countries where helmet wearing has been made compulsory a reduction in cycling of about one third has occurred. This contrasts with John’s comment that in NZ cycle participation has not dropped as a result of compulsion. Is that country different?

What is clear is that any reduction in the demand on health services due to compulsion – and it is debatable if overall helmets do reduce injuries – is more than offset by the loss of the health benefits of cycling for the one third who would otherwise be on their bikes.

While helmets protect against certain head injuries they can cause them, in particular to the neck. Also they are unlikely to protect a cyclist hit by a car. Other factors are that drivers give more clearance to non-helmeted cyclists and that wearers, believing that they provide protection, cycle less carefully.

It is no coincidence that cycling is safer in countries where more people cycle. There is a strong correlation between cycle fatalities and the percentage of trips by bike with the former falling as the latter rises. Holland tops this league with (on a par with Denmark) the lowest fatality rate and highest percentage of bike trips (27%), also the lowest helmet-wearing rate (0.1%). The photo taken by me in the Netherlands shows a ‘pelaton’ of school kids on an outing. None of them are wearing helmets but the leaders in the front are wearing high vis. jackets.



In 1992 while cycling to work I got knocked off my bike by a car exiting a driveway. I woke up in Morrision Hospital but was discharged the next day. I had facial scratches due to my face contacting the road and a stiff neck. The scratches healed in a week or two but the stiff neck persisted. I was not wearing a helmet but I reckoned that had I been the whiplash which caused the stiff neck would have been worse. I then wore a skull cap such as racing cyclists used to wear until I lost it. I then wore a helmet for three years. At this point I did some research and decided that it was not a good idea to wear one but that it was important to be visible. For this reason I have since worn a white cap.

So: wear a helmet if you wish but if in doubt do some research. www.cyclehelmets.org is a comprehensive source of information. If we are to increase cycling in the UK there must be no compulsion.

David Naylor

Cycle Safety

Cycling UK has recently come up with a report: “Cycle safety: make it simple”. Their 20 April *Cycleclips* summarise the findings under six headings as follows. My brief summary of the contents of each is based on the *Cycleclips* article.

1. Cycle-friendly design guidance.

One agreed standard is proposed to provide cycle-friendly design guidance of road junctions and traffic schemes including maintenance.

2. Enforcement

This includes measures such as the education of drivers on how to safely overtake cyclists. The West Midlands Police’s “Operation Close Pass” is given as a model.

3. Road traffic offences and penalties review

The current legal framework for dealing with irresponsible behaviour on our roads is not fit for purpose. A full review of all road traffic offences and penalties is needed, in particular the distinction between *careless* and *dangerous* driving.

4. Highway Code changes

It not having been revised for over ten years a revision is needed. This would include giving cyclist and pedestrians priority over left turning vehicles, clarification of the rules for overtaking cyclists (ie at least 1.5m.) and the ‘Dutch reach’ for opening car doors.

5. Direct vision lorries

Support a Transport for London plan to introduce a ‘direct vision standard’ for lorry cabs which would enable them to see cyclists or pedestrians currently in blind spots

6. Funding

Increase this significantly to make cycling and walking safe for all.

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Cycle Counts

Our President, David Judd, recently sat down and collated records of cycle counts taken in various parts of SW Wales over the last 20 years. They are mainly on NCRs 4 and 43. His findings, slightly abbreviated, are now on the Campaigns page of our website under the heading “Cycle Usage in SW Wales”.

The cyclists passing a counter in a year are given for two separate years at 17 locations. The separation is on average about 10 years but varies between 5 and 15. Unsurprisingly they show an increase with only one showing a reduction in cycle usage and this is quite modest. Cycle counts at 11 other locations are provided but these are for one year only so must await subsequent counts to find out how the usage has changed.

20 years ago the proportion of trips by bike in Wales was less than 2% compared with figures of up to 25% in some continental countries. A target by some local authorities was to increase cycle use by a modest 10% (some doubling it) as a result of their new cycle provision. The figures given in his report indicate a substantially bigger increase, which is very encouraging.

David Naylor

Cycle Lane Surveys

The following is taken from an article in the *Guardian*.

According to a study the vast majority of UK city dwellers would support their taxes being spent on building cycle lanes, believing their city would be a better place to live and work if more people swapped their cars for bicycles.

Sustrans, the cycling and walking advocacy group, found that although just 6% of people commute to work by bike, 75% would like to see more money spent on cycling infrastructure and 78% support building more protected bike lanes, even if this could mean less space for other road traffic.

The charity surveyed more than 1,000 people in each of seven UK cities: Newcastle, Cardiff, Belfast, Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Greater Manchester. Almost three-quarters of respondents said cycle safety needed to be improved in their city, with just 30% saying it was safe to ride a bike where they lived. Even fewer, 21%, thought it was safe for children to cycle.

In 2016 Transport for London reported a 50% increase in the number of cyclists using some roads where a protected cycle superhighway had been built. The picture shows one.

Cycling levels in the UK peaked in 1949, when, according to Xavier Brice Sustrans chief executive, 15bn miles were travelled by bike, equivalent to 37% of all journeys. “People riding bikes played a crucial role in our past and will play an important role in our future,” Brice said. “Cycling will shape how we get about in our towns and cities. It’s good for our health, for air quality, for the local economy, and for making our streets more liveable.”



“Critically, bikes are up to five times more efficient at moving people than cars. Cities are space limited, populations are increasing and too many cars cause traffic jams. Bikes will rise again.”

Thanks to member, Chris Connick, for highlighting this article. It can be found in full at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/14/three-in-four-want-more-spending-on-cycle-lanes-in-uk-cities-survey>.

David Naylor

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Guernsey Green Lanes

The prospect of establishing a Gower Green Lane like the Jersey Green Lanes was mentioned in the last Newsletter (Issue 43, p.8.). A *Green Lane* is defined as one where non-motorised traffic has right of way, with a (recommended) speed limit of 15 mph.



Back in October 2008, my wife (Fiona) and I conducted a quick tandem tour to Guernsey, which has its own Green Lane network. These tended to be in the centre of the island, and we passed countless broken and abandoned greenhouses, testament to a lost horticultural industry, and perhaps as a consequence the lanes themselves were blissfully quiet. They also featured plenty of 'honesty boxes', where farm produce is sold at roadside stalls, and it is up to the customer simply to put the right money into the box.

We even went by train (actually three trains: Swansea, Bristol Parkway, Templemeads, Weymouth), although this was marred slightly on the way back by the conductor getting on in Weymouth and asking "Whose tandem is that? If I'd seen you coming I wouldn't have let you on". It's such a pity it's just slightly too long for the space.

The choice of month was significant, because the tourist board cleverly extends the season by holding a *Tennerfest* (see tennerfest.com), in which hotels, pubs and restaurants offer fixed price 3-course meals, starting at 'ten pound a head'. These are all collated and published in a big newspaper, which is given away free, and makes planning evenings out a joy. It's fairly cut-throat, but the restaurants are banking on making a profit from the drinks, and since so much is being saved on the food, why not order a bottle of champagne? Especially when the hotel has their own label.



Tandem not quite fitting on train.

In conclusion the Green Lanes were definitely part of the tourism mix that drew us to Guernsey in the first place. Mind you, they do have over 80 of them, so the Gower has a way to go to catch up. I also think the Gower could run its own version of the *Tennerfest*, perhaps timed to coincide with our Cycling Festival.

Bill Gannon

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A Grand Tour of Irish Greenways

An email from John Grimshaw in February asked if I was interested in an Irish Trip. He had been sent details of the progress on Greenways including one he had completed a study on thirty years ago expecting a rapid start. I had been over there cycling many times and was involved in several projects (Rives Celtes and Celtic Circles) forging EU links and also a major study identifying cycle routes on largely quiet roads.

There were 21 Greenways identified as existing (290km). We planned to visit four of the longest, especially the one John studied so long ago, and a few shorter bits en route. Another 6 were being progressed (108 km) and 28 proposed (882km). Amazing progress over the last five years in the main.

I decided my Volvo could just about cope on its limit for loading with the ride participants plus bikes. John was on his Birdy, his brother Chris on Electric, David Hall (Retired ex Sustrans Yorkshire manager) on his Brompton and me on my trusty Randonneur. Three bikes went on the Thule tow hitch ball rack and the Brompton in the boot plus gear.

The major schemes we wished to visit were situated towards three of the four corners of Ireland on mainly disused railways and so the logistics were complex. The general idea was for me to drop off the group, drive to the next stop (lunch, tea or overnight) and I would cycle back to meet up. I devised a programme for the six days involving around nine hours a day cycling or driving in between stops, booked up the ferry and hotels and awaited the trip with some trepidation regarding wind and weather.

We took the afternoon Fishguard ferry to Rosslare and cycled on signed euro routes (from the earlier study) on quiet roads to Kilmore Quay, loaded up and drove to Waterford via the Passage East ferry. The next day was Waterford Greenway, some 46 km to Dungarvan, an amazing route with fantastic coastal views and stops along the way. It has been in use for around five years and is a huge success with cycle hire, cafés and restaurants experiencing a huge increase in business and using it in their advertising. We drove to Cobh for the night for the Titanic Experience and in the morning over the Passage West ferry and Cork Greenway (10km) as far as Blackrock Castle.

Then off to the Great Southern trail (38km) to Newcastle West in Limerick to look at a problematic tunnel not yet included, before driving to Rathkeale to ride the route that John had studied so long ago. We were entertained to lunch at Newcastle West and continued to Abbeyfeale. The extension into Listowel and beyond in Kerry is still subject to some opposition that is being overcome by the experiences elsewhere. John gave an illustrated talk to a large group of enthusiasts that night.

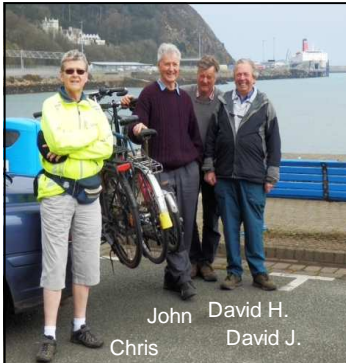
The next day a long drive up to Galway via the Shannon Ferry and towards Clifden to see part of the Connemara Greenway constructed around Ballynahinch Castle where problems of access to the railway required a well designed diversion, but further along the route follows the road. A delightful alternative takes the bog road to Clifden, it is so much better away from traffic and we hope the route will include the rest of the railway in time.

After a short drive to Westport the Great Western Greenway (42km) runs from Westport to Achill Island. Because of the weather we chose the coastal western end first. It was absolutely fantastic in both scenery and views. We then cycled the Newport to Westport section which was again a fantastic ride full of interest and built to a high standard.

After Westport we had a long drive back to Rosslare, stopping at Tullamore to cycle part of the Grand Canal being developed as a Greenway. The next day STENA transferred us to the palatial Irish Ferries to Pembroke where we had a happy time.

In all a couple of hundred kilometres cycled (not all by me) and around 900 miles driven. They are brilliant and well worth visiting, though better at a more leisurely pace. We were very well received everywhere. John is of course famous, and we were absolutely delighted to see the great progress being made over there in the last five years or so.

Details of the routes can be found on the internet but if you want to know more let me know.



David Judd

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Forthcoming events

See the 'Events' page of www.wheelrights.org.uk for possible changes to these events.

Cappuccino Rides

These easy rides take place fortnightly throughout the summer. Details on the 'Events' and 'Rides/Commutes' pages of the website. They start and finish at the Environment Centre.

Wheelrights Routes Group meeting/rides.

10.00 in Environment Centre café when ride will be decided. Normally on the first Saturday in month. Check 'Events' page of website for confirmation of dates.

U3A Rides.

10.00am starting at various locations. Normally on last Monday in month. Details on the 'Events' and 'Rides/Commutes' pages.

July

Sunday 15 July: Gower Bike Ride.

8.00-9.00am start from the 360 Café. Details on the Events page.

August

18-25 August: GOWER CYCLING FESTIVAL.

Full details on our 'Cycling Festival' page: www.wheelrights.org.uk/GCF18. Note that we would like you to register in advance. (It is only £5.)