



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 52 Summer 2020

www.wheelrights.org.uk

A better approach to Loughor Bridge.



It is some 20 years since our President first lobbied to get the northern footway of Loughor Bridge widened. At last it has been. And in addition the approach from the east has been improved. The shared use path now continues on the north side of Castle Street to Station Road where the parallel crossing (illustrated) has been provided. Previously cyclists were expected to use the narrow footway (on the left of the photo) and cross over on a blind corner.

We have all been affected by this Coronavirus pandemic, but at least we have been able to enjoy some lovely weather on foot or by bike, albeit not in a group. *Wheelrights* have been able to continue doing what they do, if not by attending meetings then by emails, phone, and to some extent visual media such as Skype or Zoom.

A positive effect of the lockdown is that roads are quieter and the air cleaner so that more are cycling. Helping to make this permanent is therefore a priority for *Wheelrights*.

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Copy deadline

Copy for the next issue should be sent to David Naylor by mid August.
(Email: david@davidjnaylor.plus.com)

This issue

First, our chair addresses our Council's failure to follow up (at least at the time of writing) a nationwide initiative to introduce pop-up cycle lanes. Then our secretary updates us on the route across Stafford Common. Nicolette describes a continental cycle tour with her dad on p. 4 and on p. 5 Oscar Chess covers a ground breaking CTC ride. A slightly tech'y article by me comes next (which some might like to skip) and the last article tells you a bit about E-bikes.

David Naylor

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Pop-up cycle lanes

They're here, they're there, they're everywhere! Or at least they should be. Whilst towns and cities all over the world are trying to maximise cycling and walking at this difficult time, local authorities in Wales have been slow off the mark. The foreshore along Swansea Bay has seen a big increase in numbers with especial difficulties at choke points like the Slip, the Cenotaph, Blackpill and Oystermouth. Instead of welcoming the increase and using this as an opportunity to widen paths and take over traffic lanes, the police and local authority state the paths could be closed to keep social distancing in place.

The Welsh Government were quicker off the mark offering extra cash to councils to fund temporary initiatives, but the closing date was May 21st nearly two months after the lockdown started. There is not a single extra plastic cone or bollard in place throughout the whole of Swansea to give cyclists greater protection from cars, and pedestrians and dog walkers more space to exercise! And where is the increase in cycling most apparent? Answer, in the number of bikes I see being ridden on the pavements. This is cyclists saying "I don't feel safe." yet this is only likely to lead to complaints (rightly) from people young and old who are taking to the streets in greater numbers.

If Bogota in Columbia can declare a car free Sunday every week and London, Milan and Paris can put in extra cycle lanes within a week or two of lockdown, surely Swansea can help social distancing rather than hinder it. How about cycle lanes on Oystermouth Road, Sketty Lane, or Walter Road? These are just three of the nine schemes we have put forward for consideration.

If you want to see pop-up lanes in your locality, please contact one of the *Wheelrights* officers and we'll work with you!



A pop-up cycle lane – but it's not in Swansea!

John Sayce (*Wheelrights* Chair)

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The saga of Stafford Common

In days of yore magnificent steam locomotives used to pull trains from Swansea up the Clyne valley to Gowerton, Pontarddulais and on to Liverpool, until the line was partially closed in the sixties. Later, in the 1980s, some far sighted folk in Lliw Valley Council planned a bike path along the disused track and created the Kingsbridge to Grovesend path, but there was a missing link between Gowerton and Kingsbridge.

There were massive problems finishing this link. These included the fast road to Llanelli (The A484.) and land ownership issues, especially Stafford Common owned by the Duke of Beaufort.

Intrepid *Wheelrights* officers started to campaign for Swansea Council to complete this link in 2009, and also to continue the route north to Pontarddulais. Sustrans were already interested and helped *Wheelrights* develop a community engagement project in Pontarddulais. This attracted interest from *Friends of Coed Bach Park*, an Independent Councillor and the Town Council. The Ramblers were also keen as they wanted the long distance Gower Way to use the path across Stafford Common.

The campaign became a real team effort but crucially David Naylor, David Judd and myself were persistent and didn't let up. Also Ben George (Swansea's Transportation officer) was determined to see this project through. In 2019 Ben successfully obtained Welsh Gov. Active Travel money, and construction work started in 2020.



The photo is looking SE across the new board walk which goes across a marshy section of common land just north of where the path goes under the A484, but work on it has been suspended due to the Covid19 emergency.

There are a couple of obstacles yet to overcome, but lets hope the Gowerton to Kingsbridge link will be completed in 2021 when we look forward to a grand opening.

The eventual route to Pontarddulais will tick lots of boxes. It will be an Active Travel route linking several villages to the two comprehensive schools and busy train station in Gowerton, then on to Swansea. It will be a new section of the National Cycle Network and an important leisure and tourism route.

So if you are near Kingsbridge on your exercise ride, pause to have a look (under the bridge) at this work in progress.

Nick Guy (*Wheelrights* Secretary)

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Cycling the St Jacobs route

It was after my father's 70th birthday that I had the idea to ask him to go on a cycle trip with me. My parents are well travelled cyclists and have done many continents by bike. I could learn something from their experiences. Also every other year I do something with my mother but never having done anything with my dad this would make for a memorable experience. With mum's approval my father and I decided to cycle part of the St Jacobs route covering Belgium, France and Spain. We mainly camped but sometimes, when the weather was adverse, stayed in AirBnB or B&Bs. As the trip ran into October we had to be careful as in France some campsites had then closed for the winter. But occasionally we did camp in them!

We met each other in Brussels, my father by train from The Netherlands and I from Swansea. I took the train to London Paddington, cycled to St Pancras and from there Eurostar to Brussels. Even though I paid £35 to book my bike I had to drop it off at the other side of St Pancras, some 20 Minutes walk from the terminal. In Brussels I found it on the platform. Apart from that the journey was uneventful.



After we met we cycled to just outside Brussels for our first night's camping. We had to be careful to follow the cycle route and not the walking one. We thought every sticker with the St Jacobs shell was the right one, but this is not true. On the first day we cycled for hours along a canal. Despite being rather boring it was quiet and rural. Having ended up in the wrong village on the first day due to interpreting a walking sign as applying to cyclists we figured out that we had to follow the route signed with the shell **and** bike.

The route took us through villages and medieval towns, along flat but also undulating country lanes, past historical abbeys and churches (great to stamp the pilgrim book), the source of the river Schelde, and through forests. The traffic was light and the roads in reasonable condition. The weather in the first week was perfect: sunny with a light breeze. This changed however in the second and third weeks when it rained but only on one day all day long. I had a problem with my front rack frame fixed in a local garage. We did however pass plenty of cycle repair shops.

Due to time constraints we used the train on some parts of our route. The trains in France and Spain are great, but make sure you are not on a high speed train because bikes are not allowed on these. We had to divert from our route near Spain to enable my father to catch a flight back to the Netherlands from Bilbao. Having waved him goodbye I cycled further to Santander where I caught Brittany Ferries back to Plymouth.

Ferries are surely the best way to travel by bike. Just ride on, take what you need onboard and the rest can remain on the bike, and on arrival just cycle back off! It was a great trip with the best company you'd wish for. Thanks Dad!

Nicolette Hoekstra

Train and Chain

A Llandovery to Swansea group ride using the *Heart of Wales* line.

The Swansea branch of Cycling UK organise rides on a brilliant range of routes, making the most of the coastline, hills, valleys, rail, rivers and canal bank rides in our area. For practical reasons the routes are loops which start and finish in the same place.

Always looking for a different angle, I wondered what the options were for a group to start in one place and end up at another which used the trains. As the *Heart of Wales* line is free to bus pass holders in the winter months, this was an added incentive. Llandovery gave a respectable 40 mile run back to Swansea so the only issue was getting ten plus bikes transported. There was no way the railway operators would put on an extra carriage so we were stuck with the two bikes/train maximum. Hiring a van would have cost around £250. Explaining the problem in the pub, a mate offered his VW T5 long wheelbase van, which would take up to 12 bikes for free. So we took it up.

A date in early March was set and plans for two bike collections at Swansea and Pontarddulais stations were made.

Despite unsettled weather we were rewarded with some bright moments on the day. There was a buzz in the air as the first wave of cyclists loaded up at Swansea. Numbers were up to 14 and we managed to squeeze 7 bikes into the front row leaving enough space for the second wave to load. Phew!

Boarding the train in Swansea we enjoyed forward facing seats and the chance of a chat as we trundled to Llanelli. After Llanelli the train reverses so we were facing backwards. The second pickup at Pontarddulais went to plan and we had a good run up to Llandovery.

On arrival the guard hopped on the platform with us and, after lowering the railway crossing barrier for the train to proceed, kindly took a team photo.



Phil and Caroline, our fab support team, met us at the station with the bikes. We resisted the temptation to pop into the pretty station café and headed off into the teeth of a strong southerly headwind. We stuck together as a group and had an excellent lunch stop at Roy's Café in Llandybie, dodging some raindrops.

Back on the saddles, the group had to endure a long climb as a muck spreader was emptying the tank spraying into the air at the top of a hill near Fforest. The smell remained in the nostrils long after passing it. The tractor and trailer then sped past our group with the last of his load splattering some unlucky cyclists as he manoeuvred.

The group progressively melted away as we headed towards Swansea Seafront. The end of an excellent day out.

Oscar Chess

Hassle with a Hub

Let me make it clear from the start that this is not about the functioning of a hub gear. The gear in question is an 11 speed Alfine. I have had it seven years and after some teething problems it now works fine. The hassle was to do with the drive train, not the gear itself.

Having covered some 8,000 miles since the transmission was last renewed and because the chain was making noises which I felt it should not be making I decided to replace the chain, chain-wheel and rear sprocket. I managed to buy what I needed in Swansea and set to to replace them.

Replacing the chain and chain-wheel was straightforward, replacing the sprocket was not. I had not expected this as simpler hub gears, such as the century old Sturmey Archer 3 speed, simply require the removal of the rear wheel and then the unclipping of a split steel ring which holds the sprocket in place. But it's not so simple with the Alfine11. One needs to read the instructions. Unfortunately I didn't!



On removing the wheel to get to the sprocket one first has to remove a pulley assembly round which the gear-change wire goes. This is held in place by what I subsequently learnt is a 'Cassette joint fixing ring'. It was covered in gunge and it was not clear how it could be removed. Thinking it was like a washer I prised it off. When I cleaned it I was surprised to find it was a *split* ring.

Having removed this ring the pulley assembly comes off readily to give access to the sprocket. This is held in place by the aforesaid steel ring. Replacing the sprocket was straightforward if fiddly. But then I had to reassemble the hub.

I got all the bits back in the right order but the pulley assembly was not firmly fixed. It clearly needed to be. So now I got to read the instructions. There are red and yellow spots which have to be lined up and then the fixing ring has to be rotated 45° to – surprise, surprise! – fix the pulley assembly in position. I then reassembled the hub but it was still loose.

The penny then dropped: the fixing ring was not meant to be split! Clearly I had broken it when forcing it off. Easily done as it is made of plastic. Fortunately I was able to buy a replacement over the internet. (From St John's St Cycles in Bridgewater, Somerset – well known as a source of eg Thorne bikes with Rohloff hub gears.) I installed this successfully and now I'm set for I hope many miles of trouble free cycling with my new drive train.

David Naylor

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E-bikes

A comprehensive article on e-bikes appeared in the 28 January issue of Cycling UK's *Cycleclips*. The essence of it is as follows.

E-bikes are forecast to triple in Europe in the next five years. This raises a number of questions which the article addresses.

When does an e-bike count as an ordinary bicycle? The answer is when its power does not exceed 250W and its motor assisted speed is limited to 25 kph (15.5 mph). Also the pedals must be turning when under power. It is then an EAPC (Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle). If these limits are exceeded the bike is classified as a moped or motorcycle and will need to be insured, the rider licensed and a helmet must be worn. The minimum age limit is however 14, not 16 as the law requires for motorcycles. These regulations only apply if the bike is used on the highway. On cycle paths or elsewhere off-road powered bikes which exceed these limits can be used unlicensed.

Twist and go e-bikes. This refers to e-bikes which do not require pedalling to activate the motor. The EU categorises them as "Powered cycles" and allows them up to 1000W, but subject to regulation. How this regulation is applied in the UK is not clear. However such e-bikes with a power of not more than 250W and manufactured before the regulations described above came into force, and which can be obtained second hand, count as ordinary bikes, ie the requirement that pedalling is required to activate the motor does not apply.

Pedelec bikes. These are e-bikes which count as ordinary bikes according to the criteria above. However in Europe there is also a more powerful 's-pedelec' (speed pedelec). This is limited to 45kph (28mph) and is regulated as a moped. They are popular in the Netherlands and Germany.



Conformity to EU standards. An e-bike that meets EU safety standards and counts as an ordinary bike should have a sticker or plate on it like that illustrated.

The article goes on to provide some cycling safety statistics but notes that these are lacking for e-bikes. It then comments on their exercise potential – yes, you get lots! – and on other matters.

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An issue not discussed is the safety issue of people who are not experienced cyclists using e-bikes. This particularly applies in hilly areas such as in Swansea. It has been suggested that e-bikes will be the key to people using the new routes springing up in the north and northeast of our city. I fear that there may be an undue number of accidents.

David Naylor

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Forthcoming events

No events involving the physical attendance of people are planned while the Coronavirus lockdown applies. This means that the Cappuccino and U3A rides and also *Wheelrights* Routes Group and other meetings are on hold, an exception being that one virtual *Wheelrights* meeting is planned. (See below). When lockdown is lifted details will be provided on the 'Events' page of www.wheelrights.org.uk as usual.

The following events do not involve physical attendance.

Wheelrights virtual meeting.

7.30pm on Tuesday, 23 June: a *Wheelrights* meeting by Zoom. If interested please email Nick Guy: nick.bike@hotmail.co.uk

Bike Week: 6-14 June

For ideas about what you might do during this week visit www.cyclinguk.org/bikeweek.

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Lockdown

We're told that we must stay at home,
That rides with friends are banned.
Restricted now our right to roam
Until lockdown is lifted.

But we encouraged are
Each day to walk or ride
As long as we don't use the car
Until lockdown is lifted.

With family or on our own
And keeping well apart
We can ride away from home
Until lockdown is lifted.

Eventually there'll come a day
When we can ride with friends
And pedal near and faraway
When lockdown at last is lifted.

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