# Wheelrights

**the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group**

**Newsletter No. 69 Autumn 2024** **www.wheelrights.org.uk**

## Quality routes are key.

The photo is taken on the SUP between Kingsbridge and Gorseinon which was upgraded last year. At the time we were concerned about the lack of a diversion for cyclists, but now that it is complete there is a quality direct off-road route for the five miles from Gowerton to Gorseinon. In addition to this upgrade, a problem of roots breaking through the tarmac north from Gorseinon has been addressed.

As you can read on p. 2 various projects are in the pipeline for providing cycle friendly routes in Swansea. In particular the plan to make a start this year on off-road provision along Walter Road from Page Street, through Uplands to Sketty is to be welcomed. From what we have seen of the plans it appears that a fair balance between the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists will be achieved. We hope that similar quality provision can be achieved with the other projects in the pipeline.

Of these the GAP (Gower Access Path) across Clyne Common should by now have been close to completion had not the Inspector turned down the Council's plans. It appears that the Commoners have accepted revised plans (which puts the path on the south side of the fence rather than the north) so, hopefully, work on it will soon resume.

### This issue

**Contents**



**Copy deadline**

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

Following a round up of upcoming infrastructure projects a senior medic highlights the benefits of active travel. Then, on p.4, Allyson updates us on the foreshore lighting.

Next, my son, Don, describes his family's cycle tour in the outer Hebrides. Finally, Bill Gannon tests some kit on a tough ride across Wales.

Having recently turned 90 somebody is needed initially to share and in due course take over the editing of this Newsletter. Any takers?

**David Naylor**

# Active Travel routes: an update.

£2.6m (rounded to £0.1m) has been allocated for Swansea active travel routes in 2024/25. £1.4m of this is for off-road cycle provision on Walter and Sketty Roads. It is Route **UP** on the SE Swansea map on the 'Routes' page of *Wheelrights* website. This is divided into three sections with work starting on the easterly section (3) this year. Construction is expected to take three years.

The sections are numbered from west to east. They are:

Section 1: Sketty (Junction of De-La-Beche Road and Gower Road.) to Uplands. (Junction of Glanmore Road and Uplands Crescent.).

Section 2: Uplands via Gwydr Square to St James Crescent.

Section 3: St James Crescent along Walter Road to Page. Street.

Throughout the 2km length cycle provision will take the form of a 3m wide segregated cycle track alongside the footway on the south side of the carriageway. There will be some rearrangement of car parking and narrowing of the carriageway to accommodate the changes.

Other routes in the pipeline are as follows. **[ ]** followed by SW, NW, NE or SE identifies the route and the map respectively on the website. (**[-]**: not marked on map.)

- Culfor Road to Gowerton (**[**CU**]** & **[**GE**]** NW). The route will bypass Pont-y-Cob Road by going from the Island Bridge past the Elba playing fields to Fford Beck.
- Pontarddulais: (**[-]** NW). S. side of town linking **[**GP3**]** via Coedbach park to the town centre.
- Penllergare Woods to Tircoed (**[-]** NE). It will go under the M4.
- Gower Access Path (**[**GAP**]** SW). Work on this route was interrupted as it was turned down by the Planning Inspector. The plans, having now been revised to meet the Commoners objections, the work should recommence as soon as approval is obtained.
- Mumbles to Newton (**[-]** SW). By following the lanes to the west of Newton Road it will provide a lightly trafficked S-N route through Mumbles.
- Morriston Hospital to DVLA (**[**MD**]** NE).
- Eaton Road (**[**CE**]** SE).
- Tawe River Corridor (**[**WT**]** SE).

There is partial funding for this work and it is hoped that some of it can commence before the end of the year.

**David Naylor**

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# A medic's perspective.

The article: "Enabling active travel can improve the UK's health" appeared recently in a national medical journal (BMJ 2024; 384: q522). The author is Scarlett McNally, an orthopaedic surgeon who is president of the Medical Women's Federation and who cycles. She writes as follows: (Slightly shortened with minor rephrasing.)

*There is an urgent need to improve the nation's health, which worsened over the pandemic. There is an abundance of evidence that exercise improves physical and mental health, reducing demand on the NHS and social care .*

*The best forms of exercise fit in with everyday life, so Active Travel is a "best buy". Cycle commuting reduces the incidence of, and mortality from, heart disease and cancer by more than 30%; it also reduces days off work from sickness and depression. Because it's normal to travel by car and because infrastructure is built around them people don't swap them for active travel. DfT statistics for 2019 find that 71% of women and 61% of men found it too dangerous to cycle on roads. Where there are segregated safe cycle routes, people use them.*

*In the UK, massive central funds are spent on major roads. Conversely, local councils who need funds for infrastructure to support active travel, are facing a £4bn spending gap.*

*I have four suggestions to support active travel:*

1. *We should demand that the changes in the 2022 Highway Code are learnt by every driver: that they must give priority to pedestrians at junctions; give 1.5m clearance when passing cyclists who are encouraged to "take the lane" for their safety. I gives talks in which I lie down on the stage to show what 1.5m looks like. A mandate requiring this education before insuring or using a vehicle for work is needed.*
2. *We should demand 20 mph limits in all areas where there are people. People are rightly scared to overtake a cyclist but should not overtake on a bend or into oncoming traffic. Cyclists should walk or wheel where traffic is faster – the horrific injuries I see in orthopaedic and fracture clinics get exponentially worse with every 1 mph increase in speed. The cost of a 20 mph limit is minimal. It will require a few signs, a change of culture, and enforcement rather than expensive traffic calming measures.*

This minimal cycle stand at Singleton Hospital, Swansea, suggests that few travel actively here.

3. *the NHS workforce should be role models. It is responsible for 5% of the UK's total transport emissions, 1.3 million staff commuting making up the bulk of that. A modal shift from driving to active travel needs focus, support, and some funding.*
4. *Every NHS organisation is required to deliver a "green plan". It should include Active Travel as this reduces the pollution which causes catastrophic ill health and harms the planet. Children getting to school under their own steam has huge benefits.*

**David Naylor**

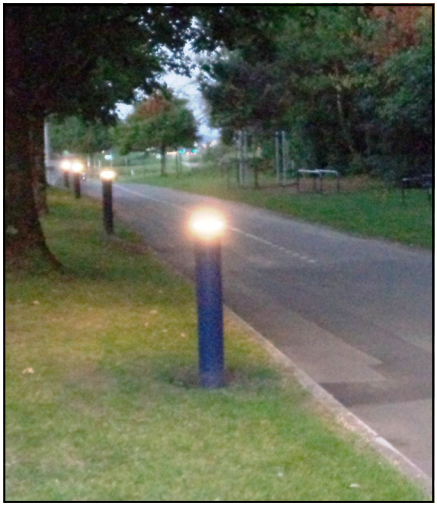
# Exciting Lighting

In the Spring 2021 Newsletter (Issue 55), I wrote about the lighting bollards that were being erected on the seafront cycle path from West Cross to Norton; and so the fight was on to get them extended to cover a larger part of the cycle path further east.

I always despair at the long autumn/winter evenings when it can be dusk in late afternoon on yuk days, and even though I have parks and a beautiful seafront nearby, I am forced to stay indoors.

No evening stroll, no cycle ride to Mumbles as everything is pitch black; with people who commute by bike, especially to the University and Hospital nearby, struggling to navigate their way to and from work.

Even on our roads these days, lighting is very poor.



So the campaign began.

We collected signatures and contacted lots of local councillors, highlighting safety issues in some very dark areas of the path.

Eventually, after a lot of hard work by some of our members, our pleas were taken up by Swansea Council and work started on erecting bollards from West Cross, where the others ended, all the way to the Secret Café.

East from there the path is nearer the road so is better lit.

They are now up and running and are a fabulous addition.

The last few bollards from Brynmill Lane to the Secret Café are in place, but not yet lit up.

In the dusk of the evening the path has lots of people on all sorts of transport, walkers included.

Let's hope it becomes a hive of activity this autumn/winter, that many others are encouraged to get up from their sofas, venture out and enjoy our beautiful Swansea Bay.

A BIG well done to everyone involved in making this happen.

**Allyson Evans**

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# A Hebridean family cycle tour

So much of the enjoyment or otherwise of a cycle trip depends on the weather, and in the Outer Hebrides the strength and direction of the wind is never far from one's mind. This is particularly the case when taking your nine year old daughter on her first major cycle tour. Our itinerary started in Barra in the south, took us north in the first week, and then after a loop of South Harris we partially retraced our steps to Lochboisdale on South Uist. We couldn't believe our luck that the wind blew from the southwest whilst we were heading north, then turned northerly and helped us again as we traveled south.

To get to the Outer Hebrides, some 50 miles off the west coast of mainland Scotland, from our home in Edinburgh was all part of the fun. First the short train journey to Glasgow, then on up to Oban on the 'Highland Explorer': a train that offers an embarrassment of riches for the cycle tourist with half a carriage providing space for 20 bikes.

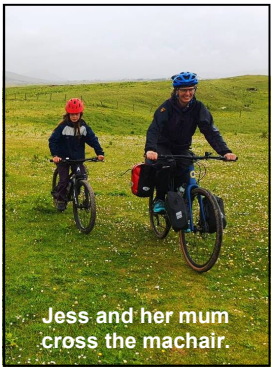

Space for 20 bikes! But it's not very ergonomic.

Oban always feels to me like a place where adventures begin. The town embraces the bay, full of yachts and tourist boats which all give way as the ocean going Calmac ferries steam in through the narrow channel between the mainland and Kerrera. The next morning as the *MV Isle of Lewis* nosed into port, raising its bow like a giant jaw, we waited, chatting excitedly with 20 other assorted cyclists. Getting priority over vehicle traffic we were first to board. The voyage to Castlebay on Barra takes about five hours and by the time we had gobbled down a fish supper, bought some provisions and ridden our first six miles to the island of Vatersay it was evening and time to set up camp on the machair.

Vatersay, like many of the islands in the chain is joined to it's neighbour by a causeway, so although there are some 15 inhabited islands (and many more uninhabited ones), to visit all of them it is only necessary to make two ferry crossings: one across the Sound of Barra, and the other across the Sound of Harris

The out-and-back to Vatersay is a necessary prelude to reach the start of the Hebridean Way. But we had little interest in 'official' routes and instead explored the beaches and cliffs and looked out to the uninhabited islands of Pabbaigh, Mingulay and the others, before heading north round the west side of Barra.

Over the next few days we worked our way northwards, enjoyed crossing the Sound of Barra in wonderful sunshine and dinner in the 'Am Politician' (Whisky Galore) pub on Eriskay. On our first day on South Uist we covered about 25 miles, largely off-road on tracks across the machair – which was fine until we hit a stretch of soft sand. Day two on the Uists was our hardest. Under grey skies we hurried across the flat lands of Benbecula watching short eared owls hunt over the moor; we even felt good enough to add in a lap of Grimsay (via an excellent café). But then as our route changed direction the wind picked up and the next hour or so was a battle to our AirBnB on North Uist. Thankfully for the next couple of days we escaped a storm behind solid walls.


Jess and her mum cross the machair.

Coincidentally some friends were also holidaying on North Uist and we joined them for a while. Jess enjoyed having kids her own age to play with as we explored some of the wide sandy beaches on the north coast. Watching porpoises playing in the surf was a highlight.


Tough cycling here!

Back on our bikes, the next morning's ride took us to the ferry port at Berneray. As the boat weaves an intricate path through the myriad rocky outcrops in the shallow sound the hills of Harris loom up ahead, marking an abrupt change in the landscape. This is a land of rock and water, and whilst the hills may not be very big there are lots of them and many are very steep. The cycling here is tough!

Making our way firstly up the eastern side of South Harris on tiny single-track roads that wriggle in and out of every little cove we reached an idyllic campsite at Liceasto. Here we indulged in the full glamping experience with a couple of nights in a yurt, dawn to dusk sunshine, a bottle of wine on the decking, and an evening kayak around the bay.

The next day, the climb up to the 'main' road marked the highest, and the most northerly point of our trip. We camped at Luskentyre, then hurried south over now familiar terrain. Leaving North Uist we experienced our one truly wet day. But with the wind behind us and our friends once again providing company spirits were high.

It is always sad to leave the islands, but the next day boarding the *MV Lord of the Isles*, we could look back on a fantastic adventure and give weary legs a rest. We had never cycled all day, or every day – that's no fun for a nine year old – but over two weeks we had covered almost 250 miles. We had experienced plenty of weather: most of it good, some of it terrible. But most of all we had collected a horde of memories, and one burning question: "Where shall we go next time?"

**Donald Naylor**

Ed: *The note on the photo of the Oban train that it is "not very ergonomic" perhaps needs clarification. Don found it awkward to load and unload their bikes and felt that the space could be much better designed to accommodate twenty. This is relevant to us in Wales where a train with space for ten bikes is planned for the Heart of Wales line. Let's hope that a better layout will be provided than in that Scotrail train.*

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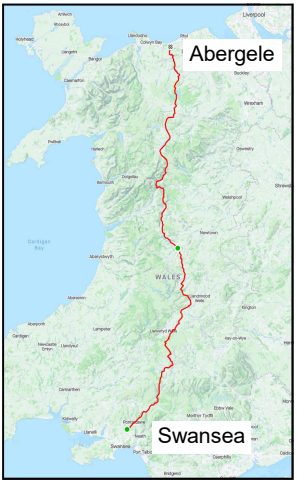


# Testing a bike charger

I recently purchased a dynamo front wheel from Spa Cycles (special offer £120) plus a VeloCharger Mk2 (£105), and decided that I would test them out on a 2-day cycle camping trip from Swansea to Abergele. In combination with my phone and a Beeline Velo Mk1, this would provide unlimited Satnav. So how did I get on?

First, it should be noted that the 3W output of a hub dynamo is not very much. However, in testing, my phone was charging at up to 8% per hour, and the flatter the battery, the faster it charges. Setting off with the phone battery on 65%, at the end of the first day it had reached 69%. This was not surprising since the Velocharger cannot get the phone to accept charge at speeds below 9 mph and I was often slower on the long hills.

With a four-person tent, sleeping bag, and a proper camp-bed (with metal poles) my typical speed uphill was more like 4 mph, and with 2,100m of climbing on the first day, there were long periods of time with no charging at all. By the next morning, the battery had fallen to 45% and had barely increased when disaster struck. Stopping to take a photo, I somehow activated the screen as I slid the phone into the pannier, and by the time I noticed (an hour later) the phone was roasting hot, with the battery down to 24%. This was shortly followed by the monumental climb of Bwlch y Groes (Hellfire Pass) with its "long unrelenting section of 20%", by which time the battery was on 15%.


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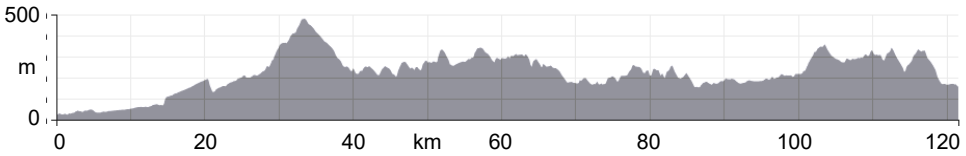


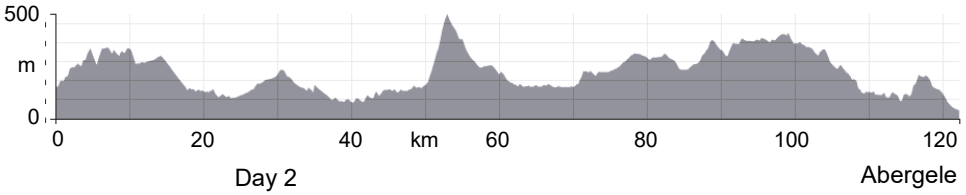

I could have done with some flatter roads between there and Abergele, but the Beeline seemed determined to take me up every single-track road in North Wales as it resolutely avoided A roads at all cost. The only way to over-rule it is to plot the driving route on Google Maps, convert this to a GPX, and then import this into the Beeline app, certainly something I should have done. [*Ed: Or use a 1:50,000 OS paper map?*]

At the end of the second day, with 2,500m of climbing, the battery had recovered to 28%. Worse still, I discovered that my supposedly waterproof Beeline is nothing of the sort, and even now my screen is still scrambled. Overall, I think this test serves to highlight how precarious the dynamo-hub-phone-charging situation can be. Nevertheless, on a less lumpy route, in a less lumpy country, and with a less heavily-laden bike, I'm sure it would be fine. I came back by train.

**Bill Gannon**

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## Forthcoming events

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

### *Wheelrights* public meeting.

7.00pm on 17 September, in the Environment Centre; Tom Wharf of *Transport for Wales* , will give a talk relating to Active Travel provision.

### *Wheelrights* Routes Group meetings.

These are usually at 10.00am monthly and take place in Ripples Café. The next is scheduled for 14 September.

### Cappuccino Rides.

Details on the Events page. These will continue into the autumn until we decide it's getting too wet and cold.

### *Wheelrights* AGM

Date to be decided. Check Events page.

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