



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



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www.wheelrights.org.uk

Let's not forget leisure cyclists



Courtesy of David Judd

While we have quite rightly focussed on active travel we need also to campaign for the needs of leisure cyclists. They comprise visitors and tourists as well as locals, and there are a lot of them. Many of the routes they use, if not all, are also used by utility cyclists, and it makes sense to consider both as active travel routes. Our President makes the case for this in his letter to the editor on p. 4, as did the erection of a No Cycling sign (pictured) on the access road between the Heritage Centre and Park Woods. Thanks to our lobbying it has been removed.

That route is part of a key link between south and north Gower for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, particularly for cyclists. Cycling is banned on the short stretch between Park Woods and Llethrid at the north end. This is a private footpath and the owners do not allow cycling for, it appears, no good reason. Our attempt ten years ago to get it upgraded to a restricted byway, which would allow cycling, was unsuccessful. We will try again.

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Copy deadline

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

This issue

First, Nick Guy gives us his take on the 20 mph default. This is followed by my summary of the CPATG's view on the WG's Active Travel plans. Then a letter from our President, followed by an article about cycle campaigning in Glasgow from Brenda who has recently moved to Swansea. Finally two cycle tour descriptions: the first: my son Don's account of an epic ride from France into the Pyrenees, then a teenager's tale of a family tour in Germany

David Naylor

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www.wheelrights.org.uk/aboutus

Twenty's Plenty

It's 16 months since the Welsh Government introduced the default 20 mph speed limit in residential areas, so a good time to evaluate its results, especially for cyclists.

A recent study found that deaths and serious injuries dropped by approx. 25% in the first year of implementation. This includes a reduction of 12 road deaths, (average one per month) on our roads. This excellent news I think justifies the efforts to implement it.

I will describe my personal view of its benefits for cyclists, which generally also apply to walkers. I live in the Uplands area of Swansea, which has the arterial Walter Rd plus a wide area of residential roads, with shops, schools, etc.

My experience is that as motorists have decreased their speeds the roads feel safer for cycling; cars give a wider passing space, as they are not travelling so fast.

I have also seen more women cycling around here taking children to school by bike.

For walkers I think the 20 mph limit has also enabled motorists to keep to the new Highway code law about giving way to pedestrians crossing minor roads.

I also believe the speed limit helps motorists, for example by making it easier for cars to pull out of side roads (as cars on the major roads are travelling slower). I have also read that some car insurance firms plan to reduce insurance premiums where there are 20 mph limits, partly due to a reduction in the costs of car repairs as a result of fewer collisions.

There have been major challenges to our new speed limits. I believe the objections are mainly due to our addiction to the motor car, and illustrate the complexities of encouraging behaviour change.

Fundamentally I believe the 20 mph limits (especially in residential areas) will enable a future fundamental change in the nature of our urban environment. They will help our towns and cities become places for people, instead of streets dominated by car use for which they have been designed .

All this can add up to the possibility of an increase in active travel in conjunction with other measures.

One example is the Council's current work in making Sandfields accessible and amenable for journeys by bike or on foot, by improving road blockages, creating rain gardens and making roads cul-de-sacs. This area is completely 20 mph.

I believe this step forward could be replicated in other communities around Swansea eg Morriston. There is a great low cost potential for making key quiet roads as bike routes, with signage etc and linking with existing bike routes eg connecting to our city centre, shopping centres and other key destinations.

Letters to the editor on this subject would be welcome.

Nick Guy

CPATG on Active Travel

Ken Skates, the WG Transport Minister, gave a presentation at the Welsh Gov. Cross Party Active Travel Group's (CPATG) meeting on 11 December, 2024 in which he outlined the Government's Active Travel plans. This is a summary of CPATG's response to it.

Funding

The Government's position has changed and this concerns CPATG members. Whilst £120m has been allocated for Active Travel the amount LA's can bid for has been severely restricted: the number of projects which can be financed has been cut from three to one. This means that budgets have in effect been halved.

CJCs (Corporate Joint Committees)

How CJCs administer Active Travel (AT) needs clarification. Key questions are:

- Will TfW continue to administer AT spending and ensure the Guidelines are met?
- If AT funding is insufficient are available LA staff to be transferred to CJCs?
- Will CJCs be given targets to increase AT to meet the WG's Net Zero Carbon aims?
- Is AT revenue funding to be devolved to the CJCs?

Inclusivity

While we share your desire that AT needs to be inclusive we do not agree that the AT Guidance causes infrastructure to be less inclusive than it should be; rather that the problem lies in its application. In particular Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are poorly exercised. The bidding process does not require equalities to be considered in designs. We recommend that the effectiveness and use of EIAs be reviewed.

We also recommend that the design element of the AT Guidance be made statutory rather than advisory as at present.

We do not accept that cycling is not an inclusive mode of travel. It enables many with disabilities to be mobile. Women feel safer on a bike than on foot. The cost of cycling is not prohibitive as you suggest.

Ownership of bikes is high (49% of residents in Cardiff) but many don't use them, due it would appear to a lack of safe infrastructure. Suitable infrastructure together with other measures to promote cycling would be cost effective.

E-bikes

We believe they have an important role in increasing active travel but recognize there is a problem with the use of illegal e-bikes. A campaign is needed to explain to the public which types of e-bike are legal and which are not.

20 mph and cycling

There is extensive evidence that it is segregated infrastructure that enables people to cycle, especially children to school. 20 mph on its own is not enough. Measures are needed to enforce the limits as speeds are creeping up.

A final paragraph makes the case for better provision for cyclists and the promotion of safe cycling as a means of achieving modal shift.

David Naylor

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Correspondence

Cycle Tourism UK Needs a boost

The European nations place great store on the benefit to tourism from cycling, particularly on their Greenways with long beautiful stretches of scenery connecting the villages and attractions along the way. Usually on disused railways or canals they attract cyclists of all ages and abilities and apart from all the benefits to health and the environment they provide a substantial income to the regions.

Why is it then in the UK so little is made of our Greenways by the tourism industry both private and public? We have the National Cycle Network developed by Sustrans in partnership with most local authorities and others, but there seems currently no appetite to give full attention to any future development or proper publicity to what we have already to enjoy. There are several disused railways in Wales needing a push to turn them into Greenways, most have been talked about for over 25 years.

Greenways and Cycleroutes, a charity focussed on Greenway development (with John Grimshaw former Sustrans Chief Engineer on whose projects I have been a volunteer) has recently joined European Greenways Association (EGWA) where there has been significant development and success in this cycling tourism product.

I would like to see a revival of the efforts in the early 2000's and take every opportunity to develop all possible routes to the benefit of tourism in particular, but also for our own enjoyment of the countryside.

David Judd

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A Scottish perspective

I've recently moved to Swansea from Glasgow where I was active with cycle campaigning for several years. I was using the bike for everyday trips as well as days out locally, choosing devious quiet routes to avoid busy roads. The city council there had published fine words about climate change, greenness, healthy lifestyles and the like, but seemed stuck in a mindset that was willing to make provision for cycling, but failed to make it possible for people to cycle safely where they wanted to.

As campaigners we were forever welcoming proposals but slamming the implementation, pointing out that 'paint is not protection'; that cycling momentum is hard won so people won't use facilities that make them stop at every side turning; that shared pavements annoy everyone whether they're walking or cycling; that it's a waste of money putting in cycleways/lanes/paths that just end; that a bicycle is a vehicle and cycling-for-leisure is distinct from cycling-for-transport.

The campaign recognised that councillors and officers included people who would welcome support in making the case for reducing car dominance. We emphasised that cycling was not just for a lycra-clad minority, and focused on being constructive in our criticisms, making them evidence based. One result was links on the campaign website to a lot of research results. Another was that after one set of local elections we wrote to the newly elected councillors inviting them (assertively) on a tour of their ward from the cycling perspective.

One time when it all came together was with the redesign of Byres Road an important busy street lined with shops that's also a through route. The original proposals at the consultation were hugely disappointing; there was no continuous protected cycling provision. This seemed like a make-or-break moment and led to the mass ride of ordinary people on cycles pictured below. There obviously wouldn't be another redesign of the street within a couple of decades, and if the council didn't build good protected cycle infrastructure there now, when and where would they?

So as well as our individual and group responses to the consultation a small number of members with amazing skills set up a sub-campaign emphasising 'Streets for People'. They did a detailed redesign to show that there was room for good quality segregated cycleways (and parking and loading). They even created visuals to show how it would look. There was a mass ride (with people on all kinds of bikes, wearing all kinds of clothes, and families with children) to make the case for a quality implementation. People spoke to local councillors and the council design team. Then we heard that the council weren't proceeding with their plans.

But eventually, new plans came out. They were very close to the designs done by our local group. It's taken forever, but the first third or so of the work was nearing completion when I left to move to Swansea. Was this a campaigning success? Who knows? [Ed: surely it was?] It didn't hurt that in the meantime the official mood was shifting, the Scottish government had increased the budget for active travel (campaigning pressure?), the city council had changed from entrenched Labour control to a minority SNP administration (with Green support) and LTN1/20 *Cycle Infrastructure Design* and its Scottish equivalent had been published. No doubt there were many factors in play, but the campaign activity certainly didn't hurt and we should keep on doing it, everywhere, as creatively as we can.



This message: "People make Byres Road" led to the re-design of Byres Road referred to above. It is an example of what can be achieved when people are heeded.

Brenda Lillicrap

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A Ride to Spain

by paths and a tunnel past washed out roads.

In late summer 2024 I took part in the World Masters Mountain Running Championships in the Spanish Pyrenees. My friends and team-mates were all flying out, but I decided to go by train and bike [Ed: *In the last issue (70) Don describes how to take a bike on Eurostar.*] The schedule was tight: Wednesday: train from Edinburgh to Lourdes: Thursday: bike from Lourdes to Canfranc Estacion, my destination. Then a weekend of mountain races returning on the Monday and Tuesday by bike to Lourdes, but breaking the journey at Formigal. Then on Wednesday train back to Edinburgh. I was hoping for a mini-adventure, but I got more than enough excitement in one day. The return journey was tamer; I cover just the outward ride in this account.



In the weeks before my trip, the Pyrenees had been hit by massive floods causing landslides that had taken out a section of the main road. This ruled out travelling by car. On two wheels however a google research suggested that an alternative route along lanes and footpaths on the opposite side of the valley should be possible.

When I arrived in Lourdes the rain was still falling. It cleared within a couple of hours and by lunchtime as I was tackling my first obstacle, the Col de Marie-Blanche (1035m), the skies cleared. With cautious optimism I flew down the western side of the Marie-Blanche into the Vallee D'Aspe. I was now fully committed to my chosen route as any detour would lengthen the ride by 200km and involve another 3000m of ascent. The N134 was deserted, and my anxiety levels rose as I climbed up to the village of Urdos through a limestone gorge 200m deep. Here I knew the main road was closed but expected to be able to take a minor lane to the west. What I hadn't counted on was the *gendarmes* stationed at the junction. "*Non. Toutes les routes sont fermes.*" I had no choice. The gorge was narrow and they would not let me through! Despondent, I turned tail and descended. A kilometre later, contemplating my limited options, I saw a hand-written sign indicating a diversion of a footpath through a disused railway tunnel. There was nothing to lose so digging out my lights I pushed my bike over rough ballast into the overgrown unlit tunnel. 100 years ago a tunnel had been bored through the Pyrenees to my destination: Canfranc Estacion. Could this be it? But Canfranc was 20km away!



However after what felt like an age, but was probably only 15 minutes, I emerged at the end of the tunnel. Checking location on my phone I realised that I was a mere 50m beyond where the police had turned me back. Ahead, the once quiet rural lane was strewn with landslide debris and heavy machinery. It was rideable (just) and, heart pounding, I pedalled hard over the rubble away from the French police. Avoiding eye contact with workers clearing the route, I pushed on until I had reached a quiet lane with a footpath sign pointing to the Col du Portalet. For the next 1½ hours I mostly pushed and carried my bike over rocks, tree roots and mud as the path wound up and down the valley side. Every side stream had been washed out by floods and I dreaded reaching one which I could not cross. But at least I evaded the authorities.



Tour de France bicycle sculptures.

Col Du Souloir on my return journey.

Eventually I rejoined the empty highway high above the landslide zone. The main road disappeared into its own tunnel and I continued on up over the Col du Portalet (1794m) in eerie silence. Exhausted my progress was painfully slow. Cresting the summit with the light fading and temperatures dropping below freezing I didn't even bother putting on a jacket for the descent. 6 kms and 10 minutes later I staggered into the apartment where my friends were waiting. "Pasta will be ready in 5 minutes" – thank you Jamie!

Donald Naylor

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A family cycle tour in Germany

We set off on our five day trip, from a small village northeast of Berlin to the Baltic sea. There were four of us: myself, my younger brother, Mum and Dad. Over three days we cycled north to the island of Usedom in the Baltic sea, overnighing in Warnitz on the Ober-ueckersee, then Ueckermünde, north of Prenzlau, and on the third day the town of Usedom on the island. We camped every night. It was hot and, passing many lakes, whenever we spotted access to water, we stopped and cooled down in it.

Highlights of the trip were on our first day a visit to the ruins of the medieval abbey Chorin, refreshing swims and the food! For example big portions of Schnitzel (fried battered pork) and Apfelschörle (apple juice mixed with water) in a nice restaurant in Warnitz and later, in Ueckermünde, we found a nice little bakery with tables under shady trees and had a delicious breakfast..

Before boarding the ferry to the island of Usedom we cycled past vast wetland areas which are protected for rewilding. We climbed a bird watching tower where hundreds of swallows had built their nests under the roof. We could even spot the young swallows within their nests. The best part however was when we spotted two ospreys flying over the wetland.

We were surprised how hilly the island was; I think we were spoiled from the previous days! Because we were severely exhausted from the heat, we stopped in Usedom for an ice-cream and something to eat in a bakery. By this time – the afternoon – while looking for a

campsite, we took a wrong turn got stuck in a stubble field. We eventually found our way out and, finally, in the evening, reaching the north coast of Usedom. Exhausted, we arrived for dinner in the *Seebad Bansin* to find everybody else dressed up. This did not stop us from having our first swim in the rather turbulent Baltic Sea.

It being late in the day it was tricky to find a campsite as the island was full of tourists. With the help of some drunks and rather conflicting information we found one. We had to pitch our tents in pitch black darkness. The next morning, we went for another swim in the sea and had a big breakfast in a bakery. Then after a few hours cycling we reached a beach where we decided to rest for a bit. We had only been there for few minutes when we were approached by a lady and asked to pay "Kurtaxe", a fee every tourist on Usedom must pay for using the beach.

After that incident we headed for Peenemunde, where we would take a ferry off the island and where, in Freest, we found a much quieter campsite away from the main tourism.

The next morning, we cycled for a few hours before reaching Greifswald. By now, the weather had turned and it rained. In the main market, we found a nice Imbiss (snack bar) with a friendly owner. We ate all his sausages and homemade potato salad. He even gave us some apricots for our journey.

We celebrated the end of our cycling tour with big portions of ice-cream before catching the train back to Berlin.

Friederich Dettmer
(Aged 13.)

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Forthcoming events

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

Wheelrights Routes Group meetings.

These are held monthly at 10.00am on a Saturday in either Ripples Café or the Environment Centre. The next is scheduled for 15 March in the Environment Centre.

Rail 200 - a Ride to Celebrate 200 years of Passenger Trains.

22 March. This ride starts at 10.00 am in Dylan Thomas Square in the city centre and goes to Mumbles, stopping for celebratory events in Blackpill. Details on the Events page.

Wheelrights public meeting.

A meeting is planned. Details to come.

U3A and Cappuccino Rides.

The U3A rides take place monthly. The Cappuccino rides will restart in March/April when it's warmer, but only if there is enough support. There were only one or two regulars last year. If you know of any new people who may be interested, please ask them to contact Allyson. See the Events page for both and the Rides page for Allyson's contact details.

Other

Bike week is from 9 to 15 June.

28 May to 1 June: Swansea and Gower Cycling Festival.