

cycle

lifestyle

Give it a Go
The Peddler
Grin up North

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Love London, Love Cycling

Issue 10

Grin up North

by Ben Irvine

I've been infatuated with the North of England ever since my first visit, aged 11, on a school trip to the Lake District. Having grown up in London I hadn't seen many sheep, stone cottages, farmers, that sort of thing. So when our coach pulled up at our hotel, beside a towering green hill, I was mesmerised. My mum had packed me off with a disposable camera, and I used up all my pictures in that first minute – clicking away as if this beauty couldn't possibly last forever. At my parents' house there's an album of all the photos I took as a boy, and when someone dug it out recently we had a good laugh: for ten pages there are just photos of one hill.

I'm not sure I ever grew out of that eccentricity. I certainly never stopped loving the North. By the time I finished my degree in Durham I had explored pretty much the whole region (often while travelling to Spurs away games) and was bewitched, by the magical desolation of Northumberland and the Scottish Borders, the heartbreaking beauty of the Lake District, the gentle majesty of the Yorkshire Dales and the misty grandeur of the Derbyshire Peaks, not to mention the quaintness of historic cities such as York and Lancaster, and the buzz of bigger cities such as Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, and, across the border, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

And then of course there's cycling up north. All the best things about cycling – the freedom, peace of mind, fresh air, novel sights, stopping off for a cup of tea or a pint, friendly spontaneous social interactions – are also the best things about the North. When you put the two together there can be few happier experiences.

So if you want a proper getaway, maybe even an epiphany like the one I had when I was 11, why not head up north for a cycling break. There are plenty more hills out there to be photographed.

For riders who would enjoy cycling with a guide, Storybikes (www.storybikes.co.uk) comes highly recommended. Andy Hunter leads groups on various tours in the North of England and throughout Scotland, recounting stories, myths and legends along the way.

If you prefer to explore on your own, the South Lakes region is a great place to start, combining gentle hills with some bigger climbs around the stunning lakes of Windermere and Coniston. Lothlorien Cottage (www.kentsbankholiday.co.uk), in the pretty seaside town of Grange-over-Sands, has dramatic views stretching for miles across Morecambe Bay – an inspirational backdrop for an author like me – and, with friendly owners David and Pam Chadwick providing advice and a warm welcome, it's a fantastic base for cycling in the area.



Journey by bicycle through lore and legend with your guide and storyteller, Andy Hunter

Stories: Through stories, travel to the heart and history of the landscape. A story or two along the way each day will include myths, legends, humour and history.

Tours: We cycle at a moderate pace which can be adjusted to suit the group, covering 20-30 miles in a day. 2014 week-long tours: Hadrian's Wall, Scottish Borders, Perthshire. Regular half-days in Edinburgh.

Sustenance: Stopping at cafes, inns or scenic sites to ensure nourishment for all the senses.

"Combination of a brilliant holiday, self-reliance, low carbon, physical challenge, good company, and everything organised" Helen, Newcastle

Storybikes, 22 Shandon St, Edinburgh, EH11 1QH
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Cycling in the South Lakes!

Lothlorien is a 2 bedroom (sleeps 4) cycle-friendly self-catering holiday home in Grange-Over-Sands with views across Morecambe Bay and a beautiful garden. It has a cycle shed & workshop and it's an ideal base for cycling in South Lakes. The railway station is close by and Windermere is only 8 miles away.

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Foreword



You hear a lot of bad news about cycling. Every time a cycling fatality occurs, especially in London, the media and cycling campaign groups seize upon the incident. Amid the clamour, it can be hard to ascertain the facts.

In 2002, there were around 110 million cycle journeys in London; 20 ended fatally. In 2012, there were around 180 million cycle journeys in London; 14 ended fatally.

One cyclist's death is one too many. But if every road casualty were highlighted similarly in the media, there wouldn't be space for any other news. Exceptionalism when it comes to reporting cycling accidents is actually sensationalism, pandering to people's fears.

Such provocation is especially counterproductive coming from cycling campaigners. I am reminded of this whenever I see a white 'ghost bike' beside the road where a cycling fatality has occurred. Surely these protests backfire, by reinforcing the view that cycling is too dangerous?

In any case, why not create a shrine for every road casualty? Or a shrine on every spot where the victim of a heart attack or stroke fell? This, indeed, would be more helpful to the cycling cause, reminding people to get plenty of exercise.

Studies have shown that cycling protects against heart disease, stroke, obesity, dementia, diabetes, high blood pressure and some cancers, and supports healthy bones, muscles, joints and even sleep patterns. If only facts like these were drummed into the public consciousness, day in, day out.

I started cycling in London when I was a kid – through the streets, round the park, and in Epping Forest where my friends and I used to wheelie over bumps and tree roots. In my teens I cycled to college.

Sure, I rode conscientiously, stuck to quieter streets, and maintained my bike properly. But in those days, cycling wasn't a big deal. It wasn't something that people were passionately for or against. I was a cyclist with a small 'c'. And I still am – just a bloke on a bike.

Cycle Lifestyle is all about cycling with a small 'c'. We don't do scaremongering or negative campaigning. We simply want to show how easily you, too, could become just a person on a bike.

To help you get started, we've provided information, tips, stories, safety advice, and inspiration.

Ben Irvine

Ben Irvine

www.benirvine.co.uk

Picture yourself on a bike by

by Gareth Jenkins



I believe the Beatles had a famous line that went: "Picture yourself on a bike by a river, with French apple trees and marmalade toast."

I was never very good at remembering lyrics correctly, but that image stayed with me until I finally booked a trip to France to go cycling.

I had never travelled abroad to cycle before. I also had never gone abroad with a baby. My lovely little daughter (who was not yet one year old) was going to come with my wife and I, for her very first hollybobs. Aaah.

Choosing the destination wasn't hard. I had got a few tips from friends and the good ol' internet that France, and more specifically the Mayenne Valley, was the place to go for this type of trip. I didn't want to conquer any mountains. I was simply looking for some natural beauty that was flat to cycle round with my baby.

My wife and I booked the ferry from Portsmouth to Ouistreham, and went the extra mile by booking a cabin on-board. I wasn't sure initially, but it was absolutely brilliant. Having a place for my daughter to crawl about, and a place for a sleep and shower, took all the effort out of travelling. We felt nice and refreshed for the drive to our hotel on the other side.

It's probably worth pointing out that you need the right equipment to drive in France. You need breathalysers, amongst other things, and also, critically, to remember

you'll be on the other side of the road. There are toll booths that pop up along the way, which seem to make up how much money you have to pay when you get there. On one section of road we paid something like £10 for a five minute drive, then an hour later it was 30p. It baffled me. Luckily you can pay by card.

We had booked into the Parc Hotel in Chateau-Gontier and hoped that the pictures we'd seen of it were accurate. They were and it was beautiful. The hotel was surrounded by about an acre of grounds, so it felt quiet and remote despite being very close to the town centre. The facilities were amazing and the owners and employees lovely. Our room had really high ceilings and huge double-aspect windows which opened onto a lovely view of the town. I don't like to show off but while I was in the hotel I mostly pretended I was a French aristocrat.

Babies, despite their cuteness, can sometimes have a way of bursting your bubble. My daughter spent most of the night screaming into our gorgeous huge room (with period features) which, as it turned out, had one hell of an echo in it. The tiredness turned to farce at one point when my wife knocked something over as she got out of bed to see to the baby. In the pitch black I heard the object hit the floor and so to help I swiped my hands from left to right where I heard the noise. My wife thought I was still asleep and so when an unexpected hand grasped her ankle from what seemed

a river...



to be under the bed things got a little louder.

Still, I was determined the lack of sleep was not going to get me down, and the next morning after coaxing my wife down from the ceiling we enjoyed our breakfast. Croissant me up.

We cycled down to the town centre, which had the amazing architecture we have come to expect from Northern France. The Mayenne river runs right through the town and the towpaths perfectly follow the river out through the countryside and neighbouring towns.

I couldn't believe how cute my daughter looked in her little cycling helmet, sat on the back of my bike. Evidently neither could she as she was asleep within five minutes of us starting and for the next hour or so I had the soft metronomic tapping of her head against my back as she dozed while I pedalled.

The towpath was extremely picturesque. It was streaked with tyre tracks, which suggested a busy cycling route, but in the couple of days we spent there I didn't see too many people, which added to the tranquility and privacy of the ride.

We passed beautiful cornfields, orchards and sleepy farms. Beside the towpath, cows were within touching distance of their tiny electric fence. The area smelt like – well, I know a French word for it but I'm told it's *impolite*.

My wife saw a heron stood on the crest of the weir. There was some debate between us about whether it was a plastic one. The argument "for" was that it didn't move for the entire five minutes we watched it. The case "against", however, was quite strong: mainly that who on

new bike on the block

earth would have put it there, standing precariously on the edge of the weir?! In an area with oodles of natural beauty, someone said to themselves “Hmm, there’s something missing from this scene... I know! I’ll get off to the French equivalent of Poundland (Euroland?) to buy a plastic bird”. Seems unlikely.

This part of the world really was wonderful and perfect for cycling. Butterflies were diving around us and dragonflies followed the bikes. The area has lots of other stuff to do, too – more challenging cycling, loads of history and great architecture to explore – and as far as I could see it is quite undiscovered so far.

There was a toll river crossing with a pulley system that despite being very old was still in use. It looked a lot like the ferry crossing in Lord of the Rings where the Hobbits escape from the Nasgul on horseback. (Sorry if I lost the non-geeks there – no more LOTR references from here on in, I promise.)

The few people we passed along the way were lovely. Cyclists, walkers, fishers, joggers would all give you a “bonjour” – guessing which ones were foreigners like us was dependent on the quality of bonjour. If they gave us a “Bonne-jooower” we knew they were British.

I already couldn’t wait to come back to the area when my daughter is a little older. She could ride herself and we could talk about all the animals we saw on the way.



There were lots of wild animals and some fields had horses (chevalle? or is it chevaux? I always get them mixed up. It’s only a matter of time before I go into a French barbers and ask them to cut my horse).

My French is OK, but I can’t hold a conversation at all. My wife’s French is really good. She’s all like “Bonjour monsieur dan le beau le bon ne cherche pas?”, and the guy’s all like “Oui ca le monmarche de poisson du lait a centre-ville”, and then they’ll both say “Ecoute moi entrecot biftec mis beau bon Michael Buble!” and laugh. I’m not jealous though.

Cycling like this was like a lovely relaxing meditation. I found it so nice to have time away from the phones, the media and the TV. It allowed me to think about my own life for a bit, find answers to stuff, make decisions, and clear the cobwebs out. Spending this quality time with my wife prompted lots of conversations we wouldn’t normally have the time or the inclination for. There is never a dull moment, as you are either away with your thoughts, talking about the stuff you always wanted to discuss (if you had a superpower what would it be?), or pointing out a weird bug like an excited six year-old. It was proper family time and I would highly recommend it to anyone who asked.

Visit Mayenne Tourism (www.tourisme-mayenne.com) for a range of ideas for holidaying in the area.

Brittany Ferries (www.brittanyferries.com or 0871 244 1400) has return Channel crossings from £109pp for a car and two passengers.



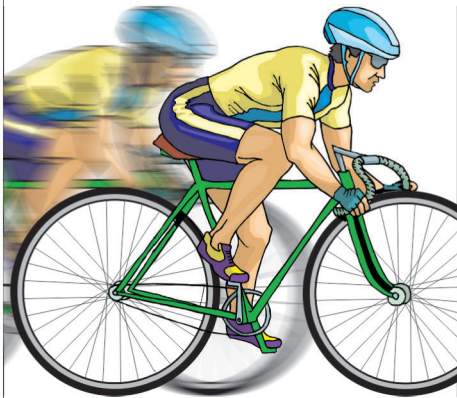
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column

The Peddler

by Adam Copeland

Cycling to work this morning, I was overtaken by an electrician's van.

You're right, it's probably not the most extraordinary thing that's ever happened to someone on a bike, but bear with me. Emblazoned on the back of the van was the company name: "Britain's Limited". That's right; Britain, apostrophe s, Limited.

Now, one of two things has happened here. Either (a) he's accidentally described the state of the nation, by unwittingly demonstrating it with his own limited grammar, or (b) some guy called Mr Britain (let's call him Keith) has innocently formed a limited company under his own name, just like Mr WH Smith, Mr Colman, or of course the reputable Messrs 2 Un before him. (That's right, a 2 Unlimited joke. The Peddler is nothing if not topical.)

Either way, the van joined my collection of Sights I've Enjoyed While Cycling Around the City. It's an ever-growing collection of photos stored on my phone to show people during lulls in conversation, or indeed to describe in a column during lulls in inspiration.

Let me share a few highlights of this collection with you now. Because after all, what better way is there of conveying a visual image than by explaining it prosaically with words? Hence the phrase "a word is worth a thousand pictures". Or if you prefer, "a picture is worth 0.1% of a word".

Firstly, "Lockyer House" – a sign on the front of a council-owned block of flats near me. Not just a building name, but also an excellent piece of advice to home owners everywhere.

Secondly, a Transit van belonging to Bumble Hole Foods Ltd ("Suppliers of Quality Egg Products"). Now, I have no reason to suppose that the standard of hygiene and food production at Bumble Hole Foods Ltd is anything other than superlative. Nevertheless, I may never be persuaded to eat eggs that have come from the Bumble Hole.

Thirdly, "Keep Calm and Have a Spray Tan or Shellac Nails £15.00 Wednesday to Saturday". Congratulations must go to this beauty salon I cycled past a couple of weeks ago. Who knows how much sooner the war might have ended if Churchill had only adopted that inspiring motto. How many lives would have been saved? And OMG, how totes amaze would their nails have been?

All of which goes to prove one delightful, indisputable fact that I'm glad of every time I get my camera out on a bike ride: Britain's limited.





feature

Give it

Blind Lambeth resident Roger Lewis rides solo

Written by Louise Jones on behalf of Roger Lewis.

"I wanted to try cycling solo for the sheer buzz of doing something as seemingly daft as cycling without any sight."

Having little or no sight does not have to be a barrier to enjoying the fun and exercise of cycling. South London cycling charity Wheels for Wellbeing offers the use of side-by-side and tandem cycles at off-road locations and led rides. Roger Lewis has been discovering cycling for the first time since losing his sight.

Around 16 years ago I was a very keen and regular cyclist both in London and on holiday breaks. I cycled daily to work and also around London as my main form of transport. I also cycled for fun on off-road routes and went mountain biking. Sadly I did wear alarmingly-coloured Lycra shorts.

My sight loss was progressive and I was diagnosed as severely visually impaired (blind) in 2005. I have been effectively totally blind for about the past seven years.

I work in the field of sensory impairment, including providing advice and guidance on new technology to visually impaired people in the London borough of Lambeth, where I live.

I'm interested in technology which enhances sensory perception skills for the blind and visually impaired, and I have followed the work of Dan Kish in the USA and his organisation World Access for the Blind, which uses the motto: "no limits". That's become my motto too.

Earlier this year, I helped to organise a technology fair at Tate South Lambeth Library. A local charity, Wheels for Wellbeing, brought along some side-by-side and tandem bicycles for people to try outside. I didn't need much persuading to have a go.

It might sound clichéd, but I felt an exhilarating sense of liberation as I cycled around the block on a side-by-side bicycle with an instructor. I loved feeling the wind blowing in my hair and face, and I didn't stop smiling the whole time I was on the bike.

Afterwards I was invited to one of Wheels for Wellbeing's cycling sessions at Herne Hill Velodrome, to try out the new UltraBike device made by UltraCane.

The UltraBike enables people who are blind or visually impaired to cycle independently on a bicycle, with the aid of sonar signals – a button on the handlebar vibrates when an obstacle is detected, so that the cyclist can steer away from it.

The idea of using Ultrasound was not new to me; I use echo location techniques to navigate around different environments on foot, and can detect obstacles such as bus stops, parked cars and phone boxes by hearing the click from my Long Cane tip rebound from these obstacles before I reach them.

On a personal level, I wanted to try cycling solo for the sheer buzz of doing something as seemingly daft as cycling without any sight.

a Go!

Find out more about inclusive cycling sessions in London at www.wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk

Find out more about the UltraBike device at www.ultracane.com

At the velodrome, I warmed up by taking the pilot's seat on the front of a three wheeled tandem, with a sighted guide from Wheels for Wellbeing in the passenger's seat. This gave me the extra confidence I needed to try the UltraBike solo.

I met with Julie from UltraCane, and we installed the sonar device on the handlebars of a tricycle. As my hands, arms and upper body strength are affected by arthritis I found it difficult to grip the handlebars, but the three wheels gave me some extra stability.

A barrier was set up along the inner part of the track and I cycled back and forth, slowly becoming more confident. It was an intriguing sensation to be cycling a bicycle on my own, with vibrations in my left or right thumbs to guide me, and Julie walking alongside.

Although I was a bit shaky at first I felt that with regular use I could become much better at steering on my own with an UltraBike device. Funnily enough it wasn't my lack of sight that made it tricky to pilot a bicycle on my own, but my lack of upper body strength which made it harder to grip the handlebars and get a good balance.

If I can work on that I'd love to use the UltraBike again. In the meantime, it's good to know that I can still experience the thrill of cycling on a side-by-side or tandem cycle.

Having been bitten by the bug again, I'll definitely be heading back to the velodrome at the next opportunity. I'm also now working with my local contacts to promote inclusive cycling and the idea of visually impaired people cycling wherever and whenever we can.



Exercise that involves speed, movement and getting out-and-about is problematic for many severely visually impaired people. Cycling offers an exciting and socially inclusive alternative to going to a gym or sports centre. I'm addicted.



London Cycle Map
Campaign

cyclinglifestyle.co.uk

THE W
FOR WAR

Girl on a Bicycle

by Alison Irvine

The cinema stands at the top of a hill. From her kiosk near the window Odette has a view of the benches and bike racks and the train station at the foot of the hill.

She sells sweets and ice creams. There are bags of popcorn on hooks behind her: butterscotch or salted. And there is a selection of alcoholic drinks.

She chooses music to play in the foyer as the audience buys tickets and waits. Film scores mostly: *The Godfather*. *Brief Encounter*. *Gone with the Wind*.

And she knows the regulars by sight if not by name. Elderly beauties in rain macs, kooky, arty kids, men in trilbies who wink. They chat to her and ask how she is. Getting there, she tells them. She knows what they'll buy and sometimes asks 'the usual?' They like that.

Today, there is a new man. She watches him chain his bike to one of the racks and take out a pad and pen from a pannier on the rear wheel.

He asks for a coke, a bag of crisps and a plastic cup. Then he opens the bag and tips the crisps into the cup.

'I hate the noise the bag makes,' he says. 'It's so inconsiderate in a quiet cinema.'

'You've come to the right place,' she says. 'Puritans. Even crisps in a cup are controversial here.'

'Really?' He looks around. His hair is closely shaven. She can't tell how old he is or who he is because his skin is bare of anything – tattoos, jewellery, piercings. So unlike her own skin. Perhaps he has a scar.

Odette watches him while she serves other people. It's a busy night. Everyone loves the Coen Brothers.

As the foyer empties Odette looks out of the window at the train station and thinks about later, when she will be rushing down the hill. The kiosk closes ten minutes after the last film starts so once she's tidied up and cashed up her shift is over. Sometimes her manager lets her leave early. Even so, she hates the pressure she puts on herself to catch the train, the slap of her feet as she

half-runs, half-walks down the hill, and then the wait at the traffic lights by the station. She always makes the train, but often it is pulling in as she arrives.

The following week Odette sees the same man.

'Do you want a cup for your crisps?' she asks him.

'Yes. Plain crisps please.'

He has a miniature light clipped onto the side of his notepad. She notices tiny doodles on his pad. Faces and animals.

'Are you writing a review?' she asks. They have lots of reviewers in this cinema.

'Yes. For the department magazine.'

'You're a student.'

'For one more year.'

'And you can see well enough to write?'

He unclips the miniature light and passes it to her. She presses her thumb against the tiny switch and shines the light onto her kiosk counter, moving it around the dark wood as if it is a follow spot or a projectionist's beam.

She doesn't want to race down the hill to catch the train. She would rather slip into the auditorium and seek out the man making notes in the dark. But she has to go.

He asks for her opinion, not on the film he is about to see, but the previous week's. They agree that to see a film with no preconceptions is a luxury so they don't speak about the film he has the ticket for. She predicts his opinions, however, and waits for the following week's conversation to see whether or not she is right. They find they have similar tastes. He adores Terrence Malik. So does she. Ken Loach can do no wrong, Tarantino: hit and miss.

'You know, we shouldn't leave it a week to talk about this film,' he says to her one week, tipping crisps into his cup.

'I know,' she says. And she knows what he means. 'But I can't. I have to rush off after my shift. If I miss the train there isn't another one for half an hour. And then it will be too late.'



'You have commitments,' he says and she nods.

He stays by her kiosk until they both know he's missed the trailers and the film is about to start. He joins two joyful latecomers at the auditorium doors and waves as he goes in.

She runs all the way down the hill and shouts with her arm outstretched as the train pants in the platform.

The kiosk is busy. Her manager checks she is coping with the crowds. The man tells her to take her time because everyone queues for popcorn.

'You distract me,' she says to him once the crowd has dispersed. She notices there is no music playing. 'When I'm talking to you, I should be tidying up. Last week I had to run all the way and I nearly missed my train.'

She looks straight at him and he looks back.

'You could borrow my bike,' he says.

She doesn't know what to say.

'I go home that way. I'll pick it up at the station. Come and I'll show you.'

It is the first time she's stood beside him without a kiosk between their bodies.

'Will I reach the pedals?' she asks.

'You'll reach the pedals but maybe not the ground.'

He kneels to show her the code for the combination lock.

'I haven't ridden a bike in ages.'

'You'll float. Just chain it up somewhere I'll see it.'

They return to the cinema.

It is awkward at first, because he is right, she can barely reach the ground, but it is an easy sail down the hill to the station, passing all the side streets she normally has to wait to cross, feeling the wind lift her fringe and billow her coat.

She chains the bike to one of the racks and looks around, as if someone is watching, as if she's not allowed to just leave a bike and walk away. On the platform she can't stand still. She is early for her train.

Next week he is there again with his bike.

'Did you like it?' he says.

'I was a bit wobbly at first. But yes, I did like it.'

'Did you catch your train?'

'Easy.'

'Good.'

She gets him his crisps and coke then serves a customer who asks for salted popcorn.

'Do you want a cup?' Odette asks the woman.

'Why?' the woman says.

'No reason.' When the woman has gone away she says, 'She'll start a riot.'

He offers her a crisp which she takes.

'Do you want to borrow my bike again?' he says.

'Yes please,' she says. Then, 'It's funny, it makes me feel happy when I shouldn't be.'

He swallows a crisp and frowns.

Next time he is straight at her.

'*The Kid with a Bike*.'

She is puzzled. A customer asks for red wine. Odette hands over two miniature bottles. Then she gets it.

'*Belleville Rendez-vous*,' she says as she takes the customer's money.

He nods. 'Good one. *Bicycle Thieves*.'

'You've prepared.'

The foyer is emptying.

'*E. T.*!' she shouts at him as he walks towards the auditorium doors.

He is back with '*Jules et Jim*.'

'You're showing off now,' she says.

'There are plenty more!'

And that is that. She wipes the counter and restocks the confectionary.

She's forgotten to check if she can borrow his bike. He could be going in a different direction. He could be meeting other people. She takes a risk and freewheels down the hill past a man with a dog and a group of kids with a football. She wishes the ride would last for longer because she's not ready for the rest of the evening.

The next week it's raining. The cinema is quiet and there are few people to serve. Her manager asks if she wants to change shifts, giving her more hours but a changed timetable.

'No,' she says, 'I want to keep things as they are.'

He arrives with his notepad and tiny light. His coat and hair are wet.

'You're not yourself today,' he says.

'No.'

He stands with her at the kiosk while she works.

'I could walk tonight,' she says to him, finally, as he is about to go in. 'I've cleared up already.'

'Ride anyway,' he says.

'In the rain?'

'You'll enjoy it.'

So she rides in the rain with the hood of her jacket down and her sleeves rolled up. It's the noise that surprises her; the hiss of the wet wheels, the car engines and

everything else magnified into one huge roar.

She doesn't go to work the following week. They send a sympathy card and let her have as much time as she needs. But she wants to go back to see him.

He is there.

'I didn't come in last week,' she says.

'I know.'

'Did you write your review?'

'Yes. The local paper is interested now.'

She smiles. 'You must write good reviews.'

'I guess I must.'

He holds out his cup of crisps and she takes one, as usual.

'Better go in,' he says.

'See you,' she says.

At the end of her shift she walks to the racks where he's left his bike. She no longer needs to rush to catch the train but she gets on his bike anyway and rides down the hill, the sky turning silver above her. Some cars have their lights on. Street lamps are newly lit. At the station she leans his bike against a rack, locks it, and looks around for somewhere to wait. The station sells coffee which she drinks, at a circular table, with a newspaper. Her train comes and goes.

Later, she leaves the empty cup on its saucer and stands outside the station next to his bike. She looks up the hill, the street busier than she is used to, watching out for him. It is a soft thought to think of him all those weeks, walking down the hill to reclaim his bike.

When she sees him at the top of the hill she wonders how long it will take him to spot her and how long she has left to run away if she decides she can't do it. But she stays, tells herself if it goes wrong she can say goodbye, walk into the train station and next week at the cinema, if he comes, she can play the films-about-bicycles game and neither will speak of it.

He's still walking down the hill with his hands in his pockets. She watches him see her, notices the jump in his step, the stretch of his neck.

He is smiling.

'I didn't need to catch my train,' she says.

'I thought so. One day you can tell me all about it.'

'I'd like that.'

He unlocks the bike and they look around for somewhere to go.



@CDooks



Alison Irvine's first novel, *This Road is Red* (Luath Press 2011), was shortlisted for the Saltire First Book of the Year award. Her short fiction has been published in the *Edinburgh Review* and *New Writing Scotland* amongst other magazines. A recipient of a Creative Scotland New Writer's Bursary, she has also been awarded a Glasgow Life Commonwealth Games residency and is writing a creative non-fiction book

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Start as you mean to go on...



The bicycle is an amazing machine that can transport you around London faster than a train, a car, a bus or on foot; a machine that is fun and free to use, environmentally friendly, and stylish too; one that literally makes you fitter, healthier and happier the more you use it.

Sounds great in theory! But what about the practicalities? Here's our handy guide to making that positive lifestyle change and forming good cycling habits.

Road bikes ('racing' bikes) are designed to be lightweight, aerodynamic and fast, with handlebars that curl downwards and skinny tyres.

Touring bikes are sturdier versions of road bikes, designed for long distances carrying luggage.

Mountain bikes are designed for rough terrain, with knobby tyres, strong frames, a wide selection of gears, and often suspension.

Hybrid bikes offer a compromise between the speed

of a road bike and the strength and gearing of a mountain bike. With smooth tyres and an upright riding posture that's good for visibility, they're a popular option for commuting.

Folding bikes can be folded away and carried like a briefcase. Useful for commuting, they can conveniently be taken on the train or bus. They have small wheels and fewer gears, and can be stored easily at home if you don't have much space.

Electric bikes are a more expensive option, with an electric motor offering assistance for getting up hills or on longer commutes.


Shed bikes are bikes that have been gathering cobwebs in your shed for years! Check them over before you get back on.

Then there are adapted cycles, tricycles, tandems, side-by-side cycles and recumbent cycles – making cycling accessible to almost everybody, including people with disabilities.

Check your bike

Before you set off you'll need to make sure your bike is safe to ride. Start with the following checks:

- Both brakes work well.
- Both tyres are pumped up (this will make your bike easier to ride as well as safer).
- The saddle height is correct (so that when sitting on the saddle your heel rests on the pedal with your knee very slightly bent). Also make sure that when



adjusting the saddle height the seat post limit has not been reached (normally this is a marked band about 3 inches from the bottom of the seat post).

- The handlebars are tightened. Ensure that they cannot be turned with the front wheel between your legs, and that they do not move when pressure is applied from the top.
- The gears work smoothly.

If you are unsure then take your bike to the nearest bike shop for a quick service. When you buy your bike from a shop you can expect them to help you with these checks.

Get dressed

In decent weather there's no need to wear special clothing when cycling any more than there is for a walk to the shops. You can even cycle in smart clothes, so long as you're comfortable. Just make sure your clothing is neither too baggy (catching in the chain) nor too tight (restricting your pedalling). In winter, however, choosing the right clothes becomes more important. Above all, you'll need to make sure you're waterproof and visible (wearing light-coloured and reflective clothing). Check out our winter cycling feature on page 20 for more information.

Accessorize

Some basic accessories are essential:

- Lights. By law you must have a front white light and a rear red light when cycling at night, and a rear reflector and pedal reflectors at all times.
- A lock. Spend as much as you can afford to get a stronger lock (or indeed multiple locks). Always leave your bike in a well-lit and busy place to deter thieves.

Others accessories are really useful:

- A bell. You'll find pedestrians appreciate an early, gentle warning of your presence if you're on a shared path – a couple of tinkles when you're still 10 metres or so away works well.
- Mudguards. These will help keep splatters off your clothes.

- A rack and panniers. Panniers are bags that attach onto a rack at the back of your bike, which enable you to be unencumbered while riding. The next-best option is a rucksack because this keeps your arms free. Never dangle bags from your handlebars.
- A pump and a spare inner tube or puncture repair kit. Punctures are rare, but it's good to be prepared.
- It's not compulsory to wear a helmet to cycle in London, but many people choose to – especially in winter when the conditions can be more hazardous. If you do, ensure that your helmet is of good quality and properly fitted.

Plan your route

Preparing a good route is essential for cycling in London, but luckily it's one of the most fun parts. There are lots of helpful resources, including:

- Transport for London cycle guides. You can order them online at www.tfl.gov.uk.
- LCN+ maps. These can be viewed online at www.londoncyclenetwork.org.uk.
- Local borough maps. Contact your local council offices to find out more.
- Google maps. An especially useful resource which uses the Google map interface is www.bikehike.co.uk. You can interactively plot your route onscreen and find out gradient and distance data.
- www.cyclestreets.net – a journey planner for cycling which allows you to type in your start and end destination locations and suggests a route for you.
- A good old-fashioned A to Z!

When you plan your route you should aim for:

- Quiet roads or roads with cycle paths
- Low speed limit areas
- Parks and open spaces which allow cycling

And you should avoid:

- Very busy junctions
- Large and fast roundabouts
- Dual carriageways
- Routes heavy with lorries
- Pavements. It's illegal to cycle on the pavement, unless it's signed as a shared-use path for cyclists and pedestrians.

If any of these are unavoidable, you can always get off and push!

Stay safe

Tips for cyclists on roads

- ▶ Ride in a position where you can see and be seen.
- ▶ Beware of vehicles turning left.
- ▶ Make eye contact with other road users, especially at junctions – then you know they've seen you.
- ▶ Signal clearly at all times.
- ▶ Follow the Highway Code – don't jump red lights and don't cycle on the pavement unless it's a designated cycle path.
- ▶ Consider wearing a helmet and bright clothing, especially in towns, at night and in bad weather.
- ▶ In wet or wintery weather watch your speed as surfaces may be slippery and it will take you longer to stop. Also avoid turning across man-hole covers or areas with lots of yellow/white lines on the road. Rain, snow or ice makes them especially slippery.
- ▶ Go easy on the front brake in wet or wintery conditions. Try to shift a little more emphasis onto the rear brake by placing your body weight a little further back and squeezing the front brake more gently. It's much easier to control a sliding rear wheel than a sliding front one.
- ▶ Consider getting some cycle training. All London's boroughs provide free or subsidised training.

Tips for motorists

- ▶ When turning left watch for cyclists coming up on your near side and don't cut them up.
- ▶ Give cyclists a wide berth when overtaking.
- ▶ Dip your headlights when approaching cyclists.
- ▶ In wet weather, allow cyclists extra room as surfaces may be slippery.
- ▶ Cyclists and motorists are equally entitled to use and share the same road space.

Tips for cyclists on shared-use paths

- ▶ Don't go too fast – it can intimidate others.
- ▶ Use your bell to let others know you are approaching, but don't assume they can hear or see you.
- ▶ Give way to others and always be prepared to slow down and stop if necessary. Remember to say 'thank you' if they let you pass.
- ▶ Keep left or on your side of any dividing line.
- ▶ Be careful at junctions, bends or entrances.

Tips for other path users

- ▶ Keep your dog under control.
- ▶ Keep to your side of any dividing line.

Find out more at www.cyclelifestyle.co.uk – or just phone a friend who cycles.

In Praise of... E-bikes



Electric bikes have all the advantages of regular bikes and have the added bonus of a battery giving you some extra oomph.

Some e-bikes are powered by a throttle, as a moped is; others operate by engaging the battery whenever you press down on the pedals. Either way, you beat the congestion.

E-bikes minimize sweating and make it much, much easier to get up pesky hills.

Their running costs are minimal too. A battery that lasts for 20–30 miles costs about 10p to charge fully.

Because e-bikes are bicycles in the eyes of the law, they don't require tax, insurance, an MOT or a licence.

E-bikes are the most fuel-efficient mode of transport in everyday use, therefore good for the environment. And they have a high resale value compared to regular bikes.

An e-bike might even keep you fitter than a regular bike, because people tend to use their e-bikes more often and so do more exercise overall.

And, perhaps most importantly, they're amazingly fun to ride!

Diamond Frame

by Geraldine Clarkson



hi-tensile steel, wide blue handlebars, snowflake lacing
on the wheels, you straddle
a saddle which carries some of your weight
not all (aching in the ischial
tuberosities)
brazen lugs and sprockets
which shine

you avoid anklng:

*

*Beryl was a racer, a belle, better than any bell-ringing
boy about town.*
Catherine wheels spinning silver
downhill
O and O!

*

Axle says to Spindle
I can see where you're going
you pivot

*

*Beryl was a racer, a belle, better than any bell-ringing
boy about town.*
she held out a liquorice allsort
to the chap bent on breaking the all-male record
as she cycled past him

on her blank cheque of a bike:

*

thus spoke Zarathustra
in his chapter on bicycles
let there be light
aluminium for the brackets
bring me diamante bar ends
a sapphire seat-post
and emerald saddle

let me strike out:

*

canal-wise across the city
unzipping the pre-dawn
out of Amwell
Street, heading north
look back
after climbing climbing the humming asphalt—there—
diamond-framed in November mist

all London lies below

Too Cold *Not* to Cycle



Ask rail passengers stamping their feet and breathing fog over disrupted train timetables. Ask car drivers scraping a small glacier off the front windscreen while their hands turn blue. Ask grimacing, shivering crowds huddling at bus stops and wishing they'd stayed in bed.

Then ask cyclists cruising along beautiful misty streets, feeling warm and energised after a bracing start, and completely in control of their destiny – whatever the weather throws at them.

This winter, to enjoy the many benefits of cycling – fun, freedom, fresh air, money saved, an uplifting start to the day, fitness, a positive contribution to the environment, community-spirited travel – all you have to do is be prepared.

1. **Wear gloves**, a hat and warm socks. These will help keep your extremities cosy.
2. **Carry a raincoat and overtrousers**. Store these in a pannier or rucksack, just in case it rains or snows.
3. **Layer up**. If you've got money, spend it on the base and outer layers. A base layer made of merino wool or similar will wick sweat away from your body, keeping you warmer. For the outer layer, a windproof gilet or jacket will add warmth. Thermal tights, leggings or long johns are a good investment too.
4. **Be safe, be seen**. Make sure you have some reflective aspects to your outer layer of clothing (and this should be brightly coloured if possible). And/or wear reflective bands on your arms and legs. Your bike must have rear reflectors and pedal reflectors, and a front (white) and back (red) light. Check your lights before you set off, and make sure they are switched on in darkness or poor-visibility conditions.
5. **Ride carefully**. Be especially alert to other road users and look further ahead to anticipate large puddles, slippery areas or other obstacles. If possible, avoid turning across manhole covers or areas with lots of painted lines on the road, as these surfaces become slippery in wet or wintry weather. Go easy on the front brake, by shifting a little more emphasis onto the rear brake; a sliding rear wheel is much easier to control than a sliding front one. When cornering, keep your weight on the outside by keeping your inside leg bent and your weight pushing down through your straight, outside leg. Bending your inside leg keeps the inside pedal high and away from the tarmac, while straightening your outside leg keeps your balance in the right place and maximises down-force from the tyres onto the road surface, giving your wheels a better grip.
6. **Warm up properly**. Imagine that your muscles are strands made of blu-tack. Cold blu-tack doesn't stretch very well before it snaps, so take it easy for the first 15 minutes of your ride.
7. **Keep on top of your bike maintenance**. It is always important to keep your bike running cleanly and smoothly, but even more so in winter. Regularly checking all the major components for wear and tear can help you to avoid problems while out and about.

www.cyclelifestyle.co.uk