



CLIVE FORTH

THE GREAT BRITISH ROAD RIDES GUIDE

THE BEST OF THE UK
IN 55 BIKE ROUTES



B L O O M S B U R Y

THE GREAT BRITISH **ROAD RIDES GUIDE**







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LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

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INTRODUCTION

Like many of you I've ridden bicycles for pretty much my entire life. As a child I used to sit and watch The Milk Race and Tour de France before heading off on my mini 'racer' around the lanes where I grew up. I'd spend hours and hours planning routes on an Ordnance Survey map, trying to link fun-flowing sections of road to those 'massive' hills in an attempt to replicate those iconic Alpine climbs. All I ever wanted to do was ride bikes for a living, I loved it that much (and still do).

By a twist of fate my beloved road bike was stolen and I ended up with a mountain bike as a replacement. My cycling career flourished as I grew through my teens but it was mountain biking that paved the way for that career on two wheels.

My father encouraged me to join the local cycling club and I would head out with them in the winter months on the trails. In the summer the old guys would get their road bikes out and I'd join them on the regular weekend runs. Suffice to say this was hard work on knobby tyres, it did however get me very fit.

My mountain bike career flourished and I left school to race for some prestigious teams. Road bicycles were always there as training aids but at the time they played second fiddle to the mountain bike. But as many of my close friends continued to race on the road, and most of them became very accomplished, inevitably their enthusiasm rubbed off on me.

A few years ago a truly magical thing happened when I met the love of my life Daria. A chance meeting in a local cycle shop cafe turned into three days of riding bikes and, well, the rest is history. Now the reason this had such a profound effect on me was not only had I found the love of my life and my soulmate but this incredible woman had rekindled my spirit for the love of all things cycling.

Daria is from Tuscany and a very accomplished racer both on road and off – she is an amazing athlete and inspiration. Just before we got married she'd taken a job in the French Alps, the road bike was pulled out of the shed and before I knew it I was chasing her up Alpine climbs, living out my childhood dreams.

My cycling career has taken me all over the British Isles on many adventures. Throughout my journeys I've ridden and seen some absolutely stunning scenery and sections of road. Having just completed my previous book title *The Great British Mountain Bike Trail Guide* it just made sense to continue the road trip taking in the best of British, only this time on the road. The guys at Boardman Bikes kindly furnished me with the latest elite SLR model while sponsors Mavic and Garmin finished the package, enabling me to navigate my way around with speed and grace on some of Britain's finest asphalt.

Clive Forth

How to use this book

With Daria's assistance (she's ridden all over the world using various guidebooks) we set out the basic concept of the book. It needed to incorporate some shorter training rides within easy reach of major conurbations and some longer more challenging rides taking in tough climbs, fun descents and superb scenery.

For the start point I wanted somewhere that was easily accessible and easy to locate. We have a fantastic rail network to accompany the plethora of roads in the UK and it made sense to use this network to access the rides.

The rides start from railway stations on the main network (with a few exceptions). It's easy to use the national rail network to get you to the start of each ride from anywhere in the country, and you will find easy parking, accommodation and all the usual amenities nearby a railway station making for an obvious start point. Information including coordinates and postcode is located at the start of each ride.

The maps provided will give you an

overview of the general area and the route descriptions have been kept relatively brief. I have done my best to avoid busy roads and complicated junctions but inevitably there is the odd occasion where you simply can't avoid such things.

As opposed to ruining your purchase by tearing out route cards, or bending the spine in an attempt to photocopy from the book, we have created route cards that you can download from the Bloomsbury website at: www.bloomsbury.com/9781408179437. You can also download GPX files for each route from the Garmin Connect website.

At the start of each route you'll find information on key climbs and total elevation gain. I have indicated the overall distance and a route profile, which will give you an idea of the severity of the ride – this will enable you to calculate how long you need to allow to ride each route. With such a wide variety in people's capabilities I did not want to add an estimated time as this is something you can easily calculate yourself.

GETTING YOUR BIKE ON A TRAIN

If you choose to take advantage of the fantastic rail network to get around then do check with the service provider in advance regarding the specific rules on taking bicycles. Each train company will have slightly different guidelines and bicycles may need to be booked on in advance. At peak times it may not be possible to take your bike on busy commuter routes. You can find lots of useful information on the National Rail website.

www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations/cyclists.aspx

www.nationalrail.co.uk/tocs_maps/tocs/TrainOperators.aspx

CHECKLIST

Before you set out it goes without saying that you should make sure your bike is in good working order and fit for the job. This checklist may help.

- Check the brakes work and you have sufficient life in the brake blocks, also make sure they contact the rim and do not rub the tyre or drop towards the spokes
- Check the brake and gear cables are in good condition
- The wheels should be inserted and tightened according to the manufacturers' guidelines
- Make sure your wheels spin free and are true, check for loose spokes and adjust accordingly
- Your tyres must be in good condition and inflated to the manufacturers' recommended pressure
- The chain and drive system must be in good working order, sufficiently lubricated but not bathing in oil
- The saddle must be in good condition and adjusted to the correct height and angle
- Bar tapes/grips and hoods must be in good condition
- You should also carry sufficient spares including:
 - Inner tube
 - Patch kit (you may want to include a tyre patch)
 - Tyre levers
 - Pump
 - Chain tool/multi tool and specific tools for your bike (chain quick links are a handy addition)
 - Navigation aids, route card, OS map, GPS device
 - Mobile phone, charged and switched off
 - Money, cash and cards
 - Spare clothing, windproof, waterproof (tailor your clothing to suit the conditions).

EXPOSURE

The exposure grade before each route will give you an idea of the type of terrain that surrounds you and how likely you are to encounter strong winds and inclement weather (particularly in spring, autumn and winter). A ride with a high exposure rating should be approached with caution in poor weather, and you should pack additional clothing.

Some of the rides will take you out into remote areas, keep an eye on weather forecasts and let someone know where you are going and when you anticipate returning. Always respect the rules of the road and wear some bright clothes. And above all enjoy yourself.

Route Analysis

Total number of routes: 55

Total distance for all routes: 4470.2 km

Total metres climbed on all routes:
67,471m

Routes under 50km: 9

- 1 Oxenhope: Taste Le Tour, part 4 30km
- 2 Longniddry: Golfers Galore 34km
- 3 Linlithgow: Beecraigs Blast 35.5km
- 4 Brighton and Hove 1: Ditchling Dilemma 37km
- 5 Tring 2: A Playboy's Playground 40km
- 6 Keswick: Buttermere Blast 45km
- 7 Brighton and Hove 2: Peacehaven Pedal 48km
- 8 Southampton, New Forest 1: Bolderwood Bowl 48km
- 9 Banbury 2: Two-Stroke Blues 48km

Routes 50km to 80km: 25

- 10 Exeter 3: A Trip to the Sea 50km
- 11 Southampton, New Forest 2: Brockenhurst Bash 52km
- 12 Tring 1: Chiltern Classics 53.8km
- 13 Barnstaple 2: Ilfracombe Rollers 54km
- 14 Milngavie: Jamie's Jewel 54km
- 15 Wendover 1: Great Missenden Mission 54km
- 16 Oxenhope: Taste Le Tour, part 3 56.5km
- 17 Beaulieu: We Are Glass 63km
- 18 Hereford 2: Literary Loop 64km
- 19 Settle 1: Littondale Loop 64km
- 20 Hexham 2: Hartside Haul 68km

- 21 Sanquhar: Leadhills Leg Burner 68km
- 22 Church Stretton 2: The Short Sting 68.4km
- 23 Dumfries: Dalbeattie Dash 68.5km
- 24 Leyburn: Taste Le Tour, part 2 70km
- 25 Moffat: Moffat Mash-Up 70.5km
- 26 Betws-y-Coed 2: Take it to the Slate 72km
- 27 Dunblane: Dance of the Naughty Knight 72km
- 28 Lockerbie 2: Tibetan Twist 72km
- 29 Fort William: Moy Ahoy 73.5km
- 30 Buxton: Trip for a Tart 74km
- 31 Exmoor: Minehead Mash-Up 74km
- 32 Wendover 2: Ludgershall Loop 75km
- 33 Exeter 2: Point to Point 78km
- 34 Inverness: In Search of the Monster 78.5km

Routes 80km to 100km: 7

- 35 Banbury 1: Shakespeare's World 82km
- 36 Betws-y-Coed 1: The Snowdon Sneaky Lap 82km
- 37 Windermere 1: The 30% 84km
- 38 Llandoverly: Search for the Stig 86km
- 39 Barnstaple 1: Exford Expedition 88km
- 40 Hexham 1: Stanhope Stoker 88km
- 41 Penrith 1: Brampton Bash 98km

Routes over 100km: 14

- 42 Applecross: A Coastal Cruise 102km
- 43 Achnasheen: The Torridon Terror 103km
- 44 Church Stretton 1: The Sting 104km
- 45 Exeter 1, Dartmoor: Furry Hands 104km
- 46 Windermere 2: Tebay Tester 104km
- 47 Settle 2: Dale Delight 110km
- 48 Leyburn: Taste Le Tour, part 1 113km
- 49 Lockerbie 1: Moffat Mission 115km
- 50 Glenfinnan: West Coast Wonder 130km

- 51 Hereford 1: Black Mountain Blast
146km
- 52 Tarbet: The Rest & Be Thankful 152km
- 53 Penrith 2: The Penrith Pennine Punisher
154km
- 54 Leeds: Tour de France: Le Tour 2014
Grand Depart (Stage 1) 206km
- 55 York: Tour de France: Le Tour 2014
(Stage 2) 208km

Three longest routes excluding Le Tour 2014:

- Penrith 2: The Penrith Pennine Punisher
154km
- Tarbet: The Rest & Be Thankful 152km
- Glenfinnan: West Coast Wonder 130km

Shortest route:

- Oxenhope: Taste Le Tour, part 4 30km

Three routes with the most climbing (excluding Le Tour 2014):

- Penrith 2: The Penrith Pennine Punisher
2559m
- Tarbet: The Rest & Be Thankful 2448m
- Exeter 1, Dartmoor: Furry Hands 2186m

Route with the least climbing:

- Longniddry: Golfers Galore 196m

Routes that climb:

Under 500m: 3

- Longniddry: Golfers Galore 196m
- Southampton, New Forest 1:
Bolderwood Bowl 272m
- Southampton, New Forest 2:
Brockenhurst Bash 365m

500m–1000m: 19

- Brighton and Hove 1: Ditchling
Dilemma 510m

- Tring 2: A Playboy's Playground 512m
- Banbury 2: Two-Stroke Blues 517m
- Hereford 2: Literary Loop 542m
- Linlithgow: Beechraigs Blast 590m
- Exeter 3: A Trip to the Sea 600m
- Dumfries: Dalbeattie Dash 670m
- Brighton and Hove 2: Peacehaven Pedal
688m
- Wendover 2: Ludgershall Loop 700m
- Tring 1: Chiltern Classics 717m
- Banbury 1: Shakespeare's World 750m
- Milngavie: Jamie's Jewel 757m
- Oxenhope: Taste Le Tour, part 4 763m
- Inverness: In Search of the Monster
790m
- Beaulieu: We Are Glass 832m
- Dunblane: Dance of the Naughty Knight
895m
- Wendover 1: Great Missenden Mission
914m
- Fort William: Moy Ahoy 922m
- Sanquhar: Leadhills Leg Burner 952m

1001m–1500m: 17

- Keswick: Buttermere Blast 1017m
- Leyburn: Taste Le Tour, part 2 1026m
- Lockerbie 2: Tibetan Twist 1040m
- Settle 1: Littondale Loop 1063m
- Church Stretton 2: The Short Sting
1069m
- Barnstaple 2: Ilfracombe Rollers 1125m
- Hexham 2: Hartside Haul 1146m
- Moffat: Moffat Mash-Up 1180m
- Llandoverly: Search for the Stig 1213m
- Penrith 1: Brampton Bash 1217m
- Oxenhope: Taste Le Tour, part 3 1258m
- Buxton: Trip for a Tart 1273m
- Lockerbie 1: Moffat Mission 1352m
- Betws-y-Coed 1: The Snowdon Sneaky
Lap 1377m
- Hexham 1: Stanhope Stonker 1402km

- Achnasheen: The Torridon Terror 1430m
- Betws-y-Coed 2: Take it to the Slate 1488m
- 1501m–2000m: 9*
- Settle 2: Dale Delight 1524m
- Exmoor: Minehead Mash-Up 1544m
- Windermere 2: Tebay Tester 1568m
- Church Stretton 1: The Sting 1572m
- Exeter 2: Point to Point 1582m
- Barnstaple 1: Exford Expedition 1585m
- Leyburn: Taste Le Tour, part 1 1685m
- Hereford 1: Black Mountain Blast 1733m
- Windermere 1: The 30% 1927m
- Over 2000m: 7*
- Applecross: A Coastal Cruise 2054m
- Exeter 1 Dartmoor: Furry Hands 2186m
- Glenfinnan: West Coast Wonder 2186m
- Tarbet: The Rest & Be Thankful 2448m
- Penrith 2: The Penrith Pennine Punisher 2559m
- Leeds: Tour de France: Le Tour 2014 Grand Depart (Stage 1) 2595m
- York: Tour de France: Le Tour 2014 (Stage 2) 3633m

RIDE STYLES EXPLAINED

If the route is not a loop there are two options:

Point to point – These rides have a different end point to the start point, the rides have been created so you can use the rail network to get back to your start point. These rides can also be turned into much longer ‘out and back’ rides should you wish to do so.

Out and back – This type of ride will involve riding the same sections of road in both directions, from your start point a route will take you to a point of interest, here you can refuel or do an overnight stop before making your return journey.

THE SOUTH-WEST



1 BARNSTAPLE 1: EXFORD EXPEDITION

Start point: Barnstaple railway station

Grid ref: SS 55593 32552

Postcode: EX31 2AU

Total distance: 88km

Total elevation: 1585m

Max elevation: 422m

KEY CLIMBS

From km 0 to km 12.5: 236m climb over 12.5km

From km 17 to km 21: 140m climb over 4km

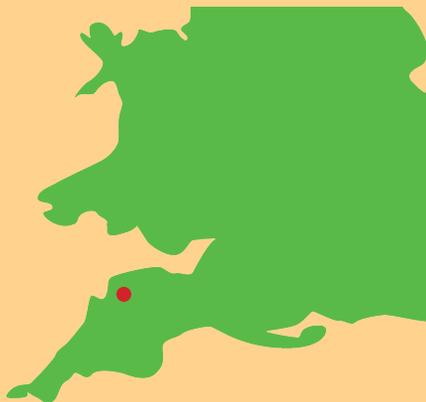
From km 26.8 to km 29.5: 148m climb over 2.7km

From km 44 to km 46.6: 124m climb over 2.6km

From km 50 to km 53: 154m climb over 3km

Other key elevation gain: From km 0 to km 57.6: elevation gain of 416m

Exposure: 4/5



Barnstaple, which lies to the west of Exmoor on the North Devonshire coast, is your starting point for a classic ride that will take you high up on the moor to the village of Exford. With over 1500m of climbing this is not a ride for the faint-hearted, nor is it a ride for a wet or a windy day. Watch the weather closely as this coastal region is known for fast-changing weather patterns as swells blow in from the Atlantic.

Throughout the ride you will discover some quaint villages and fantastic sections of road with spectacular views over open moorland and the surrounding area, and

there are many places to stop off along the way to refuel and take in the beauty of Exmoor National Park.

From the station cross over the River Taw. Taking a left turn at the second roundabout, you should pick up signs for the A39 to Ilfracombe. Follow the A road north, climbing up out of town past the North Devon District hospital. The road climbs up into open ground away from the town.

Beyond Shirwell Cross continue following the A39. The road will narrow and descend down through Woolley Wood. Take care on the descent as there is a tight right-hand switchback followed by a



left-hand switchback and a series of tight turns as you drop down towards Arlington Court.

The road continues in a similar vein towards Kentisbury Ford. During the holiday season the roads in this area can become quite busy, so take extra care on the narrower sections where visibility for motorists is hindered by the high hedges and banks.

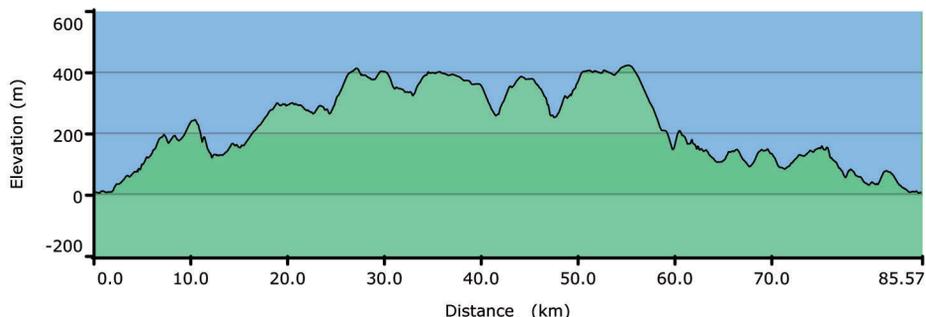
In the village of Blackmoor Gate take a right turn on to the A399. After just over a kilometre the route forks left on to the B3358 and starts to head uphill towards Challacombe village. You will pass through the village and follow the winding road through the lush green scenery towards Simonsbath. The high hedges do obscure the view but on occasion you get a glimpse of the rolling hillsides as you

head closer to the moor and the village of Exford.

In the village the route takes a right turn just before the stone bridge. If you need to take on board fuel this is an ideal place to do it. The road out of the village

High hedges line many of the roads in the area.





climbs up a steep gradient and takes you up on to the moor. Following the B3223 for a couple of kilometres until you come to a crossroads at Comer's Gate. Here you need to take a right turn and descend down into the village of Withypool, another picturesque village typical of the region.

Just beyond the river the route takes a right turn and climbs up on to open ground to Withypool Common. This lovely

climb has a good surface and the gradient is fair. As you crest the hill, passing through open ground, you start to descend slightly. Take care throughout this section as you will cross a cattle grid before a small rise leads you into a long descent.

The descent drops you down into the village of North Molton. High hedges obscure the view but once again you get the odd glimpse of the wonderful rolling

Withypool village, your last chance to take on supplies before heading up on to the moor.





The long but steady climb with stunning views.

hillsides all around. In the village you cross over the River Mole and climb up out into a wooded section that leads you down to the major A361 trunk road.

Take care while crossing the busy trunk road and continue to head in a southerly direction into South Molton, at the T-junction take a right and pass through the village centre. Following the road markings for Barnstaple before picking up a left turn on to the B3227 heading in a westerly direction signed Torrington.

You will pass over a couple of roundabouts and within a kilometre bear right

on to a minor road towards Stags Head, the road sign here is marked Kingsland cross but there is no fingerboard pointing to the right, the fork is preceded by an entrance road on your right-hand side to some industrial looking buildings.

The narrow road twists and turns its way running parallel to the major trunk road and a sweet little descent drops you into the village of Swimbridge. Just a few more kilometres to go and you're back into Barnstaple. Follow the road into the town centre. Complete the loop by picking up where you headed out at the river crossing.

2 BARNSTAPLE 2: ILFRACOMBE ROLLERS

Start point: Barnstaple railway station

Grid ref: SS 55593 32552

Postcode: EX31 2AU

Total distance: 54km

Total elevation: 1125m

Max elevation: 305m

KEY CLIMBS

From km 0 to km 14: 245m climb over 14km

From km 26 to km 33: 295m climb over 7km

From km 41 to km 43: 118m climb over 2km

Other key elevation gain: From km 0 to km 20.9: elevation gain of 302m

Exposure: 3/5



The road hugs the north Devonshire Coast, dropping through Combe Martin.



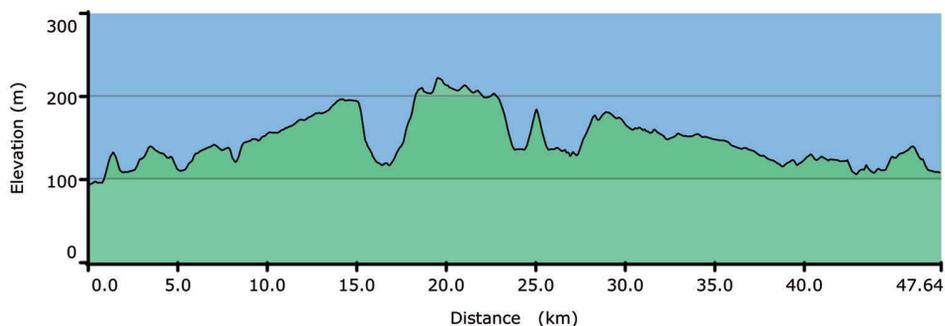
The shorter loop from Barnstaple will take you northwards to the coast and the town of Ilfracombe. Here you traverse along next to the sea through a series of sizable rolling hills before dropping into the seaside village of Combe Martin. From here you head back inland in a southerly direction through some spectacular scenery and twisty roads towards your start point of Barnstaple railway station.

From the station bear right at the roundabout crossing over the river, the road bears round to the right and at the second roundabout take a left turn on to the A39 heading towards Ilfracombe, the steep gradients lead you up out of town past the hospital, in just under a kilometre you bear left on to the B3230, the road winds its way along through woodland next to Bradiford Water.



Fast-rolling asphalt lead to stunning coastal views.

After a couple of kilometres you will pass through the village of Muddiford and Milltown, the surface throughout this section is great and there is lots of interest to the road as it twists and winds its way along heading towards the sea.



A long descent drops you down into Ilfracombe. If you wish to visit the town take a left at the junction with traffic lights for the town centre. But if you wish to continue on the route take a right turn, switching back on to the A399 and dropping downhill. This section of road is very popular with tourists as it links the major towns on the North Devonshire coast. Throughout this section of road you will descend and ascend some steep gradients. There are some great views of the rocky coastline as you make your way to Combe Martin Bay.

Passing Hele Bay on your left you climb up to a viewpoint. It's worth taking time

The North Devon coast and its many hidden bays.



out here to savour the scenery. The road then drops down past Widmouth Head and Watermouth Castle before you swing inland slightly, traversing the cliff tops once more before dropping down into the village of Combe Martin.

You will now head inland along the valley away from the sea. The climb up from Combe Martin is long, but it's a relatively easy one: the gradient is fair and the surface is good. You will come into the village of Blackmoor Gate where you need to take a right turn on to the A39 back towards Barnstaple.

The main road winds its way back through open countryside and as you approach Arlington Court on your left you start to climb up through Woolley Wood and on to Garman's Down. Once again this route is popular with tourists so care should be taken on the sections that narrow down as the high hedges obscure the visibility for motorists and larger traffic may be taking up more than its half of the road.

You will descend back into Barnstaple on the same road that you took on your outbound route, simply retrace your steps through the town centre back to the railway station where you started the ride. The town is packed with many restaurants, cafes and bars where you can refuel for your next adventure.

3 EXETER 1, DARTMOOR: FURRY HANDS

Start point: Exeter St Davids railway station

Grid ref: SX 91248 93310

Postcode: EX4 4NT

Total distance: 104km

Total elevation: 2186m

Max elevation: 450m

KEY CLIMBS

From km 0 to km 7.6: 166m climb over 7.6km

From km 13.3 to km 19.3: 232m climb over 6km

From km 21.8 to km 31.2: 264m climb over 9.6km

From km 48.5 to km 50: 120m climb over 1.5km

From km 56.8 to km 69.8: 326m climb over 13km

From km 81.2 to km 92.2: 204m climb over 11km

Other key elevation gain: From km 0 to km 31.2: elevation gain of 434m

Exposure: 5/5



Dartmoor is known for its rugged scenery, rocky outcrops and mires. This ride will take you higher up on to the moor heading out towards Princetown home of the famous Dartmoor Prison, before heading southwards and back in an easterly direction towards the start point in Exeter.

The moor itself covers in the region of a thousand square kilometres and is alleged to be the largest granite area within the British Isles. You will have some spectacular views as you ride on to some of the highest points on the moor passing the many tors

(hilltops) along the way. It should be noted that the moor can be very unforgiving, with weather systems changing rapidly. The area is known for high winds and rain, so watch the weather and choose the day to ride wisely. Make sure you take ample warm and waterproof clothing if there is the slightest hint of precipitation.

From the railway station take a right turn on the A377 Bonhay Road heading south. You will have the river to your right-hand side as you do so. In just over a kilometre you will reach a major