

Way of the Roses

Coast to Coast Cycle Ride across Britain



by Jill Croft

In a 2010 summer issue of the *Globe and Mail*, my husband Tom and I read about a new bike route called the 'Way of the Roses' located between Morecambe in Lancashire on the Irish Sea and Bridlington in Yorkshire on the North Sea. This part of England has been at the heart of some key developments of British history. The name of the route is a play on words; the 'War of the Roses' took place from 1455 to 1487 between the House of Lancaster (with the red rose for the Lancastrians) and the House of York (white rose for the Yorkists). The idea of cycling 170 miles (274 km) across Britain intrigued us from the start.

We are 64-year-old recreational cyclists from Victoria who could never fathom riding from the Pacific to Atlantic of our own country, a breadth of thousands of miles. However, the idea of biking across a country is a dream we held, and we felt Britain offered just what we wanted, a manageable distance on this new coast-to-coast route. Pedal power offers us an independence that is unavailable if you travel by car, bus, train or in a tour group. Organizing a tour for two was a great winter project, as the route had not yet been put on a tour schedule. Tom dug around until he came across Scoot Cycling Holidays (info@scootcyclingholidays.co.uk — mobile 0780807725)

based in York and with them we were able to put together a complete tour package. This included bike rental, B&B accommodation and luggage transfer between our stops.

In early June, 2011 we met with Cai Mallett, Scoot owner, and her son George at the Morecambe train station. Our rentals were removed from Scoot's van and we were outfitted with silver-grey Giant hybrid 21 speed bikes, map, customized itinerary of our nightly accommodation, helmets, panniers, lights, inner tubes and locks. Our bike seats were adjusted, we signed a waiver indicating receipt of all items for our trip, waved goodbye to the Scoot Cycle folks and then set off to rely on our own human power for the next seven days.

Riding on the left hand curb side of the road for the first time, we cautiously approached our first roundabout of the trip, leading into seaside Morecambe. Securing our bikes to the fence that surrounds the terrace of the Crown Hotel, we crossed the road and walked along the wide seaside promenade until our room was ready. The wait was worthwhile as the spacious Hawkshead View Suite gave us an uninterrupted view of the Morecambe sands where we spent a restful night in anticipation of what lay ahead.

Breakfast in Pebbles, the Hotel's restaurant, was abundant and powered us up so we were

ready to face this epic journey. A photo on the beach at Morecambe was snapped. Ahead of us we saw what would become our beacon; the Way of the Roses sign

Yorkshire. However, they were not sure what the sign posts or way marks indicated, where they led or where the trails ended. We expect, with this be-

indicating the distance to the eastern terminus in Bridlington.

And away we went! The signs led us along the Lune River path through the outskirts of Lancaster to begin our 35-mile day. We were soon in the lush countryside, passing through undulating hills and fields dotted with sheep along country lanes. Kayakers trained in the river as we rode past and up the Lune Valley to the Crook O'Lune viewpoint. Mid-morning, cruising into the tiny hamlet of Hornby, we were invited into the church hall for a cuppa and biscuit. Residents were intrigued and interested with the two Canadians passing through.

Although the Way of the Roses is extremely well-posted, not many people have ridden this route which officially opened in September 2010. The locals we spoke to along the way were aware of the distinctive blue trail signs with the red rose of Lancashire and white rose of

ing the first summer for riders using the trail, it will become more popular and once ridership increases and residents along the route will become inundated with cyclists.

We pedaled along our route which joined the Lunesdale Arts trail and stopped at a studio to watch an artist at work on a collage. With magnificent vistas across the moors, it was obvious where she got her creative inspiration. As we continued on, the landscape turned to a moonscape, brown and bleak through the fells along the Forest of Bowland. Our lunch stop was at the New Inn in Clapham, a welcome sight after a long morning ride. Cai's instructions directed us to an off-road route through dark tunnels and up and over a very rough rutted dirt path. The quiet beauty of the high dramatic hills of the Yorkshire Dales National Park was breathtaking. This route took us down a very steep hill and across the Ribble River leaving Lancashire to spend the remainder of our journey in Yorkshire. The end of our first full day was greeted with cake and tea at our B&B in the small market town of Settle.

After a full English breakfast we were ready for what Cai referred to as the most difficult day of the entire trip. Leaving Settle we encountered the toughest climb of the entire route; an extremely narrow and difficult climb that would eventually take us through the Pen-



nines and the Three Peaks. We passed Shetland cattle, heather clad hills, hedgerow bordered lanes and tiny hamlets. We soared into the tiny village of Burnsall on the River Wharfe for a cuppa and a rest.

We spent this overnight in a lovely, quiet and spacious suite in Pateley Bridge owned by a woman who once lived in Edmonton. Some of the highlights while in Pateley Bridge included The Oldest Sweet Shop in England, artists at work in The Old Workhouse Studio and the Sportsman's Arms tucked along the Nidderdale River.

Day three, a 48-mile leg, began after another delicious, full breakfast. The terrain varied but brought us through Brimham Rocks, a National Trust site, the World Heritage Site of Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, Deer Park and eventually into Ripon, one of the oldest cities in Britain. Here the familiar Way of the Roses signage confused us, but fortunately a fellow cyclist set us straight and we forged ahead with a pub stop for a pint of local ale for Tom and cider for me as the day was heating up. Cycling through the Vale of York, and flat fields, we caught a glimpse of the limestone Yorkshire Horse off in the distance to the north. Arriving in York we followed dedicated pedestrian/cycle paths along and over the River Ouse into the centre

of the city, where after finding the Hotel de Vin we were led to a bike shed where we locked the bikes up and spent a restful two nights at this lovely modern boutique hotel.

The fourth leg of the trip was a 25-mile day which began with a pedestrian cycling path that took us through rolling countryside and across the hidden dales of Yorkshire Wolds. Off-road cycling took us through fields of waving red poppies, yellow canola fields and brilliant green spring crops. Riding into Polkington, the town Crier announced a free tea and tombola, in which we were happy to participate. The narrow, sloping, dry valley road through the Wolds wound past horseback riders and walkers and led us beyond the Millington Wood Nature Reserve and permanent Gates art installation. Slogging along this gradual slope we arrived in the one-pub hamlet of Huggate and eventually to our farm stay at Greenwich Farm.

A lovely English breakfast was served in the finely appointed, elegant dining room of the farmhouse, fuelling us for the final 37-mile day of our ride across Britain. The air was cool

and it was windy as we rode into Driffield for a brief lunch stop wharfside at the riverhead. Over unmanned level rail crossings, past huge ploughed fields ready for planting, rising up onto narrow Woldgate Roman Road with finally, a distant view of the North Sea. Seeing how close we now were to our destination made us determined to pedal as rapidly

was here that Cai would retrieve the reliable two-wheeled steeds that carried Tom and I on an adventure across a country of diverse beauty. June turned out to be a great time of year for the ride as traffic was minimal, it hadn't become too warm and we were able to ride all the way across Lancaster and Yorkshire with not one drop of rain. Rid-



as we could to our journey's end. Entering Old Town Bridlington and on to the seaside promenade with views of the white cliffs of Flamborough Head was a thrill. Proudly we stood on the east side of Britain and took photos ending our adventure, having travelled all 170 miles of the Way of the Roses Cycle Route.

The final night of our trip was spent in the historic Roseberry House B&B in Bridlington, where we were met with a warm welcome by proprietors, John and Helen. It

ing west to east we had the wind at our backs until our final day when the North Sea winds blew towards us. This ride was a challenge of a lifetime for both of us and one that we will reminisce about for the rest of our lives.

Jill Croft remembers meeting in the old *Monday Magazine* Board Room at Blanshard & Courtney when the GVCC was in its infancy. Subsequently, she and her husband Tom have holiday cycled along the Danube and across Britain. Jill cycles daily throughout Victoria, remains a keen advocate of cycling her community, and appreciates all the work the GVCC has done to make biking a popular alternative form of transportation.

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