

Spokes Shropshire Weekend

See John Woodcraft's article on the Shropshire weekend on page 5 of this issue Unfortunately our budget doesn't allow for colour throughout, but be reassured, the grass and trees were green in the other views of Clun



photos courtesy Richard Norris and Ian Nightingale

2005 Spokes Picnic

For a couple of years, the idea of organising a family event for members had been talked about; but that's as far as it got. Until this year that is when Mark Ingle, Chris Keen, and myself accepted the challenge to organise something. On the face of it not too daunting a task!!! Wrong. First we had to think about where to have it. It had to be near enough to give people the opportunity to ride there, but not too far as to put some people off. The British weather had to be considered, so it had to be somewhere that had an indoor and an outdoor facility. Then we considered food hygiene regulations; should we provide food and drink, and if so, what? One of the key benefits of being one of the organisers meant that you could have your choice of sandwich fillings (that will go down as one of the highlights of my year).

Un-deterred we set out, OS map in hand, to scour the county for a suitable venue – in the pouring rain I hasten to add. We looked at several villages but only Willoughby Waterleys ticked the boxes.

On the journey back we debated sandwich fillings and food preferences (other than lots of it) Chris was an able minute taker and

kept Mark & my food fantasies in check.

So it was job done other than letting people know about it, and making the booking with the hall, doing the shopping, making the sandwiches.

On the day the sun was shining! Mark & Chris organised the sandwiches and ferried the food to the hall, and then made a dash down to the Quay which was one of three starting points.

In true military fashion I linked up with John Woodcraft at the Quay on the mobile to advise that we were leaving London Road, would pick up the group on Aylstone Road and meet him and his crowd on the Great Central Way.

In total we had about 20 people, some of whom had not cycled with us for some months; so it gave us the opportunity to catch up with everyone and exchange stories, look at photos and generally have a good time. After about three hours and after Patrick had done a sterling job with the marigolds, we had a leisurely ride back into Leicester. Ah memories of the summer

The ride out and back was very nice

Ian Nightingale

LEICESTER CYCLIST

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Summer/Autumn 2005

Spokes Summer of Cycling

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The 2005 Spokes Camping Weekend at Quorn was again a huge success although, as can be seen from the photo, Richard needed the attentions of a nurse (the 'nurse' is Lynn in costume for a Great Central Railway WW2 weekend).



... and social events

Above, a Spokes ride refreshment stop, and (right) the Spokes picnic

For information on local rides please see our website www.leicesterspokes.org.uk

Cycling in CHINA

... and a bit about Vietnam



In March 2005, I spent four weeks on a lecture tour in China; visiting the Sichuan and Yunnan provinces (both in South China) and then Beijing with a few days in Vietnam (Hanoi) in between.

I guess I went there thinking "This is going to be the biggest bicycle culture ever" and found that it wasn't any more. Yes, there were a lot of bicycles but looking from my 24th floor hotel window in Kunming one morning, there were only slightly more bikes on the road below me than motor vehicles, and given that plenty of those were mini-buses, buses, multi-occupied cars etc, then many more Kunming folk were travelling on four wheels that morning than on two. In Beijing the difference was even greater, with my ever-reliable *Rough Guide to China* saying that the roads there are fast approaching gridlock, despite there being five separate concentric ring-roads round the city and far more urban motorways than you'll ever see



in London. I guess this may all be recent, but as this was my first visit to mainland China I had no first-hand comparisons to draw on.

There were, though, large numbers of load-carrying trailer-trikes everywhere. In Chengdu in Sichuan Province, which felt more rural than other places I visited, there were many piled high with farmers' green veg early in the morning (see photo above). I guess this too will change as China undergoes the enormous population shifts from the countryside to the economic growth areas on the East coast that are forecast for the next 15 years and the inevitable mechanisation of agriculture that will surely follow.

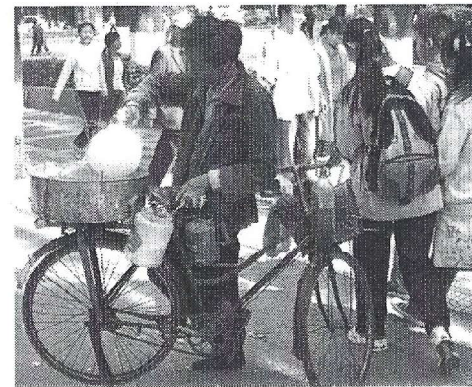
I saw a trailer trike shifting a complete double bed with headboard and side tables and another carrying what seemed to be the complete metal A-frame with rafters for the roof of a sizeable shed. It looked like a set of enormous aeroplane wings. The Chinese are nothing if not ingenious. In a rural area, I also saw a small motorbike with two dead pigs bungee strapped onto the pillion seat. They weren't debristed, gutted or anything, just newly dead with their legs sticking up in the air.

Bike and motor-bike rickshaws (photo left - a number of which appear to be electric) were also ever-present but seemed to be a dying trade, especially in Beijing where taxi-cabs were clearly taking much more trade.

One of my student guide/interpreters surprised me when he said that you could buy a fairly unreliable but brand-new bike in China for £6! A rough second-hand one could cost less than 10p. Most of the bikes I saw were heavy old black bone-shakers. I'd say less than one in 200 was a new bike and I only ever saw two mountain bikes and one set of drop handlebars. I also never saw (and some people may be delighted at this) any specialised cycling clothes or any Lycra!

I asked the same student interpreter why there appeared to be no recreational cycling and particularly, when the Chinese are increasingly prominent in so many Olympic sports and with the Beijing Olympics getting ever nearer, there seem to be no Chinese sport cyclists at all, either track or road. He said, "We see bicycles simply as a form of transport; it never occurs to us to use them for recreation." Which is all the more surprising when you consider the average Han Chinese physique, both men and women, often compact, wiry and very strong.

Another thing I saw often was a passenger. Not a Leicester-styles "croggie" on the crossbar as very few bikes (I'd say fewer than 1 in 50) had a crossbar. Most machines were female-style bikes ridden happily by either sex. So the passenger sits side-saddle on the back pannier rack often, in the morning, smartly dressed for the office. The one elaboration I saw was a teenage girl sitting



• Pedal powered candy floss maker



• Roadside cycle repair shop

on the handlebars facing the rider. It looked totally precarious and I can't imagine how the rider could see where she was going!

So, to my surprise, still the biggest bike culture I've yet come across by far is the Netherlands. In four weeks in China, I never saw anything like the stacks of bikes (must have been 2000+) outside a popular music club on the outskirts of Amsterdam. For bicycle culture, the Dutch still have the edge, despite the Chinese undoubtedly having the manufacturing edge.

Philip Draycott

... a different type of 'bike!

In Hanoi (Vietnam) the 100cc motorbike is the thing. Very few private cars (the country is very, very poor) and apparently there are three million 100cc bikes in Hanoi, which has a population of five million; and most of them seem to be on the road most of the time!

The most frightening thing I have ever done in my life is crossing the road in Hanoi on a Saturday night. There are no crossings and extremely few traffic lights. Mostly the fairly wide roads are totally full of an unending sea of motorbikes travelling fairly fast.

The one way to cross is to take a deep breath and start walking steadily across. There are no gaps. You have to avoid the cars but the motorbikes swerve round you (it's a total nightmare!) The one thing you mustn't do is lose your nerve and stop walking because the riders then miscalculate and hit you!

Fullhurst School Link (New cycle track & toucan crossing).

A welcome new SW bound off-road cycle track has recently opened on the West side of the city. It starts only 200m along Braunstone Ave from the existing Westcotes Drive cycle route. The markings start on the pavement at the junction of Braunstone Ave/ Wyngate Drive/ Ashleigh Rd, continue along Braunstone Ave under the Railway Bridge but from there onwards the pavement has recently been doubled in width alongside Westcotes Park, Imperial Ave School, etc. There it splits into a double width along Fullhurst Ave, or via the new light controlled crossing, cyclists can safely cross Fullhurst Ave into Braunstone Ave again, where the new double width pavement continues past the new library. Then across the

traffic island and on to the existing single width pavement alongside Braunstone Park (not signed as a cycle path). This is a route which I use regularly for leisure cycling as it gives access, via Shakespeare Drive, Kingsway North, and the pedestrian underpass, to the cycle path alongside Lubbesthorpe Way.

The most dangerous part of the route was always the fork where Fullhurst Ave splits off to the left from Braunstone Ave. Out-bound cyclists had to get to the middle of the road and stand there waiting for a gap in the oncoming traffic so they could move into Braunstone Ave. At busy times this was not a manoeuvre for the faint-hearted. Well done City Council. JW

Summer of Cycling on Display

In late September Bar Nova on Granby Street hosted the 2005 'Summer of Cycling' Photography exhibition. Thirty winning photographs were on display as the finale of the third annual competition organised by Picture House Centre for Photography and the City Council's Cycle-City Workshop. The exhibition in an upstairs function room was free and every visitor was invited to vote for their favourite. The exhibition was set up earlier in daylight and it was not until darkness fell that the organisers found that the artificial lighting was only partially working. Luckily Ned had his LED front bike light and we were able to check out the entries, which included shots of the Tour of Britain, Cycle Speedway, BMX riders and Leicester Road Club.

There were also some fun pictures of people just out and about enjoying the Summer. The winning images will appear on City Council street posters, flyers, magazines and websites over the next twelve months and the winner received a prize of £50.

A film about the culture clash between New York Police and organised mass cycling rides was shown with amazing scenes of cyclists being handcuffed and imprisoned in conditions that asylum seekers would not have tolerated in this country.

Afterwards there was live music from a group of State Registered Eccentrics from Derby, mostly playing instruments made from bicycle parts, who played in the style of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, for anyone old enough to remember them. JW

New Sustrans National Cycle Network Maps

The popular National Cycle Network route map series is changing with the introduction of the Discover and Challenge cycle ranges.

The Discover range still includes long distance cycle routes, and also maps areas allowing cyclists to discover more than just the one route; it includes five enjoyable day ride suggestions.

The Challenge range will also continue to focus on the long distance routes and will offer the ultimate challenges on the National Cycle Network such as the C2C and the Pennine Cycle Way.

Maps can be purchased online at www.sustransshop.co.uk

The village of Clun lies about 25 miles SW of Shrewsbury, is in Shropshire but almost on the border with Wales, and is about 110 miles from Leicester. It has a ruined 12th century castle built to defend the border and the nearby Clun Forest provides good walking and cycling.

Clun Mill is the recently modernised YHA hostel on the edge

of the village; and Ian Nightingale booked it for a party of 16 Spokes members for a weekend in May. It is a former watermill and has the preserved water wheel

and millstone in a display at the heart of the stone-built building, which is set in large lawned garden with picnic tables and a lockup shed for bikes.

Christine and I drove down on Saturday morning and due to a late start (my fault — I couldn't decide what to wear!) we didn't arrive till lunchtime.

We found the hostel down a little back lane, with a note telling us that the rest of the party had cycled on to the town of Craven Arms for lunch. We unloaded the bikes and followed the main road along the valley to the market town 12 miles away and found the others just finishing their lunch in the pub garden.

It was 3pm when we arrived but we were told it was too late even for rolls. No truck with tourists here. Fortified by beer, donated bananas and Norman's chocolates, which he had left unattended, we set off back to Clun

via the quiet route. Now I have been to Shropshire several times and it always seemed fairly flat but this part is verging on the foothills of the mountains of mid-Wales and although the main roads run along the valleys, the side roads are little-used because they are narrow and cling to the sides of some impressively steep hills.

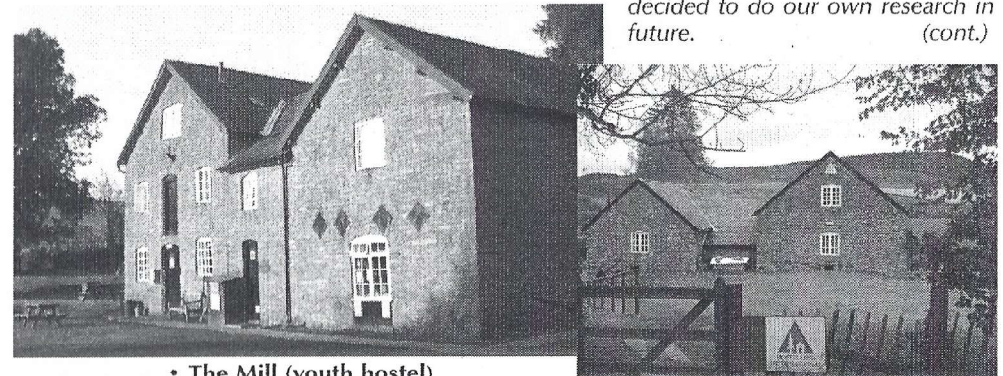
The next two hours

set the tone for the whole of the weekend as we alternately walked our bikes up the hills and then whizzed down the other side, only to find yet another even steeper

climb ahead. Eventually we got back to the hostel, cleaned up and walked the 300yds into the village to find sustenance. Of the two pubs, The Sun seemed to have the most space and the least cigarette smoke and the restaurant manageress kindly moved tables so that we could all sit together.

On Sunday morning, in brilliant sunshine, we set off through the village down to the river and across a footbridge on to a narrow road leading into another set of hills on the south side of Clun. In the first hour and a half we covered about a mile and a half, so steep were the hills; but the vista of sun-lit hills on the other side of the valley made it worthwhile. Eventually we rolled down into the small town of Knighton in search of lunch. Following on a recommendation from a local resident to a pub with a beer garden we found ourselves in the backyard carpark with one rotting picnic table and decided to do our own research in future. (cont.)

No
trouble at
t' Mill



• The Mill (youth hostel)

Two of us joined a couple with their small child at shaded table outside a very busy pub and managed to subliminally encourage them to leave so that another four Spokes members could join us for traditional Welsh pizzas and beer.

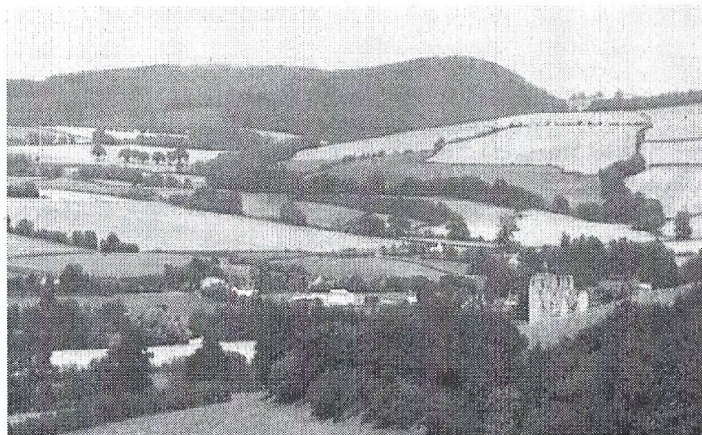
After lunch we headed off along a narrow lane running NW alongside the River Teme which flows thro the town and is also the border with Wales at that point. After a long climb during which I think we must have crossed the line of Offa's Dyke without realising, followed by a long descent, we were back in Clun.

On Monday morning the sun was still shining as we packed our stuff into the cars and, leaving them outside the hostel gate, we set off on our bikes to visit the ancient market town of Bishop's Castle which is about five miles to the North as the crow flies.

Under Valerie's leadership we again took the scenic route via the hills and then down into the town itself with its very steeply sloping main shopping street.

After an exploration on foot of the town, which has medieval origins, five of us found lunch at a decent delicatessen/caf   up at the top of the hill which also sold that cyclist's standby — almost solid chocolate cake.

We all met up again after lunch, and Valerie then led us into a forest criss-crossed with Nature Trails. Some of the tracks were fairly rough and Dave regretted coming on his racing bike. On one downhill section Rhian let loose and went rushing off ahead. Some half mile further on I saw a very small sign at



• Clun countryside

the side of the main track indicating a narrow track off to the left for Clun. By this time Rhian was out of earshot and after shouting, waiting, and phoning, two others went after her while the rest carried on to Clun.

The weather had clouded over and cooled down in anticipation of the forecast rain but we did manage to get back to the cars just as a few spots began to fall. After tea and cake at a local caf   it was back to Leicester, a much fitter group than when we started out.

To sum up, it was an excellent weekend blessed by good organisation and almost continuous sunshine but next time I shall get fitter beforehand and take fewer changes of clothes because there was absolutely no storage space in the bunk bedded rooms except on the floor but luckily there were empty beds in our room.

The hostel had beds for 24 but we booked it exclusively and with only 16 of us it was reasonably comfortable. There was central heating, hot showers, adequate sized dining room and a kitchen well equipped for breakfast but I wouldn't fancy trying to cook my own individual evening meal with 23 others doing the same.

John Woodcraft

“The next two hours set the tone for the whole of the weekend as we alternately walked our bikes up the hills and then whizzed down the other side, only to find yet another even steeper climb ahead.”

The lads at work know I'm a keen cyclist, so they often ask my advice as to which bike they should buy to get to work on.

As they'll only be using the bike for commuting, I always tell them to look for a bike that's deisnged for just that: ie preferably hub gears and brakes, a rack, and perhaps those strange contraptions called 'mudguards'.

Failing that I then usually recommend a 'hybrid' type bike: there are plenty available in the local shops — priced around £200 to £300, and to my mind they represent good value.

Unfortunately even at these quite low prices I always see an expression of horror on their faces, “Oh! I only want a cheap one”, they say. I try to explain that if cared for, a quality bike will last for years, and therefore it will work out very cheap in the long run

Returns

But I know from previous experience that my hard-learned advice will fall on deaf ears; what they really want — indeed what they always want is an “all-suspension mountain bike”. It's this sort of bike that they turn-up on at work and bring over to me to show-off.

They're usually an x-type frame, painted in garish colours with names like *Descender-Boss* or *Mantis* — there's even one quite ironically called “No Fear” (would any of us buy a bike like this, no fear!). They cost around £80 from shops specialising in catalogue returns and are always equipped with the ubiquitous semi-flat 'knobbles'.

My heart sinks when I see the latest example wheeled in, but I've learned to keep my opinions to myself; after all, no one wants their latest purchase rubbished, but why is it that

Cheap & Fashionable

people who will buy the most expensive car that they can afford, or will spend a lot of money to go on foreign holidays to places I've never even heard of, will simply refuse to buy a quality bike.

Perhaps it's to do with fashion; a mountain bike is fashionable. It seems that any bike that even slightly resembles

the kind of bike that your parents might have ridden must be avoided like the plague.

Now I don't want to seem anti-mountain bike — I've got one myself, albeit a lot more expensive than the ones at work, but mine's used for what it was designed for, and that's 'off-roading' — something the lads never do.

Flat Tyres

That brings me to another point, as they always stay on tarmac I suggest to them that they would be far better off with 'road-going tyres', pumped up to their proper pressure, but even this advice is ignored as 'semi-flat knobbles' are deemed *de-rigueur* no matter what.

I watch them as they pedal off home — the incompetently designed rear suspension seems to convert as much of the rider's energy into vertical movement as forward movement with the (always) semi-flat knobbles exaggerating the effect. It's painful to watch. I was waiting at the traffic lights on St. George's Way when I heard a rhythmic squeaking coming up behind me on the pavement.

Sure enough, a young lad on an all-suspension mtb slowly rode past me. The squeaking came from the rear suspension as the rider bobbed up and down in perfect timing with the noise; curiously he was pedalling with his heels.

Is this the shape of things to come? I sincerely hope not, or am I just getting old?

Andrew Tokeley

Em@il List

Where members have email facilities we send out occasional mailings of cycling matters which we think may interest them. We also send out notification of regular and spontaneously organised rides; but to avoid being accused of spamming, we only email these to those members

who ask to be included on this separate “Active members” mailing list. If you would like to be on this list or haven't been receiving emails recently then please notify jwoodcraft@fastmail.co.uk Also don't forget to notify John when you change your email address.

Two years ago I doubt I would have thought about taking up cycling let alone ride a tandem. In March last year I was introduced back into cycling in one large 20mile ride (and boy, did I suffer). But not being one to give up I kept at it (despite the hills, which I found really difficult) and eventually decided to take part in a sponsored bike ride with Mark Ingle.

My Travels on a 'Tandem'

The Historic Churches Trust sponsored cycle ride (and walk) takes place around the country on the second Saturday of September each year and raises money for the Trust and the rider's church. Quite a few churches are only open a few times a year so it is a good opportunity to visit these churches.

I have since found that Mark does like a challenge and the Tandem (*most kindly provided by Simon Thomas of Cyclemagic*) took centre stage. Having never ridden one or even seen one close up, the thought of riding one was hard to take in. All that balance, steering, gear changes and braking were really daunting.

The practice ride was arduous for me, particularly as we travelled into Houghton by what I consider to be the worst hill I had ever encountered and I could not stand up(!). I had the unenviable task of planning the route and the first draft was "too easy" and so with a heavy heart and quivering hand I revised the route to include the Billesdon and Gaulby area (more hills!!).

The day of the Big Ride loomed ever nearer and the first ride was reasonably successful despite my inaccurate steering and erratic gear changes. The attempted 'U-turn' didn't help my confidence that much when I crashed into a garden wall. The only injuries being to myself; both Mark and the tandem escaped (well Mark leapt off the bike before the impact). The hills were climbed and the mileage done I finished the day on a high. Within a week I had given up smoking. This all happened in September 2004.

Having trained all year (I confess that most of this was in the Gym) I was prepared for our second encounter with 'The Tandem' (which was again provided by Cyclemagic). I wasn't prepared for the wet weather though.

So, on a wet Saturday morning in September we set off from Leicester with Richard Norris and Peter Simmonds (on Tandem No:2). Unfortunately Tandem 2 took a bit of a tumble 10metres out from our first church (St. Margarets), but all was well and no one injured. We worked our way out towards Hinckley; at times the rain was quite heavy.

I did learn later in the day that the brakes on our tandem (being very wet) would not have stopped the combined 160kg of bodyweight in what were described as very close encounters (too late to pack the spare underwear then!).

Both Mark and I were impressed by the cycle path which took us from Desford to Peckleton Church, not only was it extremely well constructed and maintained but in the middle of nowhere.

The ride was successfully completed and we did cover just short of 51miles. Peter kept us entertained by broadcasting various melodies and tones every time his hearing aids got waterlogged.

As we arrived at one Church Tandem2 managed to gatecrash a wedding and we suffered the only puncture of the day. The puncture was dealt with promptly and we continued our journey.

This year Mark kindly stayed up front (probably not wanting more of last years unstable steerage), although we did negotiate one of the subways under Narborough Road South without stopping or dismounting (believe me that is some feat on a tandem). I was surprised to find that the top speed we attained was 36mph.

All in all, we all enjoyed the ride despite the torrential rains; the churches that we visited were all unique in their own way and each had a history to be proud of. It was certainly not a ride I will forget in a hurry (my mobile phone is still not fully functional after its journey in my pannier unprotected) and lunch with the Lord & Lady Mayor of Hinckley allows me to name drop.

Thanks Richard and Peter for riding with us; and my Tandem partner for his encouragement over the past two years.

Tony Grayson

We all know, don't we, that a small GPS unit can place your location to within a few feet. Is this not something that might be useful to someone cycling long distances? Worth at least the odd passing reference, wouldn't you say?

Personally speaking, I seem to get lost, to a greater or lesser extent, every time I ride an event. I have been hopelessly lost at 2am in the pitch black lanes between Canterbury and Ashford. In the rain. With a puncture (two actually). I have found myself at Castle Combe when I thought I was going to be at Leigh Delamere. I have even done a 600k from Denmead where I was lost before I started. And, I have to say, I have not much enjoyed any of it. I would much rather not get lost. I would guess most of us would share these sentiments. So, why no mention of a device that might be able to help?

Is it that Audax Man is something of a Luddite? Mmm, there may be a bit of that. But I think it more likely that most people, like me, have registered that the technology might be useful but don't know enough about it to go any further. After all, knowing where you are is only half the answer. What you really need to know is where you are in relation to where you should be. How could GPS help with that one? And what sort of unit should you buy? And will it do what it says on the tin or will it just be an irritating waste of money?

I came across a book called GPS the Easy Way by David Brawn (available via www.walking.demon.co.uk). This little book is primarily aimed at walkers but at £4.99, how could I resist? It satisfactorily answered just about all my questions and also provided advice on which GPS unit to buy. So, I took the plunge.

Mapping

Initially, what I thought I wanted was a device that contained a map on which the desired route could be superimposed along with your actual current position. After all, this is, more or less, what you get with 'in-car' Sat Nav. But these cost 400 quid and they are neither portable nor waterproof and I'm not sure the maps are detailed enough for audax use. But, if my 'ideal' was unavailable, Mr Brawn's book

pointed to an alternative that, I thought, might work just as well. What I did was to buy a set of digitised OS maps. These come with inbuilt

GPS – Which way or Witchcraft?

route plotting software and it is then a straightforward matter (no, really, it is) to transfer your plotted route into your GPS unit. Once at the start and facing the direction you want

to go, you turn the GPS on and press a few buttons and the, otherwise blank, screen shows your route as a thick black line stretching from top to bottom. Turning points come into view from the top of the screen as you approach them. If you don't pay attention and miss a turn, your track/current position, shown as a thin dotted line, gradually diverges from the thick black line. It works a treat!

So, back to the detail. Two companies sell digitised OS maps: Memory-Map and Anquet. As far as I can tell, the products are identical but I chose Memory-Map after experiencing problems trying to download the Anquet demo off the Internet (I don't go looking for trouble where computers are concerned). You can buy a 'region', eg, SE England covering the area east of the Isle of Wight and south of Oxford, for £35 but I opted for the six-region special offer that covers the whole of England and Wales south of Manchester, that's an area covered by 100 OS Landranger maps, for £110. Once loaded, simplicity itself, you get an OS 1:50,000 map on your computer plus a toolbar giving you lots of computer-type goodies. For example, you can zoom in or out at the touch of a button and centre the map at any village or town you like simply by pressing the 'Search' button and typing in the name. Now I have them, I would recommend these e-maps for everyday use even if you have no interest in GPS.

To plot a route you simply click on the 'Route' button, put the cursor at your start, point and click. A brightly coloured blob appears on the map; you then move the cursor to your first turn and click again. Another blob appears, connected to the first blob by a line with a direction arrow on it. I found it reasonably easy to plot an audax route in this way from a standard direction sheet – although it does require some concentration. As you plot your

route, the software automatically creates a file, accessible at any time, showing distances between blobs (called waypoints in the parlance), their exact positions and elevations, etc. When you have your complete route you simply press the button on the Toolbars labelled 'GPS' and select 'Upload to GPS'. The route will then be loaded into your GPS unit in about 15-20 seconds. Of course, to do this you need a cable to connect your computer to your GPS (£10, purchased when you buy your unit) and the unit itself.

Hardware

So, which GPS to buy? David Brawn's book contains lots of information on capacities, batteries and weight. I bought a Garmin Foretrex 101 (for £110) because it was the only one you can wear on your wrist. I figured that I had quite enough on my handlebars already (lights, computer, map holder). In the event, this turned out to be a mistake. Having to keep cocking your wrist is an irritation and you can easily forget to do it and miss something important. Handlebar mounting is better. Fortunately Garmin do make a handlebar mount for this unit (£15; grrr) so my money wasn't entirely wasted.

Capacity is important. My unit will hold 20 routes each with a max of 125 waypoints. I now know (though I did not when I bought) that 125 waypoints will cover 35-45 miles, ie, enough to see you from one control to the next. Thus you will need to break a 200k ride into four separate routes. Some units only offer 50 waypoints per route and this is not enough. You also need to pay attention to battery life. My unit has a quoted battery life of 15 hours for its two AAAs but I have had the screen go blank after as little as nine hours. But if you do need to change batteries, it's not really a problem because the routing information is retained. You also need a unit that is waterproof but they all are, so this is not a problem. If I were starting again, I might now choose a Garmin eTrex Legend because it has a bigger screen – this could be important if your eyesight is not so good – but it does cost £30 more and is a couple of ounces heavier.

On the road

So, having spent the money, I was keen to test the whole package in an actual event. I entered The Dean 300k but was then informed by my wife that we had an unbreakable social engagement on the day which meant that I could not possibly complete the event and get back to home in time. Rather than drop out, I decided to miss a couple of controls, cut across the middle of the loop and turn it into my own private 200k. This allowed me to plot my own route between Stow and Malmesbury which I would have to complete without any written directions to fall back on. If you look at a map you will see that there is a pretty direct main road route between these two towns but I decided to navigate something really complex through the back lanes. On the day the GPS functioned perfectly and I sailed through without the slightest hesitation at any point. It was all so easy that once I rejoined the official route for the sections from Malmesbury to Hungerford and then back to Oxford, I left my instructions in my pocket. The only point at which I had a problem was at a five-way junction where two roads left in very similar directions. I chose the wrong one but the error was clear from the screen after about 50m.

Mistakes
It was while riding this event that another huge advantage became apparent to me. Usually I am forever obsessing about whether I made a mistake at the last turn or whether I have just missed that 'second on the right after 3.4k' that I should be approaching. With the GPS this anxiety vanished completely – you just look at the screen and you see the thick black line of the route with the little walking man, ie, you, on it! You know you are still on the route.

So, I have spent my cash (about £240 in total), bought my toys and I am never going to get lost again. Absolutely not. I have the technology. What could possibly go wrong? No doubt I will find out in due course.

Fred Green

“Usually I am forever obsessing about whether I made a mistake at the last turn or whether I have just missed that ‘second on the right after 3.4k’ that I should be approaching.”

Article originally published in *Arrivéé*, the magazine of Audax UK, the Long Distance Cyclists Association; reproduced with permission. Further details on Audax UK can be found at www.audax.uk.net

Low cost for who?

FLY CYCLING ..
not with a bang, but with a whimper”
(T.S. Eliott)

In the popular current trend to fly as far as possible as cheaply as possible, it may be interestingly provocative to invite the airline of your choice to also supply carbon dioxide emission figures for your intended flight as well as the cost.

Reproduced below are some recent government figures comparing different transport modes and their costs: that is, cost to one's planet, not cost to one's pocket.

Air transport emissions are staggering:

UK greenhouse gas emissions from air transport rose 85% between 1990 and 2002, from 20.2 million tonnes to 37.3 million tonnes.

(Office of National Statistics 2004)

London to Edinburgh

Plane: 96.4kg per person

Train (modern highspeed electric): 11.9kg

Car: 71kg (1.56 people per car)

Coach: 9.2kg

Similarly for road comparison:

London to Bristol

Train: 10.6kg (modern diesel)

Car: 21.3kg

Coach: 3.3kg

Figures in kg per passenger per journey (Dft 2004).

This is where bike-bus schemes win hands down.

Rieta Simmonds

Safe Cycling in the Sun

Editor's note: Due to the delayed production of this newsletter, this advice for cycling in the sun has come a bit late for the rides this year... however, summer will soon be here again!

The incidence of skin cancer is rising faster than any other cancer. Having spent the past few months researching, for work, the evidence around health promotion interventions to prevent skin cancer, I will certainly be taking more care cycling in the sun this summer.

Most of us are pretty good about applying sun block – it is recommended that you use as high a protection factor as possible (SPF) at least 15+, apply a good thick layer and re-apply often.

However consider the following, arguably more effective, sun protective behavior:

1. Avoid the sun from 11am to 3pm
 2. Seek natural shade – look out for tree cover on rides when you're waiting around for others
 3. Wear hats and cover up with clothing
- Avoid getting sunburn at all costs, there is a strong correlation between the incidence of sunburn and the development of all types of skin cancer and remember there is no such thing as a safe tan. Have a great 'sun safe' summer of cycling (next year!)

Chris Keen

Why bikes are better than men

1. Bikes don't moan when they have to wear a protective cover.
2. If you dump your bike it doesn't keep phoning.
3. A naked bike looks fantastic. In fact a spare tyre can be an advantage.
4. Bikes don't whinge when you tug their throttles a bit too hard.
5. Bikes don't mind going shopping and they will happily wait while you try on one more frock.
6. Your bike can go all night without stopping.

Why bikes are better than women

1. You get a manual with your bike to explain how it works.
2. You can trade in your old model for a new one as often as you like without paying huge legal bills.
3. Stripping your bike is legal in public.
4. Your bike won't mind if you ride another model.
5. Your bike won't think you're a pervert if you want to chain it up at night.
6. When your bike gets old it becomes a classic - and even more desirable.