



Rick refuelled at a café barge moored at Gathurst



Less weight = easier exploring

BIKEPACKING RWANDA

William Tucker explored this equatorial African country on his mountain bike

Glancing over at my GPS watch, I saw it read 36mph. My front tyre was a blur, humming as I sped downhill, Rwanda's green forests parting around me.

I'd arrived in Rwanda two weeks before, crossing by bus from Uganda. My objective was to complete the little-known Congo Nile Trail: 150 miles along the beautiful shore of Lake Kivu. I was travelling as lightly as possible: no panniers, just a 25-litre backpack with a 2-litre hydration bladder and a few essentials.

The trail starts in Giseyni in the western province of Rwanda. With the lake on my right, navigation was straightforward as I headed south to Kamembe, passing through fishing villages living off the harvest of the lake.



It all went in a 25L pack

The hilly road was a dirt track, the only traffic the occasional motorbike and people walking to and from market. The locals were welcoming – my fancy full-suspension 29er with dropper post popular with local children keen to demonstrate their English.

Rwanda wakes early, about 5:30am, and so did I. I abandoned mileage goals and average speeds and simply set an objective town for each day. Despite being the dry season, I was never uncomfortably hot; Lake Kivu provided a cooling breeze. And I could always head down past banana and coffee plantations for a cooling swim.

My overnight accommodation in Kinunu on day two will stay with me: a white sand lakeside beach, palm trees, and fantastic local food. At the halfway point, Kibuye, the trail turns to pristine tarmac. But car ownership is low in Rwanda and the countryside is very cycle friendly.

After five days, I reached the trail's end and took a ferry back to Giseyni, where I planned to explore further in this incredible country.

Bike first-aid kit, human first-aid kit, camera, one change of clothes, and an up-to-date map

A day by the waterway

RICK ELLIOTT CYCLED 127 MILES FROM LEEDS TO LIVERPOOL BY THE CANAL

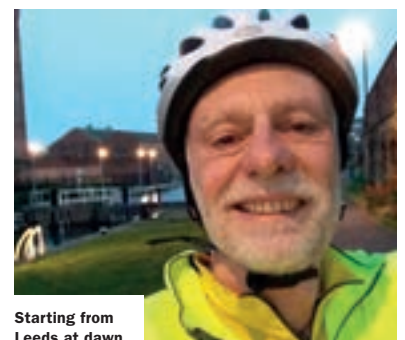
As I cycled through the Leeds suburbs at 4am, it was cold and pre-dawn grey. I was astonished to find crowds of revellers in the centre as the clubs closed their doors for the night. On the towpath, however, all was quiet.

I disturbed a heron, which flew up and alighted 100 metres along the canal. By now, the blackbirds and sparrows had started up. Squirrels darted away from my wheels, and a sleepy duck cracked open an eye. Some grey geese hissed defensively. Bingley Five Rise saw the first of the towpath commuters.

After some splendid Dales scenery and the rough, tough, grassy track from Gargrave, I finally reached Foulridge wharf and a welcome cup of coffee. Over the top of the Foulridge tunnel, I saw a pair of swans shepherding seven cygnets along the canal.

By Wigan, it was raining as I traversed the cobblestones. As the afternoon drew to a close, dog walkers and commuters reappeared, followed by the evening runners, and teenagers with cheap cider.

I pedalled the remaining miles into the Eldonian Basin, Liverpool, arriving at the train station around 8.00pm.



Starting from Leeds at dawn



Topping off Xmas with a nice desert



By Pontsticill Reservoir in the Brecon Beacons

ESCAPE TO THE SAHARA

Becci May and her partner Owen spent Christmas cycling through Morocco

After flying to Morocco on Christmas Eve, and spending Christmas Day in Marrakesh, Owen and I set off for the Atlas Mountains. We headed up the pass of Tizi n'Tichka, tichka meaning 'difficult'. The most difficult things were the narrow bends and the number of large vehicles. Frequent calls of 'bonjour, ça va?' and 'bon voyage' encouraged us onwards and upwards.

Once over the snowy pass, we rode along a river valley and through an oasis of date palms to reach Tagounite. From there, we headed off onto the desert track. We had 15 litres of water, mostly carried by Owen. We were warned we'd need a 4x4 but our Thorn Raven tourers dealt with the desert amazingly well.



Camping in the desert was special: fantastic sunsets and sunrises, countless stars, and so peaceful. We spent New Year's Eve watching the sun go down, snug in our warm sleeping bags in the cold air. We even saw a shooting star that night.

At Fom Zguid, after four days and 175km of desert riding, we hit tarmac again. Passing a military post, we were greeted with calls of 'très, très, TRÈS bien' from the Moroccan military. That beats 'kudos' on Strava!

Making our way back over the High Atlas, this time we zig-zagged up to the Tizi n'Test pass. It was a decent gradient, with amazing views all the way.

Morocco is the most welcoming place that I've experienced as a cycle tourist, and the desert is a great place to spend Christmas and New Year.

Owen made a video of the trip – visit <https://vimeo.com/239258598>.

Cardiff to Caernarfon

GARETH ROBERTS ENJOYED A WELSH END-TO-END WITH FRIENDS CHARLIE AND PATRICK

The narrow lane approaching Dolgellau was covered with sheep droppings and the overspill of grass verges; our tyres struggled to grip. This steep ascent was our big challenge for the third and final day of our ride from Cardiff Castle to Caernarfon Castle.

We started on NCN Route 8, following the River Taff for over 35 miles. We stopped at Aberfan and visited the site of the former school where 116 children and 28 adults tragically died in 1966.

Next was Merthyr Tydfil, before we took on the Brecon Beacons. It soon became apparent that this was the place for sturdy bikes with broad tyres.

Ten miles into our second day, we faced another big climb to Builth Wells. We then followed the River Wye before arriving in Rhayader. Our residence for the night was a remote pub in the wilderness: Y Star Inn in Dylife.

With 75 miles to ride on day three, we passed through Machynlleth and Dolgellau, and then along the Mawddach Trail to Barmouth. The next leg took us along the Cambrian Coast to Harlech, home of another castle. We rode through Portmadoc and headed for the Lon Eifion Cycle Way at Bryncir, which left us with a 12-mile ride to Caernarfon, where the castle dominated the landscape. We'd done 188 miles.



Starting from Cardiff Castle

Share your story

Cycle wants your Travellers' Tales. Email the editor – cycle@jamespembrokemedia.co.uk – for advice on what's required.