

The West Surrey Cyclist

**April – June
2016**

Issue 122



WEST SURREY CTC 2016

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WHAT WE ARE

CTC is the national cycling charity. It is the oldest and largest cycling body in the UK, promotes all forms of cycling, and has championed the cause of cycling for well over a century. Its network of local groups, of which West Surrey CTC is one, has 70,000 members. Membership includes third-party insurance, a cycling-related legal helpline, and a bi-monthly national magazine.

CTC headquarters: Parklands, Railton Road, Guildford GU2 9JX.
Phone 0844 736 8450.

CTC website: www.ctc.org.uk

West Surrey CTC website: <http://westsurreyctc.co.uk/>

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 16th April: Cycle Jumble, Ripley Village Hall, 09:00.

Sunday 8th May: 35/50 mile Reliability Ride, start 8.00 – 9.00 from Crown Court car park, Godalming, GU7 1EE (SU970440). Roger Philo 01483-233381, roger.philo@virgin.net

Sunday 5th June: Stonehenge 200, Danebury 150 and Elstead 100 from Elstead Village Hall starting at 8.00, 8.30 and 9.00 respectively. Nick Davison 01428-642013 stonehenge200@westsurreyctc.co.uk

Sunday 24th July: 75 and 100 mile Reliability Rides, option of led ride or route sheets. Start / Finish at Rokers, Holly Lane, Worplesdon GU8 3PB at 08:00. Entry fee £2. Roger Philo 01483-233381, roger.philo@virgin.net

Saturday 30th July: RideLondon FreeCycle. A 10-mile ride on traffic-free roads in central London. You can take part by just turning up on the day, but there are advantages to registering before 18th June. See <https://www.ridelondon.co.uk/events/freecycle/> for details.

Sunday 21st August: Tour of the Hills and Tour of the Greensand. Start: Shere Village Hall GU5 9HF (TQ074480) at 9:40 and 10:30 respectively, entry fees £8 and £3.50 respectively. For more details of the Tour of the Hills see <http://www.aukweb.net/events/detail/16-356/>.

Saturday 17th September: Cycle Jumble, Ripley Village Hall, 09:00.



The magazine and rides lists are available on our website:

<http://westsurreyctc.co.uk/the-club/magazine/>

<http://westsurreyctc.co.uk/rides-and-events/ride-lists-downloads/>

THE FINAL CURTAIN

No one has come forward to take over as editor, so this is the final issue of The West Surrey Cyclist. The Committee, speaking on behalf of all WSCTC members, would like to thank all those who have been editors over the years:

<i>Robert Shiels</i>	<i>July 1985 (Issue 1) - March 1987 (Issue 5)</i>
<i>Helen Juden</i>	<i>April 1987 (Issue 6) - December 1989 (Issue 16)</i>
<i>Ian Parker</i>	<i>January 1990 - March 1991 (17-21)</i>
<i>David Nightingale</i>	<i>April 1991 - December 1996 (22-44)</i>
<i>Peter Norris</i>	<i>January 1997 - December 1999 (45-56)</i>
<i>Geoff Smith "senior"</i>	<i>January 2000 - October 2010 (57-100)</i>
<i>Claire Hooper</i>	<i>January 2011 - July 2012 (101-107)</i>
<i>Dane Maslen</i>	<i>October 2012 - January 2016 (108-121)</i>
<i>Mark Waters</i>	<i>April 2016 (122)</i>

*The Committee will now take on the task of compiling and printing future Runs Lists for those members that still require printed copies. **Members still wishing to be sent a Runs List should notify the Chairman** by phone or email by the end of May so he can add you to the list. Please **DO NOT ASSUME** that you will be sent one if you are currently a subscriber to the magazine (see below). Also please note, you will NOT be sent a reminder if your subscription has expired - you will be informed of this when you contact Mark. The price for one year of Runs Lists (4) will for the time being be £3.00.*

*The options for **outstanding subscriptions** are as follows:*

- a) Donate the balance to club funds. This is the default, but provided you contact the Chairman by 6th June you are free to choose one of the alternatives.*
- b) Have the balance returned to you. To minimise the hassle for the Treasurer, who will otherwise have to write many small cheques, get them countersigned, and then post them, we would ask you to choose one of the other options instead.*
- c) Use the balance to receive mailed copies of future Runs Lists.*
- d) Tell us to donate the balance to the Cyclists' Defence Fund.*

Please contact the Chairman (contact details for whom are elsewhere in the magazine) to let him know your choice.

IS THIS REALLY THE END?

by Geoff Smith

West Surrey Cyclist to end, can it be? After the shock came resigned acceptance but perhaps I am being pessimistic. I'm hoping as I write that a new editor has emerged to give the *WSC* a whirl. If so, I urge him or her and the group as a whole to continue with producing and financing it in print. Otherwise I fear that death remains in the frame.

The number of printed copies down to 49 from a peak in my time of about 120, is sad in itself but it was not much more than that when I took over. Dare I suggest that the present situation of a general lack of interest and no new editor emerging stems from when the mag went online in parallel with the printed issue? I even remember some confused supporters felt then that they were being disloyal in continuing to have printed copies as their subscriptions were a net loss to the group financially.

I take comfort that all printed issues are archived in the Surrey History Centre, as well as being "preserved" digitally. At least that was my understanding a year ago when Debbie and I were in the throes of leaving Woking for our new home in Lympstone, East Devon.

I was editor for 11 years (a record?) and the WSC then was very much part of the fabric of the group – and of my life. Many of the contributions and articles are little gems, as valid now as when they were written. Dust off your old copies and have a look, or ask to see them at the history centre in Goldsworth Road, Woking. I think you will then conclude that an online runs list and a few associated announcements and news items would be no substitute.

But if that is how it turns out I sincerely wish everyone well with it. Who knows, perhaps someone in the future might come up with the bright idea of why don't we have a magazine?

All best wishes

Geoff Smith

(Editor, 2000-2010 inclusive; committee member for almost as long; and a former proud Vice-President)

EDITORIAL

Readers might be forgiven for reading this and wondering if the end of the world is nigh. Doom and gloom prevails: not only is this the final edition of our club magazine, it's also the end of our club's 138 year old identity.

Some while ago now, the traditional name of our club, the *Cyclists' Touring Club*, was deemed unsuitable for an organisation which served more than just cyclists who toured; the name was changed to *CTC, the National Cyclists' Organisation*. Then, following the club's transformation into a charity, the name changed again to *CTC, the National Cycling Charity*. And now it's changing again: from April, your club will be called *Cycling UK*. The new logo, which undoubtedly cost thousands of pounds to create is shown below.



When the news of the name change was leaked in mid-February, a great brouhaha ensued, utilizing social media tool Facebook. A Facebook 'group' had been formed by member Chris Jeggo in December 2014 after CTC's new CEO, Paul Tuohy, announced the closure of the CTC Helpdesks. Entitled *Where should CTC be going?* this forum continues to provide members of CTC with a medium through which to air their views – it's worth a good look if you've not done so already.

It would be wonderful to be writing in this final issue of our club magazine that everything in CTC's 'garden' was rosy and blossoming. Fortunately our own section of the club is in a very healthy condition, but the same cannot be said to be true for the national body. Later in this issue will be an article informing readers of the changes that have taken place over the past twenty or so years and leave it to you to form your own views on whether these changes are for the good or not, and where it leaves us as a local member group.

Thank you to those who have contributed 'lighter' touring articles; there are only two and this perhaps provides one of the reasons why this magazine is closing down. No material equates to no magazine and the job of an Editor should be to edit the magazine, not spend his or her time cajoling people to submit articles.

On a more positive note, we now have an excellent website whose blog and forum are there for members to submit relevant articles and information. Please do use these; the more people who do, the better and more interesting the blog and forum will become. Use it or lose it should be the byword. As the modern world becomes more screen and less print oriented, perhaps this is what most people want.

And so, farewell.....

Mark Waters

Annual Dinner 2016

by Mark Waters

What a joy it is to be part of a happy band of cyclists who enjoy a good dinner bash too! For the fourth year in succession, we held an annual dinner, which this year was attended by more people than ever – 65 (including two unavoidable absentees). John Murdoch worked his socks off ensuring we got the best value for money at an establishment that wanted to welcome us - the Princess Royal at Runfold. The room was a perfect size for our needs and service was, for the most part, efficient, friendly and well organised. It was also good to have a choice of two or three courses.

Amongst those attending, it was a particular pleasure to welcome Ron Richardson, who at 91 remains our most senior member, and Russ Mantle, whose palmares are well documented elsewhere in the magazine (and who, incidentally, along with Roger Philo, were the only two to *cycle* to the dinner!). Other meritorious members, mentioned by John in a brief introduction to the presentation of the club's annual awards, were Tim and Debbie Richards and John Weatherburn who cycled all the way across the USA last year; and John Gillbe who successfully completed Paris Brest Paris (one of cycling's most famous '*hors catégorie*' [1200km] audax events); finally Don Gray completed the ferocious Marmotte sportive

(174kms and 5200m of climbing in 40 degree heat).

Following the meal came the presentation of trophies and these were as follows:

<i>Bill Inder Trophy</i>	Best Sunday attendance	Clive Richardson
<i>George Alesbury Tankard</i>	Best Wednesday attendance	Neil Eason
<i>Bert Bartholomew Trophy</i>	Oldest rider to complete the 100-mile Reliability Ride within the time limit	Mark Heal
<i>Keith Parfitt Memorial Pot</i>	For organizing and helping at events	Mark Waters
<i>Wooden Crank</i>	Most amusing blunder during the year	Roger Philo
<i>Golden Crank</i>	Most outstanding contribution to the Club	John Child

There then followed perhaps the most novel and unusual part of the evening, in the form of a short cabaret given by an illness-struck quintet of *acapella* singers called 'Quintessential', although there were in fact just four singers present, with one firmly sat down and unmoveable – it didn't seem to affect her admirable baritone voice though. No less a person than our very own Heidi Vinson was the top voice of the group and it was a pleasure seeing one of our number indulging in one of their alternative passions – some of us have them! Their sound was excellent and convincingly difficult harmonies were achieved in their renditions of several classic pieces including Moon River, Fly Me To The Moon and Mamma Mia. They also managed to rouse the gathered throng in some harmonious singing too and, I have to say, the resulting noise wasn't half bad - I think we'd make a good glee club if pushed! Their final number, sung to the tune of 'All Things Bright & Beautiful' was written by Heidi, and everyone joined in the chorus. The words were so relevant to us that you can find a copy of them below.

All in all, it was an excellent evening and one that will hopefully be repeated again next year. Many thanks to John for once again doing all the hard work and making it happen with 'nere a wobble'.

A Song Entitled 'CTC'

by Heidi Vinson

(As sung at the West Surrey CTC Annual Dinner 2016 to the tune of 'All Things Bright & Beautiful').

Cycling in West Surrey is a pleasure you all know
You go out in all weathers, in wind and rain and snow
You push up every hill, zoom down the other side
and fiddle with your gadgets on every flaming ride

(Refrain) All bikes bright and beautiful, all leaders great and small
Each one wise and wonderful, they lead us one and all.

Some cycle to get fitter, some just for cycling's sake,
But some of you have other plans to get to tea and cake.
You have a certain fashion, your clothes are never naff,
But one thing that defines you, you've learnt the art of faff.

You swerve round every pothole, you "wave" at white van man,
You cycle ever faster to get some peace from Anne.
So thank you to the leaders, AND THANKS TONIGHT to John,
For all the fun they give us; so just keep pedalling on!



A FUTURE IN THE BALANCE

by Mark Waters

This is my take on the current state of the nation as it concerns CTC and West Surrey CTC. Any views expressed are my own and not necessarily those of West Surrey CTC.

I'm very proud of my club, which I accidentally 'discovered' back in the early '80s about a year after I had jettisoned my motor bike in favour of the humble bicycle to get me to my job at the Barbican Centre in the City of London. Through CTC groups, initially the Chiswick Section (now disbanded) and the West London DA generally (also disbanded), I met a whole host of agreeable people and cycling went from being purely utilitarian to playing a major part in my life in a very short space of time. By the late '80s, any day which did not contain a cycling element was a day wasted. In 1991 I rode Paris Brest Paris and went on to achieve seven 'Super Randonneur' awards in succession with Audax UK, not to mention completing 'raids' on the Pyrenees, Alps and Dolomites. Easters for 13 years were spent with other DA friends on extended Youth Hostel tours all over the country. I attended quite a few Birthday Rides, went to York Rally and enjoyed occasional visits to HQ in Godalming, having met Chris Juden and Touring Officer Trevor Roberts on a CTC holiday to Poland and Slovakia in the early '90s. That's enough about my pedigree: suffice to say that, despite coming to cycling relatively late in life, as a single man I could indulge in the luxury of being able to focus on my new found 'love' and thus CTC became an integral part of my life very quickly. This was further cemented when I was invited to join the staff in 1998 as a Touring Officer, following a decision by the existing Touring Officer to move to New Zealand – I had actually applied (and failed to get) a job assisting the two elderly event organising ladies on the staff, and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time!

CTC was not in the healthiest of states in the period immediately preceding my employment there. Alan Harlow was 'Secretary' and there was a 'restless' undercurrent flowing through Headquarters. I learned of this because I had already been working for CTC on a consultancy basis for six months before I joined full time, having been asked to carry out a feasibility study on the potential for developing the *Byways Network** into something appropriate for the current era.

(The Byways Network was created by Nick Crane and Crista Gausden for CTC in the late 1970s and consisted of a comprehensive network of routes throughout the whole of the British Isles, totalling some 33,000 miles. At a time prior to the creation of the National Cycle Network, CTC had a resource in the Byways Network capable of transforming cycling life in the UK, although it would have required political support which it would have been very unlikely to obtain. My proposals were never acted upon.)*

Plus I was friends with Pat Strauss, a London based cyclist on Council, through whom I learned something of the governance of CTC at the time.

Alan Harlow found decision making difficult and as such, in the eyes of many of the staff at HQ, CTC was stagnating: it was time for some new blood. Alan Harlow was persuaded to resign and Kevin Mayne was the person chosen to bring CTC into the 21st century.

Kevin came from a racing background. His father, Geoff Mayne, is still around and probably still competing for all I know. His children were possessed with a powerful spirit of competition and Kevin, as the youngest, I believe, was always struggling to compete with his elder siblings: he was therefore incredibly ambitious. Getting elected to the post of Secretary (as the boss was then known as) of CTC provided him with the perfect platform through which to 'outgun' his brothers.

It is from this point onwards that we can map out clearly the changes to CTC that have led to the current situation. Let's appreciate that in 1998, CTC had a membership approaching 50,000. Nothing much had changed as far as the ethos of the club was concerned for some considerable time, probably since its inception. Things were ticking along: membership was up from its very low point back in the '70s, and the club focussed very much on providing events and services to its members. Both the Birthday Rides and the York Rally had dedicated members of staff. Every issue of the magazine came with a separate multi-page section containing details of every DA in the country's rides and events, plus a more general 'DA News'.

Remember we were in the pre-internet era. When I joined CTC full time in April 1998, we did have computers on our desks, but documents could only have names of eight characters or less; nevertheless, office technology had taken off and this was a massive step forward from a few years previously, when everything was typed out and copies 'roneod'.

Enquiries about routes and every conceivable aspect of cycling came in with an SAE for the reply, and my job was to fulfil these enquiries (with

the help of two colleagues), printing out route and information sheets and sending them off. Chris Juden was doing the same with technical enquiries. We had an in-house legal expert and a staff of about eight ladies ran membership. Pauline Rose ran our own in-house shop and every issue of the magazine had pages containing details of the products available. Members used to visit and the shop occasionally opened on a Saturday as a destination for DA group rides.

There are certainly many of us who would like to see CTC returned to this period. Indeed, the 'cycling life' that we currently enjoy would be well served by a club which did exactly what I've described above. CTC was very much a club for its members, although it did then, as it does now, have a strong and active campaigning department.

The changes which have taken place since then to change CTC beyond recognition could perhaps be said to be the result of two key factors. The first is technology: new methods of communication and the internet have transformed certain aspects of our lives hugely – and all in the space of half a generation. The difference between this factor and the other is that it's impossible to halt progress of this kind. Whether the changes to our world that computers and the internet have made are for the good is not the subject of this article, but obviously the effect technology has had on the way we communicate cannot be separated from the other factor that has changed CTC. That other factor was the person appointed by Council to bring CTC into the 21st century, Kevin Mayne.

Kevin had a vision and the force of his arguments let to his seeming to have control over the CTC Council which supposedly governed the club and controlled and managed what Kevin was supposed to do in their name.

It has often been said over the years that Kevin had total dominance over Council and he was able to push his own agenda through, using his very effective powers of persuasion. One thing is for certain and that is he changed the face of the organisation almost completely over his 13 year period of tenure. Paul Tuohy is merely finishing off the task by nailing down the coffin lid that Kevin built.

So let's remind ourselves of some of the more significant changes that took place under Kevin's tenure:

The traditional 'winged wheel' logo was ditched in favour of the 'Wobbly Bike', with the strapline, 'Working for Cycling'.

The CTC Shop was disbanded. Instead members were offered a discount when shopping, first at Bike Plus, then Evans and finally Wiggle.

The membership department was outsourced; again the organisation employed to run it changed three times before the department was fairly recently moved back in-house.

Staff members, notably those who organised and ran our key annual events, were pensioned off. They were not replaced, although I took over the role of York Rally Co-ordinator as just a part of my workload for three years, until this job was passed to a part-timer based in Yorkshire. Knowledge and experience was simply thrown away.

Both the Birthday Rides and the York Rally went through a period of difficulty before being disbanded. Subsequently, the York Rally was resuscitated by a group of local volunteers; the Birthday Rides was resuscitated too and has been run in recent years by various CTC Councillors and ex-Councillor under the auspices of CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours.

Staff endured two 'culls', when significant numbers of staff were made redundant and internal reorganisation ensued.

The level of interest taken in CTC events and local groups by management dropped to an all-time low. Poor management and inadequate staffing levels resulted in a dwindling level of contact with groups which contributed greatly to the feelings of mistrust between the membership and National Office that developed over this period.

Management salaries increased, and more managers were employed to manage a relatively small number of staff, whose wages continued to remain quite low (for the South East).

The 'top man' at HQ possessed, since time immemorial the modest title of Secretary; this was made obsolete, and was replaced by the title Director and this was soon replaced by the title CEO (Chief Executive Officer). Salaries for this post went up commensurably.

On the positive side, and as a result of the political 'zeitgeist' of the 'naughties', CTC successfully attracted some significant lottery funding, which resulted in some major initiatives to develop cycling throughout the country; the number of staff employed at CTC, taken on temporarily to run these initiatives, rose to well in excess of 100. However, comparatively few

continued on after the three year period that the initiatives covered. CTC's campaigning continued to flourish during this period and was beginning to become the club's focus at the expense of local groups and active cycling members generally.

CTC converted to a charity. This took some time to achieve, but such was management's determination to achieve this status that they continued, in no small measure, to lie and deceive membership, to achieve this goal. One might ask what was the reason behind this objective, and it has been said that the principal reason was to claw back £250k in gift aid annually which, up until now, had gone straight into the hands of the Exchequer. However, it took until late 2015 before the whole of CTC finally achieved full charitable status. One wonders how the organisation was required to change in order to eventually achieve its ends; clearly it wasn't 'charitable' enough until quite recently. One suspects a reduction in the services to members played a major part, since charities are not allowed to favour their members over the public at large.

A principal factor influencing the acceptance of CTC as a charity lies in the wording of the club's Articles of Association. These were re-modelled to incorporate a strong sporting bias. The club was effectively being re-modelled into a poor relation of British Cycling, as opposed to remaining steadfastly committed to transport, travel and touring as its main themes.

After Kevin left and went to work for the European Cycling Federation, there was a period of moderate calm under the command of Gordon Seabright, but Gordon one suspects wasn't really in his comfort zone at CTC and seized the chance to go and head up the Eden Project when the opportunity presented itself. Paul Tuohy was the man chosen as his replacement. Tuohy, with his background in turning round the fortunes of failing charities, was chosen over the other shortlisted candidate who was seen by many as a safe pair of hands - not really what the Executive wanted. The Executive are the 'top brass' of Council and consist of the Chairman and the heads of the two committees, 'Management' and 'Way Forward'. It is believed that much of the direction CTC is taking has been the brainchild of this team, and they took on Paul Tuohy to be their front man.

The first major change that Tuohy initiated was the closure of the Helpdesks. Andy Hawes and Chris Juden were made redundant. The principal reason given was that the work they carried out was no longer

relevant in the internet age and they didn't have enough to do – complete rubbish, as Chris will be happy to explain to anyone who cares to listen.

In actual fact, CTC had a financial problem: there had been a couple of massive claims on the club's insurance policy and, as a result of this, a considerable amount of money had to be found to pay for the increased insurance premium. Saving the salaries of two Helpdesk staff, plus one other from the Communications team provided the necessary funds.

It was a shortsighted decision by Tuohy and prompted the start of the outpourings of agitation, outrage and emotion, notably on Facebook where Chris Jeggo set up a new group called 'Where Should CTC be going?' Where indeed! Happily what is being said on the Facebook site, as well as on CTC's own Forum, continues to be a thorn in the flesh of CTC management – but perhaps not a big enough one.

The next phase of change will take place in April when the name CTC will be seen for the last time. It will be replaced by Cycling UK and you will have seen the new logo elsewhere in this magazine. Following that, at the AGM in May, the Executive will set about reducing the size of Council to 10. What's more, it plans to no longer be answerable directly to members – that's you! Like every other change, they hope to bring this about before members are really aware of what is being taken away from them.

I hope I've not left out anything of great significance in this brief history of the club since 1998. It could undoubtedly have been written more accurately, in a less 'partisan' fashion, and much more comprehensively, but it's long enough to provide a flavour and is not intended to be the next edition of the club's history – more it's a brief synopsis of what's happened over these years which has led this great club of ours to this moment in its history.

You are all members of this great club of ours and you should be allowed to have a say in where it's heading, should you be interested. For many of you, so long as West Surrey CTC continues to offer a calendar of rides, and so long as you get your third party insurance cover for the price of your annual subscription, you probably don't care what happens. I hope I haven't done you a dis-service by describing your point-of-view thus. If I have, then I, and the West Surrey Committee would very much like to hear your views. We'd like to hear the opinions of as many members as possible because it will help the Committee to come to a decision as to where we

should go. Please write to the Chairman and also, if you choose, put your opinions up on the aforementioned Facebook page.

You will be aware that we pondered for quite some time as to whether to cease being a member group of CTC and form our own affiliated club after the Helpdesks were closed down. We decided to remain as we are. Now these additional changes have been announced – as *faites accomplis*, I might add – membership not being consulted as to their wishes – we may well think again. A number of member groups have decided to change to become affiliated groups and perhaps we should do the same.

It is our belief that member groups are somewhat of an encumbrance to CTC now; we no longer fit into the game plan. If you want to see what the game plan is, then you'll probably be able to read all about it in columns written by CTC management and Council executives, who will make it all sound very positive. A lot of it is, of course: naturally we want the club to continue championing 'cycling for all' and campaigning for a better cycling infrastructure. But do bear in mind how much you're paying for this and how little you're getting in return compared to what you used to get. But if you only want to go out for rides with the local group, and you're happy to pay the annual sub for this, you need, as they say, do nothing.

To me, and many who have been members of this famous – legendary even - cycling organisation for many years, it could be said that CTC has to some extent shaped our lives. Therefore our sense of outrage at having the ethos, traditions and now even the very name 'Cyclists' Touring Club' subtly and without any consultation taken away from us is very strong in our minds. We are not happy. And perhaps the only way to put matters right is to set up another club, focused on what WE want a club to do - the likelihood of getting CTC to reverse their plans for the future seem slim. Ideas are developing but you won't read about them here because this magazine will very shortly cease to be. However it will be possible to follow developments via our Forum on the website.

Thirty years ago - from 'Cycletouring', June/July 1986

F.W. Evans - another branch

Gary Smith, the Managing Director of F.W. Evans Cycles, has announced the opening of another branch, this time in the centre of Woking. The new shop opened on March 29th and is being managed by John Dean, who has a team of co-workers. The address is 1 Guildford Road (near Woking Station). Tel 048-62 23876.

A Cycling Legend...

by Paul Gillingham

‘Mister Mantle, el rey de la Montana.’



We cyclists of West Surrey CTC are lucky to have among us a true cycling legend. Not everyone will know him, although occasionally he will join us at coffee stops. He will be unobtrusive but friendly, and talkative if you engage him. He won't drink anything or join us for a piece of gâteau. He will also stand out because he looks nothing like the usual lycra-clad cyclist. In winter he'll be wearing not a helmet but a woollen hat, a well-worn gabardine jacket, ordinary black trousers with trouser clips and a pair of normal walking shoes. In summer he'll be in a cotton shirt, a pair of long shorts and the same walking shoes. His bike outside is a large-framed, steel Holdsworth of 1970's vintage with an ancient Carradice saddlebag topped by a rolled-up cycling cape of some vintage. He might then join the slower group for a mile or so but, at the first junction, he's likely to turn off on his own or start walking up the first steep hill.

But don't be deceived by appearances. In earlier days even the hard cyclists would have to fight to keep up with him and he'd stroke up many Surrey hills in top gear. This man is a cycling legend whose achievements as a former racing cyclist and cycle-tourist are on a scale that none of us is ever likely to remotely approach.

Russell – or Russ – Mantle will be 80 this December. He tops the list of the 300,000 mile long-distance cycling club with a lifetime total so far of over 960,000 miles, 180,000 miles ahead of the 2nd contender. Last year alone he cycled 14,652 miles, an average of nearly 282 miles a week or 40 miles a day 7 days a week. In fact his lowest yearly total in the last 63 years was the 8,500 miles he did in 1953, his first year of cycling on a racing bike, a red Coventry Eagle. He fully expects to reach a million miles in the next three and a half years, possibly the first human in the history of the bicycle to ever achieve such a feat.



His record as a racer and time-triallist is most impressive.

From 1953 to 1973 he scored 28 open event wins in time trials, many of them course records. His best times were 0.22.19 for 10 miles at Alton in 1956, 0.57.10 for 25 miles at Newark in 1961, 1.59.36 for 50 miles at Ringwood in 1959 and 4.19.49 for 100 miles at Basildon in 1964. His 1954 record for Farnham Road Club's Junior (under 18) Farnham to Alton and back ride (19 miles) of 0.44.31 still stands 62 years on. Why, we wondered, did he give up racing? His answer, "You have to feel like a clock spring to release yourself on the pedals. That spark had gone by 1972."

For nearly twenty years, from 1970 to 1989, he led the hard riders for West Surrey CTC, but more of that later.

Fascinated by the exploits of this remarkable cyclist, Mark Waters and I recently arranged to meet him at his home and find out more about what makes him tick. We were intrigued to know why he has devoted his adult life to the bicycle and what motivates him to ride, even at an advanced age, 50 miles a day five days a week.

His three-bed semi is beside a school in a quiet road in Aldershot and he has lived here, in his parents' old house since 1949. The rooms are sparsely furnished. He showed us into his sitting room. A glass-fronted cabinet houses a collection of 110 medals and 30 cups and plaques, but he points out that this is only a fraction of what he has won as many had to be returned. On the walls are framed photographs he took on his cycle tours, stunning views of mountains like the Cuillins on the Isle of Skye and other elevations - his other hobby is photography. Above the cabinet is a studio photo of his younger brother by 12 years with his wife and two children. In one alcove is a shelf stacked with OS and foreign

touring maps and in another a collection of cycling books and guides. Side tables are stacked with detailed record books of his rides, tours, racing results, racing photographs from the 50's and 60's and press cuttings. Membership of the 300,000 mile club requires detailed records and statistics and Russ's are immaculate.

Upstairs in his bedroom he keeps a hardly-used Rotrax cycle, which he uses as a spare bike; and next door, in what was once his brother's bedroom, is his workshop. Well-crafted wooden chests with compartments (he was once a joiner) contain neat stacks of rings, headsets, sprockets, chainwheels, cranks, pedals, gears, chains, cotter pins, handlebars, saddles etc. He opens the wardrobe to reveal assorted tyres hanging from the rail. As he says, he never throws any bike bit away as you never know when it will come in handy.

His parents bought the house when they returned with their two sons from Germany where his father, a career soldier, was stationed with the Royal



Engineers. Neither of his parents were cyclists and neither was – or is – his brother. His parents' peripatetic life meant Russ attended twelve schools, four in Germany and eight in different parts of Britain. As he says, he'd make a friend and then have to say goodbye. This dislocation contributed to an early sense of self-sufficiency and an ability to go it alone. Two years after returning from Germany he recalls a deep sense of longing for a bike and one day in 1951 his dream came true when his father presented the 15 year old boy with a Hercules upright.

His life's course was now set, but in the meantime he had to earn a living, with the added incentive that he could cycle to work. In 1952 he began a 5-year apprenticeship as a carpenter and joiner followed by 2 years National Service, during which he won the accolade "Sapper Cycling Star" by winning the BAOR (British Army of the Rhine) 100 kms championship. Following demob in 1959 he returned to the firm, where he'd served his apprenticeship, for a further ten years, honing his skills as a craftsman. The hours were long, but he worked it so that he could get off an hour early on Saturday mornings, allowing him to cycle from Aldershot to all the football grounds in London, the South Coast and the Midlands to see the matches.

In 1969 he followed in the footsteps of his father, who had left the army, by becoming a clerk of works for the PSA (Property Service Agency), formerly the

Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. At this time he also studied, and gained, the Higher National Certificate in Building. He was offered early retirement with a good pension in 1994 at the age of 57, which he gladly accepted, and was then free to indulge himself full-time in what he loved best, cycling, both on daily rides and long distance tours.



His feats as a cycle tourist are prodigious. He does two major tours a year, one in Britain and one in Europe, or occasionally in the USA and Canada. His aim always is to seek out the highest passes, whether in the mountains of France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Serbia or the Rockies and then, locking up his bike, climb the highest available mountain. While in northern Spain his climbing so impressed a local journalist that an article appeared in the local paper headlined “Mister Mantle, el rey de la Montana” (King of the Mountains). In Scotland he’s ridden for half a day, bagged a Munro (over 3,000 ft) and then completed a 60-miler. In the Lake District he rode up all five of its highest passes in a 112-mile day, including the brutal Hardnott and Wrynose passes, known as the King and Queen of English hill climbs. He’s climbed every Alpine and Pyrenean col featured in the Tour de France; and in the USA cycled over three

mountain passes over 12,000 ft in Colorado and ridden up Mt Evans, at 14,000 feet the highest paved road in N America. He usually rides alone, but on many rides his pal Barry, from Liphook, will join him for the first week or so.

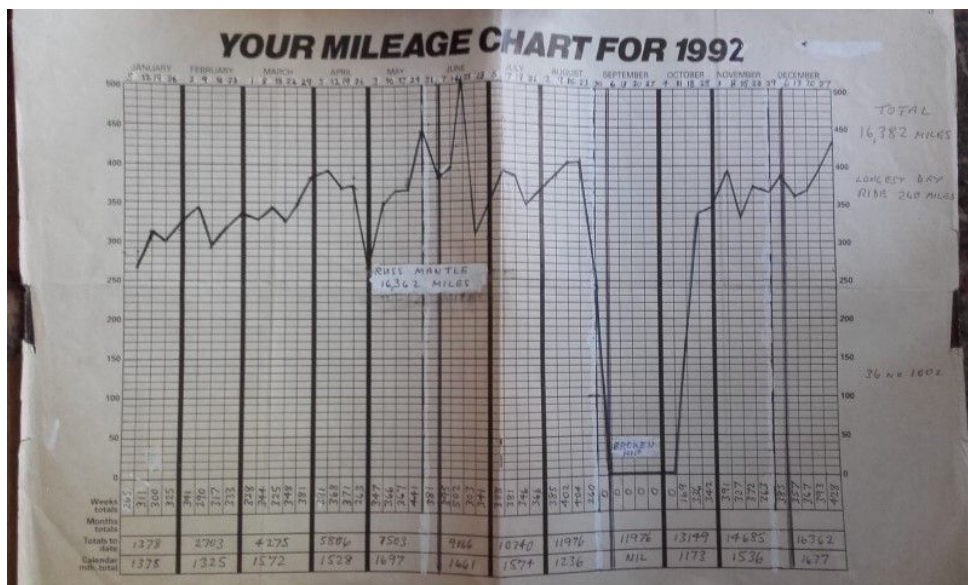
Russ has a photographic memory and can tell you all the passes he’s ever climbed and what are their exact elevations. Recently I told him about a ride I’d just done from Guildford to Oxford, but couldn’t remember all the villages I’d gone through. He rattled them all off even though it was years since he’d passed that way.

While on tour he carries all his belongings in a double-flap Carradice saddle bag, forswearing panniers which he says are clumsy. Any extras he needs are folded up in the middle of his cycle cape. For one who is very much his own man he inevitably has strong views. He never wears a helmet: “I like the freedom, the wind on my head”. He dislikes hi-viz: “motorists can see legs going up and down, can’t they!” He uses toe-clips which are kept loose and not cleats: “too dangerous!” He does not possess cycling shoes: “How can you climb mountains

or do your shopping in them?" He is no fan of water bottles: "Why carry an extra load?" He has no time for GPS: "what's wrong with maps?" He would never cycle-camp: "Why carry all that weight?" and has no interest in tours to Germany or the Low Countries: "far too flat!"

Perhaps surprisingly, in view of his many long tours in Europe and America, his longest day's mileage was achieved from his home in Aldershot. One summer's day he headed west, crossed the Severn Bridge, did a mini tour of Wales, called in at Gloucester and Bath and was back home at lighting-up time. 270 miles! Besides, he has done many lesser day rides, of 200 and 250 miles.

One of his most stunning exploits was as Ride Leader of West Surrey CTC one winter weekend in December 1991. He'd arranged for a group of twelve to cycle to Telscombe Youth Hostel just east of Brighton. The forecast was bad, with heavy snow expected. Nevertheless, he turned up at the meeting point at Ripley to find nobody else there. After a long wait he set off in a snowstorm but, with lanes impassable, had to stick to the main roads to Petworth. The snow eased off and he arrived at the hostel in bright moonlight to find he was the only cyclist there. Next morning he set off for home and by the time he reached tea at Abinger Hammer and then pressed on the snow was so heavy that cars were left abandoned on the road up to Newlands Corner. But he made it back to Aldershot.



He is a cyclist of heroic proportions, undaunted by such caprices of nature or, equally, by the vagaries of sharing the road with cars and lorries. Perhaps it is inevitable in view of all the miles ridden that he has had at least seven serious accidents. Broken ribs, collapsed lung, a broken pelvis and once ending up unconscious in hospital for three days after being hit by a lorry. On another

occasion he was hit by a car, cycled the three miles home and then drove down to Southampton CTC to give a pre-arranged slide show before reporting to hospital. In 1992 he broke his hip after a fall, was off the bike for six weeks and was soon back up to riding 300-plus miles a week, completing over 16,000 miles in the year. Whereas most of us would have lost our nerve and cut back, if not given up our cycling altogether, Russ remains undaunted. And he still disdains wearing a helmet.

On another local ride in 1985, between Puttenham and Seale, he was hit by a car on the double bend and the frame of his Holdsworth touring bike was broken in two. Once he'd recovered, the engineer in him came to the fore. With araldite, an old seat post and a length of sheet aluminium held temporarily in place with hose clips he fixed the broken seat tube together, painted over it and is still riding the bike on tours today, thirty years on. Mark and I couldn't but be suitably respectful towards the old white Holdsworth when we were shown it at rest in Russ's garden shed.



In the case of all four of his present bikes, he bought the frames and added all the components himself. He built all the wheels and made the rear wheels double-sided, fixed sprocket on one side and cassette on the other. As he says, if ever the gears fail while on tour he switches round the wheel, removes some links in the chain and rides on the fixed wheel. On the red Holdsworth he built in 1964 which was later demoted from racing to shopping bike (though shopping trips can be miles) the thread on the bottom bracket had gone, so he used araldite, plumbers'

hemp and oversized cups to repair it. Every six or seven years this needs replacing when the cranks work loose, so he cracks open the bracket, chips off the araldite and goes through the operation again. The old Holdsworth is always absolutely roadworthy.

As a master craftsman Russ keeps meticulous records. He showed us his collection of attendance notebooks kept of every West Surrey ride he led between 1970 and 89, one for each year. In those days club members were awarded points for each ride, 3 (later 4) for those out all day, 2 for part of the day and 1 for turning up. Names and points for each were carefully listed, together with the routes taken. The two groups – hard riders and wayfarers – would often start at different points but would always come together for tea. With fewer cafés then and no garden centres, he would also organise tea in village halls and in peoples' homes. If, as the records show, up to 50 could turn up for tea, this all had to be planned and booked beforehand and Russ did this assiduously.

His rides were always well researched. Some of those who rode with him as leader in the '80's are still riding with us today; Chris & Helen Juden, Chris Jeggo, Roger Philo and Clive Richardson. Russ is remembered as a well-respected leader, not averse to including some rough stuff on his routes. If he ever needed to consult a map was he would take it from his back pocket, consult it at speed, give directions to the group and just keep going. By the time he got back home from a club ride he would often have covered a hundred miles.

With the million miles mark now within his grasp he's determined to reach and maybe even exceed it. But, as he says, his annual mileage rate now decreases by a thousand miles a year. He fears that as his upper leg muscles weaken there will be more pressure on his joints, so to counteract this age-related decline he does squats in the kitchen while cooking. Apart from that he feels as fit as a fiddle and to prove the point he went down on his hands and knees and did a few speedy push-ups for me.

Unlike most of us, Russ has an obsessive desire to ride his bike and put in the miles come rain or shine in all seasons. It's a lonely life! The fact of attending twelve schools as a boy perhaps gave him the ability to cope with solitude. As he says, he is never bored on his bike and always has something to think about. He sold his Mini Traveller last year as he found his driving distance between annual MOT's was only 50 miles. He watches TV a bit, his favourite programmes being those involving the interaction between animals and humans. He enjoys photography, but it's the bike and the miles that give him his true identity. As he says, cycling for him is a habit. "If I ever let up I would have doubts about my ability". Riding his bikes for huge distances defines who he is.

As I was about to leave he offered me some liquorice comfits on a dish. Nearby was a packet of Liquorice Allsorts, which he also offered me. I love comfits and

Allsorts and he does too. A little self-indulgence from the master of self-discipline!

As the now infamous Lance Armstrong wrote in his pomp, 'It's Not About The Bike', but for our own cycling hero, Russ Mantle, It Is All About The Bike. So when we next encounter the elderly man in the woolly hat at a coffee stop we should recognise his cycling hinterland. In his eightieth year his enthusiasm for riding the miles remains undimmed. He is truly a phenomenon and we should feel privileged to be in his company. We will probably never see his like again.

Paul Gillingham, March 2016



Photo kindly provided by Paul Gillingham. They don't make 'em like that nowadays! - Ed.

CYCLING IN THE LOIRE VALLEY

By William Lowries

On September 16th I and my friend Jon Barnardo drove to Newhaven to catch the ferry to Dieppe for a week's cycling in the Loire valley. We had originally intended to do a linear trip, moving on either up or downstream, using some of the approx. 800 kilometres of cycle routes running from Nevers to the Atlantic. In the end however, the logistical challenges of arranging accommodation along the route, and getting back to the start to retrieve the car defeated us so we decided on a centre-based holiday.



The underground galleries at Maison Veuve Amiot

We found Loire valley breaks on the internet and they provided a place to stay (B&B with the facility to cook other meals if required) and provision of route maps, back-up and indeed bikes if you wanted. We took our own bikes, and having negotiated the dismal land that is Newhaven ferry terminal, the 4 hour crossing and an easy 3½ hour drive, we arrived at St Nicolas de Bourgueil, a small village about 20km North East of Saumur. The accommodation was in a beautifully converted barn, and as we arrived in the evening, the hosts were serving wine in their cellar as an introduction. There were quite a few others staying there, including a group of Catholics who had got to know one another through Student Cross, which runs pilgrimages to Walsingham. This was a diverse group and included some very interesting people, but it is fair to say that cycling was

only a small part of their itinerary! There were also a number of Australians, who were very good company, but whose cycling ability and capacity varied from negligible to zero.

The village was a good centre and we were able to do some varied routes, mostly on quiet roads or dedicated cycleways, part of the *Loire à velo* network. It is a beautiful area, with some stunning châteaux to visit, vineyards to ride through and wines to taste (purely for medicinal and educational purposes of course). The Loire valley region is largely flat, so the cycling is not generally very demanding. We covered about 300 miles over 6 days, so we were taking it fairly easily, although nothing like as easily as the other guests! The *Loire à velo* routes are signposted – more or less. In some parts it is comprehensive and clear. In others the signs have clearly been erected either by a cyclist hater or someone having a laugh. You know the kind of thing – you are following the signs which have led



Chenonceau Château

you clearly thus far, you reach a crucial junction and lo and behold: no sign. You consult the map (pretty small scale), reckon you've got it worked out, get to the next junction and find two signs marked for your destination, but pointing in opposite directions. Nevertheless, the resulting detours were never too serious.

Highlights of the trip included a ride to Fontevraud Abbey, South of Saumur, through rich, brown, rolling arable fields, on which walked (possibly) rich, brown men with guns presumably shooting crows or

rabbits. We tasted sparkling wine in caves dug by troglodytes, visited the too pretty to be true Chenonceau Château and had a chilly but fun dinner in a cave. Altogether a trip to be recommended. Another time I would like to do a moving-on trip, but I would go upstream. The height difference is minimal, but the winds can be persistent and strong, and mostly from the West.

EMULATING THE GREEN REED OF CONFUCIUS

By Chris Jeggo

Sunday the 29th of November. What's on the Rides List? Grade 4 (too fast) and Grade 1 (too slow). Hm. What's the weather forecast? Gales from WSW bearing showers. Doesn't look good. Think. Aha! Train and wind assisted - perfect!

A tenner got me on to a half-hour train ride to Micheldever, whence I was bowled along towards East Stratton. I had wondered what effect the wind might have on me riding thence due south on an exposed road towards Northington, but it turned out not to be a problem.

The Candovers were delightful, as always. In a field next to the road through Chilton Candover a man was putting a stunt kite through its impressive paces. He must have been on the point of taking off! Freewheeling up the very gentle gradient leaving Preston Candover towards Bradley, the next kite I saw was a red one. I think it was looking for lunch, but it might just have been playing with the wind.

I sought my lunch at Lasham aerodrome, expecting to meet Clive and his merry bunch. An hour later I was on the point of leaving, as I planned to bypass the tedious suburbs of Fleet and the Blackwater Valley by using the return half of my ticket, and there is only one train per hour from Winchfield. That's when the Sunday Riders turned up, so we had but a couple of minutes' chat.

Then it was 30+ mph down the hill from Herriard to Weston Patrick, and indeed rapid progress to, through and beyond Odiham without really trying. So when the weather looks like doing its worst, find a way of making it do its best for you. My mileage for the day was modest, as intended, but the grin factor was 100%.

HOW HILLY?

By Dane Maslen

Every cloud has a silver lining: the demise of *The West Surrey Cyclist* means that this is the last time you will have to read my GPS ramblings. Under other circumstances this single article would have been a lengthy series as I find this aspect of analysing GPS tracks particularly interesting.

In previous articles my conclusions were that a GPS measured distances very well but speeds rather less so. When it comes to measuring the hilliness of a ride, you should treat the results from your GPS with great suspicion. Here are the results from a circular ride I did last summer:

		Ascent (m)	Descent (m)
A	Trip counter	345	337
B	Analysis of the track file with the GPS	460	452
C	Analysis of the track file with my own program	301	294
D	Analysis of the track file with QLandkarteGT	460	452
E	Analysis of the track file with ridewithgps.com	330	323

As you can see, there is a huge spread of results, so what were the true ascent and descent figures? To muddy the water even further take a look at the following results in which the ascent and descent are calculated from something other than the altitude measurements in the GPS track file:

		Ascent (m)	Descent (m)
F	From a Suunto watch recording every 10 sec	259	245
G	From a Suunto watch recording every 60 sec	237	220
H	Calculated by ridewithgps.com based on its topographical knowledge of the route cycled	328	328

Looking at the figures you might be tempted to believe that B and D are correct because they give the same result. In fact they are wrong because they make the same mistake: they don't allow for random errors on the GPS altitude measurements. If you were to stand in one place with your GPS, you'd see that the altitude it displayed would fluctuate up and down because of random errors. If you were to calculate the difference between a pair of consecutive measurements, you would get a spurious ascent or

descent of maybe a couple of metres. If you were then to add up all those spurious ascents and descents, you would get significant totals for ascent and descent even though you had been stood in one place. That's pretty much what's happening in B and D except that the spurious ascents and descents are combined with real ones to give an overestimate of the true total ascent and descent figures.

To get realistic results for total ascent and descent the GPS track file must be analysed so as to filter out or smooth out the spurious ascents and descents caused by the random fluctuations in the altitude measurements. That is what A, C and E have done. The different results are a consequence of differing approaches to filtering or smoothing. I don't know what the Oregon 450t and ridewithgps.com do, but my own program simply ignores any ascent or descent smaller than 3 metres. While this should filter out most of the spurious ascents and descents, it will also filter out some small real ascents and descents. The hope is that the remaining spurious ascents and descents, the ones that were larger than the 3m filter, will roughly compensate for the small real ascents and descents that were filtered out, but whether that is indeed the case depends not only on the choice of filter size, but also on the nature of the ride.

The table below shows the effect of chosen filter size on the calculated values for this particular ride. You'll note that with no filtering my program gives the same result as B and D.

Filter (m)	0	1	2	3	4
Ascent (m)	460	368	340	301	297
Descent (m)	452	361	333	294	290

For a flat ride a large filter size works best as it eliminates all the spurious ascents and descents, but for a ride consisting of many small undulations such a filter eliminates too much of the real ascent and descent. Conversely a smaller filter comes closer to getting the ascent and descent right for a ride with many small undulations, but overestimates the ascent and descent for a flat ride. No method of filtering or smoothing works equally well for all rides. Consequently there is no good reason to know which of A, C and E is closest to being correct for this particular ride.

As an aside – it's got nothing whatsoever to do with GPS – the results from the Suunto watch (F and G) also involve some form of smoothing, but they

are underestimates because the watch records the height at fixed time intervals, so it tends to miss the crests and troughs of an undulating ride. Notice also that there's a greater difference between these ascent and descent figures. That's because to calculate altitude from atmospheric pressure the Suunto watch has to make the implicit assumption that atmospheric pressure at sea level remains constant. Of course on most days it doesn't, so the calculated altitudes gradually go awry, sometimes quite substantially if the barometer is rising or falling rapidly.

It might come as a surprise to you to learn that many GPS's also measure altitudes by using atmospheric pressure. That's because the random errors on such measurements are considerably smaller than what would result from measuring altitudes from the GPS satellites' signals. By averaging the latter measurements over suitably long time periods the GPS's are, however, usually able to keep the former measurements moderately well calibrated even when the barometer is rising or falling. That's why the discrepancy between ascent and descent in A-E is smaller than in F and G.

GPS's that measure altitudes using atmospheric pressure usually attempt to do a quick calibration when they are switched on. Sometimes this fails or gives a poor result, e.g. because the satellite configuration is not good for calculating altitude. If that happens, then the ascent and descent figures for the ride will be distorted by the subsequent ongoing slow calibration: the initial altitude measurement will be wrong, but as time progresses the measured altitudes gradually converge with reality. Therefore if you know the altitude at your start point and your GPS allows you to calibrate the altitude manually, do so.

Now for another aside that has nothing to do with GPS. Some websites allow you to calculate the ascent and descent of a ride – one you have done or one you are proposing to do – using their topographical knowledge. This might give you a good result – for example H is in the same ballpark as A, C and E – but on occasions you might get a poor one. This is more likely to happen when the road goes across steep hillsides, e.g. on a series of hairpin bends up to a pass. A website's topographical knowledge is often in the form of a grid with a spacing of about 10 metres. For points inbetween it must interpolate. If the terrain is steep, there is greater scope for this interpolation to give incorrect results, thereby introducing spurious undulations into the road's altitude profile.

LA SEMAINE FÉDÉRALE 2015 : FRANCE'S ANNUAL CYCLING FESTIVAL

By Paul Gillingham

It's not often you get the chance to chat to the man who demolished Eddy Merckx, whose run of five victories in the Tour de France was ended on the Col d'Izoard in the 1975 Tour, prompting a bystander in a bikini to hold up a sign announcing "Merckx is beaten. The Bastille has fallen."

The man who stormed the Bastille was Frenchman Bernard Thévenet who went on to win the 1975 Tour and again in 1977. He and I were standing chatting in his temporary cycling-clothes store at this year's Semaine in the historic town of Albi in the Tarn.



Paul with Bernard Thévenet

The Semaine is the annual week-long festival of cycling organised for the first week in August by the FFCT, the French equivalent of the CTC. This year, the 77th edition, was attended by 15,000 mainly French cyclists from local clubs around France, with a smattering of Brits.

I had arrived in Albi after an overnight coach journey from Gravesend on the European Bike Express, which dropped us off at the command centre, where we were issued with a large folder containing lots of bumph, including superb colour coded maps for each day's rides. Back on the bus, we were next taken to our accommodation.

Albi had given over its airfield for the thousands of mobile homes and caravans which French cyclists now habituate. Only the English, it seems, are foolhardy enough to spend the week under canvas. More savvy cyclists, though, stay in hotels or with local families.

The airfield was transformed into a fair-sized town, complete with 'Permanence' which houses the cycle shops (including B Thevenet's), tourist offices for each region of France, a cycle repair shop, bar, café, a stage for nightly entertainment and a huge dining hall and kitchens.

My tent was beside a runway and although I was the lone West Surrey member this year, I wasn't on my own for long as a small group of Brits soon formed. The 'facilities' were pretty basic, with communal wash basins and makeshift loos which looked grim but worked well. There were taps at strategic points around the airfield and superbly hot and fulsome showers.

There were rides for each of the six days starting from the Permanence. The four routes, ranging from 50 to 150 kilometres, fanned out into different regions around Albi, including the Gaillac vineyards and the Tarn Valley.

Bénévoles (volunteers) in yellow T-shirts shepherded the riders



Crossing the Tarn in Albi

out of Albi and manned crossroads or any tricky turnings en route. Pasted on the roads were *flèches* (arrows) pointing the way, a different colour for each day, so there was no chance of getting lost.

The thought of sharing rural lanes with 15,000 cyclists sounds dire, but with riders of varying abilities and the fact that you could start at any time you never felt hemmed in and could either ride with a group or alone. I tended to go at a leisurely pace to ensure I managed the daily 100km rides and was chastened to find I was overtaken on hills by a one-armed cyclist, a man with one leg, a huge dog pulled along in a baby carriage, a chap with a severely handicapped woman lying prone in the front recliner of a tandem and a six-year old boy on a racing bike. Not to mention the supremely fit and always stylish French cyclists who constantly flashed past.

But taking it slowly turned out to be a wise move as it was blisteringly hot in the high 30's (C) for the first four days. By the Wednesday three people had died; on that day alone there were 300 calls to the emergency services with ambulances stationed at the top of hills.

Villagers were out with hosepipes spraying us as we passed, as in black and white photos of pre-war Tours de France. The key to survival was plenty of water on board and I kept a soaking knotted handkerchief under my helmet. One clever Frenchman ahead of me leapt off his bike, seized a huge sunflower leaf and stuck it under his helmet in the style of the French Foreign Legion kepi.

The countryside was stunning, with ancient villages - some on hilltops - chateaux, sunflower fields and vineyards. At least one village along the routes was designated the 'Accueil', with beer and food tents, plenty of water and entertainment provided by the villagers. There were acapella groups, dancing cheerleaders and village bands, one with a bagpipe made from an inflated sheep's skin. This was rural France at its most seductive.



Sunflowers galore

One day focussed on the Carmaux mining area, which was once the birthplace of French socialism. The Accueil was at Cap Decouverte, formerly a huge mine crater several kilometres in circumference, with cable cars ferrying riders and bikes to the lake below where water skiers and jet skiers did their thing and cyclists dived in from a golden beach clad in full Lycra.


I made sure during the week to visit Albi, a fascinating town with a medieval Gothic Cathedral made of red brick and, next to it, the former home of Toulouse-Lautrec with a superb collection of his paintings from his days exploring the fleshpots of Montmartre.



Albi old town

Unlike most other campers I had booked dinner each night in the great dining hall of the Permanence. Initially hesitant about feeling the odd man out – and English to boot - I only had to mention Chris Froome and the dirty word ‘Sky’ to get my French friends going. Conviviality was further inspired by superb five-course dinners, served by the *bénévoles*, three bottles of wine – red, white and rose – for every six people and being serenaded with French chansons by accordionists.

Sunday morning saw the usual triumphal Grand Parade that brings the Semaine Fédérale to a close; the streets of Albi were lined with crowds cheering us on, with many of the French clubs dressed in outfits that reflected their town or region.



After fond farewells with my new-found pals who were returning to UK on the bike bus and a final buffet lunch in the Permanence I headed back into Albi to wander through its medieval streets for the last time.



Castres near Albi

The following morning the airfield was like a ghost town with all the mobile homes, caravans and tents gone. Feeling somewhat bereft, I packed up the tent and set off south, having decided to stay on in France for an extra week to cycle down to the Canal du Midi and along to Carcassonne and then on to Narbonne for a swim in the Med.

Next year's Semaine Fédérale is in Dijon, with daily rides into the wine country of Burgundy. I shall hope to be there and so, I expect, will be the man who ended the reign of the great Eddy Merckx, one M. Bernard Thévenet. *(And I hope to be there too, if only for a selfie with Bernard! I already have ones with Hinault and Roche. Ed.)*



Front cover: The front cover of issue 1 (Summer/Autumn 1985) of The West Surrey Cyclist. The design featured a drawing of a Surrey scene by Chris Juden and was used, largely unchanged, for the first 57 issues.