

# End to End journeys

Every End to End is new for the cyclist riding it, which is why its appeal doesn't fade. Four CTC members describe their version of the UK classic



## On Sustrans routes John & Ann Cave

Where do you start planning a trip like this? We wanted to visit a few relations and we like the Sustrans routes, even though they are slower. More important, however, was to get the tandem to Land's End and back from John o' Groats. Train companies do not like tandems! However, we eventually sat on the train to Penzance, relieved to be on our way and a little apprehensive about what we were about to do.

Cornwall and Devon proved to be, as predicted, quite hard, with the prevailing winds against us. Our only mechanical problem was the drag brake cable coming off, in the hilliest part of the trip. Luckily that was easily fixed the following day in Bodmin. We met a number of other cyclists doing LEJOG – all friendly and chatty, like being in a club. We spent a couple of hours 'towing' a grateful German cyclist who had completed about 4,000 miles around Europe and Africa and was on a circuitous route back to Germany.

We enjoyed the Bath-to-Bristol Sustrans route that then took us through the Avon Gorge and under the suspension bridge – a narrow, often singletrack path but well worth doing. We then rode over the impressive Severn Crossing, in splendid isolation. We headed north through the Welsh Marches. The scenery had changed constantly along our route and continued to do so as we travelled north.

We cycled towards Birkenhead to get the ferry across the Mersey, which we thought would be a great way to enter Liverpool. We were not disappointed. The ride up

(Above) John and Ann's route into Bristol went through the Avon gorge

(Below) Dunnet Head is the most northerly point of mainland Britain

to Southport went past Anthony Gormley's 'Another Place', which is well worth stopping for, whatever the weather – which improved as we continued north towards home in the Eden valley. A welcome rest but we were only halfway.

Navigation suddenly got much easier: NCN 74 to Glasgow, NCN 7 to Inverness and NCN 1 to JoG. We left Eden in good weather and enjoyed great cycling up through Glasgow,

towards Balloch and the Lochs and Glens route. We were often in big open areas with great views and little other traffic. There were some warnings given with shaking heads. 'It'll be the Pass today...' referring to the Pass of Drumochter, 16 miles of ascent that actually proved okay, and was followed by about the same distance of descent.

The roads changed as we rode north until we were on singletrack roads with passing places... and these were A-roads. We began to meet more cyclists again. We even saw a few other tandemists. The final stretch from Inverness to the north coast and east to JoG had very varied scenery and was a real joy to cycle, even in the few wet days we had.

Although JoG itself is a little uninspiring there was a steady stream of cyclists finishing, all I would guess with stories to tell. As TS Eliot said, 'The journey not the arrival matters.' And for us it was a great journey.



## Our way

**MILEAGE:** 1,150

**TIME TAKEN:** 23 days (plus two rest days)

**ROUTE:** LEJOG. We used a number of Sustrans routes, slower but scenic, travelling up the west coast and through central Scotland.

**ACCOMMODATION:** Mainly B&B – impressed with quality.

**BIKE USED:** 9-year-old Thorn Explorer tandem.

**I'M GLAD I HAD...** iPod touch. Most B&Bs had Wi-Fi. Great for keeping our blog up to date and finding other B&Bs.

**NEXT TIME I WOULD...** Take an iPhone. It would replace phone, camera, GPS & iPod.

**FURTHER INFO:** We set up a blog for grandchildren, friends and family – <http://tandemtoend.blogspot.com/>

## On a Chopper Mick Fairhurst

A neighbour offered me a rather tired Mk1 1971 Raleigh Chopper, as he was going to take it to the dump. It was in a sad condition, so I took pity on it and made it rideable and roadworthy. Months passed, and as I'm somewhat of an E2E veteran I set about planning another one. What about doing it on the Chopper? Had it been done before? Was I daft enough? Would it actually be possible?

In its basic state the Chopper could prove nigh on impossible to ride an unsupported JOGLE on, therefore planning and preparing the bike was hugely important. I didn't want to lose the iconic ape-hanger handlebars and long seat, but some modifications just had to be done. Extra gearing and better brakes would be essential to ride a heavyweight like a Chopper, let alone one towing my trailer!

I shoehorned two sprockets onto the rear 3-speed hub and used a double chainwheel to give 12 ratios. Fortunately, I had a hub brake available, so rebuilt the front wheel, producing almost perfect braking.



and how they fell off. Great fun! Absolutely everyone was in awe of my achievement in riding a Chopper so far.

My modifications stood up well. There were a couple of tiny hiccups with the chain coming off, but no punctures and no major breakdowns, although I was continually sore and tired. The riding position and the saddle took their toll, leaving me with aching arms and a sore and aching backside. I averaged around 50-70 miles a day, though over the Grampians I had a gruelling 90 miles. Thank goodness the weather was good to me.

My 892-mile journey must be a record for a Raleigh Chopper, and I'm quite proud to hold it.

## Recumbent triking it

**Roop Singh**

Summer 2010 was one of the highlights of my life. I've always had a passion for cycling and travelling. So when I had the chance to cycle the country's ultimate challenge, I danced with excitement. After weeks of planning, I set off on my Trice recumbent. Along the way I would be giving talks – I'm a storyteller and motivational speaker – and also raising money for charities.

It began more easily than I thought. Maybe I had done more hill climbs in my training than I had needed? It got even better when I met a chap on top of Dartmoor who recognised the flags on my bike. He told me that he had visited the Golden Temple some years ago, and donated a fiver towards my charities. It kick-started the whole venture and got me pedalling upbeat – so upbeat that I hit 44mph just as I entered Exeter!

Mostly I planned my accommodation ahead. Swindon was the only place where I hadn't arranged anything. By 9.30pm I hadn't got in anywhere. By sheer luck, a friend of mine who had been delayed at work bumped into me, tapping me on the shoulder. 'What are you doing here?' he asked. 'Looking for somewhere to stay,' I replied...

In Coventry I was reunited with family – my wife, daughter, son-in-



## My way

**MILEAGE:** 892

**TIME TAKEN:** 17 days in May 2010

**ROUTE:** JOGLE. Down the NE coast of Scotland to Inverness, then over the Grampians via Pitlochry, through Edinburgh and over the Southern Uplands to Carlisle. From there, the western side of England to Gloucester and Bristol, and the northern route through Launceston and Wadebridge to Land's End.

**ACCOMMODATION:** B&Bs, YHAs, and family.

**BIKE USED:** Raleigh Chopper!

**I'M GLAD I HAD...** The strength and determination to do the ride on such a difficult bike. Garmin Edge 705, together with my trusty laptop. Movie camera. Carry Freedom trailer. Good weather!

**NEXT TIME I WOULD...** Not do it on a Raleigh Chopper. Perhaps a Space Hopper instead?

**FURTHER INFO:** My blog of the trip is at <http://jogleonachopper.blogspot.com>

The elderly tyres needed replacing, so modern puncture-proof ones were fitted.

Riding it was easier than I imagined and gave a very stable ride, even at speed. Initially, I was surprisingly comfortable but I soon found out that I wasn't over any useful distance – Chopper saddles aren't meant for full-sized adults! Nevertheless, I practised three or four times a week, even lugging a concrete block behind in my trailer! This training was invaluable up and down the local hills, and before long I was fit and ready.

The Chopper and my fully-packed trailer were sent off to Wick, and I followed a short while later by train. After collection, I set out for JoG, and back again to Wick the same day, then plodded south for the next 17 days, taking well-earned time off in Edinburgh, Preston, and at home in Cornwall. I navigated using past experience augmented by my Garmin 705, but still managed to take a wrong turn or two. I had arranged that on some legs of the journey I would meet up with CTC Forum members, and I was grateful for their company and local knowledge.

The sight of a Chopper brought childish grins from everybody I met, and it was fantastic hearing their happy memories of when they were kids, and how fast they could ride,



law and grandson. I cycled onward with some friends to Birmingham in readiness to attend my friend's son's wedding. Again, plenty of familiar faces, and I raised over £300 in donations.

I did get some racial abuse on the trip. As I cycled through Walsall, I was accosted by four Muslim youths, and one tried to steal one of my flags. In Burton on Trent, three white youths on mopeds harassed me, riding dangerously close. But Motherwell in Scotland was the worst. I've always liked Scotland and its people, but I was bombarded with racial abuse from every corner, from pub doorways and from

(Above) Roop arrives at John o' Groats

(Opposite) Putting panniers on the front of the Chopper helped with stability

children as young as six or seven. I felt well out of my comfort zone. Not only was I getting all this nonsense I was somewhat lost too. I decided to challenge one of the abusers head on. I stopped my trike went over to him as he sat in his car, and said: 'Look here, pal, never mind the abuse, I'm in your town and I'm lost. So why don't you do the decent thing and tell me which road takes me to the Pollockshields area of Glasgow?' I think he was quite taken aback with my directness. He started to help.

My faith in the human race was restored as I approached Helensburgh, when I saw a young lady waving a bottle of water at me. She said that her dad had just passed me and rang her and told her that there's this uncle (in our community anyone the same age as your mum or dad automatically becomes your 'aunt' or 'uncle') coming on what looked like a rickshaw; stop him and give him something to eat and drink. So she did. The family also gave me a room in their hotel.

"Riding the Chopper was easier than I imagined but I wasn't comfortable. Its saddle isn't meant for adults"



## My way

**MILEAGE:** 1,252

**TIME TAKEN:** 18 days of cycling

**ROUTE:** LEJOG. Through Cornwall and the Midlands, through Leeds and up the west side of the UK, and then across from Fort William to John o' Groats.

**ACCOMMODATION:** Mainly B&Bs with garages (to store the trike).

**BIKE USED:** Ice Adventure recumbent trike.

**I'M GLAD I HAD...** My trike. Zero backside aches, zero wrist or neck aches. The viewing position was brilliant and climbing the steepest of hills wasn't a problem either. I'm also glad I had my mobile phone, iPod and credit card, even though I seldom used them.

**NEXT TIME I WOULD...** Spend more time taking photos. Post ride I have visited schools to tell my stories.

**FURTHER INFO:** There's more on my website [www.roopsingh.com](http://www.roopsingh.com)

Of all the route, and out of many stunning views, the slight incline just after the town Rest and Be Thankful was one of the best. If ever I wanted to know what flying was like, this was it. I was going uphill, the wind was in my face, but my momentum was amazing. I was doing 23mph!

At the finish, I rang my daughter who couldn't be there and we both shed tears of joy together. To cap it all, I met someone at the end who had also just finished – and it turned out that I had visited his school when he was just 11 years old!

**In six days**  
**Charlotte Barnes**

In 2008, I did LEJOG as part of a 12-rider amateur team, raising money for The Bishop Simeon Trust, a small charity that hardly anyone's heard of that does vital work with people still suffering from the inequalities and injustices of apartheid and its legacy in South Africa. The ride is called The Race Against Time (TRAT) and symbolizes the struggle against HIV/AIDS that characterizes so much of the Trust's work.

In keeping with the idea of a race, the event's aim is for everyone to complete the End to End in just six days, with the riders working as a disciplined team to keep the peloton moving as fast as possible. Riders are fully supported by a following crew, with a day van, chase car and a minibus catering to their every need. All I had to do was average 150 miles a day for nearly a week.

Even coming from a background in audax, I was still a little daunted by the prospect, but the support and training advice that I got from the organisers was fabulous. I've always felt that there are two ways to do a big ride like this: train lots up

front and comfortably manage the distance you've set for yourself, or do less training and put up with a bit of suffering. Fortunately, I did enough preparation for TRAT that I had an amazing experience, and were it not for a lack of land, I could have kept on pedalling past John o' Groats.

One of my most vivid memories of TRAT was the first day, from Land's End to Taunton. Apart from massive amounts of enthusiasm for the task in hand, we had fabulous weather and a following wind, which meant we were out of Cornwall by lunchtime. By lunchtime! Hammering along at well over 'evens' (20mph) in a double pace-line, all in matching colours with a team van behind us, was like a dream come true for a wannabe racer. It still rates as one of my all time best days on a bike and is definitely something I'll never forget.

It's fair to say that doing LEJOG like this isn't for everyone, and I can't pretend that I didn't have some low moments. Coping with the discomfort was made easier for me by knowing exactly what I needed to do to recover between each day in the saddle. Our support team cooked us the sort of food that hard-riding cyclists need to get the calories in

and we even had professional sports massages on several nights.

I got so much out of my high-speed LEJOG that I volunteered to crew for the following year's event in 2009 and ended up driving one of the chase vehicles for a week. There's no better way to put something back into an event like this than to offer your help to the next bunch of riders – and they'll be glad of the support from someone who's been there before and knows just how hard it can be.

(Right) Charlotte at Land's End: by lunchtime she had left Cornwall behind



(Below) The team had a support crew so the riders could more easily ride 150 miles each day



**My way**

**MILEAGE:** 874

**TIME TAKEN:** Six days.

Usually about 12 hours a day in the saddle, stopping for a half hour lunch and a few 10-minute food breaks each day.

**ROUTE:** LEJOG via the fastest possible road route – the same one used by all the Cycling Time Trials high-speed record attempts. Lots of A-roads and few major climbs.

**ACCOMMODATION:** Hostels, youth centres, B&Bs.

**BIKE USED:** Thorn Cycloportif. Its comfortable steel frame and my favourite Brooks saddle were perfect.

**I'M GLAD I HAD...** Sudocrem and cashew nuts.

**NEXT TIME I WOULD...** Take my time and do it slowly!

**FURTHER INFO:** [www.theraceagainsttime.com](http://www.theraceagainsttime.com), [www.bicycleslut.com](http://www.bicycleslut.com)

**End to End resources**



**END-TO-END CYCLE CHALLENGE:** CTC's new 200-page guidebook on route options, accommodation advice and more is available to order from 1st December, priced £12 to CTC members. Call 0844 736 8451.

**LAND'S END TO JOHN O'GROATS FORUM:** Discuss your plans, ask questions, or read about other cyclists' trips online using CTC's web forum, <http://forum.ctc.org.uk/>

[cycle-endoend.org.uk](http://cycle-endoend.org.uk) Rob Gullen's E2E website is an excellent resource for LEJOG or JOGLE riders, especially accounts of other people's trips.

But there are links to just about everything E2E related.