

Way of the Roses June 2014

Two years ago while my daughter was still living in York I had the idea of cycling coast to coast on the Way of the Roses, and I asked for the Sustrans map for Christmas. Two years on my daughter Nicola is now living in Callander, but at last my dream has come to fruition.



The route runs from Morecambe in Lancashire to Bridlington in Yorkshire, but when I suggested to Nicola that we extend our trip to the RSPB seabird reserve at Bempton Cliffs, she suggested that we start at the wetland reserve at Leighton Moss, and that she would use the trip to raise money for her former employers, the RSPB.

The official route measures 170 miles, but with these additions to our itinerary we actually travelled 190, and as we wanted to spend a bit of time at the reserves, in effect an extra day was required. We planned four nights accommodation (two nights with friends) and five days cycling and travel. All our trains (9 altogether) were pre booked and bike space reserved.

Arriving at Silverdale station close to the RSPB Leighton Moss wetland reserve. We saw avocets on the lagoons, nuthatches, marsh tits and loads of black-headed gulls and their chicks. Our photo was taken beside the newly created wildlife garden.



To get back on to the Way of the Roses we travelled beside the Lancaster canal. At one point we crossed the River Lune on an aqueduct. There were long, steep steps to get down to the Lune - nobody told us that a ramp had been made, and nobody had thought to change the signage...! Our first night was with friends at Caton which necessitated a steep climb at the end of the day.



Day 2 was going to be a hard one. Only 40 miles, but a 400m climb out of Settle. Sensibly we stopped for lunch at the Naked Man Cafe in Clapham before getting into the serious hills. Rye Loaf Hill was the only one we had to walk part of, but we didn't feel so bad because another group of cyclists did too. Spot the toiling cyclists in the middle photo!

We were now on Le Tour route, so everywhere we went there were bicycles painted yellow and bunting in the shape and colours of the famous jerseys. We arrived in Grassington in time to participate in the music festival - Ade Edmondson and the Bad Shepherds - all the old 80s favourites reworked with celtic instrumentation. The villages in this part of Yorkshire are so pretty and unspoilt, made of mellow yellow sandstone. Our accommodation was a bunkhouse in a pub. Walkers everywhere.



Day 3 involved a big 400m climb up Greenhow out of Pateley Bridge and it would be our longest mileage too. 58 miles by the time we arrived at our friends in York. However, what we were learning is that it is gradient that makes the difference. Hot chocolate and "the best scones in Yorkshire" help to keep up morale! We loved the upland birds - lapwings with their chicks and curlews. We stopped at Fountains Abbey for a couple of hours then made good time bowling through the Vale of York.



With the big hills behind us on Day 4 we travelled through rich arable land, partly on farm tracks, then began the gentle ascent into the flower-rich chalk lands of the Wolds.

The East Riding boasts pretty villages with generous duck ponds. We were staying in a farm B&B two miles out of Driffield. We had been battling into a north wind, so decided to call a taxi. Good decision, particularly as our chosen restaurant was serving a main course and drink for only £7.99!



On Day 5 we were still battling the north wind. We were travelling along country lanes with rich flower-filled verges and through wheat fields where corn buntings are common. There was the constant accompaniment of lark song.

We stopped at Bridlington to have our photos taken before cycling on to Bempton Cliffs. By now time was getting short as we were due to catch a train just after 2pm. At Bempton the staff wanted to celebrate our arrival and take pictures for their blog. Did I mention the “frett” - the Yorkshire name for a sea harr?

Notwithstanding Bempton seabirds are amazing - gannets, kittiwakes, guillimots, razor bills, puffins. Well worth a too short visit.

And so back to the station and the journey home.

Nicola and I can recommend cycling the Way of the Roses!

Oh, and thanks to people’s generosity we raised over £400 for RSPB.

Katharine Melville

