



Left: Riding the Fred Whitton Challenge after her diagnosis
Right: Anne on her e-MTB. "It makes me smile"

My journey

ANNE WADDINGTON

*Diagnosed with terminal cancer, Cycling UK member **Anne** describes how cycling has helped her*

My obsession with mountain biking began 25 years ago with a cold, muddy trip to the Forest of Dean. Despite a miserable day slithering down trails in the rain, wondering who could possibly enjoy such a ridiculous hobby, I soon found myself buying a Specialized Hardrock... and wondering where to take it.

From my first great adventure of a CTC trip to Chile, I was always planning the next trip. I'd spend Sundays exploring the Clwydian Mountains, Llandegla, Coed y Brenin. I cycled in the French Alps, the Spanish mountains, Scotland, Cumbria, Cuba, Iceland, Canada, and Poland. I slogged through the week of incessant rain that was the 2008 TransWales event.

In hard times mountain biking gave me focus. I wasn't sporty at school – my legs are short and my lung capacity is unexceptional – but mountain biking was exercise I enjoyed. I was never going to win any races but that wasn't the point. I met new friends through mountain biking and persuaded old friends to join us. It became a way of life.

My summer trip in 2017 was the Tour de Mont Blanc – five days through the Alps, climbing about 2,000 metres each day. Shortly before the trip I'd gone for a routine mammogram. Heading for the hospital, I'd had a premonition that this was a changing point in my life. Turns out Mont Blanc was my last trip abroad before cancer became my constant companion.

But in the Alps I was on top of the world. As the views opened out, I felt that I'd been preparing for this trip my whole life. As the downhill trail steepened, I kept my bike rolling, feeling the rush of adrenaline. A trail like this gives you no choice but to live in the moment. I shouted with relief as I negotiated the obstacles in my path – a feeling of pure joy.

Back home, I was confronted with the hard reality of a cancer diagnosis. While waiting for surgery I returned to my favourite local haunts: the Garburn Pass, Jacobs Ladder, Long Mynd, Llandegla. It felt like a farewell tour. After the surgery, I was sent for more scans. They showed cancer in my bones. I was in my 40s and diagnosed with incurable cancer.

Yet there was a plan. The words "chemical menopause" terrified me, but eventually I regained my strength and got back on my bike. With three friends, I entered the Fred Whitton Challenge, a 113-mile sportive through spectacular Lake District scenery, said to be the hardest one-day ride in the UK. We trained together and got ourselves round, raising money for Macmillan Cancer Support. Thanks to the treatment, I had a second chance. I went back to work part-time. I began to think long term again. Perhaps I'd get to see my four-year-old niece grow up after all.

In early 2020 there were signs that my cancer was no longer responding to the medication. Covid-19 meant that I had to stop the immune-suppressive treatment that had worked so well. My fitness began to deteriorate. Just before Christmas 2020 my oncologist told me I might only have 12 months to live.

When I'm struggling, I try to remember how it feels riding down a narrow trail. You need to focus on where you're going, not get distracted by precipitous drops to the side. Look for the grip point, the place you want to be. Not always achievable, not always easy.

However bad things are, I know that getting on my bike will lift my spirits. So I've bought myself a Specialized electric mountain bike. I'll keep riding it as long as it makes me smile. ●

The big C, cycling & me

Geraldine Glowinski and Mary Payne spoke to Cycling UK about their own experiences of being diagnosed with and ultimately recovering from cancer. Both found that cycling could be cathartic. Geraldine's story is at: cyclinguk.org/article/cycling-and-cancer Mary's story is at: cyclinguk.org/real-life-stories/cycling-instrumental-marys-recovery-following-treatment-cervical-cancer

More info

Advice on cycling after chemotherapy:

cyclinguk.org/cycle/fitness-cancer