

DOWN YOUR WAY KENT



Chris Juden takes **Mark Waters** 'down your way' in East Kent, retracing a delightful coastal ride he made with his wife last summer

The Isle of Thanet



You wouldn't know it now, but Thanet really used to be an island, separated from the mainland of Kent by the Wantsum channel. There's something special about circumnavigating an island, and though part of its moat has now silted up, as you pedal along the causeway protecting reclaimed fields and marshes from the restless sea, it's easy to imagine how it once was – and how it could soon be again!

I normally go clockwise around *British* isles, so there's less tarmac or traffic to block my view and access to the water. That's the way Helen and I went the first time around Thanet. But so much of this ride is traffic-free, and so close to the sea, that Mark and I reversed it. And since the Gossip Shop café in Minster closes on Sunday afternoons, we're glad we did.

Our ride starts on National Cycle Route 1 in Canterbury: the centre of English Christianity, all thanks to St Augustine. In 597 he landed on Thanet, following in the footsteps of the first Anglo-Saxon invaders, and converted their local King Æthelbeht to his faith.

Canterbury is an excellent base for a short holiday, being easy to reach via the main London-Dover railway line or M2/A2 road, with lots of places to stay and things to see. But if coming by car just for this ride you might rather start in Fordwich, saving five miles in total and the first rather dodgy bit of NCN1. Or with the help of local trains that carry a few bikes without much fuss and run all around this route, you can make it as short as you like! An alternative suggested by Canterbury cycling campaign 'Spokes' is to take the train to Minster, follow the coast beyond Reculver to Whitstable and back on the 'Crab and Winkle' path (NCN1). East Kent CTC's favourite rides, meanwhile, mostly explore the intricate network of lanes to the south of the city, leading to sweeping downland views.

Seaside cycling

The first quarter of this ride is best when apple blossom fragrances the gentle southern slopes of the Stour valley. We cross the river after Stourmouth, an obvious clue that 'Plucks Gutter' was once an arm of the sea, out of which we climb to the Isle. At Monkton we pick up the Viking Coastal Trail, route number 15, the blue signposts of which should guide us all the way from here to Reculver.

Minster is full of history, with the first English monastery (founded 670) and a fine church, parts of which date from 1160. But history buffs should not haste by Monkton's tiny church, which is only 30 years younger. Beyond Minster you pass a cross erected in Victorian times to commemorate St Augustine's landing, then shortly reach the sea and a replica Viking ship, beached here to remind us that the Isle of Thanet was a stepping-stone for the invasion of England by Jutes, Angles, Saxons – and Vikings. Romans also came this way, making first landfall in 43AD at Richborough just to the south, where quite a bit of their fort still stands.

From Pegwell Bay our route remains beside the seaside for the next 20 miles. We trace the tops of cliffs, dip into sandy bays and go for mile after mile on promenades literally lapped by the waves. I know of no other place in the whole 11,000 miles of Britain's coastline where you can cycle this close to the sea for



Photos by Chris Juden

so far! But first we visit the royal port of Ramsgate and thence to Broadstairs. Beach, boats, cliffs, cottages and Charles Dickens: Broadstairs has it all and is the perfect place for a long lunch-stop. Ride on a couple of miles – all uphill – to the North Foreland Light, take a breather and think of all the ships it must have guided safely past this pointy bit of England. Down we go again to Joss Bay, and maybe to the sea, exploring the shoreline south to find the secret exit from Buchan's 39 steps!

(Opposite) Mark Waters takes a breather in Broadstairs

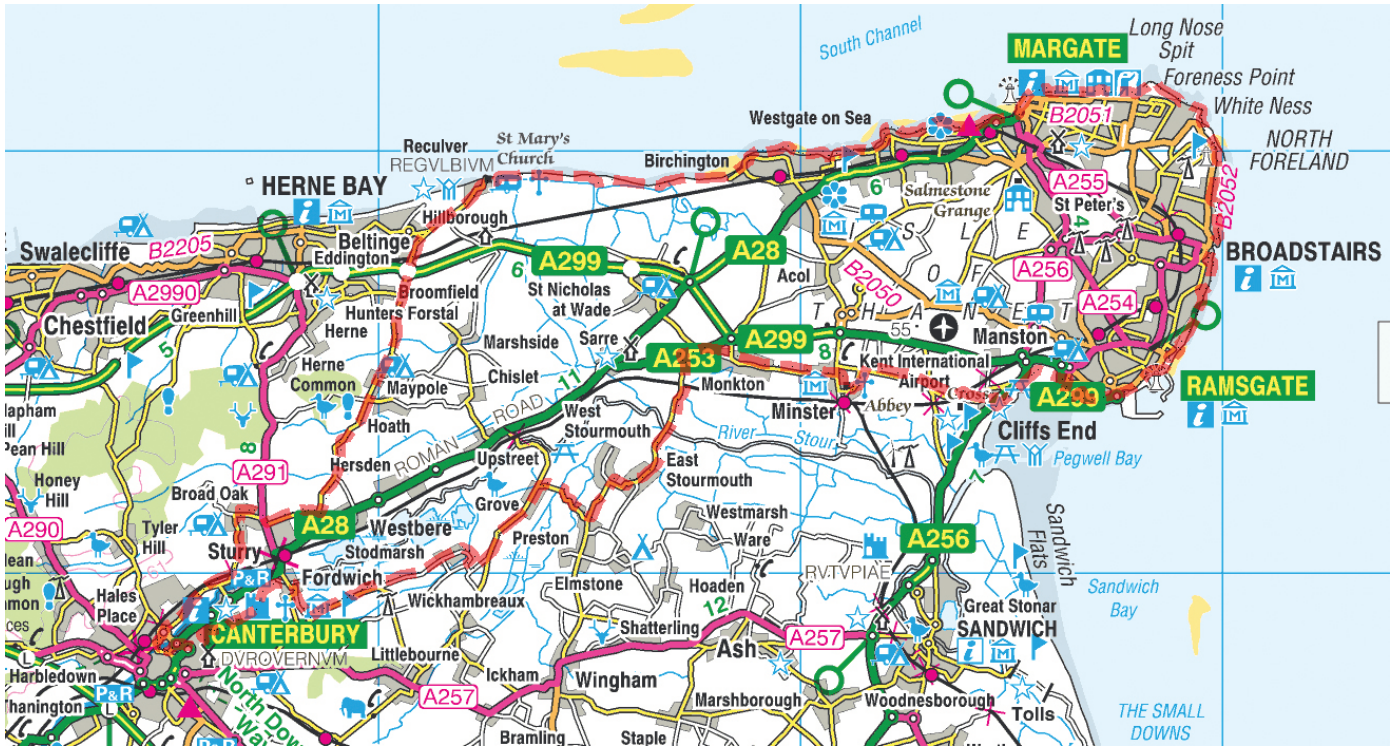
(Above) Helen Juden ascends the cobble path from Epple Bay

Where Turner painted

A lot has changed in Margate since the artist Turner lodged incognito with a fishwife, taking her name and advantage of the town's position to picture passing ships by sunrise as well as sunset. The British seaside holiday was practically invented here, and here we see its decline. The town is hoping to attract new visitors by building a 'Turner Contemporary' gallery, right on the harbour beside the trail. But for now a lack of actual promenaders is to our advantage, for here begins the most amazing stretch of wheeling by the waves at the foot of low chalk cliffs. Cycling is permitted except for three short stretches, where cafés etc. sometimes gather a bit of a crowd.

From Minnis Bay the 'Twin Sisters' of Reculver's abandoned church beckon us along the sea wall. Now a beacon for cyclists, but always a landmark for sailors seeking the Thames, these towers have been cared for by Trinity House since 1810, when a storm took off their tops. Walk your bike through the churchyard to take a closer look, but first check out the walls of the old Roman fort. It's curious how the sea has eaten half the cliff on which this fort once stood, whilst using the debris to block the channel it was built to guard!

Fittingly, a rolling Roman road carries us from REGVLBIVM back to DVROVERNVM. I suggest a diversion (at the top of the fourth hill) for less traffic and a view of the cathedral as you descend from Broad Oak. But the A28 via Sturry is more direct, limited to 30mph and has cycle lanes in busy places. If you started from Fordwich, that's just across the river from Sturry.



Route directions

All distances in miles

- 0.0 Follow NCN1 east out of Canterbury, with care, the way is easy to lose.
- 2.5 R in Fordwich, then all turns L thru Stodmarsh to Grove, where keep R.
- 8.8 At Preston leave NCN1, L @ T to Stourmouth.
- 12.1 X A253, R on sidepath for 0.4, X A253 R on Viking Coastal Trail (15) into Monkton. Look out for the little blue signs from here on.
- 14.5 Minster R @ T opp. Gossip Shop café, 0.8 xrds R.
- 17.4 Cliffs End sharp R, 0.2 X A256 & L on sidepath, 1.0 R on Rd, 0.1 keep R.
- 18.9 Pegwell xrds R, 0.5 R on path & L on cliff-top esplanade. VCT keeps close by sea all thru Ramsgate to Broadstairs.
- 23.7 R to visit harbour. Walk up path behind pub to rejoin VCT by Bleak House.
- 24.5 R @ T on B2052. In 0.2 ignore VCT sign, keep on N Foreland Rd to pass Lighthouse, then VCT rejoins from R.
- 25.7 R by pub on cliff-top path and promenade, passing Cliftonville.
- 28.3 Roadside path by Lido. 0.1 R down to lower promenade.
- 28.9 Margate harbour: join B2051 for 0.2 then R on prom for 2.4.
- 31.7 Westgate-on-Sea: join road for 0.7 to Epple Bay, where R down cobbled path. Cont. on prom for 1.7.
- 34.1 Minnis Bay: leave prom, cross road & car park to path on sea wall.
- 37.8 Reculver: R by wall of Roman fort to walk by towers. 0.1 join Rd by pub to café, visitor centre & toilets across shingle on R.
- 39.1 After Church (view): L in Hillborough & thru Maypole.
- 43.7 R on Hawe Lane. 0.9 R on A291 & 0.1 L thru Broad Oak & L down into Canterbury: 48.0.

FACT FILE

Isle of Thanet ride

DISTANCE: 48 miles, 2,200ft climbed (undulating). **TIME:** 5hrs average riding, allow plenty extra for stops.

RESOURCES: Viking Trail leaflet plus other visitor information from Thanet Tourism (01483 577671) or download at vikingcoastaltrail.co.uk. The Canterbury Cycle Routes map etc. from Canterbury Visitor Information (01227 378100) and other info at canterbury.co.uk. **START/FINISH:** anywhere on NCN1 in Canterbury, e.g. St Radigunds St, or Fordwich, or rail-assist by southeasternrailway.co.uk (0845 000 2222).

WHEN: it's sunny! **ESSENTIALS:** sunscreen, water, bucket and spade! **INTERESTING LINKS:** Ramsgate: pugin.com/pugrams.htm, landmarktrust.org.uk/news/grange.htm, ramsgatemaritimemuseum.org.uk/

Broadstairs: broadstairsdickensfestival.co.uk/, bleakhouse.info/ **Thirty-Nine Steps:** undergroundkent.co.uk/39_steps.htm, stcubyholidaylet.co.uk **Margate:** turnercontemporary.org, ellensplace.net/turner.html **Reculver:** kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserves/reculver **DOWNLOAD THE ROUTE:** a GPX file of this route should be on www.ctc-maps.org.uk shortly.



The chalk cliffs of Kingsgate Bay

Submit a route

We've changed the format of Down Your Way. Now CTC will come to you! To tell us about your best routes, contact Mark Waters at CTC national office (mark.waters@ctc.org.uk). If Mark and Chris do your route, you'll win a boxed set of three Cassini historical maps of your choice. To see the range, visit www.cassinimaps.com.

