

All those windmills in the Netherlands are a clue

When the wind blows

ON HIS WAY TO ROTTERDAM, PETE MARTIN RUNS HEAD FIRST INTO A 'DUTCH HILL'

T There are only three things to say about cycling in Holland: wind, wind, and more wind.

Mostly when I cycle, there is a rhythm and it becomes meditative and therapeutic, but every now and then it's not like that at all. Today, every bone and muscle in my body aches.

The wind is incessant. It's unreal. Cycling away from the Rhine, the terrain is boring. The riverside cycle tracks offer better views but when it's so open, there is only the wind. It's mostly at me, occasionally at my side, but never at my back.

Cyclists on road bikes fly past in the other direction. I'm not sure what is worse: cycling into the wind or trying to stay upright when it's from the side.

Most of my time is spent stuck in first gear. I am tempted to stop altogether in Dreumel but I don't have the heart to go the one kilometre off the cycle route into town to find a guest house in case there isn't one.

I make it somehow to Zaltbommel. I am struggling to decide whether to give up on my journey or persevere. I have 80km or so to go to Rotterdam tomorrow to complete my Rhine journey from Lake Constance, but I know I cannot have a day like this again.

Extracted from Pete's book, Revolutions. See petemartin.org



Traffic isn't a problem



Smiles from school children

HOOP HOOP HOORAY

Hugh Symonds' worn out touring tyre made a Cambodian boy jump for joy

Five thousand kilometres into our cycle journey from Chengdu in China to Phnom Penh in Cambodia, I felt the first slow softening of one of my tyres. The rear wheel had punctured shortly after we had crossed the mighty Mekong River in the middle of Laos. Our usual policy is to find shade, prop the bike up, and pop a new innertube in, repairing the hole later in the day.

In the next 500 kilometres, the same thing happened to the same wheel three more times. On long tours, we carry a spare folding tyre, and on the fifth puncturing I decided to find substantial shade from the fierce sun. It was time to replace the old, thin tyre. We were

just half a day's ride from the old colonial French colonial city of Kampot, famous for its fields of pepper.

Within minutes, we were the centre of attention. A boy came to watch as I removed the wheel and replaced old for new. It became obvious that he wanted to play with the old tyre. He threw it high in the air, span it with a reverse spin on rough ground so that it returned like a boomerang, and next he was using it as a hula hoop.

We had planned to carry the tyre on to Kampot to dispose of it properly, but it was clear that the tyre had a better future than we thought. The look of pleasure on the boy's face was one of immeasurable delight.

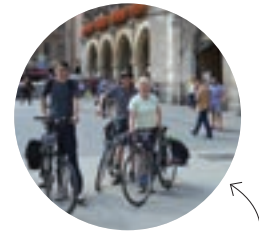
It had been 38 degrees under the shade of the trees, and now we pushed our bikes back to the road in the sunshine and rode on to Kampot, where we found tasty food flavoured with the eponymous pepper. In the following days, we rode on, puncture free, to the Cambodian capital.

There's more about our tour at crazyguyonabike.com/doc/FarEastTour



Tyre recycled as a toy

Hugh and Pauline Symonds cycled 4,000 miles in the Far East



Ready to set off from Munich



Long Mynd descent

WELSH BORDERS IN BLOOM

Lucy Coyne and four friends explored Cheshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire

D'you need a hand?' Colin calls from the towpath. We carry a wheel to his boat. It's a hot and frustrating start: three punctures, two broken tyre levers, and we're only 20 miles out of Kinver. It's day one of our four-day cycle tour, wandering across the county borders of Shropshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire.

At 5pm, after a few scenic hours on first the Staffs and Worcester Canal, then the Shropshire Union, we rejig our route. Leaving the watery tranquility and thorns behind, we carry on to Audlem along quiet, flowery lanes. It's still over 40 miles to our next B&B. By 9.30pm, we're cycling in the moonlight. Bats are on the hunt, flitting past as we pedal through pockets of warm and cool air



laden with clouds of drifting scent.

On day two, we're rejuvenated. Tyres intact, we wind our way along various NCNs to reach Shrewsbury in time for an early evening toast to the oarsmen sculling on the willow-lined River Severn.

On day three, we're aiming for Ludlow but are delayed by another puncture. Amongst the campion and buttercups at the roadside, rain falling, we replace the innertube. We ride up and over the Long Mynd, and the spectacular route down is the most incredible and steepest descent I've ever achieved.

The final day's ride to Ironbridge is glorious. The last sun-filled miles high on Wenlock Edge are followed by a swoop down to 'the birthplace of the industrial revolution'. It's been a fabulous ride. Discussion starts about next year's tour – and the debate about Slime, puncture-resistant tyres, and CO2 cartridges continues.

Bavaria and Bohemia

CYCLE TRACKS TOOK **DIANE MANSFIELD** AND HER FAMILY FROM MUNICH TO PRAGUE

Delayed by a late-night ice cream parlour, we had left Regensburg late and were now pedalling in moonlight beside the Danube. We heard a band playing, turned a corner – and saw couples ballroom dancing under the stars!

It was a magical end to the Bavarian stage of our 450-kilometre ride from Munich to Prague. Regensburg, one-time capital of the Holy Roman Empire, was the first of two World Heritage sites en route. One gorgeous cobbled square led to another, full of colour and life.

Bavaria is built on a massive scale: huge bridges over wide rivers; big roads; large fields; tall churches. Excellent cycle tracks ran by endless hectares of hops and maize, through forests, and into picturesque villages.

Fewer cycle paths in the Czech Republic meant we were often on roads. An air of neglect in some villages contrasted sharply with the vibrant city life, particularly in Pilsen, which was celebrating being 2015 European Capital of Culture.

Initial concerns about cycling into Prague proved ill-founded. Cycle tracks A1 and A12 led us right into the centre to enjoy the castle, stunning views, and divine food.

We initially struggled to get a map for our route. Look for *München-Regensburg-Prag* (ISBN 978-3-89920-601-2).



Bavarian hop fields

Share your story

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