

BIRMINGHAM Cyclist

The newsletter for *push*  *bikes*



Obstacle Course for Cyclists on Selly Oak New Road

Birmingham University welcomes thin cyclists? In 2011 Birmingham really should do better!

see page 3

Bike Train Success

5 bike trains take 70 cyclists to the city centre during the morning rush hour.

see page 9



Pype Hayes to Sutton Coldfield route complete

Community walking and cycling day took place on 29 August.

see page 5

Pershore Road Travel Choices Project Encourages Cycling

Push Bikes organise bike rides to get families back on their bikes.

see page 2

If you would like to help make the newsletter happen, please contact any of the Newsletter team.

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View from the Chair

Birmingham's Cycling Strategy 2011-2015 was agreed at the end of February (though it took until July to get it printed). So now after 6 months is it showing signs of becoming a thrusting addition to the council's policies? Are the planned actions taking place? And benefits starting to be felt?

Or will all the effort expended in producing the Strategy have so exhausted the officers that there is none left to turn it into reality, as has happened in the past? Who knows? According to the document "Its implementation and monitoring will be overseen by the newly formed Cycling Co-ordination Group" This consists of council officers so is not open to the public (or Push Bikes). We know nothing of these meetings- though I am told there hasn't been one recently. This is very worrying!

As far as the general public (including Push Bikes) is concerned we should be informed and given the opportunity to question progress at the Cyclists Forum meetings. None has been held since the strategy launch, but, it is hoped, there will be one in October. By then at least 20% of the period covered by the strategy will have passed so there should be much to be said and questioned.

Are there any other ways in which to judge the progress in implementing the Cycling Strategy? Unfortunately most of the actions listed in the document have rather vague targets and completion dates. The public will need to rely on the feedback from the council on such items as 'cycling infrastructure development', 'the amount of cycle training – both for adults and children', and success in 'increasing major employers' cycling plans'.

The Cycling Strategy is a major policy initiative, many years in gestation, so let's make sure it gets fully implemented. There must be real openness and dialogue between council and public, and it's about time it got started.

Push Bikes will, of course, continue to push hard for this and keep members informed.

John Bennett

Pershore Road Travel Choices

Centro is running the Pershore Road Travel Choices project along this corridor until April 2012. The project aims to cut traffic congestion and carbon emissions along the Pershore Road, making the area a cleaner and greener place to live, work and study.

More than 16,500 homes in south Birmingham have been offered customised travel advice on how to be lean and green this summer and beat soaring petrol prices at the same time.

Expert travel advisers representing Centro, the region's transport authority, visited homes near the Pershore Road over the past few months, speaking to families about how they can take advantage of the full range of travel options on their doorstep. The advisers have drawn up personalised travel advice for homes, laying out exactly how residents can get from their own front door to their destination without having to jump in the car. Families have been offered the help and information they need to switch to local bus and rail services and to also make more local trips on foot or bike.

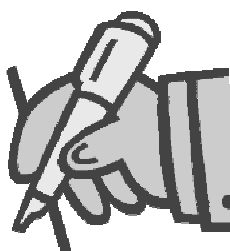
The project has included several initiatives to support people who want to get out and about more by bike or foot. Since June, Push Bikes has been holding a monthly gentle bike ride from Kings Norton rail station along local quiet roads and off-road routes, to get families back on their bikes and enjoying their local area. The last rides in August and September were well attended, with a dozen or so people taking part in each.

Local walks have also proven popular, with the Ramblers supporting Centro in setting up one-hour walks in the community and with local schools and businesses, with over 200 people taking part so far. Summer walks have finished for now, but the team hope to announce some new Autumn-themed walks very shortly.

For more information on new events and activities taking place over the coming months and how to get involved, visit:

www.networkwestmidlands.com/pershoreroad

Helen Osborn
Centro



ACTION POINTS

This symbol indicates items where readers can take action such as writing or emailing

Cycling on the Selly Oak New Road

Background

In late 2007 the Northfield bypass opened. Push Bikes reluctantly condemned its cycling provision as a waste of money because users were relegated to sharing a footway and having to operate a succession of push button signals. We doubted that cyclists would use it preferring to remain on the carriageway (as has happened). We asked "Would the Selly Oak bypass be a repeat performance?" Sadly the answer is "yes!"

Push Bikes does not enjoy being critical: we want to applaud road improvements that make it better for cyclists (and, incidentally, less frustrating for other users). As tax payers and rate payers we want to see our money spent wisely, particularly that desperately small amount allocated to cycling infrastructure. However this new road costing many millions of pounds has many of the same faults of the Northfield bypass. Cyclists are provided with a dedicated track alongside the carriageway (imagine what this will have cost) but it is interrupted by several push button lights and lengthy diversions at roundabouts. Consequently much of it will be ignored by cyclists who will remain on the single lane carriageway increasing friction with frustrated motorists who will expect the cycle lane to be used. Push Bikes is not alone: there was an article in Birmingham Post and much complaint on the Birminghamcyclist.com blog.

Details

Heading north (into city) on A38 at Selly Oak on the new road traffic goes left passed Sainsbury's towards the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham. At a roundabout road traffic bears right but cyclists (if joining the separate lane) would go 100 metres along Harborne Lane, cross at the unprotected crossing and retrace on the opposite path until directed to dismount, walk partway round the roundabout before remounting to progress down the hill towards the University. The road towards the city bears right at the next roundabout under the canal and rail bridges, but the cycle path goes 50 metres beyond the roundabout (just when you'd like to be freewheeling) to a toucan crossing then backtrack and rejoin the bypass. There is another toucan crossing at the Grange Road entrance to the University. The cycle track comes to a hazardous end at Edgbaston Park Road lights but only after the cyclist has negotiating a slalom of several posts, a bus shelter and the University Gate entrance to reach the End of Route sign.

Travelling out of town the route is more straightforward. Cyclists have no designated facility (either on or off the carriageway) until beyond the Tesco Express. Cyclists are directed off the carriageway onto a cycle lane and continue (dodging the many sign poles) all the way up to the Harborne Lane round-

about. Then chaos! The lane crosses three (currently unused) entrance roads at toucan crossings before cyclists are expected to rejoin the busy carriageway for journeys on the Outer Ring Road or A38 towards Northfield. If going towards Harborne cyclists would either have to join the road traffic before the three lane roundabout or cross the road at a toucan on to the cycle lane on the opposite side of Harborne Lane then dismount, walk and remount: far from ideal.



A sea of traffic sign posts creates a real hazard for cyclists and pedestrians alike. Could posts not have been placed at the back of the footway and signs cantilevered?

Conclusion

Isn't it about time the city required highway engineers to understand what cyclists need before they build expensive cycle facilities that aren't 'fit for purpose'? Why doesn't the council consult beforehand, rather than pay lip service by issuing plans that they have no intention of changing?



Please, highway engineer, why can't I cycle to the City Centre Attractions?"

John Bennett

Pedestrian and Cycling Task Force meeting, August

Push Bikes and other sustainable transport stakeholders used to meet Birmingham City Council at the quarterly Cycling Advisory Group. The CAG has not been formally 'disbanded', but seems now to have been substantially replaced in function and agenda by the six-monthly Task Force, chaired by Cllr Tim Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Transport.

First item at the August TF was the now approved Midland Metro extension between Snow Hill and New Street stations. A map of the city centre was provided showing the streets that would carry tracks and their impact on bus routes, directions of travel, pedestrian access and cycle flows. The council was endeavouring to make these changes so that there should actually be some improvements for everyone, pedestrians would have an all-weather, covered walking route from Moor St to New Street, lit at night and with shops either side. 'High Quality Pedestrian Routes' would be provided. The plan indicated that cyclists would find some one-ways reversed and cycling prohibited in others, with alternative routes signed. One of these prohibitions will be Stephenson Street, where the very sharp bend would make it too dangerous for trams and cyclists to share. Cycling will also be prohibited in Corporation Street between New Street and Bull Street, with signed alternatives.

Push Bikes then asked about the trams themselves. Many campaign groups press for their tram systems to carry bicycles; Cllr Huxtable confirmed that there would be new rolling stock when the Metro was extended, but could not confirm if bicycles would be carried. The stock would be specified and ordered by Centro so Push Bikes asked its representative at the meeting if carriage of cycles would be a requirement. This was noted.

At this point BCC's Cycling Officer and Team Leader Graham Lennard stated that bicycles could already be carried on the 'heavy' rail system ie 'normal' trains. We were a bit disappointed in this response: yes, we know bikes can be carried. We pointed out though that many cyclists arrive at Snow Hill station and would like to be able to continue their journeys, with their bikes, via the Metro i.e. 'integrated transport', which we constantly hear being talked about, but very little action ever being taken!

The gentleman representing partially-sighted and disabled pedestrians then asked if wheelchairs would be carried on the Metro. So we asked Centro to expand on its procurement procedure – did they tell manufacturers what it wanted, and seek the best quote, or did makers tell Centro what trams were available? It seemed the former applied. So Push Bikes re-iterated to Centro that its 'wish list' to tram makers should include the provision for carriage of bicycles and wheelchairs. Centro assured us that it had noted all this, so we would have liked Graham Lennard to have voiced more positive support for cycle carriage on trams. The Metro extension is due to open in May 2015.

The Task Force was then told about a proposed on street map system. Information posts at intersections where pedestrians new to the city could discover their location and those of local amenities, together with distances and travelling times. Graham Lennard asked that cycling information e.g. parking, should be provided too. The system would be

along the lines of those in Bristol and London, but, said Cllr. Huxtable, "better than either"!

Other schemes

A bid of over £4m had been won for the North Birmingham Cycle Routes. This will connect workplaces, schools and stations and extend the Connect2 scheme. The Centro Pershore Road Travel Choices team had visited over 5000 households, offering personalised travel plans, cycle repairs and training (*see report on page 2 for more information*).

Bike Birmingham Cycling Strategy

At the start of the meeting copies of the new strategy were distributed, complete with photos, graphics and a glossy front page. Cllr Huxtable introduced the strategy as having finally arrived! Our own John Bennett however jumped on this statement: it might have 'finally' arrived as a fully printed and published document but its text had been available for the past six months online! So we were actually 20% into its 'lifetime' and at only 30 pages, the first six intentions ought to have been actioned by now! Good point well made, I thought!

City Centre Cycling Changes

The Midland Metro extension will run from Snow Hill station along Snow Hill, Colmore Circus, Bull St, Corporation St, Stephenson Place, and terminate in Stephenson Street close to the existing entrance to New Street station.

There are several consequences:

- Buses and other traffic except cycles and taxis will be excluded from Corporation Street
- Bus routes will be altered so that they mostly turn round before they enter the city centre. Pedestrianised areas will be enlarged leading to fewer vehicles and more pedestrian traffic in the city centre. All of this should improve cyclists' ease of movement and safety.
- Traffic direction on some roads e.g. Moor Street Queen-sway will be changed.

The changes will present opportunities to remove 'clutter' of excessive street barriers and signage, and to install information columns for pedestrians and cyclists. Bus route changes will take place in September 2012. Beforehand an electronic waymarking system will be erected to sign routes for walkers and cyclists. Civil works to move underground services along the track will take place in 2013, followed by track laying and commissioning in 2014/15.

There are consequences for cycling in the city centre. Tram tracks and cyclists are not the happiest of bedfellows: extra care is needed in crossing them. Cycling along most of the route will be permitted, with the exception of Stephenson Place / Street where the narrowness and sharp corner would make it too dangerous (alternative routes will be signed). On the positive side the opportunity is being taken to improve crossing points, signage and cycle stands and there will be less vehicular traffic. Detailed plans are in the course of preparation so there is still an opportunity for cyclists' views to be incorporated in the changes.

http://www.connectedcity.org.uk/files/6113/0504/4885/Connected-city-changes_01.pdf

If you have specific ideas that should be considered please bring them forward –either via Push Bikes or directly to Graham Lennard the city's cycling and pedestrian officer (0121 303 7195) graham.lennard@birmingham.gov.uk.

Unwanted bike in the shed?



Your old bicycle could really be put to good use! Charity Re-Cycle collect unwanted bicycles and ship to a number of African

countries to provide simple, affordable transport and change people's lives. In Britain, millions of bikes are thrown away or lie unused in sheds, whilst many people in Africa have no access to transport of any kind. People spend hours each day walking to collect water, firewood or to access health care, school and employment. A bicycle lightens this burden and dramatically improves their wellbeing as well as work and education opportunities helping to bring social change.

A collection point has now been set up in Coleshill, thanks to Bluebox Selfstorage Limited who have kindly provided a shipping container. Any type of bike in reasonable condition would be welcomed except very small kids "toy" bikes with plastic wheels, or bikes that have been left out in the rain for any length of time.

Also needed are:

- Bike parts and accessories, part worn tyres
- Tools, especially bike specific tools but also general workshop tools such as spanners, hammers, screwdrivers, hacksaws, allen keys, pliers, files etc.
- Bike manuals and books (to help promote a cycling culture)

Bikes can be dropped off at:

Bluebox Selfstorage, Trillanium, Gorsey Lane, Coleshill, Warwickshire, B46 1JU; between 09.00 and 17.00 Monday to Friday and 11.00 to 13.00 on Saturdays. On weekdays ask for Lee Smith. Bluebox Selfstorage is only 400m from Coleshill Parkway train station.

Alternatively items could be dropped off at the Friends of the Earth building, the Warehouse, in Digbeth. Address on the back page, just let us know first.

The collection and transport of the bikes to Re-Cycle's warehouse in Colchester is co-ordinated by Michael Groll. Collections will continue until the end of October. To contact Michael:
Tel. 01675 467785 / Email:
michaelgroll67@gmail.com



Bush ambulance in Namibia
© Re-Cycle

Re-Cycle's UK Charity Number:
1063570



Pype Hayes Route Opening

There was a fantastic turnout on Bank Holiday Monday, 29th August for the official opening of the new section of route through Pype Hayes Park, despite an unseasonable chilling wind. A Walking and Cycling Community Day was organised with cyclists coming in from as far as Solihull. Councillor Timothy Huxtable, Birmingham City Council Cabinet Member for Transportation and Regeneration cut the ribbon. The route is part of the National Cycle Network (route number 534) and provides an off-road link between Pype Hayes and Sutton Coldfield. Links to other localities will be achieved using the recent Local Sustainable Transport Fund award (see page 6).



Canal steps at University station

There is a flight of 27 steps between the towpath and the bridge at University station. The steps are steep and without any break. Negotiating cycles is difficult; push-chairs worse, wheelchairs impossible. The steps are very busy as this section of the canal provides access for students and staff as well as for the public to the hospitals and residential Harborne and Edgbaston. It has long been recognised that improvements should be made. Under the contract to build the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham (QEHB) £150,000 is included for 'improvements to the canal access', enough one would have hoped for something to be done. But wait! There are some challenges:

- There is limited land available between the canal and the station platforms
 - The ownership is complex: University, Network Rail, British Waterways, QEHB
 - There is considerable difference (4 metres) in height between the canal and the bridge
- And, not least, who would pay the initial cost and ongoing maintenance?

Proposed schemes

Various schemes have, over the years (many years) been proposed and deferred (rejected?) such as

- A long ramp similar to that at Bournville station. Ideal but high cost (£500K+) due to lengthy towpath widening.
- Access to the station so that the platform lift is accessible. Simple to construct but not feasible now that London Midland have installed ticket barriers to prevent fare dodgers
- A new, lower pedestrian/cyclist bridge across the canal alongside the road bridge. Another high cost option, and would require University to give up some land. (This is further complicated by it being a Roman Ancient Monument site.) Wider, less steep steps with platforms and possibly a channel for wheeling cycles. Least costly (though still around £350 because of the need to widen the towpath). This option is the least satisfactory –



providing marginal benefit to cyclists and none to other potential users.

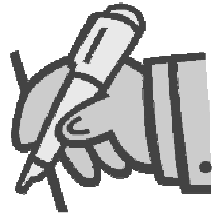
Where are we now?

The QEHB money is still available and is ring-fenced.

Birmingham University have initially rejected making any financial contribution but may reconsider if a suitable scheme emerges.

The city council are in favour of the new steps scheme: it is the least costly. The additional £200K (above the QEHB money) is not included in any current council budget. There is a possibility that if the Centro led 'major' bid to the Government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund is successful, the shortfall could be funded from that. This looks like the most hopeful current option.

What do you think? Is this a sensible way to invest this amount? Any better ways? Please let us know what you think.



Local Sustainable Transport Fund

Birmingham City Council (BCC) has been awarded £4.1million from the Department for Transport (DfT) from the new Local Sustainable Transport Fund. BCC will work with local partners to transform walking and cycling in the North Birmingham area through a mixture of physical improvements such as new paths and improved signs to create a comprehensive network of cycling and walking routes. Additionally there will be campaigns and other initiatives to encourage people to walk and cycle more.

The new scheme builds upon the successes already achieved in North Birmingham through investments in walking and cycling, including the recent improvements as part of the *North Birmingham Walking & Cycling Route – Connect 2 project*.

Another important part of the scheme is the proposals for campaigns and initiatives to promote the improvements and try to change people's behaviour towards more sustainable modes of travel, particularly cycling and walking. These will complement the infrastructure improvements and will be targeted towards:

- **Schools:** depending on what is most suited to each school, this could include elements like Bike It/ Bikeability training, road safety education, cycle route planning as well as sustainable travel and road safety events and campaigns;
- **Workplace and Commuter Travel:** site specific advice will be offered to support key employers within the area in encouraging walking and cycling amongst their staff. Marketing initiatives will target commuter trips by rail to encourage walking and cycling to rail stations; and
- **Marketing Cycling Initiatives:** Ideas to encourage cycling and walking for many trips including leisure are being developed. These could include community cycle hubs offering bike hire, cycle maintenance, cycle training and organised cycle rides.

The first parts of the scheme will be introduced in early 2012 and be completed by 2015.

Cannon Hill Park, Segregated Cycle Path

Part of Sustrans' National Cycle Route 5 runs through Cannon Hill Park, where cyclists would see what appeared to be a 'segregated' cycle path along one side of the wide tarmac 'road' on the eastern length of the park. This 'segregation' was indicated only by a continuous white line a few feet from the edge of the grass; unfortunately the many pedestrians walking along the 'road' either did not notice the line, or never understood its meaning, or ignored it anyway, so cyclists often found walkers in what they considered was their 'lane'. The more pedantic of cyclists (within a legally designated segregated path, it is illegal for a cyclist to ride on the pedestrian side, (but walkers can use the cyclists' side) would ring their bells, or call out, or stop. The less pedantic would simply ride outside of the line.

Eventually parts of the line became worn away, leaving big gaps and some long sections of the 'road' were resurfaced anyway, which lost even more of the line. So as far back as 2009 cyclists began to ask the city council if the line was going to be replaced, or removed altogether – the latter becoming a commonly voiced view. The question was put, repeatedly, to the city council, usually to the Cycling Team Leader Graham Lennard. The following 'diary' of this now astonishingly (even ridiculously) protracted saga is taken from the Push Bikes newsletter archive:

Summer 2009: Cannon Hill Park resurfacing: Improvements are needed as this will be part of the World half marathon route. Discussions taking place with Parks and Highways Maintenance. Push Bikes asked about the 'segregated' cycle path running through the park – would it be re-marked or removed and the entire path designated as shared use? BCC responded that it was likely to become shared use, as the segregation was largely ignored anyway.

March 2010: Push Bikes recently met with staff (including Graham Lennard) from the City Council Transportation and Leisure Services departments outside the café in Cannon Hill Park. They discussed whether to repaint the dividing white line which has been almost entirely lost in the resurfacing of most of the Park's section of the Rea Valley Route.

Since that meeting, emails from various cyclists and Push Bikes have been periodically exchanged with Graham Lennard, who appeared to be considering between more clearly marked segregation, or shared use, again with clear signage, but with no firm decision either way.

Therefore it was with some surprise that the August 2011 Task Force meeting heard from Graham that the Parks Dept had, without consulting him, provided a new white line through the park, with cycle symbols and what appeared to be a 5mph speed limit – there were roundels encircling the number 5. Maybe the Parks Dept simply got tired of waiting for a decision?

On the 'Birmingham Cyclist blog', August 2011, responding to bewildered comments, Graham wrote: "Just like to say that these markings are as much a surprise to us in Transportation as they are to anyone! We only found out today. The Park's managers must have put them in. Hoping to speak with them soon. There's been some discussion (with the previous park manager) over whether a segregated path is the best approach on a wide drive like this. If we had gone for a lane I think it needed to be wider than the previous one - and more clearly marked as a cycle path. More frequent use of the cycle logo than existed previously would have helped - not certain how frequent the new ones are. And of course finally we would not have put in the 5mph limit!! It has been suggested they could be National Cycle Route 5 numbering... Interesting that they have not extended the lane past the kids play area - which I think was always a possible problem area."

So, what a mess! A simple situation yet one that has been under discussion for years suddenly 'resolved' by a path that in some opinions is not needed at all, now with ambiguous signs and markings. If the '5' roundel does indicate NCR 5, it should be a rectangle, not a circle. If a speed limit, it should be a red circle!

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Bike Train, 22 September

On 22 September riders registered to join one of five 'train' routes, each coming into the city centre along some of the city's main radial roads at a normal commuting time of 7:30 to 8:30am. Experienced riders led each train to help guide and support less experienced cyclists. A bike train emphasises to drivers that bikes can and do use the road system as well as cars, and to cyclists that the roads are not as dangerous as popular perception would suggest.



There were no problems along any of the routes and a total of 70 riders arrived in Victoria Square happy and eager for their breakfasts. The media was there in force as Birmingham had never see the likes of this before, but will see the like of it again! Who said that nobody cycles in Birmingham? Oh contraire! Push Bikes thanks Joe Peacock at Birmingham Friends of the Earth who involved us and Sustrans from the very first meeting. Particular thanks to the Birmingham Mail and BBC Midlands Today, who ran a four minute feature in the evening - wow! Here's to next year!



Riders at the head of the Cotteridge Bike Train arrive in Victoria Square. Extreme left - Rachel Vann, Sustrans; extreme right, Cllr David Radcliffe.

Important victory for cyclists, but with a sting in the tail

The High Court in Birmingham has delivered an important judgment which will be of interest to cyclists who find themselves on the wrong end of an encounter with a defect in

the highway, as well as those who campaign for the interests of cyclists. It is a great pity, though, that the court delivered a sting in the tail.

Mr Thomas was cycling with around 20 members of the Solihull Cycling Club in April 2006 when he struck a spillage of concrete which had adhered to the road. He came off his cycle and suffered serious injuries. He claimed damages against Warwickshire County Council alleging that the council had failed to maintain the highway. The courts have historically sympathized with highway authorities when dealing with transient or temporary defects in the highway, but in this case the concrete spillage had stuck to the normal surface of the road and hardened. Effectively the lump of concrete had become part of the surface of the highway itself. The court ruled that the highway was defective and that this was not a transient defect.

Councils should undertake regular inspections of the highway so that defects such as this can be remedied. In fact, if they can show that they carried out a reasonable system of inspection they can escape liability even if the court rules that the defect was dangerous. In this case however, the inspector failed to take action to remedy the defect because he decided that it was not dangerous as it was in such a position that the wheels of motor vehicles would not be affected. It is pleasing then that the court found that the council were to blame for failing to remove the defect and consider cyclists might reasonably be expecting to use the road too! Clearly highway authorities should sit up, take note and remind their highway inspectors to think about the needs of cyclists when inspecting the highway.

It is a shame, that there was then a sting in the tail. The court heard evidence that the claimant was riding in such a way that his front wheel was only a few inches behind the rear wheel of the cyclist in front. It is of course quite normal for road cycling clubs to ride in this way, but the court found that this was negligent. He could not see the defect due to his close proximity to the rider in front. On this basis the court found the Claimant to be guilty of contributory negligence, which is bad enough, but the degree of blame found against the rider was extraordinarily high being 60%.

As a lawyer who represents cyclists, I find it hard to accept that the cyclist was more to blame for the way he rode than the council inspector, who lets face it, completely failed to consider the defects for anyone other than 4-wheeled users of the highway. Are we as cyclists expected to ride along scanning the road beneath us to look for defects? No. That was supposed to be the council's job, a job they failed to do and yet the court has found them only 40% to blame. One can only imagine what the court would have said if a cyclist missed a red light because he was too busy scanning the road and picking his way through the potholes. If there was contributory negligence, and I am not convinced that there was, it should have been no more than around 20%.

This case does represent an important victory for cyclists as it should force councils to pay more attention to cyclists as users of the highway, but for Mr Thomas personally the sting in the tail seems particularly harsh.

Tim Beasley, Levenes Solicitors

Memories of cycling in North Vietnam

Cycling with Red Spokes Adventure Tours was a fabulous once in a lifetime experience, with spectacular countryside from rice fields to the towering mountains. *Written by Eddie Brocklesby*

We rode long good roads, through free-roaming water buffalos, pigs, friendly dogs, children, chickens and ducks. Everyone was waving, fascinated by this group of mad westerners who were paying to cycle up hills on posh mountain bikes! Short chunks of un-made up road made the biking more challenging. The well earned long mountain descents were fantastic at the end of the day, once in a glorious sunset, the red colours reflected in the paddy fields in the valley far below.

Markets, street vendors, colourful tribes and, overwhelmingly, the people made the trip so memorable. This is a young country with 65% of Vietnamese under the age of 30. They were to be seen walking quite long journeys along the road to school.

Toddlers encouraged to wave and welcome strangers, many carried atop their Dads. Others perched precariously, on scooters with Mum; the sense of kinship and family belonging so marked.

The Red Spokes organisation was superb. The ages, nationality and cycling experience of our group were widely varied. We had our own well travelled, informed English guide; his skills and the motorised backup were much appreciated. We also had an enthusiastic knowledgeable Vietnamese guide, Phong. He showed us the rice growing stages, coffee plantations and the heart of 'PG tip' land where the price paid per kilo of tips staggered us. His love of his country, its heritage, and his informed appreciation of the diversity of the hill tribes



You always receive a warm friendly welcome from children in the villages of Laos and Vietnam.

was such a bonus. 'We eat or use everything – nothing gets left'.

We stayed in local hotels where the bar at the end of the day was usually the first port of call. Food was nutritious throughout. Noodle soup for breakfast, ideal for carb loading. Accompanying fresh baguettes were evidence of the French occupation. Healthy picnic meals emerged from our backup van for elevenses and lunches. Suppers were great, reflecting local specialisms.

Never in a developing country have I felt more challenged by the disparate wealth issues. We delivered 200 chairs to a village school supported by Red Spokes – next time the head said she would love a new water tank!! Vietnam has an effective education system, and although the children love school few from agricultural areas move on beyond primary education.

See North Vietnam by bike before commercial tourism kicks in – to travel by car,

coach or even scooter would be to miss the sense of intimacy and shared fun. The people were fascinated by our madness, but they respected, accepted and welcomed us – we were after all linked with the country that spawned Man U and Chelsea, and that's what really counts in a globalised economy.

For further information on cycling tours, contact:
Red Spokes Adventure Tours
Tel: 020 7502 7252
Web: www.redspokes.co.uk
Email: office@redspokes.co.uk

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Birmingham News and Campaigns

Councillor joins Push Bikes



Push Bikes chair John Bennett welcomes Councillor Martin Straker Welds as a new member of Push Bikes. We first met Cllr Straker Welds riding on the Bike Train and he joined Push Bikes at a public event organised by Kings Heath Residents' Forum.

Pedestrian refuges and cyclists

Push Bikes has responded to a city council consultation proposing to install more pedestrian refuges in the city. While not objecting to the facility for pedestrians, we do point out they create a hazard for cyclists from cars overtaking within the gaps. We again are asking the Council to provide either short lengths of footway cycle path to enable riders to bypass the gaps, or put in kerb build-outs with a short 'through' cycle lane to enable riders to avoid the cars. We make the strong point that most cyclists are reluctant to take the primary position and ride in the centre of the gap.

Push Bikes' Rides

Please see the website for the full list and latest updates: <http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/rides>.

You can join the rides mailing list by emailing: pbrides@pushbikes.org.uk. It's a good idea to email pbrides@ to let us know you're coming in case you're delayed or plans change.

Proper lighting is essential for the evening rides, many of which are via unlit country lanes.

Rides are open to all cyclists. Riders are responsible for their own safety, should ensure that their bike is roadworthy and are responsible for the security of their bike and personal belongings.

Rides average 10-12mph but we won't leave anyone behind.

SCOTTS CYCLES

Official Suppliers of
Dawes, DiamondBack BMX
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Custom builds available

Member of Association of Cycle Traders



wheel building service available

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REPAIRS & SERVICE OF ALL MAKES OF CYCLES

1345 STRATFORD RD HALL GREEN

(OPPOSITE WAITROSE SUPERMARKET)

0121 777 2532

COMPARE OUR PRICES!!

ALSO AT: 132 NEW RD, RUBERY, 0121 453 3148

Discount 10% on cash, 5% on credit card, (except bikes) on production of
Push Bikes membership card

Standing Order Mandate

| | |
|---|-------|
| To (your bank) | _____ |
| Address (inc. Post Code) | _____ |
| Please pay The Co-operative Bank, Birmingham Branch | |
| Sorting Code 08-90-01 | |
| for the credit of Push Bikes account number 50011748 | |
| the sum of (amount in figures) £ _____ | |
| (amount in words) _____ | |
| Commencing (date*) _____ / now* and thereafter every year | |
| on (date dd/mm) ____ / ____ until you receive further notice from me/us* | |
| in writing | |
| quoting reference _____ and debit my/our* account accord- | |
| ingly: | |
| Name of account to be debited _____ | |
| Sort code _____ | |
| Account number _____ | |
| Name _____ | |
| Signature _____ Date _____ | |
| Please cancel any previous standing order in favour of Push Bikes | |
| under the reference given above. | |
| Send to: Push Bikes, 54-57 Allison Street, BIRMINGHAM, B5 5TH | |
| *Delete as applicable. www.pushbikes.org.uk | |

We are based in the Friends of the Earth building:

'The Warehouse'
54-57 Allison Street
Digbeth
BIRMINGHAM
B5 5TH

Telephone: 0121 632 6909

E-mail: secretary@pushbikes.org.uk

As a voluntary organisation, the office is not manned on a regular basis. The most effective means of contacting us is by e-mail.

We hold meetings on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 19:30 including: 18 October, 15 November and 20 December.

Sprocket Cycles

Child and adult bike sales, accessories, repairs and spares.

10% discount for Push Bikes' members

Now open 10-4 Wed - Sat.

**54 Allison St. Birmingham B5 5TH
Tel. 0121 633 0730**

Membership Application Form

I/we * wish to join Push Bikes

October 2011

Name(s) _____

Address (inc. Post Code) _____

Home Telephone _____

Mobile Telephone _____

Work Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

I/we * enclose one year's subscription:

Individual, waged (£11)

Individual, unwaged (£5-50)

Joint/Family (£14-00)

Voluntary donation (optional)

TOTAL £

Signature _____ Date _____

I heard about Push Bikes from _____

I/we * would like to help by: (✓)

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter writing | <input type="checkbox"/> Helping on Push Bikes' stall | <input type="checkbox"/> Organising activities for Bike Week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing plans | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing articles for Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Setting up a Bicycle User Group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leading rides | <input type="checkbox"/> Assisting with Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter/leaflets distribution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter stuffing | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Push Bikes' Rides

Wednesday Evening Rides:

We're currently planning each week's rides based on the weather forecast at the beginning of each week and will email details on Monday/Tuesday.

To join the emailing list, please email: pbrides@pushbikes.org.uk

When a ride isn't listed on a Wednesday, we arrange this closer to the day and put details on the website and email those on the rides mailing list.

All Wednesday rides meet at the Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park, near the boating lake, at 7.30, for a 7.45pm start. Occasionally we start from the Hippodrome if we're heading north.

Sunday Rides:

Sunday 23 Oct: Fradley Junction

Meet at Four Oaks Railway Station at 11.00am, we shall then cycle a circuit around Lichfield, stopping for lunch at the pub at Fradley Canal Junction. Total round trip of about 30 miles led by Nick Wattison. There are two trains that leave Longbridge at 09.43 and 10.13am respectively, both will get you to Four Oaks before 11.00am.

Sunday 20 Nov: Shenstone

A 25 mile circuit of the Worcestershire countryside to the Plough pub for lunch. Meet at 10.15am at Kings Norton Railway Station car park.

Sunday 18 Dec - Tinsel Ride

Meet at Kings Norton Railway Station car park at 10.45am for a 20 mile round trip stopping for lunch at the Coach & Horses pub at Weatheroak. Don't forget to bring something 'Christmassy' to decorate your bike/person with.

Members' Discounts From:

| Bike Shop | Location | Exceptions |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|
| Scott's Cycles | Hall Green | bikes |
| (see advert p.11) | Rubery | bikes |
| Bike Pro | King's Heath | none |
| iCycle | Harborne | none |
| Red Kite Cycles | Shirley | bikes |
| Sprocket Cycles | City Centre | none |
| On Your Bike | Digbeth | bikes |

You will need your Push Bikes' membership card to claim the discount

