



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



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www.wheelrights.org.uk

Swansea Council learns about cycle-friendly infrastructure

Following his visit in April John Grimshaw returned to Swansea on 19th October to give a seminar to initiate Swansea Council in the art of making our roads more cycle friendly. The venue was the Penllergaer Council offices and the meeting was attended by around 40 officers mainly from Transport and Engineering.

The meeting took place in the Council Chamber. This was an ideal venue for the presentation. Mr Grimshaw's offer to take questions and comments as the talk progressed led to a strongly interactive session, enabling him to enlarge on various important details.

After showing how little we cycle in the UK compared with Northern Europe and discussing the role of cycling in tackling obesity he dealt in some detail with infrastructure. What stood out for me was the stress he placed on the need for continuity of cycle paths across minor junctions, drawing on examples across the UK and Europe. An outcome of the discussion on this was that our Council favour green for the colour of paths across junctions.

True to form Mr Grimshaw elected to cycle from the railway station and I had the pleasure of accompanying him both ways. The photo shows him in Penllergaer Forest on our way back to the station.



David Naylor

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Editorial

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Copy deadline

Copy for the next issue should be sent to *Wheelrights* Secretary (e-mail address below) by mid February 2010.

Normally articles in this Newsletter don't exceed one page, but the story of the Osborne family's ride across Wales (p.6) was just too fascinating to shorten. What a message for those with kids with energy to work off, and for Arriva Trains to provide more bike space!

On p. 2 we have encouraging local news and then on p. 3 Nick Guy writes about our proposed cycling festival. On p.4 I pass on tips about how the Scots promote cycling which has a message for us, and on p.5 Claudine is back with a philosophical and thought provoking article.

Finally, on p. 8, I provide feed back on our rides questionnaire and some information about the new Swansea ferries.

David Naylor

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Local News

City Centre cycling provision

A year ago we described (in Newsletter No. 6) the new Landore cycle path which provides a convenient link between the Railway Station and the Hafod. Since then the Council have done more for cyclists in the City Centre.

The shared use path which runs on the south side of De-la-Bech Street and Alexandra Road has had a cycle lane marked on it. Although narrower than recommended it serves the useful purpose of making it clear that cyclists are to be expected on this path. Also it is good in that it curves to meet the two streets it crosses at right angles thus making it easier for cyclists to see if the road is clear. The lane does not however cross these two roads – Bellevue and Pleasant Street which link Alexandra Road with Orchard Street – as we would like them to and as John Grimshaw has recommended. At our recent meeting with the Council (see below) we found them sympathetic and, hopefully, in the not too distant future we shall see coloured strips taking the lane across these two streets. This will not mean that cyclists have priority, but it will make the crossing safer as motorists will be more aware of cyclists and pedestrians. There is a precedent on the Taff Trail: a mile NW of the M4 near Taff's Well, a red strip carries the trail across a busy link to a main road.

Other new features are a new Advanced Stop Line (ASL) adjacent to the Railway Station, an ASL on Alexandra Road where it crosses Orchard Street and a cycle contra-flow on Dynevor Place.

The picture features the green lead in to the Alexandra Road ASL. (Orchard Street is off to the right.) The widening of the road by the green lane provides a safe connection with the pavement cycle lane – an example of good practice.

The Dynevor Place contra-flow allows cyclists to cycle south towards the Kingsway whereas motorists can only drive north.



Our 'wish list' prioritised

At a *Cycle Forum* in July we presented the Council with a four page list of infrastructure measures we would like to see implemented for the benefit of cyclists. These ranged from details such as the provision of warning signs at the dangerous NCN 4 crossing of the bus lane near the Sidings Bridge (the bus and cycle bridge across Fabian Way) to major projects such as a cycle path across Clyne Common linking West Cross with Bishopston. The Council duly called a meeting to prioritise this list. This took place on 16th November.

This was an important meeting chaired by Chris Vinestock, the new Head of Transportation and Engineering, and attended by four Council officers including Rob Wachowski, the Cycling Officer, and two who, amongst other things, are responsible for infrastructure design. Nick Guy and David Naylor represented *Wheelrights*.

This was a very positive meeting and in the course of less than two hours we had agreed on a comprehensive list of short term priorities and some longer term. Highlights include the Council's intention to provide continuity at minor junctions such as Bellevue and Pleasant Street referred to above, a programme of destination signing and ASL marking, and to proceed with the necessary legal preliminaries to the construction of the Gowerton to Kingsbridge (Gorseinon) 'missing link'. We have offered to help identify locations for signing and ASL locations. The Council are already working on the 'missing link' land ownership issues.

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Gower Cycling Festival (18-25 September 2010)

This is a major opportunity to raise the profile of cycling in Swansea and the Gower. Swansea Council's tourism department advise us that the above dates would fit well with their objective of extending the tourist season into September and that this could release funding.

We envisage 10-15 guided bike rides with three categories of "easy", "moderate" and "challenging". Most but not all the rides would be in the Gower. Some might have a theme and most would include a pub or café stop. Ideas include:

- Various Gower rides ranging from a circuit over Welshmoor and the Marsh road in North Gower, through trips out to the west with the possibility of visiting the west coast beaches, to the South Gower from Mumbles westward.
- A couple of rides: one to the north and west encompassing the Swiss Valley and Millennium coast cycle paths, and a ride up Swansea Valley returning round Swansea Bay
- A mountain bike ride along Cefn Bryn finishing at the *Heritage Centre*.
- A Dylan Thomas *Poems and Pints* ride through Swansea visiting key locations linked to this famous Swansea poet.
- A day trip to Ilfracombe on the new ferry with a ride in North Devon.

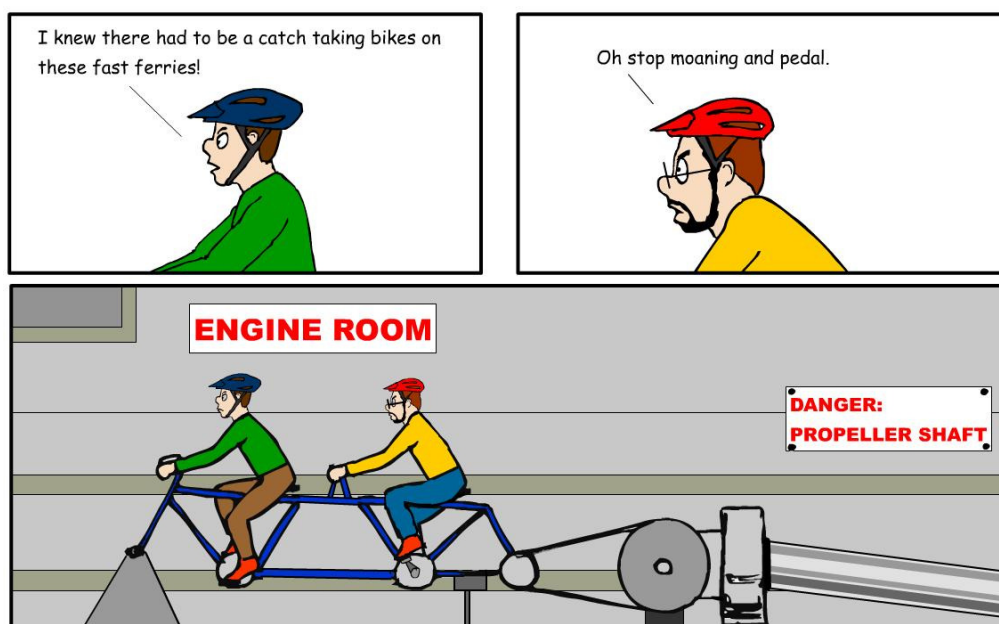
We need your ideas for rides and themes, and volunteers to lead rides or to act as stewards. A *Wheelrights* meeting to progress this is planned in January (see below) so if you can help please come to this meeting. Alternatively, or in addition, contact David Naylor or myself .

We are lucky to be able to tap into the five years experience of the *Mumbles Tourist Information Centre's* work running the successful Gower Walking Festival to help us with the organisation. We also have information from other cycling festivals so we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

My vision is to bring together a number of local cycling and other organisations, eg CTC, Bikeability (Wales), Swansea Outdoor Group and Swansea Council, into a joint venture which could have other spin offs for our campaigning to improve facilities for local cyclists.

With both the Cork and Ilfracombe ferry links starting in 2010 [See *article on p.8, Ed.*] there is an opportunity to attract cyclists from Ireland, Devon and Cornwall to our Festival and in the longer term to S. Wales for its cycle touring potential. And they will link us with cycle routes in Devon, Cornwall and Ireland.

Above all we want the Festival to be fun, energising and put Swansea firmly on the cycling map.



Nick Guy
(*Wheelrights'*
Chairman)

Promoting Cycling

If you receive CTC's on-line newsletter *Newsnet* you might have seen in the 27th November issue a link to a meeting of a Scottish Parliament Committee at which cycling representatives were questioned by SMPs as to how best to promote cycling in Scotland. The cycling representatives comprised two from *Cycle England*, one from the CTC and two from Scotland. This hour long video is so well informed and as applicable here as it is in Scotland that I have attempted in what follows to capture some of the highlights.

What makes people cycle? *Cycle England's* research indicates that the perception of improved health is the most important factor which gets people on bikes; convenience and money saved are of lesser importance, and least important is that it's green! The word *cyclist* invokes the image of a lycra lout who jumps traffic lights. People who want to cycle don't want to be *cyclists*. This image acts as a deterrent. That you can cycle in ordinary clothes and don't need special facilities (showers at work are not necessary) needs to be communicated.

Barriers to cycling. These are classified as *internal* and *external*. Internal barriers such as lack of fitness, the perception that hills are a problem and getting wet diminish as people cycle; external barriers mostly relate to infrastructure: while these are real barriers they are often overstated. Infrastructure issues were considered in some depth in the exchanges. The perception that journeys are too long is unfounded. The reality is that a large proportion of car trips are short and suitable for cycling. Despite the greater distances between communities the largest proportion of school journeys made by bike (nearly 10%) is in the Highlands.

Funding and infrastructure. Based on the English cycle demonstration towns £5 of Government money plus £5 match funding per head would be appropriate for a 6 year period. (Not clear if this is for infrastructure only or includes 'soft' measures.) £ for £ investment in cycling is cost effective, particularly when the savings in health costs are taken into account. Costs should be taken out of not just transport budgets, but also from other areas which benefit, in particular health. The development of cycling infrastructure should be *integrated* not *piecemeal*. But this does not mean uniformity. Provision should be made based on local needs. eg segregated paths may be needed in an urban area but not in rural. The need for good quality cycle routes, pot hole free and well surfaced, to attract cyclists was emphasised,

Legal. It was highlighted that the law needed changing so that, as in Northern Europe, a motorist in collision with a cyclist would be liable unless proven otherwise.

Safety. It was accepted that road danger was a problem, but noted that cycle accidents have reduced despite an increase in the number of cyclists; there is *safety in numbers*. Measures to improve safety include provision of space for cyclists and speed control, esp. 20mph zones. Mothers needed to be convinced that it was OK for their kids to cycle. They should be allowed to cycle on pavements up to the age of 10, by which age they should be sufficiently trained (by eg the *Bikeability* programme) to cycle on the road.

Cycle training. The importance of this, in particular *Bikeability*, was emphasised.

Women. Women are different from men! It was suggested that what they wear when cycling and how they appear are more important for them. The proportion of women cycling is higher in places where there is more cycling, eg 40% in Cambridge.

David Naylor

For sale

Two *Giant* bikes: a gent's ALUXX and a lady's CRS4. Both bikes as new. Asking prices: £200 for the gent's and £175 for the lady's. (These are close to half the purchase price.) Phone Joy Chapman on 01550 775875.

Joy had learnt to ride at one of our Adult Beginners Classes but unfortunately for different reasons neither she nor her husband can use these bikes.

The Speed of Progress

Let's talk politics. Our small but significant victory in the matter of bicycle carriage on the Swansea-Ilfracombe ferry recently got me thinking. I was almost indecently pleased at how easy it was compared to other campaigns I've been involved in, and quickly had to remind myself that it does not necessarily herald a utopia for cyclists and pedestrians. On the other hand, optimism can motivate us and help us toward greater successes.

How do we, a diverse bunch of cyclists with different ideas about where we are going and how we should be getting there, evaluate our progress? Are things getting materially better for us, or is every small victory just another concession to a freakish minority, designed to demonstrate the grudging tolerance of the dominant culture without troubling it to change very much? I'll lay my political cards on the table – at heart I crave radical change.

Campaigning, for me, is ultimately about the promise of transformation, and I am impatient with mere reform. I would find it difficult to get animated about dropped kerbs and proper signage if, somewhere beyond it all, there were not a more exciting vision to work towards. For me that involves rethinking the space and time we inhabit: the texture of our communities, the ways we interact with others, and how we allocate our time to different activities.

And where, you might ask, does the bicycle come in, amidst all this pontificating? Well, we've recently been hob-nobbing with a lot of councillors and politicians, and finding that they are softening a little towards us. They talk a lot about the desirability, and some even talk about the possibility, of "replacing" car journeys with other modes of transport. It occurred to me (and I don't claim it's an original thought) that we're looking at it the wrong way round. That the question ought not to be how do we replace the car, but how on earth did we ever come to think that the car could replace the bicycle?

Our esteemed *Wheelrights* President testified recently that his whole understanding of another nation was transformed by the simple act of pedalling around it and talking to people. How many people get off the car ferry and say anything like that? But it doesn't just apply to foreign shores – we understand and experience our own everyday lives and our own communities differently when we have a different relationship to them in terms of time, speed, closeness, conviviality, autonomy and interdependence. The car, and the economy and infrastructure it both serves and requires, alienates us from our communities and indeed from our lives.

There – I've said it – I don't like cars! This admission is bad PR in a climate in which change is predicated on the desirability of meeting the needs of different "road users". We have fallen for the Blairite notion that conflict is essentially a matter of misunderstanding; that it can be managed away if everyone makes a bit of a compromise. For those of us weary of confrontation, it's an attractive notion. My only problem with it is that it isn't true. Motorised private transport will continue to degrade our social environment in the pursuit of freedoms that are not only illusory, but can never be available equally to us all. Ivan Illich wrote that "beyond a critical speed, no one can save time without forcing another to lose it." That was back in 1973, and the critical speed he envisaged was about 15mph. A cyclist friend of mine today argues that it's nearer 20, but then he does have Dura-Ace bearings. Either way, I'll leave you with more of Illich's words, and insist only that "free people must travel the road to productive social relations at the speed of a bicycle."



Claudine Conway

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A family rides from Cardiff to Bangor

Every summer for the last five years we have been on a cycle tour in France or Spain. This year we felt like doing something different. I spent many evenings on the web looking for inspiration and the ideal family touring destination. We wanted quiet roads, scenery, interesting places to stay, good weather and we did not want to go on a plane!

Whilst riding to work one particularly pleasant morning I realised that the answer was staring me in the face – Wales. It has it all. Well, except the weather bit. So we booked a string of hostels from Cardiff to Bangor. I then tried to book the train home from North Wales for three solos and one tandem. To cut a long story short, it was impossible! Restrictions on the bike numbers per train can be overcome - the tandem ban on Arriva trains was a show stopper.

Getting to Cardiff was a different matter. We, Jemima, Lucy, Naomi, Sam and me, cycled from our home in Gower one drizzly morning and fought our way from our fantastic sea front cycle path, through the confusion of Swansea city centre and straight onto a First Great Western 125. We managed to get our bikes off in Cardiff Central without delaying the train by too much and after a short ride through the town centre, we found ourselves in Cardiff Youth Hostel with a comfortable family room.

The morning dawned dry and we set off. From the hostel we found our way to the Taff trail which we followed to Merthyr. It was our first time for this section and we enjoyed it immensely – except the gates which were not ideal for loaded tandems. I had also underestimated how long the trail would take, basing my calculations on road riding. The traffic free route was significantly slower. It was worth it though and we missed the peace and quiet as from Merthyr we headed directly up to Storey Arms up the busy A470. A quick stop at the top of the pass and we freewheeled down to spend the night at the excellent Llwyn y Celyn Youth Hostel.

The next couple of days found us meandering through deserted lanes with beautiful views wondering where all the other cycle tourists were. After a picnic with the grandparents who came to meet us with baskets of food we climbed slowly up to the Llyn Brianne dam before following the shores of the lake to Dolgoch hostel. Now run by an independent trust linked to the YHA, Dolgoch is how hostels used to be. Gas lights, spring water, a log fire and maps on the wall. Go there if you have a chance – it is perfect for cycle tourists.

Leaving the hostel the next morning we wound our way up a series of steep hair pins on the Tregaron road. The eventual descent to Tregaron was worth all the effort, and satisfied my eight year old stoker's taste of speed! From Tregaron there is a traffic free route right through the middle of Cors Caron, or Tregaron Bog. We stopped in the middle for a picnic



Lucy and Hamish



In the Ogwen valley



and marvelled at the change of scenery we had witnessed since setting out that morning. The afternoon took us to the swish Borth Youth Hostel. A complete contrast to the simplicity of the previous night.

The road from Borth to just outside Machynlleth was possibly the busiest of the trip. We made good time however and reached the Centre for Alternative Technology for lunch and a lightening tour of its displays. Arriving by bike gained us a discount – and Lucy’s face beamed with pride as she explained to someone in the queue that she had cycled from Cardiff!

The ride from the CAT to Dolgellau was one of the highlights of the whole trip. We followed Route 8 to Corris and beyond, over a steep and remote pass on a traffic free track. From the top of the pass it is nearly all downhill to Dolgellau – a fantastic entrance into town and a meal in a restaurant before a night in a local bunkhouse.

The next morning it was raining! The first proper rain since leaving Cardiff. We set off on Route 8 again, clad in waterproofs and expecting to keep them on all day. By lunch time they were off, the sun was out and we were happy. The route climbed up to Coed y Brenin through lush forests alongside tumbling mountain streams. For the first time we met several cycle tourists travelling in the opposite direction from us – including a German on a recumbent struggling with the gravel tracks we were enjoying.

After a picnic at the superb mountain bike centre, we continued through the forest and out into the open where we were rewarded by a panoramic view of the Rhinogs. We then swooped down into Trawsfynedd, where we dived into the trees along route 8, passing close by the Nuclear Power Station and through a maze of lanes and tracks towards Maentwrog where we said goodbye to Route 8 for the last time.

Heading ever northwards, we enjoyed a hilly but picturesque route through the heart of Snowdonia to our final Night at Bryn Gwynant Hostel. The hostel sits in a superb location below the looming bulk of Snowdon’s eastern flank and the kids loved it’s country manor house atmosphere.

The next morning dawned bright and breezy. Sad to be on our last day but enjoying perfect scenery and surprisingly quiet roads, we set out for Bangor. We were caught by one brief shower before we entered the spectacular Ogwen valley and a series of quiet back roads and traffic free paths that led us to the heart of Bangor – our final destination.

In Bangor we loaded up the car I had left the week before and set off south. It would have been so much better in so many ways to have loaded our bikes onto a train and relaxed as we headed home. Still, it was a fantastic tour, a near perfect route and I feel the girls shared a real sense of achievement to have cycled the length of their beautiful country. And, with one morning of rain in a week of cycling, we got the weather we wanted after all.

Hamish Osborn

Rides in 2010

In the last issue I commented on the Explorer rides programme and indicated that we would do something different next year. I also mentioned that a Cycling Festival was on the cards and as you can read in Nick Guy's article on p. 3 this is now a firm proposition.

We sent out two questionnaires to members in October: the first a rides questionnaire to inform us what form you think a rides programme should take next year, and the second a general questionnaire to guide us in our activities. Summaries of the replies to these questionnaires are provided in the Appendices to the Notes of our 23rd November agm. (See the 'Various' page of our website.) I focus here on the rides; suffice it to mention that the message from the general questionnaire was on the lines of 'keep up the good work'.

Of the dozen Explorer rides we held this year a couple were joined by families with young children, but only one stands out of being of real help to a beginner and that was the one to which we devoted an article in the last issue. Of the many *Wheelrights* members who had learnt to ride at our classes only one returned a questionnaire. Most were returned by people who described themselves as "regular cyclists". This suggests that we should find a different way to help our beginners and provide rides a little longer than the Explorer rides.

Details of the questionnaire findings are given in the agm notes, but in essence they indicate that most would prefer a monthly ride. We did not ask about the preferred distance having previously decided that a 2 to 3 hour ride (10-20 miles) would be suitable. There being no clear preference about when, but with more preferring Saturday to Sunday we are proposing rides on that day starting at 10.00 and finishing in time for lunch in the vicinity of a pub or café.

A key factor is that the CTC have also identified a need for short rides. Those we propose would provide a stepping stone to their Sunday and Wednesday all-day rides which are generally more than 30 miles. So the plan is for our rides to be joint with the CTC.

There will be a meeting at 7.00 pm on 18th January in the Environment Centre to progress both the rides programme and the Cycling Festival. Please come along if you feel you can help.

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Ferries

To Cork

The Company is the Fastnet Line (www.fastnetline.co.uk) and the service is due to start on 1 March 2010. The *Julia* will leave at 21.00 and arrive at 07.00 the next morning. There will be three of these overnight crossings per week each way with additional day crossings planned for peak periods. They will take bikes but we don't know yet whether or not there will be a charge for them. At the time of writing their prices have not been announced but they should be soon.

To Ilfracombe

Thanks to Claudine's initiative *Severn Link*, who plan a catamaran passenger service from Swansea to Ilfracombe starting next Spring, have reversed their initial ban on bikes. As members will be aware she provided the link which enabled us to send a message to *Severn Link*. I forwarded this to my CTC contacts. Quite a few of us sent messages to the Company pointing out how it would be in their interest to allow us to take bikes. Their U turn came just a couple of days later. I posted the good news on the CTC national Right to Ride Forum and since then messages of thanks to *Wheelrights* have been received from far and wide.

The crossing is expected to take 50 minutes, and with morning and evening sailings this opens up the possibility of day trips to Devon (as is suggested for our Cycling Festival, see p.3).

We have yet to learn when the service will start, what the time table will be, how many bikes they will take and whether or not there will be a bike charge. A figure of £22 has been given for a one way crossing. Their website is www.severnlink.com.

David Naylor