



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 11 Spring 2010

www.wheelrights.org.uk

Traxeyes show the way

You would have to be seriously impaired to veer off the Clyne Valley cycle path at night. The edges of the path are now clearly illuminated by *traxeyes* (the white blobs in the photo). They are spaced at 5m intervals on both sides between Blackpill and Dunvant. These clever devices collect light during the day – apparently in a matter of minutes – and then glow for up to 12 hours. They are secured by nails and a hard-to-remove glue which can be applied to a wet surface. So, fingers crossed, they will last a while.

We can thank Rob Wachowski, Swansea's Cycling Officer, for this splendid initiative.



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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 May.

Hopefully by the time you read this there will be signs of Spring and you will be pumping up tyres to get out on that bike. As you won't need telling, and the picture on p. 2 illustrates, it has been a cold winter; even the CTC had to cancel some rides.

This year *Wheelrights* are trying something different from the *Explorer* rides of the last two years. Find out on p. 8 how we hope to entice near beginners and occasional cyclists out on their bikes.. These rides should provide a warm up for our *Gower Cycling Festival* about which Nick Guy writes on p.3

Then there are some tit-bits about the CTC on p. 4.

Claudine follows this on p. 5 with an important piece about the CTC, then the theme changes to bikes on trains. Hamish Osborne follows up his story in the previous issue with another epic adventure with four ladies – he is a brave fellow! If you want to take tandems on an Arriva train you will now know who to consult.

David Naylor

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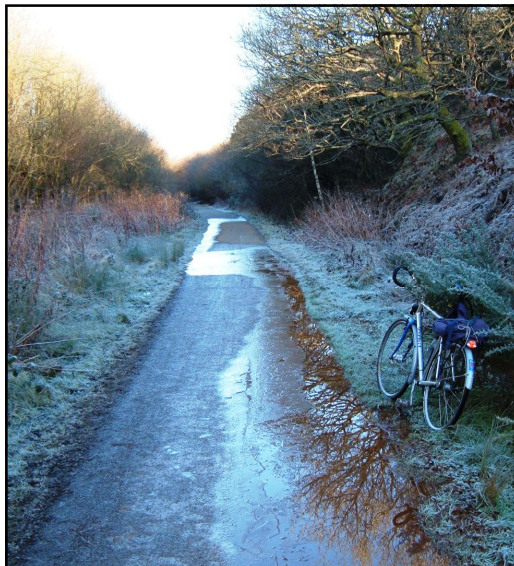
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Money for maintenance?

To quote from the 5th February *Evening Post*:
“Councils across Wales have been told they must spend at least five percent of the cash they receive to spend on roads on maintaining cycle routes”. This of course is splendid news for cyclists but it must put our cash-strapped councils on the spot. Lets hope it materialises and then problems such as the flooding of the Clyne path at Dunvant can be solved. The water had mostly turned to ice when the photo was taken on 10th February. (Not having diamond studded tyres your correspondent dismounted!)

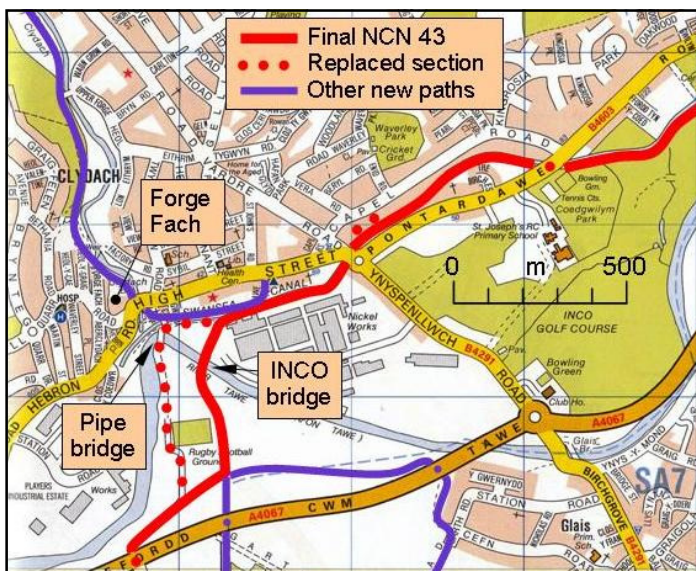
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Connect 2: Clydach

It is over two years since Sustrans won the £50m Lottery award and since then Helen Davies has been patiently and persistently ploughing through the red tape to bring the project to fruition. This has involved negotiations with bureaucracies such as British Waterways, the railways and of course the local councils. She has had to find match funding to expand our modest £200k share of the award to an estimated total of £900k. In addition she has had to keep on board the locals whose interests sometimes conflict with those of cyclists. Sharing routes with walkers, bird watchers, fishermen and horse riders requires both mutual respect and suitable infrastructure.

The final alignment has now been agreed and is shown on the map. The main feature is the use of INCO's bridge across the river. This replaces the infamous pipe bridge and is a short distance upstream of it. The canal tow-path is to be improved – part already has been (except that at the time of writing it needs a more cycle-friendly surfacing). In addition to the NCN 43 improvements new links are to be provided to Glais to the east and also to the northwest. The work has to be finished by the end of 2012.



There will be an exhibition at the Forge Fach Centre, Clydach (see map), open to the public from 2.30 to 7.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 29, 31 March and 1 April. Here you will be able to find out all about the project and there will be people there (Helen if you're lucky) to answer your questions.

David Naylor

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Gower Cycling Festival gets into Gear

(18-25 September 2010)

The Working Group has started preparations for this new *Wheelrights* initiative.

We are planning a wide range of cycle routes and events to cater for all sorts of cyclists, including:

- a Fun Ride for families with young children;
- long rides for fit cyclists;
- a ride in the Clyne Valley for people with disabilities using *Bikeability's* bikes;
- a ride in North Devon using the new fast ferry to Ilfracombe (www.Severnlink.com), and;
- even a ride for teenagers!

With the support of Swansea Council, Mumbles Tourist Information Centre and the Gower Heritage Centre this major event, comprising about 15 rides and a Festival Party, is starting to take shape.

The idea for the Festival was inspired by the *Gower Walking Festival*. Their organisers are helping us with the organisation of ours and who, in recognition of the importance they attach to cycling, have included a cycling *and* walking event in this year's Walking Festival. It is to be on 19th June and the cycling bit – a modest ride in North Gower – will be led by David Naylor. (See the Events page of www.wheelrights.org.uk for details.) Also, on 5th June, we have arranged for one of our *Wheelrights* rides (see p.8) to follow the formal opening of the Walking Festival by Edwina Hart, thus enabling the participants to attend the opening.

2010 sees the re-launch of the Cork Ferry as well as that to Ilfracombe, both with the potential of bringing cyclists to Swansea. We thus hope that our Cycling Festival together with the formal launch of our new Swansea Cycling Map (see article below) will help put cycling firmly on the map in this area.

Information about the Festival will soon appear on www.wheelrights.org.uk. A separate page for it is planned.

Nick Guy (*Wheelrights'* Chairman)

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Swansea Cycling Map

In the Summer 2009 Newsletter we reported the launch of this map. There was a problem however as it fell foul of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA). Fortunately, thanks to Sustrans' diplomacy, the problem has been overcome. The maps can now be issued, but subject to the sticker shown here being attached to each map. A formal launch is planned; when and where will be put on *Wheelrights* website when known.



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Sustrans Rangers get to work

On 6th and 13th February Swansea's Sustrans Rangers, helped by one or two others, checked NCN's 4 and 43. They cleared vegetation (including a sizeable tree blocking NCN 43) and put up signs between Loughor Bridge and the County boundary north of Clydach. The pic. shows them hard at work near Morfa.

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CTC: to unify or not to unify?

At the time of writing there is a hot debate going on about whether or not the CTC should change from its present two arm status – the Club and the Charitable Trust – to a single charity. CTC's management is pushing for this, but there are a growing number of members who are not sure that it is a good idea. This has led to a strong 'No' vote lobby. Claudine, in her article on the next page, presents their case. The issue will be decided at CTC's AGM in May when a 75% 'Yes' vote is required for unification to take place.

Our local Member Group at a recent meeting – yes it was the cake meeting described below – debated this and decided not to take a position on the issue. In view of its importance they do however urge members to make up their own minds and use their AGM proxy vote. Initially, to prime this debate and subsequently to assist local CTC members make up their minds, a one page summary of the issue has been provided on the 'Various' page of www.wheelrights.org.uk.

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The CTC eat cake

CTC's Swansea and West Wales Member Group had a committee meeting on 1st February. Now committee meetings tend to be boring affairs, but not this one! It really goes back to their much respected Chairman, Trevor Boylan, who tragically died on a CTC ride in November 2007. Trevor had a penchant for carrot cake and on the sociable ride lunch stops he would refuel with a slice of this delicacy if it was available. This rubbed off on the others, and then on Trevor's second memorial ride last November (the first is described in the Winter 2008/9 Newsletter) Phil provided a barabrith which he himself had baked. So there just had to be a CTC cake competition! It was the last item on the agenda for the 1st February meeting.

But before getting on to the cake competition the other items on the agenda are worthy of mention, in particular their rides' programme for this year. Not content with weekly rides on Sundays and Wednesday (and recently with two on some Wednesdays) an 'Away Day' to London, another to the Cotswlds – which since it involves two nights away from Swansea is rather a long day – and, as if that were not enough, a ten day cycling holiday in Santander in September (carefully timed to be home for our Gower Cycling Festival).

Then there was a debate on the serious issue of the proposed unification of the CTC, summarised above.

At last they got down to the really serious business. There were ten cakes, all of which had to be tasted by all. Now this had to be like a wine tasting: just a mouthful or two of each cake. Unfortunately those with cameras were so quick off the mark with the tasting that the virgin cakes didn't get photo'd. The pic. shows them when the tasting was well underway.

A fair way of judging was devised by the Chairman. Each person was provided with a slip of paper which he or she placed by the cake they judged the best. Voting for your own cake was not allowed.

A date and walnut cake was judged the best. Interestingly – and maybe there's a message here – this was the first cake the winner had baked!



David Naylor

This CTC Thing...

Forgive me for harping on, but I am preoccupied. As David has already indicated on p. 4, a Special Resolution will be proposed at this year's AGM, that the CTC should merge its Club and a Charitable Trust arms into a single body and become a fully-fledged charity. It sounds dull, but bear with me. Wheelrights is a CTC affiliate, and many of us have individual membership. Beyond that, CTC's activities have always had a resonance for all cyclists, and in a more general sense for groups and communities who work together to achieve, well..., conviviality.

For the best of motives, people are inclined to look approvingly on charities. They feed the hungry and rescue people at sea – what's not to like? Councillors in favour of the change are capitalising on this good feeling when they email members (as they have done recently) to urge them to vote for the change and to pay no heed to those who raise questions about the move. They will imply that clubs are exclusive and backward-looking, whilst charities look forward and work for everyone. I urge members not to be too easily persuaded by this rhetoric, and will try in this brief column to explain why not.

The issues are too lengthy to cover in detail here, but to oversimplify a little, there are three things we should be concerned about – money, politics and democracy.

Money first! We know that the Club has transferred its biggest assets to the Trust, that it loans and donates large sums to the Trust, and that no itemised account of how this money is used is available to members. Members are rightly concerned that the Club's funds are not protected from financial risks taken by the Trust. CTC Director Kevin Mayne claims that, far from the Club funding the Trust, the Trust is ploughing money from profitable contracts back into the Club to the benefit of members, but is unable to specify how due to the complex rules of charity finance. This claim will surprise anyone who has read the independent report on the disastrous recent state of CTC Membership services *. It will also surprise Right to Ride reps and local group secretaries who have been seeking support, information and assistance from National Office – many groups have trouble obtaining even a list of members in their area. Mayne claims that 19 of the staff employed by the Trust are working for the members. What, then, are they doing, and why have we only heard of one of them (the excellent Chris Juden)?

We know also that the Club has a proud history as a politically robust organisation that represents the interests of its members. However, as a Charity (though it may do excellent work) it *cannot* legally act solely in members' interests – it *must* always put public interest first. I go back to the issue of rhetoric, and what 'public benefit' actually means. I am happy to concede that the Trust's work includes projects that are good for cycling *and* good for communities, but the social value of any activity is fair game for wider political strategies. In a Club we may protect unpopular interests that are threatened by political trends, and fight for rights that no-one else might recognise as important. And I can't help wondering why cyclists in particular should match-fund government contracts if they are for the benefit of all – isn't that what general taxation is for?

Thirdly, we have come to know that, whatever the advantages or disadvantages of the Charity proposal, CTC National Office has been tasked to deliver a "Yes" vote and to forestall any opposition. We know this because we have a draft of the Communications Plan! * Is it old-fashioned of me to think that the task of staff working for the Club should be to make sure members are properly informed so that they are in a position to make the best decision on the future of their club? If there is one overwhelming reason why members should reject this *irreversible* change until they have time to consider it further, it is the fact that those at the top tried to get it past them unnoticed. If it's such a self-evidently good idea, what have they got to fear from transparency and debate?

Claudine Conway

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* Members may contact me for a copy of these documents (claud@volcanotheatre.co.uk). This is a personal view - I am associated with the "No" campaign (www.savethectc.org.uk). **CC**

A Welsh adventure and Arriva

The countryside around the Brecon Beacons is perfect for cycle touring. It is also within easy reach of Swansea so was an obvious choice for a short tour in August last year.

Lucy (8) and I set off on a tandem accompanied by Sarah and Anna (9) on another tandem and Anna's sister Amy (12) on her solo. Our first night found us in the Landdeusant Youth Hostel.

The following day we rolled along empty country lanes with beautiful views of the Beacons to the south. Even in this notoriously hilly countryside, going 'with the grain' offers easy cycling and we reached Brecon by early afternoon. After riding the first few miles of the Brecon to Monmouth canal we stopped briefly to watch a family of Australians make a good show of navigating their first lock before turning off for a short ride up to Brecon YH for our second night.

The morning dawned wet and windy. We donned waterproofs and set off into the teeth of a south westerly gale. We made the National Park Visitor Centre at Libanus for lunch in the café and then set off to brave the pass between Heol Senni and Ystradfellte. On first seeing the road wind up into the clouds the children began to question our sanity – but we soon found ourselves at the top of the pass, Amy beaming with satisfaction having made it all the way in the saddle.

Our hard work was rewarded by an exhilarating descent to Ystradfellte where we were booked into the Clyngwyn Bunkhouse. It is a shame that Ystrad' YH has closed but the bunkhouse is highly recommended.

The next morning we were treated to a huge breakfast by Julie who runs the bunkhouse. Then as the girls were exploring the field while we loaded the bikes a man staggered towards us out of breath and obviously disturbed. He was on holiday from Holland and explained that his wife had fallen whilst exploring the nearby gorge. I spent the next three hours assisting the emergency services rescue the injured woman who was taken to hospital in an RAF Sea King.

I felt somewhat dazed after the morning's events as we finally left the village. We followed the Neath Canal and arrived in Neath tired and considerably later than expected. At this point we decided that it would be prudent to shorten our journey home by taking the train to Gowerton.

The guards van on the First Great Western train to Swansea swallowed our two tandems and a solo with out any problems. In Swansea we then attempted to board the first train to Gowerton only to be told by the conductor that there was no way he would accept tandems and that the next train would be unlikely to take our bikes either. It was late and the girls were tired but we were about to give up and cycle when the heavens opened. One more try I thought. The next train arrived and I started loading the bikes when the conductor arrived. He laughed and asked where we were getting off before helping us load the bikes into the already crowded train. We were delighted. One Arriva employee had made our day and after our earlier experience, we arrived at Gowerton with our faith in railway staff restored. I only hope our email of thanks to the Arriva guard got to him in person.



Lucy: the tandem stoker

A few days later the Dutch man called to thank us. His wife, although injured, was going to be fine.

Hamish Osborn

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Bikes on Trains in Britain

There is a perception that it is difficult to take bikes on trains in this country, so difficult that many will give up on the idea of using trains to get to the start or finish of a cycle touring holiday. But my experience is that if there are not more than two of you the situation is quite good. I have in recent years taken my bike (and sometimes my wife's as well) on dozens of train journeys across the UK and only once did I have to change plans for lack of bike space. (That was in 2008 on the Caledonian sleeper from Inverness to London.)

While many trains have a theoretical maximum of just two bikes it is usually possible to take more. When the allotted places are full the train manager is within his or her rights to turn you away, but it rarely happens. It is a bit like crimes: the media thrives on them, but the chances of you being robbed, mugged or murdered are much less than the publicity would suggest.

There are significant differences between the Train Operating Companies. Arriva and Scot Rail welcome cyclists. Even though many of their trains only have space for two bikes several times I have encountered more and the train manager has not objected. There is usually additional space which can be used for bikes, eg where there are folding seats along the side of the carriage. The situation appears to be similar for other operators in the North and Northeast – I don't have experience of the South. First Great Western are different, as are Virgin. Let me explain.

The 125s of First Great Western, which ply between Swansea and London, take six bikes. They go in a baggage compartment inaccessible from the passenger area. This means that having fixed your bike you have to get out of the train and back in again; so if you are not quick you and your steed may get separated! Furthermore the bikes are secured with fiddly Velcro straps (many of which have lost their grip). There is however nearly always available bike space, although on one occasion there were eight bikes in the six bike compartment as my train left Cardiff.

Virgin Cross Country, which you would use from Bristol Parkway or Crewe if travelling to the North, run the fast but invariably crowded *Voyager* trains. They take just four bikes. And you do need to book ahead. There is no space for extra bikes, and even if there is you are liable to be turned away.

How are bikes stored? In local trains they are often secured horizontally by seat belt type straps. This works well. The Virgin trains (and also the *Caledonian* sleeper from London to the Highlands) suspend the bikes from ceiling hooks. This is an efficient arrangement: Great Western could copy it.

Just recently I encountered the generous provision illustrated. It was in a local train from North Berwick to Edinburgh. The space was designed for eight bikes, half of which can be seen in the photo. Several more could easily have been accommodated. Only on the Continent have I seen anything comparable. A foretaste of the future?



David Naylor

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Adult Beginner's Classes

The first three classes this year will be at 9.30 In the Civic Centre East car park (ie the usual venue) on Saturdays 10 April, 12 June, and 24 July. A fourth is planned for September. If you are interested phone Veronica on 01792 206617 or Rhian on 01792 510470.

2010 Rides Programme

This year something a little different from the *Explorer* rides of the last two years is on offer. Instead of targeting complete beginners the rides are aimed at near beginners, returning cyclists or anybody who would enjoy a gentle ride of around two hours (10-20 miles) with the option of a sociable lunch afterwards in a nearby pub or café. To achieve this most start at 10.00am on the third Saturday of each month from March to November with alternating west and east venues.

To join a ride simply turn up on your bike at the venue given below. Phoning the leader (numbers at bottom of page) is however recommended, especially if there is a chance of the ride being cancelled due to bad weather.

Note that this programme may require amendment so check www.wheelrights.org.uk, ('Events' page) for an up-to-date version. Also changes may be made on the day according to who turns up and the weather conditions.

Key to the ride start/finish (S/F). GR = Grid Ref. eg on OS 1:50,000 sheet 159.

BP Blackpill Lido café (GR 593323)	Dcp Dunvant Car Park by NCN 4 (GR 596939)
Com Commercial Inn car park, Gowerton (GR 593323)	RI Railway Inn by NCN 4 (GR 598924)
	SB Sail Bridge, Swansea (GR 662929)

Date	S/F	Time	Description
Saturday 20 th Mar.	RI	10.00	North Gower. Clockwise circuit: climb to Three Crosses, down over Welshmoor to Llanrhidian, back along the coast. Leader: Rhian Evans
Saturday 17 th April	RI	10.00	Mystery ride. A gentle ride at the whim of the leader: Nick Guy.
Saturday 15 th May	SB	10.00	Swansea Valley: up NCN 43 to Clydach and possibly beyond; chance to check out the planned new Connect 2 route. Leader: Mike Lewis
Saturday 5 th June	BP	10.00	A SE Gower Exploration. A short ride in the Mumbles area following the opening of the <i>Gower Walking Festival</i> . Leader: Claudine Conway
Monday 21 st June	Dcp	18.30	Wheelrights mid-summer ride.* Normally this classic ride follows the coast to the N. Gower Hotel in Llanrhidian. Leader: David Judd
Saturday 19 th June	Com	10.00	Blackhills Wild Flower Centre. 14 mile ride there; lunch, then 3 mile (optional) walk. A <i>Gower Walking Festival</i> event Leader: David Naylor.
Saturday 17 th July	SB	10.00	Crymlyn Bog circuit. NCN 43 to the Enterprise zone, up and over to the east, back via Jersey Marine and NCN 4. Leader: Eifion Francis
Saturday 14 th Aug.	RI**	9.30	Pontardulais:** A flat ride up the Lliw Valley cycle path and back west of estuary. (19 miles from Rly Inn, 13 from Gowerton). Leader: Bob Smith.
Saturday 18 th Sep.	BP	10.00	Gower Cycling Festival: choice of rides following the formal opening. (See Festival programme.) Leaders: Nick Guy/David Naylor.
Saturday 25 th Sep.	RI	10.00	Gower Cycling Festival: choice of North Gower ride. Leader: Bob Smith; or (if you are one) the teenager's ride. (See Festival programme.)
Saturday 16 th Oct.	SB	10.00	A ride to the east: maybe a circuit of Crymlyn Bog via east side of Kilvey Hill or alternatively a flat ride to Aberavon . Leader: Jan Garvey.
Saturday 20 th Nov.	RI	10.00	Mumbles/S. Gower. An easy ride in this area to suit the participants. Leader: Phil Jones

* Bring lights in case we dally in the pub.

** Or Mill St./Gowerton By-pass traffic lights at 10.00

Ride leaders' phone numbers:

Claudine Conway: 07918 140124	Nick Guy 01792 476178	Mike Lewis 07846 570178
Rhian Evans: 01792 510470	Phil Jones 01792 234705	David Naylor 01792 233755
Eifion Francis: 07773 139058	David Judd 07967 613920	Bob Smith 01792 850650
Jan Garvey: 07861 684722		