



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 9 Autumn 2009

www.wheelrights.org.uk

Amazon Roundabout



We first drew the attention of Neath Port Talbot CBC to the dangers of this roundabout in the Spring of last year. Nothing having been done we raised the matter again this summer and at the time of writing have received no more than a note from the (WAG) roundabout designers denying that there is a problem. We have presented them with a detailed safety assessment with proposals for short and long term solutions. We await their response..

NCN 4 crosses five slip roads on the north side of this huge roundabout. There are several danger points but arguably the two most dangerous are illustrated in the photo. This shows the approach

from the west to the first two slip roads – no warning markings on road or path: just a dropped kerb with traffic sweeping round. To see this coming you have to look back over your right shoulder. So, having safely negotiated the first slip road you arrive at the next, similarly unmarked crossing (just visible in the background). Here you would expect the traffic to come from the left, where, as it would be approaching, you would see it coming; but NO, the traffic on this road also comes from the right. This is *very* dangerous. Apparently the design had three “safety audits”. Safe no doubt for the drivers but what about the vulnerable road users?

Details of both our safety assessment and our proposed solutions can be found on the ‘Various’ page of our website (www.wheelrights.org.uk)

David Naylor

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Copy deadline

Copy for the next issue should be sent to *Wheelrights* Secretary (e-mail address below) by mid November 2009.

Editorial

While the Amazon roundabout problem above is a key campaigning issue for *Wheelrights*, on a more positive note we describe on p. 2 & 3 progress on some of the initiatives which arose from John Grimshaw’s Spring visit (reported in the last issue).

Something not so positive is the lack of interest in our Explorer rides. They are intended as a follow up to our beginners classes but lack beginners! The article on p. 5 shows how they can be effective. See also p. 8

As in the previous issues we have a range of contributions, including on p. 4 an insight into what is involved in becoming a cycle instructor, potential controversy on p. 6, and on p.7 a different woman’s perspective. (But Claudine will be back!)

David Naylor

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A colourful signpost

I wonder who remembers the Rowe Milepost that disappeared from Blackpill around seven years ago? It was one of around 1000 located on the National Cycle Network in four different sculptures, donated by the Royal Bank of Scotland (before their troubles), and greatly appreciated at the time..

Well it has been re-erected after being found in a Council yard. Originally they were black with white lettering but most are now superseded by the more readable millennium posts with finials. However these mileposts still have value as sculptures, especially if they are given a makeover.



I am delighted with the artistic flair Bishopston Comprehensive pupils have shown with this one that was unveiled recently at Blackpill. Sited alongside the Foreshore cyclepath on a vantage point overlooking the bay near the Clyne Brook Bridge it has views of Mumbles, the "train" and handprints of the artists of all ages painted on it.



Some thirty of the school choir plus staff attended the unveiling, braving the rain and wind they sang several delightful songs before disappearing for an ice cream at Joes. Very well done to them all.

I was very glad of the help in putting it up (from those involved in our cycle training session that morning at Dunvant); its a bit of a lump to say the least. Thanks also to the County Council who cast the new concrete base.

David Judd

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Follow up to John Grimshaw's visit

When John Grimshaw visited Swansea on 28/29th April he made a number of suggestions most of which we are following up. Three are as follows.

As explained in Nick Guy's article on p. 3 of the Summer Newsletter Swansea Council have agreed to provide seminars to inform their designers how to design cycle-friendly infrastructure. The first of these, to be given by JG himself, is now targeted for October. (Date still to be fixed.)

Another key initiative is the Thursday *Evening Post* ride descriptions; see article on next page.

We have submitted a comprehensive 'wish list' to the Council which they have welcomed and a meeting is planned to prioritise the items. Included is the Gowerton – Kingsbridge 'missing link', described on p. 4 of the Summer issue. We hope to have high priority assigned to this. To progress this we are making enquiries about land ownership.

Do we need more signposts?

Looking at the excellent new bike map it is now clear that Swansea has the potential for a comprehensive network of cycle routes covering the whole city.

Many of these are well known to regular cyclists. However, for beginners or visitors to the area it is difficult to discover where many routes lead due to a lack of destination signs.

This was brought home to me on a cycling holiday this summer across Wiltshire. At one junction, which lacked a destination sign, we took a wrong turning. This added four miles to our journey so that we had less time for our evening drink in the special pub which was our goal for that day!

I believe Swansea could do with more destination signs for cyclists. This would help promote cycling in the area, both for locals and for visitors. Signs are needed where a cycle route intersects a main road and these should be supplemented by signs on the ground.

Nick Guy (*Wheelrights' Chair*)

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Evening Post ride descriptions

These local ride descriptions, reported in the Summer Newsletter, have continued to appear in the *Evening Post* on Thursdays. The rides are typically in the 5 to 15 mile range and some of them relate to our Explorer rides. They are accompanied by a photo.

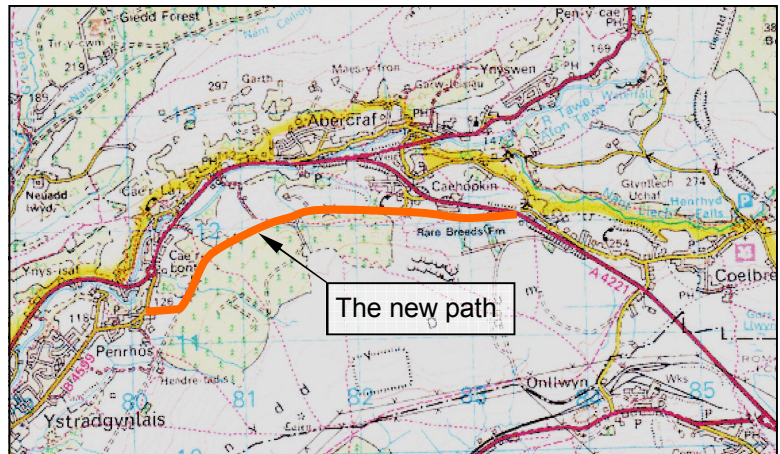
The descriptions are intended to enable somebody unfamiliar with the area to follow the route. The OS 1:50,000 map sheet which covers the route is given. These write-ups are repeated on the 'Local rides' page of our website, from where they can be downloaded as pdf files. In some cases they are longer than their *Evening Post* counterparts because of a 200 word limit imposed on the latter.

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NCN 43 heads north

In June Sustrans opened a 3km extension to the National Cycle Network up Swansea Valley from Penrhos to Coelbren. Hearing that this was a nice route the CTC decided to explore it on one of their Wednesday rides.

This they did on 15th July. They were not disappointed, enjoying a traffic free two miles from Penrhos to the A4221. Here the route crosses the main road to follow the existing road to Coelbren.



The new path is 3m wide over most of its length and provides superb views of the "Sleeping Giant" across the upper Swansea Valley. All were agreed that this was better than the main road alternative. Apart from the good views much of the climbing is got over early and the boring mile long slog up the A4221 from Abercraf is avoided.

David Naylor

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Cycling Instructor Training - a personal view

Last year I signed up for the four day training to become a cycling instructor. I was a keen and fairly experienced cyclist, am a trained teacher, and have spent the last 20+ years of my professional life in some form of teaching and training. So this should be easy, I thought!

It was a great experience – and our two, very experienced, trainers from Wolverhampton really made the experience memorable. But it was tough...and I had to quickly shift from thinking I would be very familiar with most of what we were asked to do – to recognising that a) my own cycling skills needed some shaping and b) teaching a bunch of 10 year olds means concentrating very hard (the group behaved as if they were school students when we had to try out 'hands on' teaching experience)

Probably the most significant change in my own cycling behaviour was learning about 'prime position' – how to hold one's own with confidence in traffic, and not be pushed into gutters or pavement edges, but to stay steady in the middle of the road, avoiding parked cars and also being visible at all times. The other significant mantra we learned was 'Look behind' – frequently. I now can't even cycle down my own cul de sac without looking over my right shoulder. Those two skills have changed the way I cycle and also the way I feel about cycling. I remember setting off into central Birmingham in rush hour, with a laden bike, immediately after the course, to find the train station, and marvelling at how confident I felt – right through the Bull Ring!

Teaching the Level 1 and 2 skills to children in a group requires a lot of planning – and working closely with a co worker. Trying to keep it fun and safe is a challenge – but it's worth it so see children start to cycle safely. Working with individual adults has also been immensely satisfying – and helping an anxious cyclist or potential cyclist to begin to experience the 'wind through your hair' sensation is just fantastic. I have now been able to use these skills to work as a volunteer with Pedal Power – the charity which promotes accessible cycling for all – and this has to be the icing on the cake for me.

I would encourage anyone who is contemplating doing this training to go for it. It will probably change your own cycling habits – and help you to encourage others to begin, or to improve their own cycling experience.

Sheila Johnson

For further information re training courses in Wales contact:
[Gwenda Owen - Cycle Training Development Officer - Wales](#)
[Swyddog Datblygu Hyfforddiant Beicio - Cymru](#)
Direct line: 029 20750301
Mobile : 07825081097

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A snippet

In the last issue we reported that the dropped kerb access to the foreshore from the Mumbles Road at its junction with Guildhall Road South was "tantalisingly close to completion". It was in fact completed around about when the newsletter came out.

This means that cyclists travelling west via St Helen's Road can now get on to the foreshore path immediately after turning right at the lights rather than 100m further on at the car park entrance (where the inadequately dropped kerb is a hazard).

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A beginner explores ...

For once it was sunny *and* we had a beginner on our Explorer ride. It was a Saturday morning in August. Our leader Phil Jones, Rob W., myself and Jennifer, who was on her very first cycle ride, gathered in Parkmill to cycle the two miles up Green Cwm to Llethrid and back. Jennifer had learnt to ride at one of our beginners classes a month previously. But cycling in circles round a car park is not quite the same as a proper cycle ride.



We rode gently up the valley, but with stops while Jennifer stretched her legs – those of us who cycle regularly forget how demanding the unaccustomed action of pedalling is, especially when uphill. We made good progress and reached Llethrid as planned. The picture shows us there. On the way back down we stopped to visit the caves at Cathole and then the 6000 year old burial chamber, meanwhile ‘Professor’ Phil filled us in on their history.

Jennifer gained confidence as we rode and on the way back it was as if she was a regular cyclist. But how did she find it? Best let her tell us

“The sight of my grandchildren cycling along happily and confidently, made me determined that 2009 was the year in which I too would become a cyclist. The beginner’s class was a great introduction, but the next step was to complete a ‘proper ride’.

I had **very** mixed feelings as I waited for my guides and mentors in Shepherd’s car park! When we started off, I was conscious of the fact that my speed, (or lack of it) and frequent stops were holding up my ‘outriders’, but they showed great patience. As the miles ‘flew by’, I felt my confidence (and speed) increasing. The return journey along the Cwm was easier, being downhill. I was having to concentrate a little less, and was beginning to **enjoy** the experience!

After the obligatory cup of tea/coffee in the Gower Heritage Centre, I rode back to my car in the car park far more confidently than when I had left it.

There is a Welsh saying: *Cam cyntaf, cam gorau* – ‘The first step is the best step’. I don’t suppose that I will ever ride from Land’s End to John o’Groats, but I look forward to many happy hours of cycling. I would encourage any learner to join one of the Explorer rides. Thank you, *Wheelrights*.”

The ride was not entirely without mishaps as, although Jennifer did not fall off once, yours truly came off cycling across the Parkmill ford. My wheels slid from under me on the slippery surface and, no doubt to the amusement of the onlookers, I suffered the indignity of ending up in the water. No damage however; just a little wet.

So where were the hundreds of you who learnt to ride at our classes over the years? We put on these Explorer rides to act as a stepping stone to give you the confidence to cycle as an everyday activity. There are three more Explorer rides this year (see page 8) so here’s hoping we’ll see some of you then.

The picture shows a confident Jennifer cycling on the rough grass beside the path in Green Cwm.



David Naylor and Jennifer Davies

Children and helmets

Cycle touring across Holland earlier this year I met several groups of school children cycling along the traffic free paths. The picture shows one of these groups. None of the children were wearing helmets. How come that in a country where cycling is so prevalent helmets are not considered necessary, whereas over here while adults do not have to wear them they seem to be a 'must' for children?

Shortly after returning from this holiday I joined a Connect2 ride up and down the Afan valley to celebrate Sustrans' work in this area. Several families with young children took part and they clearly enjoyed themselves. At one point two small lads, perhaps 6 or 7 years old, were cycling side by side and ran into each other. Both fell off – there were a few tears but neither were hurt. The bulky helmets on their little heads barely touched the ground. The father of one of them said "just as well you were wearing a helmet". I, who had witnessed the incident, said nothing, but I thought to myself: they could well have incurred neck injuries due to the wide brim and relative weight of that headgear.



Prompted by this I posted an e-mail on CTC's Right to Ride Forum to see what other RtR rep.s across the UK thought about this issue. Sure enough it sparked off a flurry of responses from people better qualified to comment than me. Not one of them pointed to evidence which supported the wearing of cycle helmets by children. The following excerpts are I believe representative. (I can provide the full exchange for anybody interested.)

From a father:

"... our four-year-old twins don't wear polystyrene hats when riding their bikes: They have both hit their heads hard on the ground while learning to walk, and once or twice while learning to cycle, and now instinctively keep their heads away from the road if they (very rarely) fall off. Both have suffered nasty gashes to their heads while walking and playing, but not while cycling The limited data from two children over their first four years of life would suggest that wearing helmets while playing around the house and garden, and while running around in particular, would prevent many, many, more injuries than bike helmets would.

I think the need to learn to instinctively protect the head in any fall, and to not feel invincible, is also very important for children. Children need to learn from their mistakes, You could almost argue that it makes more sense to prevent children from wearing helmets, so that they learn to ride safely and without relying on protective equipment."

And from another who having discussed the mechanics of falling wrote:

"Personally I'd be more worried about breaking my neck (which, arguably, helmet wearing might increase the likelihood of) than a skull injury.

The other point about learning to respond to a fall is very well made [in an earlier post]. As a kid I recall spending rather a lot of my time going over the handlebars in public parks and abandoned coal tips in South Wales. I would note that neither location appears to be available to kids these days (cycling being banned in a lot of parks). We learnt to use our arms to cover our heads as we came off, to the extent that its now instinctive."

I now have a grandson. It will be interesting to see if he wears a helmet when he learns to ride.

David Naylor



One woman's story and point of view

As a child I was lucky enough to have parents who encouraged me to ride my bike from about the age of five or six; many a carefree and happy hour was spent in our back lane in Bridgend with our bikes. I believe children need this essential time early on in their lives to develop road and car sense. Listening out for cars became an automatic response to our environment as natural a response as learning to talk.

I cycled across Cardiff in my twenties almost daily to get work (1988ish). I developed the essential skill during that time of making sure I was visible, even an obstacle; clinging to the edge of the road just makes you wobbly and encourages cars to squeeze past. You really need to have the attitude that you have every right to be on the road. Once I had children of my own I hardly cycled at all despite still owning an old style second hand mountain bike.

It wasn't until I was in my forties that I took the time to find out about cycling clubs. I had recently moved from Bristol to Port Talbot and was looking for a way to meet local people and do something I enjoy. I met up with Ann and Richie a lovely couple from Port Talbot, regular riders and members of the CTC, who were running a small club called Afan Nedd. Immediately I knew I had stumbled on what I needed; great conversation, plenty of fresh air and exercise and a brilliant way to find out about the best routes to cycle in the local area.

After a while I got to know about the Swansea and West Cycle Touring Club. This was quite a jump up in terms of fitness needed and on my first ride with them I found the pace too challenging and the whole group decided to change their intended route; clearly preferring not to have to wait for the ambulance when I collapsed from exhaustion! I'm happy to say that this didn't put me off and I found that my fitness improved quite rapidly. I now cycle twice a week approx 70-80 miles and I know I have benefited greatly from the last two years of cycling. I feel fitter, I have very little problem with asthma or colds, best of all I thoroughly enjoy the great company and making the most of our fabulous countryside.

In the club I am known to be the one they have to wait for at the top of hills, help with fairly frequent bike problems and see hurtling down hills. As a 45 year old woman I would say that cycling with the CTC gives me the sense of security I need. I know I am with a friendly group of people who will always wait for me if I'm having an off day and will always help, if they can with emergency bike problems - priceless!

So if you want some free fun, feisty banter, fresh air and a great physical work out, fish out that bike!

Jan Garvey

RE M I N D E R

6.00 pm Thursday 17th September in the **Environment Centre**

Jane Davidson

(WAG Environment Minister)

will give a talk on

Promotion of Cycling in Wales

An A4 poster giving full details can be viewed/downloaded from the Events page of www.wheelrights.org.uk.

All are welcome

Explorer rides – the future?

These rides serve two purposes: to provide a stepping stone for beginners to give them confidence to venture further on their bikes and to provide a sociable outing. For the first reason the rides have been mainly on traffic free routes and are short – typically about five miles – and for the second they have included a place of refreshment: a pub for the evening rides or a café for the morning.

We started them last year. They were Dave Croxall's idea as when he lived in Salisbury the equivalent rides they held there were popular. They had a social role and provided a shorter ride than those offered by the CTC.

Last year we held them just in the evening, whereas this year we have provided some on Saturday mornings. Also this year we spread the venues around more to enhance the *exploring* aspect of the rides. (Those who came on our Penllergaer Forest ride will know what I mean!)

But we have had very few beginners. As the article on p. 5 illustrates the rides can indeed serve their intended purpose. So what to do next year?

A few of us have chewed over this and have come up with a couple of ideas; unfortunately they cannot both be accommodated in a single ride. One is to make them open ended where little is planned ahead other than the meeting point, date and time, and the leader. The leader would keep the options open until he or she knows who is coming. Thus if there are beginners a short traffic free ride would be chosen. These rides can be tailored to suit the participants. The other type of ride would be the traditional structured ride where at least an indication of route and distance is given beforehand.

Next year we are planning to organise a Cycling Festival in the late Summer or Autumn. This will consist of 4 or 5 rides in the Swansea area. A possible scenario would be for these rides to provide the structured type of ride with the open ended rides being held on say one Saturday morning per month during the Summer.

We are hoping to make a decision on this at our agm in November, so think about it and let us know your views.

David Naylor

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Wheelrights 2009 programme (from September)

Dates and details liable to change; check *Wheelrights* website:
www.wheelrights.org.uk, 'Events' page for up-to-date information.

Key to RV (ie ride start point/event venue): GR = Grid Ref. on OS 1:50,000 sheets 159 or 170.

CivCe Civic Centre east car park (GR 653923) **YaC** Yacht Club, E. Burrows Rd (GR: 662927)

EnvC Environment Centre, Pier St (GR 661929) **X** See Explorer Rides programme

Date	Event	RV	Time	Description
Sun 13 th Sep	ExplR	X	10.00	City Centre: visit open houses (note change of day)
Thu 17 th Sep	Talk	EnvC	18.00	Jane Davidson: Promotion of Cycling in Wales
Sat 19 th Sep	BegCl	CivCe	9.30	Adult beginner's class
Thu 24 th Sep	ExplR	X	18.30	Clyne Valley
Sat 3 rd Oct	ExplR	X	10.00	Tircanol to Clydach
Mon 23 rd Nov	Meet'g	YaC	19.00	Wheelrights agm