

NORTHAMPTON



CTC Northampton - the local group of the national organisation for cyclists

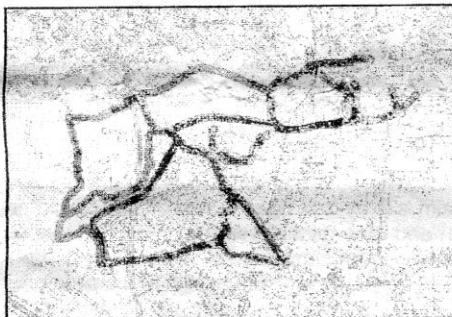
NEWSLETTER

Volume 7 - November 2007

Vote for cycling in Northampton – support Connect2 for People’s £50 Million

From 26 November you can vote for an improved cycle network in Northampton and 78 other areas of the country. Log onto “The People’s £50 Million” website from 26 November or tune in to ITV from 3 December to make your vote count.

Sustrans’ Connect2 is a UK-wide project that promises to improve cycling opportunities in cities, towns and villages by creating new walking and cycling networks.



Key
■ Connect2 Project
○ Connect2 Links
● Connect2 Gateway

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By building bridges and crossings over busy roads, rivers and railway lines, Connect2 will get people to the places they want to go. Each crossing will link up with routes to schools, shops, work and green spaces, bringing people closer together and making journeys easier.

In Northampton the “River Nene Connection” scheme will link the new Upton development and existing communities at Briar Hill, Far Cotton and Duston along the River Nene Corridor with cycle and pedestrian paths, crossings

and bridges. The route will overcome long-standing barriers such as heavily congested roads, railways and rivers, which currently make travel between these areas difficult without using the car.

Another local Connect2 scheme would create a route between Raunds and Wellingborough Station along the old gravel haul roads in the valley floor, linking in Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Irthlingborough along the way. There is also a “reserve” scheme connecting Daventry and Braunston.

CTC Northampton broadly supports the aims of these projects, while continuing to call for better conditions for cycling on roads in the town (see Commentary).

(Continued on page 3)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- New Bikeability cycle training scheme
- Rights and planning – our work for cycling
- Memorable rides of 2007
- Alpine Afflictions
- Cycling facilities tested
- December Rides List

Giving Kids “Bikeability”: Cycle Training in Northants

Learning “not to get squished”
Phil Letts

This year I became a part-time instructor in the county council’s new “Bikeability” cycle training scheme in schools. As a cyclist and retired teacher, this enables me to keep in touch with schools, and to do something to get kids out of cars, onto bikes and pointed towards a healthier, fitter, more sustainable lifestyle. Bikeability is the national “cycling proficiency” scheme for the 21st century and is being rolled out across the country since its launch in Spring 2007, so this is an exciting time for everyone who loves cycling. It was recently launched in Northamptonshire and many schools have already signed up.

(continued overleaf)

(Bikeability - continued from page 1)

Bikeability is the new national training standard designed to provide children with the on-road skills they need to handle modern traffic conditions especially with regard to making cycle journeys to and from school. We want children to be safer, more confident cyclists engaged in healthier, greener transport options. Within five years, no child should leave primary school without the chance to receive Bikeability training.

To obtain a Bikeability award, children (and adults) will be instructed in the skills essential for making cycling trips in today's road conditions, by instructors accredited to a government-approved national standard. I personally undertook a four-day training course in February offered by Hertfordshire County Council costing £450, most of which was reimbursed by the CTC.

Cycle training here in Northants. is the responsibility of Casualty Reduction, part of Sustainable Transport, headed up by keen cyclist Loretta Spyers-Ashby. Level 1 training in a primary school involves a two-hour course, usually on the playground, to develop the pupils' skills, bike control and safe cycling habits.

Our Level 2 on-road course involves three 2-hour sessions aiming to make pupils confident, competent safe cyclists who understand the principles of safe cycling, and have the skills and understanding to make a trip to school safely on quiet roads. We aim to make the courses fun, but in the end we do have to judge whether the pupils demonstrate the appropriate skills and understanding 'confidently, competently and consistently.'

Bikeability also includes Level 3 training for older pupils and adults wanting to ride on busier roads involving roundabouts and traffic lanes.



Columbus Cycle Trailers

Columbus cycle trailers from Denmark (100 kg load) now available from UK agents, Leafcycles, St Michael's Avenue, Northampton. For info. tel 01604 628956 or see www.blackcurrentcentre.org.uk

I was involved in the first course to successfully qualify children to the new Level 1 standard, at Weston Favell school in October. One of our young "graduates" was memorably quoted by the Chronicle and Echo as saying that they had learned "not to get squished by cars", a rather striking summary.

The previous Northants. scheme offered "Basic Skills" training to children aged 7+ and "On-road" training to children aged 10+. In 2005/2006, 92 children received basic and 939 on-road training, or just 1% and 12% respectively of the county's primary school children. Clearly at that rate, most children were never going to receive cycle training during their school lives.

Since January 2007 the county council has been delivering training to the new National Standard, with a pilot scheme in 33 schools, and is working towards full accreditation of the scheme by the Cycle Training Standards Board. All training in Northamptonshire schools will now be provided by a dedicated pool of employed instructors, delivering training to children and adults living within a 10-mile radius of their homes.

All instructors will be regular cyclists who have been on the accredited four-day course and received first-aid and basic bike maintenance training. The pilot scheme will train about 1000 children to the national standard, before Bikeability is rolled out countywide next spring.

Over a three-year period it is intended to deliver cycle training to all Year 5 and 6 children in the county. By July 2008 the aim is to be training one-third of year 5 children to Level 1, and one-third of year 6 children to Level 2. In addition, the team aims to be training 10% of year 7 children to the more advanced Level 3, and also to offer Level 3 training to adults and special needs children where capacity allows.

So if you would you like to see more people cycling, have a keen interest in cycle safety and would like to share your expertise with children and adults, YOUR COUNCIL NEEDS YOU! The county council is now looking to employ further instructors to help deliver this training. For an information pack please contact Loretta Spyers-Ashby on 01604 654464.

I am enjoying my work as a cycle instructor in Loretta's team and look forward to seeing many more kids riding bikes safely in future!

The Lighter Side

Trials near Arthingworth to establish which forms of Sustainable Transport are most suitable for commuting distances. It was found that over five miles the Dog performs best, just ahead of the 3 year old girl, who may have been slowed up by having to bring her Mummy.
Photo: John Cutler

(Connect2 - continued from front page)

The Sustrans Connect2 project is up against three other, more geographically restricted, projects for Big Lottery Funding, under the slogan “£50 million, four competitors and only one winner”. A public vote over the weekend of December 7th - 9th will decide who wins the money, and online voting opened on 26 November. It is therefore crucial that people in Northampton and beyond lend their support. Here is what you can do to help:

- **Watch** the ITV1 programme about Connect2 on **Tuesday 4th December** with Lorraine Kelly as champion;
- **Vote** online from 26th November at www.thepeoples50million.org.uk (requires registration);
- **Vote** by telephone over the weekend 7th-10th December (for phone number see website or TV)
- **Text** 'Connect2' to 80010 for information about voting.

Remember, if you'd like to see £50 million invested in walking and cycling with some real benefits for Northampton please make sure you vote - and if possible, register TODAY. Pass on this message to as many friends and colleagues as possible, and ask them all please to vote for Connect2!



COMMENTARY by John Cutler, CTC Right to Ride Representative for Northamptonshire

The CTC is not against off-road routes. They can be valuable assets if designed and built properly, but they should complement the Road network, be of a high standard, and cyclists should never be required to use them instead of the road network. John Grimshaw (Sustrans founder) sees no future in cycling on the roads and our county council appears to be discouraging it. So there are some fundamental differences in philosophy.

In many parts of the country - and this applies to the three schemes in Northamptonshire - Connect2 may enable the construction of routes that have been top priority for years for anyone thinking about an off-road network. Our local authorities have been unable or unwilling to progress these schemes on their own, so it seems a Lottery grant is the only hope. Even after construction, concern will remain over the funding of maintenance to keep the routes swept and in good condition.

But there is a downside and a worry in the longer term. The County Council wants to be seen to be doing something for cycling without spending their own money and without tackling the more difficult task of improving conditions on the roads. Providing a suitable cycling infrastructure should be a core activity of the highway authority, not something that depends on a Lottery bid. It is not clear that the end result will enhance cycling as a serious mode of transport. That depends partly on the quality of the facility as well as the route.

Perhaps because of pressure of time, the Connect2 routes were decided on rather quickly and without reference to local cyclists. We hope that local cyclists will have the opportunity to contribute to the details of the projects as they evolve. It is already common to find CTC members acting as Sustrans Rangers throughout the country, and it certainly is our policy to support this bid.

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Mixed weather, great rides and Le Tour: What we did in 2007

Brian Tunbridge and Philip Gray

This year, despite a relatively cool and wet early summer, has been a good one for cycling and the club, with a range of special events and one foreign tour in addition to our alternate-weekly rides programme - as well as the Tour de France's unforgettable weekend visit to Britain.

Our regular "first and third Sunday" rides each month have continued to be well supported - in particular the A' rated rides (over 60 miles), which typically attract 8 or more riders. Destinations have included Catthorpe (Warks), Sulgrave Manor and the striking Millennium outdoor centre at Marston Moretaine (Beds.). A joint lunch with Milton Keynes and Kettering groups at Farthingstone Golf Club in May saw 15 riders taking over the outside tables in glorious sunshine.

The monthly Saturday afternoon ride continues to attract riders wanting a shorter, easy-paced ride, with Phil Letts proving a valuable new leader. We are pleased that several new riders have started coming out. Our pub ride on the 2nd Wednesday each month also remains popular.

A highlight for four riders (Philip G, Mike D, Claire and John W) was Easter's Tour of Flanders, a cyclosporptive in Belgium attracting around 15,000 cyclists. All successfully overcame 90 miles of cobles, steep ascents and other riders falling off and greatly enjoyed their weekend.

Northampton riders were also present at the annual cyclists' memorial service at Meriden near Coventry (despite very wet weather), at the Regional Rally in May, Mildenhall Rally in Suffolk in August, and a camping weekend at Golden Beeches in South Bucks.

In June Eleanor Weller again led a special ride for the Cycling for Women weekend, with a limited but appreciative number of attendees.

A week later CTC organised the group of 8 cyclists (not all members) leading the Northampton Carnival. During Bike Week we ran a number of local activities including a very successful BBQ, despite heavy rain, and a Saturday family ride, with a follow-up family ride on 14 July.

Our second Guy Barber memorial charity ride on 2nd July had an enthusiastic turnout, down on last year but encouraging given the poor weather forecast and the conflict with the Tour de France 'etape' in Kent in which 3 Northampton members took part.

On the Tour de France weekend itself, a group of riders camped near London and cycled in, meeting others who came down by train, to watch the spectacular Time Trial in Hyde Park and the following day's stage in Kent.

In mid-July Philip Gray gave a talk and film show on Cycling and Climate Change as part of CTC's national "Cycle Hero" campaign. The following Saturday, a ride to local sites illustrating the challenges of climate change attracted 11 riders.



Peter Crighton shows the benefits of a recumbent! - Bike Week 2007

Rights and Planning Update

John Cutler, Northamptonshire Right to Ride Representative

There has been both good news and bad news for cycling in Northamptonshire over recent months.

A Health Authority project funded by Cycling England to increase cycling amongst over 40s in Northampton and Kettering is just getting going. A new cycling map of Northampton in the style of the Kettering map will be part of this.

There is currently no County Cycling Officer; the post still exists but is vacant to save money. We must hope that any new officer will be at a sufficiently senior level to really make a difference. The temptation to think that having a cycling officer means that other officers do not need to consider cycling must also be avoided.

Some junctions in Northampton are being "improved". Black Lion Hill outside the station on National Cycle Route 6 will become better for buses but, unfortunately, worse for cyclists. Travelling westward from the town, cyclists will have to go on the pavement and press lots of buttons instead of riding straight through as now. Major junctions in Northamptonshire appear to be routinely designed with no account taken of cyclists. Nearly always the result seems to be infrastructure that is less safe and less convenient than before.

Just to the north, but in countryside well known to Northampton cyclists, two new dual carriageways will shortly be built. The Isham Bypass Public Inquiry has just been held and the Inspector's report is awaited.

(continued on page 7)

Disco-leg and other Alpine afflictions

Phil Letts describes the joys of cycling in "them thar hills"

These days I can't go without my annual fix of 'disco-leg' and this year was no exception as I headed in June for the high Alpine passes of France. Let me explain: disco-leg is that involuntary twitching of the legs some of us get after cycling up long, murderous hill-climbs, similar to the way we might disco-dance! This condition renders the cyclist's legs useless for walking, sending the owner reeling about the top of the climb like an 'alchie.**

You see, I'm somewhat obsessed with the high cols and passes of the Tour de France and have started making an annual trip to the French Alps or Pyrenees to cycle some of them. Apart from the sheer love of all things mountainous and cycling, this also means that when the Tour hits the TV screen I can yell at no-one in particular, "Been up that one!"

I usually cycle solo and have a mate with a camper van who takes me down and then chucks me out somewhere near the high cols before he disappears touring himself. Then he either picks me up 10 days or so later, or I fly back. This year I started off at Bourg d'Oisans, not far from Grenoble. Bourg is a good base area in the Ecrins National Park close to the Alpe d'Huez, Col de Galibier and Lautaret and others.

The famous Alpe was the cause of my first case of disco-leg as I struggled for over 2 hours up its 21 hairpin bends stretching over 14 kms, with average gradients of about 8% but some at 14%, to a height of 1840m, noting that Armstrong shot up here in 38minutes - but then he doesn't get disco-leg does he?! From the top of the climb you can add on the Col de Sarenne (1999m) for a complete day's cycling of 58kms.

I tend to pick a couple of village bases from which to cycle nearby Tour cols and do lightweight saddle-bag touring, i.e. credit card and some clean underwear! There are any amount of cheap (£20 a night) *chambres* available in the area. However I did take camping gear for one long section.

For the technically interested, I ride a standard Saracen Skyline Tourer with a front triple of 28/38/48 and a rear cassette spanning 11-30. This allows me to 'twiddle' up the long gradients of 7-8%, which can be up to 30kms long, without too much pain. It's the sections of 12-14%, which do the real damage! This year I put on a reinforced Mavic rear wheel following a problem last year. But fitness-wise, I do prepare quite thoroughly on any local hills I can find, preferring interval training to long runs.

(continued overleaf)

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(What we did in 2007 - cont'd from page 4)

Autumn highlights have included the Oundle Audax and Northampton's excellent Cycle for Cynthia charity ride.

The **website** www.ctc-northampton.org.uk continues to be an important link for information on rides and section activities. Our e-mailing list and discussion group - often called the "**Yahoo group**" because it is hosted on Yahoo - is an important way of sharing information. It has over 40 members but we would like to encourage more people to join - for instructions, please go to the website or contact Peter Crighton.

Fancy joining in?

Come along on a ride with us to
- meet other cyclists

- get some exercise & explore the countryside
- learn more about cycling in a sociable setting

Our rides are:

- open to any CTC member. We would also like more non-members to come and try us out for a few weeks before considering whether to join.

- graded from E (easy) to A (challenging). You can choose the level that suits by looking at the website, or contacting us using the details on the back page.

See back page for list of current rides and other events.

(Alpine Afflictions, continued from previous page)

Having done a few climbs in Bourg, I headed up and over the long Col de Glandon (1924m) camping wild on route, to St.Jean de Maurienne where I set up base to do the Galibier, Telegraph and others. On the Glandon the temperature dropped and a heavy belt of snow fell over the high passes, making some of them inaccessible for a few days. They cleared eventually and I moved on to Valloire, a skiing village, via the Col de Telegraph (1566m) from where you do 'The Big One!'- the Galibier. There's an easyish 12 kms averaging 6-7% leading into the Galibier but then the last 6kms go straight up with sections of 13% and topping out at 2646m - definitely a severe case of disco-leg! If you're going on to Briancon you then descend 8kms to the Col du Lautaret but I just about-turned and hurtled back down in 40 minutes. That's one thing you need to get used to here - after hours of leg-quivering climbing come very fast, teeth-chattering descents, often with mist obscuring the hairpins. So it's lean into the bends and hope.....



Hairpins on the Col de Galibier

One of the nicest rides this year was the Col de Mollard (1638m) through to the Col de Croix de Feu (2067m) which is a beautiful, winding valley up. I also rode the Col de Madeleine (1993m) but that was a long, 20km slog up which never seemed to end.



Phil on the Col de Galibier - brrrr!

At the top of most of these cols are "refuges" or rest-stops where you can get a bite and a drink and try to massage the legs back to life and even commiserate/ celebrate with other sufferers! I tend to cycle these areas towards the end of May/beginning of June, when sometimes accommodation in the skiing villages may be closed; on the other hand you are rarely competing with others for facilities. I find the Cicerone guides excellent for planning purposes.

Getting your bike over to France is easy enough - the European Bike Express bus will drop you close to the Alps or Pyrenees, or you can fly Ryanair/Easyjet to Grenoble/Chambery for the Alps and Pau for the Pyrenees. Ryanair charge £15 for the bike and just want you to take the pedals off. Other carriers require a cycle-bag but who can tour with one of those? A good tip is to tape some sheets of bubble-wrap over the bike, leaving the wheels free for better handling by baggage handlers. Then you

could perhaps hand the wrapping on to cyclists coming the other way.

So if you fancy a spate of disco-leg, try some of the high Cols of the Alps or Pyrenees- great cycling, great scenery and a great sense of achievement. Can't wait to wreck the legs next year!

*(**Any reader concerned about the dreadful affliction of disco-leg is advised to try stretching thoroughly after each ride - or see the advert below...! - Ed).*



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(Rights and Planning Update - continued from page 4)

There is now hope that a new cycle route between Kettering and Wellingborough may result from this scheme. There is also hope of some better consideration for cyclists in the design of the Corby Link Road between Kettering and Corby. We recently had a meeting with transport planners who seem willing to recognise the existence of cyclists.

On a more abstract level, the new local development frameworks and documents are being drafted and consulted on. We do not have the capacity to engage adequately with the new planning process. However we did make an input to the recent Examination in Public of the planning document for North Northants called the Core Spatial Strategy.

Slightly easier to understand, if you have time to read all the paperwork, is the new Transport Strategy for Growth just written by the County Council planners. The first draft in January did not seem to understand cycling issues at all and we are still pressing for improvements to the latest version.

The Local Access Forum (that discusses rights of way and recreational issues) is recruiting to fill vacancies again. It would be helpful if someone with an interest in off-road cycling would apply to be on this forum.

In addition to the cycle training of school children being done under the County Council's new Bikeability programme, there is also some freelance cycle training taking place. Experienced cyclists who would like to pass on some of their skills should consider doing some cycle instruction, either for children or for adults. Grants for the training course have been available, or it can be done through Northamptonshire County Council when they are recruiting (see Bikeability article, pages 1-2, for contacts).

Dawes Galaxy on Cycling Facilities

Mixed e-motions on Boughton Green Road

Yardley Drive and Boughton Green Road have recently had a "cycling makeover", with several new off-road facilities. How do they fare in the "facility" test?

1. The improved off-road path coming towards town from the Holly Lodge Drive/Redhouse Road roundabout is largely a benefit, giving cyclists an off-road option on an uphill section. One criticism: the dropped-kerb entries are aimed at people crossing the road, not coming from the roundabout (don't these designers ever watch real cyclists?). That weight limit sign is perfectly placed for cyclists entering from the road, don't you think?



2. At the top of the hill several telegraph poles are placed conveniently in the middle of the path. Hilariously, these are now decked with worn-looking yellow hazard tape - presumably after someone crashed into one. One has a supporting cable on the "town" side - just nice for a hapless night-time cyclist to garotte themselves on. Take care!

3. Yardley Drive has a good wide cycle path along its entire length, linking up with a crossing to Reynard Way. And yet... Yardley Drive is a wide road with moderate traffic: is a cycle path really that necessary, even for children (at least Bikeability-trained ones)?

4. The toucan crossing of Boughton Green Road is perhaps a benefit during school rush hour - although in the mornings, cyclist will need to cross Yardley Drive to use it - not the safest of manoeuvres.

5. But the real frighteners are at the entrances to the University (see right). Here cyclists have to look back at 45 degrees over their shoulders to check for cars turning into the campus. How safe is that?

Perhaps the real benefit of cycle paths in this country is simply to advertise to (forgetful) car drivers that cyclists might be in the area. Whether this path actually makes things much safer overall, is debatable. The real answers, as always, lie in highway design, highway law, cycle training and driver attitudes.

Anyone with comments on using these paths can send them to John Cutler at righttoride@ctc-northampton.org.uk





Cycle Instructor Phil Letts (N.CTC) with Loretta in 2007 – when the new Cycle proficiency standard was rolled out called **Bikeability**, which was influenced by **Cyclecraft**, a safety manual written by CTC Councillor *John Franklin*.

