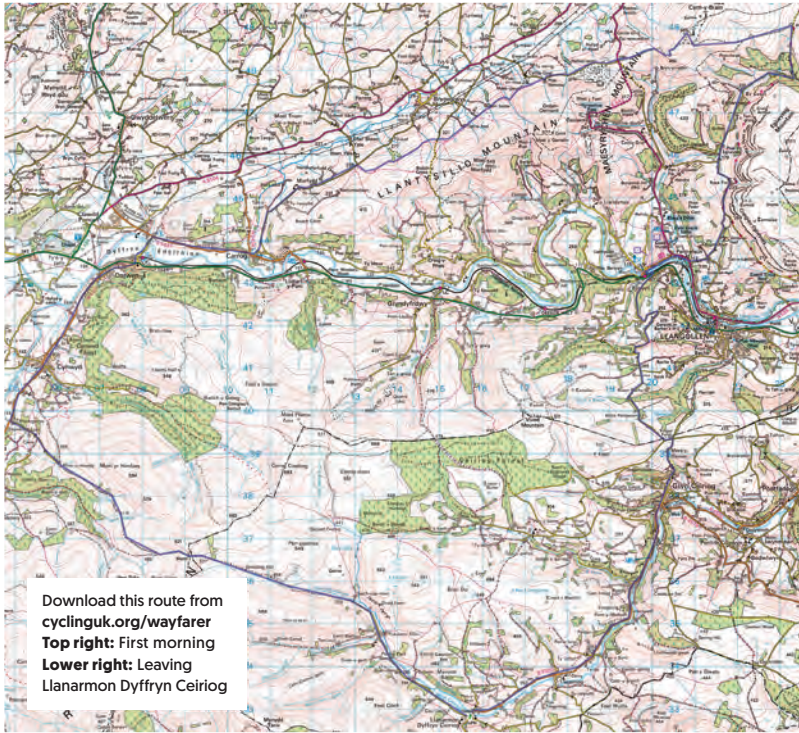


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SAM JONES
Cycling UK communications and media manager

“Well at least it’s not snowing,” I panted to Robby as the rain came down. The wind whipped his reply away before my ears could capture it, carrying it back down the valley to the faraway hamlet of Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog where we’d started earlier that morning.

The track we followed was more suited to salmon heading to their spawning grounds than bikes. A shallow river flowed where the gradient gave it urgency. Elsewhere, small lagoons were forming where the route flattened out. To put it mildly, it was wet.

The conditions were not surprising for Wales on the final weekend of March. They were also far more favourable than those faced by Wayfarer, the Choirmaster and the Old Gentleman on the same weekend 104 years ago. Back then, these three men on fixed-wheel bicycles faced deep drifts of snow and a white landscape devoid of feature. They walked much of the ups and downs of the Berwyn Mountains on their way from the West Arms.

THE ORIGINAL RIDE
The account of Wayfarer’s ride was first published in Cycling (now Cycling Weekly) in May 1919, under the



title ‘Over the Top’. (You can now read it online at cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/wayfarer.htm.) It’s an uplifting article of adversity and friendship, told with a deft comic touch that evokes the whimsy of Jerome K Jerome’s cycling adventures in *Three Men on the Bummel*.

Wayfarer’s ride was more dramatic than Jerome’s, not just because of the difference between summer in Germany’s Black Forest and the wintry mountains of North Wales but also for the ride’s proximity to the end of the Great War. The Armistice was declared just five months prior. The headline of ‘Over the Top’ will have had a very different meaning for most.

Wayfarer served and, though injured, survived the Great War. Reading the way he reclaims this phrase from the horrors of war, so that it becomes synonymous with the pursuit of wonder in the natural world by venturing into the wild on two wheels or two feet, goes a long way to explaining his enduring popularity with the cycling community of the time.

The article is life affirming, accessible and inspirational. Ever since reading it, I too have wanted to venture ‘over the top’ on the final weekend of March as the clocks spring forward.

I’ve been harping on about doing this ride ever since I missed out on the opportunity to join Jack Thurston’s centennial ride in March 2019.

First two years of lockdowns blocked my attempts, and then an imminent addition to the family. But March 2023 I had my chance. ▶

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