

The Summer Isles, off
Coigach peninsula



Scotland

The North-West Highlands

Janet Paske and her partner **Greg** cycled through stunning mountain and coastal scenery

When a lack of experience 'sunk' my kayaking holiday off the Summer Isles, I was inspired to try a cycling holiday in north-west Scotland instead. Our route started from Lairg – ScotRail's phone-line staff were genuinely helpful – and we loaded it into Komoot, mainly to estimate distances (220 miles in total) and climbs (4,250m). There is only one road along the coast so there's not much need for a guide!

We had inadvertently included a geologically significant region in our route: the North-West Highlands UNESCO Geopark, which has the oldest rocks in Europe. In one of the visitor centres we learned that we may have glamped on a meteor's 45km-wide impact crater from 1.2bn years ago.

We travelled some way along the North Coast 500, and about half the vehicles on it were motorhomes (not caravans these days). Mostly drivers were well behaved. Singletrack roads with frequent passing places featured prominently.

Our first day's cycling was our longest: 55 miles from Lairg to the campsite above the beach at Altandhu. We were on holiday and wanted to see places rather than

rush through them. After that we rode no more than 30 miles in a day. We also had stops of two nights in two places.

We couldn't believe the views. I kept stopping to take panoramic photos, then realised that it would take much longer to arrive if I did that everywhere there was a view. We passed many virtually empty sandy shores, and at Scourie in the far north-west, I was tempted into the water for a swim.

We saw a young stag at 30 yards, which was so unfazed it gave me time to get my camera and take several shots. I managed to get really close-up photos of seals during a Lochinver boat trip, too. We saw puffins on the rugged north coast and lots of other seabirds as we continued.

The trip was so good we've already started planning another one, combining Caithness on the north-east coast with Orkney.



The Netherlands

Dutch delight

Despite some fierce 'Dutch hills', **Peter Jackson** had a great trip to South Holland

THIS SUMMER 20 MEMBERS of SPOKES, the cycling group for SW Herts, enjoyed a week's cycling in the Netherlands. We caught the ferry from Harwich. Some cycled the 97 miles there from Watford.

On the Sunday we had a 26-mile ride from the Hook of Holland to Leiden. It was almost entirely on segregated cycle tracks, and the few road sections were quiet. Our route went up the coast via The Hague. We enjoyed a true tourist afternoon in Leiden.

Monday was our 53-mile ride to Zandvoort Grand Prix track, via Haarlem, returning on a cycleway down the coast through sand dunes. At times there was a gale force headwind, interspersed with some broadside gusts. Some of the group abandoned the coastal route and turned inland, but everyone still enjoyed the day.

On Tuesday we had a picturesque, 30-mile Leiden Lakes ride, which included two ferry crossings, canals and some amazing bridge architecture. On Wednesday, Storm Poly, the strongest summer storm on record in the Netherlands, slammed into the northern part of the country. Instead of heading to Amsterdam we spent the day in Leiden.

On Thursday we had a 40-mile ride to Gouda for the weekly cheese market. Friday morning was spent in Leiden, followed by a 31-mile ride to the Hook via Delft. We used an attended, secure bike park so that we could explore Delft luggage free.

It was great place to cycle, as you'd expect. Families and those who would not cycle on British roads can ride in the Netherlands with complete confidence.

