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# Sandstone Way Information





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## 1. Introduction

**The Sandstone Way** is a new 120 mile cycle route between Berwick upon Tweed and Hexham designed for mountain bikers runs mainly along the Sandstone Ridge in north Northumberland. On the journey, the route links numerous sandstone features, crags and outcrops and the sandy nature of the tracks along its length is a constant reminder of how it got its name. In between the start/end towns, the *Sandstone Way* links a number of villages and small communities including Wooler, Rothbury and Bellingham but also numerous fascinating heritage locations. From end to end the views are ever changing and scenery is superb.

**The Sandstone Way** is as much off-road as possible across varied terrain with the main alignment taking best advantage of an interesting mix of double-width dirt tracks, sections of single-track, unsurfaced lanes and bridleways of all types as well as byways and little known Unclassified County Roads (UCRs). Inevitably, there are numerous linking sections of quiet minor roads and surfaced country lanes. All the above are existing rights of way but the essence of the route's quality and 'feel' is how all these elements combine.

**The Sandstone Way** always takes the best available line possible and almost always avoids passing centrally through farm steadings whilst safely crossing a constant flow of rivers, four main roads and two railway lines.

## 2. The route

**The Sandstone Way** follows a way-marked alignment based on a protocol mountain bikers will quickly learn to recognise. The route is bi-directional and whilst the map is marked from north to south as this feels the more natural way to ride it, this is against the prevailing wind.

**The Sandstone Way** main alignment is the recommended route to follow although there are several sections where the route is braided because one option makes more sense in one direction or a harder variation is available. All these variations are way-marked as are some shortcuts.

**The Sandstone Way** map offers 10 optional loops that are not way-marked to make it possible to enjoy part of the main route and return back to your starting point, to select a harder or different route option for your first or further visits and to encourage riders to either extend their tour duration or entice them back for another visit.

## 3. Who is the route aimed at?

**The Sandstone Way** can be ridden by a reasonably fit and able rider in three days, many will do it in two long days but only a few will achieve *do-in-a-day* status.

The SW was designed for MTBs. It could be ridden on Gravel or Adventure bikes (2 names for the same thing) and / or cyclo cross bikes by fit competent riders in dry conditions. It is possible to ride the route on a decent hybrid by fit competent riders but again, only in dry conditions if enjoyment is deemed a factor worth considering. The northern third is the moist suitable for hybrids. In wet conditions the SW is hard work even on a MTB. Feedback from 2015 is that many mountain bikers either underestimated the route or overestimated their bikes and fitness or both and found the route far more challenging than they anticipated despite advance warnings.

The route summary overviews the different types of tracks and trail types that combine to make the Sandstone Way the rich experience it is.



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## 4. Safety Notes

**The Sandstone Way** mostly comprises a mix of easy-to-cycle tracks but there are some challenging sections which should only be ridden by suitably able and properly equipped riders in good weather conditions.

- It makes complete sense to carry food, drink, the route map, weatherproof clothing, tools, spares and a basic first aid kit
- You are advised to work out an exit strategy should you find yourself running out of daylight
- Mobile phone connection cannot be assumed throughout the route
- All but one ford on the route has an adjacent footbridge. The only one that hasn't (mile 37.5) is rarely un-fordable and if that occurs then the whole route will be out of condition to ride enjoyably
- Know where the bikes shops are located – there aren't many but gradually some accommodations and visitor centres are carrying basic spares
- Some bike taxis firms may be willing to come and rescue riders suffering untreatable mechanical, physical or mental breakdown
- Read and follow the Sandstone Way Good Cycling Code

### To consider

Remember that the countryside is the workplace of the farmer and forester and be really careful to close all gates securely behind you. It is so important to develop good relationships with landowners and local communities who will not be supportive if they regularly have to retrieve misplaced stock or have crops damaged by inconsiderate cyclists.

Please be particularly considerate of horse riders who nearly always live close to the route and on a daily basis ride the bridleways and tracks you will be cycling on.

Lastly, please be aware of other users at all time – especially walkers and horse riders who may be just around that next bend. Always ride within your sight lines and never miss a chance to extend a friendly greeting to everyone you meet on the route.

You will find the **Sandstone Way** a thoroughly enjoyable route to cycle by MTB and for some it will be surprisingly tiring so don't underestimate its challenge.

## 5. The Sandstone Way – Background

The Sandstone Way was first suggested to Ted Liddle of Tyne Valley MTB and *CycleTRAX* in 2009 by keen Northumbrian cyclist Victoria Brown in an un-named much shorter form to follow the central section of the Sandstone Ridge. Ted Liddle was immediately struck by its potential and set about extending the route at either end to link with Berwick on Tweed in the north and Hexham in the south.

## 6. Route Partners

From early days the project has been supported by Tyne Valley MTB members with funding and route research. Ted Liddle has driven the route forward from the outset and visible progress was achieved when regional bodies came on board. This resulted in the route being funded and /or supported by Northumberland National Authority (lead body), Northumberland Tourism, Northumberland Coast AONB, Northumberland County Council, DEFRA, *CycleTRAX* and Cycle PaD.



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## 7. Route Configuration

Starting / ending at Berwick on Tweed with Hexham at the other end, the route passes through the three gateway communities of Wooler, Rothbury and Bellingham each of which is larger than a village but smaller than a town. There is an optional spur to Belford which is an ideally overnight location for those departing Berwick in the afternoon.

<u>Between</u>	<u>Off-road km</u>	<u>On-road km</u>	<u>Other km</u>	<u>Km</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Berwick & Wooler	25	22	6.9	53.9	33.5	Spectacular coastal section
Wooler & Rothbury	29	19	10.7	58.7	36.5	Unavoidable road miles, great views
Rothbury & Bellingham	11	27	6.3	44.3	27.5	Long forest section but still scenic
Bellingham & Hexham	18	11	7.2	36.2	22.5	No shortage of hills with fine views
TOTALS	83	79	31.1	193.1	120.0	

*Other = promenade, verge cycle path, narrow country lanes which are barely tarmac*

## 8. Route Information

The route is bi-directional and way-marked accordingly but not in such a way the route can be ridden without a map. South to north seems to make most sense of the hills but it is against the prevailing wind. Both directions provide a wonderful journey. The route meanders somewhat but only to take best advantage of the longest off-road trails available. After all, cycling between the start and end by the quickest route would miss the whole point of the journey.

The Sandstone Way map, with or without gpx files, is available via the Sandstone Way website and the map only from all good book shops. A minimum £2 of every sale will be re-invested in the Sandstone Way and 100% of donations channelled through a not-for-profit Route Management programme.

**This Profile is contained in the official map**





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## 9. Plan Your Journey

### **Bike taxis:**

#### **Berwick on Tweed**

A to B Taxis 07732 520385 - 4,6,8 seaters – can carry 2 bicycles

A1 Cabs 01289 331565 Can carry 2 bicycles

Fife's Taxis 01289 307188 Can carry bicycles only if wheels come off!

Woody's Taxis 07591 933233 4 seater with wheelchair access, 6 seaters x 3, 8 seater can carry bicycles

**Wooler** - Ron's Taxis 01668 281281 –will travel as far as Berwick for pick ups

**Rothbury – TO BE COMPLETED**

**Bellingham** - Target Taxis 01434 240835 / 077101400152

**Hexham:** Eco Cabs <http://www.600600.co.uk/bike-transport/>

Hadrian's Wall Taxis <http://www.hadrianswalltaxi.com/services/>

Advanced Taxis <http://www.advancedtaxi.com/hadrians-wall-service/>

#### **Other:**

Pedal Power <http://www.pedal-power.co.uk/> will cover full route /bike hire

Adventure Northumberland <http://www.adventurenorthumberland.co.uk/index.html> bike hire

WATBus <http://www.watbus.org.uk/watbike/> groups (full route) /bike hire

The Cycle Hub <http://www.thecyclehub.org/> groups (full route) /bike hire

Stanley Taxis <http://www.bikebus.uk.com/> groups(full route)

Newcastle City Tours aka Cycle Transport North East

<http://www.newcastlecitytours.co.uk/cycletrans.php> groups(full route) /bike hire

### **Public transport:**

<http://jplanner.travelinortheast.info/>

East Coast Railway (to book bike spaces) <http://www.eastcoast.co.uk/>

Tyne Valley line (on a first arrived basis; 2 places on most – some carry 4)

email: [assistance@northernrail.org](mailto:assistance@northernrail.org) / 08456 045 608

### **Parking (Start/ End):**

Berwick on Tweed –in the Barracks car park then cycle to/from the quay

Hexham – ample room for drop-off/ collection but park considerately

**We do not currently know anywhere to recommend leaving your car overnight**

**Accommodation:** See <http://www.visitnorthumberland.com/where-to-stay/>

### **Bike shops, cycle hire & repair services:**

Berwick on Tweed: Wilson's Cycles 01289 331476 (by YHA at start)

Wooler: Haugh Head [http://haughheadgarage.co.uk/?page\\_id=71](http://haughheadgarage.co.uk/?page_id=71) 01668 281316

Rothbury: Tomlinsons Café has some limited bike spares 01669 621979

Bellingham: The Bike Place (shop, hire, repairs) 01434 220120 [www.thebikeplace.co.uk](http://www.thebikeplace.co.uk)

Hexham: Bykilogy (repair items & repairs) 07415 774937



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## En Route Services (hostels, bike shops, tearooms, pubs, useful shops, accommodation)

- **Berwick on Tweed:** Hostel, bike shop, tearooms, pubs, useful shops, all accommodations, TIC, banks, railway
- **Belford (spur):** Hostel, tearoom, pubs, useful shops, all accommodations
- **Chillingham Castle:** tearoom (free to visit)
- **Wooler:** Hostel, bike shop, tearooms, pubs, useful shops, all accommodations, TIC, banks,
- **Ingram:** Tearoom, Information Point, WC
- **Alwinton:** Bunkhouse, pub x 2, WC, campsite
- **Rothbury:** Hostel, tearooms, pubs, useful shops, all accommodations, TIC, banks
- **Elsdon:** Tearoom / WC, pub, B&B, Information Point
- **Bellingham:** Hostel, bike shop, tearooms, pubs, useful shops, all accommodations, TIC, banks,
- **Simonburn:** Tearoom / WC, Information Point, B&B
- **Newbrough:** Pub / WC
- **Warden:** Pub / WC
- **Hexham:** Bike shop, tearooms, pubs, useful shops, all accommodations, TIC, banks, railway

## 10. How Many Days to Ride the Sandstone Way?

One of the four options below will work for you depending on your fitness, available time and choice of accommodation.

### OPTION A. (3 days): Quite a challenging option even for reasonably fit mountain bikers

<u>Between</u>	<u>Km</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Ascent</u>	<u>Descent</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Av time</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Berwick on Tweed & Wooler	54.6	34.00	81.7m	17.5m	17.5km	6 hrs (6mph)	Comfortably achievable
Wooler & Rothbury	59.0	37.00	1,190m	1,185m	11.8km	6 hrs (6mph)	Comfortably achievable
Rothbury & Hexham	78.5	49.00	1,418m	1,543m	16.0km	8 hrs	A long full-on day
	<b>192</b>	<b>120</b>				(6mph)	

### OPTION B. (2 days): A challenging option for very fit competent mountain bikers

<u>Between</u>	<u>Km</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Ascent</u>	<u>Descent</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Av time</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Berwick on Tweed & Rothbury	113.5	71.00	2,006m	1,925m	29km	8 hrs (9mph)	A long full-on day
Rothbury & Hexham	78.5	49.00	1,418m	1,543m	16km	8 hrs	A second full-on day
	<b>192</b>	<b>120</b>				(6mph)	

### OPTION C. (Do-in-a-day): An extremely challenging option ONLY for extremely fit expert mountain bikers

<u>Between</u>	<u>Km</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Ascent</u>	<u>Descent</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Av time</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Berwick on Tweed & Hexham	<b>192</b>	<b>120</b>	3,500m	3,500m	44.6km	13hs (9.25mph)	<b>Extremely challenging</b>

*The current record is just under 11 hours @ an average speed of 11 mph*

### OPTION D. 4 days: A good option for averagely fit mountain bikers

**Option A plus a half day either at the start or finish** i.e. travel to Berwick on Tweed on the first morning then cycle to Belford in the afternoon or Wooler if very fit then complete the rest of option A  
Alternatively, cycle Option A then on Day 3 cycle only as far as Simonburn (advance booking necessary) then on Day 4 morning cycle to Hexham before travelling home in the afternoon.



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## 11. Luggage Transport & Tour Operators

Carrylite luggage transfers, can transfer people <http://www.carrylite.co.uk/index.php>  
01434 634448 OR 07976 356459

Saddle Skedaddle [www.skedaddle.co.uk](http://www.skedaddle.co.uk) Guided Holidays  
0191 2651110

Pedal Power <http://www.pedal-power.co.uk/> Self Guided with luggage and people transfer  
01665 713 448 OR 07790 596 782

## 12. Day Loops or Alternative Linear Options

**The Sandstone Way** map offers 10 optional loops that are not waymarked to make it possible to enjoy part of the main route and return back to your starting point, to select a harder or different route option for your first or further visits and to encourage riders to either extend their tour duration or entice them back for another visit.

## 13. The Sandstone Way: Places and Sites of Interest

[www.visitnorthumberland.com](http://www.visitnorthumberland.com)  
[www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk)  
[www.northumberlandcoastalb.org](http://www.northumberlandcoastalb.org)

Berwick on Tweed plenty and varied inc Elizabethan Walled Town and coastal views

Holy Island (Lindisfarne)

St Cuthbert's Cave (natural feature)

Chatton (art)

Chillingham Castle

Cragston (Rothbury)

Bellingham Heritage Centre

Hexham – plenty and varied inc Abbey & Gaol



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#### **14. Sandstone Way: Route Management Funded by User Donations**

**The Sandstone Way** will be future-managed & sustained by user donations as well as funding applications. If you have enjoyed cycling this route and wish to see it managed and improved, PLEASE consider donating a minimum of £3 per person (about the price of one pint of beer) to contribute towards funding managing and improving the Sandstone Way. Keep an eye out for donation boxes at Sandstone Way supporter sites on the route.

Please kindly transfer your donation to the account details below before you forget and contact the Sandstone Way route manager via [info@sandstoneway.co.uk](mailto:info@sandstoneway.co.uk) to advise of this, enable receipt of acknowledgement and to provide any route feedback. This not-for-profit account is independently audited and dedicated to cycle route management. ALL your donation will be allocated to managing the Sandstone Way.

Tyne Valley Cycling Project account: Lloyds Bank, Hexham, Northumberland

Branch sort code: 30-94-19 / Account number: 22941968 / Trans code: 85

For a PayPal link <https://tynevalleymtb.com.wordpress.com/sandstone-way-user-payback/>



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## 15. The Sandstone Way *Good Mountain Biking Code*

*Please follow this code which is best practice to safeguard the environment, maintain goodwill and ensure safe enjoyable trouble-free cycling.*

### Always obey the Highway Code

**File-out** on road sections when meeting vehicles and allow them to pass

**Be considerate to other road** users at all times and always acknowledge and reciprocate courtesy

### Be Courteous

**Always exchange a friendly greeting** with other trail users and anyone else you pass

**Always pass people & animals considerately** – you are an ambassador for cycling

**Always give way** to walkers, horse riders and all slow moving people some of whom may be hard of hearing, visually or mobility impaired. Don't assume they have heard or seen you

**Ring your bike bell** or politely call out to warn of your approach

**Cycle extra considerately** on shared use ways and always slow down when passing

**Thank people** who give way to you; it may help to advise how many other cyclists are following

### Be countryside aware

**Follow the county code**; in particular respect crops, livestock and wildlife

**Close all gates** you pass through unless found open. Groups – ensure the last person knows to close or leave open any gates

**Avoid erosion** by braking carefully and not skidding

**Take all litter home** including banana and orange peel which takes months to bio-degrade

**Show goodwill** to all engaged in rural industry - farm / forestry activities always take precedence

**Expect to meet** cattle, sheep and horses and behave appropriately

### Look after yourself and others

**Make sure your bike** is suitable and in good condition

**Plan your route** and cycle within your limits

**Take special care** at junctions, when cycling downhill, round blind corners and on loose/wet surfaces

**Wear a suitable cycle helmet** correctly

**Wear weather-suitable clothing** which is conspicuous for safety reasons

**Carry** water, food, repair items, route map and spare clothing

**Carry** money, personal ID and don't rely on mobile phone reception

**Avoid remote sections** in bad weather or if insufficiently confident or competent

**Use lights** when needed but for goodwill reasons, **PLEASE DO NOT CYCLE THIS ROUTE IN THE DARK**

### Meeting horse riders

**Expect to meet them** at any time! **Be friendly and NEVER** pass quickly or closely

**Warn riders and horses** of your approach preferably by politely calling out. A horse likes to know it is human coming up behind not a predator

**Stop and back away from nervous horses** or if asked to do so by the rider

**Lay your bike flat** if the horse is spooked by it until it calms down

**Open / close gates** for horse riders if sensible to do so

REMEMBER: Most horse riders live nearby and ride daily – you are probably just passing through

### Care of the environment

**Make every effort** to travel to/from the route sustainably i.e. on public transport, by car sharing or bike taxi

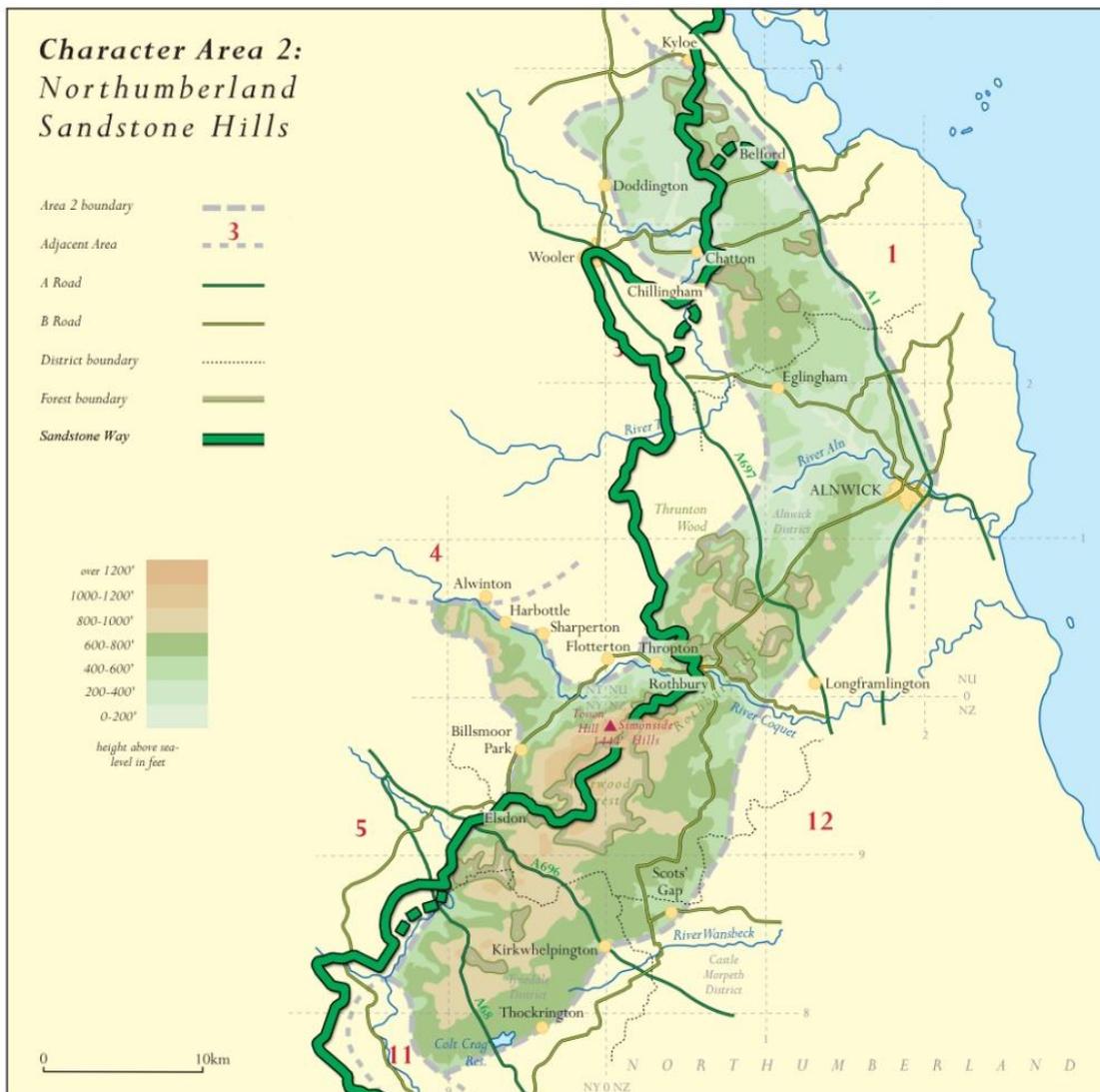
**Use support vehicles sparingly** – don't 'patrol' or block road sections or gateways; switch off the engine when parked; it is insensitive to supply food or drink to your group outside a tearoom or pub



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## 16. The Sandstone Way: A Geological Journey

The Sandstone Way crosses a landscape dominated by sandstone rocks from the Carboniferous period of Earth's history. The rocks are approximately 330 million years old. They were formed when what we now call Northumberland was covered by a huge braided river system. At that time the county lay within 5 degrees of the Equator and these enormous rivers flowed into tropical swamps and seas to the south. **Think Brahmaputra, not Breamish!** The sands carried by that river system have, over geological time, become the sandstones we know today. Later, forces in the Earth's crust injected molten lava (the Great Whin Sill) and tilted all the rocks gently to the east and south so that they sweep in a great arc across Northumberland. The characteristic landscape of north and westerly facing escarpments is a result of millions of years of erosion by water and wind..... and ice. Two million years ago, during the "Ice Age", a sheet of ice more than one kilometre thick flowed over and accentuated those escarpments. **Think Antarctic, not Alnwick!** When you struggle and curse up the scarp slopes on your mountain bike you might like to distract yourself with the thought that with every wheel turn you are crossing a few thousand years of Earth's history. You'll cycle the length of Northumberland, across massive rivers, tropical swamps and equatorial seas, molten lava and icy wastes. Just 100miles and 330 million years!





[www.sandstoneway.co.uk](http://www.sandstoneway.co.uk)

## 17. Contacts and Social Media

**E-mail** – [info@sandstoneway.co.uk](mailto:info@sandstoneway.co.uk) – direct all enquiries here and admin will send them to the right contact within the steering group

**Website** – [www.sandstoneway.co.uk](http://www.sandstoneway.co.uk) – there is a feedback forum on each listing on the site if people have specific comments to make.

**Facebook** – SandstoneWay – the Sandstone Way community called 'Sandstoners' are great at answering questions about conditions, tips etc always ask an enquiry to post a question on this page.

**Twitter** - @SandstoneWay – good to post promotions etc. If you use the #CycleNorth hashtag it usually gets forwarded across the region by NorthEastHour

**Hashtags** - #SandstoneWay #CycleNorth

## 18. Final summary

**The Sandstone Way** really is an enjoyable journey down (or up) just about the whole length of Northumberland which is one of England's best kept secrets. Apart from its undoubted merit as a thoroughly enjoyable mountain bike experience, the Sandstone Way has a fascinating cultural, historical and geological tale to tell when all its aspects and features are stitched together. It's not just a lovely scenic ride along its entire length, there are sections which are truly iconic and almost certainly, all those who cycle any part of this route will want to come back for more.

## Notes