

Lands End to John O'Groats

End to End Cycle Challenge

Depart Tuesday
Arrive Saturday
12 days / 11 Nights

Cycling from Land's End to John O' Groats, the furthest possible distance in the British Isles, is a classic challenge that many dream of. Starting at Land's End on the southwesterly tip of England, we pedal our way through Cornwall, over Dartmoor and north along the Welsh border, skirting the Lake District into Scotland, via lochs and the highlands to the North Coast and John O'Groats.



In all we will cover almost 1000 miles in 12 days, passing through some of the most stunning and remote countryside in the British Isles.

This is a tough challenge but a fabulous way to see the country, and one of the most rewarding things you will ever do!

ITINERARY

Day 1: Lands End – Lostwithiel

Land's End is stunningly situated on the southwestern-most tip of England. Its rocky cliffs and pounding seas make a fabulous backdrop for the obligatory



photos before we start! Then we gather at the Start line and begin our challenge. Our journey starts on winding Cornish roads as we head east towards Penzance, cycling along the sea for a short stretch as we pass the famous monument of St Michael's Mount.



Today is mainly undulating but with a few longer climbs and some shorter steep ones! Inland again, we take winding back-roads before joining a quiet main road to Truro and St Austell, passing close to the Eden Project, before cycling on towards the pretty town of Lostwithiel.

Approx Mileage: 75 Miles

NB We will start fairly early from Land's End, so you will probably find it more practical to arrive the night before. We can arrange transport from the nearest mainline railway station, Penzance, the night before as well as hostel accommodation in St Just (approx 5 miles away.)

Day 2: Lostwithiel – Cullompton

Today we cross Dartmoor, which is generally recognised to be the most challenging section of the ride. We cycle over rolling hills into Devon and through Tavistock, where we have a steep climb onto Dartmoor



itself. The views are fabulous if it's a clear day, though it can often be foggy in this wild part of Southwest England, so we take it easy as we climb towards the village of Two Bridges. There is a great descent into Postbridge, site of the well-

known stone Clapper Bridge, and then we climb again. By the time we reach the small town of Moretonhampstead the harder climbs are over, though there are still a few short sharp hills as the road winds its way to the edge of Dartmoor, where it's downhill all the way to Exeter. Crossing the centre of Exeter as a group, we follow a quiet road north through the small town of Cullompton and finish a few miles further north at our hotel.

Approx Mileage: 92 Miles

Day 3: Cullompton – Tintern

Continuing north, we cycle mainly on quiet, flat roads, as we cross into Somerset and pass Wellington and the busy town of Taunton. On back-roads again, we cycle towards Cheddar, enjoying the typically English rural scenery. There are a few short hills but we avoid the steep Gorge itself. We near the



Severn Estuary as we approach the outskirts of Bristol, and take the Avon Gorge cycle path for a short stretch as we take the busy roads through Avonmouth and up to the Severn Bridge. We cross the bridge using the cycle path, and celebrate our arrival in Wales! Our day ends with one of the most scenic parts of our route as we follow the rolling road through the forested Wye Valley, enjoying views of the beautiful ruin of Tintern Abbey and its pretty riverside village.

Approx Mileage: 98 miles

Day 4: Tintern – Shrewsbury

We follow the Wye River to Monmouth, where we head north into Herefordshire, leaving Wales behind. The long, fairly gentle gradients are still with us though, as we ride north towards the town of Hereford, with its striking cathedral and red sandstone buildings. Here we see the Wye for the last time as we cross it going into the city. We

head out of town on a quiet road heading to the small village of Leintwardine, crossing into Shropshire a few miles further on. We cycle on undulating country lanes, passing fields and small villages, and the lovely scenery of the Hope Valley. We re-join the main road just south of Shrewsbury, where we have a short run-in to hotel.

Approx Mileage: 90 miles



Day 5: Shrewsbury – Preston

Our morning starts with a gentle cycle through the medieval town of Shrewsbury, with its historic black and white timbered buildings, and we cross the River Severn – much smaller than when we crossed it two days ago! We head north, turning onto a quiet country road and passing through the small market towns of Wem and Whitchurch. Our route is mainly flat and the miles pass quickly. We head through a quiet corner of Cheshire on main roads into the most built-up area of our journey, by-passing busy Warrington and Wigan as we cycle on fast flat roads into Lancashire and on to our Travel Lodge just below Preston.

Approx Mileage: 86 miles

Day 6: Preston – Longtown

Today is a long day, but it will be our last ride on English soil for the trip! We cross Preston early, avoiding the morning traffic, and head north on quiet roads once more through Garstang and along the edge of the impressive Bowland



Forest. The roads are primarily flat as we follow our route through the attractive town of Lancaster, cross

into Cumbria, and pedal on through Kendal, renowned for its energy-boosting mint cake! The hills of the Lake District rise to our left as we



head towards Shap Fell, at over 1000ft the most notable climb since Dartmoor. The climb is long but the gradient is fairly gradual. From the top there are great views of hills and rolling green valleys. A fabulous long twisting descent now awaits almost all the way to Penrith, where we cycle past the castle and on to Carlisle. We head north of Carlisle to the small village of Longtown just before the border with Scotland.

Approx Mileage: 109 miles

Day 7: Longtown – Kilmarnock

Crossing over into Scotland, we pass the famous blacksmith's forge at Gretna Green, elopement capital of the world, and head through the village. Our first day on Scottish roads takes us on mainly flat, quiet back roads east, bypassing the pretty town of Dumfries. The morning's ride is very picturesque with the lush green rolling hills of



the Southern Uplands to either side as we cycle northeast through small towns and villages. There are some long but fairly gentle climbs and descents as we pass through this beautiful countryside. We pass through the small town of Sanquar, home to Britain's oldest post-office, and a great old Tolbooth. In Sanquar, along with Cumnock and New Cumnock a few miles ahead, look out for memorials and plaques commemorating the Covenanters who rebelled against the religious

dictates of the Stuart Kings in the late 1600s. Nearing Kilmarnock the roads get busier but our hotel lies just out of town.

Approx Mileage: 95 miles

Day 8: Kilmarnock – Inverary

We cycle through Kilmarnock and turn onto quieter B-roads as we head east to the Firth of Clyde via Irvine and Kilwinning. Following the coast road via the pretty waterside town of Largs, we enjoy fabulous views across the water to the Isles of Arran and Bute. The road continues to climb and descend as we cycle along the coast to Gourock, where we take the ferry across the short strait to Dunoon. We cycle north through beautiful forest and along the shores of Loch Eck, sometimes hidden from view by the trees, at other times we cycle right beside the water. This section is mainly flat, until we reach the shores of Loch Fyne, where from



the small village of Creggans we have a stiff climb to the top of the loch, with tempting views of Inverary a short distance away (as the crow flies) on the opposite side of the loch! We pass the world-renowned oyster-beds of Loch Fyne and approach Inverary on flatter roads. Look out for the fairy-tale towers of the castle among the trees to your right just before the town.

Approx Mileage: 90 miles

Day 9: Inveraray – Loch Lochy

Our day starts with a long but fairly gentle climb out of Inveraray, and we start to feel as though we are really in the Highlands! After a few miles we reach the shores of Loch Awe and cycle around the top of it, admiring the ruins of Castle Kilchurn at its head. Heading east to the coast again, we cross over the iron bridge at Connell, with great views of Loch Etive to our right and the Isle of Mull across the sea on our left. Our route now is beautiful, as we follow the coast road with views of stunning desolate beaches,

and hilly islands and peninsulas across the water. Inland, the higher peaks are visible in good weather.



Skirting the forests of Appin, we head north again, still following the coast, to Ballachulish – where the road splits off to the famous Glencoe. We continue straight on, crossing Loch Leven, and cycle along the banks of Loch Linnhe, enjoying a much-deserved flat run into Fort William. In good weather we may get good views of Ben Nevis and the surrounding high peaks. We climb out of the town, passing the impressive Commando Memorial after about 6 miles, and cycle an undulating route alongside Loch Lochy to our hostel at the end of the Loch.

Approx Mileage: 97 miles



Day 10: Loch Lochy – Bonar Bridge

Another day of beautiful Highland scenery awaits us as we head further north. We are nearing our destination now, taking the hills in our stride and our legs feel great! We follow the Caledonian Canal to Fort Augustus, with its impressive ladder of canal locks, and the foot of Loch Ness, which will be our companion for many miles. We pass Invermoriston and then the ancient Urquhart Castle, very picturesque against the backdrop of the loch. At Drumnadrochit we leave Loch Ness and head north again, uphill, to

Beauly, skirting the end of the Moray Firth, and on to Dingwall. Look out for seals as we pass alongside Cromarty Firth. The roads are flatter here but we start to climb again as we take the back-roads from Alness across bleak but beautiful moorlands to the Dornoch Firth. From the great viewpoint above the Firth we have a fantastic descent to Bonar Bridge, where we find tonight's hotel.

Approx Mileage: 83 miles

Day 11: Bonar Bridge – Tongue

A shorter day again today, though the terrain is not easy and we will deserve our half-day's rest later today! Leaving Bonar Bridge, we head due north once more, passing through Lairg at the foot of Loch Shin and encountering our first long climb of the day. Now in northern



Scotland, the Highlands are behind us and the landscape is much bleaker, with rich peaty moorlands and clear rivers. A few miles from Lairg we turn onto single-carriageway road, which is the standard for the rest of the day. We will encounter very few vehicles on this road. Look out for herds of red deer and birds of prey such as osprey or even the elusive golden eagle, as this area is very untouched. Our road is undulating, and can be hard if there is a strong wind. We skirt the beautiful Forest of Naver and pass the end of its loch at Altnaharra. This is the most sparsely populated region in



Northern Europe, with the nearest shop about 20 miles away. A few

more miles take us to Loch Loyal, with Ben Loyal towering above it, and after another couple of climbs we reach the North Coast, with views of beautiful, deserted golden beaches. Our hotel is stunningly located on the Kyle of Tongue.

Approx Mileage: 52 miles



Day 12: Tongue – John O'Groats

Leaving Tongue, our road now is due west and runs parallel to the North Coast. The first section inland sees some hard climbs, but the views of the endless moors more than make up for it, as do the views of isolated golden beaches as we re-join the coast at Bettyhill. After the long climb out of this small village, the road becomes two-way again and after the villages of Melvich and Bighouse, a few miles further on, the roads become flatter. We pass the power station at Dounreay and approach Thurso, and from this point we pick up mileage signs for John O' Groats and your legs will feel much lighter! The small town of Thurso comes as a slight culture shock after all the miles we have cycled on near-



deserted roads in the last two days. A few miles further, our road passes through the high sand-dunes of Dunnet Bay, with its beautiful white-sand beach and renowned bird-life. We pass the turn-off to Dunnet Head, Scotland's most northerly point, and pedal the remaining miles along a mainly flat road to John O'Groats and our Finish line!

Large celebration!

Approx Mileage: 67 miles

If the whole group wishes to do so, it may be possible to detour to the tip of Dunnet Head. This would add approx 12 miles extra to the day's cycling total.



NB: Depending on the ability of the group we should arrive at John O' Groats by mid-afternoon. We can arrange optional transport to Inverness (good onward transport links) and accommodation at a hotel in central Inverness if required; should enough of the group want to do this we can also arrange a celebration meal in Inverness – further details will be given nearer the time.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Tour cost

The tour cost includes all meals (except breakfast on Day 1 and dinner on Day 12), accommodation, support vehicle and all back-up, Discover Adventure Leaders and support crew.

It does not include personal insurance or bicycles (we do not recommend cycling on a mountain bike.) It also does not include any snacks, drinks or personal expenses.

Approx. £100 - £120 is recommended for personal expenses.



Food & Accommodation

Our accommodation ranges from small B&Bs to larger hotels. Due to

the route we take, some nights are in Travel Lodges to minimise unnecessary extra mileage. In Scotland we stay in hostels for one or two nights (depending on group size) as these are our best option in remote areas.

The hotels are comfortable and well situated but not luxurious. All rooms have en suite facilities. The hostels will provide mainly dorm-style accommodations with shared facilities. All food is included except two meals as indicated above.



Weather UK Min/Max average 8 – 20°C

The weather in May should be generally good, though it can be changeable especially in Scotland, where there is an increased chance of rain and strong winds. The prevailing wind direction will have more of an impact on the cycling difficulty than rain.

CYCLING INFORMATION

Support vehicles are with the group all of the time. All luggage and spares will be carried in them.



The cycling is mainly undulating over rolling countryside though there are some longer, tougher climbs (primarily in Dartmoor). Distances are fairly long, averaging approx 100 miles per day, with two shorter days at the end. Participants should make sure they are fit enough to manage these distances over the length of 12 consecutive

days. This is not a ride which any cyclist should attempt without specific training.

Traffic is light on most of the roads but when we pass through large towns we go through as a group.



Bike Repairs

There will be a range of spares in the vehicle along with a full tool kit. However it is impossible for us to carry spares for every eventuality so it is vital that your own bike it is in good order before departure.

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