

Wide Open Skies and Empty Spaces

Whether it's off-road or on quiet lanes, Norfolk has something for everyone

While Noel Coward wasn't entirely accurate with his 'Very flat, Norfolk' line in *Private Lives*, it's quite true that you don't have to be the Tour de France's King of the Mountains to enjoy cycling in the country's combined sunniest and driest county - the undulations here are very kind to knees and calves.

The great thing about Norfolk is that it has gentle gradients and terrains for all ages and types of cyclists, whether it's off-road or on quiet lanes, whether you pedal gently to see the countryside or you're a little more competitive.

Cycling in Norfolk might mean travelling along the country lanes of the Waveney Valley, or pretty coastal paths past fields of

poppies and golden barley with the distant sea sparkling on the horizon. It might mean woodland trails or the open vistas of the Fens, former low-lying marshlands and wetlands that have been drained over the centuries for agriculture. It might mean the heather-carpeted heathlands of the Brecks or by the water in the unique man-made landscape of the Norfolk Broads.

The city of Norwich is also very bike-friendly and by cycle is a great way to get around one of the best-preserved medieval cities in northern Europe, with its imposing Norman castle and cathedral.

If you're feeling energetic you can try the Norfolk Coast Cycleway which covers 59 miles from King's Lynn, with its rich maritime history, to seaside resort

Great Yarmouth via Cromer. With much of the route passing through an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty it has dramatic views, beautiful countryside and outstanding wildlife. It follows less-used lanes just inland from the coast and around every corner you will see yet more breathtaking scenery.

The north Norfolk coast is the UK's capital of birdwatching, with many reserves to stop off at, and spectacular migrations in Winter and Spring. You could also leave your cycle for an hour and take a boat trip out to see the grey and common seal colony at Blakeney Point.

The area around Cromer is actually the highest in the whole of East Anglia and here you'll get dramatic views of the sea and





the rolling cliffs. The route down to Great Yarmouth takes in sandy beaches and dunes tufted with marram grass.

Also, the Bure Valley path passes through some of the most beautiful and peaceful parts of the Broads, following the stunning River Bure past the picturesque village of Coltishall. To get a true feel for what is probably one of the nicest stretches of river in Norfolk TheCanoeMan has a very unique offering called a Pedal Paddle – where you can cycle to the top of the river and then canoe your way back down making the obligatory stop at the riverside hostelry! With your bikes to meet you when you finish what better way to spend a day?

Norfolk was the first county in Britain to introduce Quiet Lanes, country roads where motorists are encouraged to take particular care in the presence of cyclists, walkers and horseriders. These quiet country lanes occupy a triangle of North East Norfolk from Cromer to Bacton along the coastal area and

inland to North Walsham. Covering some 36 miles they are not a continuous network, but link with many other lightly trafficked lanes for riders to create their own routes. The entry and exit points of each Quiet Lane are clearly signed.

The Quiet Lanes link with the Norfolk Coast Cycleway and Bittern Line stations at North Walsham, Gunton and Cromer. The Bittern Line is a cycle-friendly railway line operated by Greater Anglia railways and links Cromer and Sheringham with Norwich and the Norfolk Broads. It has a special map showing linear and circular cycle routes from its stations, using country lanes. Distances vary from 6 miles to 30 miles and more, as some routes can be linked together.

The Bittern Line links with the Norfolk Coast Cycleway at Gunton and Cromer, the Bure Valley Railway Path and the Norfolk Broads at Hoveton & Wroxham, and the Marriott's Way and National Cycle Network

1 at Norwich. The Sustrans National Cycle Network Route 1, using old railway paths, forest tracks, country parks, bridleways, quiet minor roads and traffic-calmed streets in urban areas, passes through Norfolk, to King's Lynn via Norwich and Fakenham, and is designed to make cycling fun, safe and simple. There is ever-changing scenery, from market towns to quaint villages and peaceful countryside.

The quieter paths, including the Marriott's Way, are a great place for children and new cyclists to practice their cycling skills and many are just the right length for a day ride.

At 26 miles the Marriott's Way is one of the longest traffic-free routes in the country. Linking historic Aylsham and Reepham with the heart of Norwich, this combination of two former railway lines is open to cyclists, walkers and horseriders.

From Aylsham you can take the 9-mile Bure Valley Path through the picturesque



river valley to Wroxham in the heart of the Broads. It follows the narrow-gauge Bure Valley Railway and halts are provided at Brampton, Buxton and Coltishall to put down or pick up passengers on request, including bikes (subject to space). At Wroxham why not take a boat trip out on the water and see for yourself why we call this the UK's Magical Waterland.

The Wherryman's Way travels through the southern Broads area, following the course of the River Yare between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. Look out for the unique way markers along the route, which includes figures, sculpture, information panels and audio points.

There are also cycle routes in the Southern Broads around Burgh St Peter where you can hire bikes by the day or half

day at the Waveney River Centre. This is a perfect area to explore by bike, with many miles of gentle and peaceful country lanes and the Centre can provide long or short route maps free of charge. If you want to stay, you could book yourself into an Escape Pod for the night! You could also try Broadland Cycle Hire at the fantastic BeWILDerwood visitor attraction.

National Cycle Network Route 1 links with the Norfolk Coast Cycleway at Wighton and with Route 13 at Gateley, just south of Fakenham, it forms part of the North Sea Cycle Route. The route also links with the Bittern Line in Norwich.

A feature of the 30-mile National Cycle Network Route 13 is that it passes through the distinctive Breckland landscape of mid-Norfolk. It follows mainly minor roads,

passes close to Thetford Forest High Lodge which offers wide scope for off-road riding, and links with the ancient Peddars Way. The Peddars Way National Trail is a challenging off-road ride. There are easy sections, but others that are bumpy and some that involve moderate climbs. There's varied scenery along this 46-mile route that runs from Holme near Hunstanton, where the famous Seahenge was found that now resides in King's Lynn Museum, and inland to touch the edge of Thetford Forest, finishing just beyond the Country Park of Knettishall Heath. Most of Peddars Way is off-road and is open to walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.

The Peddars Way crosses the Norfolk Coast Cycleway and National Cycle Route 1 at Ringstead, near Hunstanton, and links

with National Cycle Network Route 13 at Wretham, just north of Thetford.

If you have time for a detour to High Lodge at Thetford Forest, it's a great opportunity to go off-road. In the heart of the largest lowland pine forest in the UK, you will find miles of trails especially for cyclists. You can hire a mountain bike at the Forest Centre and join one of the organised rides, or take your own bike and explore the forest at your leisure. There is a variety of routes to choose from with something for all abilities. Graded by colour, the green Shepherd trail is a gentle route and great for all the family with wide tracks and fairly level ground, there's a blue Poacher trail and the more challenging red Beater trail and red Lime Burner trail.

The town of Diss in the Norfolk/Suffolk

border the makes a ideal centre for cycle touring, with many rides out either following the river Waveney, or along country lanes into quiet villages. The best place to get local knowledge is at Madgetts Cycles in Shelfanger Road, where all the staff are keen cyclists. For nearly a century it has been the hub of the local cycling community, and can advise on local routes and terrain, as well as club rides and events, also helping you with any technical advice, repairs – or even selling you a new bike!"

If you appreciate wide open skies and empty spaces with no hills to disrupt the glorious views, then Norfolk is ideal, whatever your age and however you like to cycle. It's said that wherever you are in Norfolk you can see a church on the horizon. Why not come and put that to the test?

INFORMATION:

To find out more about cycling in Norfolk www.visitnorfolk.co.uk.

Norfolk is a great county for competitive cyclists. Revolution Events put on an annual Cycle Show and organise a series of sportives. Details at www.revolutionevents.co.uk

Norfolk Broads Tourist Information & Activity Centre based in the heart of the Broads (beside Wroxham Bridge) offers access to cycle routes, maps & downloads as well as offering top quality cycle & canoe hire and access to a wide variety of activities that will allow you to explore the quieter areas of the beautiful Norfolk countryside. **01603 783777** info@NBtic.co.uk www.NBtic.co.uk

Next year, Norfolk will once again host a stage of the Tour of Britain.

