

Bikexplore

France Normandy

Land Only, Self-Catering, Tarmac & Gravel Tour
(Tour CW 242)

30th June – 7th July 2024

This is a one week cycling holiday during which the group will travel by cross-channel ferry from Portsmouth to Ouistreham (the port for Caen) and then ride west to the small harbour town of Carentan which will be the base for this single centre holiday. The town is located at the centre of the Cotentin and Bessin Marshes Regional Natural Park. The area will be explored in a series of day rides to the north, south, east & west. A visit to the city of Bayeux will form part of the group's return ride back to Ouistreham at the end of the holiday. The leader of the tour will be Colin Ward.

Itinerary

A Land Only, Self-Catering Tour

Sun 30 June – Meet up in Portsmouth & Board Overnight Ferry

We meet up at the Brittany Ferries Cross Channel Ferry Terminal in time for the 2300 sailing . We will be carrying our own luggage.

- Route distance: 2 miles from Portsmouth Harbour railway station.
- Route altitude gain: Dead flat.
- Accommodation: Ferry. (You have to book either a reserved seat or cabin).
- Meals: Self Catering. (Breakfast can be purchased in the on board restaurant.)

Mon 1 July – Arrive Ouistreham, Disembark and Ride to Carentan

The ferry gets in at 0645. Carrying our own luggage, we ride from Ouistreham (the port for Caen) to Carentan, stopping at a big boulangerie on the outskirts of Bayeux to buy lunch.

- Route distance: 88.4 km (54.9 miles)
- Route altitude gain: 524 m (1,718 ft)
- Accommodation: Mobile-Home Cabin in Harbourside Campsite.
- Meals: Self Catering. (Eat at one of the nearby Bistros or cook for ourselves)

Tues 2 July – Ride West

A circular luggage-free ride to St Germain sur Ay on the west coast of the Cotentin peninsular, making a quick stop at the lonely Chapel of St Anne on the marshes. There is a sandy beach at St Germain which faces the Island of Jersey. There are a couple of places to buy lunch. The westward ride is on tarmac country roads and the return is on a cycle path which follows the route of an old railway line.

- Route distance: 75.7 km (47 miles)
- Route altitude gain: 449 m (1,474 ft)
- Accommodation: Mobile-Home Cabin in Harbourside Campsite.
- Meals: Self Catering. (Eat at one of the nearby Bistros or cook for ourselves)

Wed 3 July – Ride North

Another unladen day ride, following the east coast and calling first at Utah Beach. For lunch, we'll be in the harbour village of St-Vaast-la-Hougue. We then return south by an inland route to visit Ste-Mère-Eglise on our way back to Carentan. (A visit to the Airborne Museum might appeal to some.)

- Route distance: 96.1 km (59.7 miles)
- Route altitude gain: 449 m (1,474 ft)
- Accommodation: Mobile-Home Cabin in Harbourside Campsite.
- Meals: Self Catering. (Eat at one of the nearby Bistros or cook for ourselves)

Thur 4 July – Ride South

We take the cycle path across the marshes which follows first La Taute and then La Vire river to the city of St Lô where it should be market day. After Lunch, we return to Carentan by an alternative route over the marshes.

- Route distance: 78.8 km (48.9 miles)
- Route altitude gain: 572 m (1,877 ft)
- Accommodation: Mobile-Home Cabin in Harbourside Campsite.
- Meals: Self Catering. (Eat at one of the nearby Bistros or cook for ourselves)

Fri 5 July – Explore the Carentan Area or Free Day

There are lots of places near to Carentan to visit. A ride up to the lonely Pointe de Brévands to look out over the Bai des Veys will provide plenty of landscape photo opportunities. A little further on, in Isigny-sur-Mer (famous for its salted butter and Camembert cheese) there is a lovely picnic spot beside the Quai Neuf. There is also the Maison du Parc bird sanctuary only a 7 km bike ride from the campsite.

- Route distance: 37.9 km (23.5 miles) (round trip to Pointe de Brévands and Isigny)
- Route altitude gain: 164m (537 ft)
- Accommodation: Mobile-Home Cabin in Harbourside Campsite.
- Meals: Self Catering. (Eat at one of the nearby Bistros or cook for ourselves)

Sat 6th July – Return to Ouistreham via Bayeux

This morning, carrying our own luggage, we ride first to Bayeux to explore the city, market and the famous tapestry (if that's your thing). In the afternoon we continue on our way towards Ouistreham, stopping for an evening meal in a restaurant beside the sea. We then have just the last few kilometres to get to the ferry terminal in time for the 2330 overnight ferry to Portsmouth.

- Route distance: 92.8 km (57.6 miles)
- Route altitude gain: 546 m (1,790 ft)
- Accommodation: Ferry. (You have to book either a reserved seat of Cabin.)
- Meals: Self Catering. (Breakfast can be purchased in the on board restaurant.)

Sun 7th July – Arrive Portsmouth and Disembark at End of Tour

The ferry should get in at 0615. The tour leader will assist with directions away from the terminal on cycle routes to rail stations or parking places.

Price & Key Dates

Price: £350 per room, Land Only, Self-Catering

The Mobile-Home Cabins in the Harbourside Campsite look like this:



This type of cabin has a kitchen and two ensuite bedrooms. One is a double and one is a twin.

The twin room looks like this:



The beds are close together. We think this would suit a couple who are content to have twin beds rather than a double, or two friends who don't mind sleeping near each other. However, we don't think that this arrangement would be suitable for two strangers to share. This is why we are pricing the tour per room rather than per person.

'Land Only' means that participants will book and pay for their own return ferry fare. (further details below).

Participants will also provide their own meals (further details below).

The price is based on a minimum number of 8 booked rooms. If there are insufficient bookings by 21st April 2024, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Price includes:

- 5 nights in 1 double or twin room (sharing or single), sharing kitchen with other cabin occupant(s)
- Bikexplore costs

Price does not include:

- Ferry Fares. At Dec 2023 prices: £124 return + £5 reserved seat (each way) or 2 berth cabin £66 (outbound), £81 (inbound).
- Travel to and from Portsmouth Cross-Channel Ferry Terminal.
- Meals.
- Drinks
- Lunches or refreshments at morning and afternoon stops
- Meals in transit
- Entry fees at any attractions visited
- Any other personal expenses
- Tips
- Travel Insurance

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £35 per room is required as soon as possible once the Tour Leader has processed your Booking Form (see below), with the final balance of £315 per room to be paid by 21st April 2024.

Cancellations

Should you be forced to cancel your booking for any reason you must notify us in writing. Cancellation charges are as follows:

Written notice received:

- Before 21st April 2024: £35
- 21st April 2024 to departure: £350

To Make a Booking

Please contact the Tour Leader to check that there are still places available. Then complete and submit the online booking form. Instructions on how to pay the deposit (and balance) will then be sent to you.

Holiday Information



This Holiday is classed as Grade 4 – Moderate

Area Covered By The Holiday

The Tour will be based in the attractive small harbour town of Carentan located at the centre of the Cotentin and Bessin Marshes Regional Natural Park with its areas of hedgerow (called the *bocage*) wetlands, moorland and coastline. It has a huge variety of flora and fauna. This is great birdwatching country. Last summer, we saw a large flock of white storks circling above us as we rode south towards St Lô. Utah Beach, where American Troops landed from the sea in 1944, is a short ride away from Carentan and so is Ste-Mère-Eglise, where America's D-Day paratroopers are remembered. The fishing and yachting harbour, St-Vaast-la Hougue, voted France's favourite village a few years back, is 50km up the coast. The Medieval city of Bayeux lies roughly half way between the port of Ouistreham and Carentan. From a couple of kilometres away the great spires of its cathedral are visible

across the surrounding fields and are a useful landmark for cyclists. This city is, of course, the place to see the Bayeux tapestry which, among other things, depicts the Viking style ships which carried William the Conqueror and his army across the channel to England in 1066. A reconstruction of one of these ships can often be seen moored in Carentan harbour.

Travel & Communication

You will have to make your own arrangements for travel to and from the start and end point of the tour at Portsmouth Cross Channel Ferry Terminal. Portsmouth Harbour train station is less than 2 miles from the terminal. National Cycle Route 22 passes close to the ferry terminal cycle entrance.

We will be boarding the ferry with bikes so, if arriving in Portsmouth by car, you will need to arrange parking for the duration of the holiday. A parking app like JustPark might help with this. There are easy connections with the motorway system.

When the tour has been confirmed, you will need to book and pay for yourself & bike on the following overnight Brittany Ferries:

Portsmouth to Caen (Ouistreham): 30th June 2024. Departure: 23:00. Arrival: 06:45.

Caen (Ouistreham) to Portsmouth: 6th July 2024. Departure: 23:30. Arrival: 06:15.

It is very important to note that neither the Tour Leader nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements to join the tour, you should ensure that you have read and understood our booking conditions. Should the tour not attract sufficient bookings to reach the minimum operating size, we may cancel the tour at any time up to 10 weeks before departure. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation, or wait until you have been told that the tour will go ahead.

A WhatsApp group will be set up, for those who have the App on their phones, to make communications between participants simple.

Accommodation

Our accommodation will be in Mobile-Home cabins in a harbour-side campsite in Carentan (see picture above). The site is located at the edge of the town between the Canal de Carentan yacht harbour and the local Hippodrome (horse-racing track).

Participants are responsible for handing back the Mobile-Home cabins clean at the end of the stay. This simply requires sweeping out the rooms and leaving the bathrooms and kitchen clean. Two of us didn't spend any more than 30 minutes on this last summer.

Meals, Health & Diet

Each cabin has a fully equipped kitchen. There is a large supermarket within walking distance. The town also has a good choice of bistros within easy walking distance. A quick early morning spin to the local boulangerie should satisfy the needs of those who like a continental breakfast. Cafés, bakeries, and village shops are few and far between in the countryside so I usually make up a filled baguette before I set out, in case I need a snack. On the ferries, continental and cooked breakfasts are available for purchase in the restaurant.

Last summer there were some mosquitos flying at night. Keeping bedroom windows closed kept them away. Packing an insect repellent would be a good idea.

Group Information

The maximum number of participants will be 12 including the Tour Leader.

Weather and Clothing

July is a good time to visit Normandy with daytime average temperatures ranging from 20°C to 25°C. July is also the driest month. Shorts and a cycling top with short or long sleeves are the usual daytime riding attire, but make sure you pack some warmer things and wet weather gear. We strongly recommend wearing a cycle helmet. Your favourite casual clothes will be suitable for evening wear.

Cycles & Equipment

A touring bike, gravel bike, hybrid or lightweight ATB would be suitable for this tour. You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. A low bottom gear (e.g. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended. If you are unsure about gears, please discuss with the Tour Leader. Mudguards are optional but show consideration for those who are following you in wet weather. Lights are a legal requirement at night so are needed if going out for an evening ride. Tyres of at least 28mm diameter are recommended. Each day participants will be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs. For carrying your clothing and wash gear etc on the ride to and from Carentan, a strong rear rack with panniers or bike-packing bags or saddlebag and bar bag would all be suitable. You are advised to do some riding before the tour with a similar load to that which you will be carrying during the tour to get a feel for how your bike will handle.

Rides, Rest Days & Fitness

I have called this a Tarmac and Gravel Tour because I want cyclists to choose tyres which are suitable for rough surfaces on the cycle paths. The Tarmac roads are mainly smooth, but some of the lanes have broken gravelly surfaces with potholes. Members of the group usually ride together but, if participants prefer, they will be equipped with sufficient maps and directions to ride on ahead or drop behind and catch up later. We will be carrying our own luggage on the journey From Ouistreham to Carentan and on our return. When day riding from our base, we will be unladen and the main group will travel at an average speed of about 20kph (12mph). We will have stops for coffee, lunch or tea and to admire the landscapes, seascapes, buildings of interest and the like. Friday can be a free day, as described above, but there is nothing to prevent participants from remaining at the campsite to rest on any of the days in Carentan.

Maps & Guides

Before departure, participants will be sent the following:

- links to the routes on RidewithGPS (can be read on Smart Phones and iPhones)
- files to load onto GPS devices including .gpx, .fit and .tcx
- PDF maps, elevation profiles and cue sheets to print (useful if you don't have a GPS device).

The French IGN Top 100 map, No. 106 Caen / Cherbourg-en-Cotentin was used in planning the tour. Pages torn from a cheap road atlas would be perfectly adequate.

The address, phone number and location of your accommodation will be provided. You should carry these each day and a mobile phone if you use one.

Travel Insurance & Vaccination

When the tour is confirmed, you should obtain travel insurance.

The UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) has replaced the existing European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). If you have an existing EHIC you can continue to use it until the expiry date on the card. Once it expires, you'll need to apply for a UK GHIC to replace it.

Since 14 March 2022, the "vaccine pass" has been lifted in France in all areas where it was previously required. Similarly, the COVID certificate is no longer required as of 1 August 2022.

Passport, Visa & Monies

A Passport is required for entry into France issued less than 10 years before the date you enter the country and valid for at least 3 months after the day you plan to leave.

British citizens do not require a visa if spending up to 90 days over a 180 day period in the Schengen area. The currency in France is the Euro.

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) provides advice about risks of travel to help British nationals make informed decisions. Here's a link <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france>

About the Leader

This will be my 11th year organising cycling holidays, having led tours in the UK and India. I have reced this tour by bike during trips to Normandy over the last two summers. In 2023 I was accompanied by one of my cycling club-mates.

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