

OPEN CHALLENGE

LONDON TO PARIS BIKE RIDE

18-21 July 2008

This long-weekend challenge links two great European cities, London and Paris (Eiffel Tower) covering around 300km in just three days.

We set off through the streets of south London and cycle through undulating countryside towards the south coast, heading towards the port of Newhaven where stay overnight, before boarding the ferry to Dieppe, the following day.

We cycle from Dieppe through sleepy Normandy villages to Beauvais with some challenging hills to conquer along the way.

As we approach Paris on day three our surroundings become more urban. We reach the city centre via its most famous park, the Bois de Boulogne. From there it's just a couple of kilometres along wide Parisian boulevards to the city's most famous landmark, the Eiffel Tower, our finish line!

Day four is free for you to explore the sights of Paris or just unwind, before boarding the Eurostar for a relaxing journey back to London.

Day 1 – Friday 18 July

Crystal Palace, London – Newhaven

90km approx

Our starting point is in the grounds of Crystal Palace, one of Britain's 5 National Sports Stadiums. We meet at 9am and set off in the morning through the streets of south-east London. There is likely to be a lot of traffic around so we'll cycle slowly and keep close together. The terrain is undulating as we travel south-west towards Croydon. By this stage our surroundings are less built up and less congested. Once through Wallington, the road is undulating followed by a steep downhill stretch. We pay for this a few kilometres later with a sharp uphill climb towards the village of Chipstead.

As we approach Reigate and Redhill and cycle to the other side of the M25 the scenery starts to become very pretty and more rural. Some 45km from our starting point we stop for lunch at "The Crown" on Turners Hill, a 16th century farmhouse which has been converted into a public house. We will be ready for a break after the challenging hill-climb it takes to get there!

In the afternoon we pass the South of England show ground, on the approach to Lewes. Watch out for a steep climb here, but you can look forward to the reward of fantastic views of the South Downs once through town.

After 90km we at last see the "Welcome to Newhaven" sign and head for our overnight hotel for showers and dinner together. Early night to prepare for the early start tomorrow.

Day 2 – Saturday 19 July
Ferry Newhaven – Dieppe
Dieppe - Gournay en Bray

87kms approx

Early start as we get back in the saddle and cycle 1 mile to the ferry terminal, then wheel our bikes on board. Our ferry departs at 06.00 for the 4 hour crossing to France. During the journey we will have breakfast and a chance to sleep some more, or relax. The boat is due to arrive in Dieppe at 11.00hrs. We disembark with our bikes and head out of Dieppe, an old fashioned port town nestled between two limestone cliffs. The streets are likely to be crowded due to the traditional Saturday street market. Within 2½km we are into the pretty Normandy countryside. We pass through typically French villages, all of which seem to have at least one *boulangerie* and *bar/tabac* no matter how small.

The route to our first stop in the village of Torcy le Grand is gently undulating. The terrain is similar for the next stretch to the centre of Saint Saens, with its pretty central square and church, where we'll stop for lunch. From there we encounter a few uphill sections - some longer and more challenging than others. From Bosque Eveline (51km into the day) the route becomes undulating once more.

The last stretch of cycling is another succession of sleepy villages along quiet roads. The terrain continues to be undulating with an uphill stretch that affords beautiful views of Saint Aubert-en-Bray and Onse-en-Bray. We will spend the night in Gournay en Bray. This evening we are bound to celebrate today's achievement over a glass or two of French wine or beer in these picturesque surroundings.

Day 3 – Sunday 20 July
Gournay en Bray – Eiffel Tower, Paris

99km approx

We leave Gournay en Bray in a south-easterly direction bound for Paris and a beautiful days' cycling. Normandy is known for its *bocage*, farmland criss-crossed with hedges and trees and we are soon cycling amongst this type of rural landscape. We pass through numerous villages this morning and see the locals heading to and from church. The terrain is mainly undulating but there are some short climbs.

As we progress through the day, our surroundings start to change and we enter the suburbs of Paris. We stop for lunch after having cycled around 40km. Straight after lunch we enter a forested area known as Le Parc aux Etoiles for about 3km. From there it's a strong descent towards the River Seine. We cross the river over a bridge close to Poissy. This is a main road and there is likely to be lots of traffic. Once through Poissy we head uphill through more forest on a dedicated bike lane. The next main place we reach is St Germain-en-Laye. It is here that we cross the Seine once more, the river having swept round from where we crossed it before. We encounter a succession of traffic lights and roundabouts before crossing the river once again. The route is mainly uphill with one very steep climb followed by a long downhill.

The next bridge we cross takes us into the Bois de Boulogne on the western edge of the city. The designer of these woods took his inspiration from London's Hyde Park. Today it is home to the French Open tennis tournament and two horse racing tracks – we pass both of these venues on our route through the park. We re-group inside the park for the final stretch of cycling.

We exit this pretty expanse of green together at Place de la Porte de Passy. From there the excitement starts to mount as we cycle along the wide Parisian boulevards towards our final destination. We cross the Pont d'Iena and straight ahead of us is the Eiffel Tower, Paris' most impressive and recognisable landmark. It is here that we celebrate the end of this memorable ride.

A short ride (approx. 5 minutes) to our hotel (IBIS Paris Tour Eiffel) situated close to the Eiffel Tower. Tonight we enjoy a celebratory meal in a restaurant close to the hotel.

Day 4 – Monday 21 July

Paris - London

Free morning to explore Paris independently. It is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities in the world – Notre Dame, the Champs Elyées, Arc de Triomphe, Montmartre, Sacré Coeur, Musée d'Orsay...there is so much to see and do.

We catch a Eurostar train back to the UK from the centrally located Gare du Nord at 17:10 (depart hotel at 15:30). On arrival at London Waterloo station (18:56) we are reunited with our bikes.

This is a complex itinerary and may be subject to change

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