

Cathedral of Santiago
de Compostela



Dumfries & Galloway

Solo in Scotland

Novice cycle tourer **Rebecca Mitten** enjoyed her longest trip yet in October

AS A SINGLE WOMAN in my early 50s, with my children young adults who are doing their own thing, my holiday options are different now. I love walking, cycling and seeing different places but friends aren't always free to join me. So I thought I'd give cycle touring on my own a go. I started with a one-night trip over the Humber Bridge. It was fantastic!

My latest ride in October was my longest yet at 260 miles, mostly in Dumfries and Galloway. The longest day was 43 miles, the shortest 24. I rode from Carlisle to Stranraer on NCNs 7 and 73, taking in the Mull of Galloway Lighthouse, plus the Forth Bridge on the journey home.

What was lovely about it? I was lucky with the weather – some rainy patches but overall bright skies. B&B owners were cheery and helpful. I had the best chips I've eaten in years at a small hotel in Sandhead, and in the morning the best porridge ever while a cat sat purring on my knee. In Castle Douglas I enjoyed the best Greek meal I've had. The cafés were spick and span. Torhouse Stone Circle and Caerlaverock Castle were worth seeing. The Mull of Galloway Lighthouse (right) was glorious. Roads and paths were mostly smooth and peaceful. The only not-so-lovely element was the hassle of getting my bike on trains.

I'd be interested to hear what other female tourers do when nature calls and there are no toilets around. I feel pretty exposed with my shorts round my knees. Anyway, it was a glorious trip and I'm looking forward to my next one.



Spain

A pilgrim's progress

David Stringer was tested by an eight-day 'organised' ride along the Camino de Santiago

As I struggled up yet another long, steep climb – my muscles burning, my hips and knees aching and my lungs gasping for breath – I was wondering what I had let myself in for. Eventually I found myself at the top and entered a small town, but there were still a few more hills before we dropped back down to the coast. This was only the first day of an eight-day led ride along the north route of the Camino de Santiago. I was already suffering.

What had possessed me, a 70-year-old cyclist of average ability at best, to take on this challenge? I had done a C2C and a leisurely LEJOG, and I was open to new challenges. I looked up the tour on the website and, after making a few enquiries, decided it was achievable. I signed up and paid my money. A bike would be provided so I wouldn't have to worry about transferring my own to Spain.

At the start there were four of us, including the two leaders/organisers. As we progressed it soon became apparent that the organisation and planning left a lot to be desired. The beginning and end point of each day were known but the route seemed to be made up on the fly.

There were no easy days apart from day four, which was a rest



In the mountains
near Meira

day. I rested. On the last day we rolled into the cathedral square to finish our pilgrimage. Like an audax, you need to provide proof of passage via a passport you collect at the start and which you get stamped along the way at various cafés, bars, hotels, churches and tourist offices. We took our passports to the pilgrimage office and received our certificates. The bike was returned to the hire company, I caught the bus to the airport and went home. I'm glad I managed to do it. I only wish it had been a properly organised tour.



Some Caminos
utilise tunnels