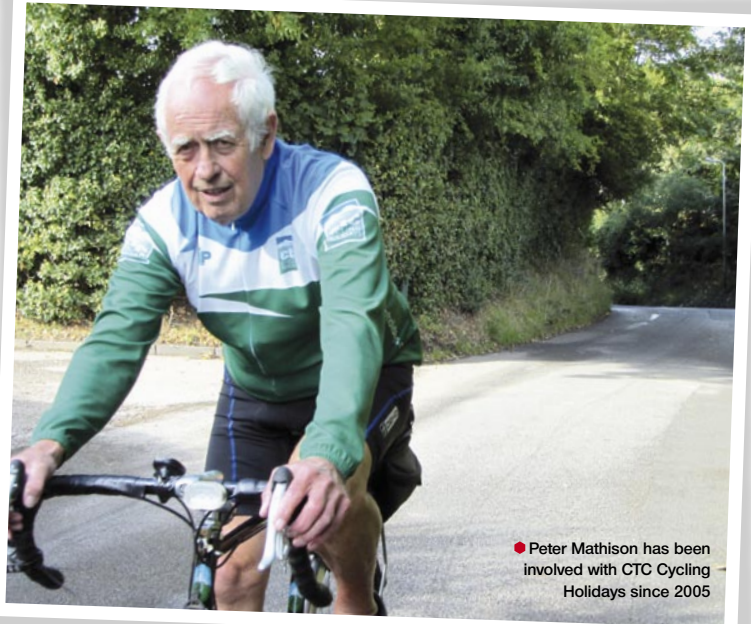


Peter Mathison

*The CTC Birthday Rides coordinator tells **Dan Joyce** what makes this annual cycling celebration tick*



● Peter Mathison has been involved with CTC Cycling Holidays since 2005

The Birthday Rides are a week of cycling and social activities to celebrate CTC's founding in 1878. Beginning in 1970 as a build-up to the centenary, they've been held almost every year since at venues all over the UK. And they're still going strong: 350 members booked for the 2015 Rides in Penrith to enjoy daily rides into the Lake District and the Eden Valley. Looking after this many cyclists is a big job. The current event coordinator is Peter Mathison, a director of CTC Cycling Holidays.

'CTC Cycling Holidays was asked by CTC to take over the organisation and running costs of the Birthday Rides in 2008,' he said, explaining that it had previously been arranged by CTC Member Groups. 'It's a year-round process. Jim Maynard and myself investigate possible locations. We are constantly thinking about the rides but have difficulty finding venues able to meet our requirements.'

Different accommodation requirements need to be catered for on the same site. 'At earlier Rides, people were scattered at

hotels and guest houses around the area,' Peter said. 'We try to provide residential beds, camping and caravan pitches. People enjoy the social side of the event because we are all at one location.'

Peter acknowledged that some campers might want a solely camping event, as it would be cheaper. 'I prefer to have an event for all. We like an all-in price so that we can assess our break-even numbers. This also makes it possible to simplify administration and minimise the size of the organising team, usually about five of us. We ask members close to the venue – this year the Eden Valley Member Group – to suggest and prepare routes of varying distances. These are produced as route sheets and, for the last four years, as gpx files too.'

Peter first attended the Birthday Rides in 1992 and has organised four: in Ellesmere, Yarnfield in Staffordshire, York, and this year Penrith. I asked him how he got involved. 'It just happened. I was brought up in a cycling family and did a lot of cycle-camping with my brother. Then I joined CTC in 1976 when I moved to Solihull. I rode with the then Birmingham DA (Southern Section) and took part in lots of club runs and weekends

in Wales and the Cotswolds. I was a CTC Councillor for nine years from 2003. After a couple of years on Council, I became one of the two Councillors to sit on the board of CTC Cycling Holidays and Tours, as it was known then. I remained after I finished on Council.'

As you'd expect from someone who organises cycling events, he's a keen cyclist whose fleet includes a Longstaff tourer, a hybrid, and a couple of folding bikes. The moving-on continental tours that Peter enjoyed in the past have these days been replaced by gentler excursions into the Shropshire lanes. He also delivers Bikeability training at local schools, being keen to pass on a cycling legacy.

Along with the rest of the Birthday Rides team, he'd like to see more younger CTC members at the Rides too. 'We hope that CTC Council will increase its efforts to attract new members. But we recognise that cyclists below the age of, say, 50 seem to prefer to do shorter and more intensive rides. There's nothing wrong with that, it's just different. We hope to provide for those who like the format, which can be adapted to suit their needs.'

Numbers are nevertheless healthy. 'The Rides attract people who like to meet those of like mind to ride in different parts of the UK on routes recommended and prepared by local members,' Peter said. 'Since the event, we have had many guests writing to say how much they enjoyed it.' ●

For more on the Birthday Rides, visit birthdayrides.org



● Daily rides are the core of the event

“350 members booked for the 2015 event in Penrith to enjoy rides into the Lake District and the Eden Valley”

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