

Top to bottom: Kerry Ridgeway, Aberystwyth, Caban-coch dam, Garreg-ddu reservoir – note low water level



Weekender

Mid Wales exploring

Follow the favourite routes of the Adventure Syndicate's Emily Chappell: cyclinguk.org/emily-chappell-wales

Crossing the Dragon's Back



Living on the Welsh border, one of **Paul Rogers'** favourite rides is an off-road route over the Cambrian Mountains to the Irish Sea



PAUL ROGERS
Paul is a former tour leader for CTC Holidays and Tours

O riginally conceived as a single day crossing of Mid Wales, this route links up three distinctive off-road sections: the Kerry Ridgeway, the Elan Valley, and the Ystwyth Trail. It's approximately 50% off-road and can be tackled either way to make best use of the prevailing wind direction.

Quiet lanes connect the mainly gravel off-road sections, which provide traffic-free trails across open moorland, around reservoirs and along old railway trails. The town of Rhayader is well positioned to break the journey if you're doing it over a weekend.

I've ridden this many times as a day challenge. A recent easterly wind gave two of us the opportunity to ride to the coast for a change. As ever when reversing a route, it's very different – and it meant we could finish with fish and chips on the beach.

We caught the train back from Aberystwyth to Newtown, which is about 17 miles from Bishop's Castle. An early train out to Aberystwyth works for a west-east crossing.

Weekend ride

CROSSING THE DRAGON'S BACK

- **Start/Finish:** Aberystwyth pier (SN582818) or Bishop's Castle (SO324886) • **Maps:** OS Landrangers 135, 136, 137, 147
- **Ride length:** 113km (71 miles) • **Climbing:** 1,500m (E-W) or 1,700m (W-E) • **Bike type:** Gravel or MTB
- **Rider level:** regular (two days) or experienced (one day) • **GPX file:** cyclinguk.org/weekender-dragonsback



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1 BISHOP'S CASTLE
This ancient border town is an excellent spot to start or finish this ride, or to explore the Welsh Marches in general. There are many colourful buildings, each with a story to tell. The town also boasts the UK's oldest brewery, a thriving music scene, pubs, cafés and more.

2 The Kerry Ridgeway
An ancient drovers' route that crosses the high moorlands to the east of Newtown, it was originally used to drive cattle to the English markets. It offers big skies and big views. The ridge overlooks Wales on one side and England on the other.

4 Elan Valley
You pass a series of mostly Victorian-built reservoirs that supply water to Birmingham. With cycle paths around much of the valley, this is an ideal place for a longer family bike break. The recently-built short mountain bike trails are sure to put a smile on your face.

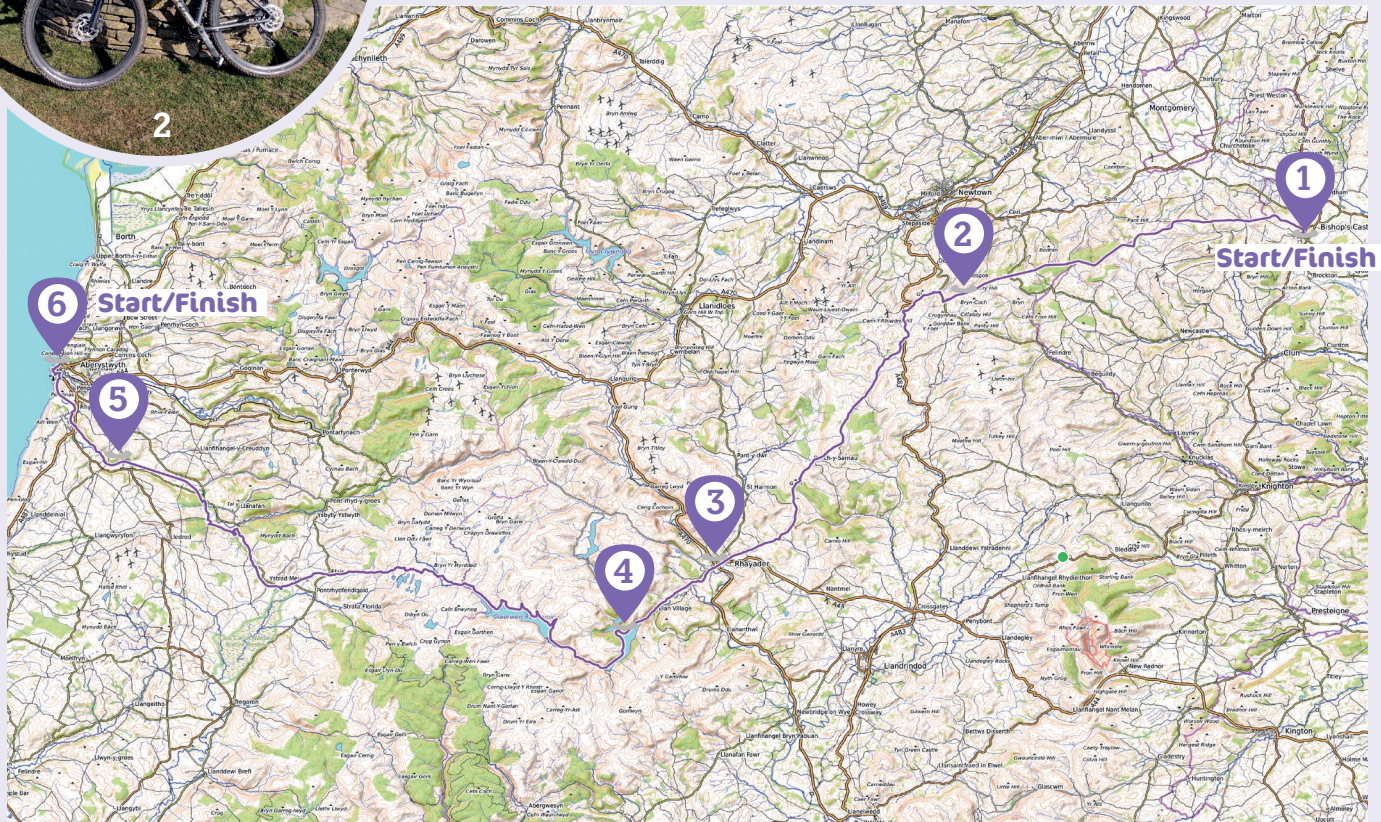
3 Rhayader
At the base of the Elan Valley, Rhayader is a bustling market town with plenty of cafés and accommodation. It's a good mid-way point for a two-day ride, with excellent wild swimming options in the River Wye after a long day on the bike.

5 Ystwyth Trail
Sustrans NCN Route 81 uses the old railway bed by the Ystwyth River. Although tempting to miss out the steep climb to the railway cutting on the hillside, this is an absolute gem, with moss-covered walls, gently dripping to the path below.

6 ABERYSTWYTH
The start or finish point of this ride, Aberystwyth is a lively Victorian seaside town at the mouth of the River Ystwyth. It has all the usual seaside attractions. The darker months bring huge startling murmurations each evening as they gather to roost under the pier. Not to be missed.



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