

# An American, plus Bike, views the UK cycling scene

By George Moore

I recently had a chance to do some riding in the UK, including a club ride organized by a local group of the Cyclist's Touring Club (CTC). Below find what I learned about [general biking clubs in the UK](#), and [a ride report on my ride](#).

## Selected General Biking Organizations in the UK:

The main Biking Club in the UK is called the CTC, see <http://www.ctc.org.uk/>.)

As the UK's National Cyclists' Organization, CTC has been protecting and promoting the rights of cyclists since 1878. CTC is a not-for-profit organization that is funded through its membership and donations in return for support.

The CTC seems to be a combination of a US group like League of American Bicyclists (LAB) which advocates for cyclists at the national level and a supporter of local bike clubs. It also has sub-groups that were until recently called district associations (DAs) which seem to work much like a local bike club at the regional level, supporting the local cycling "groups" that organize rides. (CTC is now calling DAs "Parent Member Clubs". District Association seems more descriptive so I will use that older term.)

For example, I did most of my riding in Wales in an area covered by the Chester and North Wales DA (See <http://www.ctcchesterandnwales.org.uk/>.) This association has about eight informal riding groups that organize group rides in their area. They mostly focus on road riding, but also have an off-road group. CTC also sponsors randonneuring style events sponsored by Audax UK, the UK long-ride organization.

I rode with the Snowdonia (Eryri) cycling group. This group is ably lead by Doreen Lindsey, and is centered on the western side of Snowdonia National Park. The group has weekly shorter rides on Thursday, and biweekly rides on Sunday. They ride in all weather, though fewer people show up in the rain.

Many of these groups have websites which list cues and information about local rides. For example, see the lovely website <http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk> which includes a good amount of

- advocacy information (see [http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/cycle\\_life.htm](http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/cycle_life.htm)),
- articles to encourage riding ([http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/cycle\\_life.htm](http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/cycle_life.htm) under "campaign issues"), and

- a number of great rides with photos (see [http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/rides\\_routes.htm](http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/rides_routes.htm) and [http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/onroad\\_routes.htm](http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/onroad_routes.htm)).

I found these websites (and e-mails to the people listed therein) to be a much better source of info on potential rides than published books on bike touring in the UK.

Another important biking organization in the UK is Sustrans (<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/>).

Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity. Our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. Every day we are working on practical, innovative ways of dealing with the transport challenges that affect us all.

Among the activities of Sustrans is the maintenance and extension of a national network of biking "Paths" called National Cycling Paths. These operate both rail-to-trails paths, local lanes, and highways, as needed. The network is described at <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/national-cycle-network>. By the way, newer versions of the topographic maps of the UK (Ordnance Survey Maps) show these National Cycling Paths on the maps.

Sustrans also promotes bike commuting, "liveable neighborhoods", biking to schools, etc.

I'm sure there are other general biking organizations in the UK, but the CTC and Sustrans described here give a flavor of biking organizations in the UK, and are very helpful to American cyclists who want to bike in the UK.

### **My Ride Report:**

Before going to Wales I used the CTC websites to find a local club with rides in the area where I would be staying in Dolgellau (pronounced dole-ge'-tla). That put me in touch with Doreen Lindsey of the Eryri cycling group of the CTC District Association for Chester and North Wales.

Doreen's group had a ride scheduled for the day after I was to arrive in Wales. I contacted Doreen and was welcomed to the ride. This was followed by my asking a number of questions to help me plan my packing, and to prepare for the ride. Doreen patiently answered my many questions.

The ride was to start about 40 miles from where I was staying. I considered taking a train to the ride, but they don't run on Sundays. My next plan (when I learned that the ride itself would be short) was to ride to and from the ride. In the end, I rode about 25 miles, each way to Porthmadog (pronounced porth-ma'-doc) and Doreen gave me a lift the rest of the way.

The ride was to be a relatively short ride (< 30 miles) at a comfortable pace. The original plan for the ride was to include a good amount of climbing, but the restaurant that was the destination for this ride closed for the owner's vacation, so the ride was redirected to another destination. This new destination was a lovely restaurant organized around art and organic food in Brynrefail (pronounced something like Bryn-RE-vail, see <http://www.caban-cyf.org/EN/about.asp>). It made a fantastic lunch stop.

The ride started at 10AM and I was to meet Dorren in Porthmadog at about 9:15, so on the Sunday after arriving, I set out from Dolgellau in the dark about 6:30 to ride to Porthmadog. It was raining when I left, but this cleared before Porthmadog, and weather was good most of the day. I was riding on the local A470 and A487 which are main highways. Both were new and in great condition. Traffic was very light so early on a Sunday, as Doreen had predicted.

I got to Porthmadog by 8:30, having ridden over a low pass through Coed-y-Brennin (pronounced something like Koyd-a-BREN-nin, the King's Forest). Below on the right is a picture of the forest area. The photo on the right spans from near the top of the pass on the left, to the Porthmadog area (over the horizon) and which is much lower than the lake in the picture.



Because I arrived early I rode on about 3-4 miles to the top of the next hill to look back at Porthmadog from the North. The view was spectacular (but my photo wasn't). Then I turned and headed back down to Porthmadog to meet Doreen. After a short ride in Doreen's van (and pleasant conversation), we meet a group of about 20 riders at the Inigo Jones Slate Works, had a cup of tea at the tea shop, and headed out along the Lon Eifion trail (a converted rail line, see [http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/lon\\_eifion.htm](http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/lon_eifion.htm)) to Caernarfon (pronounced something like Car-NAR-von).



From the Caernarfon waterfront we could see both Caernarfon Castle and the Isle of Anglesey on the other side of a narrow straight.



We then headed north and then west to lunch in the Caban restaurant. I rode this section of the ride with Roy Spilsbury (on left in picture above-right) who is one of two people who manage the [cyclingnorthwales](http://cyclingnorthwales.com) website. We talked about Roy's riding history, and his efforts to promote cycling in north Wales.

More people showed up for lunch, where we celebrated Doreen's birthday (with cake) and she was presented with a certificate of meritorious service to cycling by the district association president. The photo on the left shows Doreen and her husband Barry. The one on the right shows a bit of the restaurant and other riders.



Then we rode back to the start (round trip about 28 miles at about 10 mph) and had another cup of tea. Doreen graciously offered to drive me back to the south side of Porthmadog to avoid traffic. The return trip was all in the dark, but on good roads. (Total ride was about 83 miles.)

The riders were extremely friendly, and we had a number of interesting conversations on the ride.

- Doreen explained that the local group schedule and that many riders are not local, but folks who have moved into the area. Doreen also explained efforts the group has made to promote changes to road construction to accommodate safe cycling.
- I did meet several riders who were Welsh speakers and local. I had a nice conversation with one at lunch.
- I also met Mike Doyle, who turned to cycling after a mountain climbing injury as a way to recover his mobility ([http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/ped\\_to\\_mob.htm](http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk/pages/ped_to_mob.htm)). Mike and I had an interesting conversation about photography and travel.
- I spoke with several other riders, but sadly I didn't remember all the names. At least two of the members volunteer as trail managers for sections of Sustran's national cycle path network.

The group tends to stay together riding "Audax" style at the club's pace.

It was a lovely day out and I felt very welcomed by the local group. THANKS Eryri cycling group!!