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INTRODUCTION

Ask a dozen cycling writers for their most memorable bike rides and you get many more than a dozen answers. For some, biking was purely about escapism and involved nothing more complicated than packing some sandwiches and meandering into the distance with the wind at their backs. One or two went a little further and, GPS unit in hand, ventured into the wilds of Patagonia and the Himalaya, powered by nothing more than their legs and a desire to see what was around the next corner.

Those writers with families recommended flat and accessible loops around traffic-free islands or along river paths. A few contributors preferred to case themselves in skin-tight Lycra and seek out heart-pounding ascents, making ardent pilgrimages to the sites of classic races to pay their respects. Mountain-biking writers wrote of thrills and spills on rugged trails on every continent. And more than a few authors agreed that a good ride wasn't complete without a beer or two afterwards with old friends or new.

What was clear, though, is that everybody has their personal interpretation of 'epic'. You can have an epic adventure straight from your front door and be back in time for tea. Or you can follow in the tyre tracks of adventurer Alastair Humphreys and pedal around the world, through 60 countries, for four years.

This book attempts to reflect that diversity and those varying levels of commitment. We can't all take a sabbatical for cycling! We've sought out some of the most entertaining experiences you can have on a bicycle, whether you're a casual rider or a cyclist with a stable of carbon-fibre machines. The settings of these experiences range from some of the world's most remote places – Mongolia, Bhutan and the Outer Hebrides – to its hippest cities and dreamiest islands. Some of these rides take just a couple of

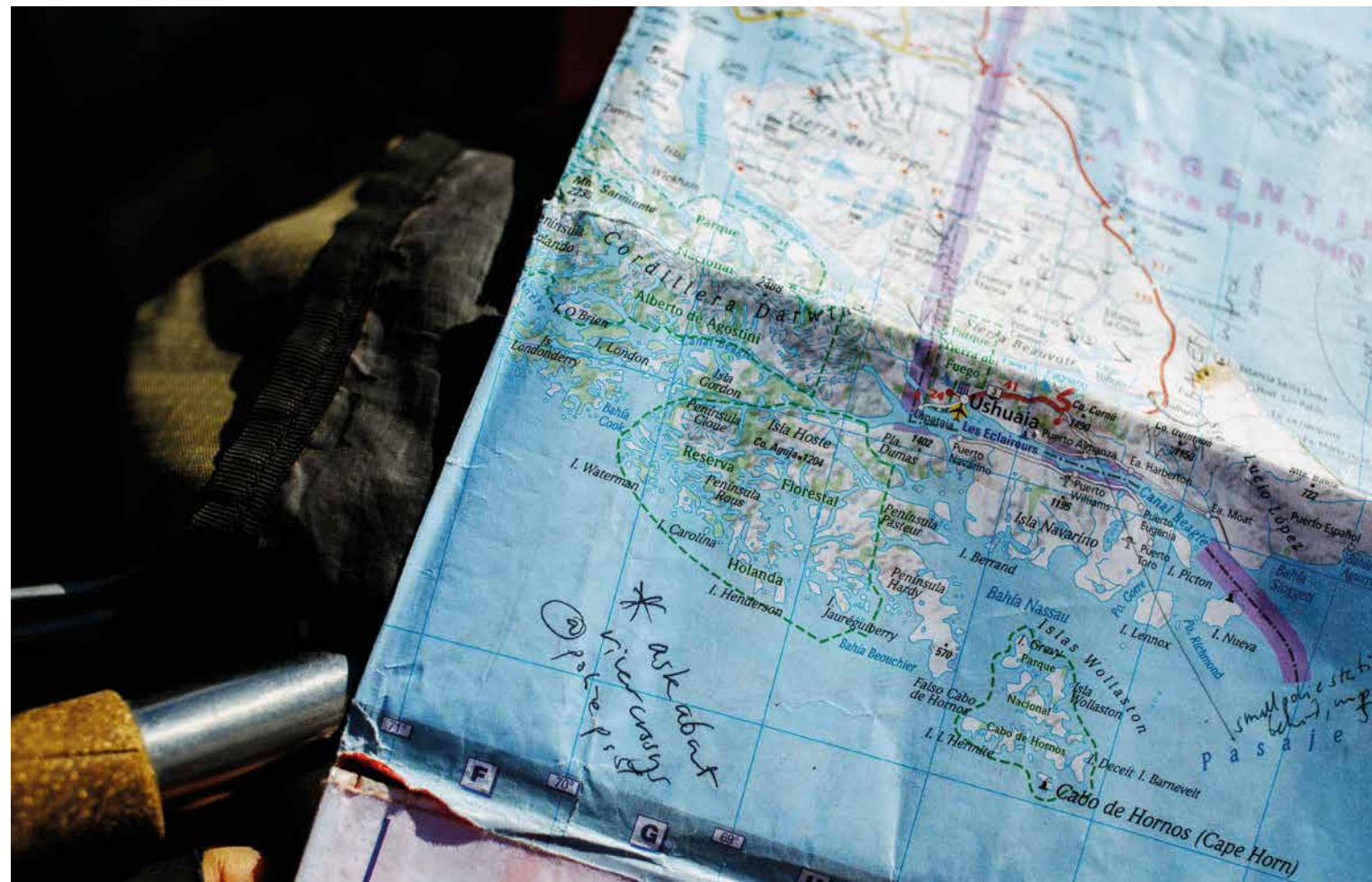
hours, others a day or two, a week, or more than a month. We've usually not tried to specify times the rides might take beyond the distance involved – everybody is different; take as long as required.

Instead, we've given a general indication of whether a ride is easy (in terms of terrain, distance, conditions or climate) or more challenging (bigger hills, longer distances, fewer cake shops). The most important point of these stories is to inspire you to get your bike out (dusting it off and pumping up the tyres first if need be) and explore somewhere new with the wind in your hair.

Cycling is the perfect mode of transport for the travel-lover, allowing us to cover more ground than if we were on foot, but without the barriers that a car imposes. We are immersed in our surroundings, self-powered, independent, and forever pondering the question 'I wonder what's over there?'. The bike rider is free to follow a whim, discover the limits of their endurance, or stop and settle for while. Hopefully, this book will prove that there's no better way of simply experiencing a place, a culture and its people than by bicycle. And as some of these tales tell, arriving on a bicycle opens doors, literally and figuratively.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The main stories in each regional chapter feature first-hand accounts of fantastic bike rides in that continent. Each includes a toolkit to enable the planning of a trip – when is the best time of year, how to get there, where to stay. But beyond that, these stories should spark other ideas. We've started that process with the 'more like this' section following each story, which offers other ideas along a similar theme, not necessarily on the same continent. Many of these ideas are well established routes or trails. The index collects different types of ride for a variety of interests.







ARTY COPENHAGEN CRUISE

Be a Dane for a day on this leisurely coastal cruise from the world's most bike-friendly city to Denmark's must-see Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

Riding over Knippelsbro bridge, with views of copper-roofed Christiansborg Palace, the Danish parliament, from the island of Christianshavn in central Copenhagen, it seemed as if I had slipped into a parallel universe; a City of the Cyclists, in which bicycles ruled the roads and unhurried riders glided like shoals of fish through the city. And this little fish, relishing the freedom, couldn't wipe the grin from his face.

Laid out over a series of islands, Denmark's capital is the most bike-friendly place I have pedalled. Some streets see 30,000 cyclists per day; and dedicated traffic signals and junctions, cycle lanes separated by kerbs from cars, and supersized bikeways all help to keep them moving safely. Indeed, in 2015 the city opened an aerial bikeway, the *cykelslangen*, swooping above the harbour and a shopping mall.

Here, a bicycle is the best way to encounter the fun-loving side of Copenhagen, from the cafe-backed beach park at Amager to the parks and gardens of Frederiksberg. Architecture fans can pedal down Ørestads Blvd for Jean Nouvel's blue-clad concert hall, food-lovers can tootle along the canals of Christianshavn, home to the famed restaurant Noma (and its newest little sister, 108). Danes cycle to work, they cycle to school and they cycle to bars, restaurants and parties.

But, irresistible though the city is on two wheels, I have an out-of-town trip in mind: a 25-mile (40km) or two-hour jaunt north along the Danish Riviera to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, near Helsingør (Elsinore), where castle Kronborg was the setting for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Before I plan my route, though, I have a coffee with photographer-turned-bicycle-ambassador Mikael Colville-



© Sarah Coghill





Andersen, who agrees cycling is a quick entry point into a country's culture. 'If you're standing shoulder to shoulder with 100 cyclists at a red light, smelling the perfume of the person next to you, that contributes to a sense of community.'

Danes pedal with panache: women wear heels and skirts, men sport suits. 'Anything you can walk in, you can cycle in,' says Mikael. Few wear helmets, feeling as safe on their bikes as they do on foot or in a car, and none break the rules – I spy not a single red-light jumper. Danes ride all year round ('Viking biking' Mikael calls it), easily navigating the city, in wind, rain or sun, on robust town bikes.

'Bicycles are like vacuum cleaners in Denmark', Mikael tells me, 'we all have one and we all use them every day but we don't think about them all day, we don't have ten of them, and we don't polish them; it's a tool.'

The next day I borrow one of these tools from a friend in Frederiksberg and set off on my Danish Riviera trip, starting with a big breakfast. Lying at the end of a cobbled lane next to a canal and embodying the Danish concept of *hygge* (warmth and wellbeing), Parterre satiates with avocado on rye toast, skyr with muesli, and fresh-baked pastries.

At the far end of Christianshavn and its colourful canal-side buildings is Copenhagen's landmark opera house. Once you've taken a spin around the island and some photos, head back



"It was no longer unusual to see somebody pedalling a cargo bike with their dog in the front"

onto Torvegade, Christianshavn's main road, and over the Knippelsbro bridge.

From here, I jump onto Bredgade and turned north through the city, cruising past the star-shaped Kastellet fort.

The roads are busy but cyclists have a segregated path to themselves. I remember Mikael's most important point of etiquette and keep to the right side of the lane so faster cyclists, or at least those who know where they are going, pass me to the left. Young or old, male or female, it seemed that everybody was on a bicycle and moving along with an elegant efficiency. It was no longer unusual to see somebody pedalling a cargo bike with their dog in the front, or breeze around a corner, head up, skirt billowing.

Eventually the city's industrial zone peters out, to be replaced by a marina. This is where navigation becomes a cinch: just keep the sea to your right. Soon, the bike path runs alongside the waterfront: on the other side of the stretch of sea lies Sweden.

This is the start of the Danish Riviera. When the sun is out, the

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clear blue water is speckled with white sails and slowly turning wind turbines. But in overcast weather, the view can be as gloomy as a Scandinavian detective drama. I pedal on, my heavy town bike dictating the sedate pace, though unimpeded by any hills. I roll through Klampenborg, a low-rise village with yachts moored just beyond the sea wall, then through Taarbæk and Skodsborg, the sea always just a few metres off my right shoulder. Bike Route 9 seeks out more traffic-free paths and lanes.

The signposts suggest that I'm nearing my destination, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, a long and low white building best known for its collection of works by Alberto Giacometti. Louisiana was founded by Knud Jensen in 1958 – his original intention was to display Danish art, but he soon changed direction and decided to promote international art in Denmark.

I park my bike outside – I'm not the only person to have cycled here – and go exploring. Louisiana's best feature is a seafront sculpture garden, featuring works by Henry Moore and Joan Miró. It's a sunny day and families picnic on the lawns, dabbling in the sea and running around the sculptures.

As the afternoon passes, I begin to think about getting back to Copenhagen. I cycle to the local railway station and jump on a S-Train from Humlebæk to Nørreport station in central Copenhagen with my bicycle – simple, sensible, practical.

So very Danish. **RB**



CHRISTIANIA

Christianshavn is also home to Christiania, the alternative enclave and self-proclaimed 'free state', known over the years as a marketplace for cannabis (and police raids). Epic Rides readers will, naturally, be more interested to learn the place has lent its name to a range of practical cargo bikes, in which Danes ferry their groceries and families. Christiania is also the only place where unusual upright Pedersen bicycles are made (and can be bought at www.pedersen-bike.dk).

Left to right: cycling Danish-style; Copenhagen's Opera House; beaches and maritime weathervanes on the way to Louisiana. Previous page: Nyhavn waterfront in Copenhagen



TOOLKIT

Start // Copenhagen

End // Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk

Distance // About 25 miles (40km) one-way

Getting there // Fly to Copenhagen international airport; there are easy-to-navigate rail services into the city centre.

Where to stay // City-centre hotels, hostels and B&Bs.

Bike share // From 125 bike-sharing stations and also rail stations, such as Osterport (www.rentabike.dk). Bycyklen bikes (www.bycyklen.dk/en; from 25kr per hour) with GPS screens are available. For cargo bikes (and normal bikes) try www.christianiacykler.dk in Christiania.

What to take // Wet weather gear.

More info // Maps of cycle routes from tourist information offices: www.visitcopenhagen.com. Louisiana (www.louisiana.dk) is open from 11am-10pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Sat and Sun.



Opposite: riding the Yarra Trail
into Melbourne, Australia

MORE LIKE THIS BIKE-SHARE RIDES

PARIS, FRANCE

In France, the bicycle is known as *la petite reine* (the little queen). It might not rule the French capital but it's a great way of getting around. Paris' Vélib (*velo liberte*, bicycle freedom) bike-share scheme was one of the first and there are now more than 1800 street side stations for 20,000 bikes and more than 273 miles (440km) of bike lanes. Additionally, roads along the Seine and elsewhere are closed to traffic during Sunday; yes, that includes the Louvre and Jardin des Tuileries. And the Eiffel Tower. One great route is to follow the 3-mile (4.5km) Canal St-Martin from République to Quai de Valmy pausing at cafes for *ravitaillement* (refreshment) as required. You can continue to follow canals, such as Canal de l'Ourcq for as far as you want.

Start // République

End // Quai de Valmy

Distance // 3 miles (4.5km)

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

As a bike-friendly city, Melbourne stands head and (compulsory) helmet above its Australian counterparts. This is not just due to the influence of Jan Gehl, the Danish urban designer and consultant to cities around the world on how they can be more like Copenhagen, who spent several years in the 1990s advising Melbourne. The city's topography plays its part too: the Yarra River runs from the northeast down to the bay; and running beside it is the mixed-use Yarra Trail. It's a tranquil, green corridor; as it passes through Yarra Bend Park try to spot the flying fox bats roosting in the trees beside the river during the day. When the trail reaches the city, it's possible to connect with the Bay Trail that follows Melbourne's bay south to Seaford, via St Kilda.

Start // Eltham railway station

End // Melbourne CBD

Distance // Yarra Trail is about 20 miles (32km) in total.

PORTLAND, USA

If any American city can be said to emulate Copenhagen, it's Portland, Oregon: the city in the Pacific Northwest is no stranger to cargo bikes or rain. It's an eclectic, sustainable, independent sort of place, famed for its coffee and craft beer – what more could a cyclist want? In 2015, Portland announced a bike-share scheme, called Biketown, consisting of 600 bicycles and stations across the city. There are already more than 350 miles (563km) of bike lanes in the city, including the 11-mile (18km) Waterfront Loop along the Willamette River. To get out of town, the 125-mile (201km) Willamette Valley Scenic Bikeway starts south of the city and flows into Oregon's world-class wine-making country.

Start/End // Start the Waterfront Loop from the Salmon Springs Fountain and head north.

Distance // 11 miles (18km)

More info // There's a downloadable map at www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/348454



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