With its wild and rugged landscape, stunning coastal scenery and plenty of sheep, Pembrokeshire proves the perfect destination for a tough and beautiful ride.
Our route was a tester for the Tour of Pembrokeshire Sportive. You'll have to be fit for the longer rides.
We only ride 100 metres before I want to stop and enjoy the view. Rolling out onto a narrow, open pontoon of tarmac, we’re crossing a wide, reed-covered riverbed. To our left a broad lane stretches out over marshy grassland that has tried but failed to keep the river from flowing into the Irish Sea just beyond. To our right I catch a glimpse of tall, stooped birds huddling skinny-legged and knobbly-kneed in the sparkling ripples of the shallows.

“Herons, I assume, but there’s not time to stop and twitch, as I have to keep pedalling to keep up with my guide for the day, Tour of Pembrokeshire sportive organiser and local bike shop owner Peter Walker. No doubt such idyllic views are more commonplace for Peter – who has organised today’s highlight loop to give the view our full attention.

Soon we join a supposedly bigger ‘C’ road and continue our gentle ascent. Until at last, about 6km in, where the hedgerows have shrunk to tufty banks, the sea reveals itself as a slightly darker blue smear under the grey-blue winter sky. Only now, as we top out at 170-odd metres above sea level, does the road start to tilt down again.

Little by little, more of the rugged coastline starts to appear, with dark cliffs plunging into the foamy sea, the headland on the other side of Pwllygranant Bay reaching out in the distance.

A sharp left at a solitary-looking whitewashed cottage marks a nosedive towards the cliffs, stopped only by a severe right-hander. It’s all too tempting to blast down the last few hundred metres to the bottom, but first we stop to give the view our full attention.

The other side of the bank to our left, the grass disappears into fresh air with nothing but the Irish Sea far below. Up ahead, still mostly hidden, is the entrance to the narrow, box-like Ceiwr Bay, beyond which successive outcrops of black serrated cliffs side stand shoulder-to-shoulder, 400-million-year-old, tortuous folds in the rock strata adding to the drama.

After passing the Webley Hotel gives us a bird’s eye view back along the estuary, across the sand bar to the neat white lines of breakers beyond.

At the next small collection of precious few flat miles in this part of Wales, we’re on top again I’m already glad of the compact chainset of the carbon Infinito that I’ve been lent by the Tour of Pembrokeshire sponsor Bianchi. Following signs for the refurbished cafe and lifeboat station.

COAST ALONG THE COAST
For what must be the flattest mile in the whole ride, we coast alongside the estuary, admiring the glistening mud flats and myriad moored boats on the water to our left. Soon, though, a short rise after the Webley Hotel gives us a bird’s eye view back along the estuary, across the sand bar to the neat white lines of breakers beyond.

After a brief spin down to the water’s edge, we roll into St Dogmaels, and start climbing steeply through the town. An unlikely looking right turn after the post office drops us below the ruins of an abbey, once one of the richest in Wales. Just beyond it, a right-hander starts us following signs for the NCN route 82, and up the third steep climb of the day.

A straight but narrow lane takes us across high, open farmland. There, just before we start the descent to Crott, Peter greets some local farmers, leading their cows across the road, in Welsh – still the main language in this part of north Pembrokeshire. The cows aren’t so friendly, and leave a streak of slurry across the road for us to gingerly pick through.

At the next small collection of...
We meander through quiet lanes until our gradually increasing pace suggests we’re descending again.
houses – and small boats – called Croft, we turn right onto the main road and continue following the National Cycle Network and its little blue signs. The next 6km turn out to be a seriously fast, rolling two-up time-trial, with six-foot-something Pete in his element as we power along the smooth tarmac down to Eglwyswrw.

**SHIRE THING**

After passing the Dyfed Shire Horse farm we turn left onto a smaller road and a descent to the River Nevern, with its long, low, stone-walled bridge. A few more minutes of twisting and rolling B road and we’re through Crosswell and heading towards Brynberian.

On either side of us now, smooth green hills seem to have risen up without us noticing, and we pass signs to Pentre Ifan, where Wales’s best-preserved neolithic dolmen still stands. It’s incredible to think that the five-metre capstone has been perched on the points of its three standing stone ‘pillars’ for over 5500 years. Equally fascinating is the mystery that still surrounds how and why similar ‘blue’ stones were taken from here to Stonehenge, 140 miles away. The sign to Brynberian also marks the start of a steady 4km climb. Gradually the scenery opens up, and to our left the featureless green northern flanks of the Preseli Hills rise like a giant tidal wave. Our road skirts the edge of the hills and then exploits the slightly shallower gradient of a gap between the rounded Foel Feddau and Foel Eryr peaks.

Rounding a corner, we cross that common harbinger of impending cardiovascular punishment, a cattle grid, and the full size of what we’re up against becomes clear. Flanked by nothing but windswept moorland, our wide, white-banded strip of tarmac drapes up the hill’s undulating green and brown contours all the way to its grassy summit. It looks hard enough already, without Pete pointing out that what we see is a false summit: “Don’t be fooled. There’s more.” It’s a wild, windswept couple of kilometres from the cattle grid to the top, even without the mind games, and coming about 70 miles into the 100-mile route of the Tour of Pembrokeshire, all you’d need is the addition of a strong westerly headwind to make it epic.

The views are big from the top, the sea visible on three sides when clear. Today we’re confined to closer grey horizons but even the near distance is spectacular. To our right is the rubble-strewn top of Foel Eryr and slightly further away to our left Foel Cwmcerwyn, at 536m the highest point in Pembrokeshire.

The only water we can clearly see, directly in front of us, is the Rosebush reservoir, while to the left the disused Rosebush slate quarry still leaves a mark on the landscape. A railway line once served it but is also long since gone – the only reminder being a platform which is now the beer garden for the legendary red-painted, tin-covered Tafarn Sinc pub.

From the top it’s a fast and open 2km descent towards the Rosebush reservoir, a great opportunity to tuck in and let rip. Which is main reason I over-shoot the next turn. Turning left would take us to the Tafarn Sinc but we’ve still got 12km or so of tough riding to go, so we push on, turning right, towards the sea once more.

**CWM AGAIN**

After some gentle climbing, we veer off onto an even more deserted single-track lane. As this lane starts to dip downwards, the landscape beyond reveals itself, with what must be Fishguard harbour somewhere where the greeny browns of the land fade into murky blues and greys.

For the next 5km we weave and wind our way down increasingly tight single-track lanes, the banks rising either side turning into hedgerows, then treelines, before closing us in completely. But before they do, we catch a few glimpses of our →
next challenge – another steeply rising bank of hillside called Mynydd Caregog. At the far right-hand end of this bank sits the stony cairn of Carn Ingl, high and proud above Newport.

A delightful descent takes us past farmyards and then straightens before diving down past Pontfaen Church and through a white-knuckle wooded S-bend to the hamlet of Cwm Gwaun, where a narrow bridge crosses a charming river that meanders through meadows between steep, densely wooded valley sides.

The village is best known for its pub, the blue painted Dyffryn Arms. It’s not open as we pass, but Peter tells me it’s like a time capsule inside, where the legendary landlady Bessie Davies serves ales by the jug, straight from the barrel, through a tiny serving hatch into her front room bar.

Conversation soon dries up as we fork left and start hoisting ourselves out of the valley. Rising through dense woodlands, the road’s gradient reaches breaking point before two switchbacks ease the pressure, briefly, before the road jacks up again, snaking through a green tunnel of trees.

After a kilometre the gradient eases to about 10 per cent and then all but gives up, gouging an eight-foot-deep furrow below the surface of the fields that stretch away from the tops of the grass banks either side of us.

Another cattle grid marks the start of the last gentle push over close-cropped rolling moorland, before the last 4km descent. As the road steepens, the promontory of Dinas Island appears, then the whole jagged coastline, with its countless little coves. But we have to take care here, as the roadside is littered with unpredictable sheep.

All too soon, after we pass a last buttress of boulder-strewn moorland, the wild bracken and gorse moors turn to tended gardens, and we finally find ourselves at a junction with the main road, signs pointing right, back down to Newport.

THE ROUTE

Distance 36 miles (58km) Climbing 1275m (4183ft) Grade Hard – almost no flat riding Duration 3-4 hours Maps OS Explorer OL35 North Pembrokeshire Download the route www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/big-ride-pembrokeshire

1. Start in Newport and head east on the A487, taking a left after the Georgian Llys Meddyg Restaurant and Rooms. Follow the road across the River Nevern (Alun Nifer) and continue north, shadowing the coast to Cefnber Bay.

2. Keep following this road to the village of Moylegrove, turning left down the hill at the T-junction, and over the river, past the church, keeping left, and up out of the valley.

3. Follow the road to the next T-junction and turn left, following signs for Poppit Sands. Continue through Cippyn and down to the bottom of the hill next to the Poppit Sands car park.

4. Turn right onto the B4546, past the Webley Hotel and over the short climb to St Dogmaels. Climb the High Street and follow the road sharp left down the hill. After 100m turn right down Church Street and past the Abbey.

5. At the next T-junction turn right up David Street and follow a wooded climb to the next crossroads. Turn left. Carry straight on over the next crossroads and continue to the next T-junction with the A487.

6. Turn right on A487 and follow main road to Eglogwyswen. Go through the village and then turn left onto the B4329 just past the stud farm. Crosswell to Brynberian and over the big climb to the crossroads with the B4313 near Greenway.

7. Turn right onto the B4313 and stay on this road until a right fork signed Pontfaen. Take this and follow the road through Pontfaen and down into the Gwaun Valley.

8. Go over the bridge and turn right, then take the road up the hill behind the Dyffryn Arms. Follow this road over the last big climb and then down to the A487. Turn right and continue back into Newport.

NEAREST STATION
Fishguard www.nationalrail.co.uk

FOOD AND DRINK
Tafarn Sinc, Rosebush www.tafarnsinc.co.uk (closed on Mondays). Dyffryn Arms (Bessie’s), Cwm Gwaun, 01348 881305. Poppit Sands Café, Poppit, 01239 623530 www.poppitsandscafe.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY
Llys Meddyg is a small boutique hotel in Newport with excellent food www.lysmeddyg.com. The Golden Lion is also in Newport www.goldenlionpembrokeshire.co.uk. The Webley Hotel, Poppit Sands is on the route www.webleyholiday.co.uk

BIKE SHOPS
Pembrokeshire Bikes, which organises the Tour of Pembrokeshire, is in Narbeth www.pembrokeshirebikes.co.uk. New Image Bicycles is in Cardigan www.bigbikebike.co.uk. Mike’s Bikes is in Llandysul www.mikes-bikes.co.uk

TOUR OF PEMBROKESHIRE
The next Tour takes place on 26 April. There are three options: 52, 79 and 107 miles – and a family ride – all starting and finishing in nearby St Davids. The popular event is limited to 1500 riders. www.tourofpembrokeshire.co.uk

TOURIST INFORMATION

105 | March 2014 | CYCLING PLUS
Get Involved...

Volunteer to help out on Saturday the 26th of April 2014 for the main event or on Sunday the 27th of April 2014 for the family ride.

www.tourofpmemrokeshire.co.uk/volunteers
It’s “the” Spring Classic of the UK Sportive calendar

Paul Adams

Riding Through A Village Near You...

Sunday 27 April 2014

Magical History Tour Family Ride
Oriel y Parc, St Davids (10.30-13.00)
8 and 16 mile family routes
Questions to answer along the way
With Prizes

Come And Join Us,
Cheer On The Cyclists
If you’d like to help on the day
www.tourofpembrokeshire.co.uk/volunteers

Pendre Inn, Fishguard (8.15-12.00)
RNLI Station, Poppit Sands (09.30-12.30)
Boncath Inn, Boncath (10.15-13.30)
Gwaun Villa, Pontfaen (10.15-16.00)
Jubilee Inn, Letterston (10.00-17.00)
Oriel y Parc, St Davids (7.00-19.00)
50, 75 & 100 mile routes
WIN a fabulous Sabbath Aspire road bike

Saturday 26 April 2014

The Tour of Pembrokeshire
www.tourofpembrokeshire.co.uk

Gwaun Valley Meats