
GRAVEL RIDES SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

24 gravel bike adventures
in the West Country



KATHERINE MOORE



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Back cover (L–R) *Plantation tracks in Longleat Forest (route 20)* © Michael Drummond; *wonderful views from atop the Quantock Hills (route 11)* © John Lambert; *coastal bridleways at Woolacombe Bay (route 07)* © Alan Darby & Britt Walker; *Mousehole Harbour (route 01)* © Sam Voaden.

Opposite *Passing the redwood trees in Ashton Hill Plantation near Bristol (route 14)* © Tim Wilkey.

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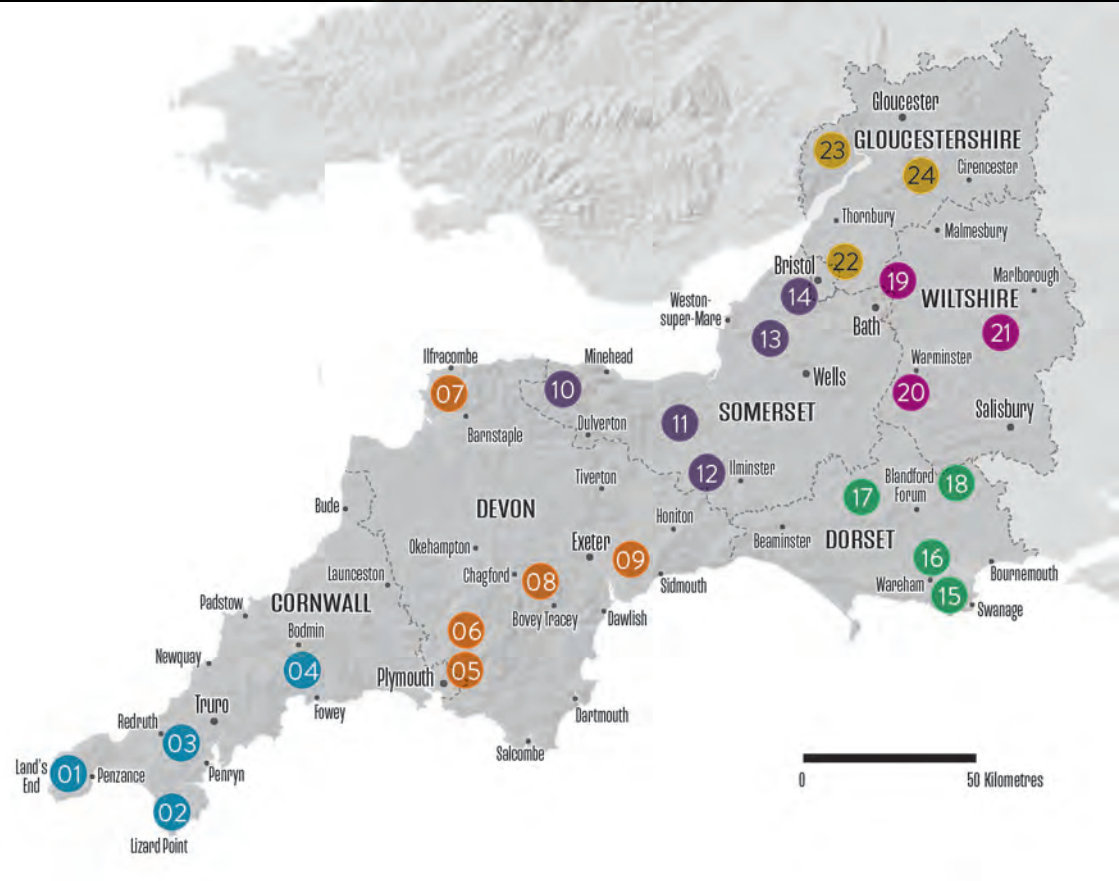
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PLEASE GIVE WAY TO HORSES AND PEDESTRIANS.





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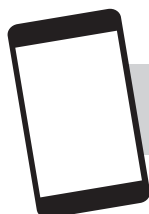
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Download the Gravel Rides South West England
GPX files from www.adventurebooks.com/GRSWE-GPX



CORNWALL





0 20 Kilometres

CORNWALL

Rugged cliffs, colourful harbour towns, clear blue waters and Atlantic surf; at the furthest south-western tip of mainland England, Cornwall is a popular holiday destination for good reason. Yet there's much more to be explored when you head inland from the many glorious beaches – clifftop bridleways with jaw-droppingly beautiful views lead to expansive moorland trails, steep wooded river valleys and an extensive network of gravel routes linking the crumbling remnants of the Celtic county's industrial past.

There's no doubt about it, riding in Cornwall is tough, with steep inclines that test even the most experienced legs. But with effort comes reward, and some of the very finest riding in the South West – just don't expect to cover mega miles in this corner of the country!

No visit to Cornwall is complete without a pasty – traditional fayre of the tin miners – or a cream tea or a chippy tea, and thankfully these routes offer up opportunities for sampling these in spades. Visit one of the county's many shanty festivals for a roaring sing-along, or a seaside regatta for sailing races, gig rowing competitions and live music.

While many opt to visit Cornwall in the height of summer for the best weather, I'd strongly recommend considering spring and autumn if you're travelling from elsewhere to visit. You'll be able to enjoy these routes – and the rest of your trip – without the crowds or queueing. Late spring offers the most gorgeous displays of sea thrift and hedgerows full of wild flowers, while early autumn boasts the warmest sea temperatures and golden light for that post-ride dip.



01 A LAP OF LAND'S END

62KM/39 MILES

Introduction

Taking in the West Penwith chunk of Cycling UK's West Kernow Way multi-day bikepacking route, this loop around the south-western tip of Cornwall is truly an unforgettable ride. Sublime coastal gravel tracks, old mine ruins perched on the clifftops, gorgeous villages and ancient history are all rolled into one, all easily accessible from Penzance.

The local area

Land's End is well known in the cycling world, often the much-celebrated beginning – or finish – of an end-to-end ride spanning the length of Great Britain. However, linger a little longer and you'll discover that this far western tip of Cornwall has a lot more to offer.

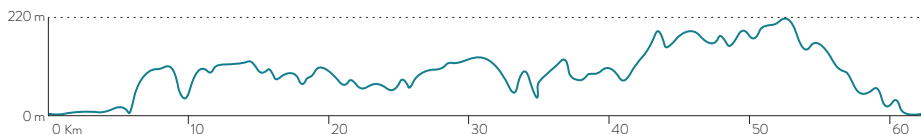
While Land's End itself is more of a miniature theme park than cycling paradise, the views from the point are not to be missed. What makes this route special, though, are the miles of coastal gravel doubletrack that lead you high above the turquoise waters and craggy cliffs.

At the end of the main train line from London, Penzance is a popular town bordered by the busy fishing port of Newlyn. You'll find a pub that dates back to 1695, the Admiral Benbow, which once was the regular haunt of pirates and smugglers, and Morrab Gardens which boasts a huge selection of Mediterranean and subtropical plants thriving in West Cornwall. The town sits in the middle of Mount's Bay, which stretches to the Lizard peninsula and is home to the iconic castle-topped island of St Michael's Mount.



OPPOSITE RIDING PAST THE RUINED MINE ENGINE HOUSE OF WEST WHEAL OWLES. © SAM VOADEN

DISTANCE 62km/39 miles — ASCENT 750m/2,460ft —
OFF-ROAD 25% — START/FINISH Penzance station —
START/FINISH GRID REF SW 475 305 — SATNAV TR18 2LQ —
GPS 50.1216, -5.5325 — MAP OS Explorer 102, Land's End (1:25,000)





THE GORGEOUS MOUSEHOLE HARBOUR. © SAM VOADEN

Handy tips

This route is best enjoyed in the late spring and early autumn, to strike the balance between drier, warmer weather without the crowds and traffic of the peak tourism season in July and August. You follow the coast path for several sections, which are best enjoyed when quiet rather than at peak times.

While the West Kernow Way is an official bikepacking route, it's not waymarked at all, so you'll need to have your own way of navigating around the loop. A GPS cycle computer or phone navigation app is ideal.

Cycling UK offers much more information about the full bikepacking route, including a paper or downloadable guidebook: www.cyclinguk.org/west-kernow-way

While West Cornwall is a popular tourist destination today, its past was certainly more industrial. As you ride along the north coast you'll pass numerous old mine workings at Wheal Edward, Botallack Mine and Levant Mine, as well as visiting Ding Dong Mine further inland. At their peak in the 19th century, these sites were globally important sources of copper and tin.

Route overview

The first leg follows National Cycle Network Route 3 through Penzance and Newlyn, passing the glorious harbour town of Mousehole and on quiet country lanes to Sennen, with the exception of a short gravel bridleway shortcut.

The Cornish Way is a fantastic stretch of gravel cycleway that runs separately to the South West Coast Path atop the cliffs between Sennen and Land's End, which you get to enjoy in both directions.

A fairly gentle stretch on the road takes you past Land's End Airport, where small propeller planes fly to the Scilly Isles. Then you're soon heading out of the verdant Cot Valley on the coast path on a technical bridleway climb that'll challenge even the most skilled riders.

What goes up must come down, with a chunky gravel byway descent with magnificent views of Cape Cornwall and the lookout



1



2

1 OVERLOOKING SENNEN COVE ON THE APPROACH TO LAND'S END. 2 GRAVEL TRAILS OF THE TIN COAST. © SAM VOADEN

station before you. A pedal through St Just offers a great chance to refuel, before heading back to the coast on the other side of the valley on wide gravel tracks that lead you past the old mine workings at Wheal Edward, Botallack Mine and Levant Mine.

You start to head back towards Penzance from here, but turning inland doesn't put an end to the gravel tracks or the views. A series of great doubletrack and singletrack trails awaits as you continue to follow the path of the West Kernow Way out of Trewellard and close to Chûn Quoit.

Then you leave the bikepacking route behind as you take an extra gravel detour to pass by Ding Dong Mine, thought to be one of the oldest in Cornwall, possibly dating back to the Roman period. From here, you'll be wowed by panoramic views down to Mount's Bay, St Michael's Mount and the Lizard peninsula, before descending on some lovely lanes through the Bone Valley to finish the ride on Mount's Bay cycle route beside the sea.

The ride may only be 25 per cent off-road by distance, but with some technical sections and wonderful views to admire, the off-road sections certainly won't be 25 per cent of your ride by time, or enjoyment! The route has been awarded a gravel rating of 5 due to multiple sections of technical climbing and descents, so it's certainly not one for the faint-hearted or narrow-tyred.

Facilities and refreshments

At a little over halfway through the route, the **Cafe Dog and Rabbit** in St Just is a fantastic cafe with glorious courtyard seating and space for bikes.

There's also the **Count House Cafe** at Geevor Mine (near Levant Mine), plus a selection of eateries at Land's End, Sennen and Penzance.

The route is well served with public toilets, including at Penzance, Land's End, Cape Cornwall and St Just.







THE CORNISH WAY TO LAND'S END. © SAM VOADEN

Bike shops

Contact **Stanford CycleWorks** (T: 07886 491 908) in Penzance for servicing and repairs, or cross over to the north coast to **Hayle Cycles** (T: 01736 753 825) for the nearest bike shop. There's also the larger **Giant Helston** (T: 01326 564 564) a little further east.

Public transport and access

Penzance is at the end of the main train line from London, so getting to the start of this route is straightforward, though you may need to reserve a bike space when you book. There's also the large Harbour car park at the beginning of the route, which is pay and display.

Most of this route follows Cycling UK's West Kernow Way – there is some interesting information about access along this route, and about cycling access in general, at www.cyclinguk.org/west-kernow-way

The route

- 1 From Penzance station, follow the signs for *National Cycle Network Route 3* to ride on The Quay past the harbour and along the seafront. Pass Newlyn Harbour, climbing gently to join the cycleway that runs alongside the road to Mousehole.
- 2 Ride through the quaint harbour town and start your first proper climb of the ride up Raginnis Hill out on to country lanes. Continue to follow Route 3 on the road to Lamorna, then there is a brief bridleway shortcut before you join the B3315 passing the Merry Maidens stone circle and Cruk Tregyffian burial chamber, both beside the road.
- 3 Turn right to take the lane to St Buryan and turn left on to Land's End Road at the church. Continue to follow Route 3 by turning right on to a narrower lane that cuts inland across fields towards Sennen village.
- 4 Make the out-and-back trip to Land's End. A paved cycle lane beside the road leads to Maria's Lane, a residential street with incredible views over Sennen Cove, and then on to a magnificent stretch of gravel track called the Cornish Way, over the clifftops to reach Land's End.
- 5 Head north from Land's End and continue to follow the coast by taking a short stint on the A30 and B3306 past the airport. Turn off to the left in Kelynack, to reach a narrow, twisting lane. Cycling UK asks cyclists to dismount and walk for the last 150m of this trail before the road to Bosorne (SW 36492 30562 to SW 36434 30672), as a courtesy to the local residents. This leads you to a short, technical singletrack climb to the gorgeous Cot Valley.



DESCENDING THE BYWAY TO CAPE CORNWALL. © SAM VOADEN

- 6 After descending a short while on the tarmac through the valley, veer off to the right on to a steep bridleway climb out of the valley on the coast path, briefly joining Carn Glouce Road before a rocky byway descent towards Cape Cornwall. This is really chunky lower down, so you may need to walk a short stretch. When you reach the car park, climb up on the Cape Cornwall Road to St Just.
- 7 After a highly recommended cafe stop, descend out of St Just to Nancherrow, picking up Old Foundry Road to head back towards the coast and a gravel doubletrack. You'll ride past Wheel Edward – an old beam engine house – and Botallack Mine on this incredible stretch of gently undulating coastal gravel. When you reach Levant Mine, turn back inland to Trewellard.
- 8 Climb on Trewellard Hill out of the village and turn left on to a gravel doubletrack bridleway that skirts around Pendeen Carn and down a brilliant rocky singletrack. After a short stint on the B3318, turn left on to a gravel track that passes close to Chûn Quoit. This is a magnificent trail that's much like a pump track nearing the farm.
- 9 Take the lane past Lanyon Quoit, then take a sharp left to climb the lane and gravel track passing Greenburrow Engine House and Ding Dong Mine to reach Boskednan. From here the views down to Mount's Bay, St Michael's Mount and the Lizard peninsula are breathtaking. The winding lane leads you to the beautiful Bone Valley, gently descending to join Polmennor Road.
- 10 Take School Lane into Gulval, then cross over the A30 on the bridge to finish the route along the Mount's Bay cycle route right next to the sea back to the train station.

Other routes or attractions in the area

If you enjoy this route around Land's End, then you'll love the full West Kernow Way bikepacking route. However, if you prefer day rides to multi-day epics, then consider pairing this route with **02 The Lizard and The Loe** (pages 13–19).

The best way to finish this route is with a visit to Jubilee Pool in Penzance, a fantastic, restored seawater lido that also offers a geothermally heated pool and sauna. There's no better remedy for tired legs!

For some post-ride culture, a visit to the Minack Theatre offers an unforgettable experience, with a variety of open-air shows right on the craggy cliffs overlooking the sea. There's also a fabulous garden to explore with many subtropical species that don't grow elsewhere in the UK.