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PLUS DON'T MISS ALL THIS

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EASY TWEAKS FOR YOUR D12

A GRAND SLAM
WE TACKLE ITALY WITH FLINTOFF AND DALLAGLIO



The long and winding road that leads, um, from the Irish Sea to the North Sea...

CROSS COUNTRY

Most sensible cyclists take a few days to ride coast to coast, but a new sportive throws down the gauntlet of riding from Irish to North Sea in a day



The snot green, scrotum-tightening sea...



T

welve miles down plus a one-in-three gradient plus 39/52 chainset... I'm trying to do a mathematical equation, but I'm having difficulty concentrating. Not surprising, really. I'm swaying precariously from side to side while a bead of sweat hangs off my nose like a stalactite made of jelly. I look down at my gears for the umpteenth time to see if I've got an extra one, but my glasses have misted up. I want to remove them and at the same time wipe my nose, but if I take either hand off the bar I'll almost certainly fall over.

With a grunt Maria Sharapova would be proud of, I push down hard on the pedals, only for my rear tyre to spin on the wet tarmac. I'm halfway up Hardknott Pass, the steepest road in England, I don't have a compact chainset and I still have 138 miles to go until I get a glimpse of the sea.

I'm riding coast to coast across England. Thousands do it every year, mostly over several days. But I'm not doing the one you're probably thinking of. And if you're wondering why I'm on Hardknott – no, I'm not lost. I'm cycling the inaugural Coast to Coast in a Day sportive which, at 149 miles and with 4600m of climbing, is one of the toughest in the country.

I'm no expert rider, either. I'm really a runner who's developed a penchant for cycling, tough challenges, bucket lists and adventure. With three national parks to traverse, a ferry crossing and a multitude of hernia-inducing climbs, the Coast to Coast in a Day is the perfect place to find all four. It also happens to be my first sportive.

If you've ever attempted a coast to coast (C2C) on your own, you'll know that logistics play a major part in the planning process. But the only real planning you need for this event is how to get to Penrith – the rest is organised for you. Some of you will have spotted that Penrith is not on



the coast, but its road and rail links make it the perfect place from which to operate a park and ride service.

And so, on a Friday afternoon, I take the train from Euston, then cycle the few miles to Penrith Rugby Club, where several coaches and a lorry will transport us and our bikes to the start at Seascale.

CARB LIGHT, STOMACH EMPTY

Once I've registered and attempted to erect my tent in a force 10 gale, I join the other 215-odd cyclists queuing at what appears to be Seascale's only takeaway. "Any pizzas?" "Nope, run out." "Lasagne?" "Nope." "Anything at all containing carbohydrate?" "A kebab?"

One hour later, I return to my damp tent clutching the next best thing – a burnt burger and chips. Impressive considering he used a microwave.

I set my alarm for 4.30am, but needn't have bothered. Having forgotten my roll mat, I have to make do with a cardboard bike box. Feeling like a sporty tramp, I lie awake listening to the outer tent flap in the gale, pondering on whether this is more annoying than my growling stomach.

As the sun attempts a semblance of dawn, I head for the beach at 5.30, where the official start is held. The first riders set

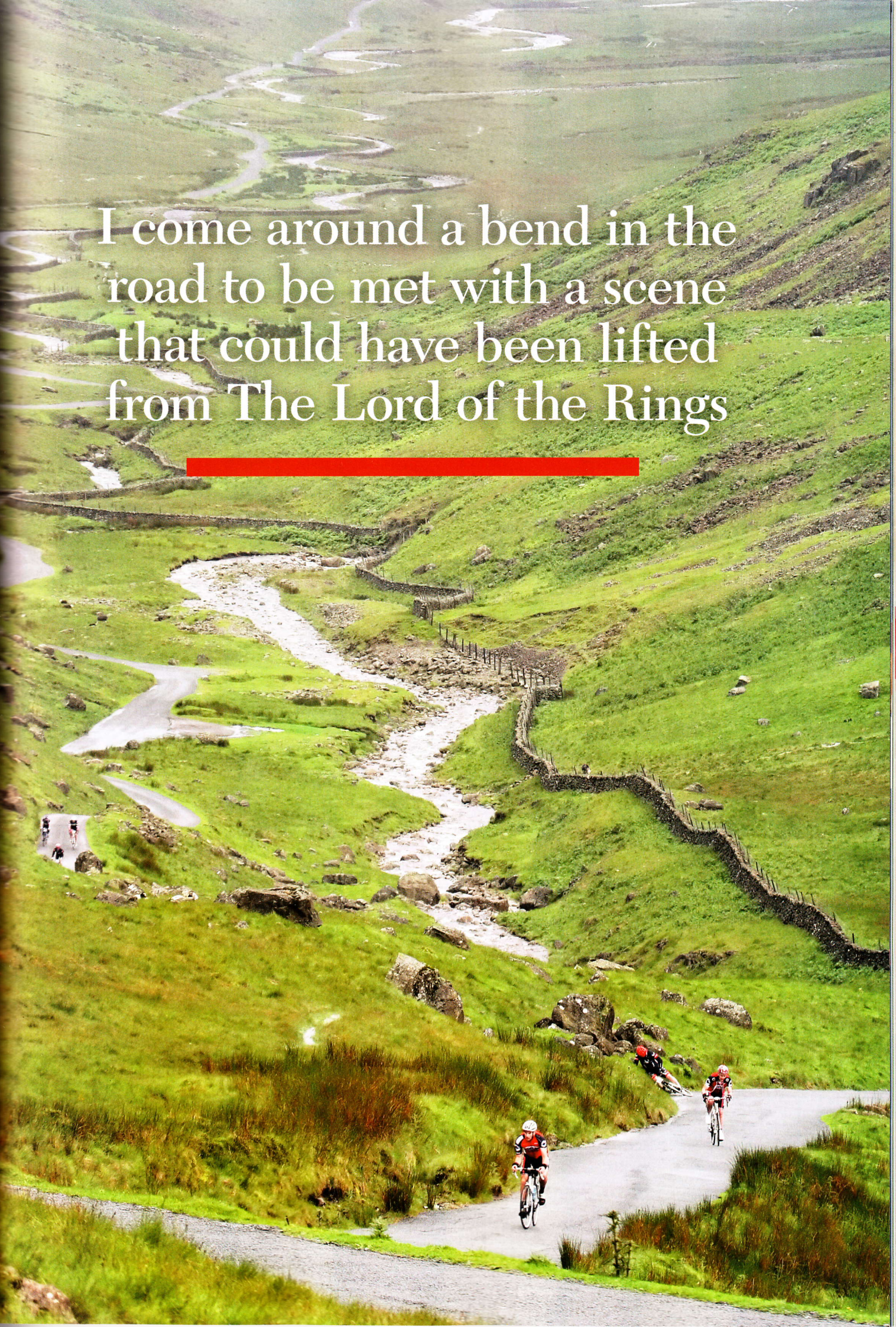
off at 5am – probably those who'd slept in a B&B – but with a three-hour window in which to leave, and the Windermere ferry not working until 7am, there's no rush.

The start line is on a small but charming wooden pier that stretches out into the sea. Feeling like a parody of Meryl Streep in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, I pose for a photo as I stare into the distance, then, realising that I am essentially faffing, I dib in at the control point and set off on what is already feeling like a proper adventure. Ahead of me lie three national parks, the first being the Lake District.

Due to blind enthusiasm, I have to turn around within about five minutes as I've set off in completely the wrong direction (almost – I haven't ridden into the sea). Once on the right course, I catch up with Ray Milligan, a policeman from York who has a much better idea of where we're going, and what lies in store...

This being my first sportive and potentially the longest time I will have spent in the saddle, I don't go out too hard. We trundle along country roads, passing through the quaint villages of Holmrook and Eskdale, and I can't help but marvel at the Lake District's beauty.

Twelve miles into the ride, I come around a bend in the road to be met →

A high-angle, wide shot of a lush green valley. A river winds through the center, bordered by stone walls. In the foreground, a paved road curves through the grassy hills, with several cyclists riding along it. The overall scene is reminiscent of a fantasy landscape.

I come around a bend in the
road to be met with a scene
that could have been lifted
from *The Lord of the Rings*

There is a reason why any C2C journey is done from west to east. It's the beautiful tailwind



with a scene that could have been lifted from *The Lord of the Rings*. Before me, like some Mordor-esque Mount Doom, is Hardknott Pass. As I pass the 30 per cent sign, I'm already in my smallest gear...

When I finally reach the top, I'm met by a Mountain Rescue team who warn me to take it easy going down. I'd have been better off on a mountain bike for the amount of gravel and potholes, as I painfully hold onto my brakes while sliding down the hill, passing Ray who's punctured.

Feeling like I'm on a roller coaster, I crawl my way back up Wrynose Pass. It feels less arduous than Hardknott – probably because I'm looking forward to reaching the first checkpoint in Kendal and tucking into some food. Breakfast so far has consisted of tea and Clif Shot Bloks.

They say any good journey should at some stage cross water, and I reach the Windermere ferry with seconds to spare, dib in (our time stops while on board), then join another 30 cyclists busy swapping stories of how they fared on Hardknott.

I arrive in Kendal after three hours of riding. I'm so hungry that I promptly gorge myself on several baguettes, half a dozen

brownies, three flapjacks and a cup of tea – without doubt, the most gluttonous tea and cake stop of my short riding career.

Refreshed and full, I get back on the bike, joining forces with Stephen who is sporting a jersey proclaiming that he was a recent finisher of the Fred Whitton Challenge. We head west out of Kendal along the Old Sedbergh Road. Moments later, on the outskirts of the town, we're faced with a 730ft climb that drags on for a couple of miles. Regretting the second baguette and feeling a bout of indigestion, I make my way up like Thomas Voeckler trying to cling on to the yellow jersey in Stage 19 of the 2011 Tour de France.

WIND SWEPT

There is a reason why any C2C journey is done from west to east. It's the beautiful tailwind. With it gently pushing me on, I travel with relative ease through the collection of river valleys and hills that form the majority of the Yorkshire Dales, excited about the homemade soup that awaits at the second checkpoint at the Green Dragon Inn of Hardraw.

Passing Catterick Garrison, and after

GRAND PLAN

James Thurlow, director of Open Cycling, is the man responsible



"Crossing the country is an uncompromising journey. Unlike loops you can't take a short cut. I kind of like that.

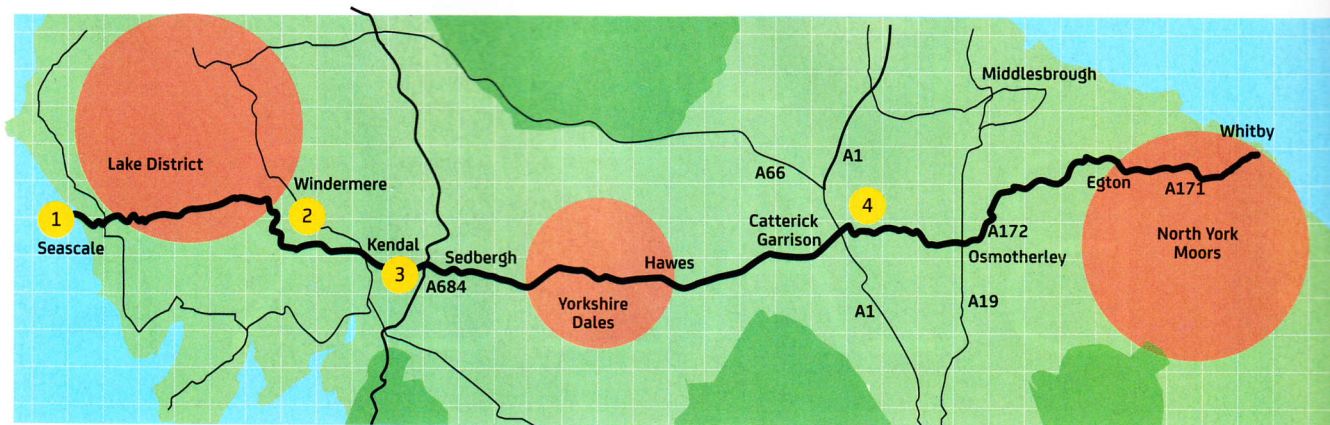
This event also gives people an opportunity to 'tick' one of the country's classic cycling journeys.

"Four years ago I put together the Coast to Coast Adventure race, a mixture of kayaking, mountain running and cycling (mountain bike and road) across the three national parks, so I know the landscape pretty well.

"The temptation is to start in Whitehaven and head north following a similar route to the Sustrans one, but this barely sees any lakes and plays hopscotch with the A66. It also heads north into the Pennines rather than the Dales. Coming across Hardknott Pass and using the Windermere ferry leaves the riders in no doubt that they're in the Lake District. It also brings you into the quiet rolling roads of the Dales.

"I must admit that if I could shorten the bit crossing the Vale of York – a flat expanse of fields and rural landscape – I would. But it does offer a sharp contrast to the hills."





another bout of baguette chewing at checkpoint three, I enjoy getting in and out of my jacket as the weather does its usual thing of not knowing whether to rain or shine. And then it changes.

An ominous cloud has been hovering in the distance, but a flash of lightning closer to home gets our attention. We count the seconds, waiting for the inevitable clap of thunder to indicate the distance from the lightning. Five.

"Bloody hell, it's not even a mile away," I say to Stephen. We quickly don our rain jackets (again), and moments later the heavens open and hit us with a freakish hailstorm that makes us wince with pain.

THE END IS NIGH

You'd think that signposting a 150-mile route across the country would be a recipe for error, especially when it's raining so hard it hurts simply to look up, but not once did we take a wrong turn. It is brilliantly marked. And because it's going like clockwork, we start thinking we've got it in the bag when we reach checkpoint four in Ingleby. With a tummy full of delicious hot chilli stew, we're just about to leave when a friendly marshal warns us that it gets a "bit hilly" over the North Yorks Moors.

Hilly? It's not like the last 120 miles have been flat.

I wish he'd been joking. Hilly doesn't do the North Yorkshire Moors justice. Zipping up our suits of courage, we plough on, desperate for a glimpse of the sea that'll mean the end is in sight. Finally, a break in the trees reveals a panoramic view of a sun-dappled Whitby. Our destination.

As we amble down Whitby's esplanade, I cross the finish line 11 hours and one minute after setting off. Smiling, I can't help but do some maths: my first ever sportive, plus affordable entry, plus the longest and most climbing I've ever ridden, plus delicious food, plus great organisation, plus not getting lost, plus friendly marshals... equals one massive tick in the box for a fabulous sportive adventure. **PLUS**

THE ROUTE

Distance 150 miles (240km) **Climbing** 15,091ft (4600m)
Grade Hard **Duration** 9-24 hours **Maps** Landranger 89 West Cumbria, 92 Barnard Castle & Richmond, 93 Middlesbrough, 94 Whitby & Eskdale, 96 Barrow-in-Furness & South Lakeland, 97 Kendal & Morecambe, 98 Wensleydale & Upper Wharfedale, 99 Northallerton & Ripon **Download the route** www.opencycling.com/coast-to-coast-in-a-day/route.php



1 From Seascale ride towards Holmrook then Eskdale, once there continue until you reach Hardknott and then Wrynose. Once over these, pass Little Langdale, turn right to the A593, turn left then immediately right onto back lanes, then head for Hawkshead followed by Windermere.

2 Cross Windermere on the ferry then make your way to Kendal, passing through Crook.

3 From Kendal head west along The Old Sedbergh Road until you hit the A684.

Follow this through Sedbergh and on towards Hawes, turning off just before it to pass through Hardraw village. Head towards Bolton Castle, then Catterick Garrison, skirting just below it to Catterick village.

4 Ride towards and then through Brompton then Osmotherley, over the moor to Swainby, where you briefly join the A172. From here head through Great Busby and Kirkby, Kildale, Commondale, Danby and over Lealholm Moor. Continue towards Egton followed by Aislaby, at which point you hit the A171. Turn right to Whitby.

NEAREST STATION

Penrith, Seascale and Whitby
www.nationalrail.co.uk

FOOD AND DRINK

If cycling on your own, there are plenty of towns along the way to stop for food. During the event there are four feed stations with enough food to feed an army.

WHERE TO STAY

Although camping facilities are provided at both sides of the country, accommodation can be found at visitcumbria.com and visitwhitby.com

BIKE SHOPS

Arragon Cycles (arragons.com) has an excellent shop in Penrith. There are also shops en route in Kendal – Evans Cycles (www.evanscycles.com/stores/Kendal) – and Catterick Village – Bank Cycles (www.bankcycles.co.uk)

INFORMATION

Next year's Coast to Coast in a Day is provisionally on 29 June 2013 www.opencycling.com