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Way of the Roses

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Way of the Roses

The Way of the Roses is exhilarating rather than exhausting, from the valleys of Lancashire through the Dales of Yorkshire to the lovely, but little-visited Wolds.

An instant hit from its launch in 2010, it's an unbeatable way to see the best of Northern countryside without needing to be super-fit. Morecambe's seafront, Ripon Cathedral and York Minster might attract the photographers, but the delight of this route is really in little towns like Pateley Bridge and Settle, the tearooms of Clapham and the pubs of Appletreewick.

The National Cycle Network has several Northern coast-to-coast routes, but this is the most accessible. For most people, it's closer to home than the C2C or Hadrian's Cycleway, so there's less hassle with booking long train journeys. The hills aren't too steep, and since it passes through well-known tourist areas like the Yorkshire Dales, there's plenty of accommodation.

How long does it take?

At 170 miles, most people will take three to five days over it. (If you only have two days, consider cycling from Morecambe to York alone.)

West to east, as ever, is the most popular direction: there are only two taxing climbs this way, and walking up the first is almost *de rigeur*.

What sort of bike?

The route is almost entirely on quiet roads and tarmaced paths. The worst section, the notorious cobbled lane outside Austwick, has just been replaced with a new roadside path. There's a very short unsurfaced section just east of York.

So whether you have a hybrid, a road bike, or something more rugged, you shouldn't encounter any issues.

Is it signposted?

Yes; you'll see a white rose/red rose combination on the trademark blue signs. Don't expect to simply follow a number as you would with other Sustrans routes, though. The Way of the Roses is pieced together from several different NCN routes, and actually follows eight different route numbers along its course.

How do I get there?

There are frequent trains to each end of the route. Morecambe is on a branch line from Lancaster, but the two are sufficiently close together that you might just get the train to Lancaster and cycle – though you'll retrace your steps when you set off. At the other end, Bridlington has half-hourly services back towards Doncaster and Sheffield (hourly on Sundays.)

Booking is recommended, particularly if your outward journey will take you on a Virgin service to Lancaster.

There aren't many options for joining the route along the way: there are stations at Settle and York, and Driffild shortly before Bridlington.

Is it suitable for a first-timer?

Yes. The climb out of Settle is tough, and again at Appletreewick. Other than that, though, it's best described as 'undulating' terrain – enough to feel like an achievement, but never too much.

Do take extreme care on Greenhow Hill, the descent into Pateley Bridge. This is steep, twisting, and often potholed, and has been the scene of several accidents, some fatal. If you're uncomfortable cycling down it, there's no shame in pushing.

Are there any route options?

Not yet. The Way of the Roses was conceived as a main route and an optional 'southern braid', but the latter is far from finished. You can explore some of the excellent new paths around Harrogate and Wetherby that will eventually form part of that, but you'll need to use your own initiative (or *cycle.travel's* route-planner) to find your way there.

That said, the National Cycle Network's tentacles extend into many parts of Yorkshire and the North-West; so if you have time to spare, it's easy to plan a few off-route diversions. In particular, take a look at the new routes around the Yorkshire Wolds, a lovely area of the country whose quiet roads are too seldom visited.

Morecambe to Settle

The place to stay in **Morecambe** is undoubtedly the stunning art deco Midland Hotel, an astonishing outpost of the Railway Age on the seafront. But if, like us, your budget doesn't quite stretch that far, choose from one of the many guesthouses in this pleasantly weathered seaside resort, and eat at the excellent Palatine pub.

Take a photo by the Way of the Roses sign on the promenade before setting off. The first seven miles are all easy railway path, crossing the River Lune in **Lancaster** on a splendid new cycle bridge. Note the Lancaster Canal passing overhead on a sturdy aqueduct.

The friendly little café at **Caton** marks the start of the country lanes that characterise this route, often unfenced through lush pasture. There's a few climbs as you dodge along the side of the Lune Valley, but nothing too steep; the gently undulating ride up the Wenning Valley from Wray, long a favourite road with cyclists, is greatly enjoyable.

It might be called the Way of the Roses, but only 19 miles of this 170-mile route is in Lancashire. **Clapham** is a pretty Yorkshire Dales village, and a good tea-and-cake stop. There was once a notorious cobbled lane here, all tunnels and rocks, but the route has sensibly been rerouted along a new cyclepath beside the busy A65; those with suspension might still like to try their skills at the original route.

The valley of the infant Ribble leads to **Settle**, best known for its railway to Carlisle but in itself a friendly, not-too-touristy town. Local supermarket legends Booths (like Waitrose, but northern) have an outlet here. Accommodation in Settle is a little pricier than you'll pay elsewhere, but it's a good first-night stop if you're taking the route over four days.

Settle to Ripon

Any coast-to-coast route is going to involve some hills. The good news is that the Way of the Roses is much kinder than, say, the C2C. But it's still no pussycat – and the climbs start here.

The climb out of **Settle** is crazily steep... and cobbled. It's also pretty short; the main action is over in half a mile, so there's no shame in pushing. You're rewarded with the surprisingly remote scenery at the top, followed by a string of little villages over the succeeding miles. The tiny narrow road out of **Cracoe** is particularly enjoyable.

Burnsall and Appletreewick are good places to overnight if you're tackling the route in three days, and enjoyable stops at any rate. **Burnsall** thrives on its riverside tea rooms, while **Appletreewick** has two excellent pubs, camping and a 'mountain bike livery'.

There's another tough climb up from Appletreewick to **Greenhow Hill**, but it's the following descent where you have to take more care. The B-road down to Pateley Bridge is twisty, steep and often potholed. Take it carefully, especially in wet weather; there have been serious cycling accidents here. Ridden sensibly, it's very enjoyable.

Pateley Bridge itself is a pleasant Dales town, a good place to refuel for the next climb – pretty much the last one for 60 miles. It leads to **Brimham Rocks**, a National Trust-owned playground of "weird and wonderful" rock formations, and a genuinely surreal area to cycle through.

The National Trust figures again five miles further on, at **Fountains Abbey**. This World Heritage Site is a stunning assembly of history: the Cistercian abbey, the landscape gardens, the medieval deer park. Best of all, you can cycle through the grounds, in a remarkably forward-thinking move by the Trust – one which other stately home owners would do well to emulate (yes, we mean you, Blenheim Palace). It makes a fittingly grand approach to the cathedral city of **Ripon**.

Ripon to York

Had enough hills for now? No problem. The route is almost entirely flat between **Ripon** and York, following the Ure and Ouse valley (one of those rivers that changes its name). Neither city needs an introduction from us. Both are tourist hotspots, best known for their cathedral and minster respectively; and both have plenty to distract the touring cyclist for an afternoon or more.

The Way of the Roses meanders down the valley along quiet rural lanes, stopping in at **Boroughbridge** – less well known than Ripon, certainly, but worth a brief stop. It crosses the Ouse on the rickety Aldwark Toll Bridge, which is free for cyclists; motorists are charged a sky-high 40p. From here the roads get a little busier, but still very tolerable except, perhaps, at school run times.

The route enters **York** on a tarmac cycle path across the meadows, neatly avoiding the city traffic. Then, instead of continuing along the riverside, it diverts past York Minster onto another traffic-free route, the Foss Islands path. It's a good route all told, but you'll miss out much of York if you simply follow it; so lock your bike up by the Minster, and go for a stroll around town.

York to Bridlington

The easy riding continues through the flatlands of East Yorkshire, passing **Stamford Bridge** – site of the other 1066 battle. The journey there involves an unsurfaced bridleway, but it's easily rideable and avoids the busy A road running parallel.

Pocklington is a real find, an unspoilt market town with an endearing mix of architectural styles. It marks the beginnings of the Yorkshire Wolds, a superb cycling area that has somehow escaped the attention of most riders. The next ten miles of riding are among the best on the whole route, tiny lanes nestling in narrow dales. There's a small amount of climbing to do – we're starting from just above sea level, after all – but it's worth it.

After descending into Tibthorpe, a roundabout route takes the Way of the Roses into the proudly old-fashioned town of **Driffield** – perhaps best known for its annual agricultural show.

From here, it's quiet lanes all the way to Bridlington, with a short off-road interlude after Harpham. This area, particularly the Roman Road of **Woldgate**, is a frequent source of inspiration for painter and Bridlington resident David Hockney.

Bridlington's cheerful promenade, busy harbour and acres of sand make for a terrific end to the route. Arrive on a summer day and it's the quintessential seaside resort, still with a touch of the 1950s about it; even on an autumn evening it has an undeniable appeal. But be warned – people have been known to stare out to sea and think "hmmm, maybe my next challenge should be the 4,000-mile North Sea Cycle Route"...

















