

# Coast to coast

Cyclist discovers a picturesque route from Newquay on Cornwall's north coast to St Austell on the south, via every steep hill in between

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**F**rom my hotel room I have an excellent view over Newquay's Fistral Beach. It's undeniably beautiful, with long stretches of sand sweeping down from a fringe of green dunes, but it's also disconcerting. Large waves are crashing onto the shore, throwing up spray that's being whipped away by a powerful wind. It's a sign that today's ride could prove tougher than I'd expected.

## Cornish delight

As a peninsula that tumbles southwest into the Atlantic Ocean, Cornwall has one of the longest coastlines in Britain. As such it provides plenty of opportunity to witness the elements at their most impressive but its

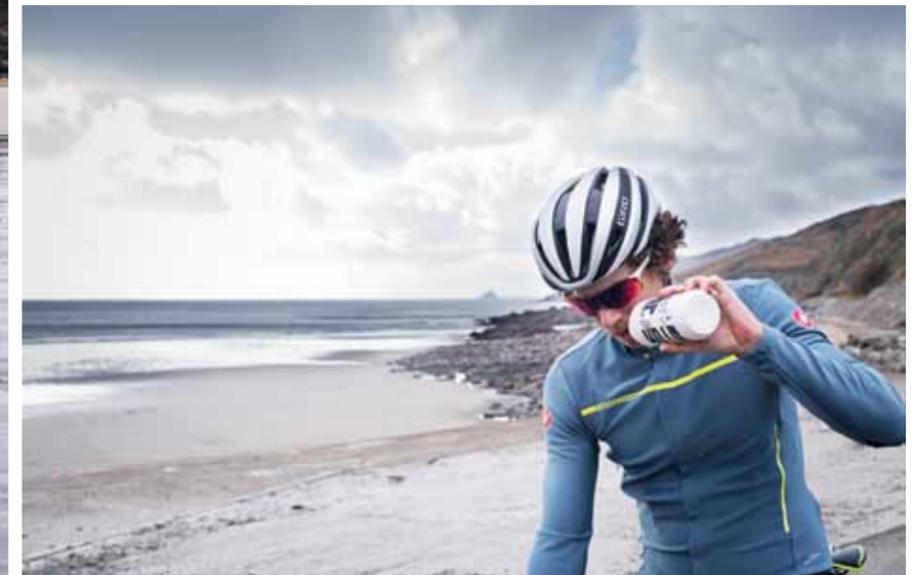
abundance of surfing beaches and other attractions such as St Austell's Eden Project mean that in terms of road cycling it remains underexplored.

Due to my front row view of the weather I'm not sure I actually want to explore it right now, but I put thoughts of gales out of my mind, and after wolfing down the largest and most fortifying breakfast on the menu of the Fistral Beach Hotel's Dune Restaurant, I meet up with my ride partners for the day, Rob and Jonny. Their self-deprecating manner immediately puts me at ease but their physiques suggest that I'm not in for an easy day on the bike. Rob is an ex-professional rugby player turned Ironman triathlete and time-triallist with legs like tree trunks, while Jonny





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is lean and lithe, reinforcing the climbing credentials to which several local Strava segments already attest.

We spin away from Fistral Beach, leaving a few brave souls to attempt something akin to surfing in a supremely choppy sea, and meander along the appropriately named Narrowcliff Road, which is tightly sandwiched between a steep drop to the sea and Newquay town proper.

Casting a look back across Newquay Bay it's easy to pick out the distinctive and peculiar Huer's Hut, its stark whitewashed walls almost Greek in appearance. The hut was built in the 14th century when Newquay was famous for pilchard fishing – a lookout would be stationed in the hut and shouted 'Hevva!' to the fishing fleet when they spotted a pilchard shoal. While the Huer's Hut is now just a tourist attraction, Newquay's insignia still includes two pilchards as a reminder of the town's fishing past.

I'm permitted only a brief glance back at the Hut as the wind tugs at our handlebars, threatening to blow us across the road. On Rob's advice I've brought a skinny-tubed frame with 34/32 bottom gear to cope with Cornwall's coastal inclines and as I battle the gusts I'm doubly glad I haven't brought an aero bike with deep-section wheels.

Before too long we leave the urban setting of Newquay behind, taking an arterial road out through Quintrell Downs. Our environs get rapidly more rural as we take a right turn onto the type of single-lane road we'll spend much of our time on today, passing by Kestle Mill, heading towards St Newlyn East, and the high hedges that line the road on both sides insulate us from the full force of the wind.

The surprisingly gentle topography serves as a great warm-up for the day and means we can hop from hamlet to hamlet chatting amicably. We reach St Newlyn East and pass the Pheasant Inn, which Jonny tells me is the oldest pub in Cornwall. His reliability is somewhat undermined, however, when he tells me the same thing about the next two pubs we come across. Rob finally tires of the joke and a brief argument ensues, before it dissolves into laughter. I can tell I'll have to keep a close eye on my local guides today.

The hedgerows that have provided our shelter finally run out as we approach St Endor Wood, and their disappearance signals a change to more spiteful gradients. Nevertheless the slender road remains deserted of traffic and the tranquility among the trees means the route isn't yet causing too much discomfort. ▶

The only way out of Portholland is back the way you came, but the views are worth the detour

## Pedals and pasties

Follow *Cyclist's* trek across Cornwall

To download this route, go to [cyclist.co.uk/58cornwall](http://cyclist.co.uk/58cornwall). Head east out of Newquay and pick up the A3058. Take a right at Kestle Mill, heading towards St Newlyn East. From there the Halt Road will take you under the A30 to Mitchell, where you turn right to Trelassick and over the B3275 through Ladock. Turn south through Grampound Road, straight over the A390 and descend into Tregony. A left turn by Bessy Beneath sees you wiggle along the south coast, pass through Boswinger, Mevagissey and Pentewan and on to St Austell. Head for Tregregan Mills on Chapel Lane to pass the Eden Project. Take the B3274 through to Roche and turn left just before the A30 to run alongside it. The A3059 takes you past the airport and back into Newquay.



Hopping from one seaside village to the next means plenty of technical lanes amid rolling countryside



## Rob ducks his head and goes into full time-trial mode along the undulating road. Jonny and I cling on for dear life until he signals a left turn

By the time we emerge from the woods the day has become bright and clear, happily at odds with the cloudy forecast. It means the view down into Tregony from the summit of the hill is unobscured, but I can't linger on it for long – the twisting, technical descent requires concentration and handfuls of brakes to get down it safely.

### No laughing matter

The first truly testing climb of the day comes out of Tregony with a couple of kilometres at over 10%. All of a sudden chat stops and things get serious. Jonny makes the move he's been threatening to all ride – a seated acceleration that leaves me and Rob unable to follow. We crest the rise and Jonny sits up with a grin, climbing ability sufficiently displayed. With barely any time for me to recover, Rob ducks his head and goes into full time-trial mode along the undulating road. Jonny and I cling on for dear life until he signals a left turn and things settle down again.

'Sorry about that – I don't like that bit of road, it's busy and I'd rather get it over with,' Rob says. After I stop seeing stars I'm more than a little relieved to hear that he does like most of the rest of the route.

Our efforts are rewarded with some stretches of flatter tarmac on high ground between Bessy Beneath and Caerhays. The views are of expansive countryside to the left and occasional glimpses of the sea to the right, drawing attention to the fact that we've covered most of the distance between the north and south coasts. A glance at my Garmin shows we've covered 40km, but the rest of the route profile reveals that things are going to get a lot harder – we'll be steadily gaining altitude for a while now so there will be some big ups and not so many downs.

Jonny has fully embraced the creative element of composing a UK Ride and frequently suggests detours to local places of note. Rob's usually firm stance on sticking to the planned route goes out the window when Jonny proposes a deviation down Parnell's Hill Wood to an inlet called Portholland. The suggestion reveals a hidden gem: a beautiful, narrow descent opens out to an idyllic seaside hamlet. As a rider north of 80kg I don't go uphill easily so it should say a lot that the trip to Portholland is well worth the 3km climb back up to rejoin our route.

A swift down-up-down sees us roll past Caerhays Castle, a manor house that has existed in its current guise



## The rider's ride

Lynskey R240, £1,499 frameset, [lynkeyperformance.com](http://lynkeyperformance.com)

The titanium R240 is burly American muscle that's brilliantly suited to British riding. A sticker just below the seat tube cluster claims this bike is 'built to ride... fast', which could be dismissed as American over-enthusiasm but in this case rings true.

The solid frame can thud slightly at low speeds but when you put some power into the bike it comes alive, revving up to speed like a Mustang. It cedes some weight to equivalently priced carbon machines, but the frame combines a rock-solid bottom bracket area with snappy handling thanks to a short wheelbase. It's the perfect beast for punching up Cornwall's sharp climbs.

A mix-and-match 105/Ultegra groupset is a good cost-cutting strategy though it might seem incongruous on a premium frame, but all the important bits are high spec and perform with Shimano's usual precision. DT Swiss's Spline RC28 C carbon wheels are a highlight – they help keep the weight down and their stiffness does wonders for acceleration. Overall the R240 is a great mix of titanium ride feel and carbon-esque efficiency.



since 1807. Nestled amid copses of trees and unkempt countryside it looks unaltered by time, and I imagine *Downton Abbey*-esque characters scurrying about its halls.

Caerhays Castle has an imposing position overlooking Porthluney Cove, an attractive little beach flanked by steep, crumbling cliffs on either side. On a warmer day it would be a great place to stop and while away an hour or two, but I've come to learn that each pretty cove along this route is followed by a brute of a climb, so there is no time to linger.

We're making our way up the coast towards St Austell now, so seaside villages come in quick succession. In the fishing port of Mevagissey we stop for some overdue sustenance – apparently some sharp ascents aren't far away. We visit the Wheel House, which overlooks the bay. The tide is out so it's a long drop over the edge, and in the harbour fishing boats are stranded on the mud. A few fishermen are taking the opportunity to work on the hulls of their boats.

The fare is simple pub grub but by the time we set off again I'm thankful for the dense, starchy carbs that have





Around Newquay and St Austell you quickly learn that a beautiful beach is followed by a leg-stinging climb

reawakened my sleepy legs. It's a draggy ascent away from Mevagissey, but the hard work is rewarded by the opportunity to freewheel into the next port, Pentewan.

#### A holy hill

'Hardly anyone ever stops in Pentewan,' says Rob. 'Which is a shame, as a few of the cafes do awesome cake. It's just everyone is too scared to climb the next hill on cold legs.'

I decide he must be exaggerating – there's always time to stop for a good cake – but regrettably he isn't. The narrow climb up Pentewan Hill rears up to 20% for over a kilometre. It's tough enough to briefly turn me religious

and leaves Jonny vocally expressing his regret at choosing a large portion of greasy fish and chips as lunch.

At the top the road eases off for a few kilometres and we roll along high ground into St Austell. Traffic-wise it's the busiest part of the ride but thankfully it's short-lived. Before long we turn off the main road to start a 10km ascent that leads us through a series of pretty hamlets before we catch sight of the Eden Project, the environmental complex with its giant transparent domes.

We turn for the road to Newquay and the sharp, man-made peaks of the 'Cornish Alps' dominate the horizon. In 1745 a Plymouthian apothecary called William Cookworthy discovered a deposit of china clay here that turned out to be the biggest in the world. Used to make porcelain, the clay's extraction formed the large sculpted peaks that we are making our way around.

Not that I get much opportunity to appreciate the mounds – a combination of failing weather, winding false flats, fast cars and another stretch of road Rob doesn't care for makes the next 20 minutes the most intense of the route. I can see the top of the final rise when I crack spectacularly. I crawl the final 100m of the climb, where

we reach the roof of our ride. It has been disproportionately hard going considering we're barely 300m above sea level.

#### The home straight

A couple of gels and a reminder from Jonny that it's largely downhill from here lifts our spirits. Compact chainsets are quickly spun out as some efficient through-and-offing through the beautiful Goss Moor nature reserve dispatches a few kilometres of open road quickly. We skirt the edge of Newquay airport, where the high hedgerows return once more and occasionally reveal glimpses of the sea, but this time it is of the Atlantic rather than the English Channel.

A final 10% climb up through the village of St Columb Minor is one last reminder that a leg-stinging climb is never far away around here, but after grinding up that all we are left with is a spin through the centre of Newquay.

Fistral Beach is still playing host to a few diehard surfers braving the inclement swells. Jonny suggests a quick dip – Newquay's answer to a post-ride ice bath – but I decline. In a choice between bike and board, there's only one winner. *Sam Challis is Cyclist's editorial assistant and is sick of the sight of pasties*

## Do it yourself

### TRAVEL

Despite being near the southwestern tip of Britain, Newquay is one of the more easily accessible towns in Cornwall. Once the M5 runs out at Exeter, it's about an hour and a half drive on the A30 to Newquay. Or you could fly – Newquay airport is served by regular flights from several airports, and trains to Bodmin are on the main line from London Paddington. From Bodmin, Newquay is 30 minutes by taxi or bus.

### ACCOMMODATION

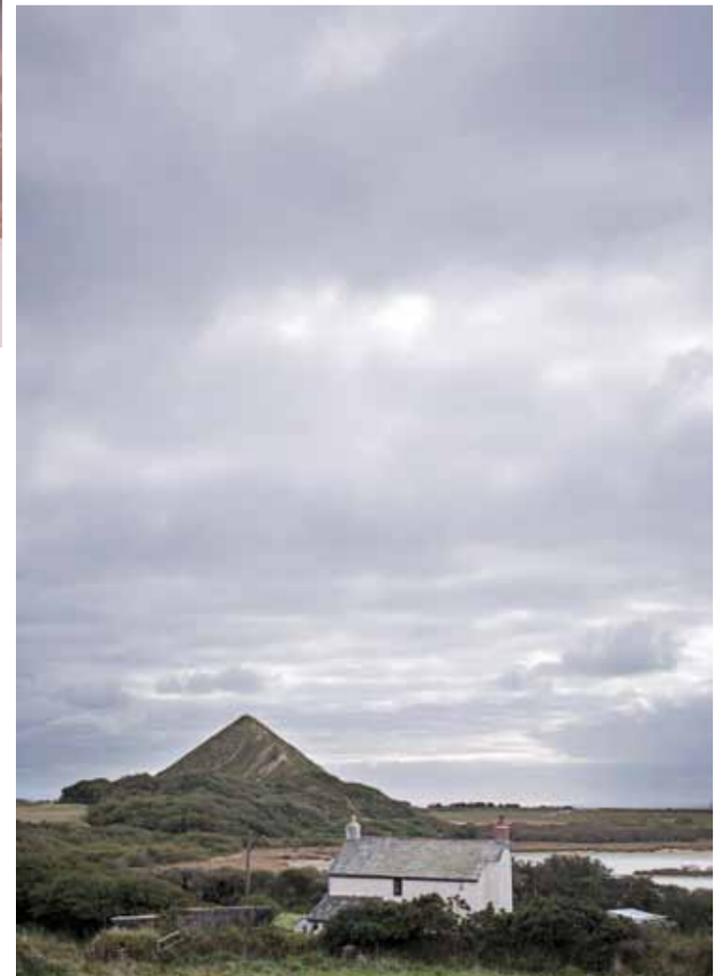
*Cyclist* stayed at the Fistral Beach Hotel, which is a 10-minute walk from the centre of Newquay. The four-star hotel has fantastic views out over Fistral Beach, which is only a short stroll if you fancy some surfing or a bracing swim after a hard day's riding. If you want to be treated a little more gently, the Fistral Beach has a great spa, and its Dune

Restaurant caters perfectly for those with food allergies (myself included).

### THANKS

Thanks must go to Rob Ley of Cornwall Council and Zennor Vélo (zennorvelo.cc) for his help in organising this trip and for the massive turns he took on the front towards the end of the ride. Thanks also to Rob's 'cycling husband', Jonny Burt, for acting as an entertaining (and knowledgeable) third rider on the day.

Newquay's Little Italy (littleitaly-newquay.com) deserves a special mention for *Cyclist's* delicious post-ride pizza. Finally, a heartfelt thanks to Sarah Harrington of Excess Energy (excess-energy.com) and Visit Cornwall's Rosa Pedley – their logistical efforts were the main reason the trip was such a success. For more information on the area go to [visitcornwall.com](http://visitcornwall.com).



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