

Update from "Oop North"

By The Exiled Foreigner

So, I thought initially that car drivers were a tad friendlier in giving space, until I realised that they probably did, because of a cyclist with a "foreign" County name displayed on his back.

Not so. Drivers are just as ridiculously stupid here, as down south. There are the odd ones, who appear to either ride themselves or are concerned about an accident damaging their car...

Cycle paths are more like non-existent. You have to look far and wide, and plan long in advance to figure how to get the mere 4 miles to the town (pardon, city) centre, if you fancy a relatively car free journey.

Fair enough, there is the canal. If you want to look it up: I live at WV10 8QD; follow the roads: Pear Tree Lane, SO at RAB [Long Knowle Lane], 3rd exit at RAB [Prestwood Rd West], 1st L [Victoria Rd], R at TJ [Graiseley Ln], R at TJ [Wolverhampton Rd], L just before Tfl to enter towpath [NCN 81], follow to under Rlw bridge, where L access to Lower Horseley Fields, R onto A454, 3rd exit at RAB into town.

The canal provides a nice ride - during the cold temperature fairly free of people as well, but it looks likely to become very crowded when the sun's in full flow. Anyway, going back at night along the canal has its own thrills. The issue is mainly at the sometimes very narrow paths just when you get under a bridge and at their exit. The other option is obviously to take on a few ravers on the road... similar kind of thrill.



Mist under Oxley Railway Bridge on the Staffordshire-Wolverhampton Canal

Along the canal to Birmingham City centre is 1.5 hours for 17 miles. And after the second time, I actually made it in that time, as crossing the bridges, when the tow path changes sides, doesn't appear to be included in the time/distance calculations. There's a bit blocked off, with a winding diversion, which interrupts the beauty of the ride slightly.

Last Sunday I tried a ride into the countryside. If the lake in the field is two foot higher, but the road is relatively dry, you appreciate the tight foundations of the hedges on the side. It didn't prevent me though from finding my own lakes, as wide as the road, with no way to walk around without sinking into the mud of the soaked road sides. So through I go. Riding up a slight steeping I thought, surely no flooding now, as water would collect at the lower parts of the fields. There I was: another lake with no way to get round, and no idea as to its depth. Luckily a car just approached, and I kindly waved them through smiling and wishing him good luck. Not as deep as I thought initially, so I followed and continued on my way.

I haven't ventured out much as yet, and I am still looking for cycle group that I could join. So, for now I am riding on my tod to find out about my nearer and farther surroundings. There is Cannock in the north with a nice town centre, but rather difficult to get to due to the few smaller roads – according to the map. Wombourne, south-west of Wolverhampton has also a nice flair. However, getting there is an adventure on its own.

So far, I think like a car driver and I act like a car driver, so I go the shortest route from A to B initially scanning the area on the way out-bound and trying to alternate my home-bound route.



Below Bilston St Island

I had not detected this “underground” cycling junction, until I rode back from one of my ventures. As it happens, it's underneath that last

roundabout in the brief route sheet above, with a tram crossing above. But unfortunately, like in so many towns, there is no contiguous cycle route that gets you safely from one end of the town to the other.

I've experienced far fewer cyclists around this town than in our regions. Obviously there are those, who ride on the pavement, because the road is so dangerous. However, I think it's more down to the layout not being conducive to cycling at all, and more geared towards cars. Maybe I am just used to be out in the countryside within 10 minutes from the centre of Southend, or I just need to find and get used to the relaxing areas to roam on my two wheels.

For now I am enjoying my daily ride to work and home – only 10 minutes one way – and try to get fit for an Audax, or something similarly challenging. There's an YH in Ironbridge, a mere 1.5 hours, or 18 miles away, if you fancy coming for a visit. 