

## Cycling in the Goring Gap



Overheard recently: “Why do they do it? All those cyclists, they just keep riding through the village.”

I was surprised, as the answer seemed obvious to me. I ride my bike because I love it, it keeps me fit and healthy and enables me to explore the beautiful local countryside. What activity can I still enjoy as much as I did 50 years ago, which compares to freewheeling downhill on a summer’s day?

Sixteen years ago I described a series of local bike rides for the youthful *Goring Gap News*. Time moves on, and much has changed. You can no longer go to the King Charles Head for a “Pub Lunch in the Country”. GB cyclists have won numerous Olympic and Paralympics medals. Cycling has been described as “the new golf”. Concern about obesity and related issues such as diabetes has been increasing. People are encouraged to take more regular exercise, through initiatives such as the Goring Health Walks.

Getting started in (or returning to) cycling can be daunting at first. I was chatting to a friend while we were out on a ride recently. He had never ridden a bike until his wife bought him one at the same time as their son got his first bike. “I couldn’t even manage the little slope away from Mill Road on the bridleway to South Stoke, I had to get off and walk. The first time I rode up Catsbrain Hill to Woodcote I had to stop three times to get my breath.” He persisted and over the next couple of years lost 20 kg (around 3 stone).

“If exercise were a pill, it would be one of the most cost-effective drugs ever invented”. The NHS website has lots of useful information on “Cycling for beginners”. It states that “Regular cycling can reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke. It can also boost your mood and keep your weight under control”. There is advice about what sort of bike to get, safety and health issues, and it points out that cycling is actually safer than gardening.

Many people seem to think that cycling is too dangerous because of the traffic, or too difficult because of the hills. In fact this area is ideal for cycling, as demonstrated by the number of visiting cyclists we see riding through the villages. You just need to know where to find the easiest climbs, quietest lanes and most enjoyable descents. I’m often surprised when driving to see cyclists riding on major roads I’d never consider, because there’s a much more pleasant alternative nearby on quieter roads or bridleways.

There are lots of local resources for cyclists. Goring has its own bike shop – Mountain Mania, right in the heart of the village. They rent bikes, as well as selling and repairing them, which useful if you have weekend visitors or want to try before you buy. Phone ahead for rentals, as limited space means the bikes are not stored at the shop. Although there are fewer country pubs nowadays there are more cafes, often as part of the local village shop. You can find links to these resources and more at [www.goringgapcycling.co.uk](http://www.goringgapcycling.co.uk). This is a free, non-commercial website I set up to share bike routes, coffee (and cake!) stops, and my love of cycling generally. The routes range from a four-mile loop through skylark country to longer day or touring rides.



To download free routes and maps of over 40 rides starting from Goring and Streatley, visit <http://www.goringgapcycling.co.uk/> or scan the QR code.

