

MICRO

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(2014)

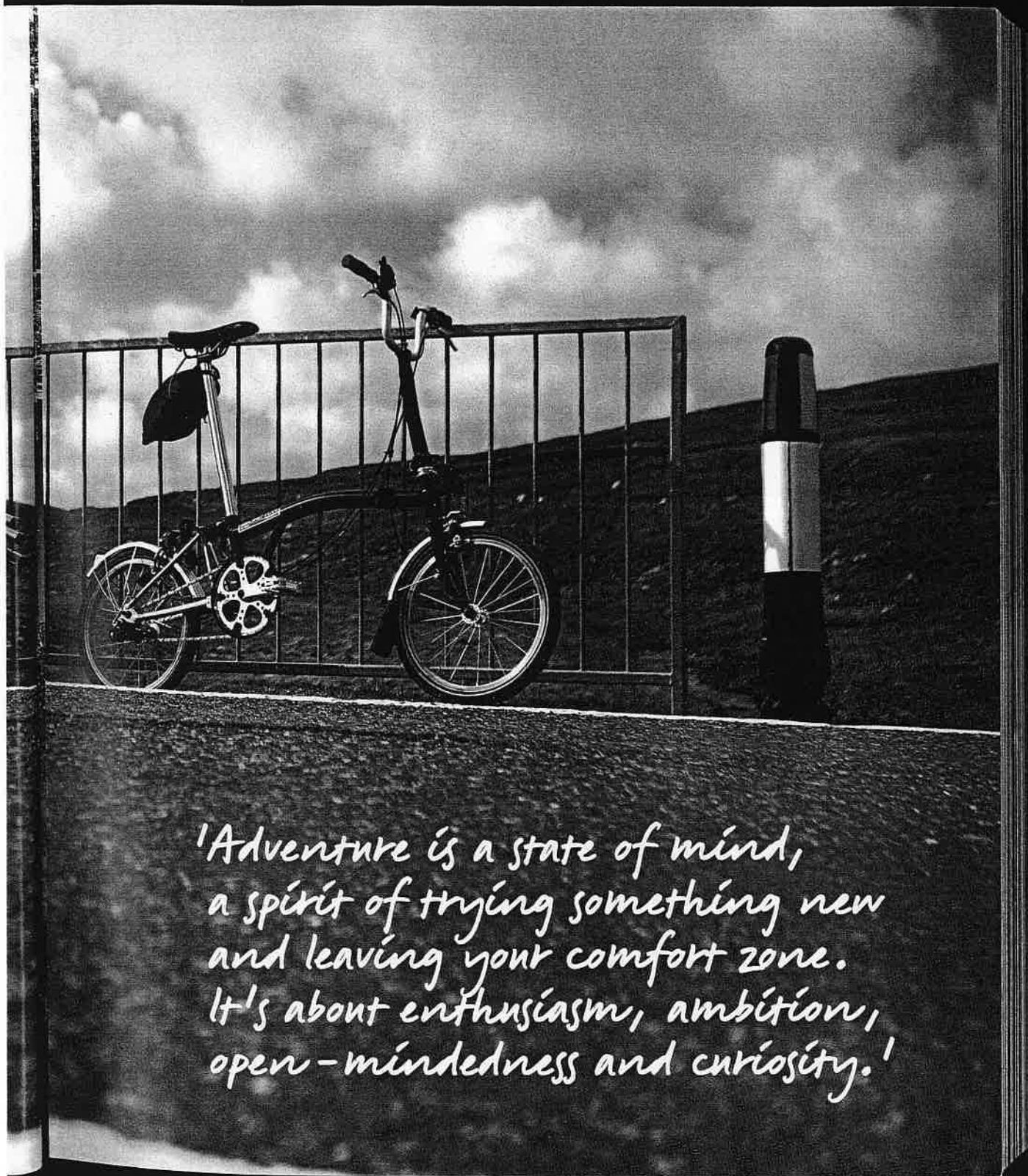
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ADVEN

LOCAL DISCOVERIES FOR GREAT ESCAPES

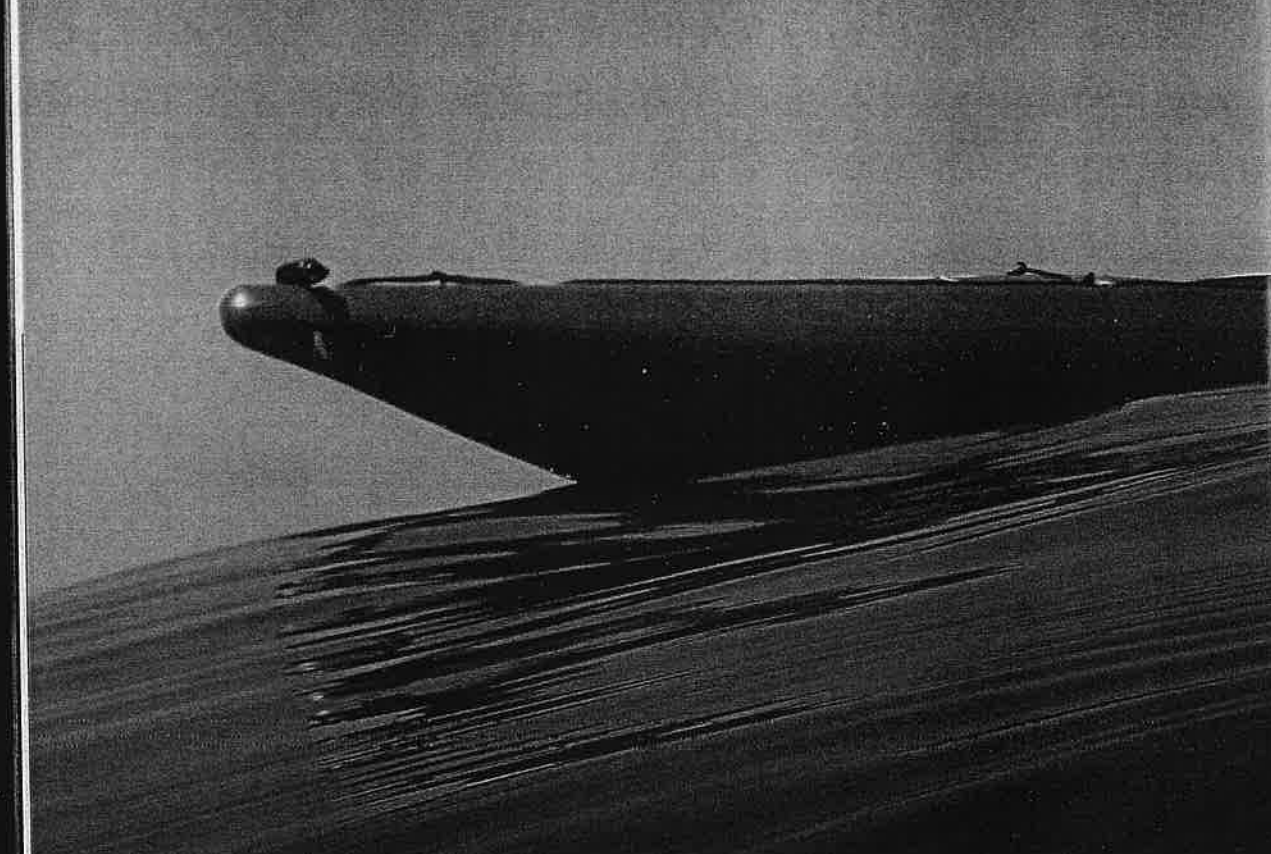
TURES





*'Adventure is a state of mind,
a spirit of trying something new
and leaving your comfort zone.
It's about enthusiasm, ambition,
open-mindedness and curiosity.'*

INTRODUCTION



Half a lifetime ago, I left home to spend a year in Africa. That was it. I was hooked. Adventure! Since then I have spent years on the open road, chasing the spirit of adventure across the planet. I've visited almost half the countries on Earth and still itch to explore all those that remain undiscovered to me. I have rowed and sailed across oceans, walked across deserts and cycled across continents. I do it because it is fun. I do it because it is miserable and difficult but also because it is easier in many ways than the complicated confusion and stress and hassle of modern life. I do it because I love the wild, silent beauty of the

empty places on our planet. And I do it because I love the teeming, vibrant fullness of our planet and the surprising, memorable interactions with the random selection of seven billion souls I bump into along the way.

My adventures have taught me so much about the world and about myself. They have given me more focus, purpose and perspective than I used to have. I have spent the last decade or so writing books and blogs and giving talks about my adventures. I am very fortunate that my passion and hobby has become my job. I've spent years paying my bills and taxes (did I mention the stress



and hassle of modern life?) through my adventures.

So I felt a fair degree of hesitation when I decided to dedicate a year to exploring my own not-very-wild country. I was not going to embark on the sort of big, exciting adventures that are the traditional fare of career adventurers. I was going small. Really small. Tiny adventures. Smaller even than that, perhaps – I was going in search of *microadventures* close to home.

What made me decide to do this? I am aware that most people do not have the time or the money to live as adventurously as they might like. But over the last few years I have felt increasingly that

these need not be limiting factors. And the benefits and enjoyment I derive from adventure felt too important to me to not try to share with as many people as possible.

Over time a couple of things have become clear to me, through emails on my blog and chatting to people at talks I give. Firstly, almost everyone loves vicarious adventure. The terrifying ranks of the North Yorkshire Women's Institute enjoy hearing about far-off lands and the call of the wild just as much as a Gore-Tex-clad audience at the Kendal Mountain Film Festival or Royal Geographical Society.

The second thing I learned was that giving talks, having a website and printing cheap business cards describing myself as an 'Adventurer' somehow set me apart from the people who heard me speak or stumbled across my blog. Time after time I heard variations of this refrain: 'You are an Adventurer. I am a Normal Person.'

That is total rubbish. I am an Adventurer, but I am also a Normal Person. The only difference between me and other people is that I've managed to cobble together the time, the money, the kit and the fitness necessary to do various big expeditions. I am not stronger or more heroic than Normal People. Absolutely not.

Most people enjoy adventure and would love to have more of it in their lives, but most people don't have the time to cycle round the world. But adventure should not only be for 'Adventurers'. So I realised that what I wanted to do was to break down the barriers to adventure. And thus the microadventure was born.

I will define what I feel a microadventure is shortly but, first of all, I should define adventure. It's important to do it this way round because it is vital not to consider a microadventure as a diluted, inferior version of an adventure. It is not. A microadventure is an adventure.

Adventure is a loose word that means different things to different people. It is a state of mind, a spirit of trying something new and leaving your comfort zone. Adventure is about enthusiasm, ambition, open-mindedness and curiosity.

If this is true, then 'adventure' is not only crossing deserts and climbing mountains; adventure can be found everywhere, every day, and it is up to us to seek it out.

You probably can't go on huge adventures all the time (we all have to pragmatically juggle the commitments and constraints of our 'real lives'), but you can have a microadventure. Because you do not need to fly to the other side of the planet to find wilderness and beauty. Adventure is stretching yourself, mentally, physically or culturally. It is

about doing something you do not normally do, pushing yourself hard and doing it to the best of your ability. You do not need to be an elite athlete, expertly trained, or rich to have an adventure.

So a microadventure is an adventure that is close to home: cheap, simple, short, and yet very effective. It still captures the essence of big adventures, the challenge, the fun, the escapism, the learning experiences and the excitement. All these things remain.

A microadventure has the spirit (and therefore the benefits) of a big adventure; it's just all condensed into a weekend away, or even a midweek escape from the office. Even people living in big cities are not very far away from small pockets of wilderness.

Adventure is all around us, at all times, even during hard financial times such as these; times when getting out into the wild is more invigorating and important than ever.

'So a microadventure is an adventure that is close to home: cheap, simple, short, and yet very effective. It still captures the essence of big adventures, the challenge, the fun, the escapism, the learning experiences and the excitement.'

This is a book about adventure: adventure that is accessible to everyone. There are adventures in this book that you can attempt even if you are really busy or have never climbed a mountain. There are adventures in wild places that you can tackle whether you are a young child or a disabled adult.

Maybe you live in a big city or feel that Britain is boring and crowded, or that adventure exists only in the Yukon or Patagonia. Perhaps you enjoyed camping as a child but have now grown up, got



yourself a mortgage and a lawnmower. This book hopes to grab you, politely but firmly, and shake you to go and rediscover the rivers and sunsets you used to enjoy. It's a book that gives you permission to regain a childlike enjoyment of wild places.

This is a book for everyone who would love to cycle off into the sunset or head out to sea and just keep going but who, for now at least, cannot do this.

It's for aspiring adventurers who are looking for the confidence to kick on to bigger projects, as well as for seasoned adventurers wanting to learn more about their local area or scratch the itch of adventure in between big trips. It's for people with real jobs and real lives, with a couple of kids and a cat to feed. It's for people who love reading about adventure, who yearn for adventure, but who think that they are too busy, too old, too fat or too urbanised to be able to get out there and do it.

It's a book for dads and lads, mums and sisters, for families looking to begin adventuring together. It's for husbands or wives who still have a lurking primal urge to escape and climb a mountain, build a fire and be a bit daft, if only for an occasional night away from domestic duty.

'If you are reading this and looking longingly out of the window at a distant hill, then this book is for you, whoever you are and wherever in the world you might be.'

The adventures in this book take place in Britain, but the ideas and the spirit are transferable. For that matter, the book is somewhat London-centric, for the simple reason that this is the part of Britain I live in at the moment. That doesn't matter either; most of the adventures in this book are deliberately designed to be done anywhere. So if you are reading this and looking longingly out of the window at a distant hill, then this book is for you, whoever you are and wherever in the world you might be.

It's a book about removing barriers, both real and perceived, and busting excuses – both the valid ones and those that are self-defeating and lazy. It's about stopping yourself feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of a long-term goal and instead taking the first tiny step on that journey. It's a book about getting started. Though the book is specifically about microadventures, I hope the concept and the essence will be transferable to whatever it is that you would like to tackle more adventurously.

Britain's landscape has been moulded by millennia of man's activities that have destroyed or changed our original wilderness forever. In these more enlightened times, increasing numbers of people are passionate about protecting, preserving and restoring our wild places, but the forests that once covered our land are gone. Thousands of rivers have been dammed or diverted or buried. But although this book will, I hope, encourage people to care more viscerally about the countryside that remains, it is not a book about despair. The fox cubs I saw playing one morning on a quiet, bramble-choked section of what was once Britain's busiest Roman road are a reminder of nature's resilience and versatility. Spend some time concentrating quietly in a garden or park and you will hear wild birds belting out their songs, just as they have always done. And although, snug in your sleeping bag on a frosty night, the valley below may be bright with street lights and roads, the wind is as raw and fresh as ever, and a night beneath the stars remains magical and precious.

These pages do not contain a list of the most epic adventures in Britain: there is no Grade E11 rock climb or Grade 5 white water. There is not even a Saturday night out on Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street. It doesn't claim to cover Britain's 'Xtreme Adventures', 'Most Awesome Wild Places' or anything like that. It's more gentle and generic. Those books certainly have their place, but you should not need to live in a beautiful wilderness to have adventures. My microadventures take place in

normal places for Normal People. And I hope that is the greatest, most awesome aspect of this book.

Most of the microadventures in this book revolve around wild camping – sleeping outdoors, but not in official campsites. I’ve spent well over a thousand nights sleeping outdoors. Probably only about ten of those have been in a ‘proper’ campsite.

I have slept on top of England’s highest mountain on New Year’s Eve and on the northern tip of Britain in midsummer week. I’ve slept on hilltops, seashores, riverbanks, even on a swimming platform out at sea as well as in sewage pipes (clean ones) on three continents!

So I know how easy, fun, rewarding and invigorating sleeping wild can be, but I also understand how someone who has never done it might think otherwise. I hope that this book will encourage people to try new ideas, including wild camping. So, at the end of the microadventures are ‘How To’ chapters to make things easier for you to begin, and to answer a few common worries.

There are so many adventures out there close to your home. All you have to do is make them happen.

Here is how to get the most out of the book, whether you are applying it to adventures or something else entirely:

1. Think Big. Allow your mind to wander and your imagination to get carried away.
2. Think Small. What’s the first tiny little step you need to take in order to get going?
3. Start Small.
4. But do Start!

I sincerely hope that this book will encourage participation and collaboration and sharing. If you do nothing more than flick through the pretty pictures on the loo, then I have failed. Even if you read the entire book and enjoy it, but then just put it down and get on with something else, then I have failed.

My aim for this book is to give enough anecdotes to sow some ideas of your own, and enough basic

information to get you started. And then I want you to actually get out there! I want people who read this book, even if they have never slept on a hill before (perhaps *especially* those people) to actually give a microadventure a go, even if only once.

My website – www.alastairhumphreys.com – has additional videos and photographs from many of the microadventures featured in the book. The introductory notes at the beginning of a chapter detail if I made a film on that microadventure.

Go on a microadventure by yourself or with friends. Do it with your parents or children or colleagues from the office. Seek out short, interesting, rewarding adventures right on your doorstep. And once you have done your microadventure, please share your story online. Stick it on Twitter or Facebook or Pinterest or YouTube or Instagram. Tag it with #microadventure so that everyone who reads this book can see what you got up to. I believe that this is the best way to break down the barriers that stop ‘Normal People’ having adventures. It will show that Normal People like you, like me, are finding brilliant adventure close to home.

‘Go on a microadventure by yourself or with friends. Do it with your parents or children or colleagues from the office. Seek out short, interesting, rewarding adventures right on your doorstep.’

If you are too busy, too stressed, too broke, too tired or too unfit for an adventure, then you *definitely* would benefit from a microadventure.

Climb a hill, jump in a river, sleep under the stars. Try it. What’s the worst that could happen?

Microadventure: a refresh button for busy lives.
#microadventure



THE 'ONE DAY' ADVENTURE

'One day I'd like to do a big adventure.' I hear this all the time: at parties, at events I speak at, by email from strangers. 'But I don't have the time / money / fitness / shiny kit.'

Time Required:	One day
Difficulty Level:	Easy
Location:	Wherever you live
Essential Extra Kit:	Map, compass

The excuses vary occasionally, but the essence remains the same: 'One day I want adventure in my life, but, unfortunately, it can't be right now'.

Waiting for all your stars to align is a guaranteed way to ensure that the adventure you crave will never happen. Waiting until you somehow, suddenly and simultaneously, have both loads of money *and* plenty of time is daft (if you'll excuse me being a bit direct before we have got to know one another properly).

One day? What rubbish!

If this applies to you, listen! You do not need a winning lottery ticket to have an adventure. What you need is a polite kick up the backside! A push. I want this book to give you the tiny bit of momentum needed to get started. This is a book for people who want adventure in their life but find that real life has got in the way.

'One day' is just an excuse. It's lazy, self-deluding and – worst of all – completely unnecessary. So if you are procrastinating and dithering about committing to adventure, why don't you begin with a one day adventure, something so tiny that it can barely be called



an adventure? Let's call it a 'microadventure'. Now go and do it as soon as you can, not 'one day'... Tomorrow would be a good time to start. Or this weekend at the very latest. Start small. But do start.

The concept is simple: Pick up your wallet. You're ready. Open the door. Step out... and begin. (This sentence, by the way, is the hardest thing you will read in this entire book.) Then jump on a train. I'd suggest doing this microadventure by bike, because you can explore so much more new ground that way, but going by foot is a simple alternative. Hell, take a canoe if you like.

Anyway, choose a station, almost at random, that's about 30 miles away from your home. Buy a one-way ticket. I say 30 miles because it's a distance long enough to be challenging on a bike, but achievable in one day, even if you are pretty unfit. (If you're on foot or if you can't manage 30 miles then do a shorter trip. But don't just duck out and do no trip! This approach applies throughout this book: if something I suggest is too difficult, do an easier version. If something is too easy, make it harder. Mould it and adapt it to your own situation. Just make sure you do something.)

When you arrive at your destination, hop on your bike and cycle home. Travelling 30 miles away from your home should guarantee that you'll begin the adventure in lovely countryside. I suggest you navigate homewards using a compass (see pages 226-7 for instructions), or the Crowsflight app on your smartphone, rather than a map. A compass (or the app) won't tell you what route to take, it will only point you in the right direction. The twists and turns and decisions that crop up along the way are therefore down to your instinct and serendipity. It becomes far more of a journey into the unknown than merely following the clearly prescribed route back home that a map would give you. If that feels a bit daunting, by all means use a map or even a Sat Nav. Don't let any of the ideas in this book put you off. Just modify them to what appeals to you.

I once spent four years cycling back home. Within the single day ahead of you will lie most of



the challenges, hurdles and rewards of a multi-year ride – although maybe fewer bears. But I mean this seriously. You will have to navigate your way, you'll become wildly hungry and relish the joy of stopping at a cafe and eating cake, guilt-free. You will see things you have never seen before. If you travel slowly and with a smile on your face then you will meet different people, have interesting conversations and learn something new about the world and about yourself.

When you eventually make it back to your front door you will be tired, aching and hungry. But you will have had an unusual and rewarding day and – I sincerely hope – you will have realised that you are capable of more and are thus eager for more.

You have opened the door to adventure.

Let us know how you get on: share your experiences online using the hashtag #microadventure



- In London, cycle from King Henry's Mound in Richmond Park to St Paul's Cathedral. At King Henry's Mound there is a perfect, uninterrupted view – created in 1710 – through a gap in the trees and all the way across the city to St Paul's Cathedral. It is a view that is protected by law. Protecting magnificent views is proof that the law is not, always, an ass.
- Build up to a Century: cycle as far as is comfortable for you in a day. Build this up, a few miles each week, with the aim of completing a Century: a 100-mile bike ride in a day. If you build up gradually this is an achievable, though impressive, goal.
- Enter an organised mass ride such as the London to Brighton Bike Ride, Dunwich Dynamo, Lord of the Lochs Sportive, Exmouth Exodus, Hell of the Ashdown, Skylark Sportive in Yorkshire, Birmingham to Oxford or an Audax event. Search online for more information.

OTHER IDEAS TO GET YOU OUT OF THE FRONT DOOR

- Cycle to the biggest cathedral or sports stadium in your county, or the newest restaurant or the oldest museum.
- Ride to a friend's house and arrive unannounced for lunch.
- Cycle a marathon in world-record running pace. At the time of writing that means 2 hours 3 minutes for the boys, 2 hours 15 for the girls.
- Make a pilgrimage to perhaps the oldest tree in Scotland (The 2,000-year-old Fortingall Yew), Wales (The Llangernyw Yew) or England (The Ankerwycke Yew). Or search online for a list of 'Britain's 50 greatest trees' and pick the one you'd like to hug.

GEOCACHING

Geocaching is an enjoyable way of enticing yourself to get out into the countryside and go to places you have never been. Using a GPS, you search for small boxes hidden at thousands of specific map coordinates across the country. The box will contain a logbook for you to sign and sometimes trinkets for you to swap with the next person to come along. It's a really good way of making a ramble in the countryside more exciting for children. If you search online for geocaching you will find the coordinates for over a million geocaches, hidden all over the world. If you think it's easy, try getting to the geocache that is stored on the International Space Station...