

# Paths Less Travelled

The Clyde Coastal Path offers a much-needed biking adventure

by FIONA RUSSELL

FOR years I'd seen the signposts for the Clyde Coastal Path (CCP) dotted around my community, yet I'd never followed them.

Like many people I would stick to more familiar local routes, such as the West Highland Way (WHW) and the John Muir Way (JMW), and save my exploring on foot or by bike for places further afield at weekends.

Then came the Covid-19 lockdown and the same old trails lost their appeal after riding them repeatedly – and many destinations became crowded.

I started to crave an adventure – and suddenly the green signs for the Clyde seemed to promise just this.

With tight restrictions on where we could go – this was the first lockdown – I sat down with a map and scoped the countryside on my East Dunbartonshire doorstep.

My plan was to challenge myself to find new and different routes for a series of day mountain bike rides, each starting and finishing at my Bearsden home.

With a week of sunshine forecast, I set out for the first ride, riding the CCP to the Kilpatrick Hills.



Main: Jaw Reservoir

## Kit list

- ▲ Mountain or gravel bike
- ▲ Comfortable cycling clothing
- ▲ Helmet
- ▲ Map and compass
- ▲ Mobile phone
- ▲ Water and food
- ▲ Puncture repair kit
- ▲ Spare inner tube
- ▲ Bike pump



The Clyde Coastal Path

Cycling at first through pretty woodland at the edge of a housing estate in nearby Milngavie, I'm amazed I've never seen the path before.

Climbing uphill, the views are suddenly expansive and sweep from hills to coast and over urban Greater Glasgow.

Peddalling a mountain bike uphill on rough terrain is tiring and according to my planning I still have 518 metres (1700ft) more ascent.

A short descent leads to Douglas Muir

Quarry, eerily silent due to lockdown. An information board states an older section of the quarry has been returned to wildlife as moorland and wetland.

More descending on a peaceful single track brings me to a stretch of road, which is again familiar as access to one of my local hill runs.

Here, I leave the CCP, which continues west, to join a short section of Tarmac before veering off on to a new-to-me track that climbs north amid farmland.

At the brow, I follow a sign to Jaw Reservoir, riding a narrow path between two fenced fields. In one

## top tip

When exploring a new trail, note your route as you go for future reference.

The view from the trig offers rolling countryside and the distant city



“The route home is deliciously downhill”

field, a trig pillar sits at a height of 229m (751ft).

A trig always calls for a photo and I admire the vista of rolling countryside giving way to the clutter of the city.

Climbing further, on track and cropped grass, the waters of Jaw suddenly pop into view.

A rugged path veers upwards from the reservoir, where I see a causeway I hope will take me north.

A short hike-a-bike down a bracken-thick bank is required to reach the boggy shoreline of Jaw, then I jump into the saddle for a lovely ride on two flat, narrow grassy causeways that cross the waterway via a tiny island.

I'm delighted to find a narrow path that wiggles along the edge of forestry. Climbing northwards, I ride to the highest point of the day at 320 metres (1050ft), and just

as I'm beginning to question my whereabouts, I turn a corner and see another expanse of water.

I recognise the triangular shape of Kilmannan Reservoir and then a smart wooden sign for the JMW.

The JMW, which was opened in 2014, cuts through East Dunbartonshire on its journey from Scotland's west to east coast.

I can either head directly downhill or ride around another reservoir, Burncrooks. The weather is still warm and I set off on the three-mile rollercoaster-style loop.

The route home is deliciously downhill, firstly on the JMW and then on to the WHW. While it is easy to speed along, I relish the opportunity afforded by a reduced workload and sublime conditions to stop to look, lie in >>



Resting among the Bluebells

blankets of sweet-smelling bluebells and learn about local history from a series of art installations.

I call my adventure ride the Four Reservoirs Route.

The following day, I feel a hankering to ride even closer to the mountains and plan a 35-mile circuit north, joining together the WHW and the JMW.

More sunshine and “taking my time” give rise to an adventure that, while tiring due to the greater mileage and total ascent of 823 metres (2700ft), is wonderfully diverse on paths, tracks and Tarmac.

I pass Kilmannan and Burncrooks reservoirs again before entering a wild-feeling forest on a seemingly endless descent to the village of Croftamie at the edge of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park.

On a southern section of the WHW, I ride along the eastern edge of the prominent Campsie Fells before heading on to a network of paths in Mugdock Country Park and home again on roads and trail I know very well.

The final in the trio of big bike adventures visits an

## DID YOU KNOW?

According to legend, the Auld Wives Lifts were named after three old women who laid a wager on who could carry the greatest burthen – old form of burden – and brought in their aprons the three stones and laid them in position.

ancient landmark that I’d long heard about but never found the time to locate.

Joined this time by my husband, Gordon, who is sure he remembers going to the Auld Wives Lifts as a teenager, we map another loop of 32km (20 miles).

We follow some familiar trails, including the WHW, as well as less used routes, such as the Strathkelvin Railway Path, to reach the sprawling Lennox Forest.

Making up a route as we ride, but generally travelling through the forest from north to south, we chance upon another trig pillar with fantastic hill views and then cycle on to a quiet country road near tiny Baldernock.

Leaving our bikes at the roadside, we walk up to Craigmaddie Muir where, in a natural amphitheatre, lies a pair of large boulders with a third balanced.

The Auld Wives Lifts are covered in carvings from hundreds of years ago, including Celtic inscriptions.

Truly, we remark, we would never have visited this fascinating spot if it had not been for lockdown.

Nor would we have lingered, hunting out another trig pillar and lying in the sun to take in impressive views of city and countryside before riding home with fresh discoveries and new views expanding our minds. 