

Choosing the Ride

Alec, in his role as GASBAGS Annual Ride Organiser, called a meeting on November 8th and asked everyone to come up with potential options for the annual ride.

There had been whisperings about Scotland and though Mike absolutely loved Scotland he now felt he knew it too well. Fortunately he was backed up by a fellow cyclist called Joe Burns who lives in Glasgow. Joe had contacted Mike after watching his Youtube about the Prague to Vienna trip, and asked about hiring bikes. Later he sent an email about his group's rides, and all their rides were in Germany with one being along the Rhine – nowhere near Scotland. Mike issued the email from Joe to GASBAGS to inform them about wonderful German cycling.

The meeting arrived with just Alec, Mike, Bushy & Bridget (B&B) and Jeff & Pam attending. Mike proposed Majorca or Budapest then Jeff proposed cycling along the Rhine – he had been won over by Joe's eloquent prose. Jeff's proposal won the vote easily. Jeff had thoughts of taking the bikes on the train but the detail was left to the next meeting.

Mike issued out the minutes. Brenda replied to say that her and Malcolm were interested. Paul replied to state that he might be keen but Susan would not be – Paul's last Annual Ride trip had been back in 2007 in the Yorkshire Dales and even then he hadn't cycled as he had been sick. Since then Paul had been interested most years at the early stage. Dave replied to ask to be kept in the loop and told us about hiring a bike from Burg & Bike when he had cycled the Rhine with his daughter.

The second meeting to go through the detail was a week later. By this time Mike had bought a map of the Rhine area and an ebook called "Cycling the Rhine". A route was worked out involving cycling along the three rivers: the Rhine, the Moselle and the Lahn. As the normal participants for the last few years were not now tied to school holiday breaks it was agreed that the ride would be moved to the middle of June. On seeing the change of date Brenda wrote to state that she could not come along as her holidays were still locked to school holidays. It now looked like the participants would be the same as for the last three years: Alec & Ann; Jeff & Pam; Mike & Naoko; Bushy & Bridget.

Outside the meeting it was recognised that the route from Bingen straight across to the Moselle would be too long and too mountainous. Jeff and Bushy met up to check out options and came up with an excellent new route. Now a full plan had been developed:

- Fly from Leeds-Bradford airport to Dusseldorf and stay overnight
- Train to Koblentz then onto Oberlahnstein and collect bikes
- Stay 2 nights in each of Sankt Goar, Cochem and Koblenz
- Cycle up Lahn on the last day, hand back the bikes, and return by train and plane.

Mike sent an email to Lothar of Burg & Bike. Lothar replied to say that he was travelling in Vietnam but the answer was "Yes" but what if our group increased to 50?

At the end of November Dave sent an email to state that he would be delighted to join us as the dates did not clash with cricket. At the end of December Mike paid Lothar the bike deposit. Naoko had been unsure she would be in the UK for the ride but agreed to at the end of January. Ann & Alec announced in the New Year that they were no longer a pair but would both still be cycling. Changes were coming through!

Bushy agreed to book the train from Dusseldorf to Lahnstein and return. He decided to be totally democratic and sent out train times for the rest to vote on. He voted to arrive back at Dusseldorf airport 4 hours before take-off. Was he being serious?

Mike had booked extra singles in case Naoko didn't come but no-one in GASBAGS wanted to join the group and make it an even number. Then in May Renata appeared on the scene – very fit, a fast and quick cyclist. She agreed to join us and now we had an even number – great!

In early June Mike sent out an email about Day Leaders, an idea which had worked well for the last 2 years. Out of the blue Dave sent out an email. He was not able to cycle with us as his personal life was getting full up. What a great shame! This meant that the Day Leaders had to change. Jeff being the GASBAGS Ideas man asked to switch to the last day so the final agreement was:

June 19th & 20th - Ray - Ray has booked the trains and can own the section to Sankt Goar

June 21st - Pam - Bingen & return - Many castles & wine

June 22nd - Mike - Sankt Goar to Cochem - hopefully look round Cochem Castle

June 23rd - Alec - Cochem to Zell & return - many vineyards

June 24th - Renata - Cochem to Koblenz - Koblenz looks interesting and cultural

June 25th – Mike & Bushy - Bad Breisig & return - more castles?

June 26th - Jeff - Lahn ride then return to Dusseldorf

The Ride

Wednesday June 19th – Home to Dusseldorf - Bushy

We had agreed which cars we would take – the estate cars of Jeff and Alec – and who would go in each car. Ann had sent out an email saying that she and Bushy would swear to booking the car parking with Sentinel. This prompted Jeff to book for on-airport parking and Alec to book a different off-airport and cheap parking. Ann must have felt she was invisible – again!

We were on the 6pm flight from Leeds-Bradford to Dusseldorf, and arrived at 8:15. Bushy had the next step worked out – the S11 tram that looked like a train. However we had to buy tickets from an on-platform ticket machine. Mike spied a woman buying a ticket and in his best German asked her to buy her to buy him a ticket then upped it to 9 tickets. The German woman could actually speak English and found that she had to buy each ticket in turn – a demanding job and she never complained. Ann was having trouble wheeling her bag so Naoko adopted the role of being Ann’s assistant bag carrier leaving Mike to hump their bag by himself up the staircases – but he was not one for complaining!

We arrived at the Hotel Bejuna at 9pm, and set out half an hour later to find food in the old town (Altstadt). Our progress to find a restaurant was very slow with Renata despairing that her slim stomach was contracting too much so dived into a garage shop to buy an icecream. Mike followed her and bought a Twix – two bars thus one for Naoko but she said no so Mike ate them both.

We arrived in the Altstadt street with restaurants but we seemed to be too late to eat. However Jeff, with another good idea, persuaded one restaurant to serve us all salad. Jeff did a quick check, then shouted, “Nine beers and nine salads please”. B&B immediately complained – they weren’t having salad pushed down their throats, and they said in unison, “we want chips and just one bowl”. Bushy’s hair would have stood up but for the slight problem of a lack of it but his back-of-the-head curls pointed more upward. Bridget complained again, “I don’t want beer. I will have a cider”, as she had forgotten she was in Germany. The waiter did not understand the word “cider” so Bridget drew the shape of a tree with her arms but it was to no avail so accepted having a Coke.



Thursday June 20th – Dusseldorf to Sankt Goar – 20 miles - Bushy

The train to Koblenz was not till 11:58 so we had agreed to meet for breakfast at 8am and to sightsee in Dusseldorf till about 11:15. Bushy was the Day Leader for this day and everything was going well till we arrived at Koblenz at 1:50pm – just 10 minutes late. Someone asked for the train for Lahnstein and we all jumped straight onto it with no further checking. The train set off at 2:10 and we should have arrived in Oberlahnstein after 10 minutes. Instead the train stopped at Niederlahnstein then at Friedrichsseggen by which time we realised we were on the wrong train. We or rather Renata asked the station-mistress in German what we had to do to get to Oberlahnstein. We needed to get the next train back to Niederlahnstein then change trains to go one station up to Oberlahnstein. We arrived at Burg & Bike at 3:30pm rather than 2:30pm – just an hour late.

Lothar, the owner of Burg & Bike, welcomed us but was surprised to see us as his record check had found no deposit had been paid. However he had only checked back to January 1st and Mike had sent through the deposit on December 30th. Lothar sorted out the bikes, we checked them, changed clothes, and finally paid. In the meantime



Bushy had been checking for the best route as the ferry he had hoped to use at Lahnstein had been shut down. Lothar recommended that we cycle to Filsen then cross to Boppard. We set off 2 hours after arrival at 5:30pm. Alec and Renata were racing ahead and stopped after 8 miles to buy icecream – required on this very warm day. Everyone bought an icecream and relaxed in the sunshine then astoundingly Renata bought a second massive icecream – she is a definite icecream-aholic.



Two miles later we arrived at the Filsen ferry. Alec blurted out, “I have left my camera at the café”. No-one was surprised as he had a reputation for leaving things. We agreed that we should still catch the ferry as Alec could catch up with us easily – especially as we aimed to look around Boppard. By the time we had looked round the ferry had collected Alec and we were re-united at 7:15 pm. The distance to Sankt Goar



was 10 miles and we set off at a remarkably fast pace and arrived at the Hotel Rheinfels just after 8:10pm – a wonderful achievement. We arranged to meet at 9:15pm in the reception of the hotel – a time agreed by our Route Leader Bushy.

Jeff informed a few but not Bushy that they would walk into the centre early. When Mike & Naoko arrived at reception 2 minutes late no-one was there, and they saw B&B marching off to the centre. B&B must have been diverted as when Mike & Naoko joined the rest drinking outside a café they weren't there. Then B&B appeared, with Bushy giving Jeff a severe dressing down. “Don't leave before the agreed time again”, he stated strongly and this time his beard was sticking on end.



The local wine Riesling was being sold as dry, medium sweet, and sweet, and all three were enjoyable to drink. Unfortunately the café only sold snacks and not full meals. We moved to a hotel where both the beer and the wine was more expensive. However after an easy day's cycling we relaxed in the heat of the evening till we were driven indoors by driving rain. After the meal Mike & Naoko with Alec and Renata went back to the café to share a bottle of wine, finally falling into bed at 11:30pm.

Friday June 21st – Sankt Goar to Rudesheim and back – 41 miles - Pam

Pam had been passed the baton by Bushy and was now the Day Leader. She had stated the previous evening that we should be ready to leave at 9am, and after chatting with the team had decided that at first we should cycle to Schloss Rheinfels. Pam was excited as she had researched the day well and had a play planned to be performed at Bingen. Over breakfast, the best one of the week, Pam read out the itinerary for the day and included the historical background of the places we would pass through. She was taking her role seriously – in her mind she imagined that we were her pupils. A few interrupted but Pam continued on, without any thought of giving a tongue lashing.

Mike waited patiently at 9am at the front and was joined by Naoko, Ann, Pam, Alec and Jeff but where were the other three? Mike checked the garage and they had gone. It was unbelievable! After Bushy giving Jeff a dressing down the previous evening for not waiting, he had now not waited! We cycling slowly uphill to the castle with only Ann parking her bike and walking up. B&B were already there and Mike laid into Bushy about leaving early – and winked at Renata, who must have been wondering what she had let herself in for with this strange group. Bushy made a lame excuse about meeting in the garage. We took a photograph of us all kicking Bushy.

Pam declared, “We will set off again at 10am from outside the hotel”. This seemed to be a challenging time as Alec, Renata and Ann paid to visit the castle. The rest of us stood around looking at the beautiful views below, Sankt Goar and the Rhine. Astonishingly everyone, including Ann, who must have run back to her bike, was assembled outside the hotel just after 10. No-one dare cross Pam – not even Jeff.





Pam led off, and if there had been a pole with a GASBAGS flag on top she would have attached it to her bike to show that she was in charge. We cycled along the Rhine path past the Loreley rock then diverted through Oberwesel for a brief stop. It looked like a festival was planned as stalls were being erected. We continued on along the Rhine path and then diverted to Bacharach. Pam, our leader, parked her bike and checked if we could buy coffee at the nearby hotel. Meanwhile Jeff was cycling around looking for the elusive café that sold cakes. We all joined Pam, even Jeff, then out came Pam's hand-

written notebook and she read out the history of Bacharach. If there had been massive crowds around they would have joined us assuming that we were on an official tour. Pam stated in a firm voice, "You can have 30 minutes to look round", and no-one demurred. Several of us walked up high to Stahleck castle, knowing that we wouldn't be left behind as Pam was in our group.



We cycled back to the Rhine path and onto a section with thick dust on the path.

Suddenly a cry went out and we all stopped. An elderly man on an electric bike had cycled off the path and was now stuck in undergrowth with his bike on top of him. The best explanation given for going off the path was that he had looked up as he came towards us, saw our blonde bombshell Renata and was so taken by her beauty that he lost concentration – was Renata actually the lost maiden of the Lorelei who lured ships onto the rocks? GASBAGS went into rescue mode with the men, except Mike, and some of the women going down the bank to help out the elderly man. A Dutch man on a bike stopped and communicated with the rescued man in German. It seemed that he was less concerned about himself, and more concerned about the 2 bottles of wine in his pannier and what he would tell his wife about his cut nose. It never crossed his mind that he could have opened the wine and shared it with his rescuers.



We cycled onto Bingen, a town that Mike had been expecting to visit but he must have lost concentration over breakfast as Pam's plan was to catch the ferry to Rudesheim, known to be much prettier than Bingen. First though we said goodbye to B&B who had decided to cruise back from Bingen to Sankt Goar. Bushy looked back to the days when he and Bridget had cruised annually on the QE2, and when he could proudly wear his QE2 shirt. He also knew that a cruise was synonymous with gaining weight and hoped he might put on a few pounds by the time he reached Sankt Goar as Bridget had complained about him being too thin.

Rudesheim turned out to be another attractive town, and after looking round we sat down for dinner with our bikes safely locked away courtesy of Jeff, the GASBAGS fixer – the Derek Trotter of GASBAGS. Mike saw a lady looking alike to Ann, but definitely not Ann, coming out of the toilet marked "H" so went in the one marked "D" then realised that the "D" meant Damen and "H" meant Herren. Nearby tourists smiled as Mike re-appeared!



We crossed back to Bingen by ferry and cycled fast back up the cycle route towards Sankt Goar. Pam's plan was to cross by ferry to the other side after Bacharach, and cycle up to Sankt Goar then cross back by ferry. Her aim was to set a world record in the number of Rhine crossings in a day. However when we reached Bacharach we saw a sign for a wine festival so we begged Pam to change her plan and let us go to the festival. Just as we entered Bacharach Pam received a text from Bushy, "Which side of the Rhine will you be cycling on?". Pam realised that it was indeterminate and didn't know what to reply, and asked Mike. Mike said, "Tell him we don't know" – easy! (we later discovered that B&B cycled just 10 miles after alighting from the boat so cycled 10 miles less than the official route planned by Pam). Alec, Renata and Ann raced ahead towards the wine festival after seeing a sign showing it was 2 km up the hill past Bacharach. Jeff shouted to the rest (Pam, Mike & Naoko), "Follow me on the lovely scenic route". Pam dutifully followed but Mike & Naoko raced after the leading three. When we arrived we looked to be too early but one lady in a stall took pity on us and served us wine. The Kings arrived 10 minutes later with tales of fantastic views on their long scenic route. The cycle back from Bacharach passed fast for the wine drinkers, and for Naoko who never drank alcohol when she cycled and was dreaming of her first glass of beer.

Jeff had now come up with the clever plan to meet in the evening at a wine café as he never wanted to be abused by Bushy again. The time had been set to meet at 7pm at the same café as the previous evening – approved by Pam. Mike & Naoko arrived first with Mike spying a sign for buying 5 glasses of different wine for 6 Euros. Naoko wanted



beer first but would then help Mike drink the wine. Alec & Ann appeared next and bought the same 5 glasses. Then B&B and Jeff & Pam also bought the same set of wines. Our wonderful pleasant waitress in the eye-goggling low-cut dress must have wondered if we were a crowd of football supporters as our merriment grew. Only Renata took to drinking standard glasses of wine – no sweet wines for her.

It was Mike's turn the following day to be Day Leader and to lead the team from the Rhine to the Moselle. He had used "Map My Ride" to devise 5 possible routes with one being identical to the one Bushy had devised with a different PC application months ago. The choice came down to two, (a) cycling to Boppard then cycling steeply to Buchholz, or (b) cycling less steeply straight out of Sankt Goar but much further to get to Buchholz. He had learnt from Bushy's democratic way of deciding train times and decided to put the route choice to the vote. He, of course, explained all the good reasons to cycle straight up out of Sankt Goar, his personal choice, and all the bad reasons to not choose going by Boppard, Bushy's original route. The vote was unanimous for cycling straight up out of Sankt Goar. Even Bushy agreed but was there any lingering resentment?



We decided to try a restaurant up the hill from our hotel, and at this point the author's memory has become fuzzy – probably showing we all had a pleasant evening with more beer and wine. The photographs indicate that we had a very good evening!



Saturday June 22nd – Sankt Goar to Cochem – 36 miles - Mike

Mike led the team away just after 9am, back towards Boppard then turned off left to cycle up the 7 mile hill. We proceeded slowly up the hill with only B&B walking for a short time – a remarkable achievement. The road was traffic free and Bushy thought he had voted correctly. We then hit a main road with plenty of traffic that went on for a few miles. Bushy remarked with a smile (or grimace), "We should have stuck to my route". We turned off towards Buchholz and now the traffic had disappeared. Five miles on we stopped to view the Moselle that was winding along below.



We cycled on for 8 miles to Treis where we divided into two groups. Initially most of us stopped to buy an ice-cream and beer – a strange combination. However Jeff was determined to buy cake and cycled into the main square where one café had delicious cakes. Jeff cycled back and persuaded Pam and B&B to join him. The other five sat outside in the beer garden which looked over the majestic Rhine. The sky opened and there was a heavy rainfall.

Jeff and followers re-appeared at 2:15 and we cycled off again. Unfortunately Naoko fell off her bike as we cycled away, watched by a large group of motorcyclists who had descended on the ice-cream café. Until Treis there had been no wind but once we crossed the bridge to Karden we found ourselves cycling into a strong headwind. At 3:30pm, after cycling 7 miles, we arrived at Cochem. Mike was confident that the hotel booked by Jeff was across the bridge whilst Jeff was confident that there was no need to cross the bridge. Jeff was right – Mike had been looking at the map upside-down.

On arriving at the hotel Alec, Mike and Renata checked in quickly and cycled to Schloss Cochem to arrive just in time for a 40 minute tour around the castle. Meanwhile Jeff & Pam walked with Naoko back into the Cochem and booked a restaurant for the evening.



After having the meal in the evening we walked past a campsite as we returned to our hotel. Jeff, our fixer, spied that there was no-one in the camp bar. He checked if we could go in then the drinks flowed – another excellent evening.

Sunday June 23rd – Cochem to Ediger and return – 30 miles - Alec

Alec, the Day Leader, had worked out a 54 mile route down as far as Punderich and gave us a talk about all the sights and experiences that we would have. However most were not happy about cycling that far so he had quickly changed the route to go as far as Ediger so just 30 miles to cycle.



We again cycled off at 9am, very consistent on the starting time and no-one complaining, The first stop was at Beilstein, renowned for having 5 films made there. We cycled onto Senheim, the next village on Alec's tour, where he hoped we could go round a wine museum. When we arrived it was shut and outside there was a sign stating closed on Sundays. However the owner saw us hanging about and decided to open the museum just for us.

We cycled onto Ediger and went into the first café that we found with a very small eating area outside, and all ordered cake – Jeff was pleased about more cake. We looked around Ediger as it was renowned for having 60 houses dating from the 16th and 17th century.



All but Alec and Renata turned back and cycled back to Cochem with the wind behind us. Naoko was for once in the lead with a speed of 17mph with only Mike keeping up. Alec and Renata only cycled 2 miles more and went on the via Ferrata helped by a group of Germans, and arrived back at 7pm just in time for dinner. Mike and B&B went up the chair-lift to the Pinnerkreuz and had to walk down a steep cliff when they found the chair-lift shut. It was a difficult descent so Mike led the ancient pair of GASBAGS slowly down – though Bridget thought Mike had not helped!



Monday June 24th – Cochem to Koblenz – 40 miles – Renata

Renata had a full plan for the day including Burg Eltz, scenic villages and sites in Koblenz so was adamant that we must start off by 9am as had become the norm. On the way to Cochem Mike had assumed that they would cycle all the way on the right bank but the signs at Treis indicated that the bike path continued over the bridge so Mike had taken this path but it was not pleasant cycling as the path was adjacent to a major road. Renata thought we should cycle on the right hand bank to Treis as our travel book guide said, "After the ferry (at Klotten) follow the unpaved road – this takes you along the river through a nature reserve, where you can enjoy a long, quiet ride through a tranquil riverside landscape". It sounded wonderful to Renata! Renata was the Day Leader so no-one wanted to challenge her judgement. The path turned out to be very rough and muddy and progress over the 4 miles was slow.

The forest may have been tranquil but we were concentrating keeping on the bike. The one good point was that there were continuous ladies and gents toilets all the way.

Renata’s plan had been to cross the river to Karden – a town linked to St Kastor. However Jeff’s stomach spoke to him, “Fill me with more cakes”, so Jeff persuaded Renata to stop at the cake shop where he had stopped 2 days previously. For once Jeff might have been right as the cakes were delicious and when we arrived in Karden there looked to be no cafes.



We cycled on and saw signs for Burg Eltz, which was the major non-Koblenz site on Renata’s itinerary. We immediately turned left and started to ascend a steep hill. Mike had stopped to take off his top jacket and when he set off he passed struggling Bushy then Jeff. Heavy rainfall started and after putting on his raincoat Mike passed Bridget, then Pam, then Ann who was sheltering under trees, and arrived at the car park just after Naoko and joined Alec and Renata. Gradually everyone arrived, even Bushy! It should have been obvious that we had arrived at the wrong car-park as there was no attendant. We walked downhill for 25 minutes to arrive at Burg Eltz. We all paid for a tour round, had lunch, then had to walk back to the bikes. It was becoming clear that there would be little or no time to look around Koblenz.

We stopped for a beer, wine and chip stop at Kobern, another scenic village. We arrived in Koblenz at 7:30pm. Mike had printed out a map of how to get to the hotel – he had booked it. Renata said, “I am the Day Leader – give it to me” (or words like that). She immediately set off in the wrong direction with the rest of us snaking after her. Alec helped Renata to go in the right direction and stopped to ask a passer-by if the “Hotel Koblenz” was nearby. This was Mike’s error as it was actually the “B&B Hotel” in Koblenz and we were right next to it. We were told that our bikes could be locked up in the open garage under the hotel. Bushy was concerned about this, and stated, “We are putting our bikes in our room”. However he was sensible in the end and left them under the garage.

Tuesday June 25th – Koblenz

The original itinerary had the Day Leaders for this day as being Bushy and Mike with the plan being to cycle 44 miles and pass through Bad Breisig and Bad Honningen. However there had been no time to see Koblenz the previous day so it was agreed that this day would be for looking around Koblenz. Some of the sites seen:



Wednesday June 26th – Koblenz to Bad Ems and return to Oberlahnstein then home – Jeff

Our final day had arrived and the Day Leader role passed to Jeff. He was so concerned about the possibility of getting lost as we cycled from Koblenz to the Lahn river that he had bought a map the previous day. Mike had remarked to Pam the previous evening, “We have to be up again at 8 and leave by 9”. Pam immediately said, “Have you checked with Jeff?” Fortunately Mike was able to answer in the affirmative or he might have had his knuckles rapped.



Jeff led the way slowly through Koblenz stopping to see one more Koblenz site, blocks from the Berlin wall. Jeff had his map mounted on his handlebars and led us without mistake to the bike path running by the side of the Lahn. Part way along the path was blocked so we switched to the road. Mike took a group photograph at this point. As we cycled along the road we were honked at by a police-car. The policeman indicated



how to return to the bike path – cross the road, turn left and left again. Most went by these instructions but Renata had crossed the road and turned right, and was indicating that we could join the bike path. However a cacophony of

noise arose from the other GASBAGS, "This way," they shouted. Poor Renata was overwhelmed, turned round, and promptly fell off her bike in front of a car that braked just in time. As she lay on the ground she was still gesticulating for the rest to join her. The police-woman in the police-car said that we could go either way. Renata was right!

We cycled onto Bad Ems and found a Spa with indoor and outdoor pools, and a cafe that served apple cake. Jeff loved cakes and determined that we would stop. The pools looked very inviting and five (Alec, Ann, Jeff, Pam, Renata) paid to go in. Mike asked Alec and Renata to pose for him on the far side of the glass window separating the café from the pool. They refused so the author is not able to include what would have been an excellent photograph of the pool.

We cycled back to Oberlahnstein to hand in the bikes. What had been a splendid holiday was over.

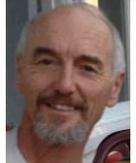
Overall

We cycled 190 miles over 6 days and had plenty of time to sightsee and take in the scenic views. The temperature when we arrived had been too hot, just over 30 DegC, but it dropped to just below 20 DegC for the rest of the week. We only had a few rainshowers.

We had only a few problems with the bikes Jeff fixing Pam's gears. Both Mike & Bushy had worn brake blocks. All the people we met at the hotels and restaurants were very helpful and friendly with the exception of our Cochem hotel where the owner was grumpy. We had no complaints when we made up sandwiches from the spare food at breakfast.

We kept together well as a team with only the odd cross-word. The idea of Day Leaders worked well.

The GASBAGS Team

								
Alec	Ann	Bridget	Bushy	Jeff	Mike	Naoko	Pam	Renata