



A new outlook on life -Rob Duckworth - Credit: Rob Duckworth

things to do

## Rob's wheel-whooshing cycle challenges

Rob Duckworth was badly injured in a car accident in 2007, suffering a life-changing head injury. Cycling has played a huge part in his recovery, as he explains here, alongside his guide to some fine spring rides with great cake stops along the way

Rob Duckworth

Cycling is out there for anyone, and I consider it freedom. Nothing in the animal kingdom can match a cyclist for space covered in relation to energy expended. It can be enjoyed by anyone in some shape or form - whether you are a local club rider, a serious racer, or an endurance mile muncher, city commuter, road cyclist, or mountain biker. Whatever your pace it opens up the world to absolutely anyone!

I first began cycling back in 2013, when I decided to cycle the length of the country in ten days with a friend of mine - yes, John O'Groats to Lands' End. This was to help raise funds for the Neuro Intensive Care unit at Leeds General Infirmary.

I wasn't entirely sure of the magnitude of the challenge ahead. I was far too ambitious and it was one of the hardest things I have ever done.

I had no idea what to expect, and it definitely taught me a thing or two about myself. I was in pain for the majority of the ride as I made the common mistake of not taking the time to be properly fitted. It was absolute torture some days.

I remember one specific day; I was so exhausted, that my mum had to physically put me into a bath. I had nothing left, both physically and mentally.

But despite the agony, I fell in love with cycling and have enjoyed it ever since. Pushing myself beyond my limits has changed me and I see the world in a completely different way.

Since the days when the Tour de France began in Yorkshire in 2014, the county's relationship with cycling has changed. Yorkshire had gone cycling mad! It was an inspiring and unforgettable experience that I will always remember. People began to notice how great Yorkshire is on a bike.

For me, riding a bike has helped me in so many ways, both physically and mentally. When I struggle to come to terms with my emotions, have a foggy brain, or get down about life. I go out and ride my bike. I come back a completely different person. My mind feels clear and I feel really good about myself. The fresh air, the sound of my wheels whooshing beneath me, disconnecting from everything and immersing myself in the moment.

It's one of life's simplest forms of freedom. I discover so many places I wouldn't if I didn't ride a bike. It has healed me, and I'm certain, it can heal others too, in so many ways.

I have become stronger, more motivated, and just a happier human being. I'd be lost without it.

It's safe to say coffee and cake go hand in hand when it comes to cycling. Below are a few of my favourite rides and recommended café stops in Yorkshire. I want to share a few of my favourite places to cycle around Yorkshire on a road bike.

For more routes visit [strava.com/athletes/2228300](https://www.strava.com/athletes/2228300)

[lifeandtimesofayorkshirelad.com](https://www.lifeandtimesofayorkshirelad.com)

### Easier rides



Simon's Seat and the landscape of Burnshall - Credit: Rob Duckworth

### **Burnsall via Bolton Abbey**

Skipton, known as the ‘Gateway to the Yorkshire Dales’ is a popular historic town full of rich culture, independent shops, cafes, an iconic castle and a famous market that is held every Saturday. The Tour de France even rode through the town in 2014. The route takes you past Billy Bob’s ice cream parlour, Bolton Abbey and drops down into Burnsall to the ‘Wharfe View Café’. There is also the Craven Arms in Appletreewick if you fancy a cheeky pint. Whilst the route is not necessarily flat (no route is when in God’s Own Country), it is full of variety and places to stop. Especially for coffee and cake.

Distance & elevation: 26 miles / 2,621 ft elevation

Start: 1 Main St, Embsay, Skipton BD23 6RE

Cafe: Wharfe View Café/Tearoom

Route: [strava.com/routes/2930509826679089612](https://www.strava.com/routes/2930509826679089612)

### **Bingley via Skipton**



Skipton and the dales - Credit: Rob Duckworth Starting from the market town of Bingley, the route takes you over rolling terrain away from the chaos of main roads. Cycle through towns such as Gisburn, Cononley and Carlton before following the A59 into Skipton for some well-deserved coffee and cake at the Clubhouse Café&Cycles. This is a café specifically for cyclists with treats such as Nutella-filled Franzbrötchen, almond croissants, flapjacks, sausage rolls and bacon butties, along with freshly brewed coffee. There is also a rack inside to put your bike on. Once fed, head back towards Bradley and Farnhill before following the old road back into Keighley and Bingley.

Distance / Elevation: 30 miles / 1,687 ft elevation

Start: Main St, Bingley BD16 2LZ

Cafe: Skipton Clubhouse Café&Cycles

Route: [strava.com/routes/2932645201768031136](https://www.strava.com/routes/2932645201768031136)

## Medium rides



Striking views towards Hebden Bridge - Credit: Rob Duckworth

### **Hebden Bridge**

This explores some of Calderdale's finest roads. Climbing high over Hebden Road from Oxenhope in Keighley. The descent is fantastic once you have passed the elephant at the top. Descend into Pecket Well and follow a spectacular piece of road to Luddenden. Honestly, the views over Hebden Bridge to Luddenden are out of this world and on a clear day you can see as far as Stoodley Pike! From Luddenden, the road continues to Hebden Bridge with plenty of options for a café stop. The town has been voted the fourth funkiest town in the world! Continue upward to Heptonstall (beware, it is extremely steep and takes on some cobbles). Afterwards, continue onwards through the exposed valley to Widdop reservoir, through the town of Trawden and onto Two Laws road, the final leg. Even though this ride is extremely lumpy the descends are extremely rewarding.

Distance / Elevation: 45 miles / 4,859ft elevation

Start: Cliffe Castle, 15 Spring Gardens Ln, Keighley BD20 6LJ

Café: Coffee Cali, Hebden Bridge

Route: [strava.com/routes/2930522663443848524](https://www.strava.com/routes/2930522663443848524)

### **Pen-y-ghent**



Pen y ghent towers over the landscape as you ride - Credit: Getty

Images/iStockphotoAs I have said previously, you can cycle pretty much anywhere in the Yorkshire Dales from Skipton. I have chosen this route purely because there is so much to see in one ride, including some of the Dales' prettiest towns and landscapes: Airton, Malham Cove, Pen-y-ghent, Halton Gill, Arncliffe, Kilnsey, Kilnsey Cragg, Burnsall and Bolton Abbey. There are plenty of options for a café stop too. I'd recommend Town End Farm Shop & tearoom in Airton - a popular cycling stop, and the views are fantastic if you fancy sitting outside whilst gorging on the finest selection of cakes or a bacon butty.

From Airton and into Malham, take note that the climb is extremely steep. However, once past the lung-buster, the rest of the ride continues to be fairly undulating. Following swooping roads into the deep depths of the Dales. It's a great ride to explore some hidden gems.

Distance / Elevation: 58 miles / 4,958ft elevation

Start: 1 Main St, Embsay, Skipton BD23 6RE

Café: Airton Town End Farm Shop & tearoom.

Route: [strava.com/routes/2933328677160151382](https://www.strava.com/routes/2933328677160151382)

Toughies

**Brontë territory**



On the Bronte run - descending from Cragg Vale - Credit: Rob Duckworth Also known as the Brontë sportive, which is home to famous Brontë sisters, this is one of my favourite routes in the area. The ride is extremely challenging and takes you up some of the hardest and most iconic hills in the area. Including Cragg Vale in Calderdale (the longest continuous ascent in England). Although this may seem daunting, the views at the top make it all worthwhile. Be sure to stop off at 'Cobbles and Clay' on Haworth's cobbled main street. They have a great selection of cakes to keep you fuelled throughout. Take note, the ride isn't for the faint hearted and is said to be one of the hardest in the UK, alongside the Fred Whitton in the Lake District. A very lumpy ride. If you want to challenge yourself, I'd highly recommend this. The sense of achievement afterwards is a fantastic feeling!

Start: Keighley College Bradford Rd, Keighley BD21 4HQ

(Heathcliff Route)

Distance / Elevation: 93 miles / 10,466ft elevation

Café: Cobbles and Clay, Main Street, Haworth

Route: [strava.com/routes/2932646665213087744](https://www.strava.com/routes/2932646665213087744)

### **Tan Hill**



Stop for a breather and take in the views - the remote Dales landscape at Tan Hill  
- Credit: Rob Duckworth

Immerse yourself into vast areas of the Yorkshire Dales. Push yourself beyond your comfort zone and simply enjoy the voyage of exploration. I can honestly say I loved this ride! The feeling of freedom on two wheels was exhilarating.

Discovering new places I had never been before, including the highest pub in the UK; Tan Hill. The route starts and finishes at Malham Cove. You start by climbing high into a vast area of quiet rolling hills, this continues through remote villages and eventually into Richmond. There are a variety of places to stop for a bite to eat along route, but I'd recommend the Dales Bike centre which is almost halfway! Plus, you'd need the fuel to tackle the last half. Tan Hill, Hawes and Settle. The roads are relentless. It can be extremely difficult, especially in a fierce head wind. It's a test of the mind and the legs. However, finishing in Malham is always a treat. Especially when you can sit down and relax with a proper Yorkshire ice cream.

Start: Malham Cove - Malham, Skipton BD23 4DJ

Distance / Elevation: 94 miles / 8,990ft elevation

Places to stop: Malham Cove, Tan Hill, Asygarth Falls, Hawes

Café: Dales Bike Centre just before Reeth

Route: [strava.com/routes/2932648386021581728](https://www.strava.com/routes/2932648386021581728)