

ON YOUR BIKE: OXFORDSHIRE
by Ellen Lee & John Broughton

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The Windrush and Evenlode Valleys (15½ miles)

This quiet circuit gives a taste of the countryside around the rivers Windrush and Evenlode. You'll notice that the gentle, pastoral countryside has many typical Cotswold features; golden stone cottages with slate roofs, cottage gardens and dry stone walling with its associated flora (moss, ferns and lichen) to admire. The route leaves Witney heading parallel to the River Windrush before climbing out of the valley at Crawley. It then heads through the quiet villages of Delly End, Ramsden and Finstock before descending to the River Evenlode. The wooded climb out of the valley gives interesting views of the river snaking below, especially in the winter when there are no leaves on the trees. The route then continues through East End and on to North Leigh before a gentle descent back to Witney.

MAP OS Landranger 164 Oxford, Chipping Norton and Bicester (GR SP356096).

STARTING POINT This ride starts from the Buttercross in the centre of Witney. Ride west along the cycle track adjacent to the A4095, through Long Hanborough and on to rendezvous with the route at Park Road on the eastern edge of North Leigh. If you travel to Witney by car, there is a free car park on Witan Way, just east off the High Street.

REFRESHMENTS There are numerous cafés and pubs in Witney itself. Along the route, the Woodman in North Leigh,

the Lamb in Crawley and the Plough in Finstock all serve food. The Ramsden Garden Centre, which is less than ½ mile from the route, just west of the B4022, has a café which serves both meals and snacks. If the day is a fine one, then both the Roman villa at East end and North Leigh Common are good places to picnic.

THE ROUTE The ride is an undulating one, but that is very definitely part of its attraction. All the climbs are on quiet roads, so there is no problem about stopping to admire the view and allowing the pulse to recover!

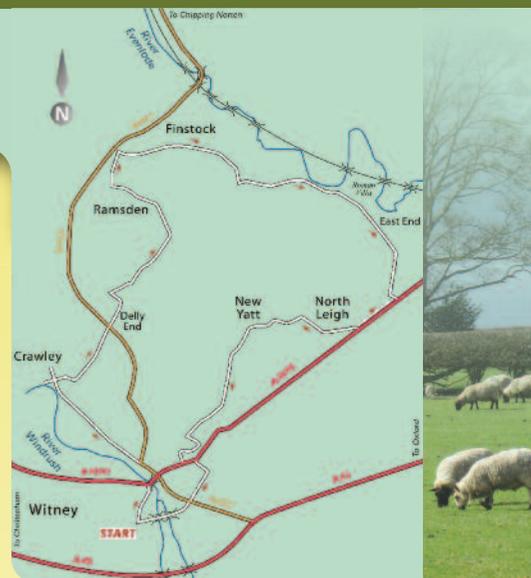
From Witney's Buttercross ride west and **turn R** at the mini-roundabout onto High Street (not signed). Go straight over a mini-roundabout (signed Charlbury/Bicester) and also straight over at the traffic lights with Witan Way. **Turn R** at the next mini-roundabout onto Bridge Street (signed North Witney Industrial Estate) and cross the River Windrush. Soon **turn L** at the mini-roundabout onto West End (signed West End Industrial Estate/Hailey). Ride along West End and go straight over at the mini-roundabout onto Crawley Road. Soon leave the town behind and climb gently, enjoying views of the river on the left. Descend into Crawley and **turn R** at the T-junction (not signed) and keep straight on past the war memorial.

Ride up the hill past the Crawley Inn and at the top, **turn L** (Priest Hill Lane). Go straight over the crossroads with the B4022 (signed Delly End) and keep straight on at the village green (Wood Lane). **Turn L** at the staggered T-junction and ride up and through the village of Ramsden. **Turn R** (signed Mount Skipet) and climb the short sharp hill. **Turn R** at the T-junction (not signed) and descend the hill into Finstock. Ride through the village, climbing another short sharp hill on

exit. **Turn L** at the crossroads (signed East End/Stonesfield) and enjoy a good descent. Take care at the bottom, as you will need to give way at the crossroads! Go straight over at the crossroads (signed East End/Hanborough).

The road now climbs fairly steeply through woods for about ½ mile. Enjoy the views of the ever-diminishing River Evenlode to your left. Continue straight on and enter East End. The track down to the Roman villa is 100 yards on your left. The villa is situated about ½ mile down this track in a quiet valley, another good place for a picnic. Otherwise keep straight on through East End and **turn L** at the T-junction onto Boddington Lane (signed Hanborough, etc.). The small car park on your left just before reaching this junction is for North Leigh Common. Here is another place to stop for a rest, a picnic or to stretch your legs. This common has recently undergone much habitat restoration in order to return it to the wet heathland once typical of much of this part of West Oxfordshire.

Turn R onto the cycle track adjacent to the A4095 (signed Witney/North Leigh) and take the second **turn R** onto Park Road (signed New Yatt, etc.). Ride through North Leigh



following signs to New Yatt. Keep straight on, descending gently through New Yatt and onward to the outskirts of Witney. **Turn L** into Early Road and **turn L** again at the T-junction with the A4095. Soon **turn R** (signed Wood Green School, etc.). If the road is busy, there is a handy zebra crossing. Keep left, following the road with 'Farm' written on it and with school railings to the right. **Turn R** onto a track, still keeping the railings to your right about 20 yards before reaching buildings at the end of the road. Continue straight ahead onto a wide gravel track with the school playing field on your right.

Bear L to cross a stream on a wooden bridge and immediately **turn R** along a tarmac path which soon brings you out onto the Oxford road. Go straight over into Church Lane. Once again use the zebra crossing if necessary. Keep straight ahead following signs for the town centre. Soon cross the River Windrush on a wooden bridge and bear L by an electricity substation to emerge at a roundabout on Witan Way. Go straight over into Langdale Gate (it's easiest to push your bike here) and ride back to the Buttercross.

NORTH LEIGH ROMAN VILLA

The Roman villa at North Leigh is one of many in the Cotswolds, often country estates owned and run by wealthy Romano-British families. This particular villa was discovered in 1813 and originally consisted of around 60 rooms arranged in three wings around a central courtyard, including a bath house complex and high status rooms for entertaining. A shelter has been erected over a particularly fine mosaic floor which is believed to have been made by craftsmen from Cirencester. The villa is accessed via a track which would have originally been used by servants, a Roman 'tradesman's entrance'! Entry to the villa is free and it is a wonderfully tranquil place to enjoy a break from cycling.