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# Lon Cambria

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# Lon Cambria

Wales is known for its mountains, and its cycle routes are no exception. But Lon Cambria, which crosses the centre of the country from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, gives a chance to enjoy the fine scenery without too many gruelling climbs.

Quiet lanes wind from town to town – Welshpool, Llanidloes, Rhayader – with rarely a car to be seen. Scenic highlights include miles of views from the top of the Long Mountain; a truly delightful lane down the Wye Valley; and the glorious cycle-path past the Elan Reservoirs. And if you need any more persuasion, the route finishes with a full 24 miles of descending to the sea at Aberystwyth.

## What sort of bike?

Any hybrid bike or road bike will be fine. Most surfaces are tarmaced, with only a few (easily skippable) sections on the descent to Aberystwyth requiring sturdier tyres. Mountain bikes may struggle up the steep climb of the Long Mountain.

## How many days?

Three days makes for a comfortable ride; two is achievable for the fitter rider. Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth, at each end of the route, are interesting historic towns that merit a longer stay if you have time.

## How do I get there and back?

Shrewsbury is easily reached by train from Birmingham, Manchester or Cardiff. (Arriva's trains have limited bike accommodation and you're advised to book; the London Midland trains on the Birmingham route are less cramped.)

For your return journey, there's a direct Arriva service from Aberystwyth back to Shrewsbury. This also stops at Welshpool, Newtown and Caersws, should you need to break your journey.

## Is it suitable for a first-timer?

A reasonably fit first-time tourer will cope comfortably, especially on a four-day itinerary. There are a couple of stiff climbs, but the views from high ground are instantly rewarding.

## Where to start and finish?

Though cycle routes are usually tackled west–east, to gain the assistance of the prevailing wind, in this case we'd recommend starting at Shrewsbury. The hills gradually unfold to show mid-Wales at its best, and arriving by the sea in Aberystwyth is a fine finale to the ride.

## Are there any route options?

Just the one. When the main route takes a circuitous (but delightful) detour via Rhayader, you can choose to head due west from Llangurig over a high, exposed pass. It's hard work over a rough surface, but offers an unforgettable glimpse of Wales at its wildest.

# Shrewsbury to Welshpool

Enclosed by a loop of the River Severn, **Shrewsbury** is a bustling Border town with an interesting mix of architecture. Lon Cambria begins on the busy riverside path before heading off on residential streets and roadside paths – not the most interesting of exits, but reasonable enough. A three-mile haul on a B road leads to Montford Bridge, and ten lovely miles of easy lanes through the Severn Valley.

Wales begins at Crewgreen – and so do the hills. The tough but short ascent of Breidden Hill is followed by the ascent of the Long Mountain, a great bulk topped by quiet lanes which give excellent views on a clear day. This is the hardest single climb of the whole route, so take your time. The descent into Welshpool is steep, winding and exhilarating; not to be attempted with weak brakes!

# Welshpool to Rhayader

Famous for its cattle market, **Welshpool** is essentially a one-street town with an unhurried air. The Montgomery Canal runs through the town – and Lon Cambria follows it all the way to Newtown.

The canal towpath was improved in 2013 to make a very pleasant level route, replacing the former journey up hill and down dale. You won't see many boats: though much of this section has been restored to navigation, it's cut off from the main canal system by a dry section around Llanymynech, so the only way for boats to reach it is via low-loader. South of Berriew, the canal is largely unrestored, but Lon Cambria follows the towpath regardless.

**Newtown** is often maligned as the most workaday of the Border towns. In fact, there's much to explore here, with its main street falling attractively to the Severn bridge. The Sportsman (the Monty's Brewery tap) and the tiny Railway deserve a visit if you're stopping overnight.

More quiet, hilly lanes take the route through Caersws – the last sight of the railway until Aberystwyth – and onto **Llanidloes**. Nicknamed 'Planet Llanid' for its mildly hippy vibe, this is a friendly, sleepy town with old-fashioned cafés and pubs.

Here we meet Lon Las Cymru, Wales' north-south cycle challenge. The two routes share the same path to Rhayader. First comes a long, surprisingly tough climb from the Severn Valley to the watershed, then a steep descent into the Wye Valley at tiny **Llangurig**. The best bit, though, is the astonishingly rural 10-mile run down the valley into Rhayader, a contender for the finest road on the National Cycle Network. (At Llangurig, you can also choose to miss out Rhayader completely by heading west on Route 818: stunning views, but a steep climb and rugged surface.)

# Rhayader to Aberystwyth

**Rhayader** reputedly has more pubs per head of population than anywhere else in Britain; don't try to sample them all in one evening. It's a quiet, friendly place centred around an attractive central cross... which has the misfortune of hosting two major A-roads.

The next 15 miles might look circuitous on the map, but there's a good reason. The traffic-free cycle path follows the shore of the **Elan Valley reservoirs**, with stunning views to the imposing dams. It's a steady, gentle climb, only really taxing at the turn above the highest reservoir onto the mountain road. From here, you feel like you're on top of the world as you slowly cross from the Elan to the Ystwyth valleys.

It's pretty much downhill all the way from here: 24 miles of easy descending all the way to the sea. There's a bumpy, gravelly forest path after Cwmystwyth which is quite enjoyable, but you may choose to stay on the quiet B road instead.

A laughable scramble (where you will have to push your bike) takes you up to the old railway from Carmarthen; Lon Cambria will intermittently follow this into **Aberystwyth**, including the final approach to the town itself. The route ends by the pier; rest at one of the seaside cafés and raise a glass to your ride across the heart of Wales.











