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# Lon Teifi

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# Lon Teifi

Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire are best known for their glorious coastlines – but the cliffs and bays do tend to exercise the weary cyclist's legs. What if there were a way to explore this rural idyll without all the climbing?

That's the idea behind Lon Teifi, which follows country lanes down the Teifi Valley to the sea. The river, once known for its salmon fishermen in their tiny coracles, flows through countryside rarely visited by tourists.

This is an enjoyable route, but a little deceptive in two ways. Firstly, although it largely follows the river valley, the lanes have a tendency to dart up and down the valley sides – so don't expect a long, easy descent all the way to Cardigan. Secondly, it follows more A and B roads than is normal for the National Cycle Network. This is rural Wales, so they're not exactly highly trafficked; but even so, at times you might find traffic roaring past you at speeds greater than you'd expect.

## What sort of bike?

The route is almost entirely on roads and the occasional well-surfaced railway path, so hybrid bikes and road bikes are equally suitable. There is one muddy bridleway near Newport, but an easy diversion exists for those not of the mud-plugging persuasion.

## How many days?

At 100 miles, this is two days for the fit cyclist, or three at a more comfortable pace. More than most routes, though, there's a strong case for taking four or even five days over it and enjoying the towns en route. That way, the A and B roads will seem like less of a slog.

## How do I get there and back?

Both Aberystwyth and Fishguard have railway stations, but it's a very long way by train between the two – you'll have to go back into England and out again! So don't think about parking a car at the start and getting the train back; better to do the whole lot by train.

## Is it suitable for a first-time tourer?

Pretty much, unless you're nervous about traffic. If you're a city commuter looking for your first long-distance tour, you won't encounter any issues. If you'd prefer something largely traffic-free, perhaps look elsewhere.

## Where to start and finish?

The route starts on the coast at Aberystwyth, touches it again at Cardigan, and finishes at the port of Fishguard. In other words, it's the same amount of climbing either way. Do what's easiest for your there-and-back travel plans; we slightly prefer north-south as it gives a gentle descent down the valley.

# Aberystwyth to Lampeter

Lon Teifi shares its first 11 miles with Lon Cambria, the east–west route between **Aberystwyth** and Shrewsbury. It's a slow ascent up the Ystwyth valley, mostly on an old railway path though occasionally ducking onto minor roads. When the routes fork, Lon Teifi (as Route 82) is the one that continues by the railway, meeting the Teifi valley at tiny **Ystradmeurig**.

The railway path across the Cors Caron nature reserve is a wonderfully solitary experience – assuming the wind's with you. There are bird hides beside the path for a spot of twitching. A moderately quiet B road takes the route into **Tregaron**, a tiny rural town with a passing nod to tourism in its craft centre and red kite museum. (You're almost certain to see the fork-winged birds of prey circling high above.)

Largely level, the B road follows the valley down to Lampeter, passing **Llandewi Brefi** – where you can stop for a pint at “the only pub in the village”. For a lightly trafficed alternative, turn right at Llanfair Clydogau and take the lane down the other side of the valley.

# Lampeter to Cardigan

Inexplicably, Lon Teifi avoids **Lampeter** town centre, taking a tedious detour past housing estates and car parks. Ignore the signs, and continue through this university town on the main road. You'll rejoin the route at the western side of town just in time for the first hill in many miles.

A forgettable B road gives out to a pleasant minor road on the north side of the valley, especially enjoyable on the twisting, undulating section before **Llandysul**. We cycled this at sunset and it was a magical experience, the light darting in between overhanging trees to give occasional glimpses of the Teifi below. Keep your wits about you in **Llandysul**, a hilly village with an odd one-way system.

A series of short, sharp climbs take you onto the A475, by which Lon Teifi enters **Newcastle Emlyn**. This very pretty town is an essential stop, particularly if you're in search of a café. Do also take the opportunity to visit the castle ruins, on the banks of the river.

However, it can't be denied that the roads leading in and out of the town are less than ideal for the cyclist, especially at rush hour. Heading east, there's a nasty sharp climb across from Cwm-cou, and the slog up the B road after Cenarth is unpleasant as traffic speeds by.

For once, then, we'd suggest ignoring the official route, and making your way south-west from Newcastle Emlyn over the hill. It's a tough climb out of the valley, true, but the lanes are delightful. You can also take the chance to visit the Caws Cenarth creamery, home of the exquisite Perl Las and other cheeses. Once you've topped the hill, it's a lovely ride down the Cych valley to return to the official route at **Abercych** – with a friendly pub at the junction.

It's a little flatter now as you follow lanes towards Cardigan, through strung-out Cilgerran, onto a riverside railway path passing the Welsh Wildlife Centre.

# Cardigan to Fishguard

Lon Teifi follows the south bank through St Dogmaels, but do make a detour to explore the traditional market town of **Cardigan** – now something of a centre for outdoor activities. The climb out of St Dogmaels is steady but wearing. There's then, unusually for the NCN, a mile on the fast, busy A487; fortunately the road is wide here. It's worth it for the tiny, narrow lane that follows, diving to a ford at Castell Henllys.

At the wonderfully named village of **Felindre Farchog**, a bridleway bypasses the main road for a while. MTBers and adventurous hybrid riders will enjoy the challenge, but most people will prefer to stick on the main road through to Newport. Again, though Lon Teifi skirts the village, **Newport** is worth the detour; you can cycle down to the beach, refuel at the welcoming pubs, or (panniers permitting) load up at the superb butcher and warren-like second-hand bookshop.

The last 10 miles of Lon Teifi are, without doubt, the finest. The **Gwaun Valley** is the land that time forgot – literally. New Year is still celebrated according to the Welsh tradition here, several weeks after the rest of the world. Though just a few miles from the holiday cottages of Newport, Welsh remains the language of the valley.

Nowhere is this more true than at the Dyffryn Arms – a tiny front-room pub of the sort you thought was long extinct. Beer and cider are served straight from the jug; Coronation prints decorate the walls; and the landlady Bessie is as often to be found in front of the hatch as behind it. Just make sure to leave enough time to catch your train home from Fishguard...









