



IMBA - UK

The International Mountain
Bike Association in the UK

Trans Cambrian Ride

Revised June 2008

The IMBA - UK Trans Cambrian Epic Ride

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Introduction and Safety Notes

The IMBA Trans Cambrian Epic Ride is a 100 mile route from the English border to the Irish Sea across the remote hills and moorland of central Wales.

A reasonably fit rider will be able to complete the route in three days - but be warned, Day 2 will be tough, and a test of your endurance. We recommend leaving Rhayader no later than 08.30 to enable the ride to Llangurig to be achieved by early evening. Alternatively, you may prefer to take the more relaxed 4 Day option.

The route has been designed to avoid main roads, gated field systems and farmyards, and largely uses moorland tracks and trails. Many if these are remote and exposed, so it is essential to carry food, drink, maps, weatherproof clothing, tools, spares, first aid kit - and an exit strategy, should you find yourself running out of daylight.

We have identified local taxi firms who will offer a rescue service should this happen, but do not rely on your mobile phone, as coverage is patchy in this sparsely populated area.

You will find some challenging descents, & will cross some five major fords on your ride - all of which can be treacherous following heavy rain. Fortunately, all have optional bridges or are crossable upstream. So if in doubt, always take the safer option.

Remember that the countryside is the workplace of the farmer, and be really careful about closing all gates securely behind you. We want to develop a good relationship with the local communities, who will not be supportive if they are regularly having to rescue sheep and cattle who have strayed through unsecure gates.

Finally, please be aware of other users - walkers and horse riders, who may be just around that next bend. In particular, ride within your sight lines on the final descent to the sea, as this trail is a popular route.

You will find the Trans Cambrian Ride tough and a challenge - enjoy it!

Colin Palmer. Route Coordinator IMBA UK

The IMBA Trans Cambrian Epic Ride

Why the Epic Ride?

The IMBA Trans Cambrian Epic Ride was pioneered by IMBA UK members on a three day bank holiday ride in May 2005. Since then IMBA has been asked to publish details about the route so that other mountain bikers can enjoy this epic trip.

These details follow, together with a summary of local services.

What is it

The route crosses Wales from Knighton on the English Border, to Dovey Junction near Machynlleth on the Welsh coast. The trail network consists of bridleways, restricted byways, BOAT's and unsurfaced unclassified roads linked by country lanes.

Length = 175km (100 miles)

Offroad = 115km

Country Lanes = 60km

Height gain = 3,700m (12,000ft)

Which way. How do mountainbikers follow the route?

We suggest riding from east to west. This means that the wind may tend to be against you, on some sections, but you will have the bonus of 500' more descent than climb! We understand that many key route directions have been provided with yellow arrows. A series of A4 maps using Tracklogs are downloadable from <www.imba-UK.com> 5 A3 1:50.000 route maps are available from IMBA UK - see <www.IMBA-UK.com> , or use the following OS maps.

Explorer: 200, 201, 213, 214, 215 and Outdoor Leisure 23. Or Landranger 135, 147, 148

Are there Pubs, Shops and Accommodation on the Route?

The 3 day ride provides an opportunity for pub lunches to be taken at Llanbadarn Fydd (day 1), Pont rhyd y groes (day 2) and Dyliffe (day 3). NB Check to ensure they are open. Much of the route is in remote countryside, but despite this, the recommended overnight stops will have camping, b & b's, pubs and shops. A list of facilities on or near the trail can be found in this Ride Guide.

How Many Days to Ride the Trail

3 day Option.

The original IMBA ride - for most fit riders this should be a reasonable choice.

| <u>Day</u> | <u>Route</u> | <u>On road</u> | <u>Offroad</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>Climb</u> |
|------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Knighton to Rhayader | 20km | 30km | 50km | 1300m |
| 2 | Rhayader to Llangurig | 20km | 50km | 70km | 1500m |
| 3 | Llangurig to Dovey Jn. | 20km | 35km | 55km | 900m |

This works well as there is camping, b & b and pubs and shops at both overnight stops.

4 day option

A more relaxed timetable would be:

| <u>Day</u> | <u>Route</u> | <u>On road</u> | <u>Offroad</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>Climb</u> |
|------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Knighton - Rhayader | 20km | 30km | 50km | 1300m |
| 2 | Rhayader - Pontrydygroes | | 35km | 45km | 700m |
| 3 | Pontrydygroes - Staylitttle | 20km | 25km | 45km | 1100m |
| 4 | Staylitttle - Dovey Junction 10km | 20km | 30km | 600m | |

There are B & B's at Pontrydygroes, but the nearest camping is at Tyllwyd (NE of Cwmystwyth and no pub!) or at Devils Bridge.

1 or 2 days?

Yes - it can be done if you are really fit , and a strong rider - but we don't recommend it. The record is held by John Houlihan (Chairman Trail Cyclists Association) at 12 hrs 25 mins.

Do I have to carry my Luggage?

No - we have arranged portage through local taxi operators

| | | <u>Knighton to Rhayader</u> | <u>Rhayader to Llangurig</u> | <u>Llangurig to Machynlleth</u> |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Knighton Taxi | 01547 528165 | £25 | - | - |
| Owen Motors | 01547 528303 | £? | - | - |
| SP Cars | 01597 810666 | £30 | £12 | £30 |
| P & C Taxis | 01686 412047 | 30 | £10 | £32 |

How about getting back?

The following options (2006 prices) are worth considering for the return to Knighton.

1. Mach Taxis (Machynlleth)

A minibus service which will return up to four bikers and bikes.

Costs around £70 and takes around one & a half hours.

2. P & C Taxis (Llanidloes)

Minibus / car and large box trailer for bikes.

Cost: Minibus + trailer £94 (<8 riders/bikes) Also 16 rider option.

Car + trailer £75 (<3 riders / bikes)

Trains. NB Check current timetables as they change every 6 months.

3. Train. Dovey Jn / Machynlleth to Knighton

Costs about £20 per person. Change at Shrewsbury. See timetable .

4. Train. Dovey Jn / Machynlleth to Craven Arms

Costs about £20 per person. Change at Shrewsbury. This involves pre planning, in that the car needs to be left at Craven Arms at the beginning of the ride.

There are trains from Craven Arms to Knighton (20 minute trip) as follows: (check!)

Monday to Friday 06.04, 09.46, 13.39 & 18.01

Saturday 06.12, 09.25, 13.39 & 18.01 Sunday 12.40 & 16.38

Following the ride, the return is made by train to Craven Arms via Shrewsbury.

This is a more efficient alternative to option 2, although it should be noted that the Shrewsbury / Craven Arms trains can be very crowded.

5. Train to Newtown + Taxi to Knighton

Train Fare around £6 per person. Taxi around £25 (P & C Taxis).

There is also a bus which leaves on Tuesdays at 14.30 (Owens Motors 01547 528303)

6. Cycle back on A & B roads. 54 miles

Machynlleth A489 to Cemmaes Road, then A470 to Caerws, A489 to Newtown then A483 / B4355 to Knighton.

7. Cycle back on minor roads and B roads. 60 miles and hilly!

Machynlleth - Dyliffe - Staylitttle then B4518 via Llanidloes to Pant y dwr. Then Bwlch u Sarnau to join B4356 NE of Llanbister - Llangunlo - Knighton

8. Two cars

Leave one at Knighton and one at Machynlleth. About 50 miles each way.

What about Day Rides

The route can be ridden as a series of one day rides as follows:

Knighon to Rhayader

Ride to Bwlch y Sarnu.

Cycle to Peny Bont (cafe at Crossgates) near Llandridod Wells. Use train to Knighton.
or

Ride from Knighton to Rhayader. Return using P & C Taxis or SP Cars minibus service.

Rhayader to Llangurig

P & C Taxis tow a trailer which will carry bikes back to Rhayader

or

Ride to Cwmystwyth. Cycle back to Rhayader along the mountain road.

Llangurig to Dovey Junction.

Use either Mach Taxis for the return to Llangurig

or

Train to Caerws and SP cars + trailer to return to Llangurig.

What other mtb trail options are available.

1 Jack Mytton Way

This Shropshire bridletrail inks into the beginning of the Trans Cambrian Way and is a 95 mile / 150km route from Cleobury Mortimer via Much Wenlock and Church Stretton to Llanfair Waterdine - some 5km into the Trans Cambrian Trail.

There is accommodation locally should you prefer to avoid the return trip to Knighton.

The Mortimer Trail will take 3 days for the whole trail, or 1 day if you start at Church Stretton (on the Shrewsbury / Knighton rail line).

2. The Mach mtb Trails

Three trails, 16km, 23km and 30km which start and finish at Machynlleth, parts of which are also used by the Trans Cambrian Trail.

Routes leaflet available from Machynlleth TIC.

3. Coed y Brenin & Dolgellau

The Karrimor, Red Bull and MBR trails are readily accessed using the X32 coastal bus service which is equipped with a cycle rack and stops in the town and at the visitor centre.

4. Gwyder MTB Trail Llanwrst.

Use the X32 bus service to Blaenau Festinio or Bangor where there are connections for the rail service to Llanwrst.

The IMBA Trans Cambrian Epic Ride - Guide to Services

Tourist Information Centres (All numbers refer to the Route Map)

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|
| Knighon (1) | www.offasdyke.demon.co.uk | 01547 528753 |
| Elan Valley (12) | | 01597 810898 |
| Machynlleth (29) | | 01654 702401 |
| Builth Wells (for Rhayader / Llanidloes) | | 01982 553307 |

Accommodation

Knighon (1)

| | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Fairview, Knucklas Road | 01547 520367 | £18.00 |
| Travelly, Knucklas Road | 01547 528906 | £25 |
| Plough Inn, Market Street | 01547 528041 | £25 - £30 |
| The Fleece House, Market Street | 01547 520168 | £26 - £43 |
| Anne Maslen-Jones, West Street | 01547 529021 | £22.50 |
| Byford, Victoria Road | 01547 528822 | £17 |
| Offa's Dyke House, High Street | 01547 529816 | £25 |
| George and Dragon Inn, Broad Street | 01547 528532 | £26.50 - £35 |
| The Horse & Jockey Inn, Station Road | 01547 520062 | £25 |
| Westwood, Presteigne Road | 01547 520317 | £22 |
| Milebrook House Hotel, Milebrook | 01547 528632 | £49 d/t |
| Wern Cottage | 01547 550336 | £25 |
| The Mill Guest House, Lloyney | 01547 528049 | |
| 13, Bridge St, Knighon (Offas Glyndwr Hostel) | 01547 520374 | |

Llanbadarn Fyndd (9)

| | | |
|----------------|--------------|-----|
| Hillside Lodge | 01597 840364 | |
| Carol Horler | 01597 840204 | £30 |

Rhayader (11)

| | | |
|---|--------------|-----------|
| Bryncoed Guest House, Dark Lane | 01597 811082 | £18 - £25 |
| Glanrhos Estate, Llanwrthwl | " 810277 | |
| Dyffrin Fm, Llanwrthwl | " 810117 | £24 |
| Dolifor, Llanwrthwl | " 8110521 | £35 |
| Riverside Lodge, Glanrhydwen, Elan Valley | " 810770 | £23 |
| Liverpool House, East St | " 810706 | £24 |
| Maesyfed | " 810951 | £23 |
| Elan Hotel, West St | " 810109 | £25 |
| Glyn Gwy Guest House (5km N) | " 810441 | |
| Hendre Fach Old Farmhouse B&B, Nantmel | " 810785 | |
| Brynafon Country House Hotel, South St | " 810 735 | £27.50 |
| Brynteg, East St | " 810052 | £18 |
| Elan Valley Hotel, Elan Valley | " 810448 | £35 |
| Elan Valley Lodge (groups of 10+ only) | " 811143 | |
| Crown Inn, North St | " 811099 | £20 |

Pont-rhyd-y-groes (15)

| | | |
|--|--------------|-----------|
| Mount Hazel Guest House, Ystrad Muerig | 01974 282289 | £23 - £42 |
| Miners Arms Guest House | " 282238 | £20 |
| Hafod Lodge | " 282247 | £24 |

Cwmystwyth

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-----|
| Old Post Office | 01974 282231 | £20 |
|-----------------|--------------|-----|

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|---|--------------|--------------|--|
| <u>Devils Bridge (16)</u> | | | |
| Hafod Arms Hotel | 01970 890232 | £38 - £60 | |
| Erwbarfe Farm Guest House | " 890251 | £34 (double) | |
| Free Trade Hall Guest House, Tre Taliesin | " 832368 | | |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|--|
| <u>Llangurig (20)</u> | | | |
| Glangwry Fm | " 440697 | £14 | |
| Blue Bell Inn | " 440254 | £20 | |
| Glansevern Arms, Pantmawr | " 440240 | £28 | |
| The Old Vicarage | " 440280 | £25 - £40 | |
| Panty Benny | " 440212 | £18 | |
| Plas Bwlch | " 440659 | £25 | |
| Black Lion Hotel | 01686 440223 | £18 - £20 | |

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|---|--------------|-----|--|
| <u>Staylitttle (24)</u> | | | |
| Star Inn, Dyliffe | 01650 521345 | £20 | |
| The Old Weather Station Bunkhouse (groups only) | 01939 220421 | | |

| | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------|--|
| <u>Machynlleth (29)</u> | | | |
| Reditreks Bunkhouse | 01654 702184 | £15 | |
| Dyfi Guest | 01654 702562 | £26 | |
| Maenllwyd | 01654 702928 | £24-£30 | |
| Gwelfryn | 01654 702532 | £20-£23.50 | |
| Felin Crewi, Penegoes | 01654 703113 | £26.00 | |
| Cwm Dylluan, Forge | 01654 702684 | £18.50-£22.50 | |
| Marchlynn Farm House Aberdyfi Rd (A493) | 01654 702018 | £25.00 | |
| Dolgelynen Farmhouse | 01654 702026 | £26.00 | |
| Talbotndrain Guesthouse | 01564 702192 | £22 - £26 | |

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|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|------------|
| <u>Camping</u> | | | |
| Knighton (1) | Cwm Sanaham Farm | 01547 528431 | All year |
| Rhayader (11) | Wyeside Campsite | 01597 810183 | Feb - Nov |
| Rhayader (11) | Gilgrin Farm, South St | 01597 810243 | All year |
| Cwmystwyth (17) | Tyllwyd | 01974 282216 | May - Sept |
| Devils Bridge (16) | Woodland Caravan Park | 01970 890233 | Mar - Oct |
| Llangurig (20) | Glangwry Fm | 01686 440232 | All year |
| Aberhosen | Rhiw Gam Farm | 01654 703975 | |
| Aberhosen | Croeslyn Fm | 01654 702383 | |
| Aberhosen | Esgairfochnant Fm | 01654 703819 | |
| Dovey Junction (28) | Morben Isaf Caravan Park | 01654 781473 | Mar - Oct |
| Dovey Junction (28) | Furnace Farm | 01654 781264 | All year |
| Machynlleth (29) | Llwyngwern Farm | 01654 702492 | Mar to Oct |
| Machynlleth (29) | Plas Forge (2km E) | 01654 703228 | |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|--|
| <u>Shops & Cafes</u> | | | |
| Knighton (1) | All services | | |
| Knucklas (3) | Stores and Post Office | | |
| Llanbadarn Fyndd (9) | Petrol station & shop | | |
| Rhayader (11) | Good selection | | |
| ElanValley (12) | Visitor Centre & Cafe | 01597 810898 | |

| | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Pont-rhyd-y-groes (15) | Stores & Post Office | | |
| Llangurig (20) | Stores & Post Office | | |
| Staylitttle (24) | Stores & Post Office | 01686 430208 | (Mon - Sat) |
| Machynlleth (29) | Good selection | | |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--|
| <u>Pubs serving Food</u> | | | |
| Knighton (1) | Good selection | | |
| Lloyney (3) | | | |
| Llanbadarn - Fynydd (9) | New Inn | 01597 840378 | |
| Abbeycwmhir (10) | | | |
| Rhayader (11) | Good selection | | |
| Elan Valley (12) | Elan Valley Hotel | | |
| Pont-rhyd-y-groes (15) | Miners Arms | 01974 282238 | |
| Devils Bridge (16) | Several | | |
| Llangurig (20) | Several | | |
| Dyliffe (26) | Star Inn | 01650 521354 | |
| Machynlleth | Good selection | | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|--------------|
| <u>Bike Shops</u> | | | |
| <i>Before you start</i> | | | |
| Ludlow | Pearce Cycles | | 01584 879288 |
| Craven Arms | Fort Royal | | 01588 673500 |
| <i>In the vicinity of the route</i> | | | |
| Rhayader (11) | Clive Powell MTB's (+cafe) | | 01597 811343 |
| Newtown | Sapphire Cycles | | 01686 610021 |
| <i>At the end</i> | | | |
| Machynlleth (29) | The Holey Trail | | 01654 700411 |
| Aberystwyth | Cardi Cycles | | 01970 828930 |
| Aberystwyth | Summit Cycles | | 01970 626061 |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| <u>Jetwash, showers and changing facilities at Machynlleth</u> | | | |
| Jet wash for bike. | H J Jones Garage | | 01654 702108/9 |
| Showers | RugbyClub (small quick groups only) | | 01654 702006 |
| " | Leisure Centre (£1.00) | | 01654 703300 |

| | |
|--|--|
| <u>Transport</u> | |
| <u>Rail</u> | |
| Enquiries 08457 48 49 50. The route is served by two railway lines operated by Arriva | |
| Trains Wales <www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk> | |
| Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth (8 trains Mon - Fri, 7 trains Sat, 3 trains Sun in each direction) | |
| Shrewsbury - Newtown - Caerws - Machynlleth - Dovey Junction - Aberystwyth. | |
| Shrewsbury to Swansea (4 trains Mon - Sat, 2 trains Sun in each direction) | |
| Shrewsbury - Craven Arms - Knighton - Penybont - Llandrindod Wells - Swansea. | |

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|---|
| Shrewsbury to Cardiff (hourly service) |
| Shrewsbury - Craven Arms - Hereford - Newport - Cardiff |

Outline Rail Timetable (2005 times as a guide - so check current timetable)

| | Mon - Sat | | Sat | M - F | Sun | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Dovey Jn. 17.38 | 05.38 | 09.50 | 15.58 | 17.57 | 19.59 | 20.15 | 12.57 | 15.57 |
| Machyn'th 17.47 | 05.48 | 09.56 | 16.05 | 18.06 | 20.11 | 20.24 | 13.06 | 16.08 |
| Caerws | 06.14 | 10.35 | 16.37 | 18.37 | 20.42 | 20.58 | 13.34 | 16.36 |
| Newtown | 06.21 | 10.42 | 16.44 | 18.34 | 20.49 | 21.05 | 13.42 | 16.43 |
| Shrews. | 07.02(a) | 11.22 | 17.22 | 19.22 | 21.27 | 21.46 | 14.21 | 17.24 |
| Shrews.* | 08.54(d) | 13.09 | 17.29 | 19.41 | - | 00.09 | 16.07 | 17.40 |
| Crav.Ams*09.25 | 09.46 | 18.01 | - | - | - | - | 16.38 | 17.56 |
| Knighton | 09.46 | 13.59 | 18.21 | - | - | - | 16.58 | - |

* There is an hourly train service between Shrewsbury and Craven Arms.

These services are advertised to take 2 bikes and this may be reservable. In practice, the Knighton line is lightly used and the guard may allow more bikes, while the Machynlleth and Hereford lines are much busier - and more than 2 bikes could be a problem on peak time trains. There is also a Bangor to Shrewsbury service which can be accessed via the X32 bus (see below).

Bus.

Enquiries 0870 608 2608 / Local / North Wales, or Arriva 07004 277482
The X32 Bangor to Aberystwyth. (4 services per day in each direction)
Bangor - Dolgellau - Machynlleth - Dovey Junction - Aberystwyth.
This service has a bike rack and will carry at least bikes and provides an opportunity to add the Forestry Commission Trails at Coed y Brenin, Gwyder (and Nant yr Arian) to your ride, linking with the Arriva Trains Bangor Shrewsbury service.

Taxi

Craven Arms Craven Arms Taxis. 01588 660448 (Craven Arms to Knighton)

Knighton

Two taxi firms will carry luggage and passengers but not bikes

Knighton Taxis 01547 528165

Owens Motors 01547 528 303

Rhayader

SP Cars 01597 810666. Will portage luggage and carry bikes in minibus.

Llandidloes

P & C Taxis 01686 412047 have trailers & minibus, and will portage luggage and up to 16 bikes with riders over the whole route, and also offer a roadside rescue service.

Machynlleth. Mac Taxis. 01654 702048

Mac Taxis have a minibus (and a jetwash!) and offer a return service for bikes and riders to Knighton for around £70.

Aberystwyth Cardi Taxis 01970 625625

Cardi Taxis have a large estate car and can transport 2 clean bikes and riders. Aberystwyth also has a very cheap taxi bus which will take passengers (not bikes) to places such as Cymystwyth for just over £2. To book, ring 01970 633555 before 4.30pm. Bobs Taxis, 01970 615537 offer a competitive passenger only service.

The IMBA Trans Cambrian Epic Ride - Places and sites of interest.

Knighton (1)

A pleasant market town situated halfway along Offas Dyke and on the Shrewsbury to Swansea Central Wales Railway.

Its position on the River Teme made the town strategically important in Saxon and Norman times, with Offa King of Mercia building his dyke to defend the English borderlands from the marauding Welsh towards the end of the 8th century. Later, in the 13th Century, Ralph Mortimer of the powerful Mortimer family cunningly "won" the town by marrying the daughter of Welsh warlord Llewellyn the Great, and claiming it as part of his dowry.

The shops on the narrow streets show little regard for the typical high street multiples, with the clock tower and the "Narrows" providing a pleasantly rural feel to the town.

River Teme (2)

The river Teme rises in the Kerry hills and at 50 miles Plus, is the second largest tributary of the River Severn which it joins at Worcester. On leaving Knighton it flows through Ludlow and Tenbury Wells, passing the orchards, hopyards, woods and countryside of Herefordshire and Worcestershire & supports wily brown trout and grayling.

It has been an important trading route since pre Norman times, and from the 14th century was used for the transport of wheat, silver, gold and enormous quantities of lead, as well as being strategically important in the prolonged squabble over who owns Wales.

Knucklas Viaduct (3)

Probably the most impressive and photogenic piece of engineering on the Central Wales Railway, built in 1862.

Knucklas Castle (4)

Some earthworks and a little remaining stone walling is all that remains of this castle on the site where King Arthur is reputed to have married his Guinevere.

The castle was commissioned in about 1240 by Ralph Mortimer, who then disappeared off to Europe for a spot of warring and leaving his 11 year old son Roger to supervise the construction.

It was sacked around 20 years later by a vengeful Llewelyn II, and was likely to have been a ruin by the time the revolting Owain Glyndwr started to be difficult in 1402.

Beacon Hill (5)

Your route climbs along the original ancient main highway from Knighton to Newtown area of high moorland and managed as a wildlife reserve by the Crown Estate. The ruined Beacon Lodge in Beacon Woods was served by the oddly sited Llanbister Road Station, built specifically for the Victorian shooters.

Look for white (male) Hen Harriers as well as the usual buzzards, kites & kestrels.

Source of the Lugg (6)

The 45 mile River Lugg rises near just to the south of the highest point on Beacon flows through Herefordshire via Leominster, to become a tributary of the River Wye, which it joins some 9 miles downstream of Hereford.

Much of it is enjoyed by canoeists, but can be very dangerous when in flood

Moelfre City (7)

A couple of kilometres to the south is surely the smallest city in the world.

It was once a major prehistoric settlement with around 14 barrows and later a mediaeval platform settlement.

River Ithon (8)

Fording this river which flows from Newtown to reach the Wye at Newbridge on Wye can be tricky - and entertaining.

Llanbadarn Fynydd (9)

An extremely lively village which dragged itself out of seemingly terminal decline to become UK Village of the Year in 1998. It now runs a community shop in addition to the pub, garage and a thriving project telemarketing locally hill reared "sweet lamb".

Abbey cwm Hir (The Abbey in the Long Valley) (10)

The ruined Cistercian abbey 3km to the east was once the site, around 1143, to the second largest religious building in Europe and is thought to contain the grave of Llewellyn ap Gruffyd, the last of the Welsh Princes who died in battle in 1282.

It was attacked in the late twelfth century by Hugh de Mortimer after which the earlier wooden building was replaced by a significant stone structure close in size to the abbeys at Durham and Winchester.

During the 13th century, Llywellyn Fawr embarked upon an ambitious building programme which was spotted by Henry III, who imposed a huge fine upon the abbey, and effectively stopped its development as a national cathedral.

By 1400 it was a stronghold of the Mortimer family, and was attacked during the Owain Glyn Dwr uprising after which it became the source material for much of the stone walls and farm buildings in the area.

Rhayader (11)

Rhayader developed in the 5th century and is regarded as the oldest town in Mid-Wales.

The waterfall that can be seen today is the remains of the original that was blown up in 1780 to make way for the bridge and which gave the town its name Rhaeadr Gwy - Waterfall on the Wye. Below Water Lane can be found the ancient ford which provided the original crossing of the River Wye.

For mountain bikers, the town is famous for Clive Powell's Dirty Weekends - and Clive's shop can be found near the bridge.

Elan Valley Dams (12)

Built to supply Birmingham with clean water to eliminate typhoid & cholera, the four dams on the River Elan were completed by 1904 and later supplemented by the Claerwen Dam built by Italian masons (the Brits were busy sorting out bomb damaged London) and opened in 1952 by the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II. They now provide up to 365 thousand tonnes of water daily to the second city sourced from the local rainfall averaging 1.8m per year. The estate, once owned by the Cistercian monks of Strata Florida Abbey, is now managed by the Elan Valley Trust on behalf of Welsh Water for conservation, farming and recreation.

Monks Trod (13)

To the north of the permissive track on the Elan Valley estate this ancient 10km highway to the mountain road was used by the monks in their travels between the sister abbeys of Strata Florida and Abbey Cwm Hir.

Unfortunately the combination of poor drainage and use by recreational vehicles does mean that the route is unpleasant in all but the driest of summers.

Strata Florida (14)

Some 2km to the south, this ruined Welsh Cistercian abbey was first founded in 1164 and developed into a major abbey under the patronage of Lord Rhys of Deheubarth. In 1285 the abbey church was struck by lightning, and was severely damaged by the following fire. No sooner had this been repaired than the Abbey suffered further damage as a result of the Welsh rebellion and then from the attentions of English royal forces. In 1401, during the rising of Owain Glyndwr, it was occupied by 120 English men-at-arms, at which point the Abbot cried enough, upped stick and took his monks to pray in less stressful conditions, which was far sighted considering the forthcoming effect of Henry 8. Despite the frequency and severity of these wars, it is nothing short of a miracle that the beautifully preserved west doorway and other structures remain at Strata Florida to be worth viewing.

Pontrhydygroes & Ysbyty Ystwyth (15)

"Ysbyty" means place of hospitality, reflecting the days when the village was a stopping place on an important route used by the monks of Strata Florida Abbey.

Pontrhydygroes, which means "bridge by the ford of the cross" became the centre of the 19th century Lisburne and Grogwynion lead mines - whose spoil heaps are visible today.

Devils Bridge (16)

Around 5km to the northwest this famous beauty spot with the spectacular Mynach waterfall also offers an opportunity for a trip to Aberystwyth on the narrow gauge railway.

Cwmystwyth Mines (17)

The enormous spoil heap by the side of the road is all that remains of a mine which dates back to 1500BC, was probably worked by the Romans, but only became intensively developed in the 16th century and peaked in Victorian times.

Both lead and copper were extensively mined, both through open cast workings, and also through a honeycombe of workings inside the hill to the north much relished by your scribe and other cavers in the 70's and 80's.

The mines finally closed in the 1960's.

The Mountain Road (18)

Once the main highway between Aberystwyth, Rhayader and England, this was used to drive cattle & sheep from the Welsh Hills to the English markets, and later was the route of the Aberystwyth Stagecoach. Its importance fell when Telford built the current A44.

Esgair Ychion Forest (19)

Planted by the Forestry Commission in the 1960's this 25ha forest is now gradually being felled and replanted, and is the home to some 35 groaning wind turbines.

Llangurig (20)

Quite rightly claiming to be the first village on the Wye, Llangurig nestles languidly in the junction between the A44 and the A470 and boasts two pubs, a 15th century church and a splendid 20th century roundabout.

Hafren Forest (21)

Named after the Severn (Afon Hafren), planting started in the 1930's and now totals some 40ha which is much enjoyed by offroad motorbikes for enduros and trials. The forest is a haven for birds including crossbills feeding on the pine cones, together with the raptors Red Kite, Merlin and Goshawks while the damp climate encourages Tormentil, Marsh Violets and Bog Asphodel on the streamside banks. A picnic spot is available on the banks of the Severn, together with riverside walks for those wishing to stretch some different muscles.

Rivers Severn & Wye (22)

Both rivers rise on the Plynllymmon Hills some 4 to 5km to the west of the route, and the Severn is crossed by a cantankerous ford (or bridge if you walk). By some strange chance the two rivers take quite different routes before meeting some 200km later in the Bristol Channel.

Lyn Clwedog (23)

The Clewedog dam was opened in 1968 to satisfy the growing trend for brummies to invest in flush loos and washing machines, and resulted in the loss of some 2.5sq km of farmland.

This rather upset Plaid Cymru who organised a concerted campaign to prevent the construction. Serious damage was subsequently caused in 1966 by a bomb explosion, probable placed by 'MAC' (Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru), a group of political extremists under the leadership of John Jenkins. 'MAC' eventually got their come uppance when a bomb intended for Prince Charles decided to do its own thing and blew up its handlers. However, it was all worthwhile, 'cause Jimmy Carter later caught a fish on the new lake.

Staylittle (24)

Staylittle owed its prosperity to lead mining, and particularly the Van mine which began production in the 1860's. At its busiest time it is said to have employed 1000 men and was for a short time the most productive lead mine in Europe, with a railway line laid from Caersws to take the lead to market. It was largely dismantled in 1921, although some working continued for another decade, and all that now remains are two chimneys and the inevitable spoil heaps. The village shop is well worth a visit.

Roman Fortlet (25)

The Roman Pen Y Grogben Fort was constructed by the Romans to protect the Roman Road and their lead mining operations at nearby Dylife. The 63ft diameter Red Wheel, was probably the largest in Wales and the wheel pit can still be seen, along with the top section of the pump rods driven by the wheel which can be spotted as you climb the hill. In later years the hill became known as Gibbet Hill - where a local blacksmith was forced to construct his own gibbet before being hung for the crows to savour for murdering his ex lover and her children in 1720. The hanging irons were rediscovered in 1938 are on display at St Fagens Folk Museum near Cardiff.

Dylife (26)

Mining peaked in between 1820 and 1890 when some 1000 to 1500 workers were employed - particularly at the Dylife Mine. From 1845 over 36,000 tones of lead ore were extracted, along with substantial quantities of copper and zinc ore, and some silver. 14

A Dylife miner who was killed in a mining accident was buried in the local graveyard, and his clothes buried separately, according to a local custom, near a place called Ty Maggi. His ghost appeared on several occasions, waving a jacket at his mates and telling them to dig it up. When finally they did so, they found his life's savings in his pocket, which they shared between themselves. His ghost only appeared once again, just to smile and wave goodbye!

Glaslyn (27)

The area around this lake is a nature reserve managed by the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, and includes a footpath around the lake leading to a viewpoint. The reserve is largely managed to encourage heather regeneration to attract Rd Grouse, Meadow Pippets, Wheatears and Ring Ouzels. Underfoot will also be found the insect eating plants, sundew and butterwort.

Just along the track to the north is a memorial to Wynford Vaughan Thomas, the BBC contributor who died in 1987.

Dovey Junction (28)

This recently refurbished railway station lies close to the mouth of the Dyfe estuary, where it meets the Irish Sea. It services the main line from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury where it connects to the coastal branch line to Pwllheli, and is approached along a 1km long track. If the legs are weary, then Machynlleth is only one stop away!

Machynlleth (29)

Machynlleth became the capital of Wales during the short lived 1404 rebellion against English rule under the leadership of Owain Glyndwr. The only reminder of this is the Parliament House "The Plas" which stands on the site of the rebellion HQ, and now houses "Celtica" an audio visual display through the Celtic heritage of Wales.

The town owes its existence to having the final ford on the River Dyfi before it reaches the Irish Sea, and was settled in Celtic times, and by the Romans under the name of Maglona. Just out of town is the Centre for Alternative Technology, where reduced admission is granted for travellers by cyclists, who can ponder over the cliff railway, wind and water powered 'lectric, and composting loos. A good reputation for mountainbiking is maintained by the Holey Grail cycle shop, the Mach I, II & III mtb trails, in addition to a presence on the National Cycle Network.