

Great Rides

ASTRAY IN HARROGATE

Cycling UK was founded in Harrogate in 1878 – and banished from its hotels thereafter. **Carlton Reid** explores the spa town's history and surrounding area



CARLTON REID

Journalist and author. Carlton was the founder of the cycling trade magazine, *BikeBiz*

Opposite Harrogate's Convention Centre there's a small brass plaque erected in August 1953 to celebrate CTC's 75th anniversary. Known as the Bicycle Touring Club when founded in 1878, it became the Cyclists' Touring Club, or CTC, in 1883. Since 2016 the 145-year-old body has been known as **Cycling UK**.

This route starts with a multi-use rail trail, has a steep climb to a one-of-a-kind quarry sculpture, and ends at a plush hotel intimately connected with the birth of CTC. Along the way, the route skirts Brimham Rocks, a natural wonder that has attracted day-trippers for hundreds of years. Pioneer cyclists certainly visited, paying sixpence for entry. (Today it's free for those arriving at this National Trust site by bike.)

Harrogate was catnip to these pioneers. Accessible by train, it was a health resort with plenty of what a period cycling pamphlet described as "frolics". CTC was one of many clubs which used to muster in Harrogate for a long weekend of rides, races and tent-based accommodation. The North of England Meet and Camp ran for more than

20 years but wasn't initially held under canvas. Instead, the first few meets were hotel based. The original event HQ hotel still exists, and this is where the inaugural CTC members stayed in 1878.

Today the West Park Hotel welcomes cyclists. Its walls are adorned with cycle art, and there's a penthouse suite dedicated to the Tour de France's visit to the town nearly 10 years ago. But in 1878, back when it was the Commercial Hotel, all cyclists were banished after some tussled with troops. The 2nd West York Yeomanry Cavalry was in town to parade; pioneer cyclists were there to ride – and party.

Harrogate was the perfect location for circular day rides, including short ones to Knaresborough and longer ones to York, Ripon and beyond to the Yorkshire Dales. The minor roads on this ride would have been familiar to the pioneer cyclists. More usually they would have ridden on direct routes such as today's A59. High-wheelers (almost all of whom were men) would have had this and other such main roads primarily to themselves because the motor car was yet to be born.

Photos: Carlton and Josh Reid