



national trails office
An Irish Sports Council Initiative

**THE
IRISH SPORTS
COUNCIL**



AN CHOMHAIRE SPÓIRT



Discover Cycling

An introduction to cycling

irishtrails.ie

An Irish Sports Council Initiative

Cycling is an ideal pursuit for all age groups and is truly a life-long activity.



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Acknowledgements

This guide has been compiled by cycling veteran and outdoor enthusiast Doug Corrie for the National Trails Office. We would like to acknowledge and thank him and the following for their contribution to this publication: Michael Crowley, Susie Mitchell, Gillian Costelloe, Jenny Corrie, Mark Lidwell, Ray Linn, Una May, Jean Boydell, Sean Collins and Lynne Chen.

The following are acknowledged for contributing photographic images; Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Countryside Access and Activity Network (NI), Coillte, Action Photography Ltd, Doug Corrie, Cormac MacDonnell, Michael McLaughlin and Pdraig Philbin.

The National Trails Office would also like to acknowledge the ongoing work of all agencies and organisations responsible for the development and upkeep of the cycling trails and routes around the country.

Introduction

Cycling is becoming more and more popular in Ireland both as a means of transport and as a leisure time pursuit. It is an ideal pursuit for all age groups and is truly a life-long activity. Cycling is ideal as part of a daily exercise routine and can be part of your daily commute, your trip to the shops or a weekend spin with friends just for fun.



This little book aims to provide you with the basic information needed to get you started cycling and indeed is also ideal for anyone who may have cycled in the past and would like to give it a go again. After all, most of us have cycled at some time in the past, even if it was only in our childhood years. The guide will help you choose a bike, give you guidance on where you might cycle, tips on remaining safe while cycling and lots more.

If you get hooked on cycling, as many people do, this guide outlines some of the more challenging types of cycling you might like to consider in the future. If you are interested in progressing to a higher level of fitness and skill, we recommend you consult another more advanced guide book "Introduction to Cycling" by Paddy Doran, produced and available from the national governing body for cycling – Cycling Ireland. That publication also includes some basic information for beginners as well as comprehensive guidance on cycling skills, fitness and nutrition.

One of the features of this guide is short contributions from existing cyclists, some newcomers to the activity and some who've been at it for a while. These snippets give you a flavour of what cycling means to them and will hopefully inspire you to become a regular cyclist.

Whether it is cycling the thousands of back roads around the country or the off-road trails in our forests, parks and disused railways – there is something for everyone in Ireland. So now it's over to you – get on your bike and get out there exploring!



A note from John Treacy, CEO Irish Sports Council

I have been lucky enough to have been involved with sport all my life and, although I've always been a runner, I've recently had the pleasure of participating in some cycling events. Like many of you reading this guide this was a new departure for me and one which I found very enjoyable and will certainly be doing again.



Becoming a cyclist has so many benefits from a health perspective and is a great way to enjoy the outdoors with family or friends.

I'm delighted that the Irish Sports Council is involved with the development and promotion of cycling and cycling trails in Ireland. I would encourage all Irish residents, young and old to get out there and discover the magic of the lifelong pursuit of cycling.

A handwritten signature in white ink, which appears to read "John Treacy".

Getting Started

Getting started is often the biggest problem people have with a new activity and cycling is no exception. All sorts of questions arise – such as – “Where will I cycle? What sort of bike should I get? What sort of clothes do I need?” This little book answers these questions and offers guidance on the basic things you’ll need to know to get started.

Probably the first thing you’ll need to think about is getting a bike. Before investing in a new bike there are a few options you might consider.

If you’re a lapsed cyclist you may already have an old bike that’s perfectly adequate. If you decide to use an old bike it’s important that you make sure that it’s in good working order before getting out on it. However, if your bike is very old it may be less user friendly than a modern bike (e.g. heavy or with no gears) and may not be worth considering. Other options are to rent a bike to see how you like cycling or simply borrow a bike just to get you going. If renting or borrowing you should make sure you get a bike that’s the correct size for you and adjusted to suit you – a bike which is too big or too small will be uncomfortable and may discourage you.

While these options may get you going there’s nothing like a new bike to get you motivated and enjoying cycling.

Types of bike

If you’re going to buy a new bike you need to be aware of the different types of bike that are available before you purchase. There are three general types of bike:



- **Road bike** - for cycling on the road as the name suggests. This type of bike typically has drop handle bars, (like a racing bike), but straight handlebar versions are also available.



- **Mountain bike** – for off-road cycling on rough ground but can be used anywhere.



- **Hybrid bike** – for use both on the road and light off-road riding (e.g. gravel surfaced paths)

For a detailed overview of these bike types and other variations see the *Summary of Bike Types* at the rear of this book.

Choosing and Buying a Bike

Your choice of bike can have a big impact on your enjoyment of cycling – choose the wrong type of bike and you may feel cycling is a chore – choose the correct type of bike and it can be fun every time. There are a few questions you should ask yourself before buying a bike –

1. What do I hope to use my bike for?

If you're new to cycling it may be hard to answer this question. If you have friends, work colleagues or relatives who do some cycling, you might like to chat with them about their experiences to get some ideas about what might interest you. Some possibilities might include:

Getting about locally - This can be very beneficial and time saving. For example if you live in an urban area, a trip to the local newsagent to get the paper may take you 10 minutes by car but only 5 minutes by bike as you don't get held up in the traffic and have no need to worry about a parking space when you get there.

Commuting to work - This can save you time and will almost certainly save you money on fuel, parking charges or public transport fares. (See section on *Commuting by Bike*).

Easy recreational cycling - This can be cycling at a gentle pace to get out for some fresh air at the weekend or on a summer's evening.

Fitness cycling - Using a bike to get fit or keep fit is ideal. Fitness cycling can be at different levels from a relatively short gentle 20km spin in the evening to a full day all out long distance cycle. If you plan to do longer cycles bear this in mind when choosing a bike.

Off-Road Cycling - This can be cycling on everything from flat unsurfaced paths to purpose built mountain bike trails with a very variable surface. Some bikes are suitable for off-road cycling and some are not.

Long Distance Cycling/Cycle Touring - This might be doing a long cycle at the weekend, organised events known as sportives or audax events of over 100km or cycle touring with a full load of luggage including panniers and maybe a tent if you are camping. (See more on these options in the section on *Moving up a Gear*).

There are of course lots of other possibilities for cycling but these suggestions will give you some idea of the options.

2. Will I need to carry stuff while I cycle?

This is something people often don't consider when buying a bike. If you plan to use a bike for grocery shopping, commuting, going on picnics or overnight trips you will probably need to have some carrying capacity on the bike. This means it needs to be a bike on which a carrier/pannier rack can be fitted. Some bikes are not suitable for this. Of course there are other ways to carry things such as a backpack but this can be uncomfortable and is generally not advisable unless it is very light. A large saddle bag or a handlebar basket can be fitted to most bikes but the capacity of this will be limited.



3. How much do I want to spend?

This is a very important question and may have a large influence on the bike you choose. New bikes range in price from €100 to €10,000. Luckily you can buy a bike at the lower end of this scale and it will probably be quite adequate for your needs. However, as a general rule when you buy a bike you get what you pay for. The more you pay the higher the specification and generally the higher the quality. A cheap bike will have cheap low quality components which are more prone to causing problems than those on a more mid price bike. A cheaper bike may also be very heavy which is manageable if you stay on flat ground but noticeable when you come to hilly terrain.

While a bike for €100 may be usable it is probably wise to spend something in the range €300 to €400 at a minimum on a new bike. If you stretch to €700 + you are into the bottom end of the higher quality bike range. Over €1100 you are well into the higher specification, lightweight models.

Spend what you can afford and do not be tempted to stretch above this unless you're very certain you're buying a bike that you will really appreciate. An option to consider is buying a secondhand bike and this is discussed later on.

The *Summary of Bike Types* at the end of this book will provide you with guidance as to the most suitable bike for you depending on how you hope to use it. Of course you may decide that you want to use your bike for various different purposes so you may have to compromise and get a bike which is usable for all types of cycling or, as many cycling enthusiasts do, you could buy more than one bike!!

Buying a Bike

Although the prices available for bikes at internet based bike stores can be very attractive, it is generally more satisfactory to go to your local bike shop to buy your bike. You can try out various bikes – sitting on them and in many cases it will be possible to go for a short test ride. Also -

- You'll get the benefit of advice from the bike shop staff.
- You can leave the shop not only with a bike size that suits you but also with the saddle and handlebars adjusted to fit you.
- If you have any problems with the bike you can bring it back to the shop – if you make an online purchase you will need a lot more effort to get any issues with the bike resolved.
- If you need your bike adjusted or tweaked after you buy it, generally bike shop owners/staff are much better disposed to customers who bought a bike from them than made an online purchase.

There are some large bike shops in the country with a vast range of bikes available in stock and then there are small bike shops, which may be more local to you but have a smaller range in stock. In this case even if they don't have exactly what you need, they may be able to order it for you.

However, despite the advice given above, if you are certain about what you need, very good offers can be found online.

Making sure your bike fits and is adjusted to suit you

Like buying a new pair of shoes, you should always buy a bike that is the correct size for you. If your bike is too big or too small it will be uncomfortable to ride and can cause all sorts of aches and pains unnecessarily. When buying a new bike you have the chance to make sure it is the correct size. The staff in any good bike shop will ensure that your bike is the perfect fit. However, don't rely entirely on the bike shop staff and go armed with some understanding of how you should feel on a bike that is the correct size.

The letters LBS mean 'local bike shop' – you might see this used in online cycling discussion forums, magazines, etc.

Bike fit criteria

The fit of a bike is related to the size of the frame, and the adjustment of the saddle height, the fore/aft position of the saddle and the handlebar position. However, detailed discussion on these factors is outside the scope of this guide. For more details have a look at "Introduction to Cycling" by Paddy Doran, available from Cycling Ireland, which contains a more in-depth discussion on bike sizing.

General bike fitting guidelines:

- A good rule of thumb for a bike with a cross bar is, when you straddle the bike the bar should be no more than 4cm away from your crotch for road bikes and hybrids and about 5cm for mountain bikes.
- When pedalling, your legs should never feel over stretched (saddle too high) or scrunched up (saddle too low). A general guide to find the correct saddle height is to put your heel on the pedal and when your leg is at the bottom of the pedal stroke it should be more or less straight. When cycling, the ball of your foot will be on the pedal and at the bottom of the pedal stroke your leg will have a slight bend in it.
- Your arms should be sloping forward to reach the handlebars, but not stretched.
- Sitting on the saddle you should generally be able to reach the ground with your toes.



If when you are on the bike the saddle or handlebars have to be adjusted to their highest or lowest position to feel comfortable it is possible that the bike frame size is too big or too small for you.

Should Women buy Women's Bikes?

No, not every woman needs a women's bike. But every woman needs a bike that fits. Bikes designed for women tend to have a frame with a shorter top tube (the tube between the saddle and the handlebars) to take into account the fact that women often have a relatively shorter torso than men. Other differences may include narrower handlebars, shorter crankarms (the arms which go from the pedals to the centre of the chainring) and a wider saddle. A man's bike may be adjustable to fit a woman but for long distance cycling it may be worth considering a woman specific bike if a man's bike feels uncomfortable.

Buying a second hand bike

A possible option to allow you to buy a higher quality bike for a lower price is to buy second hand. Lots of good bikes are sold by individuals at very reasonable prices through the classified ads. Some bike shops also sell second hand bikes. However, there are pitfalls. You can be unlucky and buy a well used bike which needs a lot of work to maintain it or worse still come across an unscrupulous seller who sells stolen bikes.

The best source for second hand bikes is likely to be either a reputable bike shop or an acquaintance who is selling a bike he/she no longer needs.

If you are planning to buy a bike see details of the Bike to Work Scheme in the section on *Commuting by Bike*.

Accessories, Clothing and Footwear

Accessories

There are certain accessories which are essential to have:

Bike Lock

Never leave a bike unattended in a public place without locking it. If leaving a bike for a long period use a good quality lock which cannot be opened or cut easily with a cutting tool. Always lock your bike to something solid and include both wheels as in the diagram.



How to securely lock a bike

Tool Kit including spare tube and pump

If you're a long way from home and you get a puncture you will need to have a spare tube to replace the punctured one. To get the tyre off the wheel rim and replace the tube you will need tyre levers and to put air in your tyre after replacing the tube you'll need a pump.

It's always good to have a basic set of tools for most of the important nuts on your bike. A multi-tool which incorporates a set of allen keys and screwdrivers should be sufficient.



Pump tubes and tyre levers



Basic multi tool



Saddle Bag

If your bike has nuts to secure the wheels rather than a quick release device, you will need to carry a suitable spanner to take off a wheel in the event of a puncture. (See more details on repairing a puncture in the section on *Basic Maintenance and Repair*).

Saddle Bag

The most convenient way to carry your spare tube and tools is a small saddle bag. Your pump will usually have a holder which is attached to the bike frame.

Lights

It is a legal requirement to have lights on your bike if cycling in the dark. Lights are important for two reasons:

- to ensure you are seen by others
- to allow you to see where you are going

Lights must be turned on in the hours of darkness but it is also wise to use them at dusk, dawn, or on a dull rainy day to make you more visible. If you are cycling in total darkness you will need lights bright enough to clearly see the road in front of you – including any potholes! A red rear light must be used.

A bell

If cycling where there are walkers using the same route, it is useful to have a bell to give a friendly ‘ting’ when approaching from behind.



Front light



Rear light



Bell

Some other accessories, while not essential may be useful:

Mudguards

If cycling in the rain, spray from the wet roads will come off the wheels onto your clothes – especially the rear wheel which will leave a muddy stripe up your back. Mudguards can help keep both you and your bike clean in wet weather.



Mudguards

Carrier – panniers

When cycling if you have a need to carry anything you could use a small backpack. If you need to carry anything which can't fit in a small backpack, panniers are ideal. To attach panniers you will need a rack. This can be fitted to any bike which has the appropriate screw inserts in the frame to secure it.



Panniers

A bottle cage

Holds your drinks bottle. It is important to remain hydrated on a longer cycle.



Bottle carrier

Bike computer

Mounted on your handlebars, a bike computer displays your current speed, your average speed, how far you've gone, your cycling time, etc. More sophisticated models can display altitude, temperature, your heart rate and more.



Bike computer



Cycling is a good form of aerobic exercise that is not a strain on the body, which in turn, increases stamina and decreases tiredness and fatigue.



Ray Linn
Age 55, Dublin

I had been a runner for many years but recurring injuries had me looking for an alternative form of exercise that still involved the great outdoors. I was encouraged to take up cycling by two cyclist friends just over a year ago, and I haven't looked back since! A moderate investment in a new bike, some suitable clothing and a helmet and I was ready to go. What amazed me were the distances that I could manage within a few weeks of starting. With a moderate level of fitness, routes of up to 30 kilometres were possible within the first few weeks which I could then build on over time. Fitness levels soon improved and a whole new set of opportunities to explore and connect with the countryside became available. Journeys previously considered only by car became possible cycling opportunities. From my home in North Dublin a couple of routes are now established favourites: an evening trip around Howth Head via the seafront at Clontarf or, for a longer spin, within 40 minutes I can be out of the city and heading up the Dublin Mountains toward the Sally Gap and Laragh before returning via Enniskerry.

My bike is a Felt Z85

Clothing and footwear

Essentially any sort of comfortable clothing can be worn while cycling – such as a tracksuit or other flexible clothes which allow the range of movement needed while cycling. It is not advisable to wear any trousers with heavy seams in the gusset area as these can be uncomfortable after a short while on the bike. Although you can wear anything while cycling, clothing designed specifically for cycling tends to be more practical and more comfortable.

Cycling tops

When cycling it is best to wear clothing in layers. If the weather changes layers can be added or removed as required. A base layer worn next to your skin should be made from material which allows sweat to pass through rather than remain in the material. This is known as ‘wicking’. There are various fabrics good for wicking sweat, usually made from synthetic materials but also including merino wool which is good for use in colder weather. Cotton material is unsuitable as it retains moisture.

In hot weather short sleeved shirts will be suitable but in colder weather it is advisable to wear a base layer (or two) and a windproof top over your base layer(s) as the cooling effect of the wind can make you feel quite cold while cycling. Obviously, the use of a rain jacket is also advisable in wet weather. Rain jackets designed for cyclists tend to be made of light materials which can be rolled up and kept in a pocket when not needed.



Cycling jacket

Many cycling tops, especially those intended to be worn as an outer layer, have pockets around the section which cover the base of your back. This is useful for carrying things while on your bike.

Cycling bottoms

Cycling bottoms with padding in the gusset area are advisable for use on any type of longer cycle. These can be the tight fitting lycra shorts commonly used by sports cyclists or regular looking shorts and trousers often used by mountain bikers or touring cyclists which can also be bought with padding. Alternatively undergarments with padding designed for cycling can be worn under loose shorts.



Cycling shorts

Waterproof leggings for cycling can also be purchased. These are usually made in such a way that they provide flexibility which allows for the pedalling movement of your legs.

Shoes

On a bike with ordinary flat pedals or pedals with toe straps, any sturdy pair of shoes will be fine including runners.



Cycling shoes



Pedal with toe strap



Clipless pedal



Shoe with 'cleat'

Shoes specifically for cycling can also be bought. These can have a style similar to walking shoes. More advanced cyclists tend to use shoes with 'cleats' on the bottom for attaching to the confusingly named 'clipless pedals'. You may want to consider using this type of pedal as you get more experienced and want to take on longer cycles. This arrangement allows you to cycle more efficiently pulling up on the pedal as well as pushing down.

Gloves

In cold weather gloves will be needed as your hands will be very exposed. Gloves designed for cycling will have padding in the palm area to absorb some of the vibrations from the road coming through the handlebars and make your hands more comfortable gripping the handlebars in general. In warmer weather, fingerless gloves can be worn to protect your hands while at the same time allowing them to stay cool.



Fingerless gloves

Helmet

The wearing of a helmet is always advisable while cycling although not currently compulsory by law. A helmet should always be the correct size for the wearer. It should be worn fastened comfortably but not loose or pushed far back on the head. It should bear the safety standard number CE EN 1078.

A light skull cap type hat designed for wearing under a helmet can be worn in cold weather.

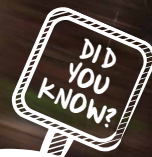
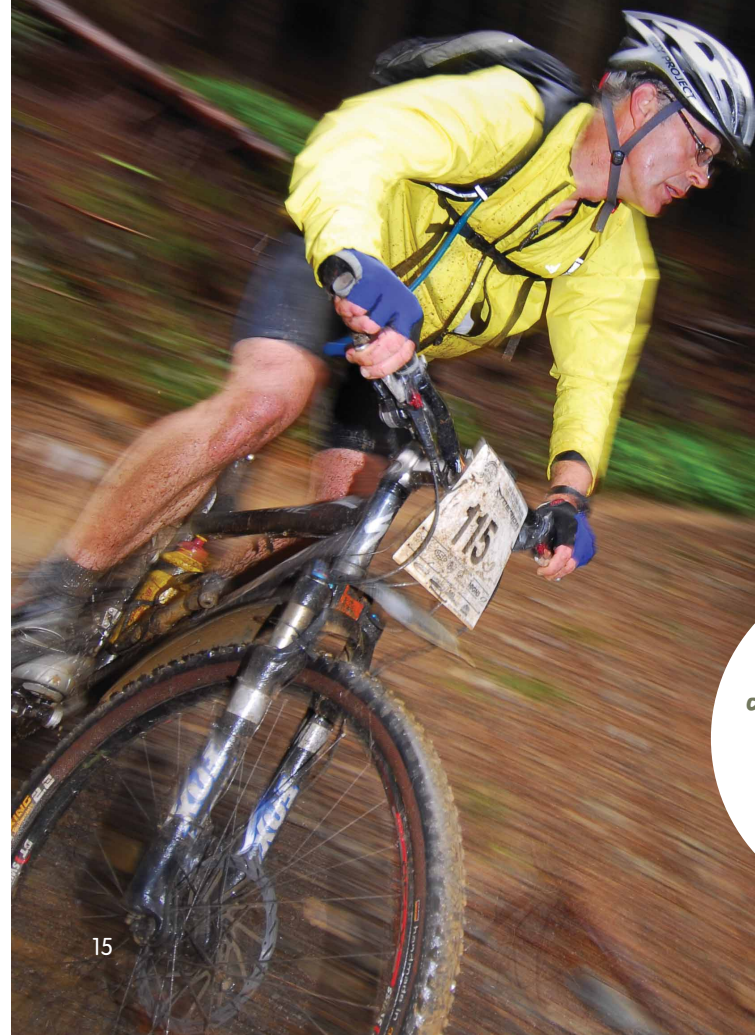


Helmet position

Where can I Cycle?

One of the questions which concerns people most when they think about taking up cycling is "Where can I cycle?" The answer is – there are lots of places to cycle! In fact for many people there are lots of places right beside where they live or within a very short distance. This is especially true for people living in a rural area or even in a provincial town. Within a short time they can be on quiet country roads which are great for cycling. Almost everywhere in Ireland there are quiet country roads.

Even for city dwellers, within a few miles of the city there are places to cycle. Obviously you have to get out of the city, but for anyone with a little cycling experience and with the help of cycle lanes – this is not such a big problem.



Cycling is ideal for those who find it hard to perform other aerobic exercises because the bicycle's seat holds 70% of the body weight.

What if I don't know the area where I live?

For most people the most usual place to go when getting used to cycling is somewhere close to home. If you are not familiar with the road network near where you live, get yourself a Discovery Series Ordnance Survey map which covers your area and plan out a simple route to get you started. These maps are available from www.osi.ie or from most Easons book shops.

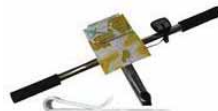
How far should I go?

Don't be too ambitious at first and try maybe a 5km loop or an out and back route of 2.5km. Stick a map in your pocket when heading out in case you need it to find your way. As with any new activity – build up gradually and keep the distance you cycle to something manageable. Setting out on a marathon cycle at the early stages will only discourage you if you find it tough and may turn you off the idea of cycling altogether. Within a short while you will build up your fitness and get used to cycling. Cycling 20 or 30km within a month of taking up cycling is not unusual. Covering such distances you can see quite a lot. This is one of the benefits of cycling – you can explore quite a large area by bike, which you would never consider doing on foot.

What about doing longer cycles?

When you get more experience you can use the Ordnance Survey maps to plan out longer routes which you might do on your own or better still with a group of friends. If you plan a route and find it particularly enjoyable you can mark it up on the map for future use.

If you would like to keep an eye on the map when out on your bike you can get a small map board which fits on the front of a bike and has a clip to hold the map in place. This avoids the need to take it in and out of your pocket every time you want to look at it.



Of course with the aid of GPS units suitable for use on bikes you could ride a pre-planned route following your GPS or record a route you are cycling and save it on the GPS so that you can do the same route again in the future.

Another possibility is to look at some of the websites dedicated to recording cycling routes. These websites can be used by anybody to upload routes they have ridden. Sometimes you can find an interesting route here. Some such sites are:

www.mapmyride.com

www.bikeroutetoaster.com

www.bikemap.net

The sites are free to use but usually require users to register.

What if I want to cycle somewhere not close to my home?

If you find somewhere you would like to cycle and it is a bit further afield – consider bringing your bike on the train or the provincial bus. Both of these options are now possible. If you have a car, maybe you can fold down the seats, and fit a couple of bikes in the back, (take off the front wheel to get them in more easily). Another option is to fit a bike rack on the back of the car or bike roof rack and put a few bikes on that. Bike racks for almost any car are available and are reasonably inexpensive and a great investment.

Other cycling options

If you are not confident using a map, there are a number of road based waymarked cycling routes around the country. These routes are generally either on scenic routes or quiet rural roads.



Waymarked Cycle Hub Routes

A number of towns around the country have been designated as cycle hubs and cycling routes have been developed by the Local Authorities with assistance from Fáilte Ireland. These are all looped routes which start and finish in the hub town. The routes are waymarked and vary in length from less than 10km to over 80km. Details on these routes can be found via www.irishtrails.ie by selecting 'On Road Cycling' in the drop down menu list for trail category when using the trail search facility on the website.

Other waymarked cycle routes

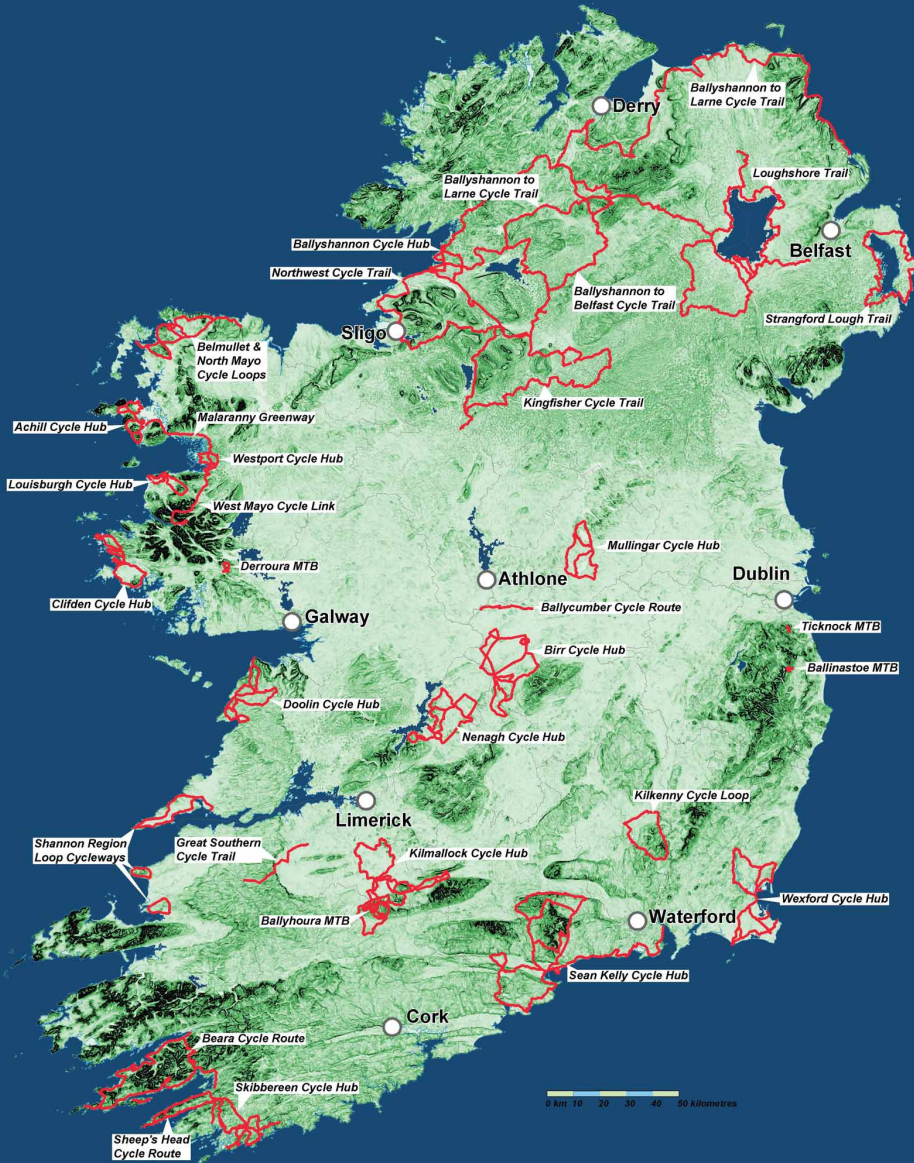
There are various waymarked cycle routes all over the country from short 10km loops up to routes of over 200km. For example on Sheep's Head there is a route which directs cyclists around the entire peninsula along scenic roads. In Northern Ireland and the border area there are also numerous waymarked routes.

Routes in the Republic of Ireland can be found via www.irishtrails.ie while those in Northern Ireland can be found at www.cycleni.com.

irishtrails.ie

CycleNI.com
Your definitive guide to cycling in Northern Ireland

Waymarked Cycle Routes





Susie Mitchell
Age 35, Carlow

I've been cycling for about 6 years and my favourite trail is in the Ballyhoura mountain bike park in Ardpatrik. There are a number of different loop options here, but my favourite spin is the white loop. It covers 35km taking in some of the best sections of single track in the park and the most stunning scenery. It only takes a couple of hours so it's suitable for a day trip from Dublin, which is where I live. Good quality mountain bikes can be rented on site so it's great if I want to bring friends or family with me who don't have bikes for a spin. The facilities in the mountain bike park are also fantastic – not only is there a bike wash in the car park, you can have a shower on site afterwards for a small charge allowing you to get nice and mucky and still be respectable enough to go for a bite to eat somewhere afterwards on the trip back home!

My bike: Fatboy Focus mountain bike

Off-Road Cycling

There are various possibilities for off-road cycling in the Republic of Ireland -



Designated trails in Coillte forests

Details of these locations and trails can be found on the Coillte recreational website www.coillteoutdoors.ie or on www.irishtrails.ie. These locations include trails which range from easy family cycle routes to purpose built mountain bike trails for experienced riders. These trails are usually graded as Family, Easy, Moderate, Difficult, Severe and Very Severe. The table below describes what these terms mean. The difficulty level of a trail is normally highlighted on promotional websites, trail information boards and other trail information sources.

| Grading | Description |
|--------------------|---|
| Family | Traffic-free trails suitable for all ages and all types of bikes. Very even surface (usually sealed) and essentially flat (very low gradient). |
| Easy | Consistent, generally even surfaces suitable for off-road bikes only. Low level of bike control ability required. Of low gradient with some features in trail such as minor dips or occasional minor potholes. Average gradient 1:20 or 5% |
| Moderate | Variable and slightly uneven surfaces suitable for mountain-bikes only. Low level of bike control ability and physical fitness required. May have some dips, hollows, potholes and protruding roots. May include some wide timber boardwalk sections and moderate gradients. Average 1:15 or 6% |
| Difficult | Very variable and uneven surfaces suitable for mountain bikes only. Not suitable for children under 11 yrs old. Requires a high level of competency in bike control and a high level of physical fitness. Technically challenging with features such as tight turns, small rock steps, narrow boardwalk sections and may cross steep exposed side slope. Average gradient 1:10 or 10% |
| Severe | Extremely variable and uneven including large loose material, large rock steps, protruding root systems, severe grade reversals and very narrow boardwalk sections. Requires extremely high levels of bike skill and physical fitness. May require climbs and descents greater than 600m over distances greater than 35km. Mountain bikes with suspension only |
| Very Severe | Extremely and suddenly variable, rocky, very uneven surfaces with features of the above and also rock slabs and exposed severe gradient rock outcrops. Only to be undertaken by those with the highest levels of technical bike skills, physical fitness and personal survival skills in remote and very exposed environments. Mountain bikes with full suspension only. |

Note: At present cycling on any other trails or forest roads in Coillte forests is prohibited following the introduction of by-laws in 2010. It is hoped that some forests will be designated for cycling in the future and that further purpose built mountain bike trails will be constructed.

Greenways

Greenways are trails that are designed for shared use by leisure walkers and cyclists. They are mainly traffic-free, off-road and have a solid surface, either tarred or compacted.

Greenways can be for leisure use or to commute to and from school, or work, or to link centres of population and facilities.

The main leisure greenways in Ireland are located in some of the larger urban parks. New Greenways utilising old rail lines have also been developed in recent years including the Great Western Greenway (see www.greenway.ie) and the Westport Greenway (see www.mayowalks.ie) in County Mayo and the Great Southern Trail (see www.southerntrail.net) in Counties Limerick and Kerry.



Public Parks

Some public parks allow cycling on their path network and a few also have segregated cycle and walking routes. Dublin's Phoenix Park, the largest enclosed public park in Europe, has a network of cycle trails which are off-road although specific routes are not waymarked. You should ascertain if cycling is allowed before attempting to cycle in a public park.

Cycle Tracks

In some built up areas there are sections of cycle track segregated from traffic and running parallel to public road. These sections are quite safe and where they run for an extended distance can be used for a short family cycle.

In Northern Ireland there are a variety of off-road routes including woodland trails, canal towpaths and lakeside routes which are perfect for safe cycling and families. All of these can be found on the website www.cycleni.com by using the search facility and ticking the off-road option.

There are two off-road routes that are worth a special mention as they offer outstanding cycling in spectacular surroundings:

Blessingbourne Mountain Bike Trails, Co Tyrone – 8kms of mountain bike trail and pump track on a private estate. Great for older kids and seasoned mountain bikers.

Castle Ward, Co Down – 35kms of cycle trails through forests and farmland at this stunning National Trust property on the edge of Strangford Lough.

Safety

When cycling, it is important to think about your own safety and the safety of others. Whether cycling on the road or off-road always make sure your bike is in good working order before you set out.

Always be courteous and cycle with respect for others, whether other cyclists, pedestrians, drivers or anyone else on your cycling route. This helps maintain your safety and the safety of others.

Always wear a helmet while cycling. However, it is important to remember that a helmet will be of limited benefit in the event of a collision with a vehicle so don't let yourself believe that you are protected from all eventualities just because you are wearing a helmet.

Cycling on the road

There is a big difference between cycling on a quiet country lane compared to the centre of a busy town or city, but wherever you cycle it is important to think about your safety at all times. Here are some tips:

- Ensure you are familiar with the Rules of the Road – they apply to cyclists also. In particular refresh yourself with the specific rules for cyclists.
- Maximise your visibility to other road users:
 - wear bright clothing.
 - if cycling at night fit lights to your bike and ensure they work properly.
 - at night wear clothing with reflective strips
- Be alert to what's happening around you. Don't wear earphones while cycling.
- Cycle decisively and make your intentions clear to other road users by using hand signals when planning to turn.
- Think ahead, anticipate drivers' actions and catch their eye.
- Cycle well clear of the edge of the roadside or kerb – debris and drains at the road edge are a hazard.
- Don't cycle on footpaths intended for pedestrian use.
- If cycling in a group, always warn any cyclists behind you of hazards ahead – such as potholes, parked cars, pedestrians, etc.

Cycling Off-Road

When cycling off-road there are usually no risks from motorised traffic but there are other potential risks and hazards which you need to be aware of.

When cycling on paths which are used by pedestrians:

- Give way to pedestrians, leaving them plenty of room and slow down or stop if necessary.
- Be careful at junctions, bends and entrances.
- Don't assume that other users can see or hear you – use a bell – don't surprise people.

When cycling on mountain bike trails:

- Get an understanding of how your bike reacts to different surfaces .e.g. can slide on wet rocks.
- Match your speed to the surface and your bike handling skills.
- On purpose-built trails, check the difficulty rating and cycle trails that match your skill and fitness.
- Don't be over confident about your abilities on your first time out on a trail.
- Always expect the unexpected – e.g. a sudden drop or rock on the trail.

Cycling with your Family

One of the best ways to enjoy cycling is with a group, and there's no better group than your own family! Cycling is a great way to introduce children to physical activity and the outdoors. Cycling with your family is an opportunity to spend time together, to relax, exercise, keep fit and bond in a recreational environment. If you have any children who are still too young to cycle themselves, there is a range of products available to allow them to come along too. There are baby seats, trailers and tow bars available for bicycles that allow children of any age accompany an adult safely on a cycle. Some of these are shown below.



Baby Seats are usually mounted on the back carrier of a bike and allow children from 6 months to about 4 years old to be carried comfortably. Above this age the seat weight limit may be exceeded.



Baby seat

A **"Tag-A-Long"** or **Trailer Bike** usually attaches to the seat post of an adult bike. This type of bike is suitable for children in the 4 to 9 years age range. With this arrangement the child may pedal or freewheel independently of the towing adult.



Trailer bike

A **Trailer** can be used to bring along children from as young as new born babies up to about 5 years old. Trailers can usually be used to carry one or two children depending on their size and typically have a carrying capacity of around 45kg.



Trailer

There are a few important points to take into consideration when planning a cycle with your family:

Family Safety

When on a family cycle the safety of your family is the most important thing to consider. Safety tips were listed earlier in the previous section of this guide but here are some other things you need to focus on if cycling in a family group with children

- Make sure everyone is wearing a helmet (including adults – who should set a good example).
- Ensure that children are on a bike matched to their height and experience.
- If cycling with young children or children inexperienced at cycling, try and stick to off-road routes or very quiet country roads.
- Only allow children to cycle on the road when they are old enough to understand the rules of the road and are fully competent on a bike.
- Maximise the visibility of everyone in the family group – wear bright clothing.
- Avoid cycling during the hours of darkness with children but if you must ensure front and rear lights are used.

Plan your route

Plan a route suitable for the abilities of everyone in the group before you set out

- Consider the terrain - avoid steep inclines – they will discourage children on the way up and can be dangerous on the way down.
- Plan a route that can be achieved by everyone in the group – if it is too long it will discourage those who struggle to complete it.
- If a planned route is quite long, consider including a rest stop for a picnic or a swim.
- If on the road - consider the amount of traffic that is likely to be around during the time you plan to cycle. Some otherwise quiet roads can be busy at certain times of the day.

Preparation

Correct preparation ensures that you are well equipped for any situation that may arise.

- If planning to be away for more than an hour or so, bring some drinks and food for everyone in the group or plan to stop somewhere you can get some.
- Check the weather forecast and dress for the conditions.
- Bring rain gear if there is a chance of rain.
- Bring a small first aid kit to patch up any scratches or grazes which may occur.



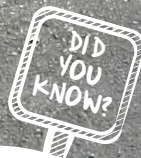
The May Family - Justin, Una, Cian (age 10), Caoimhe (age 8) and Oisín (age 4), Cellbridge

We've cycled with our kids for as long as we've been able and have enjoyed some really lovely cycles as a family. Our most complicated cycle involved two adult bikes, one towing a trailer, one towing a tag-a-long and the eldest on his own bike. As the kids have got older we recently managed our first outing as a whole family each on his/her own bike (including Oisín) on the Portumna Forest cycle trails. Probably the biggest kick we all got out of that cycle was the excitement Oisín got out of the single track trails on his "big bike"! The kids love racing on their mountain bikes and Caoimhe particularly likes beating the boys – Oisín just loves to rush off racing! Cian appreciates the fact that cycling helps to keep him fit and is much easier than walking – and he now has a new-found love of road cycling – it helps that we live in flat Kildare!

Commuting by Bike



Commuting to work is a great way to get out on your bike every day and it has a number of advantages over travelling by car or public transport.



Car drivers are exposed to 5 times as much polluted air than bikers, making cycling good for both the environment and health.

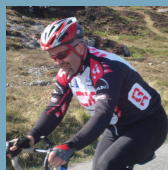
Saves money – by cycling you will save money on fuel or fares and once you have a bike, the running costs are very small.

Saves time – if your commute involves driving in traffic it is quite possible that you will cycle the same journey faster by bike than by car especially over a short distance. If you cycle instead of using public transport you can eliminate the need to wait for buses to arrive and the delays often experienced when a bus doesn't turn up.

Provides exercise – when commuting by bike you are getting exercise twice a day without eating into time for other things. Cycling every day is a great way to maintain fitness.

Enjoyment and wellbeing – cycling to work can get you out of the drudgery involved in driving or using public transport and your journey to and from work can become an enjoyable experience which you look forward to. The cycle helps you to wake up fully in the morning and clears your head on the way home after work. When you arrive at work or home after your cycle you are refreshed and full of energy.

Environment – cycling to work minimises your impact on the environment.



Michael Crowley
Age 43, West Cork

Following an introduction to recreational cycling at age 36 by the local doc here on the Beara peninsula, I wondered why I hadn't been motivated before to get out and enjoy this wonderful sport. I have been very active all my life with the usual pursuits of football, golf and some indoor soccer but had missed a connection with cycling. It is now a very big part of every week, not just spring and summer but year round. From a reasonably small group, we have now up to 20 on the road with average of 12 to 15 on every spin.

The main attraction for some of us may be the coffee and cake stop at the half way mark in Harringtons Post Office, but that is all well deserved after climbing the awesome Healy Pass before crossing the border to Kerry and making our way along the coast road back to Ardgroom. This ring of Beara approx 50 miles is our most regular route winter and summer and every day we comment on how lucky we are to have on our doorstep this wonderfully quiet winding road with the most spectacular scenery anywhere in Ireland. Over the summer we extend the miles to 80/100 from Castletownbere to Adrigole and rising out from Glengarriff to climb the Caha Pass over the border into Kerry and downhill into Kenmare for that well deserved break in one of the many great coffee stops.

It is amazing how quickly you can build up the miles from a beginner with no experience, to doing 50 or 100 miles reasonably comfortably. I would encourage any reader to at least try it out and get a small group of mates out and about on the bikes, you will be amazed how much fun you can have.

My bike is a Willier Triestina aluminium frame with campagnolia set.

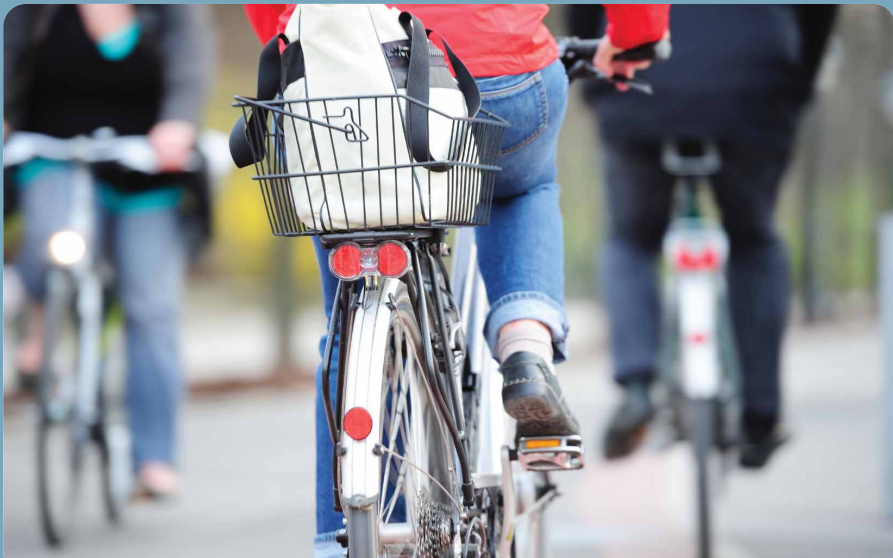
Tips for cycling to work

Clothing – if your cycle to work is short you can manage fine in your work clothes provided you cycle slowly and tuck in loose trouser bottoms so that they don't get caught in the chain. If your commute is longer you may want to wear older clothes or cycling specific clothes and change when you get to work. If you have a shower at work that is ideal but it is surprising how well baby wipes work as a substitute. Regardless of what clothes you wear it is worth investing in a good waterproof jacket and over trousers to keep you dry if it rains. When buying a jacket, get one in a bright colour with reflective strips to improve your visibility to other road users.

Carrying stuff – it may suit you to bring in clean clothes once a week by car but you can carry most of what you will need on the bike if you are suitably equipped. For small amounts a small backpack will be sufficient but an alternative to allow you to carry more is to use panniers.

Safety and Security – as discussed earlier in this book – you must consider your safety at all times while cycling. When commuting, it is recommended that you wear a helmet and brightly coloured clothes to maximise your visibility. If commuting in the dark lights will be a requirement. To ensure the safety of your bike you will need a place to lock it at work.

Route to work – when cycling, the route you take by bike will not necessarily be the same as the route you would drive. Pick a route that has least fast moving traffic – in considering your safety it is the speed of the traffic rather than the volume which provides the greatest risk.



Bike to Work Scheme

To help promote the use of bikes for commuting the government run a scheme that allows employees to purchase a bicycle and associated accessories tax free.

The scheme covers bicycles and accessories up to a maximum cost of €1,000. The bicycle must be purchased by your employer but the scheme can then operate either with your employer bearing the full cost of the bicycle, or by way of a salary sacrifice agreement in which you pay for it, tax free, over 12 months. If the bicycle is purchased directly by the employer, it can be claimed as a tax exempt benefit in kind. Where it is financed via a salary sacrifice, the employee saves on income tax, levies and PRSI.

The employee chooses the bicycle and associated equipment (locks, helmet, pumps and lights) that he or she wants up to €1000. The employer then purchases the equipment on his or her behalf. It is then up to the employee and employer to decide how the bicycle will be paid for, whether the employer buys the bicycle outright for the employee or whether the employee pays for it via the salary sacrifice.

For more information on the bike to work scheme go to the website: www.bikescheme.ie



Mark Lidwell
Age 54, Cavan

At the ripe old age of fifty-four, I have taken up cycling. The object of the exercise is simply to try to remain fit and healthy – I have no illusions of emulating Lance Armstrong! My mount is a Raleigh Pioneer Metro which I imagine is the workhorse of the cycling fraternity as opposed to the racing filly with its downturned handlebars or the steeple-chaser with its tractor tyres.

At the moment I ride out three mornings a week, for anything from thirty minutes to an hour. I tend to set out at an ungodly hour of the morning, which has the advantage of avoiding traffic, as well as neighbours fearing the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Living at the top of a steep hill means an easy start but a ferocious final furlong.

Dress is optional – hitherto I remain lycra-free! Helmet is obligatory. Apart from the usual aches and pains, I do suffer from the embarrassment of saddle-soreness, and am looking into the possibility of investing in padded shorts. My recurring nightmare is a puncture in some out-of-the-way place because, although I do possess a repair kit, the likelihood of carrying out a successful operation on the side of the road is negligible. So I always pray for a safe return.

Basic Bike Maintenance and Repair

Generally if you're a newcomer to cycling any major work on your bike is probably best left to a competent bike mechanic. However, there are a few basic jobs that you should do periodically to ensure your bike runs smoothly and safely.

Tyre Check

Check that your tyres are pumped hard enough. You can use a pressure gauge to see if they are within the recommended pressure range as written on the side of the tyre. This will read something like 60 – 90 PSI (2.8 – 4.6 bar). However, if you don't have a gauge, just squeeze your tyre with your thumb and if it feels soft it is probably too soft.

If your tyres are soft the bike will be harder to ride. Also, if you hit a pothole you can easily get a puncture because the inner tube gets pinched against the side of the pothole. It is also advisable to give each tyre a quick look over for any cuts or debris, nails or thorns lodged in the tyre.





Clean and Lubricate

To prevent a build up of dirt and grime on your bike you should clean it periodically. When a bike is dirty the components will not work as well as they should. Also if you store a dirty or wet bike rust can begin to develop, especially on the chain and sprockets (cogs on the back wheel). If a chain becomes rusty it will not run smoothly or shift gears swiftly.

A bike should be washed down with hot soapy water taking care to remove dirt from all of the awkward places. The best way to reach this dirt is by using cleaning brushes which are available from most bike shops. When cleaning the chain and sprockets it is best to use a degreasing liquid which will break down any build-up of oil and dirt and makes it easier to remove. An old toothbrush can be used for this job. Special chain cleaning devices can be used which pull the chain through a reservoir of degreasing fluid and then through a set of brushes to removed the dirt.

Once the bike is clean, dry it off with an old towel or cloth and then lubricate the chain, derailleur and front mech (gear changing mechanisms). To do this:

- Lightly spray oil onto the chain on the rear sprockets while turning the pedals slowly to ensure the distribution of oil all along the chain. Be careful not to spray oil onto the wheels or tyres.
- As you spin the pedals change the gears up and down a few times so that the oil is also distributed onto all of the sprockets.
- Spray some oil onto the joints on the gear changing mechanisms also.
- Use the oil sparingly – it shouldn't be dripping off when you've finished.
- If you've applied a bit too much oil you can wipe it off with a cloth



Badly rusted chain



Cleaning kit

Fixing a Flat Tyre



1 Releasing the brakes

2 Opening quick release lever

3 Regular wheel nut

If you get a flat while out on a cycle you need to be able to fix it or get someone to come and rescue you! Assuming you want to avoid the latter - here is a step by step guide to fixing a flat tyre.

If you get a flat it's normal to replace the punctured inner tube with a new one. You can bring the punctured one home and repair it later if you want. This section describes the steps required to replace an inner tube.

Step 1. Release the Brakes

Firstly it is usually necessary to release the brakes to allow the wheel to pass through them. On road bikes you can normally do this by flipping the little lever for this purpose. On other bikes you will need to release the cable.

Step 2. Take the wheel off the bike

Next turn the bike upside down. If your bike has quick release wheels, the wheel can be removed by opening the quick release lever by hand. You may also need to loosen the nut a little to allow the wheel to come off. If the wheel is attached by a regular nut it will have to be undone with a spanner.

If you have to take off the back wheel it's a bit more complicated, because you need to get the wheel past the chain. If your bike has multiple gears, change into the smallest cog to make it easier to get the wheel off.

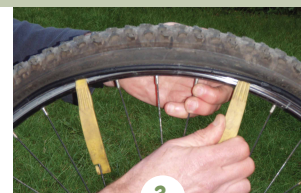
Step 3. Lever tyre off rim

When the wheel is off you need to lever the tyre off the rim on one side to get the tube out.

If the tyre is not fully deflated by now, open the valve and release any residual air. To get the tyre off, first squeeze the edges of the tyre inwards from the edge of the wheel rim. Do this right around the tyre. This makes the tyre easier to remove.

Then insert a tyre lever between the wheel rim and the tyre, and lever the edge of the tyre up over the rim. The tyre lever usually has a little hook on the end which can be hooked onto a spoke to hold it in place. Now get another tyre lever and insert it a bit further along to lever another bit of tyre past the rim. This can sometimes be quite difficult and often requires a lot of force.

After you have a fairly large section of tyre up over the rim, get a third tyre lever and start to lever the rest of the tyre off, working your way around until the whole of one side of the tyre is over the rim.



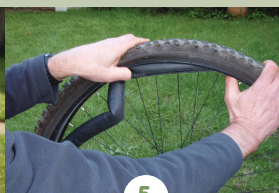
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Removing tyre with tyre levers



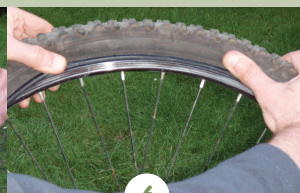
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Removing the tube



5

Fitting the new inner tube



6

Refitting the tyre

Step 4. Remove the inner tube

Now you will be able to remove the inner tube. First push the tyre valve through the hole in the wheel where it sits and pull the inner tube out from between the wheel and the tyre.

Step 5. Fit the new inner tube

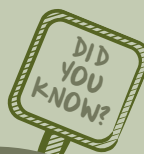
Before you put in a new inner tube it is essential that you feel with your fingers around the inside of the tyre to see if whatever punctured your tube is still stuck in the tyre. For example a thorn or piece of glass may have become lodged in the tyre and when you put in a new tube and pump your tyre it may get punctured again straight away. When doing this, move your fingers slowly and gently around the inside of the tyre to avoid cutting yourself if a sharp object is protruding.

After you have checked the tyre and removed any sharp object, put a small bit of air into the new tube to give it shape before easing it back into the tyre. Firstly, put the valve back through the hole in the wheel and then work the tube in all the way round the tyre.

Step 6. Refit the tyre

Next you need to get the tyre back onto the wheel. Firstly push the tyre on where the valve is located and make sure the valve and the edge of the tyre are fully seated at this location. Pull the valve out fully and if there is a retaining ring, screw this down fully to keep the valve in place. Then push the tyre onto the wheel all the way round with your fingers until it becomes too difficult to get any more of the tyre on. At this stage you may need to use the tyre levers to get the last part of the tyre on. At this point it is essential that you don't get the tube caught between the outer tyre and the rim. If this happens the tube can get nipped and it can rupture as soon as you start pumping it again. Pump the tyre and check that it remains hard.

Once the tyre has been pumped, refit the wheel, making sure it is firmly attached and reattach the brakes.



Cycling is a relatively inexpensive activity to engage in. While there may be an initial cost of purchasing a bike, the upkeep and maintenance is very cheap. Also, a good bicycle will last you decades.

Joining a Cycling Club

Cycling alone, with your family or with a group of friends can be very enjoyable but you may want to consider joining a cycling club for the many benefits that brings. There are clubs which cater for all types of cycling – some are specific road cycling clubs, some are Mountain Biking Clubs and some cater for all disciplines. A full list of cycling clubs in the country can be found in the Club Directory on the Cycling Ireland website www.cyclingireland.ie



Benefits of being in a club

- New members can quickly pick up valuable tips from experienced members.
- Cycling clubs usually have organised group cycles for members of all levels.
- Being involved in a club group cycle you can try out new routes without the need to worry about finding your way and this can lead to you venturing further afield.
- If you are interested in long road cycles it is especially beneficial to cycle with a group, as the effort required can be significantly reduced. Typically in a group, riders take turns riding at the front and for a rider in the slipstream of another rider the effort required can be reduced by as much as 40%.
- Members encourage each other to get out cycling when enthusiasm is flagging.
- If you have arranged to go cycling with a group you are more likely to stick to that arrangement than if you plan to go out alone – especially if the weather turns out to be not as nice as you hoped!
- Being a member of a cycling club can improve your cycling ability and skills and give you the confidence to move up to a higher level and take on more challenging cycling endeavours such as sportives or cycle racing.
- Cycling is a great sport for meeting people and becoming a member of a cycling club is a great way of socialising.



Cycling Ireland



All recognised cycling clubs are affiliated to Cycling Ireland which is the National Governing Body for the sport of cycling on the island of Ireland affiliated to the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI). To be a member of a club you have to be a member of Cycling Ireland. You can be a member of Cycling Ireland without being a member of a specific Cycling Club. As a member of Cycling Ireland you will enjoy various benefits:

Insurance: you will be covered for personal injury, and third party damage/liability. This cover extends to training and events.

Events: once you become a member of Cycling Ireland you will get a yearbook, which has, among other information, a calendar of events for road racing, off-road racing and leisure tours. Throughout the year the weekends are full of events in which you can participate.

Newsletter: "Braking News" is a monthly online quarterly newsletter made available to members, keeping them up to date with what's going on.

If there is no cycling club in your area and you form a small cycling group with a bunch of friends there is no reason that this cannot evolve into a formal cycling club in due course if numbers increase, and become affiliated to Cycling Ireland. For further information on the formation of a club contact Cycling Ireland by email at info@cyclingireland.ie and request a club starter pack.

Moving up a Gear

The beauty of cycling is that it can be enjoyed at many levels depending on your interests and ambitions. Your optimum enjoyment may be achieved by a 2km cycle around the block or by a 30,000km cycle around the world – albeit taking a bit longer! There are numerous possibilities and once you get some experience cycling you will begin to know if you want to ‘move up a gear’ and take your cycling to the next level or just carry on the way you are. Here are some ideas you may want to consider:

Cycle Tours or Sportives

Cycle tours or sportives, are long distance, organised, mass participation cycling events. For most participants, they could be likened to the cycling equivalent of running a marathon, however, a sportive is not actually a race. The idea is that participants complete a set course, usually between 50km and 200km. Organisers typically offer two distance choices and sometimes also a short family focused distance. The course is marked and there are marshals and food and water stations along the route. While the roads are not usually closed, other road users will be well aware that there is an event going on.

While some of the participants in sportives are long time experienced cyclists, these events are open to everyone. However, they are not intended for the occasional cyclist and, as in the case of running a marathon, they require a level of fitness and endurance, which will require suitable training in advance. To participate in the longer courses on events like this, it is recommended that you read the Cycling Ireland publication ‘Introduction to Cycling’ which is also aimed at those quite new to cycling but more advanced than this guide.

There are numerous such events run in Ireland including the events run as part of the An Post Cycle Series supported by the Irish Sports Council. The series has been run since 2009 and typically includes 5 events at different locations:

- An Post Tour of Sligo (May)
- An Post Tour de Burren (June)
- An Post Heritage Cycle Tour of Meath (July)
- Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford (August)
- An Post Rebel Tour of Cork (September)



Cycling provides a resistance, endurance and cardiovascular workout all in one.

The An Post Cycle Series has seen over 10,000 riders take part over the five events. The series has something for all including clubs, friends, families, work colleagues and serious riders. At each event as well as the long course there is a middle distance course and a short course of around 10km which would suit any cyclist including families. These events are co-ordinated by Local Sports Partnerships in conjunction with their city, county and cycling club partners.

To take part, find a Tour near you and contact the local organisers for more information. For general information see www.irishsportsCouncil.ie



Gillian Costelloe
Age 31, Dublin

Working in the Irish Sports Council I got involved in the An Post Cycle Series two years ago, both cycling and volunteering in the events. I cycled to work previously but only really got interested in cycling through the Cycle Series. My first event was 60km and I progressed onto the 100km and 160km. I love cycling for fitness and find it much easier than running which I always hated. I love the fact that you can go out on the bike on a Saturday morning and get 5 or 6 hours of cardio exercise with little effort. Since I got into cycling I have met several cycling buddies and have encouraged some of my own friends to get into the sport. I don't have an interest in racing but love taking part in "sportives" or leisure events where you meet people of all ages and cycling abilities.

I have 2 bikes – a Felt F65 road bike & Specialized Rockhopper Comp mountain bike.





Racing

Many cycling clubs have a racing league (Road Racing or Mountain Bike Racing depending on the club) and it is possible for any cyclist who has a suitable bike and has reached a suitable level of fitness to participate in cycle races. You will also need a Cycling Ireland racing licence to participate in races.

It is outside the scope of this guide to discuss racing and the preparation needed for races. However, If cycle racing is something you think you might enjoy have a read of the Cycling Ireland publication 'Introduction to Cycling'. This guide is a slightly more advanced guide and has all the information you will need to know if you are to move to this level. The Cycling Ireland website www.cyclingireland.ie will also include a list of fixtures throughout the year.

Audax

Audax is a form of long-distance cycling where riders have to complete a lengthy and often very tough route within specified time limits. Each rider has to visit a series of checkpoints along the route. The time limit for these events is quite generous, being determined by a minimum average speed of 15km/h which is well within the capabilities of any moderately fit cyclist. As with most endurance sports the challenge lies in possessing the determination to carry on when tiredness sets in. Audax distances begin where most sportive (see *Sportives* above) distances leave off, at the 200km mark. Audax event distances include 200, 300, 400 and 600km to multi-day rides of 1000km and more, including the most famous audax event of all, the 1200km Paris-Brest-Paris. In general, audax tends to attract experienced cyclists who enjoy long hours in the saddle. For more details see www.audaxireland.org.

Cycle Touring/Cycling Holidays

If you like a little bit of adventure and freedom, cycle touring may be something you'd like to try. To start with you could try a cycle tour involving one or two overnight stops. This would give you a good idea for what's involved. Typically, when overnight touring you'll need to carry some clothes and gear with you. This will usually be in panniers mounted on your bike and they can be both front and back. Some people like to use a bike trailer.

For overnight stays you might choose to stay in hotels, B&B's, hostels or if you are really adventurous or on a tight budget camping might be ideal for you.



If you like the idea of touring but don't want to carry your gear, you might consider making arrangements with many of the commercial operators who organise cycle tours. Operators like this can organise an entire cycling holiday for you. This can include accommodation arrangements and carrying your gear each day to your accommodation for that night. If you don't have a suitable bike, they can provide this to you and they can also provide you with a guide or you can fend for yourself each day.

For more information see cycling link on www.discoverireland.ie

Leave No Trace - good practice for cyclists



All cyclists are encouraged to apply the Leave No Trace ethic when out biking.

The Seven Principles of Leave No Trace are:

1 Plan Ahead and Prepare

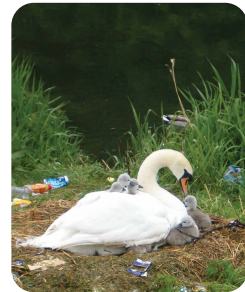
- Be self-sufficient at all times. Know your equipment, your ability, the area in which you plan to ride and prepare accordingly.
- Keep your bike well maintained and carry spares, tools and supplies sufficient for the nature and duration of your ride.

2 Be Considerate of Others

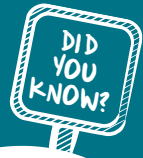
- Including other cyclists, pedestrians and other road users
- When cycling off-road, let your fellow trail users know you're coming. A friendly greeting or bell is considerate and works well; don't startle others. Show your respect when passing by slowing to a walking pace or even stopping.

3 Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife

- Let nature's sounds prevail. Keep noise to a minimum.
- When cycling off-road, look out for animals as they may be startled by an unannounced approach, a sudden movement or a loud noise.
- Take special care when passing horses and follow directions from the riders (ask if uncertain).



Further information on responsible outdoor recreation is available on www.leavenotraceireland.org



With petrol and diesel prices rising, more people are turning to cycling as a viable way of reaching their destination - cycling can save you money on fuel.

4 Travel and Camp on Durable Ground

- Practice low-impact cycling and be sensitive to the trail beneath you.
- Use designated off-road cycling trails and avoid cycling on wet and muddy trails as they are more vulnerable to damage.

5 Leave What You Find

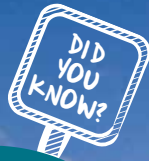
- Respect property.
- Leave gates as you find them (open or closed).

6 Dispose of Waste Properly

- "Pack It In - Pack It Out" - taking home all litter and leftover food (including tea bags, fruit peels and other biodegradable foods).
- Bring home toilet paper!

7 Minimise the Effects of Fire





Cycling is a fantastic cardio exercise that can fit into any weight loss programme. If you can ride for at least thirty minutes, four days per week, you will be provided with the recommended fitness activity level.



Jenny Corrie
Age 24, Swords

I used to enjoy going for a run, however I developed a knee injury and had to give up running. Feeling disheartened I stopped exercising for a while and became a bit of a couch potato until I decided to give cycling a go.

I had always thought of cycling as something that was not for me, but decided I'd give it a try anyway as I had a perfectly good bike in the shed. So I wiped the cobwebs off my bike and set off on a short spin. Although I began my cycling in an effort to get fit again I began to quickly see some of the other benefits. After a day spent at work I soon realised that cycling was a great way to re-energize, de-stress and unwind. Going out for 20 minutes soon turned into 40 minutes and instead of wondering if I'd cycled enough for today I found myself wondering if I have enough time to cycle a bit longer and where can I go next.

I used to think that Swords, where I live, had no 'good' places to go cycling. However I soon discovered a maze of interesting routes, from quiet back roads in the countryside to beautiful seaside spins along Swords estuary into Malahide and Portmarnock.

My bike is a Lapierre LP4.



Web Guide

www.irishtrails.ie



irishtrails.ie is a new website from the National Trails Office, providing information on all developed walking and cycling trails in Ireland. The site also carries information on new greenways, canoe trails and horse riding trails.

The site offers a very good interactive trail search feature where anyone can search for and find trails in any county. It also links with other agency websites which provide information on trails. The site carries detailed information on all Long Distance Waymarked trails and lists trail events being organised around the country each month.

So how does this site work?

To find a trail:

1. You can click on one of the counties on the map on the home page which takes you to a map of that county. Clicking on any of the pins will get you to the information page for the trail you've chosen where there's lots of detail about it. You can also view a full list of the trails in that county and by clicking on the trail name this will bring you to more information about that trail.
2. You can also use the drop down menu below the map on the home page to find different types of trails.
3. For almost all of the trails you can print out a map to take with you when you go.



What else can I find on the site?

1. There's a section on trail user advice with information to help you plan your walk and lots of background details.
2. The Trail Events page tells you what is going on around the country.
3. Trail News is full of nuggets of information on what's happening related to trails.

Overall, Irishtrails.ie is a one stop shop for information on trails in Ireland and is a great resource so click on and see what cycling trails are in your locality, just waiting to be discovered.

National Bike Week

Ireland's Bike Week takes place each year in June.

This annual event aims to encourage more people to get on their bikes on a regular basis.

Cycling is a super option for shorter journeys – not only will it often get you to your destination more quickly than by car or by public transport, it's a relaxing and fun way to travel. It's also the healthy option – regular exercise has an acknowledged role in combating obesity and improving mental wellness.

Events will be organised throughout the 32 counties over the week.

Visit Bike Week at www.bikeweek.ie and follow the event on Facebook





National Trails Day

National Trails Day is an annual event that celebrates Ireland's wonderful variety of trails and encourages people from all over the country to either organise or take part in trail events around the country. An estimated 10,000 people took part in over 180 events organised as part of National Trails Day in 2010 including guided walks, cycles, paddles, nature walks, runs and many others.

For more information on events being organised as part of National Trails Day in your county or how to get involved with the event, visit www.nationaltrailsday.ie

The National Trails Office



national trails office
An Irish Sports Council Initiative

The National Trails Office (NTO) is a programme run by the Irish Sports Council building on the work of the former National Waymarked Way Advisory Committee (NWWAC). The programme is focused on supporting the development of a diverse and sustainable recreational trails network in Ireland. This will encourage many more people to become active in outdoor recreation and will contribute to the Council's overall mission of increasing participation among all Irish people in all forms of sport and physical activity.

The NTO seeks to act as a central resource to all individuals, agencies and organisations with an interest in recreational trails in Ireland, be they for walking, cycling, horse-riding or paddling in both urban and rural environments. The corner stone of this support is in setting and monitoring standards for Irish trails and promoting good practice for recreational trail development, maintenance & management. The main areas of work of the National Trails office include:

- **Trail Standards and Classification**

Development of trail management standards and a trail classification and grading system.

- **National Trails Register**

Management and maintenance of a register of all accredited trails in the country.

- **Trails Inspection Programme**

Inspection of new trails and ongoing annual inspections of all accredited trails.

- **Walks Scheme**

Support for National Scheme for landowners undertaking maintenance.

- **Trail Development Advice**

Provision of advice to trail developers at a pre-planning stage in a trail project.

- **Technical Trail Advisory Service**

Provision of detailed technical advice to trail providers regarding the improvement of existing trails or the development of new trails.

- **Education and Training**

Provision of training programmes related to the planning, development and ongoing management of trails.

- **Trail Promotion and Awareness Building**

- **Trail Research**



Useful Contacts & Websites

National Trails Office/ Irish Sports Council

Top Floor, Block A,
Westend Office Park,
Blanchardstown,
Dublin 15
Tel: 01 8608800
Email: nto@irishsportsCouncil.ie
Web: www.irishtrails.ie - information
on trails, including cycle trails, in ROI

Cycling Ireland

(National Governing Body for Cycling)
Cycling Ireland,
Kelly Roche House,
619 North Circular Road,
Dublin 1
Tel: 01 8551522
Email: info@cyclingireland.ie
Web: www.cyclingireland.ie

Coillte

(State Forestry Company)
Newtownmountkennedy,
Co. Wicklow
Tel: 01 2011111
Email: pr@coillte.ie
Web: www.coillte.ie
Also www.coillteoutdoors.ie -
information on recreational
opportunities in Coillte forests

WEBSITES:

www.womenscycling.ie

Woman specific site run by Cycling Ireland

www.cycleNI.com

Provides information on cycle routes in NI

www.discoverireland.ie

Fáilte Ireland website with lots of cycling
information and information on
accommodation

www.dublincitycycling.ie

Dublin City Cycling website is a Dublin City
Council project led by dublin.ie and Roads &
Traffic Department.

www.cyclist.ie

Ireland's National Cycling Lobby Group

www.mbi.ie

Advocacy group promoting responsible
mountain biking in Ireland

www.mtbireland.com

General mountain biking site

www.mountainbiking.ie

Another general mountain biking site

www.bikescheme.ie

Bike to work website

www.boards.ie

Forum website where there is a very active
cycling forum

wiki.boards.ie/wiki/Links

A compendium of cycling links from boards.ie

www.leavenotraceireland.org

Leave No Trace website



MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS:

Ordnance Survey Ireland

Tel: 01 802-5379,

E-mail: mapsales@osi.ie

Web: www.osi.ie

EastWest Mapping

Tel: 053 9377835

E-mail: info@eastwestmapping.ie

Web: www.eastwestmapping.ie

WEATHER INFORMATION:

Met Éireann – Weather Services

Web Link: www.met.ie

Weather Dial:

Munster 1550 123 850

Ulster 1550 123 853

Leinster 1550 123 851

Connacht 1550 123 852

Dublin 1550 123 854

Sea Area 1550 123 855

EMERGENCY SERVICES:

Diall 999 or 112

Summary of Bike Types

Road Bike/Racing Bike

Description

Traditional lightweight bike with skinny tyres and dropped handlebars. Designed for longer faster rides and made to be as efficient as possible for speed, climbing hills and descending.



Pros

- Fast
- Light
- Good for cycling uphill (also for carrying upstairs if you need to for storage)
- Very efficient so easier to pedal than other types of bikes
- Can be used for racing, triathlons, sportives (e.g. An Post Series)

Cons

- Thin tyres need to be pumped hard so ride is harsher compared to bikes with thicker tyres and not really suitable for use off-road
- Small saddle, drop handlebars and riding position may feel uncomfortable for some
- Often no space to fit mudguards so can be uncomfortable in wet weather conditions
- May not be suitable for fitting a carrier

Ideal use

Longer road cycles, training and even racing. Can be used for any type of cycling apart from off-road. Unless it has inserts for mounting a carrier it will not be suited to touring with panniers.

Mountain Bike

Description

Designed for going off-road and is therefore more robustly constructed than other bikes. Has strong wheels, knobby tyres, flat handlebars and low gearing to allow you to pedal up steep inclines. Most bikes have front suspension, known as a 'hardtail' bike or front and rear suspension known as a 'full suspension' bike. Often known as MTB.



Pros

- Robust design means excellent durability
- Reduced chance of flat tyres and bent rims because of thick tyres and strong wheels
- Very comfortable due to wide tyres and upright seating position and suspension
- Copes well on rough roads and off-road
- Can be used on the road as well (although needs more effort to pedal than a bike with narrower tyres)

Cons

- Can be ridden on the road but isn't efficient for long distances (narrower road going tyres can be fitted to improve it for road use)
- Can be quite heavy – apart from very expensive models
- Despite robustness and suitability for carrying luggage not all bikes have suitable mounting points for a carrier rack
- MTB's are attractive to thieves

Ideal use

Off-road riding, but can be used anywhere. Can be fitted with tyres suitable for use on road but not recommended for long distance road cycles because it is slower than a bike intended solely for road use.

Hybrid Bike

Description

A bike designed primarily for road use but can be used on smooth off-road conditions as well, such as forestry roads, gravel roads, etc. In between a road bike and a mountain bike it has a sturdier frame than a road bike and thicker tyres. The riding position is upright.



Pros

- Comfortable riding position
- Durable
- Lighter than a mountain bike.
- Usually good for fitting a carrier
- Flexible – can be used on surfaced and unsurfaced roads

Cons

- Neither ideal as a road bike or a mountain bike so not great on the road or off the road
- Not as fast or efficient as a road bike so not ideal for distance riding, though better suited for it than an MTB

Ideal use

Fitness riding on and off road, commuting and a means of transport in general.

Dutch Bike

Description

Traditional old style bike still very popular in some northern European countries. Sometimes seen as a fashionable bike to ride.



Pros

- Upright position comfortable for use over short distances
- Often good for short commutes in business dress – has chain guard, dress guard and mudguards
- Step through design suitable for women in dresses/skirts
- Very sturdy and durable

Cons

- Often very heavy
- Not suitable for long distance cycling
- Big frame and wide handlebars – needs plenty of storage space

Ideal use

Short commutes or local transport

Flat Bar Street Bike

Description

Very similar to a road bike in all respects but with flat handlebars instead of drop handlebars.



Pros

- More comfortable and easier to handle in traffic than a drop bar bike

Cons

- Has everything except the drop bars so less suitable for sport or competitive cycling than a regular road bike

Ideal use

Fitness cycling, long rides, commuting and a means of transport in general.

Cyclocross Bike

Description

Designed for use in the sport of cyclocross which involves cycling on a grass surface. Looks like a road bike but has slightly bigger tyres and brakes more like a mountain bike. Has become popular outside the sport of cyclocross as a sturdy road bike with tyres changed to road tyres



Pros

- Sturdy construction and more comfortable to ride because of the slightly wider tyres
- Can be used on off-road surfaces

Cons

- May not be as good on the open road or in the hills as a purpose built road bike

Ideal use

Fitness cycling, commuting and a means of transport in general.

Single Speed/Fixed Gear

Description

Road bike with one gear only. Can have freewheel or fixed gear which means the pedals go round all the time. Originally designed for track racing. (Single speed MTB's are also available)



Pros

- Very simple to maintain

Cons

- No gears so difficult to cycle in hilly terrain

Ideal use

Fitness cycling, commuting and a means of transport in general

Road Sport/Audax/Sportive Bike

Description

A variation of the road bike with longer wheelbase for more comfort than a true racing bike and lower gearing to help in the hills. Can usually be fitted with slightly wider tyres, as well as mudguards and a carrier. This is often not possible on a true racing bike.

Pros

- More comfortable than a racing bike

Cons

- Slightly heavier

Ideal use

Fitness rides, long distance events, commuting, distance touring.



Touring Bike

Description

Designed for cycling touring over long distances carrying luggage. Can have drop or flat handlebars. Usually has carrier to carry panniers, front and rear.

Pros

- Very sturdy and stable with panniers

Cons

- Can be quite heavy

Ideal use

Cycle touring, commuting and a means of transport in general



Folding Bike

Description

A bike designed to fold up so that it can be carried as luggage on public transport or in the boot of a car. Most often used by commuters who use public transport for part of their trip and cycle the rest.

Pros

- Perfect for commutes involving public transport and easy to store



Cons

- Good quality models are expensive

Ideal use

Commuting and a means of local transport in general

Guide to Bike Parts

The picture below shows all of the main parts on a bike.



For a very detailed glossary of bicycle and cycling related terms have a look at this website www.sheldonbrown.com/glossary.html



DID
YOU
KNOW?

Getting outside and into nature will provide you not only with some beautiful sights and picture perfect views, but it can help you fight stress. Being out in the sunlight is proven to help fight depression and reduce your stress level.



national trails office
An Irish Sports Council Initiative

National Trails Office

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