

OUR PLACE *News*

The monthly magazine dedicated to help everyone over 50 get the best out of life!

JUNE 2022

Inside this issue...

Garden longevity:

Could you extend your life and drop your stress by taking up the pursuit, too?

The Great British 'chippy':

Seaside fish and chip shops are a national treasure. Here are 20 of the best

Lost lanes of the Midlands:

Five great cycle routes in the heart of England

Play some Kylie, keep it short and enlist your friends!

The beginner's guide to loving exercise

PLUS...

What's on • Health & Beauty • Money & Work • Leisure & Travel
Food & Drink • Arts, Crafts & Hobbies • Home & Garden

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to Our Place - The monthly magazine dedicated to help everyone over 50 get the best out of life!

Every month, we bring you news and features on; Health & Beauty, Money & Work, Leisure & Travel, Food & Drink, Arts, Crafts & Hobbies, Home & Garden, plus... our Charity of the Month!

Our Place was founded with a mission to connect the mature online community to a world of news, features, offers and life changing products they may have missed out on. Bring them all into one place, Our Place.

What makes us special is that we are a vibrant team of all ages, from 21 to 65 who are all passionate about living life to the fullest irrespective of age. We have built strong relationships with some of the best UK age related businesses with the aim of brokering discounted rates for our Over-50s community.

Become a Friend of Our Place and receive our exclusive newsletters. They are a great way of keeping updated with the latest news and promotions. We aim to bring a smile to your face every time you open your inbox by selecting exclusive vouchers and discounts just for you.

We welcome you and hope you enjoy Our Place.

The Editor - Our Place

PS. Do you have an interesting story or article? If so send us an email by visiting: www.ourplace.co

CONTENTS

What's On	3
Health & Lifestyle Feature	
The beginner's guide to loving exercise	4-7
Health & Lifestyle News	8-9
Leisure & Travel Feature	
Five great cycle routes in the Midlands	10-13
Food & Drink Feature	
20 of the best seaside fish & chips	14-15
Home & Garden Feature	
Garden longevity	16-17
Our Charity of the Month	18

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Horse Racing: Royal Ascot 2022

From 14th - 18th June 2022

Ascot, Berkshire

Britain's most popular race meeting attracts the world's finest racehorses, jockeys and trainers for five days of top-class racing. The racing highlights include the Diamond Jubilee Stakes, the Queen Anne Stakes and the Gold Cup. It is Britain's most valuable race meet and prize money for the week totals millions of pounds.

The history of Royal Ascot

You'll have the chance to spot members of the Royal Family, including the Queen herself who often attends the event, which is steeped in unique tradition, heritage and pageantry. Founded by Queen Anne in 1711, the event features a daily horse-drawn procession from Windsor Castle to Ascot Racecourse led by the royal carriage. The Queen has also enjoyed considerable success at Royal Ascot over the years, having owned many winners including Estimate, which won the Gold Cup in 2013.

Tickets for Royal Ascot

There are four levels of tickets for Royal Ascot:

- Windsor Enclosure tickets are the cheapest tickets. There is no formal dress code, so it's a great way to catch all the racing action on a budget.
- With Village Enclosure tickets you can enjoy the race as well as pop-up restaurants, cocktail bars and all-day entertainment including DJ sets and live bands.
- Queen Anne Enclosure tickets give you access to excellent facilities and entertainment, including military bands and a traditional sing-along after racing each day.
- Access to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot is restricted to those who have been sponsored for membership. Overseas visitors may also apply to their embassy or high commission for badges.

Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships

From 27th June to 10th July 2022

Wimbledon, West London

Experience two weeks of first-class tennis, served with strawberries and cream, at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships.

The world of tennis descends on Wimbledon in south-west London every summer for the longest-running tennis tournament in the world, and one of four annual Grand Slam tennis events held around the globe.

Games are still played on the original playing surface, grass, and there's a strict white-only dress code for players.

The tournament attracts around 500,000 spectators including the royal family and millions of TV viewers worldwide.

2022 is a historical year for Wimbledon. Not only does it mark 100 years of Centre Court, but also the permanent introduction of play on the Middle Sunday for the first time. 2022 also welcomes the first year of the 14&U Junior Championships.

Wimbledon tickets: in advance

There was no public ballot for tickets in 2022. Guests who were successful in the 2020 public ballot have been offered the same day and court for 2022. Fans can register for ballot returns. Hundreds of tickets are also released daily throughout the tournament.

Wimbledon tickets: on the day

Almost uniquely for a major sporting event, Wimbledon offers spectators the chance to buy premium tickets on the day - but be prepared to queue! Check back later for more information on ticket on-day sales.

History of Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships

The Lawn Tennis Championships at Wimbledon have developed from the first meeting in 1877, witnessed by a few spectators, to a highly professional tournament attracting an attendance of close to 500,000 people. Players from more than 60 nations compete in front of a crowd of millions worldwide, through press, radio, internet and television.

Father's Day

19th June 2022

And don't forget to treat the 'old man' to a pint this Father's Day on 19th June!



Play some Kylie, keep it short and enlist your friends! The beginner's guide to loving exercise

There are many reasons people struggle to get fit. Here's how to build an effective fitness routine that you'll stick to - and (mostly) enjoy.

Looking around the streets and parks of the UK, or scrolling through #fitspo workout selfies on social media, it can sometimes feel as if everyone is exercising: running, weightlifting, wild swimming or competing in Ironman triathlons. In reality a huge 12.4 million of us are inactive. But why?

It's often a combination of reasons: time, money, health, feeling unsure where to start, mobility problems, being intimidated by gyms, or even scarred by school PE lessons.

Then came Covid. "Our latest Active Lives survey found that activity levels are now starting to recover after the disruptions of the pandemic," says Kate Dale of Sport England. "But the pandemic exacerbated existing lower activity levels for certain groups of people.

Women, lower-income households, people from Black and south Asian backgrounds and those with a long-term health condition or disability are still less likely to be active. In challenging times, boosting our health and wellbeing through movement - be it a walk, swim, jog, a dance or a fitness class - is essential."

But taking that first step can feel overwhelming. According to Paralympic cycling and swimming Olympic champion Sarah Storey, "people are still struggling to access activity that they are confident in doing; we still need to find a way to enable people to have that confidence to get started." So I asked some experts and recent converts for tips - Lycra optional.

Work out how you're talking yourself out of exercise

Guilt at taking time away from family; a belief it's too late; the "I can't train yet because I'm too unfit" mindset - trainers have heard it all. "Identity is a huge part of it," says Robbie Thompson, a trainer and coach who has worked with Northumbria police and Deloitte.

"If you've spent your whole life being inactive, how you view yourself and how others view you is based on that identity and it's a huge shift to start to pull at those seams." Men in particular, he says, have an expectation that they should already be strong. It's a sentiment echoed by my friend Simon, who says:

"There is often a feeling of 'the other guys are laughing at how little weight I'm lifting.'" For Thompson, it's often a case of persuading men to "start where you are. Focus on what you can do, make small changes: they have an enormous impact when you do them consistently."

Be realistic

"You get trainers who say: 'We all have the same 24 hours a day,'" says Hannah Verdier, who only started exercising in her early 40s and is now a personal trainer in south London. "We haven't!"



Thompson agrees. "People have families and work and they're sleep deprived," he says. "Training is a stress: a positive stress, but a stress. It's a good reason to start sensibly in terms of how you pitch the intensity."

Do a little, regularly...

"Nobody is motivated all the time," says Sarah Scudamore of Mumology Movement. Aim for little and often: "It's easier to build a habit by doing something for five minutes each day than to spend 45 minutes three or four times a week."

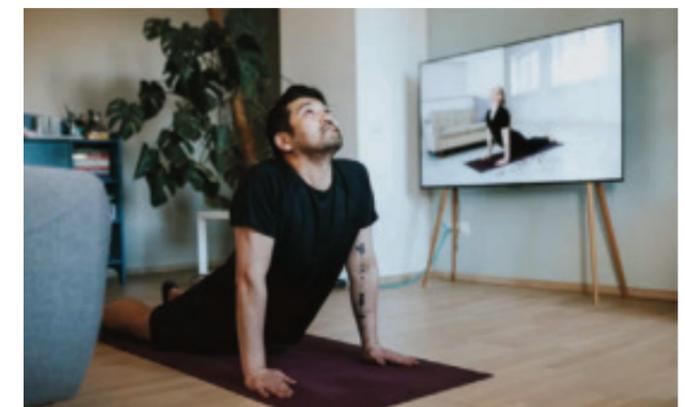
"There's no scientific reason we exercise for an hour," reminds Verdier. Search for something short online, from 20 minutes of absolute beginner's yoga with Adriene to the Couch to Fitness five-minute "bite-size" sessions.

...but let yourself off

"Lots of Instagram influencers say: 'You'll never regret a workout, no excuses.' I don't believe that," says Verdier. Sometimes life will get in the way, and that's OK. "I don't want people to think, 'I've got to do this three times every week' - because you just don't," she adds. "If you're going to be doing it for the next 20 or 30 years, what does it matter?"

Bridge the 'enjoyment gap'...

To really exorcise the ghost of school cross-country runs, look for something you find fun. This Girl Can classes are "designed to tackle the enjoyment gap," says trainer Lisa Brockwell.



"We're looking at people that haven't exercised, or haven't exercised for some time - we already know they're not comfortable, but we're going to try to make it as fun as we can."

The "bite-size" class format over nine weeks gives participants the chance to try lots of different things - boxing, yoga-based stretching, circuits - in a relaxed, no-pressure, non-judgmental environment.

Instructors are trained to be empathic and to adapt to all levels of mobility and fitness, says Brockwell. "That's really important, that ability to go: 'It's fine, just come on in, let's see how we can make this work for you.' And if it doesn't go right, it doesn't matter!"

...but don't expect to enjoy every session

People who exercise aren't some breed apart who actually want to go out for a run in the rain. My friend Robbie, an apparent exercise fiend, surprised me by saying:

"One central truth about exercise is that, pretty much universally, no one wants to do it." Thompson agrees: "I don't in any way feel motivated to do my run today. Most days I don't. Don't think about how you feel beforehand - think about how you're going to feel afterwards."

Continued on pages 6-7...



Tap into specialist resources

“The challenge for people who have long-term health conditions, physical disabilities or visual impairments is knowing the right place to start,” says Storey, adding that this is particularly true for older people.

“It’s only in recent times that inclusivity has been championed.” She recommends using the Parasport site to find activities in your area.

For cycling, Storey says Wheels for All centres are a great place to start. “Support staff will help you at the right pace, and help you find the right equipment as well.”

Do it from home

An upside of the pandemic has been the explosion of online exercise options: Joe Wicks was just the muscular tip of the iceberg.

The free online Couch to Fitness site offers a nine-week programme of 30-minute sessions combining cardio, strength and flexibility elements. Amanda Oliver is a convert: “You don’t need much space.

There isn’t too much jumping to annoy the downstairs neighbours. It’s on demand, so no travel time (or cost!) or hanging about waiting for a class to start and you haven’t got the barrier of having to be outside in the pouring rain.”

The classes also offer three coaches doing three different levels simultaneously, meaning there is always a modified option: “You’re never left staring at the screen thinking, ‘That’s impossible.’”



Measure your progress

“People convince themselves they’re not making any progress, but they’ve got no point of reference,” says Thompson.

“Most of my coaching is pointing out what’s already happening to people who are too hard on themselves: a lifetime of it not working makes them think it’s not going to.”

Notice and log your progress. That needn’t be running for longer, building muscle or losing weight; it could be having more energy, being more patient with your kids, or improved sleep.

Enlist a friend (or two)

“If there are two of you, you’re more likely to go,” says Brockwell. “And you’ll have a laugh.” Verdier agrees:

“I teach a group of women and, on the morning of the class, the excuses will come out - but someone will say, ‘Oh come on, it’s sunny! We’ll have a coffee afterwards!’” Having a mate you don’t want to let down keeps you coming.

Or find your gang

For beginner cyclists, “it’s trying to create that network of friendly faces and people who understand what you’re going through,” says Storey.

She is supporting the She Can Ride campaign, for women who want to get into cycling but don’t know where to start, or are intimidated by the kit and busy roads.

She Can Ride helps women find local cycling clubs and groups who can provide a supportive environment. Or hit your local cycle shop: “a fountain of all knowledge,” according to Storey.

“There might be someone in the shop who’s going out for a ride, or they can direct you to a local path or track.”

Use music

Whatever you’re trying, stick some music on. “It transforms your mood,” says Verdier, who swears by “late 90s rave” and Kylie to get people moving.

Recovering from a bad bout of Covid and weak as a kitten, I tried out Couch to Fitness’s mini Couch to Bhangra and Afroblacks courses: at nine or 10 minutes a session, they’re about my level, and the high-energy beats and easy choreography made my faltering steps back into movement properly fun.

Try dance

Dance is absorbing and joyful: it can feel less like a workout and more like a good time.

The Swing Dance Company offers online or in-person free trials for their Absolute Beginners course, which is suitable for people who have never taken a dance class in their lives.

The Royal Academy of Dance Silver Swans classes, online and in person, welcomes older learners who “don’t know their plié from their pointe”.

Hit the park

Our Parks offers a range of exercise classes in London parks, and the justly famous parkrun gets people across the UK and beyond running every Saturday morning: they’re both free.

Or use the Move the Masses map to find fitness trails and outdoor equipment near you.



Check out chair-based

The NHS has a seated pilates workout on its website and many local authorities offer chair-based exercise or yoga classes. Joe Wicks also has some chair-based routines on his Body Coach YouTube channel.

Go for a wander

The best, easiest way to start is just to open the front door, go out and walk. “You don’t need special kit, you can do it anywhere, and it’s so good for your mental health,” says Thompson. “Just get outside in the fresh air,” urges Storey. “A 10-minute walk massively changes your health outcomes.”

Rest!

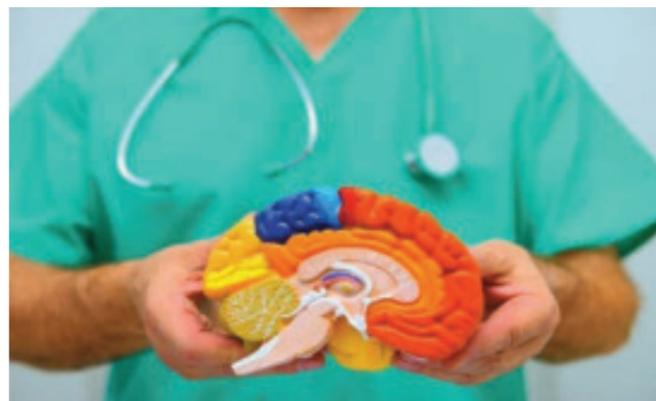
“Your training is only as effective as your recovery,” says Thompson. “Make sure you’re having rest days where you allow your body to reboot.”

Scudamore recommends checking in on your sleep and energy levels before you go all-in on a new exercise routine: “If you already feel absolutely shattered, you’re more likely to give up after a few weeks when burnout hits.”

(Article source: The Guardian)

Researchers found that music 'can treat brain illness like Parkinson's'

MUSIC therapy can have a life changing influence on Parkinson's sufferers and help them to regain functional skills, experts claim.



The Express reports that one of the keys in treating the devastating brain condition can lie in rhythmical exercises. Rebecca Atkinson, researcher with the University of Brighton, said: "It's thought the reason it works is because it can activate and stimulate so many different parts of the brain simultaneously."

"Research shows that music can uniquely form new connections in the brain. Listening to music also improves neuron repair better than other activities - such as listening to an audiobook."

"Music is believed to have longlasting effects on the brain, too, so much so that a musician's brain is actually better connected than people who haven't played music."

Ms Atkinson wrote in an online blog that she believes this could open the door to improved treatment for people living with Parkinson's.

Though she stressed "more research needs to be done before neurological music therapy is used widely," she believes it could improve recovery quicker than other standard therapies.

One of those who finds music beneficial is Jonny Acheson, 47. Diagnosed in 2016, he relies on melodic sounds to ease his symptoms when his medication wears off.

The NHS emergency medicine consultant, from Leicester, said he often becomes "very stiff" down his left side and, between doses, he is anxious, tired and his thinking becomes slow.

Mr Acheson felt "isolated and unmotivated", for years, but said: "When I listen to music at these times, my movement is more fluid and it helps with walking."

"For me, it is all about the rhythm or the beat of the music. If you pick that up, it definitely helps with the fluidity of the movement."

"But it also helps me to relax and concentrate. It is just another part of the management of my Parkinson's, one that I actually enjoy."

The father of two wants to inspire other Parkinson's sufferers to take control of their disease to make everyday tasks more manageable.

He added: "Music and exercise combined have improved the quality of my life - it would definitely be harder without my music."

Jane Gilmour, 75, from Hertfordshire, was diagnosed nine years ago and a pal suggested dance classes in 2016.

She said: "Music can be uplifting and it can be relaxing. You don't know what the future holds and some days this makes me feel really down. When I feel like that, I put on music and it gets me going. My favourite is Another One Bites The Dust by Queen. I would hate to be without music."

Parkinson's UK estimates 145,000 people in Britain live with the disease, the fastest-growing neurological condition.

Sufferers do not have enough of the brain chemical dopamine because some of the nerve cells that make it have died. There are 40-plus symptoms, with the most common being a tremor, but there is no cure.

Fiona Lindop, a physiotherapist who works with Parkinson's sufferers, said: "Using music can address freezing problems, increase stride length and arm swing while reducing the risk of falling."

"The music should be chosen carefully depending on the problems but it will even work short term."

"Knowing you have a strategy can reduce anxiety. Music can also improve cognition and many individuals have reported their mood and motivation also improved."

(Story source: The Express)

Poll: Most people over 50 feel their health is the same or better than before 2020

Despite the pandemic's terrible toll on older adults, a new national poll shows that most people over 50 still say their health is as good as it was before March 2020, or even better.

News Medical reports but a sizable minority - 20% of those in their 50s and early 60s, and 14% of those over 65 - say their health has declined in that time, according to the new findings from the National Poll on Healthy Aging.

A smaller percentage said their health has improved.

The percentage saying their health has declined during the pandemic was much higher - 40% - among those who call their current physical or mental health status fair or poor.

The poll's other findings also suggest that this group of older adults may need extra support to help them age well.

The poll team asked older adults in April about how their health today compares with what they expected when they were younger, and what aspects of their life are helping them age well.

"This is a great reminder that this pandemic has not affected everyone equally, and that we have a long-term challenge of understanding and address the needs of older adults whose health has declined over the past two years, or who already had major physical or mental health challenges even before the pandemic," says Preeti Malani, M.D., the poll director and a Michigan Medicine infectious disease physician also trained in geriatrics.

"At the same time, our findings underscore the resilience of many older adults, and the importance of everything from social connections to hobbies and getting outdoors in helping them age well."

The poll is based at the U-M Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation and supported by AARP and Michigan Medicine, the University of Michigan's academic medical center.

The new findings come as the poll celebrates its fifth anniversary with a special webinar on May 19, called "Optimizing Health and Well-Being as We Age" and co-presented by IHPI and AARP.

Key findings about overall health:

- Nearly one-third of older adults of all ages say their health is a higher priority for them now than it was before the pandemic, with women, Black and Hispanic older adults more likely to say so than male or white respondents.
- 20% of adults aged 50 to 64 say their health has declined since the start of the pandemic, compared with 14% of those over 65. By contrast, nearly 14% of those aged 50 to 64 say their health has improved, compared with just under 7% of those over 65. The rest said their health was about the same.
- Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to say their health had improved during the pandemic years.
- Those who are retired are less likely to say their health had improved than those who are working (5% vs 14%).
- 40% of those who say they are in fair or poor physical or mental health said their health had declined in the pandemic, compared with 11% of those who say they're in excellent, very good or good physical health and 15% who say the same about their mental health.

- Looking back on what they might have expected when they were younger, 26% of people age 50 to 64 say their health is better than they expected, compared with 43% of those over 65. But among those who say their current physical or mental health is fair or poor, 54% say their health now is worse than what they had once expected.

Key findings about factors that older adults say help them age well:

- Two-thirds said their home environment helps a lot. Percentages were significantly higher for those with more education or higher incomes, and those who are married.
- People over 65 were much more likely to say that their relationships and friendships help them a lot as they age, at 71% compared with 58% for people age 50 to 64. Hispanic older adults were most likely to cite relationships and friendships as helping them a lot in aging well.
- Around 55% said their outlook for the future helps them a lot in aging well, though women were much more likely than men to say so (61% vs 47%) and the percentages were lower among those who say they're in fair or poor physical or mental health (37% and 44%).
- 55% said access to outdoor spaces helps them a lot, but the percentage was only 32% among those who said their physical health is fair or poor.
- 43% said that hobbies help them a lot as they try to age well, though the percentage was 29% among those in fair or poor physical health.
- One-third of those in their 50s and early 60s said continued learning and education helps them a lot as they seek to age well; 22% of those over 65 said this.
- Only 1 in 4 older adults said that their sense of connection to their community helped them a lot as they age.

Malani notes that the vast majority of adults aged 50 to 80 agreed that they know what steps they should take to be healthy as they age, but the poll shows gaps between what people "know" they should do and what they do.

The National Poll on Healthy Aging results are based on responses from a nationally representative sample of 1,037 adults aged over 50 from the Foresight 50+ Omnibus panel, which draws from the Foresight 50+ Panel by AARP and NORC at the University of Chicago who answered a wide range of questions online and by phone in April 2022. Questions were written, and data interpreted and compiled, by the IHPI team.

(Story source: News Medical)

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If so, send us an email by visiting:
www.ourplace.co*



Lost lanes of the Midlands: Five great cycle routes in the heart of England

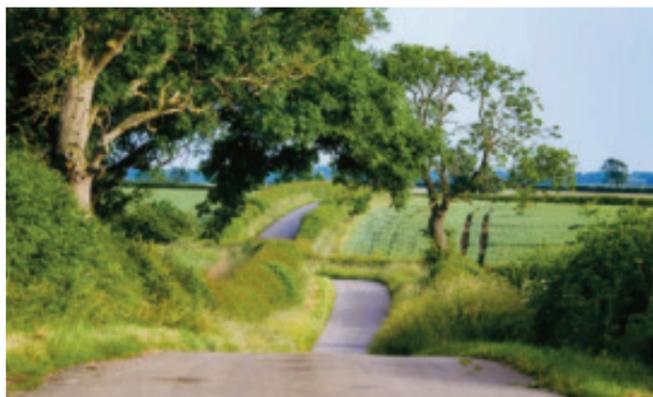
Taking in backcountry from Leicestershire to Shropshire, these 30 to 50-mile routes, included in a new book, feature beautiful villages, countryside and places to stay.

Stilton and pork pies, high Leicestershire

Start / finish: Melton Mowbray
Distance: 34 miles

This ride will refute any misguided belief that Leicestershire is flat. “High” Leicestershire lies between Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough: a rural enclave of broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys.

What makes the area especially good for cycling is its dense network of quiet country lanes, the least travelled of which have farm gates that you open and close as you go.



My route begins in Melton Mowbray, heading due south from the town centre on to a gem of a gated road that leads to Burrough Hill, one of the highest points in the county.

After a pleasantly meandering section on more choice gated roads via Newbold and Owston is Launde Abbey, a former monastic house tucked away in the gently sheltered combe of the River Chater.

It is a spot so beautiful that Thomas Cromwell, chief adviser to Henry VIII and in charge of the redistribution of England’s vast monastic wealth, earmarked Launde for himself as a place to where he might retire and grow old. The executioner’s axe meant it was never to be, and the abbey is now a Christian education centre.

More lanes and a great traffic-free byway leads into the county of Rutland and the pretty villages of Belton, Brooke and Braunston. Built from the rich orange ironstone that is a distinctive architectural feature of the area, all three have 12th-century churches worth a stop, especially Brooke with its Elizabethan oak interior.

The return route, via Knossington and Somerby (whose village pub is the excellent Stilton Cheese Inn), passes the entrance to the iron age hill fort on Burrough Hill. The last miles back to Melton take in a farm byway that is just about passable before picking up the same glorious gated road of the start of the ride.

Lunch: The Blue Ball, Braunston. This 17th-century thatched inn claims to be the oldest in Rutland. Cosy in winter with outside seating in summer.

History: Burrough Hill iron age hill fort, a site of major archeological significance and one of the best sunset viewpoints in the east Midlands.

Stay: The Admiral Hornblower, in Oakham (doubles from £90 B&B), offers good value rooms in a characterful 17th-century former farmhouse, two miles off the route from Brooke.

Squires and spires, Northamptonshire

Start / finish: Northampton
Distance: 48 miles

Whether you see them as glittering repositories of history and culture, or emblems of injustice and oppression at home and abroad, the UK’s landed estates have shaped the countryside. Northamptonshire has one of the highest concentrations of stately homes of any county in England and this ride takes in five, connected by some choice lanes and traffic-free trails.

From the centre of Northampton, head north on Brampton Valley Way, the route of a disused railway line, as far as Brixworth (the village’s magnificent Saxon church is a short detour up the hill). A few miles on is Cottesbrooke Hall, with its beautiful 5.2 hectare (13-acre) originally Arts and Crafts garden designed by Robert Weir Schultz in the first decade of the 20th century.

A steady climb leads to the broad ridge near Naseby, where on the foggy morning of 14 June in 1645, the New Model Army of Oliver Cromwell inflicted a decisive defeat on the main Royalist army of King Charles I.

After passing through the grounds of Stanford Hall and crossing the M1 by bridge, a quiet lane leads to the handsome village of Ashby St Ledgers. From just south of the village of Norton, a sublime wooded bridleway just south of the Watford Gap crosses back over the motorway, a canal and a railway line into the landscaped parkland of Brockhall Hall. A good gravel track connects to Little Brington and into the orbit of Althorp, the last and grandest of the route’s landed estates.

The Spencer family rose from sheep farming minor gentry to become one of the most prominent and wealthy families in Elizabethan England. Elaborate memorials to generations of Spencers fill the church at Great Brington, from where an avenue of trees leads to Althorp House. The most famous Spencer of all, Diana, Princess of Wales, is buried in a mausoleum on an island in the grounds, which is strictly off-limits. The last miles back through the suburban outskirts of Northampton are efficient, if lacking the genteel splendour of the rest of the ride.



Lunch: Pickle and Pie, 23 Church St, Crick. Outstanding hot lunches, coffee and more.

History: The half-timbered gatehouse of the manor at Ashby St Ledgers is where Robert Catesby hatched the gunpowder plot to blow up parliament and kill the king. We remember Guy Fawkes, but Catesby was the mastermind.

Stay: The Hollies B&B (doubles from £70), South Kilworth. Stylish, good value B&B just north of the route’s halfway point.

Bournville and the Bard, Birmingham to Warwick

Start: Birmingham **finish:** Warwick
Distance: 46 miles

The West Midlands green belt is the size of the Peak District and the Shropshire Hills combined and keeps suburban sprawl in check while providing precious rural space. This linear route shows just how easy and satisfying it is to ride from a big city into the countryside and then hop on a train back.

Continued on pages 10-11...



The route out of Birmingham follows the Rea Valley Cyclepath (part of National Cycle Route 5) passing close to Birmingham Central Mosque and Edgbaston Cricket Ground, and then into Cannon Hill Park, a 32-hectare (80-acre) landscaped pleasure garden.

It skirts Bournville, the famous “factory in a garden” built in the 1890s by the Cadbury family of chocolate-making Quakers, who sought to “alleviate the evils of modern, more cramped living conditions”. After a section of canal towpath the route follows the ancient highway of Icknield Street into the Forest of Arden, one of the most fabled lost landscapes of Merrie England.

Picking a way south, my route keeps to the quietest of lanes to Wilmcote, where Shakespeare’s mother, Mary Arden, was born. Her house and the adjoining farm are run as a working Tudor farm (currently only open to local schools).

From here the canal towpath offers an easy ride into Stratford-upon-Avon, a handsome Warwickshire town that makes much of being the birthplace of the Bard but suffers under the burden of its visitors.

There is a train bailout from Stratford but my route negotiates the town’s cycling-unfriendly one-way system to follow National Cycle Route 41 to Warwick via Wellesbourne airfield, a former RAF base with a small museum and cafe and Charlecote, a very grand Elizabethan country house and landscaped grounds. The ride ends at the ancient Mercian stronghold of Warwick, with its elegant town centre and sensational castle.

Lunch: Coach and Horses Inn, nr Alvechurch, Worcs. Real ale pub that is a favourite with local cyclists. Bar food served all day.

History: Charlecote Mill is a working water mill that offers guided tours. There’s a good swimming spot around the back in the Avon.

Stay: Twitey’s Tipis and Camping Meadows at Lowe Farm, Hunscoate (standard pitch £14pp, glamping from £210 for two nights), is an excellent car-free campsite option just off-route.



Rollercoaster ride, Churnet valley, Staffordshire

Start / finish: Denstone
Distance: 31 miles

The Churnet Valley is a Staffordshire hidden gem. A bike ride might not deliver the same dose of pure adrenaline as a rollercoaster at nearby Alton Towers but it does promise constantly changing scenery and some fascinating industrial history.

It is also a workout for the legs: the Churnet Valley is too narrow to accommodate a road along the valley floor, so there’s a fair bit of climbing and descending.

Starting in Denstone, my route sets out north-east towards Ellastone and turns west on a densely wooded lane squeezed between Alton Towers, once a country seat of the Earls of Shrewsbury, and Wootton Lodge, a Jacobean house built in 1611.

After a rich history including being besieged during the English civil war, Wootton Lodge was bought by Joseph Cyril Bamford in the early 1960s, who founded digger manufacturer JCB. The company’s global headquarters is on a huge campus just down the road at Rocester.

After a stiff climb up Carr Bank the route passes neatly walled hay meadows on a lane beneath the ridge line of Ipstones Edge. It’s another descent back to the river at Cheddleton.

There has been a mill here since the 1200s but in the late 1700s it was converted to grind flint for the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent, including for Josiah Wedgwood’s famous Jasperware. Canals are always tranquil places, and the steam trains that run on the heritage railway line conjure the atmosphere of a quieter age before the arrival of cars.

The return journey initially follows the unsurfaced canal towpath to Froghall and then uphill one last time, initially on the A521 to Kingsley Holt, but soon on to quieter lanes. The wooded descent down the Dimmingsdale Valley on a carriage drive built for the earls of Shrewsbury is a highlight of the ride. Back once again at the river, it’s a fairly swift return to Denstone along the old railway line, now a walking and cycling route.

Lunch: Black Lion Inn, Consall Forge. Traditional canal-side pub with a lovely car-free setting. Real ales, pub fare.

History: The Churnet Valley has a long industrial history of iron and metal-making. The copper cable used in the first ever transatlantic telegraph was made at the wireworks at Oakamoor.

Stay: Manor House Farm, Prestwood (doubles from £45pp B&B), offers comfortable rooms in a Jacobean farmhouse. Next door is the Farm on the Hill (from £10pp a night) eco-campsite with private pitches and bike hire, set among woodland and wildflower meadows.

Castles and coral, Shropshire Hills

Start / finish: Ludlow
Distance: 49 miles

Ludlow makes the perfect base in a county that’s endlessly rewarding to explore by bike. Head west into a labyrinth of lanes that lead to the Welsh border, or north, as in this route, into the broad valleys of Apedale and Corve Dale, the wooded slopes of Wenlock Edge and the Clee Hills. Expect narrow and twisting country lanes, splendid trees, big views and just the right balance of climbing and easy pedalling.

The route north out of Ludlow follows National Cycle Route 44 from beneath the walls of Ludlow Castle and along the River Teme and then one its tributaries, the River Onny. It then cuts across Hope Dale and Apedale, with views to shapely Caer Caradoc. With a wealth of buildings from the 16th century and a few even older, the village of Cardington oozes rustic charm. The dark, wooded scarp slope of Wenlock Edge looms in the east. This limestone ridge - the remnants of a 400-million-year-old coral reef - is the defining landscape feature of the area and the route ascends to a col between its two highest points.

After a descent into Corve Dale, it’s uphill once again, on the climb up Brown Clee Hill: at 540 metres, the highest point in Shropshire. A balcony lane that follows the contour of the hill at about 350 metres and the climb to the top is an optional extra. Abdon Burf is a challenge for even the strongest of legs. Of course, there is no shame in walking up, and panoramic view from the top is ample reward for the effort.

The circuit around Brown Clee Hill ends with a traffic-free run on the estate road through Burwarton Park. The B4364 is the direct route back to Ludlow, but I opt for a roundabout route on farm lanes via Bitterley, and a farm byway. Squirrel Lane leads back to Ludlow.



Lunch: The Royal Oak, Cardington, is a 15th-century pub with low-beamed rooms, quarry tiled floors and inglenook fireplace. Try the cider-infused fidget pie.

History: Brown Clee Hill was the scene of eight air crashes during the second world war, more than any other hill in the UK. The lake on the summit still contains the remains of a Wellington bomber.

Stay: The Mount Guest House, Ludlow (doubles from £115 B&B), has views over the town and is cycling-friendly. The Pheasant, Neenton (doubles from £90 B&B), is a superb community-owned pub with rooms that makes a good overnight stop on the route.

Jack Thurston’s Lost Lanes Central England (£16.99) is published by Wild Things Publishing. It is available from Guardian Bookshop for £14.78. Online GPX maps turn-by-turn route directions for these five routes are accessible at lostlanes.co.uk

(Article source: *The Guardian*)



The Great British ‘chippy’: Seaside fish and chip shops are a national treasure. Here are 20 of the best

It's one of the UK's favourite dishes and it always tastes better with a big portion of sea air.

It would be grossly unfair to the many fabulous chippies located inland in this country to say that all the best places for fish and chips in the UK are down by the sea. There are many brilliant practitioners of the noble craft of deep frying all over the United Kingdom. But in the matter of our national dish, there's no doubt that context matters; that the virtuous interplay of battered white fish and fried potatoes simply tastes better eaten at the seaside, ideally from within an unwrapped present of white paper, rendered translucent in places by a smear of hot oil from the gift within.

Forget tables. Forget chairs. You need to be on the beach itself or, at a push, perched on a sea wall, with a view out over British waters the colour of a day-old bruise, rippling away to the horizon under gunmetal skies.

You unwrap and immediately receive a gust of hot, captured air that smells of all the good things in life. The very warmth of it feels like a reassuring challenge to the chill winds coming off the sea. Your supper is looking after you.

Then there's the sweet dance of your food with the honking air here by the waters. Some chefs working at the very cutting edge of gastronomy have experimented with complex air sprays to augment the experience of their dishes: a spritz of something smelling of pine and juniper to conjure the waft of the forest for a venison dish, say, or a burst of artificial bonfire, to boost a slab of barbecue. hilariously, mother nature, has long had this one covered. The smell of salt on the air down by the beach, along with the occasional burst of freshly stocked fishing boat, gives you all the sensory cues you need. It simply makes your fish and chips taste better.

And there's something else. At times there have been concerns that fish and chips was a seriously hefty dish engineered for a time when more of us were engaged in calorie-burning manual labour, even though with its combination of protein, carbs and fats it is nutritionally balanced. Certainly, a fish supper taken on the couch at home can feel like a lovely indulgence that will ease you into a food coma's sweet embrace. Eaten by the sea, however, where the winds roar and the sands give way beneath your feet, there is no room for words like indulgence. This is food as necessity. It's a matter of survival. Or at least that's what you can tell yourself, as you expend even more energy fighting off stropky gulls, determined that you should tithe to them a chip. Or seven. It's all part of the experience. There are good reasons why fish and chips was not rationed during both world wars. It was never just a dish; a clever combination of deep-fried battered fish and deep-fried chipped potatoes. It's a matter of morale, of comfort, of identity. And the very best place to eat it is down by the sea. Jay Rayner

The Lifeboat House, Coverack, Cornwall - Set in a pretty Cornish fishing harbour on the Lizard Peninsula, you can enjoy your freshly battered fish perched on the harbour wall with a breathtaking view over the lifeboat slipway across the bay and beyond (thelifeboathouse.co.uk).

Coastline, Blyth, Northumberland - A sign tells you what spud varieties are being fried, alongside properly northern portions of mushy peas, gravy and curry sauce (coastlinefishandchips.co.uk).

Beach Buoys, Margate, Kent - Thoroughly Margate in its creative ways with battered pickles and banana blossom and tofu; crab-loaded fries and squid ink mayo live happily alongside classic cod and chips (beachbuoys.co.uk).

Maggie's Café, Hastings, Sussex - Housed in the old net stores, Maggie's gets fish straight from the boats, the original café has been joined by adjacent Maggie's at the Boat with fishy street-food options (maggiesfishandchips.co.uk).

Middle Street Fish Bar, Deal, Kent - Holding firm to chippy tradition even as Deal gentrifies around it; big portions and mugs of tea, but the back room has had a lick of paint recently (tripadvisor.co.uk).

Bardsley's, Brighton, East Sussex - A walk from the seafront, but Brighton's cognoscenti come for chips and sustainably caught cod; all fish can be grilled and poached as well (bardsleys-fishandchips.co.uk).

Fish 'n' Fritz, Weymouth, Dorset - Just off the harbour, this chippy with a small restaurant attached is regularly garlanded with awards, both for food and service (fishnfritz.co.uk).

Mersea Island Fish Bar, Essex - Cross the causeway for top fish 'n' chips, rollmops and jellied eels alongside a shop selling Mersea's famed oysters (merseaislandfishbar.co.uk).

Adam's Fish and Chips, St Martin's, Isles of Scilly - Adam catches the pollack; brother James grows the potatoes; wife Fiona is in charge of the café that Adam also found time to build (adamfishandchips.co.uk).

Atkinson's, Morecambe, Lancaster - Just off Morecambe's prom, a vast portion of sustainably sourced haddock and chips comes in at under a tenner. Spuds are Lancashire grown and it's all served in biodegradable boxes (atkinsonsfishandchips.co.uk).

Aldeburgh Fish & Chip Ship, Suffolk - This chippy on the High Street has reigned supreme since 1967. Best accompanied with a pint of Adnams Ghost Ship and splash out on their pineapple fritter (50p) for dessert (aldeburghfishandchips.co.uk).

Colmans, South Shields, Tyne & Wear - Part of Sandhaven history since the 1920s. Scampi is doused with a secret-recipe batter, served with homemade tartare sauce (colmansfishandchips.co.uk).

The Magpie Café, Yorkshire - For good reason this Whitby landmark has a queues down the street whatever the weather or season - their chip butty is perfection at a princely £2.95 (magpiecafe.co.uk).

Britannia on the Beach, Devon - In the minute village of Beesands, the Hutchings family have turned their bait store into a restaurant and it gets rave reviews (britanniaatthebeach.co.uk).

Morton's, Ballycastle, County Antrim - You can perch by the harbour and see Scotland's Mull of Kintyre while eating fish brought in by the shop's own boat (mortonsfishballycastle.com).

East Pier Smokehouse, St Monans, Fife - Tempura batter on prawns, cullen skink and lobster on a good stopping-off point on the Fife Coastal Walk (eastpier.co.uk).

The Bay, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire - A longstanding takeaway with pleasing modern touches -specially made beer and an app to keep customers updated on which boats have landed the day's catch (thebayfishandchips.co.uk).

Frankie's, Brae, Shetland - Britain's northernmost chippy showcases its island's superb seafood including langoustine tails; chips come with the option of Orkney cheese (frankiesfishandchips.com).

D Fecci & Sons, Tenby, Pembrokeshire - Coeliacs can eat without fear here, thanks to a rice-flour batter, separate fryers and utensils, gluten-free sauces and vinegars (aroundtenby.co.uk).

Enochs, Llandudno - In Conwy's capital of seaside cute, everything is fried in a high-oleic sunflower oil; the catch is MSC certified and all packaging is compostable and 25p goes to the RNLI with every fishcake sale.

(Article source: *The Guardian*)



Garden longevity: Could you extend your life and drop your stress by taking up the pursuit, too?

Dan Buettner has studied five places around the world where residents are famed for their longevity: Okinawa in Japan, Nicoya in Costa Rica, Icaria in Greece, and Loma Linda in California and Sardinia in Italy.

People living in these so-called “blue zones” have certain factors in common - social support networks, daily exercise habits and a plant-based diet, for starters.

But they share another unexpected commonality. In each community, people are gardening well into old age - their 80s, 90s and beyond.

Could nurturing your green thumb help you live to 100?

Mood elevator

It is well-known that an outdoor lifestyle with moderate physical activity is linked to longer life, and gardening is an easy way to accomplish both. “If you garden, you’re getting some low-intensity physical activity most days, and you tend to work routinely,” says Buettner.

He says there is evidence that gardeners live longer and are less stressed. A variety of studies confirm this, pointing to both the physical and mental health benefits of gardening.

In recent Dutch study, researchers asked participants to complete a stressful task, then split them into two groups. One group read indoors and the other gardened outdoors for 30 minutes. The group that read reported that their mood “further deteriorated”, while the gardeners not only had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol afterwards, they also felt “fully restored” to a good mood.

Australian researchers following men and women in their 60s found that those who regularly gardened had a 36% lower risk of dementia than their non-gardening counterparts.

And preliminary studies among elderly people suffering from cognitive issues (such as dementia and Alzheimer’s) report benefits from garden settings and horticulture therapy. Sunlight and fresh air, for example, help agitated elders feel calmer, while the colours and textures of various plants and vegetables can improve visual and tactile ability.

There is no panacea for growing old but, the science suggests, gardening does appear to improve our quality of life as we age.

Let nature nurture you

It’s not just about health effects, either: the social benefits of gardening can also increase longevity. Dr Bradley Willcox of the University of Hawaii studies centenarians in Okinawa, which has the world’s highest ratio of centenarians, at approximately 50 per 100,000 people. Many residents maintain small personal gardens well into old age.

He says that gardening helps with other essential, if somewhat more ephemeral, factors in increasing longevity. “In Okinawa, they say that anybody who grows old healthfully needs an ikigai, or reason for living. Gardening gives you that something to get up for every day.”

On top of that, explains Willcox, Okinawans value the concept of yuimaru, or a high level of social connectedness. “Getting together at a local market, bringing your produce and sharing your latest creations from the garden is a big social activity,” he says. “That certainly helps people feel grounded and connected.”

A sense of connection to other people is important, but so too is the individual connection to nature. One Harvard University study showed that people who were surrounded by lush greenery lived longer, with a lower chance of developing cancer or respiratory illnesses.

Doctors in Scotland can now prescribe a walk in nature to treat a variety of ailments, including reducing blood pressure and anxiety, and to improve overall happiness. Gardening - even on a small plot in an urban area - is a simple way to incorporate more nature into your daily life.

Finally, there is also a dietary component to longevity that gardening can help with. Researchers have demonstrated a link between the “Mediterranean diet” - rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, fish and olive oil - and slower aging.

Willcox says the fundamental principle of eating an abundance of fresh vegetables, ideally from local gardens and markets, is important to longevity, whether the diet is technically Mediterranean or not. In Okinawa, for example, most people grow vegetables such as bitter melon and sweet potatoes in their gardens.

“When you eat vegetables that you’ve grown yourself, it changes everything - they taste more delicious, and it really makes a difference in the health qualities (vitamins, minerals, phytoactive compounds etc.) of the food itself,” says Willcox. Buettner, the “blue zones” expert, recommends a diet of “90% plants, especially greens and beans”, and points out a simple truth: gardeners are more likely to plant what they want to eat.

Farming for a longer life?

If gardening is good, is farming even better? Many of the lifestyle factors associated with longevity - such as living in the country and getting lots of exercise - apply to farmers as well.



Some evidence suggests that farming is one of the healthiest occupations. One Australian study showed that farmers were a third less likely to suffer from a chronic illness, and 40% less likely to visit a GP than non-farm workers. Researchers from the US compared mortality rates among farmers against rates for the general population and found farmers less likely to die from cancer, heart diseases or diabetes. And studies in Sweden and France have also showed farmers are healthier than non-farmers.

Dr Masahiko Gemma of Waseda University in Tokyo studied self-employed farmers in the central province of Saitama, who were found to have a longer life expectancy than non-farmers and work later into life. Many of Gemma’s respondents were part-time farmers or retirees, and he describes many of their responsibilities as “similar to the work of maintaining a garden”.

“Small family farms are common in Japanese agriculture,” says Gemma, explaining that his survey did not include farmers working for large-scale corporate operations. He found that self-employed farmers enjoyed statistically significant and positive changes in psychological and physical conditions before and after engaging in light farming activities. “Our guess is that farming work contributes to the maintenance of good health and spirits,” he says.

(Article source: BBC)

Please help us rescue and care for vulnerable hedgehogs - **Britain's favourite mammal**

A shocking study has revealed that hedgehogs are rapidly vanishing from our countryside, with numbers HALVED in the last 20 years.

I am delighted to tell you that Britain's hedgehog has won favourite mammal in a UK poll.

The UK's only spiny mammal won with 35.9% of the 5,000 votes, more than double that of the Red Fox, who came in second place with 15.4%. The Red Squirrel came third with 11.4%, out of a shortlist of 10 charismatic UK mammals.

Unfortunately, hedgehogs are rapidly vanishing from our countryside as numbers have HALVED in the last 20 years, a shocking study has revealed.

Henry Johnson, hedgehog officer, People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) said:

"We Brits seem to love hedgehogs for a whole range of reasons, including their cute appearance, their role as slug controllers and the way they have colonised our gardens with such aplomb. This is why it is so sad to see them decline, with one in three lost since the millennium."

Threats to hedgehogs come mostly from us. In rural areas, our farmland increasingly lacks the diversity of habitats hedgehogs need and the invertebrates they feed on. In towns and cities green spaces are lost to development, paved over or increasingly fragmented. Hedgehogs are also very prone to road traffic accidents.

This is why we have launched this special Annual Appeal to protect Britain's favourite mammal.

At Hedgehog Rescue Rehabilitation and Care Centre we respond immediately to rescue injured hedgehogs. A vet is called in straight away and the hedgehogs are monitored and cared for. Once fit and well they are released back into the wild.

Hedgehog Rescue is now conducting its Annual Appeal. Only by continuing our huge effort and long-life commitment can we give these wonderful animals a safe, happy and contented life.



We care for many hedgehogs here at our rehabilitation centre. Hedgehogs just like these:

'Julie'



'Julie' (pictured left) came in last Autumn, quite small, out in daylight and had ticks. She stayed a few weeks, put on enough weight, and made a full recovery. She was released back to her own territory by the finder.

Baby Hedgehogs

These 2 hedgehogs came in as very small babies and had stayed with us a few weeks, gaining weight and giving us a chance to sort out their health issues. They had several ticks and needed worming. When they were 100% ready, we released them close to where they were found.



These hedgehogs are some of the lucky ones. Others are less fortunate.

As a friend who knows what a wonder animals can be, I hope you will support our Annual Appeal. Your kind gift will help us rescue and care for many more vulnerable hedgehogs - Britain's favourite mammal.

To donate to Hedgehog Rescue, go to:
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/hedgehogrescue>
 or write to: **Raisemore, Unit 1, Alton Road Industrial Estate, Ross-on-Wye HR9 5NB**

