

CICERONE

CYCLING

THE COAST TO COAST CYCLE ROUTE

Whitehaven or Workington
to Tynemouth or Sunderland



Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla

THE COAST TO COAST CYCLE ROUTE

**WHITEHAVEN OR WORKINGTON
TO TYNEMOUTH OR SUNDERLAND**

By Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla

CICERONE

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*This book is dedicated to Dave Crolla – he loved this route
and returned to it many times.*

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Front cover: Between Leadgate and Hartside Top on the hilly middle section of the C2C (Day 2)

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Passing Ribton House just before Great Broughton (Stage 1A)

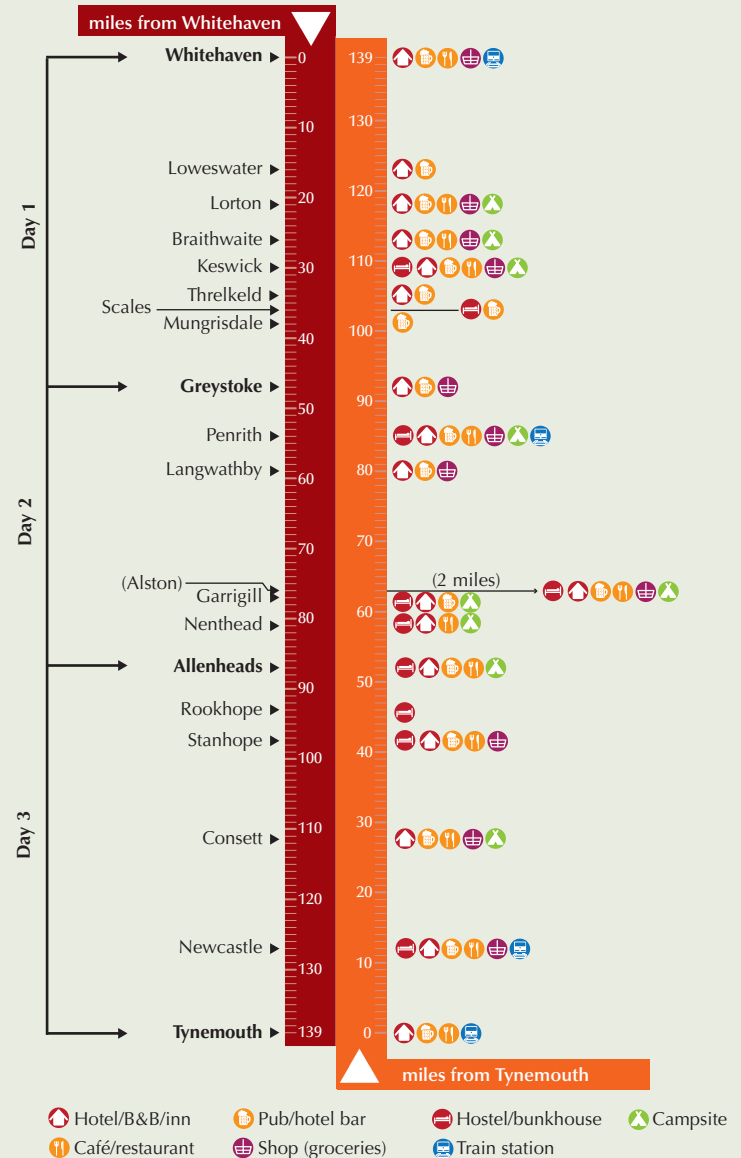
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Note on mapping

The base maps onto which the authors have charted the routes in this guide are derived from publicly available data rather than from an official mapping agency. They have been checked by the authors.

Ride planner from Whitehaven



ROUTE SUMMARY TABLES

C2C Whitehaven to Tynemouth/Sunderland three-day itinerary					
	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent	Page
Day 1	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)	Greystoke (NY 440 309)	47 miles (76km)	1251m	34
Day 2	Greystoke (NY 440 309)	Allenheads (NY 860 453)	40 miles (65km)	1533m	63
Day 3	Allenheads (NY 860 453)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691)	52 miles (83km)	845m	81
Day 3	Allenheads (NY 860 453)	Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	49 miles (79km)	822m	104
Total	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691) or Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	139 miles (224km) or 137 miles (220km)	3629m or 3606m	

C2C Workington to Tynemouth/Sunderland three-day itinerary					
	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent	Page
Day 1	Workington (NX 982 297)	Greystoke (NY 440 309)	44 miles (71km)	1191m	54
Day 2	Greystoke (NY 440 309)	Allenheads (NY 860 453)	40 miles (65km)	1533m	63
Day 3	Allenheads (NY 860 453)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691)	52 miles (83km)	845m	81
Day 3	Allenheads (NY 860 453)	Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	49 miles (79km)	822m	104
Total	Workington (NX 982 297)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691) or Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	136 miles (219km) or 134 miles (216km)	3569m or 3546m	

C2C Whitehaven to Tynemouth/Sunderland four-day itinerary					
	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent (approx)	Page
Day 1	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)	Threlkeld (NY 320 254)	35 miles (56km)	910m	34
Day 2	Threlkeld (NY 320 254)	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	43 miles (70km)	1301m	46
Day 3	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	Parkhead (NZ 003 432)	23 miles (37km)	1087m	74
Day 4	Parkhead (NZ 003 432)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691)	38 miles (61km)	331m	86
Day 4	Parkhead (NZ 003 432)	Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	36 miles (58km)	308m	86
Total	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691) or Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	139 miles (224km) or 137 miles (220km)	3629m or 3606m	

C2C Workington to Tynemouth/Sunderland four-day itinerary					
	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent (approx)	Page
Day 1	Workington (NX 982 297)	Threlkeld (NY 320 254)	32 miles (51km)	850m	54
Day 2	Threlkeld (NY 320 254)	Langwathby (NY 567 337)	25 miles (40km)	539m	46
Day 3	Langwathby (NY 567 337)	Rookhope (NY 939 429)	34 miles (55km)	1489m	68
Day 4	Rookhope (NY 939 429)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691)	45 miles (72km)	691m	83
Day 4	Rookhope (NY 939 429)	Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	42 miles (68km)	668m	83
Total	Workington (NX 982 297)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691) or Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	136 miles (219km) or 134 miles (216km)	3569m or 3546m	

THE COAST TO COAST CYCLE ROUTE

C2C Whitehaven to Tynemouth/Sunderland two-day itinerary

	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent	Page
Day 1	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	78 miles (126km)	2211m	34
Day 2	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691)	61 miles (98km)	1418m	74
Day 2	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	58 miles (94km)	1395m	74
Total	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691) or Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	139 miles (224km) or 137 miles (220km)	3629m or 3606m	

C2C Workington to Tynemouth/Sunderland two-day itinerary

	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent	
Day 1	Workington (NX 982 297)	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	75 miles (120km)	2151m	54
Day 2	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	Tynemouth (NZ374 691)	61 miles (98km)	1418m	74
Day 2	Garrigill (NY 745 416)	Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	59 miles (95km)	1395m	74
Total	Workington (NX 982 297)	Tynemouth (NZ 374 691) or Sunderland (NZ 408 589)	136 miles (219km) or 134 miles (216km)	3569m or 3546m	

Passing Loweswater and its distinctive guardian, Mellbreak (Stage 1)



Crossing Wainford Bridge on the approach to Allenheads (Stage 2)



INTRODUCTION



Passing Ennerdale Water with Pillar in the distance (Stage 1)

Arcing its way from Irish Sea to North Sea across an absorbing and beautiful swathe of northern England, the 139-mile Sea to Sea Cycle Route (or 'C2C') is an essential rite of passage for cycle enthusiasts. Comfortably Britain's most popular cycling challenge, since its inception in 1994 it has proved to be the mother of Sustrans' ever-burgeoning family of tours. The many cyclists that return to it year after year are testament to its enduring success. Whether solo or in a group, riders tend to discover a supportive camaraderie while cycling along the course or resting in tea-room stops and at overnight accommodation. Unquestionably, the C2C remains *the* cycle tour against which all other British tours are compared:

veterans will give knowing nods about its merits and challenges, while no cycle tour discussion would ever be complete without references to it.

Adopting a west-east direction to take advantage of prevailing westerly winds, the route strikes eastwards from the Cumbrian coast stitching together the lakes and mountains of the northern Lake District to create a picturesque collage. Here, cyclists weave their way, soaring upwards and gliding downwards as the lakes of Ennerdale Water, Loweswater, Crummock Water, Bassenthwaite and Derwent Water find vertiginous guardians in the mountains of Pillar, Grasmoo, Hopegill Head, Catbells, Skiddaw and Blencathra.

THE COAST TO COAST CYCLE ROUTE

Beyond the Lake District, the route bridges across the verdant Eden Valley – via Penrith – and ventures into the wild beauty of the lesser-known northern Pennines. Overlapping fells now briefly capture cyclists in steep-sided land-that-time-forgot valleys, before challenging escapes gain hilltops and high moorlands that reward endurance and perseverance with scenes of sublime wuthering vastness. The challenging traverse of the spine of England culminates at the remote Parkhead Station – a relic of an improbable upland mining railway. From Parkhead, the route commences a delightfully elongated descent towards the North Sea, winding its way along more than thirty miles of adapted former rail lines and cycle paths to the coast.

In many ways, the C2C is an umbrella route. It has a series of options that pose a few quandaries to the tourer even before setting out. The choice of where to start (Whitehaven or Workington) and finish (Tynemouth or Sunderland) requires a spot of contemplation. Whitehaven is the more popular of the two starts, while Tynemouth is the more popular of the two finishes. Reflecting this, they feature in our primary route description. Conversely, Workington and Sunderland, which both have their individual merits, are included as fully described alternatives (see Where to start and where to end).

While the ride is more commonly tackled by cyclists on road bikes, the

route nonetheless presents a series of alternative unsurfaced off-road options that need consideration. Although a couple of these were originally intended as the primary route line (and in the case of the bone-jangling off-road descent of Whinlatter, remain so) the majority tend to be ignored in favour of good road options. However, some – such as the climb via Bolts Law standing engine to Parkhead – present truly impressive riding and may tip the balance away from road bikes. Other alternative off-road variations always seemed like an afterthought by Sustrans. These have, over the years, tended only to be tackled by masochists. To help planning before setting out, refer to the Unsurfaced off-road options and What kind of bicycle sections of this introduction.

WHY CHOOSE THE C2C?

Every cyclist in Britain should do the C2C at least once. As the original coast-to-coast ride, it is deservedly well-known and popular. Initially, the designers envisaged C2C completists collecting a series of 6 special stamps on route that enabled a commemorative T-shirt to be acquired, but this idea seems to have fallen out of favour; this is a special route that needs no gimmicks to promote it.

With its simple yet romantic premise of crossing the country from one sea to another, the route has come to be seen as the classic short British cycle tour. Where less-confident



At 457m, Nenthead is one of the highest villages in England (Stage 2)

cyclists might choose the slightly easier Hadrian's Cycleway or Way of the Roses coast to coast routes, the C2C is nonetheless an achievable goal for most, and the advent of e-bikes has broadened its accessibility. More than any other, the C2C sees a phenomenal number of repeat riders; its multiple route options, good signage and links to other routes help explain this. Over the years a mini economy has grown up around providing services for the thousands of C2C cyclists who complete the route each year. Transport companies abound and, while Covid closures forced many amenities on route to shut down, doing the C2C is a great way to support local businesses in parts of the country where it really matters – what better excuse to make numerous café stops!

HOW TOUGH IS THE RIDE?

The C2C offers a good balance of challenge over a three-day tour and is an attainable goal for most regular cyclists. If you can comfortably ride 40 miles with 1000m of ascent and still clamber back onto your saddle the next day, then you will be more than able to tackle the three-day itinerary. A west–east C2C works well insofar as once the challenging Pennines are finally crossed and the remote Parkhead Station is reached, the remaining 37 miles or so to Tynemouth or 35 miles to Sunderland are nearly all either downhill or flat – a tremendous incentive and boost to any riders who are 'hilled-out'.

The C2C involves some tough climbing when compared with similar Sustrans three-day coast-to-coast

tours. It has roughly 1400m more ascent than Hadrian's Cycleway, and 825m more ascent than the Way of the Roses. Fortunately, this extra climbing is offset by a reduced distance: the C2C is shorter than the Way of the Roses and Hadrian's Cycleway by 33 and 37 miles respectively. The following ascent data is based on the present OS mapping tool.

- Coast to Coast 139 miles, 3629m ascent, standard tour 3 days
- Way of the Roses 170 miles, 2823m ascent, standard tour 3 days
- Hadrian's Cycleway 174 miles, 2109m ascent, standard tour 3 days
- Reivers Route, 173 miles, 3780m ascent, standard tour 4 days
- Yorkshire Dales Cycleway 133 miles, 4306m ascent, standard tour 3 days

The climbs

Day 1

On Day 1, crossing the Lake District is an unsurprisingly fairly hilly affair. Nonetheless, it is not remotely as challenging as might be expected and certainly not as challenging as it could have been made. Riders are confronted with one truly daunting big climb – the ascent of **Whinlatter Pass** (258m height gain). While Whinlatter is a great climb and a good challenge, it is the tamest and least gruelling of the big Lakeland passes. Almost all find it enjoyable, while the views

of Skiddaw that appear on cresting the pass amply repay all the effort involved in getting there.

Day 2

Day 2 of the C2C is, simply put, a beast. Hills abound – if you do not like them, you may regret not opting for Norfolk or Holland. Yet these grand ascents are what give the route its character and legendary status. The day has a series of testing and memorable climbs, although two in particular will live long in the memory. **Hartside Top** (575m, 383m height gain) is one of the most protracted and impressive ascents in Great Britain. Because its steepest moments barely touch 1 in 5, on a cool, still day it is possible to settle into a steady rhythm and really soak up the sense of climbing into the high Pennines. Nonetheless, for many riders the climb proves to be the most psychologically and physically challenging of the hills on the C2C. Its long nature is impressed upon every cog spin by the 'still-that-far-away!' top being in sight for the majority of the climb. Likewise, because the treeless Hartside road snakes towards the sky, riders are exposed to the elements and will find any moments of hoped-for wind assistance are likely to be balanced by unwelcome moments of wind opposition.

Conversely, the Garrigill climb (599m) over **Flinty Fell** (268m height gain) is very much a direct test-piece. Its initial escape from the valley floor serves up a delightfully brutish 1 in 4.

This sees many tourers resort to bike-pushing. Nonetheless, it is a beast quickly tamed and the determined will be pleased to find that after the initial short struggle, the gradient eases substantially and the climb relaxes into a pleasant if elongated affair. Two further substantial climbs intercede between Nenthead and Allenheads. The first is the high point of the C2C at a dizzying 609m on **Black Hill** (152m height gain). This point is only 150m above Nenthead and although initially hard up to a left turn, most will settle into a good rhythm and achieve the summit on the fifth-highest road in England with relative ease. After dropping down just over 100m from Black Hill, the final climb of the day over **Killhope Law** (586m, 81m height gain) is not so tough – assuming riders have anything left in the legs, that is.

Day 3

Day 3 serves up three more highly rewarding hills before giving way to easy terrain. The first challenge is a long and extremely pleasant **climb from Allenheads** (130m height gain) which includes a set of forested switchbacks that give a hint of the alpine before open moorland leads to a lofty beehive-shaped 'cur-rick' (cairn) guarding the entrance to Rookhope Dale. The day's second big climb is an elegant if challenging affair that makes great use of a wonderful minor road over **Coal Crow Hill** (115m height gain) to Stanhope. The final big climb of the C2C is the notorious **Crawleyside Bank** (254m height gain) between Stanhope and Parkhead Station. This is no toy. It peaks with a fairly long passage of 1 in 5 and considerable graft is required to overcome this monster ascent.



Having accomplished the long climb of Hartside (Stage 2)

DAY 1

Whitehaven to Greystoke

Start	Whitehaven (NX 969 182)
Finish	Greystoke (NY 440 309)
Distance	47 miles (76km)
Total ascent	1251m
Steepest climb	Whinlatter Pass – one of the great Lakeland hill climbs (peaks at 1 in 4 main route, or 1 in 5 recommended route)
Terrain	Surfaced cycle paths, otherwise minor roads predominate. At Whinlatter, there are unsurfaced-track or road options.
OS maps	Landranger 89 and 90 Route signed as 71 or C2C.
Refreshments	Kirkstile Inn, Loweswater (just off route), Lorton (excellent café/shop and pub), Braithwaite (café, pub and shop), Keswick, Threlkeld (excellent café and pub), Scales (pub), Mungrisdale (pub).
Intermediate distances	Rowrah, 9 miles; Loweswater, 16 miles; Lorton, 21 miles; Braithwaite, 26 miles; Keswick, 30 miles, Threlkeld, 34 miles and Mungrisdale 38 miles.

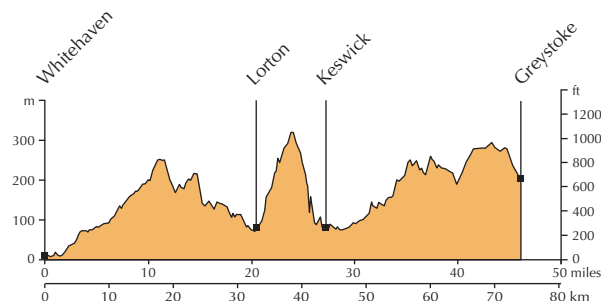
The first leg of the C2C is a great day's riding in anyone's book. From Whitehaven cyclists are eased into action on 9 miles of former railway with a virtually imperceptible upwards incline. This allows for a rapid transition from coast to Lake District. The first two miles are a slightly scrappy affair and the route is slow to reveal its hand. When it does, swathes of Lakeland scenery become the delectable flavour of the rest of the day. Intermittent climbing gains the lapping shores of Loweswater, with Ennerdale Water, Crummock Water, Bassenthwaite Lake and Derwentwater also part of the tour. On fair days, high fells make up the skyline: Pillar, Grasmoor, Skiddaw and most impressively of all, Blencathra vie for attention. After a peaceful journey through the Vale of Lorton, Whinlatter Pass, the day's test piece climb, rears its head and presents pristine forest scenery. The honeypot of Keswick is escaped by the bridges and tunnels of the excellent revamped rail path in the Greta

valley that leads to the pleasant, Threlkeld. Thereafter, a superb and little-known minor road leads to Mungrisdale. Taking the recommended route, the gradual climb over Berrier Hill to the attractive village of Greystoke adds Hellvellyn and High Street to the day's smorgasbord of panoramic Lakeland delights.

The route sets out from the **Marina** in Whitehaven. This has seen good investment over the last thirty years and is a pleasant place for a 'grand depart'. There is a large C2C sculpture by the water's edge on the first slipway on the south side of the marina. This denotes the official starting point and is a suitable place to dip a wheel in the Irish Sea.

Dipping the traditional wheel at the route's Whitehaven start





The official start point is easily reached from Whitehaven rail station. Cycle out of the car park past a superstore and turn right on the main road into town. Take the first left (signed NCN route 10), then cut left almost immediately onto the seafront path, where the sculpture is easily located.

Whitehaven's distinctive Candlestick chimney vented a mineshaft of the former **Wellington Pit**, the scene of Cumbria's worst mining disaster in 1910 when 132 miners lost their lives. There are two monuments to the tragedy here, along with a recently commissioned mosaic.

Whitehaven has a rich **sea-faring history**, which is recognised by its maritime museum and an annual festival. In 1778 the town was attacked by the proto U.S. Navy commanded by John Paul Jones during the American War of Independence.

From the C2C sculpture on the marina slipway turn right (towards the Candlestick chimney) to the nearby T-junction with Quay Street. Turn left on this, then right at the next T-junction and follow the sometimes busy road away from the coast for 400m until, just after passing over a mini roundabout by a retail park, a poorly accessed sharp left turn allows escape onto a cycle path.

A road is soon crossed requiring a brief right, then immediate left to join a drive passing Whitehaven's rugby

and football grounds. This leads to a cycle path that soon swings left to pass under the railway line via a disconcertingly low tunnel. It is followed by a snaking weave up to an estate road. Turn right and after 200m trend right again to join another section of cycle path. This passes back under the railway line before emerging onto another estate lane. Head straight on for 100m then turn left before the bend and cross a little green to join another

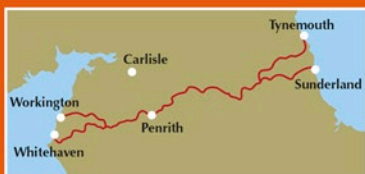




- the 139 mile Sustrans Sea to Sea Cycle Route
- coast to coast across northern England
- Lake District National Park and North Pennines AONB

The 139 mile C2C route is the most well-loved short cycle tour in the UK – and for good reason. Taking you from the Irish Sea at Whitehaven or Workington to the North Sea at Tynemouth or Sunderland, the ride weaves through the Lake District National Park before venturing into the wild and wonderful northern Pennines, until eventually giving way to over 30 miles of traffic-free cycling leading to the coast. There is a satisfying balance of challenge and reward – the ascents to the classic mountain passes of Whinlatter, Hartside Top, Flinty Fell at Garrigill and Black Hill will live long in the memory.

The C2C is a route where you can enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded cyclists and discover a wealth of excellent cyclist-friendly facilities



and accommodation. Designed to be achievable for most cyclists over a long weekend, every cycle tourer should do the C2C at least once.

- three-day main itinerary of 40–52 miles per day, from west to east
- contains advice about completing the route from east to west
- alternative two-day and four-day itineraries
- contact details for cyclist facilities and accommodation

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