



Route report for route 1

## ***ATLANTIC COAST ROUTE***





**EuroVelo**  
**The European cycle route network**  
**Developed by the**  
**European Cyclists' Federation**

Route report for route number 1  
**ATLANTIC COAST ROUTE**

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**OTM**  
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# Index:

Presentation and acknowledgments.....

## 1- Description of the route

- Norway.....
- Scotland.....
- Ireland.....
- Wales and Southern England.....
- France.....
- Spain.....
- Portugal.....

## 2- Technical description

### 2.1 – General criteria

### 2.2 - Country reports

- Norway.....
- United Kingdom.....
- Ireland.....
- France.....
- Spain.....
- Portugal.....

### 2.3 – Charts and Maps.....

## 3- Landscape description –Interest for tourists

- Norway.....
- Great Britain.....
- Ireland.....
- France.....
- Spain.....
- Portugal.....

## 4- Organization and funding

- Norway.....
- Scotland.....
- Ireland.....
- Wales and Southern England.....
- France.....
- Spain.....
- Portugal.....

## 5- Conclusion

## 6- Useful addresses

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## Presentation

The present Document is an assignment from *Euro Velo*, an European Federation of Cyclists's Project being developed since 1995. It pretends to design a network of cycling routes trough all Europe. This routes are intended mainly for cycle tourism, but the European Federation of Cyclists is aiming as well to encourage and make easier daily cycling.

This Document summarises the studies carried out till now in order to outline a cycling route as close as possible to the western edge of Europe, that is the Atlantic coast. This itinerary is named as *Velo Route 1 – Atlantic Coast Route*, and maybe it is the longest of all Velo Routes. It will run from the furthermore northern corner of Europe (the North Cape) to the South West corner, Agres, in Portugal. The route goes trough the borders of 6 actual States, and many more historical cultures and peoples. Climate, lanscapes, languages and cultures are thus many and very different, even if some of them share the category and characteristics as a "lands end" in their own country.

The use of the bicycle by the public, and the facilities for cyclists are very different from one country to another, and even inside each country, according to its differents economical, social and cultural

situations, and being a reflection of social priorities and concerns.

The small length allowed for this report, and the sharp time constrictions, makes very difficult the job of summarise the full richness and potencial of this route, as it has to deal with very long sections in very different countries, in very different stages of definition. So it will just outline the possibilities and the difficulties of the route, based on the reports provided by some bicycle enthusiasts, and a number of other sources. This work will have to be reassumed from time to time, when the different people, Associations and Administrations involved in promoting the use of the bicycle will advance in the definition of the route.

I would like, specially, mention the following people that have provide a significative amount of invaluable information, that helped to make the job:

Chris Heymans (PedalNor) from Norway, Philip Insall (Sustrans) from the United Kingdom, Shane Foran (Galway Cycling Campaign) from Ireland, Carmen Aycart and Francisco Polo (Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles) from Spain, Phillippe Coupy (AF3V) from France, and Paco Tortosa (Paleta d'Ocres, Coop) ho has actually ride on his bike most of the length of Euro Velo Route 1.



# 1– The Atlantic route

## *Norway*

## *Scotland*

The ferry from Bergen (about 30 hours navigation) leaves the cyclist in Aberdeen, from where the route goes north through the eastern coast of Scotland, and its wild open land and seascapes, farming villages, cliffs and historic towns and castles. Once in Inverness, capital of the Highlands, you are in the middle of a great area for outdoor sports. Several cycling routes exist along the well known Loch Ness.

But the Euro Velo 1 takes now to the South, using the Scottish National Route (a cyclable route already signed and mapped from Inverness to Glasgow), climbing up to the open moors of Strathspey, and following one of the main historical communication corridors, even usually at a distance enough from the busy roads to avoid most noises and traffic disturbances. This is not the case with the busy Drumochter Pass, when the main road is still shared. It is possible to take a train to avoid such a problem. Drumochter is one of Britain's highest corridors (424 m.), and from it the EuroVelo descends to the wooden hillsides and rich farmlands of Perthshire and Stirling.

Glasgow is becoming one of the most cycling-conscious towns in Great Britain, and is building a complete hiking and cycling network in all the urban area and its countryside. These facilities, along with all the local amenities and cultural opportunities make very likely staying longer than forecasted...

South from Glasgow, the route heads into the rolling hills and pastures of Ayrshire, with exciting views towards Arran and the Clyde Coast, till the harbour of Stanraer, from where reaching Ireland is just a short ferry promenade.





## ***Ireland***

In Northern Ireland we would pick out the Laggan valley leaving Belfast, Lough Neagh (worth a short detour up the cycle route to its bird sanctuary)., Armagh with its two cathedrals, the Sperrin mountains, and it should be said, the site of two recent terrible bombings, Omagh and Enniskillen (EuroVelo hopes as well as cycling to spread the message of peaceful co-existence) before you head into the lakes of the border area, where a long circular route, the “*Kingfisher cycle trail*” has been signposted over the border.

In the Irish Republic no cyclist routes are yet available, as the concern about promotion of cycling is just starting, but the Irish geography is full of small quiet rural roads that are worth to discover, and helpful locals can substitute the un-existing cycle signing... The route proposed takes the cyclist through the Connaught (hills??), from where he can reach Galway, on the River Shannon estuary, and following the coastal roads through County Kerry to Cork in the South Coast, in the way to Rosslare, the harbour from where a ferry takes you to the Welsh port of Fishguard.

## ***Wales***

Now back in Great Britain, the route runs by the hills and coasts of south Wales, outstandingly beautiful. The Celtic trail, (*Lôn Geltaidd*) offers the choice of a coastal or a high-level route over most of its length. In the way to the Severn, in Newport, the cyclist will be carried across the river Usk by the Transporter Bridge.

## ***England***

Into England the crossing of the Severn Bridge is itself an experience, as is Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol (you cycle right underneath it), Wells cathedral viewed across the flat landscape of the Somerset Levels, and then the tiny Devon lanes, the huge expanse of Dartmoor.... and the traffic-free run down the Plym Valley path to Plymouth, crossing a huge viaduct, to meet another ferry yet, in this much truly maritime route...

## ***France***

A 6 hours navigation to Roscoff, in Brittany, takes the cyclist back to “*the continent*”, as British use to call the European mainland... The route starts in France by the nice seaside resort and fishing harbour of *Roscoff*. Linking the busy town of *Saint Paul de Léon*, the route continues along the fields of cauliflowers and artichokes to *Morlaix*.

The route is passing through the old harbour and active town of *Landenau*. Crossing the last inhabited European bridge *Pont de Rohan* the route is now



following the Elonn estuary to Brest. An alternative route from Roscoff to *Carhaix - Plouguer*, avoiding Brest, is possible using an old railway that will link with the canal Brest-Nantes.

Getting out of *Brest* along the harbour, passing along Oceanpolis center and crossing the pedestrian old bridge, the route is following the main strawberry growing country of Brittany. Stepped little rural routes allows to reach the little town of *Chateaulin*. From here, the Euro Velo is following the towpath of the *Nantes to Brest* canal, mainly on its right side, following a green deep valley. Crossing the nice town of *Blain* and the forest of *Gâvre*, wellknown for its wildlife, the route is continuing to link the *Erdre* river and the regional capital : *Nantes*.

From the south of *Loire* river, the route enters the south of France. The roofs of the houses are passing from grey to red. Getting off *Nantes* by the cycle path network the route is going along the *Grand-Lieu* lake and its natural park to *Machecoul*. From here the route is entering marshes land as well as *Vendée* to the charming *Noirmoutier* island and its oysters parks. From this place, the route avoids the busy seaside and crosses the open field country side till the important and busy seaside resort of *Les Sables D'Olonne*, from where is continuing to reach the old *Vendée* country and its historic town of *Talmont Saint Hilaire*. Further, the route will pass along many megaliths to link the *Poitevin Marshes* and the natural park. Kilometres of canals are going to the Green *Venise* and the country of *Chaume*. From *Marans* the route enters in the department of *Charentes Maritimes* and the historical harbour of *La Rochelle* by a canal, and it is possible to reach the island of Ré and its kilometres of seaside linked by cycle paths.

Out of *La Rochelle*, the route is following the recently opened cycle path to *Rochefort*, by the seaside, and afterwards crosses magnificent marshes to link *Oléron* island at *Marennes*. Crossing the *Seudre* river, the route continues across a forest and reaches the historical town of *Royan* by the seaside. Taking a ferry to the south you enter *Aquitania* region, soil of good wine and food with its many kilometers of white sand seashores. The coastal route gives access to all the beaches, sea resorts and many lakes. A good traffic-free path is linking the coast at *Lacanau* to the inland and the regional capital : *Bordeaux*.

Near *Bordeaux*, the *EuroVelo Route 1* will meet another cyclist way, the *EuroVelo Route 3*, the old *Pilgrims Route* from *Trondheim* to *Santiago de Compostela*, and from here onwards both Velo Routes will share a long of the route. Now crossing the huge *Landes* pine forest, most of the time the route is using the old resin pickers forest paths. At the bottom of the forest, the route arrives in *Bassin d'Arcachon*. In summertime, a ferry service brings the cyclists several times a day to *Arcachon*. In wintertime, the cyclists have to go around the *Bassin* by a traffic free cycle path. The route wil continue close to the coast, till the French-Basque town of *Bayona*, near the border.

## **Spain**



From the French border, the route will benefit of several existing sections of cycle lanes and greenways in the *Basque Country and Navarra* region, and it solves gracefully one of the main problems of the Iberian Peninsula: the need to climb steeply *cordilleras*, to access to the central Plateau and the plains of *Castilla*.

West from *Pamplona*, once in *Puente la Reina* (Navarra), the *VeloRoute* will take, during the first part of the route, the same trail as the main trunk of the traditional *Camino de Santiago*. Small detours and alternative tracks will be necessary, in order to avoid the margins of busy roads or severe slopes in the trail, better negociables for pilgrims on foot than on a bike. From *Frómista*, little away from *Burgos*, the route will abandon the *Camino de Santiago*, as well as *EuroVelo Route 3*, making a bend to the Southwest, using the towpaths along the *Canal de Castilla*. For cyclists that will make a little change from the naked landscape of *Castilla*, since huge trees shadow the canal and it will be specially refreshing in Summer.

From *Benavente*, the *Velo Route* looks straight South, following *La Ruta de la Plata* (*The Silver Trail*), another historical route in use since roman times. It runs through *Castilla-Leon* and *Extremadura* regions, combining, all the way down, cattle trails, quiet local roads and rural tracks. It has to cross *Sierra Morena* to enter *Andalucia*. Again rolling on small roads and rural tracks, the *Route* arrives to *Riotinto*, centre of a mining activity near of 3000 years old, from where it is easy to arrive to the coast, following abandoned railways. Instead, you can make a detour, also trough greenways, till exciting *Sevilla*, and, probably in the future, to link with the *Mediterranean Route* (*EuroVelo route 2*).

Back to the *Atlantic Route*, an already arranged greenway, the *Vía verde del litoral*, takes the cyclist to the town of *Ayamonte*, on the river *Guadiana*, the border with Portugal.

## **Portugal**

On the other side, *Vila Real de Santo Antonio* starts the Portuguese route trough sunny *Algarve*, actual destination of thousands of european tourists. Yet to be defined, the *EuroVelo* route will allow the cyclist to avoid the main roads (specially busy in Summer), running always with wonderful beaches at a close reach, till the town of *Agres*, the historical place of a prestigious School of navigators, 500 years ago, during the Age of Explorations, that linked Europe with the rest of the World. Here the route ends, but the traveller stays dreaming with the Islands that lie a little beyond, footsteps to all the many other sides of the Atlantic...



## 2- Technical description

### 2.1– General criteria

The route has been chosen according to Eurovelo's criteria, but evidently have many differences from one country to another, that reflexes the different stage of practise of cycling. While in the United Kingdom a big organisation such as Sustrans is creating since many years a full cyclepaths network, and its pace is being followed by National Autorithies, mainly in Scotland, other countries like Ireland and Portugal are yet to start to assume that cycling is a modern way of transportation, with a great future, and that cyclists suppose a big potential for a kind of tourism that can help a lot to reinforce local economies.

Long separated cycle ways are now a common feature in some northern countries, and "off-road" means almost always a good rolling surface, usually asphalted. In Spain the search for an alternative non-motorised route supposes too often non-asphalt track, well suitable for Mountain Bike but sometimes not for every bicycle, even though with Spanish dry climate it means that is passable almost all the year. That is going better every year, anyway. Hundreds of Kilomenters of local and rural roads, suitable now for a EuroVelo Route, are thretened by future road developments, thus giving priority to cyclists, and protecting them from heavy traffic and fast cars, is a guaranty for the future.

The *Atlantic Route* defined is not always following the Atlantic coastline, for a number of reasons :

- the coast is often very jagged, and following it could double or triple the total length of the route, without adding much interest.
- the inland regions are also related to the sea, and very interesting from a natural and cultural point of view.
- Growing spectations on rural tourism development, can win a strong local support .
- in Summertime, roads are very busy along the coast.



- concentration of population and activities on the coast leave less low-traffic routes available.

## **2.2 - Country reports**

### **Norway**

### **United Kingdom**

The published *Sustrans* maps for the British National Cycle Network that exist today will cover almost all sections of *EuroVelo route 1* in the United Kingdom. Please note that this routes are opened and mapped as “interim” routes. That means that all of them contain sections that are not yet up to *National Cycle Network* standard (good surfacing, correctly signed, and separated from busy roads). The *Sustrans* people have opened and mapped the routes, so that people can use them as early as possible, but improvement work continues. This work includes mainly signing (as some sections of route are not adequately signed yet), and finding alternative solutions for the few remaining busy roads shared. However, by June 2000 most of the route will be up to standard and properly signed.

The Aberdeen to Inverness and Thurso map will cover the first length of the route to be published in 2000, while the actually available maps cover the *Scottish National Cycle Route* from Inverness to Glasgow and almost to Stranraer. Maybe the last section to Stranraer is mapped before 2002-2003.

For Wales, *Sustrans* will publish in November 1999 a pair of maps for the *Celtic Trail (“Lôn Geltaidd”)* which will take you directly across Wales from the port of Fishguard to the Severn Bridge, the English border, when the Euro Velo route continues now using the *Thames Valley Cycle Route* (mapped from Severn Bridge to Bristol), and the *West Country Way* (mapped from Bristol to Barnstaple). In year 2000, the *West Country Way* map will be changed to take in the Severn Bridge, thus unifying the sections of the Velo Route. Due in April 1999 is the *Devon Coast to Coast route*, from Barnstaple to Plymouth and the ferry to France, which will end the insular circuit.

ScotRail and the different British Railways have greatly improved its service to cyclists, and the routes are very close to different stations all over the way.

### **Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, *Sustrans* is also publishing maps that will cover sections of the Atlantic Route. Now available is the *Kingfisher Cycle Trail*, which runs across the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.



The route from Belfast to Newtownstewart, Omagh and Enniskillen will be published in 2000.

In the Irish Republic, lots of rural roads, most of them with asphalt surface, provide a good basis for the Velo Route. Till now they were very quiet roads, but industrial activity at western towns areas is increasing, along with motorized tourism. The traffic generated makes it necessary to find some alternative routes and safe links and accesses to towns. Some dismantled railways could provide the necessary infrastructure, although cycle tourists cannot help to try to approach the windy little roads that follows the cliffs line...

## **France**

In Brittany, the continental route starts using minor roads through the countryside. All these routes are well surfaced and maintained by the local authorities, even if traffic calming could be necessary on some sections. Some constructions are needed : south east of *Roscoff* ; the north access to *Morlay* ; the south access to *Landernau* and the access to the harbour of *Brest*. To be mentioned some important gradients getting to *Chateaulin* at the beginning of the *Mont d'Arrée*. Construction is needed to cross the river *Aulne* at *Terenez* Bridge. A train service is running between *Brest* and *Chateaulin*, which provides an alternative for not so experienced cyclists.

From here to *Nantes*, this section is following the towpath of the *Nantes to Brest* canal, currently used by lots of hikers (GR-37) and cyclists, even if it needs some re-surfacing, signing and mapping to meet Euro Velo standards. Some construction is needed from *Nort sur Endre* to *Nantes*, as the existing link using local roads is not comfortable enough. The good quality cycle network of *Nantes* allows to cross the town easily.

From *Nantes* to *Sables d'Olonne* the route uses quiet roads, well surfaced, 3 to 6 meters width. Exceptions are some dangerous crossings, and access to *Sables D'Olonne*.

The department of *Vendée* plans to build a traffic free cycle path all along the 100 km of coast, and 10 km are opened yet between *Saint Jean* and *Saint Gilles de Mont*. From *La Rochelle*, the route is following the recently opened cycle path to *Rochefort* by the seaside. The department of *Charentes Maritimes* is planning to build a cycle route along the coast. In the meantime, the Euro Velo is using local and rural roads, well surfaced 3 to 6 meters width and well maintained by the local authorities. Several sections need some works to be carried out : across the marshes between *Grues* and *Puyravault*, the crossing of river *Seudre* on D 728 and the north access of *Royan*. In the marshes a possibility would be to build bridges to link the little canals avoiding the busy route.



From *Pointe de Grave* to *Cap Ferret*, the route is following most of the time good traffic free cycles paths 2 -3 meters width, surfaced with asphalt. The existing signage have different standards. A few sections need to be restored : From *Le Verdon* to *Soulac*, at the south of *Lacanau* and between *Léze* and *Cap Ferret*. For those who would go around the basin of *Arcachon*, a link is missing between *Biganos* and *Arcachon*. A train service carrying bicycles exist all the year round.

The South route is following brand new good cycles paths (traffic free) 2 -3 meters width, surfaced with asphalt . They are old paths used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the resin pines pickers and restored by the French national office of forests (ONF). Links are missing between *Biscarosse* beach and *Biscarosse*, *Parentis* and *Mimizan*, *St Giron*s and *Léon*. Most of the time, links can be found using local roads. The path ends at *Labenne*. From here to the spanish border, the existing path is badly surfaced and have no continuity. Local authorities plan to build a cycle path along the national route n°10. Train services exist from *Labenne* to *Bayonne* and the spanish border and it is possible to carry bikes at certain times, mainly in Summer.

## **Spain**

The “*Fundación de los Ferrocarriles españoles*” (depending from Spanish Railways) made in November 1997 a preliminary report to identify the Spanish section of the Velo Route. The route proposed by the *Fundación de Ferrocarriles* combines, all along the Spanish section, different types of ways and surfacing: small cycle lanes and urban promenades, greenways already arranged or projected using abandoned railways, mainly rural roads and tracks, and even one of the few inland canals ever built in Spain have been included. It is obliged to outline the use of cattle tracks, an important feature in rural Spain, where cattle (mainly bovine) had to travel seasonally from the Summer pastures in the mountains to the Winter in the southern plains. They run occasionally in parallel to major roads, and most of the times through impressive isolated and scenic surroundings. Altogether, the Velo Route avoids in such a way the busy roads. Maybe this supposes a frequent change of platform and surfacing as well, and frequent crossing of roads. Anyway, a correct signing would avoid misleading and major dangers, meanwhile new alternatives will be provided.

The route will include some small sections sharing busy roads, in narrow passages that do not allow an alternative. Such is the problem between Irun and Navarra, where the two ends of an dismantled railway are converted to a very nice greenway, while in the middle a 7 Kms of busy road are remaining. Chances are to carry on works to recover the missing link. The crossing of the sierra between *Castilla* and *Extremadura* near *Béjar* makes it necessary to share a busy road in a short section (an attractive alternative is at present being studied, at this point, using an artefact on an unused railway, with rails not yet removed, that could carry the bicycles on it...). In a couple of years time, maybe another alternative can be available, as it looks likely<sup>o</sup> several sections of an recently abandoned railway (covering most of *the Ruta de la Plata*) will be



dismantled, and could be converted to a greeway. Things are changing very fast for cycling in Spain, and it is allowed a good degree of optimism.

## **Portugal**

Work of identifying the route is just starting, carried on by the Cyclists Federation (FPCUB). Opportunities arise to find funds to sign and put in place the route afterwards, as Portuguese Organization for Investment, Trade and Tourism has shown interest in attracting non-seasonal tourism to the Southern region of El Algarve.

## **2.3 – Charts and Maps**

### **United Kingdom**

- *Off-road* means sections of cycling route independent from roads shared with motor vehicles, even quiet ones.
- *On-road* means sections of shared routes, even if roads are little used, (*which* is mainly the case).

#### **Type of infrastructure by section**

<b>SECTION</b>	<b>Km Total</b>	<b>Off road</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>On Road</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Scotland</b> (Aberdeen-Stranraer)	770	328	43	442	47
<b>Northern Ireland</b> (Belfast-border)	315	79	25	236	75
<b>Wales</b> (Fishguard to Severn Bridge)	253	128	51	125	49
<b>England</b> (Bridge to Plymouth)	307	204	66,5	103	33,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1645</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>55</b>

### **Spain**

Type of roads indicated in Spain do not give exactly the situation of surfacing.

- *Rural roads* are almost always asphalted now,
- *Cattle tracks* are a main feature in central Spain, dust surfaced (a few sections have asphalt) They are dry most of the time, but can experience





problems in rainy seasons. A parallel road is usually available as an alternative.

- *Local roads* means roads that fit EuroVelo requirements, as traffic is very low.
- *Greenways* are the tracks of old railways, many of them with a light asphalt, but others just with a hard earth surface, as are the
- Canal towpaths.
- *Cycle lanes* are mostly urban, and surfacing is always asphalt.

### Different types of infrastructures with length

TYPE	KMS	%	COMMENTS
Rural / Cattle tracks	587	43%	Mostly Hard surface
Local roads	404	29,5%	
Greenways/ old railw.	183	13,4%	Many already usable
Canal towpaths	95	7%	
Other roads	89	6,4%	Alternatives studied
Cycle lanes	10	0,7%	Number increasing
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.368</b>	<b>100%</b>	

### Type of Infrastructure by section

Region	Basque Country	Navarra	Rioja	Castilla/ Leon	Extremadura	Andalucia	TOTAL
Cycle lane	3			7			10
Canal towpaths				95			95
Greenways/railw		33	8	40		102	183
Rural/cattle track		74	35,8	231	215	31,5	587,3
Local roads		63	36,6	146	129,5	28,5	403,6
Roads	7	9	2,8	13	36,5	21	89,3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>83,2</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>1368,2</b>



## **Black Spots / busy roads**

56,2 Kms, 4,52 % of total length



## 3 - Landscape description – Interest for tourists

### *Norway*

### *Great Britain*

Although not so scenic as the Western Highlands, the Scottish Eastern coast offers pleasant views on a route sharing seaside and farmland landscapes. Inverness is the central point for routes on the *Highlands*, or just a round trip by a cycleway along *Loch Ness*, with its magnificent view from *Castle Urquhart* (maybe the cyclist can spot the Monster...if he or her believes enough in it). On the Scottish central corridor, the remaining of the Caledonian pine Forests dot the hillsides along the route, and *Cairngorn* mountains are often covered by snow...or certainly clouds. The route reaches some of the main inland lakes (*lochs*) of Scotland: *Tay*, *Earn*, *Lubnaig*, and the specially beautiful *Loch Venachar*. The *Falls of Leny*, as well as an important number of castles, industrial heritage and natural life are another main features along the route. Near Glasgow, the route crosses the stunning Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, and passes nearby Loch Lomond, till reaching the Firth of Clyde, and the outskirts of Glasgow.

*Glasgow* is Scotland's greatest city, with a rich industrial heritage, magnificent architecture, art collections, and a thriving cultural and social life, including, of course its pubs.

South from Glasgow, the route heads into the rolling hills and pastures of Ayrshire, with exciting views towards Arran and the Clyde Coast. The area is famous for its golf courses, and there are plenty of them along the way.



The Western coastal corner of Southern Wales enjoys a mild winters and sunny springs, and it supports a rich agriculture and milk production, while rivers and sea have plenty of fishing activity. Norman castles and popular architecture dot the landscape. The slate and stone traditional houses from farmlands and villages, give place to the lines of terrace houses, now gaily colored, of the old coal fields.

*Cardiff*, welsh capital, and its biggest town, houses an active cultural life. *Newport* crossing is a must by itself, thanks to the Transporter Bridge (from 1906), that takes you on a movable platform over the river Usk. Leaving Wales by the great Severn Bridge will be another unforgettable experience.

Southern England is also a mainly rural area, with rolling pastures hills in Devon and huge open wild areas, such as *Exmoor* and *Dartmoor national Parks*, that will be crossed by the EuroVelo route till the historical port of *Plymouth*.

If you don't just want to cycle, there are fantastic traditional pubs in almost every village and town along the way, serving many different kinds of local beer, cider, and Whisky (also "local" in Scotland) and in many cases good home-cooked food. Some of the most important scottish Whisky distilleries are from a short reach of the Euro Velo, even if trying it maybe is not most recommended for cycling afterwards... In the bigger cities there are great nightclubs - Glasgow nightlife is famous and Bristol has a tremendous music scene. Irish pubs are so famous that every country in Europe has tried to recreate their special atmosphere.

British food, according to its lovers, is much better than many people imagine, even in small towns you can find restaurants offering cuisine as good as anything in France or Belgium, and each region has its own specialities.

Britain still has a very specific national culture (or in the case of this route, four national cultures - in north Wales many people speak Welsh as their first language and will very much appreciate it if you learn a few words; the same goes for parts of western Ireland). It may not be worth looking for a list of "typical" foods, activities or dress - just enjoy the special experience of travelling through cultures quite different to the rest of Europe.

We could though point out the many local sports - if you have the opportunity to visit a "Highland Games" the costumes are as fascinating as the many trials of strength; Ireland has several sports of its own, including a local version of football; in south Wales and England cricket is as much a piece of cultural history as it is a sport (and don't worry, most Britons don't understand the rules either!).

Accommodation of all kinds is widely available all along the route - although there is naturally less choice in rural Wales or Scotland than in the English southwest. Along some of the Sustrans routes, accommodation guides have been locally produced and on the maps details are given of Tourist Information Centres, which can advise on accommodation either before or during a trip.



## ***Ireland***

In Northern Ireland, the route travels through a territory that is dotted with many rivers and lakes. The route is fairly flat, with some gently undulating hills and is very rich in historical heritage: dolmens, castles, Estates...

Western coast is made of big cliffs (between the highest in Europe), hundreds of islands, long peninsulas and hidden beaches. Castles, old monasteries and the remainings of old vanished cultures are widely scattered. Landscape is always scenic, while rural inland is mainly a succession of hills, pastures and stone walls along the quiet roads.

Accommodation of all kind is available, including bed&breakfast, farms, campings, hostels...

Irish pubs are more than a place to drink, it's local social centre as well, a music venue (live sessions) and a place for discussion and meeting warm local people. They are different from each other, fitting for every mood and occasion. Local stout beers are mostly often found: Guinness, Murphy's, Beamish... *Whiskey* in Ireland is certainly different from Scottish *Whisky*, and each has its passionate defenders).

Celtic music (mainly Irish music, but also Scottish and Welsh) is in the mood, and many opportunities will arise to enjoy it live, in pubs, country fairs or festivals such as the Galway July festival, lasting a full week.

## ***France***

Western Brittany is mainly the Country of the Sea (*Armor* in Breton language), with its many scenic beaches and cliffs, and fishermen's harbours. Surrounding countryside is green and rich in agriculture, such the famous *Léon* country, *Morlaix*, a very nice and busy harbour with an old town. Getting out by *Saint Fiacre*, the route passes by the parish close country, one of the most interesting historical things to visit in Brittany.

*Brest* is a historical naval town, and nearby it are the main strawberry fields in France. Following the *Aulne* estuary the route enters the regional and natural park of *Armorique* and its open air museums.

The countryside between *Brest* and *Nantes*, following the canal, offers a blend of open fields and traditional bocages. The Velo Route is crossing a country of legends. *Nantes*, historical capital of Brittany (even if now belongs to another administrative region) has many remainings from this past, along with a rich maritime tradition. Crêpes and Cider are most significant of Brittany cuisine, along with seafood.

The route enters the historical harbour of *La Rochelle*. From where it is possible to reach the island of Ré and its kilometres of seaside linked by cycle paths. The magnificent old town of *Rochefort* is very friendly for cycling and the old



Royal Corderies have to be visited. Getting out of *Rochefort*, the route crosses magnificent marshes to link *Oléron* island at *Marennes*. This is the country of delicious oysters and mussels.

Once crossed the Gironde river in Royan, almost till the Basque country, the route is now crossing *Les Landes*, a huge Pine forest (1 million Ha), planted and cultivated during several centuries. The EuroVelo is running on old paths used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the resin pine pickers. The French national office of forests (ONF) have restored the paths very well. The cyclists will find all services in summertime also a free map edited by the departmental tourist board (CDT). In winter time, it is better to be able to cycle more than 20 km without finding any services.

At the bottom of the forest, the route arrives in *Bassin d'Arcachon* an inland sea well known for its nice sunsets, oysters and wild beaches. *Cap Ferret* is a calm nice seaside resort bordered on a side by the violent ocean and on another side by the calm inland sea. In summertime, a ferry service brings the cyclists several times a day to *Arcachon*. In wintertime, the cyclists have to go around the Bassin by a traffic free cycle path to *Biganos* and *Arcachon*.

*Arcachon* is a nice and rich sea resort with many beautiful houses. To the south, the unforgettable *Dune du Pyla* is standing with its hundred meters of sand.

The route is now continuing between the white sand beaches and the wild pines forest to join the *Landes* department, seaside resorts. The landscape is quite similar than the Gironde's one. The fishing ports of *Vieux Boucaux* and *Capbreton* as well as the *Hossegor* lake are nice places to stay.

The real south is coming when the route arrives in *Pyrénées Atlantique* Département at *Boucau*. Old town of *Bayonne* have to be lived at night.  *Biarritz* famous seaside resort offer all the services of a modern town. The Basque country is here with his typical accent and rhythm.

## ***Spain***

The Iberian Peninsula is a Subcontinent by itself, with so many different landscapes, agriculture, peoples, and cultures (including a variation in food and wines hardly available in most of the world). Relief is an attractive itself, even if for cyclist maybe a handicap. Anyway, the Velo Route 1 bypasses the Pyrenees Range, that makes the frontier between France and Spain by the coast, and manages to cross different cordilleras by the easiest passes. To the truly Atlantic Basque Country, maritime and rainy, a succession of landscapes with different mixtures of Atlantic and Mediterranean will follow: hilly country in *Navarra*, vast plains in *Castilla*, several mountain ranges along the way, and a "different" Atlantic: this of Southern Spain and Portugal. Usually dry and mild weather facilitates open air activities, such as cycling. In the central sections, there are extreme seasonal changes (hard and sometimes snowy winter, hot and dry summer), that can discourage cycling, but most of the time it is possible



to cope with this problem by choosing the best riding hours. So the route will be practicable most of the year, and this is a must for Europeans.

Part of the route follows a historical trail: *El Camino de Santiago*, well publicised and with a most adequate lodging system for cyclists: the pilgrims lodges in many towns. A growing number of additional accommodations are also in offer, induced by the success of *El Camino* as a modern days tourism alternative.

Rioja region is the point of crossing of the Ebro river, a plain and gentle slopes full of raisins, famous mainly for their well known wines and vegetables gardens, that allows many gastronomique pleasures, from a well provided table to a promenade along the bars streets, visiting many bars to eat a *tapa* (a little food) and drink a glass of wine, always different.

The plains of Castilla will be a surprise for those Europeans who use to enjoy the Spanish Mediterranean coast. The smooth rolling through the huge plain gives a feeling of open spaces, without the risk of boring: a number of small rivers, the canals, the vicinity to many historical towns, castles, churches...gives the needed variety and provide amenities and accommodation.

Extremadura introduces a new feature: the "*dehesas*", which dots the cereals fields with scattered huge trees, that provides food and shelter for cattle and black porks. Rural roads and cattle tracks takes the cyclist trough this areas, where many European birds spend Winter. Here the Velo Route follows another historical way, the *Ruta de la Plata* (Silver trail). Old from Roman times, lots of remaining of Roman buildings and causeways are still in place, along with the towns and palaces of many *Conquistadores* (the soldiers of fortune that won America for the Castillian King). Since some time ago this route has been promoted as inland tourism alternative, so much infrastructure and accommodation is available. Even sparsely populated, there is always a town or rural lodge nearby.

Entering Andalucia gives again a surprise to the less informed tourist, as it is a mountainous land, the Sierra Morena and Sierra de Aracena, with several Natural Reserves, and plenty of Industrial Heritage, with some very old mines (even previous to Roman times). The greenways that use old railway tracks ensure a smooth riding dawn (and up) the coastal plains, where the Velo Route takes the already conditioned Coastal Greenway, another old railway, along marshes and wonderful beaches, till the Guadiana River.

Much of the way along Spain the Velo Route crosses or passes by the vicinity of Natural Parks and places of outstanding beauty, including some animal refuges. Between them we must mention: Señorío de Bertiz, in Navarra, Parque Natural de Monfragüe, in Extremadura, and la Sierra de Aracena and Picos de Aroche, as well as coastal marshes, birdlife refugees, inAndalucia. Roman vestiges, as the Aqueducts and Proserpina Reservoir in Merida as well as many bridges and remainings of old causeways.



## **Portugal**

The Algarve regions is a piece of Atlantic land with a fully Mediterranean atmosphere, with its gentle climate. Warm temperatures (moderated by the ocean breezes) and year-round sunshine, invites to ride a bycicle at any season. The coast extends for 150 Kms along great beaches of white sand, fringed by reddish cliffs and sandstone rocks. Meanwhile many towns allows to enjoy a quiet and traditional ambience, plenty of facilities for massive tourism offers the pleasures of southern nights to the lovers of more Cosmopolitan amenities.

Faro is the main town, with medieval walls and a roman-gothic cathedral decorated with painted ceramic tiles from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and many churches and museums. Lagos, MonchiqueSilves and Tavira and are renown for its rich architecture, while Monchique and Olhao are the main fishermen's towns, with a very particular ambiance.

Sagres shows the souvenirs of its old School of navigation that had a crucial role in European navigations. Nearby lies the Saint Vicente Cape (old Roman's Promotorium Sacrum), the extreme south-western tip of the Eurpean Continent.

Local gastronomy reflexes its links to the sea and to the past: seafood, fish dishes and soups, (specially renown tuna fish with onions), and sweets of a distinctive Arab origin.





## 4- Organization and funding

### ***United Kingdom***

Development of the route through the UK is entirely coordinated by Sustrans. This is a log-experienced .....

Funds for the development of the route itself will be assembled from a range of sources (National Lottery, Local and County Councils...) by Sustrans. The Scottish Office is committed to improving the trunk road sections as part of their *Trunk Road Cycling Initiative*, and Sustrans is already negotiating to obtain better off-road alternatives.

The whole route will be in place by summer 2000 Exception will be the short link to Stranraer, and possibly the eastern section of *Lôn Geltaidd* - if these are later it will only be by a year or two, and if EuroVelo requires development to be speeded up, that should not be a problem after Sustrans.

### ***France***

In France the responsibilities for tourism and roads are shared by different public and private organizations: Central Government, Regions, Departments, Local Councils, as well as "Syndicats d'Initiative" organising local businessmen and officials to promote tourism and activities. Although France is a Country with long outdoor sports tradition, roads were not safe for cyclists, and the mountain bike (VTT, Vélo Tout terrain) was recently the main trend. Things are changing fast, as the more and more towns and regions are investing in recovering and promoting car-free routes for cyclists.

The situation of the west coast of France is not homogeneous. In one hand, some departments have created a good level traffic free cycle path network, especially in *Aquitania*, near *Bordeaux*. In the other hand, some departments, particularly in Brittany have just recently heard about cycles routes and have not



decide their policy yet. In the middle, in *Pays de Loire* region, some sections are yet built on under construction and the idea of a coastal cycle route is generally accepted.

An important point is the new project of a National Cycle Network proposed by AF3V organisation « *Association pour le développement des Véloroutes - Voies Vertes* ». Since December 1998, this project is now officially supported by the French Government, Ministries of Transport, Environment and Sports. The French National Network planned will have common routes with Eurovelo project. Here are some regional initiatives that will allow in a short time period to put together the Euro Velo Atlantique in France:

The Department of Finistère has decided in 1998 to develop an active policy. A study will begin in 1999 to find the ways to set priorities. Long distance cycle routes as proposed by Eurovelo project seems to be included.

In the Department of Morbihan, some projects are under study particularly along the coast, but no scheme is yet planned. Whatever the department concentrates his efforts on the canal Nantes to Brest which is maintained as a cycle path by the authority.

The Department of Loire Atlantique is involved in a main project : a route all along the coast. The project is under study and the choice of the route is not decided yet.

In Department of Vendée, the authority has planned a cycle path all along the coast to link the different resorts. 10 kilometres are already constructed on 100 kilometres. Other circuits are also existing in the inland in order to develop tourism. The island of *Ré* is an exemple in France for cycle paths network with important benefits on local economy.

The regional authority of the Pays de Loire ( Loire Atlantique - Vendée) is involved in the « *La Loire à Vélo* » project . This project, proposed in partnership with region Centre, aims to create a good quality cyclerooute from the ocean to Nevers along the Loire valley. The region is also sustaining other projects like the coastal routes of Loire Atlantique and Vendée.

A coastal route is planned in the Department of Charentes Maritimes from La Rochelle to the south. 30 kilometres have been constructed to Rochefort.

Since the 80's the authority of the Department of Gironde has developed a very active policy. The Network of trafic free cycle is now more than 700 kilometres. Most of the paths are built on forest tracks and old railway. The work is now mainly to restore old paths and to create new links to the inland.

The Department of Landes aims to complete quickly the coastal cycle path which is linking the seaside resort. This could be achieved in the new millenium.



The Department of Pyrénées Atlantiques is late compared to its north neighbours. It is now planned to build a path which will complete the coastal route to Spain. The deadline is not known yet.

The authority of the Region Aquitaine ( Gironde - Landes - Pyrénées Atlantiques) wants to promote the regional network to develop tourism. The council aims to harmonise the quality and signage of the paths and is sustaining the development of the network.

## **Spain**

The Ministerio de Fomento (Public Works) and the similar Departments at the Regional level are doing already some works, mainly providing a good surfacing and signing on abandoned railways (Bidasoa and Plazaola Railways, in Basque country and Navarra, Ruta de los Molinos del Agua and Ruta Verde del Litoral in Andalucia). A Charity Trust (Señorío de Bértiz) has arranged a very nice greenway in Navarra, used by the Velo Route. A few Local Councils have arranged cycle lanes at the outskirts of the towns (even fortunately this number is growing). Regional Governments, and specially its Tourist Boards are increasingly concerned with the non-stational inland tourism.

In November, 1997, the *Fundacion de los Ferrocarriles Españoles* published a Study identifying the route trough Spanish territory, and all the regional governments involved (Basque Country, Navarra, Rioja, Castilla-León, Extremadura and Andalucia) participated in supplying information and funding it. Yet till now they have not compromised much effort in doing works and signing, with the exception of the above mentioned *Camino de Santiago* and *Ruta de la Plata*. However, It is likely they will be participating and funding the implementation of the Euro Route 1.

## **Portugal**

In Portugal, the Portuguese Federation of Cyclists (*Federação Portuguesa de Cicloturismo e Utilizadores de Bicicleta*) is already working on the identification of a VeloRoute separated from the main road, from the border town of Vila Real de Santo Antonio to Sagres. This route will take profit of an abandoned railway, rural roads and roads with little traffic. At the same time, they are placing in a map all types of services needed for cyclists: catering, workshops, lodging...

The ICEP (Investments, Trade and Tourism Association of Portugal) has shown deep interest in this project, identifying cycle tourism as an emerging bussiness, specially interesting because it is not as seasonal depending as the usual "sun and beaches" massive tourism, concentrated in just a couple of months. Fine weather practically all the year round gives the best opportunities to this kind of out door activity. As soon as the Federation of Cyclists would be able of proposing a project, it is very likely to put together finance rressources from



private or public origin, according with an statement of a representative from the above mentioned Association.

The Federation is also in talks with the CP (Portuguese Railways) in order to obtain better facilities for cyclists on trains.



## 5 - Conclusion

Variety along this route is maybe its main feature, despite the common topic of the Atlantic coast vicinity, that links all these lands together. Variety of countries, and of cultures inside each country. Variety of languages (many more than official languages), and between them some of the oldest spoken ones in Europe: Basque, Gaelic... Variety of climates, always tempered by the Ocean breezes, variety of socioeconomic situations, and activities.

EuroVelo Route 1 will reflect this variation along its way, and therefore has to accept all these differences, and consider a varied range of technical solutions and of project maturity.

While in the United Kingdom a National cycling network is being put in place smoothly, with the desired participation of National, Regional, and Local administrations, along with a powerful non-profit Association such as Sustrans, in France have been mainly local tourism initiatives which have built a patchwork of cycle lanes yet to fit together. In Spain the goal of a cycling network is not objected now, but it is always waiting to be started with strength enough. Other countries are just beginning to talk about..

Nevertheless, the bikes are increasingly moving, and they will try and find its place on the roads network. Maybe an European project like EuroVelo can provide the necessary thrust and illusion to produce a decisive take-off. Resources can be put together from many origins: European Funds for local development, all-European programs, Sponsors, Regional policies...and local resources and energies will strongly cooperate as soon as the aim of the project will be understood, and demonstration effect from the most advanced localities will show.

EuroVelo Route 1 has all the reasons to become successful, as much of its way is already in use, and much more identified and ready to be signed. Certainly, the length of the route makes it very unlikely to run it at one stroke, but the existence of good public transportation (including mainly railways and ferries) in all the route makes it easy to access its different sections, and to reassume the route in different times. The Atlantic route will have the opportunity to become one of these "once in a lifetime" travels that capture the imagination.



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