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To Auschwitz on two wheels

Robert Desmond, of Hampstead Garden Suburb, recently spent 25 days completing a 2,222 km (1,350 mile) cycle trip from London to Auschwitz, Poland. Travelling alone, with two large panniers full of warm clothes and his laptop, he spent 22 days on the bike. Here he describes his journey.

I devised a route which would follow the Path of Liberation taken by soldiers during World War II, stopping at places of interest along the way. My journey began at Westminster and I crossed the Channel by ferry from Poole to Cherbourg. I followed the Normandy beaches, then pushed through to Paris.



Robert Desmond standing at the entrance to Auschwitz after his 2,222km ride.

After cycling on to Luxembourg, a country invaded by the Germans despite being neutral, I crossed into Germany where I met a friend who lives in Frankfurt. I visited the trial rooms at Nuremberg where Nazi war criminals were tried after the war and, moving through Bavaria, visited the first concentration camp of my trip, Flossenberg.

Reaching Prague, I spent a day off the bike and reached Poland a few days later, visiting the largest concentration camp the Nazis built, Auschwitz. Approximately 1.5 million people were brutally murdered here and it was an emotional and poignant place to complete my journey.

Unforgettable experiences

Starting in October, I expected it to be cold and wet and it was, but despite some bad weather I had some incredible experiences. From extreme pride at being British when travelling along the Normandy beaches to immense sadness at the concentration camps, I experienced a whole range of emotions throughout the trip,

feelings I will never forget.

I met some very friendly people throughout France: some American and Canadian travellers at the Normandy memorials who were very generous, buying me lunch and museum tickets, and several fairly old (70+) cyclists who were still hitting the road, a great inspiration for me.

I was pulled over by police and beeped at by many drivers, especially when I accidentally joined a motorway in the dark in the pouring rain! I fixed two punctures and had to buy new tyres halfway through. I sent around 60 postcards and managed to solve most language issues with hand gestures and pointing.

I wanted to



The tokens Robert laid on a memorial at Auschwitz.



Adam is a star baker

Crouch End cake maker Adam Cox appeared alongside Great British Bake Off judge Paul Hollywood on his television series Pies and Puds. The episode, broadcast in November, had Adam demonstrating his cake decorating skills and showing Paul how to make a sugar model of himself. Adam's website is www.adamscakes.co.uk

quit at several points, or at least cheat by taking a train for a short part, but I pushed on through the rain, cold and hills to cycle the whole distance.

Cycling in commemoration

I realised that if a person had been standing at every metre on my two-million metre journey, I would have to return home to England and complete the journey from scratch again in order to

pass six million people lining my travels. This was the number of Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. This doesn't include the soldiers or civilians who also perished.

I made this journey to commemorate the fallen; to try and understand something that is so close to home and so recent in history. Read more at <http://dezco.co.uk/auschwitz-cycle/>

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