

Keith Gilks speaks with Paul and learns about his passion for cycling and music.

I first met Paul Cheese (yes, his real name) at last year's Champions of Cyclesport Dinner. You couldn't miss him; he was the only one with long blond dreadlocks (yes, his real hair), a dinner jacket and green doc martins. Within minutes I was fascinated by his stories of his latest cycling adventure; in 2013 he cycled over 3600 miles (5887km) across Europe, carrying 45kg of equipment, writing and recording an album along the way. His trip took him from Edam to Gruyeres, then over the Alps to Gorgonzola, finishing in Camembert via a 'slight' detour over the Pyrenees. Previous to that, in 2012 he cycled 2000 miles (3200 km) across the UK, covering the furthest points of the compass, carrying 40kg of recording equipment, whilst finding interesting and inspirational locations to record an album. I had to learn more, and kindly Paul invited me to his studio in Kent. Paul's studio is a converted Granary situated amongst other ancient farm buildings, typical of the style and type found

in rural Kent. A wonderful setting. The plan was to have a quick tour of the studio and then off to a pub to hold the interview over lunch. (I feel it is important to keep journalistic traditions alive). However due to Paul's enthusiasm to share his cycling and musical experiences, two hours flew by and we had to rush to our gastronomical destination before last orders!

WHAT IS YOUR NORMAL DAY JOB?

Over the years I have had many different jobs to support my music and adventure.

I am lucky enough now to have so many 'thumbs in musical pies' that amount to a living. I believe nowadays that is the definition of 'making it'.

Today I run my own recording studio, recording everything from metal bands that push you faster down hills, to big dance tunes that help you up mountains. I also work with singer-song writers, write music for TV and radio and, most rewardingly teach guitar/music. (I actually continued to

teach some of my students via Skype on my European trip).

I have played guitar/ sung in bands, and written songs for as long as I can remember. Also I have always tried to explore further than I was allowed.

When I was little, I was told never to go further than the end of the road. Well, on my gold Raleigh Budgie I used to cycle 10 miles to the 'big bridge' and get lost coming back again. I remember being really scared at not knowing where I was and the relief of getting home, but every day I would go out and do it again.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO DO THE 2000 MILE BRITISH TRIP?
INSPIRATION 1:

I had an ambition to go out the front door, get on my bike and keep cycling left until I couldn't go any further. So in 2011 I did.

That was a shock to the system. Never really cycled for more than two days in a row! Eight days....

INSPIRATION 2:

Whilst snowboarding in Austria at the end of 2011, I decided to take all of my recording

equipment to the top of the mountain, setup, and record a vocal and guitar track whilst looking over the Alps.

'Bloody blimey' such an amazing experience. Singing and playing in an inspirational location changes your expression, recording is all about capturing the performance.

I tell my clients in the studio to imagine a place/atmosphere when recording a take...

In 2012 I went out to find those places.

First, my mate Nailz and I said, 'Lets do Land's End to John O'Groats'.

Okay, then we thought....why not start at the furthest point east. Great, it's only just up the road (I live in Sussex). WRONG! The furthest east point of mainland Britain is Lowestoft.

Then we thought, well if we are starting at the furthest east...why not do, the furthest east (Lowestoft) then furthest south and furthest west; So... Land's End. WRONG! Lizard Point is the most southerly point and Ardnamurchan point the most westerly point. We then obviously had to go onto the furthest north; up to John O'Groats..... yep, WRONG! The northerly point is Dunnet head. We only realised this when I googled it five days before we left!

But, when you make a plan...'stick to the plan, or don't make a plan!'

So I ended up carrying 40kg of recording equipment, a guitar and a suit nearly 2000 miles in the wettest June on record. Thirty days, only six of which were without rain.

HOW MUCH TRAINING DID YOU DO BEFORE THE BIG TRIPS?

I found that the best form of training is to fill up your pannier bags with bricks, logs, and dumbbells, and head for the nearest hill.



A tasty interview with Paul Cheese – Cyclist, musician, composer



I learn so much from every big ride. I try to get out as much as possible and try to start training as soon as the dust settles from an adventure.

WERE YOU SPONSORED?

No, I worked as much as I could and sold everything I didn't use.

I spoke to a couple of companies about what I was about to do in Europe and got a great response, Emerald carbon fibre guitars, Contour cameras, Silva Water proof gear and Electron lights all donated a few bits of equipment to the cause.

WHAT BIKE DID YOU USE?

A 2011 Giant Roam XR1, it was the best and most solid bike I could afford. It has been the most 'me proof' bike I have ever had. It has currently done over 12,000 miles and I have only changed the cassette and chain twice.

My local bike shop, Evernden Cycles, has been brilliant. They built the rear wheel specifically for me – extra spokes to handle the weight and also provided guidance and advice.

CAMPING OR HOTELS?

On the first trip in 2011 we carried tents and camped, but after many freezing cold nights

and with only a couple of hours sleep, (don't get me wrong, camping is good), I decided to stay in cheap B&Bs and hostels for the Britain adventure. Some of the hotels/hotels were the same price as camping and it was good when you have been cycling for 12 hours not to have to set up a tent in the rain whilst trying to stop all the recording equipment getting wet.

WHAT WAS THE MOST INSPIRING EPISODE OF THE BRITISH TRIP?

So many, but probably cycling to Ben Nevis, setting up my recording equipment in a gondola and freetracking (recording in an inspirational place) whilst going up and down the side of the mountain. The views were awesome.

And another day, after a long day cycling in the cold rain, we got to the top of the hill in Ludlow. We found a fantastic bakery and sat on a bench and ate pastys. There were two little old ladies sitting on the bench next to me...One of them turned around and said to me " We used to be able to cycle up that hill too, you know" I smiled with steaming red face and hot pasty grin, then she said to me " we don't complain about getting old you know, getting old is a privilege. There are so many people that do not have the chance"

Everyday I thought about that, so lucky to have the ability to do what I've done and so lucky to have the want to do it.

DID YOUR EXPERIENCES FROM THE BRITISH TRIP SOW THE SEED FOR THE EUROPEAN ADVENTURE OR HAD YOU HAD THE TRIP IN MIND FOR SOME TIME?

My life is pretty project based, so really had no idea about Europe until a good few months after I got back from the four corners of mainland Britain.

DID YOU HAVE A SUPPORT TEAM BEHIND YOU?

My support team were in the panniers! I took everything I needed, and prepared as much as possible against breakdowns and punctures. I fitted 'Slime tyre liners' and also had slime in the tubes.

Amazingly I did not suffer one puncture or a broken spoke in the whole of the journey!

My friend Kim joined me for half of the road trip. It makes such a difference mentally when you are cycling with a companion, but then all of the little 'mental holidays' you go on when you are on your own is great for lyric writing. If you ever need anything sorted out - put that thought in a cyclist's head and send



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them off for a few days, every possible angle will be thought about, agonised over and then solved.

HAD YOU A 'BACKUP PLAN'?

I had a spare tyre. Does that count? Cable ties and gaffa tape can fix anything!

DID YOU PLAN THE TRIP IN DETAIL?

Nope, it was all made up as I went, the only things I knew were the four cheese destinations (Edam, Gruyeres, Gorgonzola and Camembert).

I learnt from the first trip that it is not just the miles you cover in a day; it is also the elevation that makes the difference.

At the end of every day I would sit down and work out what was possible. One day it took me six hours to cover fourteen miles. I used a Mio sat nav that was absolutely brilliant as it showed not only the distance, but also the elevation of the route ahead. Great for planning.

From the experience and lessons learnt from the British trip, I planned to continue to use cheap hotels and hostels. Not only was this better for my welfare, but also for the security of the bike and equipment. In every hotel I either had the bike in my room or in a ground floor room, stored on a light weight tarpaulin. I must say Booking.com were great. They informed hotels of my circumstances, which lead to a couple instances where managers rang me when

I was running late to offer help; such as coming out to find me and escorting me in! Fantastic.

In over seventy days I only had one issue, when one grumpy manager refused to allow me to book into the hotel at 1am one morning. (It was a long day!) And on top of that it was raining. I managed to spark up my lap top in the shelter of a bus stop, and reserve a room at an alternative hotel through Booking.com. It was 3 or 4 am in the morning by the time I arrived at the new accommodation. (Actually it was a very long day!)

DID YOU COME ACROSS MANY UNHELPFUL PEOPLE?

Not at all, in fact the opposite is true. For example on several occasions cars stopped and the occupants informed me of road closures up ahead and lead me on alternative routes. How friendly and helpful is that? They were also patient with my poor command of European languages.

ANY SCARY MOMENTS?

Oh yes. Especially climbing and descending to and from Andorra. It was a main road, with a steel barrier to my right, protecting me and vehicles from dropping off the mountain and only limited space for vehicles, mostly buses and large trucks, to pass on my left, which they did in their 'droves' every few seconds. Descending was particularly scary as I not only had to contend with the

traffic, there were pot holes and puddles covered with ice!

However on another occasion, I managed 51 mph down a mountain road, scary but fun.

Another moment was when I strayed off the cycle path due to bad weather and ended up a ditch waist high in water. I was okay apart from being soaking wet and having another eight hours cycling to do, but was concerned about the equipment. Thankfully the Vaude panniers I was using did a marvellous job of keeping everything dry. I can't recommend them enough.

But one of the scariest episodes was when I stayed in a hotel in the Dordogne, France. At first I thought I had landed on my feet as the place looked like an old Chateau and was really cheap. However inside it was like a set from 'The Shining'. Old dolls were placed on furniture everywhere you looked. I was glad to leave in one piece!

You mentioned the security issues with the bike and equipment, how did you overcome these?

When my friend was with me it wasn't a problem, we would take turns to go into shops etc.

When I was on my own I had to come up with cunning ways or go without supplies! For example, on one occasion I locked the bike and equipment in a toilet cubicle, climbed out and went shopping! On another I hide the bike in some woods.

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ON THE EUROPEAN TRIP YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY LYRICS OR MUSIC WRITTEN, WAS THIS DAUNTING?

Nope, exciting. All the creative possibilities, and all the time in the world to think about them too! All the melodies and tracks I either wrote and recorded on the way or recorded notes on a Dictaphone to tell myself what to do in the studio when I got back.

WHO PRODUCES THE ALBUMS?

I edit, engineer and produce my tracks and then when I am happy with them I send them to producer Clive Martin (Queen, Reef, Skunk Anansie) for the 'you don't need that' or 'make more of that', finishing expert touch. He brings something to the mix that only a respected outside opinion can. His ears are magic!

HOW DO YOU SELL YOUR ALBUMS?

They are available from iTunes, all the regular digital distribution outlets, and from my website www.paulcheese.com

You can also pre order the second album (released 1st May 2015) and get involved with different exclusives from www.pledgemusic.com

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE NEXT TRIP / FUTURE?

I have the second album to release first! ('Just for the Record Too') on the 1st May 2015. But.... unlike before, I have several plans in the pipeline for the third album... so exciting. Not sure if they are physically possible though!

I left feeling inspired. One ambition of mine is to just leave the house and see where the bike takes me. Paul also offered me the opportunity to join him for a few days on his next trip. An offer I can't refuse and I look forward to reporting on the experience.

Cycling World thanks Paul for his time.

INFORMATION:

Paul used;
Giant Roam XR1 (front suspension with lock out), Mio Sat Nav 505HC, Contour action camera a Roam and +2, Vaude Panniers, Silva waterproof gear, Electron lights, Emerald carbon fibre guitar

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