

Spokes Covid Competition 2021

Cycling in the Pandemic

We asked for your cycling experience during the pandemic – anything from just one incident through to major lifestyle changes

Notes:

- ♦ Judging was done anonymously as far as possible, with the judges not being told names of entrants. Judging was by four members of Spokes Resources Group together with external judge, [Andy Arthur](#), illustrator and bike culture enthusiast.
- ♦ We did not ask entrants for titles, so the titles to the entries below are often our own wording.

First prize, Ken Morrison – New experiences, new lessons

Our world and my experience of cycling has changed so much over the past year; I guess we'll only be able to understand it fully when we can look back. I well remember the first days of Lockdown. It was eerily quiet, like a scene out of the film *On The Beach* (filmed in post-nuclear holocaust Australia). You could hear ambulance sirens from miles away and wonder, is that one coming for anyone near me? Roads I'd avoid like the plague before became, for a short period, a perfect way to get around. The city centre, freed up from the tourists and traffic, was a joy to explore once more. In my local area, loads of mums were out with wee kids on bikes, feeling safer. Elderly friends were getting old bikes out of storage, and friends were doing them up to make them safe and useable.

I used to cycle with others, but I soon found out that that being on my own gave me a chance to explore, without having to keep up. I've discovered castles, a roman fort, standing stones, hill forts, cup and ring stone carvings, old monasteries, churches; all within easy riding from Edinburgh and all close to roads I'd been on before but never stopped to look for. Most were on the excellent Spokes maps which I'd consult when I got back home. Perhaps the newer editions have all of them marked? One or two were found by chatting with the local farmers, or just going down a road I hadn't been on before. Do we realise how lucky we are in the Lothians with all we have around us?



There have been downsides too. The canal footpath was often too busy to relax on. Especially when I'm taking the grandkids home from school on their bikes at a busy time. The children manage fine: one of them sings as he goes, the other says "thank you" to everyone she passes. They make me feel ashamed when I get annoyed by a perceived lack of space. Why aren't there arrows on the canal path to indicate which side you should be on? Why hasn't an alternative to the aquaduct path been developed? Why are there cars parked in the bike lanes? Why am I so irritated when I should be enjoying myself?

Then there's Spaces for People, which has been the subject of so much anger and misinformation. I did pluck up courage to write to my local councillors about the difficulty of cycling with my grandchildren to school.



The Conservative didn't reply until I prompted him, and even then, he couldn't propose any solution, as if just driving like others do was acceptable. We did manage to find two points of agreement: reducing the speed limit (to 30mph, on an urban road, where a cyclist had been killed by a lorry!), and on the benefit of proper road surfaces for all road uses. I did try for a bit to counter some of the rubbish in the press and on social media, but that quickly sucked the joy out of life.

I hope I'll remember the good things I've learned from cycling in the Pandemic. Cycling at my own pace puts less strain on my body. Unless you wear glasses, facemasks are not a bad thing for winter cycling in Scotland, and keeping two meters apart doesn't need to mean not being friendly. Maybe I'll even develop more inner calm if I can practice singing as I go, and saying thank you more often?

2nd prize, Rosanna Rabaeijs – Cargobiking continues through covid

Before the pandemic I had been signed up, together with one or two fellow Spokes volunteers to do some cargo bike training, my motivation for this being in order to be able to volunteer to help transport the Spokes stall and materials to extend the number and locations it could be used without being transported by car.

I also volunteer with the SHRUB Coop and wanted to be able to use their cargo bike, now affectionately known as 'The Tank', which had been contributed to by Spokes at the start of their Food Sharing Hub, operating from the Zero Waste Hub on Bread Street. Sadly this training was cancelled along with all other group activities in March 2020. However, in November 2020 I got my chance of a place on a Cycling Scotland training course, organised through SEStran, which was fun (picture).



Since then, I have used both 'The Tank' (pictured, sadly it lost its branding somewhere along the route, including the SPOKES logo), and my own trailer, (pictured loaded up at the Zero Waste Hub), to get actively involved with transporting things in a low carbon way with several zero waste and food sharing charities, such as the RCK (Refugee Community Kitchen), and the SHRUB. Riding the 'tank' about town is fun as people notice it and react positively, partly I think because there's maybe a bit of a mismatch between rider and bicycle. It feels really positive to collect surplus donated clothing and especially food that would otherwise go to waste, and help with its redistribution to people who need it, either direct to those temporarily housed in hostels, or through the SHRUB Co-op's Food Sharing Hub on Bread Street, or sometimes taking food for the animals at Gorgie Farm.



During lockdown I have been doing a weekly shop for a housebound neighbour who is not online, and in order to make just one trip to the supermarket, I use my trailer for this too, doing our own shopping at the same time.

Earlier in 2021 the organiser of the Sustrans pre-lockdown monthly litter picks along the NC1, where I often helped using my trailer, suggested that I could be one of those to be asked to make a short film clip to feature in Sustrans' International Women's Day celebration video montage. The theme for 2021 was 'Choose to challenge', and the suggestion was that my choice should be '*I choose to challenge how much can be transported by bike*' – and of course I do! It was another really positive thing to be able to do in a year when so much has been curtailed, and I shared the [YouTube video](#) widely. My brother's reaction: 'Is your trailer full of rubbish that you've picked up?' He thought he was joking, but indeed there is of course still far too much litter in our environment, and I pick it up whenever I can (although there are now so many more guidelines to follow!) by whichever mode of active travel I happen to be using.



3rd prize, Mags Donaldson – Rediscovering the joy of cycling

I haven't ridden a bike regularly since I was about 14. I'm not going to say exactly how long ago that was, but nobody owned mobile phones then. It's been a while. Sure, I've bought a couple of cheap second-hand bikes to try over the years, but usually 1 ride and I'd give up.

Lockdown has changed that. I've been stuck at home for a year. I have multiple good friends who are cyclists and I think it rubbed off on me. I'm bored of walking.

I bought a second-hand bike that I thought looked ADORABLE (cuteness being a strong factor for bike buying) and spent an afternoon riding circles around a park. I'm not going to say I looked cool or confident (can you ever look confident when you're wobbling around a park?). But it turns out that I can remember how to ride a bike, even after all these years!

Now, the moment the weather is good, I want to be out on my bike. I've lived in Leith for the best part of 12 years, but now I'm finding parts of it that I never knew existed! I'm seeing so much wildlife! I went from wobbly circles in a park to 6-mile rides being nothing. I've covered Seafield to Granton and there's still so many more places and routes to see.



Don't get me wrong, it's not always rainbows and sunshine. Cobbles are a nightmare. I'm still not confident on some main roads. Lugging my 14kg bike up and down stairs has led to some interesting bruises on my legs. My bike only has 3 gears and everything in Edinburgh is up a hill. But I love it. I love exploring. I love the sheer joy that it brings. I love when another friendly cyclist gives me a nod as I pass. I love how supportive all my super-powered bike pals have been. They're all the kind of people who own multiple bikes and have those fancy clip-in shoes, and I'm excited that my bike is BLUE and has a BELL. And they've made me feel part of their space. They've given me advice. They've encouraged me.

I have a car and I love to drive. But I guess I'm also a cyclist now? I watch YouTube videos on bike maintenance. I track my routes. I'm getting a little more confident around traffic. Owning my bike has given me a kind of freedom that I hadn't expected.

So, if you're around Leith, and you see a chubster with pigtails riding a blue and silver vintage bike (probably looking a bit wobbly still), gimme a wave. Because I don't ride to be cool, or elegant, or even for exercise. I ride for the sheer joy of it. And that's how you'll recognise me more than anything – the huge grin on my face as I go.



4th prize, Jane Herbstritt – Learning to ride in an empty carpark

In the lockdown desertion of Fort Kinnaird, in a car park peaceful without the buzz and chaos of shoppers and cars - the only moving vehicle was a bicycle going round and round in wobbly circles. Finally, the cyclist came to a halt beside me and made his ungainly dismount. My husband, aged 55, had finally mastered riding a bike!

It had completely surprised me when I found out he did not know how to ride a bike – surely every learns how to do that when they are young! We had talked about learning, and many years ago before we were married, we had even cycled on a tandem, with a group of cyclists from Jubilee Scotland, on a two week 'drop the debt' campaign cycle ride from Edinburgh to Geneva where the G8 was being held. He sat at the back, and I thought after hundreds of miles as the 'engine' of our cycling duo, he might just pick up a bike and be able to ride – but he never mastered the balance. Later, both our children learned to ride and I have been a regular volunteer teaching bike ability at our primary school for seven years. Surely now I could teach my husband to ride? There were several failed attempts in the grass at the Jewel Park near our house – but there never seemed to be the time to persist.

Then lockdown arrived. As extra-curricula activities ceased, and we couldn't travel further afield, I was working from home and time was no longer a luxury we couldn't afford. Actually, it was the cycle traffic along our local cycle-ways in the lovely spring weather – the family outings that we couldn't manage without excluding Alex – that made him jealous and determined enough to give cycling a better shot. It was our lockdown challenge!



We took our home-schooling kids for their 'P.E. lessons' to Magdalen Glen and while they cycled circuits around the park, passing my husband with encouraging shouts as they passed, Alex began slowly to learn how to balance. Using small downhill at first, while I shouted 'Head up! Pedal, pedal, pedal' (in my best bike ability instructors' voice) and he grunted and tried not to lose his temper with the slow progress and my patronising optimism! Slowly, bit by bit, the balance improved and he worked his way further and further along the Magdalen Glen path trying not to be embarrassed as dog walkers, children, cyclists passed staring.

Learning to ride is so much harder as an adult! Falling off seems a more daunting concern and surely hurts more when it happens, with aches and pains the following day. But hardest of all is the hurt pride! The paths we chose to practise on became so busy during lockdown and nobody expected an adult on a bike coming towards them to be a learner. As we began to advance along the Innocent Railway path we learnt that no pedestrians were going to step aside, or pick up their dogs as Alex approached. Proficient adult cyclists whizzed past only centimetres from the learner cyclist, causing him to wobble and fall. He had collisions with poles, with prams, with dogs and their owners. We considered an 'L' plate for the back of his bike! But over a few months, with twice or thrice weekly practise Alex finally made it all the way along the Innocent Railway path to the first road. Then one sunny Saturday, our whole family joined the hoards of family cycle outings and followed the Innocent Railway path past the first road, up the second part of the path, through the tunnel and out to the Meadows. Ok, so there was a fair bit of walking – and the kids got rather impatient – and we maybe left him to walk the last bit while me and the kids cycled the final bit of road to reach the Meadows. But this had been our lockdown challenge – a family cycle outing. We celebrated with ice cream!

We are still not completely there with the cycling. Alex has returned the bike kindly lent to us by a family friend, bought his own second hand bike and continued to practise along the Innocent Railway. In the summer, we had a short holiday on the isle of Millport which included a day cycle trip around the Island: Alex and me took the tandem! The bike's been out less over winter, and Alex ended up with some health problems early in the year which kept him out of action. But the bike's been out again since then. Alex is still nervous of steep hills – and we have yet to negotiate the roads. But I'm hopeful that will all come this year.

All in all we're pretty proud of Alex's lockdown achievement. And I have a whole lot of appreciation for any adult prepared to swallow their pride and teach themselves to cycle. Alex's cycling achievement is at the top of my surprisingly long list of good things to have come out of this pandemic.

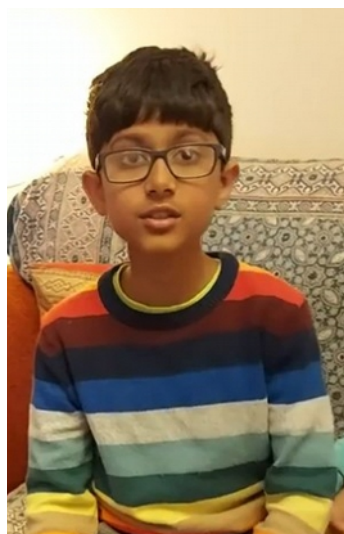
5th prize, Jain Sumeet – Pandemic cycling by children & parents

Spokes note: this entry was a video, click [here](#) to view.

Here are 3 stills from the video, plus a photo supplied separately by the family



*"I bought an e-bike with a loan from the [Energy Saving Trust](#)
I now cycle to work to avoid using the bus ... it's so much easier and much more fun!"*



*"The roads were really quiet during the lockdown, so it was really nice ...
I just love cycling"*



*"I like sitting on the back of daddy's bike ...
Now I'm learning to cycle on my balance bike"*



Position

Entries in positions 6-10 [prizewinners]

Lockdown Discoveries and the Freedom of Cycling

In the last year, the world has felt so much smaller because of the Covid pandemic. People have felt restricted and trapped in many cases, but I wanted to share how liberated and free I have felt with cycling and my trusty Spokes maps.

Knowing that I was restricted in where I could go, I decided to use my bike as a way to explore locally and try to make the best of a bad situation. In the last year thanks to the pandemic, I have discovered more trails, connections, routes and beautiful places close to my doorstep than many previous years' combined. I've been especially delighted with my Spokes maps, using them to discover places of historical importance nearby that I had never heard of before.

For example, I discovered two neolithic forts at the top of Dalmahoy and Kaimes Hill, stunning cup and ring marks at Tormain Hill near Ratho, multiple neolithic standing stones less than six miles to the west of my house, neolithic cup and ring marks in Corstorphine woods, the ruins of Auldcathie Church near Winchburgh, multiple trails and routes through the Pentlands, multiple new trails in Cammo Estate and Dalmeny Estate, the incredible stately ruin of Penicuik House and its estate, multiple deserted farm access roads near Balerno, the community woodland space in Gifford, the Ormiston Yew, the stunning climb over the Lammermuirs and a long list of other places and finds. All with Spokes' Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian maps and my bike.

The last year of the pandemic and cycling has taught me that you do not have to venture to far-flung places to find interesting things and feel satisfaction. These discoveries and explorations have been hugely important for my mental and physical health, have helped me feel grounded and present in my community, have introduced *other* people to these treasures via my sharing on social media, and have complemented my day-to-day utility cycling. I can only hope that other people have been as delighted as I have been when looking for adventure and exploration on the doorstep - there's so much out there and so close to home.

I've attached a few photos to illustrate a small selection of my lockdown cycling discoveries.



Lammermuirs climb



Newbridge standing stone



Penicuik House



Pentlands gravel

6
Claire
Connachan

Rickshaw Rescue

We took delivery of our wonderful new electric assisted rickshaw in September 2019. It was shipped from Amsterdam via Cambridge Dutchbikes Ltd. We got the idea to buy a bike which we could both use together after trying out some of the fantastic All Ability Bikes at Saughton Park. Needing to make use of the [Energy Saving Trust Interest Free Loan facility](#) meant the purchase took a few months to organise, so we missed the joy of using the rickshaw over the summer of that year.

Weather allowed for miniature forays throughout the first winter. Even so the savings on taxi fares started to mount up. But we were very much looking forward to the next spring to start taking some longer trips. Then, of course, the pandemic struck, so our first adventure was delayed by several months until the lockdown was eased in the summer of 2020.



On July 20th we planned our first longer journey through Saughton Park, along the Water of Leith to Roseburn Park and then the Roseburn Path to Trinity to visit friends for a socially distanced picnic in their garden. So, it was on a baking hot day we excitedly set out along the feeder road avoiding the traffic travelling at 40mph along the Calder Road, and headed off towards Trinity. We paused in Saughton Park to admire the rose garden and breath in the heady scent of the flowers. We enjoyed the coolness of the shade along the river beside Murrayfield Stadium. Then disaster struck. Coltbridge was closed for repairs. The voyage rescued, or so we thought, by finding a reasonably obvious alternative route up Garscube Terrace. The alternative route was relatively free of traffic.

However, as we arrived at the Craighleith turn-off to the Quarry Shopping Centre, we discovered a second diversion on the path. Not unduly concerned, we cycled along Groathill Avenue, expecting to rejoin the path at the bridge on Telford Road. Unfortunately, problems when cycling often come in pairs.

We arrived at the bridge, slightly discombobulated by having to negotiate fairly busy traffic for the first time, only to find hoardings for the bridge renovation blocking half of the path, and the other side of the path blocked by a strategically placed bollard. What to do? Was our first sojourn in 4 months to be curtailed prematurely? ... When hallelujah, Divine providence steps in in the shape of four burly youths, who without hesitation lift up the rickshaw, passenger and all, and place it down on the other side of the offending bollard.

Happily, our journey to Trinity was rescued and we survived to picnic in the sun.

Blipfotos – forgotten gloves and morning commute

Three things happened to me in the pandemic; I started 'Blipfoto', where you upload a photo per day with a few words, I really got into my bike and I went grey haired.

Pre-pandemic we were planning a family cycling holiday in Scotland and we did it in July 2020; 205 miles in 5 days. It was hard, wonderful and, for me, life changing. I then continued to cycle to work, even through the winter, including breaking my wrist on black ice (boo, but I am undeterred).

Many of my 'blips' are full of the joys of cycling or at least mention it in passing. I have chosen two 'blips' that for me, sum up 'cycling in the pandemic'.

Oct 22nd 2020 - Gloves My Mammy Knitted for Me

My daughter was using my cycling gloves to keep her hands warm at athletics. She, her dad and brother are away on hols in Ardnamurchan. I did ask her to leave out my gloves and indeed, they may be in her bag but I came across these wee beauties which mum knitted last year.

Mum always has a knitting project on the go. I joke with her that the devil will find use for idle hands if she's not knitting. It's getting harder for her as she lost feeling in her hands and feet following chemotherapy for bowel cancer over a decade ago.



I visit my parents on a Wed, at least I did before the pandemic. On one of those days, mum insisted I choose some wool and something to be knitted. I was a bit 'I don't need anything, Mum' but chose these gloves and a snood scarf. She duly battered them out.

I think I got them in spring and had put them in the hat, scarf, glove bag in the cupboard under our stairs. I confess, I'd forgotten them but when I went to look for alternative gloves for my cycle rides, there they were - fingerless mittens, just ideal, a fab pink too and knitted by my Mammy.

Love the flecks of gold the leaves are creating.

I am wearing them now, having a cup of tea in a cafe between jobs - ideal for hand-warming but also typing on a mobile phone.

2nd Nov 2020 – Bike Ride to Work

Took this about 8.20am, on my way to work. Had already got a signature for a letter I'm working on. Stopped on prom cause I was on time - snapped this. In the end I didn't take many more shots.

I'm glad I took this one and share it today in memory and honour of the 36 year old woman cyclist, as yet unnamed, who died in Portobello today in an incident with a lorry driver at a bad junction (one I avoid by taking the prom route) around 3pm this afternoon.



I am so sorry to hear this. I can name too many dead cyclists, yet still cycle. In particular I cycle because in the traffic chaos that ensued with the road being closed for several hours, my journey home was the same, smooth and beautiful and cherished. We have to get out of cars. The more cyclists there are, the safer we all are.

I loved that on my morning commute I bumped into Loretta and her husband, after yesterday's event and then around Inverleith met a former colleague (from last century) out jogging. That doesn't happen in the car.

9

**Katherine
Dorman**

Taking school friends on a post-lockdown adventure to Portobello

On Saturday 7th April 2021 I took some school friends down the Innocent Railway line to Portobello. It had been around 3 months since we had last seen each other in person, due to social distancing.

Out of the 4 of us I was the only one that knew how to get there by bike so a few days earlier I had planned out the route and cycled it with my dad so we didn't take any wrong turns.

We met up in the Bruntsfield links and set off down the Meadows, the cycling infrastructure connecting the innocent tunnel and the meadows was extremely helpful as some of my friends weren't too comfortable cycling on the road.

We had a blast going through the tunnel, hopefully not scaring too many pedestrians in the process!

It was a very welcome break to sitting at home staring at schoolwork all day!

The weather was fantastic and we had a lovely cycle all the way down with only a few interruptions caused by loose dogs.

The Promenade was very busy so we locked our bikes to the helpfully placed bike racks and ate chips and ice cream on the beach.

Pedalling back up hill was much more tiring so we stopped a few times for water but it was worth it to stand in the sun for a few minutes!

Some of the parents had been nervous about letting us go off on our own but the off road paths made it safe and easy to cycle!

Opening my senses in lockdown time

There were few cars, fewer aeroplanes and more bicycles and walkers. I cycled through five seasons, from the 2020 spring blooms to the 2021 snowdrops, my route from Colinton Mains to Balerno, then round the lanes beyond. Out of the city and the village, what had been a vague awareness, of somewhere I'd cycle a few times a year, solidified into detailed knowledge. Places and features linked up into a route that arrived, with a bit more greening every trip, at a place of solace and hope.

Predictable seasonal shifts were recorded in details along changing verges. Daffodils, primroses and ramsons, then so much glorious gorse. Later, iris and bog cotton at Red Moss. Orange-tip butterflies abounded, sensitised to the clean air and quiet. Laburnum, rhododendron and honeysuckle wilded where big house grounds met the lane. Their beech hedges re-greened. Limes and oaks leaved at different rates. Warm air released the aroma of bluebell, timber, pine. The upper Water of Leith, normally silenced by traffic from the A70, was audible in its incised channel below the straight from Whelpside. There was four-part burnsong, with curlew solo.



I started to imagine the 'Leith Plateau Farmland', the countryside beyond Balerno, as a small, fertile island under the Pentland skyline. The fineweather blue firth to the northeast made sea-cliffs of Dalmahoy and Kaimes. More wildflowers – yellow, purple, grass-heads, orchids – bloomed into a passable machair. This was my sanctuary: a substitute Rousay, a replacement Barra, a bield to experience the quiet of a Uist evening, that I sought several times a week.

10

**Helen
Boden**

Visibility, enabled by good weather and lack of pollution, extended further north and west like a permitted extension of daily exercise limits. Sense of time was increasingly distorted, both accelerated and decelerated, by absence of normal routines, and presence of some strange new ones.

I became acutely attuned to the lie of the land, interested in where its character changes and opens out, where broadleaves thin along the lanes beyond the village. Through Cockburn, Buteland, Haughhead, Glenbrook, my personal route-map from lockdown connected up the places I used to whizz past. Fieldside, woodside, forestside; farmstead, formal garden. I noticed things for the first time - the mossy walls. 'The Boathouse' lodge, inland at Bankhead, and a memorial garden planted in an abandoned boat at Goodtrees, aptly symbolised the topsy-turvy world of 2020. Hope that it would right itself was expressed in the lovely lane and gate-art made by local children. I almost didn't mind not being able to go further afield.



I'd continue from the Buteland road-end, through forest on one hand; past fields with growing lambs and calves, red-ploughed earth or ripening crops, on the other. The track described a dusty-earthed parabola: up to the moor, down to the buzzaed-patrolled ruins at Buteland Hill. Then it opened out above the valley-bottom scraped flat by the glacial young Leith. On the way back I could cycle through several seasons in half an hour: wind and rain on the moor, warm gorse-scented forest air. Later I'd ride through the turning leaves.

Early and late rides at midsummer - and then midwinter - made the local less familiar again. If lockdown-lethargy made it harder to get out of bed, effort was amply rewarded. My imaginary 'island' looked especially Hebridean in a haary dawn or dusk. One June daybreak it became clear that we're the guest species here, outnumbered by hares in the first field after the road-end. The buzzard of Buteland Hill shoulder-swooped humans daring to reach Leithhead. Skylark song was louder than the traffic of the city bypass.

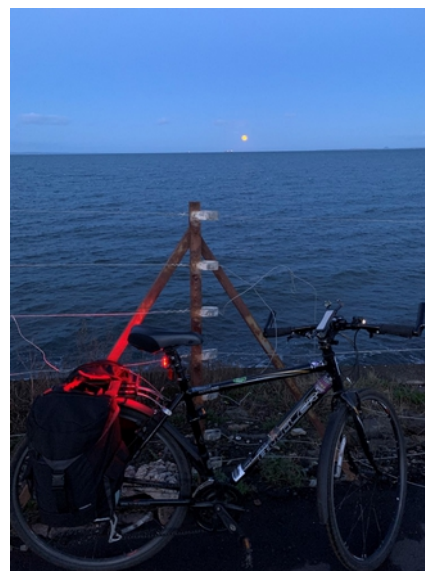
RUNNERS UP [in random order]

Feeling safe, thanks to Spaces for People

I have always been an occasional cyclist, although in recent years I had been cycling less and less after having some frightening experiences cycling around Edinburgh including close passes on the road and men shouting at me from their vehicle windows. However, during the pandemic I felt it was important to try and avoid public transport where possible so that there would be space on the buses for people who aren't able to walk or cycle for their essential journeys, and so I fixed up my bike ready to use it more often.

Whilst my normal work in theatre and live events had stopped during the pandemic, I took on a regular volunteering role at FareShare in Leith, so after driving there and back a few times I decided to give cycling a try for that regular journey. I was really pleased to find that the route from my home in Portobello to the FareShare depot in Leith was now possible to be made almost completely on segregated cycle routes away from vehicle traffic, and I was surprised at how safe I felt making the journey. I continued to do so throughout the summer and winter, even feeling comfortable to cycle there and back in the dark. The photo is from one of those journeys.

Whilst I've been driving around the city for my volunteering with FareShare, I've been able to see where the Spaces for People schemes have been set up and how much of an increase in segregated and protected cycle lanes there has been around the city. Knowing this makes me much more likely to continue cycling for my own personal journeys in the future.



Relaxed & enjoyable bike travel, thanks to Spaces for People

This past year has been such a challenge in so many different ways for so many, but what a great and welcome boom time it has been for cycling! While the streets and roads were so eerily quiet, especially during the first lockdown in spring 2021, it was so good to see so many more people out on bikes, parents able to introduce children to on road cycling etc and taking advantage of a great spell of weather back then.

For myself, before the pandemic I was already a regular cyclist, but again, I have so enjoyed the times over the last year when the roads have had much less traffic, making for a much more relaxing cycling experience in cleaner air with the reduction in vehicle fumes.

With the Braid Road closure being one of the early Spaces for People schemes implemented, as a local, it was great to be able to take advantage of this and was such an appreciated step introduced remarkably quickly to enable both cyclists and pedestrians to access the Hermitage of Braid safely while being able to maintain social distancing. This is such a busy area with narrow pavements and during the periods over the last year when we have been asked to stay local, it has been so good to have such a beautiful spot so nearby and so much more safely accessible. I do very much hope that as we move forward, steps put in place to benefit cyclists on local roads are able to be retained where at all possible to encourage those who might have discovered the joys of cycling over the last year to continue to do so and feel as safe as possible out on the roads.

Teaching my 4-year-old to cycle

I've had lots of experiences cycling during the last year (mainly good) but the one that stands out for me was teaching my then 4 year old to ride his first 'proper' bike. He spent a bit of time on the pavement wobbling and falling off his bike but as soon as we went to Victoria Park he took to it really quickly as was off like a rocket!

Now nothing stops him and we've cycled many miles together (largely using the old railway lines).



Fundraising in lockdown – bike refurbishing!

I'm Fundraiser for the Edinburgh Branch of the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, you'll have seen our 'Plants For Peace' stall at the Meadows Festival and maybe split your sides at the benefit nights the Stand Comedy Club kindly donated to us.

When Covid came along these were cancelled and income dried up so I decided to try something new. I've always been a mad keen cyclist and briefly worked in Edinburgh's top bike shop before I trained as a teacher so I tried something I could do at home with, mostly, little contact with others and risk of infection.

I put the word out and began repairing and selling bikes donated by supporters, friends and family. I advertised the bikes on Gumtree and Ebay and made sure social distancing was observed when buyers came to try the bikes-happily the first to try the bike usually bought it, so no need to wipe down.

I've kept busy for months. Firstly collecting bikes, eg thanks to Penny the Singer who got permission for me to remove the bike and wheels cluttering up her tenement bike shed. Some were beyond repair but all had useful parts for getting others going.

Next I had to repair the bikes. I learnt some hard lessons, I should never have tackled that Portugese mountain bike that had been in my son's Stockbridge garden since the Miner's Strike. It needed everything replaced, took many days of work and sold for a mere 40 quid!

A good source of parts, advice and help was the Bike Station (cheers! Gee and Mark). Indeed all the excellent bike shops we have in Edinburgh were really helpful despite these hard times. Some of the bikes I had to send by mail or courier and couldn't have done it without those giant bike boxes the shops give away if you ask nicely! I didn't feel I was competing with them as they couldn't meet the demand for bikes and repairs.

I've met all sorts of people from all over the world as they got themselves some safe, budget transport. There was the contract worker from India, the guy who needed a bike to work as a delivery cyclist, the English language teacher, and (on Gumtree) the ambulance paramedic who has become a mate and emails me his bike and other news every month.

And now? Well I'm trying to ease myself out of the bike fixing, maybe time to go back to face-to-face plant stalls at festivals (eventually), or try something new, but I'll always be proud I helped our campaign by increasing the number of cyclists on the road with the many benefits that brings to all of us.

And even now if I got a call about a tasty handmade 1980's road bike needing some TLC, well, who could resist?!

If you can't commute, distribute! ... charity food transport

My cycling has greatly reduced this past year because I'm not cycling to work as often! (due to work from home, not traffic-related). And even though it was lovely to go out for longer rides in the first lockdown, traffic levels were back up very quickly after with drivers seemingly going a lot faster (although close passes were reduced, I think).

Anyway, my entry into the competition are the photos attached. I started helping out with charity food collections and even though people are always amazed at how much you can transport on a bike, there is always more!

So, I got a trailer and 1st May was the first collection with it. It was very fortunate timing as otherwise I would have had to leave all

bread items (it's a big-brand supermarket where all use-by and best-before items of the day get distributed).



Bikes powered by the sun, thanks to lockdown inspiration

Our story has its origins before lockdown. I have been cycling in Edinburgh for a number of years, but owing to trouble with RSI, my partner had not been able to join me. That was until he inherited an electric bike with a more wrist-friendly upright riding position. This enabled us to ride together, but presented a new problem - I couldn't keep up on my non-electric bike! So in 2019, I bought a conversion kit and we made my bike electric. For a battery we used some power-tool batteries we saw on special offer in our local supermarket. A friend made a holder for them and we placed them in a waterproof box on the rear pannier, leaving room to spare for transporting cake.

Then came the first lockdown and the order to stay at home. We imagined a world outside by watching videos of other people's cycling adventures, and discovered the epic solar powered [Sun Trip from France to China](#). The spring sunshine beamed in through the windows of our flat as we worked. This got us thinking ... could we too power our electric bicycles from the sun? In Edinburgh? Edinburgh, in Scotland? Clearly lockdown was making us think strange things.

We bought a small foldable 100 watt panel that we could store indoors and take out only when needed. The first results were disappointing; our panel only supplied a fraction of the power we needed. Maybe we had made a mistake and this was futile in Scotland after all. However, after some research, tinkering and more soldering we managed to increase the power to 92 watts. Success! One hour of sun time would give us about 7 miles of bike riding. Our dreams of riding on sunshine were now a reality.

We got into a lockdown rhythm of charging our batteries by day and riding at night when there were fewer people around. It was often so quiet that the only creatures we would see or hear would be foxes, owls, badgers or deer. The arrival of nature into the city was an unexpected but welcome balm at such a time.

A year later and we are still charging our bike batteries using our solar panel, having made some tweaks along the way. For example, we had to replace the batteries after they were damaged when our shed flooded during the severe thunderstorm in the summer.

While we've not been allowed to venture far during lockdown, learning about DIY bike conversion and the potential of renewables has been an adventure in itself. Encountering nature while travelling effortlessly up a hill knowing you're being powered by the sun is an amazing feeling, and it really feels like the future.



bike energy & human (cake) energy



Cycling in the pandemic (and Spaces for People) saved my marriage

I have long been a fan of cycling for leisure and for transport. When lockdown hit I took to cycling in the morning to galvanise me for the day ahead, working from home and simultaneously looking after wee ones with schools shut.

With advice and encouragement from my cycling mentor, I increased distances and experimented with new routes. Spaces for people and quiet roads helped.

Cycling in the pandemic kept me smiling. I would have become miserable without my daily injection of peace, movement and fresh air. My husband used to shoo me out early doors knowing I'd return a nicer person.

Now I count myself as a cyclist. I cycle for pleasure. I prioritise my time around family and my bike. The rest of the world can wait!



Lockdown cycling experiences



Forth Bridge



Signposts



Parking



Lookout

Seats for People ??

It's amazing what some Councils have provided for cyclists during the pandemic!



Lockdown 'commute' ... from home to home office!

Back during lockdown one when the traffic really thinned I commuted out the A70 to Harperrig Reservoir most mornings. Then turned and took the tailwind back to the office at home ready for the day.

Apart from a few Tuffnells delivery vans and an old diesel Merc whose driver used to like to give me a close pass every morning it was just me, the sunshine and the wildlife.

The wee birdies did not know what had happened to the world, it was quiet and peaceful. The crows just stayed on the road as you cycled by. The hares glanced disinterestedly from the fields and the goldfinches joined me at the top of Auchinoon Brae and flew along beside me with their beautiful flashes of red and yellow.

Tiny specks of beauty in the more austere landscape of the southern Pentland range.

The world has to slowly wake up again from its Covidian slumber and lessons probably won't be learnt but maybe some of the good things will abide. The diesel Merc driver will still give me a close pass (you can hear him coming and pull in a bit), Harperrig will still be a Mediterranean paddle board and wild swimming resort and maybe the goldfinches will still fly beside me as I roll contentedly down Auchinoon Brae to the water side.

My bike is part of my life again, thanks to lockdown

This story is not heroic or exciting. There are no athletic feats, no fitness goals achieved and certainly no lycra. It's about how the pandemic got me back on my bike.

Three years ago I fell and cracked a small bone in my arm. It wasn't a serious injury but it made me rather nervous of cycling. I've cycled all my adult life but if I could break a small bone just by falling over, how much damage might I do if I fell off my bike? Late middle age had come too soon. I still used my bike for short trips, carrying heavy shopping and taking things to and from the allotment but I stopped using it on the traffic filled streets I needed to use to get to work. I started walking instead. The slower pace gave me time to explore the steep, cobbled streets of Edinburgh's old town and to listen to the birdsong.

Then came lockdown and working from home. I could still walk around my neighbourhood and discovered new joys, new birds and walks along the Water of Leith. I didn't really need my bike at all, apart from one thing, the three mile weekly trip to visit my mother at the other side of town. She is in her eighties, at high risk of Covid and depends on my weekly visits for social support, shopping and a whole lot of other things. I couldn't risk taking the bus. So I got back on my bike. At first I was nervous, particularly on potholed roads and paths. 'Protect the NHS', they said. The last thing the NHS needed, let alone me or my mother, was more broken bones.

Over time, I discovered the best off road and quiet routes. As well as avoiding the bus and getting me there faster than I could walk, the bike meant that I could pick up my mother's shopping on the way and bring back her recycling on the way back. On one trip I parked my bike outside her sheltered housing complex, leaving my helmet and gloves on the bike. Someone stole them. I can't think why. Like me and the bike, my helmet was rather old and battered, although I was rather fond of the handknitted gloves. I bought a new shiny helmet online as the bike shops were still closed. The upside was that the adverts on my laptop changed from pension plans and care services to outdoor gear and fitness equipment. Small consolations.

I've been cycling this six mile round trip every week for over a year now. I've come to know the route very well. It's often busy with other cyclists, families, children on scooters, dogs, people out on their daily exercise. I've watched the seasons change. I've heard birds and seen foxes on my route. These bring small joys. I haven't broken any bones, yet, but cycling has become part of my life again.

Kids enjoying cycling

Video entry - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoMITyenTF0>



still from the video

Shandon to Saughton at high speed

Video entry - https://youtu.be/u_aS663C4E0



still from the video

I love my bike, it's always there for me, despite a lonely time in the pandemic

My bike lives in my spare room. At least it used to. It's my office now. I guess the commute is a bit shorter.

My bike doesn't get out much. It has nowhere much to go. It usually does some daily exercise and comes back home again.

My bike is lonely. It wants to get out more, but isn't really allowed. It sometimes visits another bike it likes, but has to stay 2 metres away.

My bike is getting old. Its parts don't work as well. It creaks and groans a bit, but is managing to stay out of the bike hospital.

My bike wonders why I walk more now. Why would I choose a much slower mode of transport? I'm trying to educate it that people on foot, or on a bike, are on the same side.

I still love my bike. Not in the kind of way that can get you arrested. It's had a tough year, but the next one will be better. My bike is always there for me.