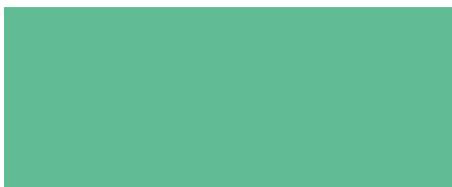


# Leisure Cycling

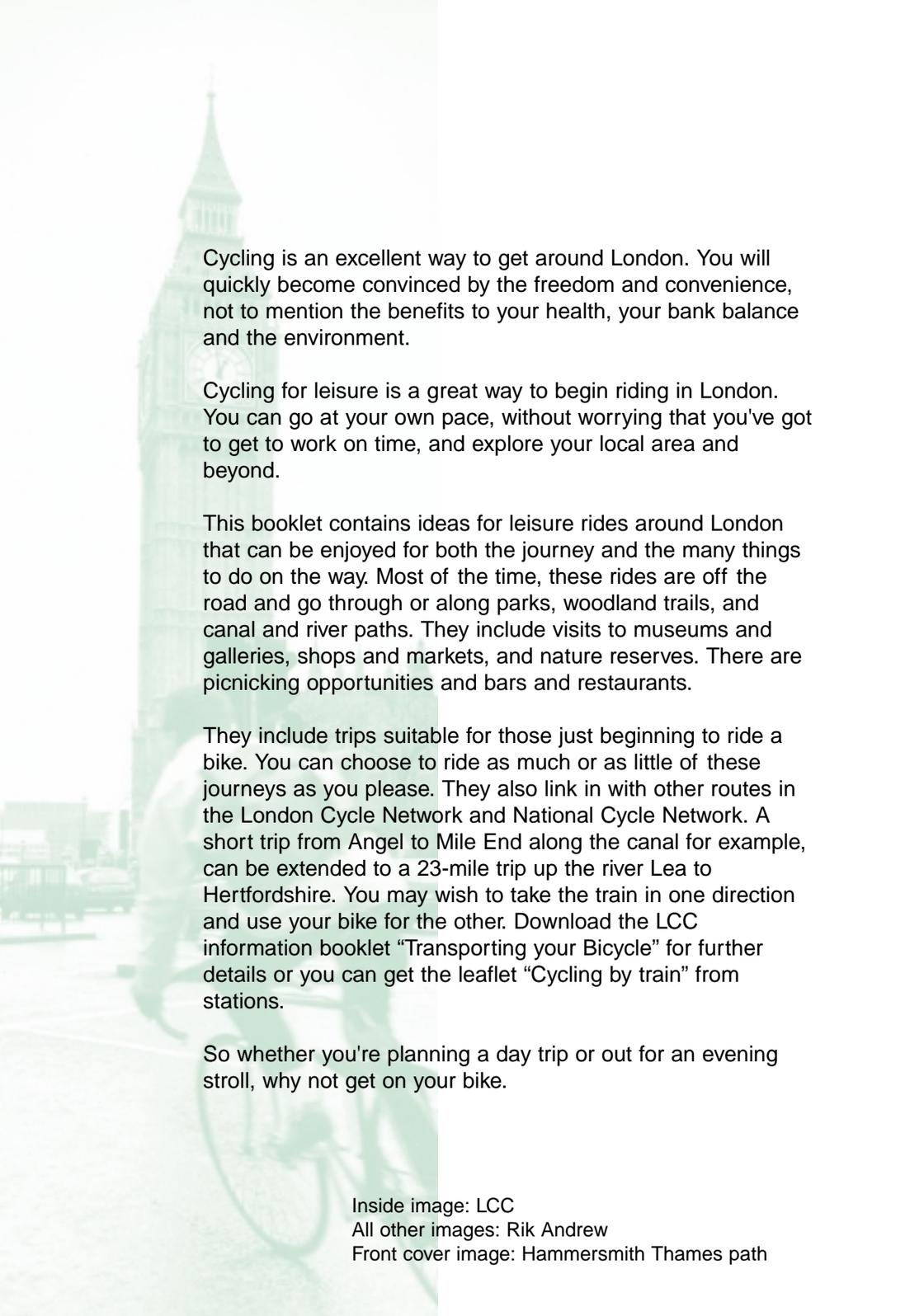


## London Cyclists' Trust



**London  
Cycling  
Campaign**

CYCLING - GOOD FOR LONDON ... GOOD FOR YOU!



Cycling is an excellent way to get around London. You will quickly become convinced by the freedom and convenience, not to mention the benefits to your health, your bank balance and the environment.

Cycling for leisure is a great way to begin riding in London. You can go at your own pace, without worrying that you've got to get to work on time, and explore your local area and beyond.

This booklet contains ideas for leisure rides around London that can be enjoyed for both the journey and the many things to do on the way. Most of the time, these rides are off the road and go through or along parks, woodland trails, and canal and river paths. They include visits to museums and galleries, shops and markets, and nature reserves. There are picnicking opportunities and bars and restaurants.

They include trips suitable for those just beginning to ride a bike. You can choose to ride as much or as little of these journeys as you please. They also link in with other routes in the London Cycle Network and National Cycle Network. A short trip from Angel to Mile End along the canal for example, can be extended to a 23-mile trip up the river Lea to Hertfordshire. You may wish to take the train in one direction and use your bike for the other. Download the LCC information booklet "Transporting your Bicycle" for further details or you can get the leaflet "Cycling by train" from stations.

So whether you're planning a day trip or out for an evening stroll, why not get on your bike.

Inside image: LCC

All other images: Rik Andrew

Front cover image: Hammersmith Thames path

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## Why leisure cycling?

So you've got your bike. Now what do you do with it? One third of all London households already own at least one bike. Although many of the cyclists on London's streets are on their way to work or the supermarket, they can use their bike for leisure too. This includes all kinds of leisure activities where the bike is the means of transport, the leisure itself or both.

It is often more convenient to cycle to parks, museums, galleries, concerts, theatre, cinema, shopping and sporting events than by any other method. You can get there quickly, you can park at your destination, and you don't need to use public transport. Cycling for leisure can be a spin through the park or along the river, BMX, riding with a group, and long-distance touring. Furthermore, it is easy to combine leisure cycling with other activities. A gentle ride through parks with time for lunch is a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

What's more, the freedom of a bike allows you to explore London. You can go further than you can walk, yet are not limited to public transport or parking restrictions. The gentle exercise is also great for your health and your stress levels!

The journeys in this booklet are a mixture of rides and things to ride to. They are all suitable for new cyclists and can be as short as you want them to be. More ideas for rides can be found in publications listed in the back of this booklet or you can create your own using the London Cycle guides, a series of 19 maps showing cycle routes across the city. You can order these from [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk). Further afield, you can join the National Cycle Network in London and then keep going, or follow Sustrans routes, which have been established all over the UK. Local London Cycling Campaign groups also organise rides for all. See [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk) for details of local groups and events.

## Before you ride

### Where to go

First you need to decide where to ride and how far you plan to go. Think about where you want to get to or what you'd like to do or see, and how to avoid traffic. Most leisure routes are designed to avoid heavy traffic but many will include quiet roads and you will probably have to go through traffic to get to the beginning of a traffic free route. You also need to plan your distances. Eight to ten miles per hour is about right for a leisurely ride, but you need to factor in time for food and drink and perhaps wandering off the route to explore.

Planning a route is easy with the many books and maps available for cycling journeys. The 19 London cycle guides indicate whether routes are on roads, next to the road or completely traffic free. They include the London and National Cycle Network routes, other signposted routes, traffic free routes and LCC advisory routes that are on quiet roads. You can order these by visiting the LCC website: [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk) or by calling the Transport for London travel information line: 020 7222 1234. The London and National Cycle Network are also signposted, making them easy to follow without checking your route map. You can download the London cycle network maps through the London Cycle Network website: [www.londoncyclenetwork.org](http://www.londoncyclenetwork.org). You can download and buy route maps for all of the UK through the Sustrans website. A further list of maps and guides can be found in the back of this booklet.

If you use a book as a guide for a particular ride, it is often useful to have another map too. With an Ordnance Survey map or the A-Z you can go off the route if you want to explore. The OS maps are also useful if you want to avoid the steep hills that you may find outside London.



Richmond Park (central path)

### What to take:

- Waterproof coat, hat, scarf and gloves, sunblock, sunhat: depending on the weather
- Drinks and snacks
- Tool kit: at least enough to fix a puncture
- Guide book and map (see list of maps at end)
- Money: for food, drinks or trains
- Lights and reflective kit
- Lock

## Be safe

You should make sure that you and your bike remain safe: just because it's a leisure trip does not mean that you don't need to think about safety, being seen, and locking your bike.

- If there is any chance that you'll still be riding when it goes dark remember to take some lights and reflective strips. Check that the lights work before you leave.
- Follow the Highway Code when riding on the road. Be aware of vehicles and make sure they are aware of your movements. A bell is extremely useful for warning walkers and other cyclists that you need to pass.
- In areas where there are lots of tourists you should be extra careful. Tourists are more likely to make unexpected movements, as they are unfamiliar with their journey and may be consulting maps and guidebooks or taking photos.
- See the LCC website for a code of conduct for sharing paths with other users.
- If most of your journey is off the road, take care if you have to cross or join a road for a short time. The 19 London maps show safe crossings where you can either ride or push your bike from one off-road route to another.
- When riding in a group you should still be responsible for your own safety. Just because the person at the front has seen that a crossing is safe it does not follow that the road is still clear
- Groups should also take care not to get in each other's way or that of other cyclists and pedestrians. Two or three bikes alongside each other on a path can leave no room for other users.
- Remember that some paths, especially those at bridges over canals, become narrow. If you go through too fast you may end up in the water.
- If cycling in the countryside be aware that you can cycle on bridleways (with respect for walkers and horse riders) and BOATS - By-ways Open To All Traffic, but not on footpaths - these are for walkers only.
- You should have a British Waterways permit for cycling along many canals and towpaths, these are free, and easy to download from [www.waterscapes.com](http://www.waterscapes.com).
- If you plan to leave your bike unattended anywhere make sure you have a good lock. See the "Bike Security" booklet for more advice on locking your bike.



Kingston  
Thames  
- Canbury  
Gardens

## **Make sure you and your bike are up to it**

A successful trip also needs some preparation for you and your bike. Your bike needs to be checked and you should make sure you take everything you will need for the journey.

Important things to check are:

- That both sets of brakes work
- That the tyres are pumped up and are not balding
- That the chain is oiled
- The saddle is the right height

It's a good idea to take tools and spares to deal with a puncture. A spare inner tube, a spanner if you don't have quick release wheels, a pump and some tyre levers mean you won't have to walk anywhere if you get a puncture. See the Cycle Maintenance booklet in this series for more advice about looking after your bike.

British weather being what it is, be prepared for anything, especially if you are planning to be out all day. Check a weather report before you leave the house. Unless you are sure it won't rain, you should take a waterproof coat and make sure you can stay warm, if necessary. You may also be out in the sun all day: the British sun can burn so use sunscreen and wear a hat or helmet. You should also make sure that your clothes or shoelaces can't be caught in the chain.

It's also important to make sure you have, or can buy, enough food and water for the journey. Although gentle, cycling is exercise and so you need to drink plenty of water. Do not rely on beer!

Lastly, if you end up going far further than you planned, you may want to get the train back home. You are allowed to take your bike on many train services and some tube services as long as it's not rush hour. See the booklet "Transporting your Bicycle", also in this series, or use the leaflet "Cycling by train" available from train and tube stations for more information.

## Old Father Thames

Without the Thames, there would be no London. It was a major shipping artery from pre-Roman times until the 1960s. However, after the docks closed and industry declined, the river has become cleaner and so more of a leisure resource. Along its banks are galleries, a nature reserve, parks, restaurants and riverside pubs. A large proportion of the South Bank is taken up by paths that are open to cyclists and pedestrians, making an ideal car-free route: as it's along the river there are no hills to climb either.

### West from Putney (Cycle Guides 9, 13, 14)

From Putney you can cycle up to 24 miles upstream along a riverside path with only a couple of roads to cross when the path changes from the South to the North bank between Kingston and Hampton Court. You can join or leave this route at any point that suits you, catching the train home or designing a circular route to incorporate what takes your fancy.

Near to the beginning of the path, in Barnes, you pass the Wetland Centre, 40 hectares of created wetlands designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and supporting a range of wildlife including ducks, waders, water voles and bats. A little further on is The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At Richmond you can take a detour into Richmond Park which has eight miles of cycle track. Beyond Kingston you can visit Hampton Court and Bushy Park. There is much to see there, including the famous maze, so you should leave plenty of time for this. There are also opportunities for riverside pub lunches along the way.



Bushy Park



South Bank looking towards the Thames Barrier

Some parts of this path are also part of National Cycle Network route 4. Once at Weybridge, you can follow this marked route to Windsor and Eton, Reading and beyond. Although some of this is on or beside roads, it also goes along some of the most beautiful stretches of the Thames.

### **Greenwich, Woolwich and the Isle of Dogs** (Cycle Guides 10, 11, 12)

Although you aren't going to find the countryside in this stretch, the area around Greenwich, Woolwich and the Isle of Dogs is interesting for its architecture and its history. National Cycle Network Route 1 runs along the South Bank of the river from the Cutty Sark towards the East. You can continue along this further eastwards, but the two crossings at Woolwich and Greenwich allow you to do a circular route along one side of the river then the other.

At Greenwich there is much to see and do. It was a Royal Estate as far back as King Alfred the Great, and was developed by Henry VIII into docks for his fleet. The Cutty Sark, a Victorian tea clipper, and the Royal Naval College hark back to the days when Greenwich was the maritime centre of the British Empire. Nearby are Greenwich Park and the Royal Observatory, the home of Greenwich Mean Time. From here, you can follow the river around the Greenwich peninsula, past the Dome and on towards Woolwich, famous for the Woolwich Arsenal, which besides being the original home of Arsenal FC, is now Firepower, the museum of the Royal Artillery.

From Woolwich you can take the free Woolwich ferry to North Woolwich for the journey back. A cycle path runs alongside the road towards Canning Town and the Isle of Dogs. As you cross the River Lea you can again see the Dome across the Thames.

However, in the midst of all this you can find the Mudchute city farm, the largest in Europe, and at the southern tip of the Island you can take the foot tunnel (walk, don't ride) back to Greenwich.



Isle of Dogs; view from Westferry

## Canals and Lee Valley

As with the Thames, cycling along the city's canals and smaller rivers can give you car-free cycling without any hills that is suitable for everyone. Most of the towpaths are open to cyclists, and those that aren't, for example the stretch between Angel and Westbourne Park, may be open in the future. You should have a British Waterways permit for cycling along many canals and towpaths, you can download these from the [www.waterscapes.com](http://www.waterscapes.com).

Between Angel and Limehouse you can ride along the Regent's canal completely car free and by taking the Hertford Union canal through Victoria Park you can also join the River Lea and head north towards Hertfordshire, again in a car-free environment. On both of these stretches there are places to visit, to go shopping or to relax at a waterside pub.

### Regents Canal (Cycle Guide 10)

The canal can be ridden from the east side of the Islington tunnel, beginning at Noel Road. You can visit the shops of Islington here, or wait until you get to Broadway Market, which also provides access to London Fields. In between these two shopping areas, you can also visit the Geffrye Museum, the museum of historical English Interiors, just north of the canal on Kingsland Road. A little further east, just next to Victoria Park, the canal path splits. Heading south along the Regent's Canal takes you on to Mile End Park, Queen Mary



College, and the Ragged School Museum, previously Dr. Barnardo's largest school for poor children. For the western part of the Regent's / Grand Union canal from Brentford to Little Venice see [www.waterscape.com/cycling/routes/Cycling\\_in\\_London.html](http://www.waterscape.com/cycling/routes/Cycling_in_London.html)

### Hertford Union Canal to the Lea Valley Park (Cycle Guides 10, 5, 2)

For a longer and more rural ride, you can take the Hertford Union canal to Hackney Wick where it joins the River Lea. From the Thames to Hertfordshire, the river is part of the Lee Valley Park, where as well as around 26 miles of easy car-free riding, you can also visit bird reserves, a golf centre, a sports centre, riding centre, ice rink and the Eastway Cycle circuit. This is all within the first few miles. The park stretches out beyond the M25. More wildlife, especially water and wetland birds, can be seen both alongside the path and in the reservoirs, marshes and meadows. You can also visit historic Waltham Abbey, which many believe to be the final resting-place of King Harold. This ride could be plenty for a day or weekend trip. There are picnicking and riverside pub opportunities, and if you



end up unable to ride back you can either take the train that runs along the route or stay in the new youth hostel, on the path in Cheshunt.

### **Shorter Canal loop (Cycle Guides 10, 11)**

If you don't have the time for a long ride, you can combine the Limehouse Cut, with the newly installed floating towpath, the River Lea and the two canals to create a circular ride, taking you through both Victoria and Mile End parks.

### **Epping Forest (Cycle Guides 10, 5, 2, Ordnance Survey Explorer 174, Landranger 167, 177)**

Once you make it out onto the Lea Valley Path you are getting close to Epping Forest, which is a favourite for mountain bike riders, but also has gentle paths that are suitable for beginners. If you don't feel like cycling out there you can get there on the train. Epping Forest stretches from Chingford to Epping, and can be a great place in which to forget the city exists for a day.



Epping Forest  
Bridle Path



Kensington  
Gardens

## **The Royal Parks** (Cycle Guide 10)

There are cycle paths in or alongside all four central London Royal Parks that allow you to travel from Notting Hill to Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square completely car free, except where there are road crossings. Three of the other four Royal Parks, Richmond, Bushy and Greenwich are also excellent places to cycle and can be reached by the Thames paths that are outlined above - West from Putney and Greenwich, Woolwich and the Isle of Dogs.

The four central parks, Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park, Green Park and St James's Park form a continuous green corridor running from West to East across the West End. Being central, they are close to much of London. London Cycle Network Routes 0, 5, 38, 39, 40, 44, 45 and 50 all pass through or near to the parks. You can use the London Cycle Guides to find a route around these parks. Visit the Royal Parks Website: [www.royalparcs.gov.uk](http://www.royalparcs.gov.uk) for further details of events being held in the parks.

### **Kensington Gardens**

Although you may not cycle on the pedestrian paths, Kensington Gardens has a cycle path running through it with entrance points at Kensington High Street, Notting Hill Gate, and near to the Serpentine Gallery. There are plenty of museums, galleries, and other attractions, not to mention the shopping opportunities in the area. Within easy reach of Kensington Gardens you can find the Victoria and Albert, Science, and Natural

History museums, and the Royal Albert Hall. Famous shopping strips; Kensington High Street and Portobello Road are nearby and in the park itself you can visit Kensington Palace and the Serpentine Gallery.

### **Hyde Park**

Hyde Park has a cycle path running around most of the perimeter with many entrance points and a path running alongside the Serpentine. There is a cycle crossing over Hyde Park Corner. Hyde Park is a great place for picnics, and Speakers Corner can make an interesting diversion.



Hyde Park,  
Rotten Row

### **Green Park**

Green Park has a path that runs along its South side and you can cycle along side the Mall from Buckingham Palace to Trafalgar Square. Further east, the area around Green Park and St James's is where you can find the seats of royal and parliamentary power. Buckingham Palace is next to the cycle path where you cross between the two parks, but you do often need to walk the short stretch where the tickets to the palace are sold. However, this ride is best done on a Sunday: Constitution Hill and the Mall are both closed to traffic on Sundays leaving this path to cyclists and pedestrians.

### **Saint James's Park**

Beyond St James's there are many places to visit, including Horse Guards Parade, the Cabinet War Rooms, Westminster Abbey and, of course, the Houses of Parliament. Although you are not allowed to park bikes outside these buildings (your bike may be removed if you do), there are places to park on nearby streets. Alternatively, head north for Trafalgar Square to visit the National Gallery or just sit and watch the world go by.

### **Finsbury Park to Alexandra Palace (Cycle Guide 4, 5)**

Between Finsbury Park and Alexandra Palace you can ride along the Parkland Walk, a disused railway line that has become the countryside in the city. There is a gap between two sections of the walk, where you can either ride through Queen's Wood or along the road: Highgate Wood is closed to bikes. The whole journey takes under an hour. You could also take a diversion south from the Parkland Walk to pass Highgate Cemetery and visit Hampstead Heath, which has two cycle paths running through it.

### **Streatham to Clapham Junction and more (Cycle Guides 10, 14, 15)**

Similarly, it is easy to plan routes around the many parks of South London. You can ride from Streatham to Clapham Junction alongside Tooting Bec and Wandsworth Commons using London Cycle Network Routes 5 and 26. There are also routes through Clapham Common, Brockwell Park and Battersea Park so you can plan a ride to avoid heavy traffic, with car-free sections and quiet roads. If you visit either Battersea Park or Dulwich Park you can hire specialist bikes including tandems, tricycles, recumbents and bicycles designed for people with disabilities. Further out is the Horniman museum and gardens. Make up your own route that takes in your favourite park, restaurant, museum or bar.

### **Wandle Trail, Morden Hall Park**



### **Wandle Trail (Cycle Guides 10, 14, 15, 18)**

The Wandle Trail is a Sustrans route reaching from the Croydon to the Thames. Cycling this trail makes a good day out and it is mostly off road. You cycle through up to 12 parks including Ravensbury Park, Morden Hall Park, Wandle Meadow Nature Park and Beddington Park. You can stop at the Merton Abbey Mills market and Deen City Farm, not to mention all the nice pubs and cafes on the way. See [www.wandletrail.org](http://www.wandletrail.org) for further information or go to [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk) to order a free map.

### **Sponsored Rides**

Many charities organise sponsored rides in the UK and overseas, look in cycling magazines for further details.

### **Planning your own ride... Where else to look:**

London is a great place for exploration and with the London Cycle Maps and an A-Z you can discover interesting routes that may not be part of the cycle network but are off-road or on quiet roads. Indeed, your local branch of the London Cycling Campaign will be able to guide you to these hidden gems. Look on the LCC website for contact details for your local group.

If you want to make up your own ride, join up with others or find out about other bike-related leisure there are plenty of books and websites to consult. A small selection is listed here:

#### **Books and maps:**

London Cycle Guides 1-19 (free from [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk), call 020 7222 1234)

Sustrans - cycle maps for London and the UK, [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk), telephone 0845 113 0065

Around London South / Around London North Philip's (£8.99)

London Cycle Guide: 25 Great Rides in and Around the Capital Nicky Crowther, Christopher Pick (£8.99)

Cycling Without Traffic: London / Cycling Without Traffic: South East Nick Cotton (£9.99)

#### **Websites:**

Local groups of the LCC: [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk) (Many organise rides)

CTC, the UK's national cyclists organisation: [www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk) (organised rides, maps and books, and much more)

London Cycle Network: [www.londoncyclenetwork.org](http://www.londoncyclenetwork.org)

Sustrans: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

Transport for London: [www.tfl.gov.uk/cycling](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/cycling)

BBC's 'Cycling In London' website:

[www.bbc.co.uk/london/travel/features/cycling/cycle\\_index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/travel/features/cycling/cycle_index.shtml)

PlayStation Skate Park, Notting Hill (Tuesday night exclusively for BMX): [www.pssp.co.uk](http://www.pssp.co.uk)

Audax UK: [www.audax.uk.net](http://www.audax.uk.net) (For longer organised rides)

There are many wonderful places to cycle farther-a-field; see the Forestry Commission: [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk), for details of cycle routes through forests for the whole of the UK.



Thames, Putney

There are 12 information booklets in this series. The other topics are:

Bicycle Security - lock it or lose it!

Transporting Your Bicycle

Cycling with Children

Cycling - what to do if you are in a collision

Buying a Bike

Cycling to Work

Cycle Sense

Cycle Maintenance

Getting started on a Bicycle

Cycle Parking - home, workplace and city

Cycling and the Workplace

These can be ordered by calling the LCC or downloaded from

[www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk). Published June 2004.

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London Cyclists' Trust in partnership with London Cycling Campaign (LCC) works to improve conditions for cycling in London. For further information on the LCC and membership benefits such as insurance, bike shop discounts, legal advice and social rides call 020 7928 7220, email [office@lcc.org.uk](mailto:office@lcc.org.uk), or go to the website: [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk).

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