



Who was Wayfarer?

Wayfarer was the pen-name of Walter MacGregor Robinson (1877-1956), who wrote for *Cycling* magazine (now *Cycling Weekly*). His ride over the Berwyns in March 1919 was immortalised in his 'Over the Top' article, which was published that May. It remains a landmark article for encouraging cyclists to leave the tarmac behind and explore rough-stuff routes.

Wayfarer was reportedly idolised by the 'wheelmen' of the 1920s; his lantern-talks were often sell-out events. His enthusiasm for the wild places and mountain passes could be seen to have inspired the world's oldest off-road cycling club, the Rough-Stuff Fellowship, which was founded in 1955, a year before Wayfarer's death.



This photo: Salmoning up the track to the Wayfarer memorial
Top left: Except to cyclists...
Below left: Respecting the Countryside Code

RIGHT AS RAIN

The previous night in the Wayfarer room in the West Arms in Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, we'd pored over the map, tracing the route I'd put together based on Wayfarer's account of his ride from the same pub to Llandegla. Outside heavy rain fell. We were glad to have a real roof rather than canvas for the night.

The morning greeted us with rainbows, coffee and a hearty breakfast. Outside the daffodils bloomed. The occasional rain squall did nothing to dent our enthusiasm as we assembled our machines.

Passing an ominous sign – "Road closed ahead" – we left the village and began to climb. It started as tarmac, which gradually grew more battered by heavy agriculture equipment, until it became that most varied of things: a British farm track. As we left civilisation behind and ascended the moor above the River Ceiriog, the rain, a soft caress at first, grew wilder. Hoods came up but our faces broke into wide grins.

Wayfarer said he was "a stickler for observing the feast days and holidays", by which he meant the start and end of the cycling seasons. His ride over the top marked the end of the off-season. As we followed in his wheel tracks, I think we all began to see the appeal.

After a winter of wet weather, the conditions we rode through would normally have seen us remain indoors. But we were marking the shifting of the seasons and, as Keir reflected: "A bit of rain isn't a reason not to ride."

WHAT BIKE FOR THE WAYFARER PASS?

With modern gearing and good fitness, the east side to the memorial is rideable for the most part. By the old shooting hut marked on the OS map, however, we encountered a quagmire that halted us – and also a posse of petrol-powered bikes.

Flurries of mud rooster-tailed several metres high as they tried to coax their heavy machines through axle-deep filth. With our lighter steeds, we simply waded on to terra firma and took the opportunity to ride once more.

As the final push for the top began, the surface became looser. Picking a line and maintaining momentum became harder. Occasional stops gave us opportunities to look back. If I began to pause more often than my companions, I blame the view of the opening valley through the mizzle as much as my lacklustre legs.

It was on one such pause that I turned to hear the clatter and jangle of a bike coming down rather than up. Guiding his gravel bike down, nimble