

AUK member **Piper Fowler-Wright**, a PhD student from the University of St Andrews, combined business with “pleasure” in September, biking from conference centre to conference centre on an Edinburgh-Munich-Edinburgh marathon ride...

**SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS** travel, a cycling holiday, a test of endurance? I think I signed up to all three when I decided to travel to Molecular Polaritonics 2022, a research conference held this year in Straubing near Munich, by bicycle.

The start date was fixed by my attendance, firstly, at another conference, Polaron Day, hosted by the University of St Andrews at the Malmaison in Dundee on the first day of September. That would give me a little over a week afterwards to reach Munich, plus a day riding to Straubing. Tight but feasible.

So a plan was drawn up, the route plotted and accommodation booked. I left Polaron Day promptly in anticipation of an early start from Edinburgh the next morning. That was the local one done – farewell. Next stop Germany.

Journeying down the west side of the UK proved familiar if hard work at times on account of the wind direction. Along the way I managed to fit in a £9 budget stay in Lancaster, an afternoon wedding in Wolverhampton and a ride through old stomping grounds from my time at the University of Birmingham.

The fourth day brought the most unappealing section of the entire trip – a Monday morning ride across central London, and a rush down to Dover to catch the 4pm ferry. Enough time in the end for a meal before embarking. The continent beckoned.

Arriving in Dunkirk I swiftly exhausted all my French at the hotel check-in – a shame, because it turns out they speak that in Liège too, my second stop abroad after a day's ride across Belgium. On the plus side I discovered this was the land of waffles, which were consumed in great quantities, specifically the Luikse variety.

The next three days took me into north, then central Germany and, barring



Bon voyage... Piper waits for the ferry to Dunkirk at the Port of Dover on the fourth day of the adventure

# CUTTING IT FINE IN THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

a routing mishap along the Rhine (a footbridge was still under construction), went according to plan. I arrived in Munich in high spirits and with a spare day to look over the bike and enjoy the hospitality of friends who lived close to the city centre.

A shorter albeit very wet ride then saw me to the Genusshotel Wenisch in Straubing on Sunday, with three days of conferencing to start from the following morning.

**I'M NOT SURE** what was more challenging – cycling 1,800km or maintaining concentration on slide 60 of 74 during only the third hour of talks on Wednesday morning. Anyway, I'd survived both, so all that remained was

the matter of getting back!

A different route north through Germany, this time crossing into the Netherlands. I'd been greatly enjoying the European cycling infrastructure, but here it was simply unbeatable. The weather less so, and the wind and rain got rather biblical as I approached Hook of Holland for the overnight ferry to Harwich. Copious amounts of hot Chocomel were required to restore the senses while I awaited boarding and the prospect of a warm shower on deck.

It was reassuring to land back in England, these pleasant pastures – and, humorously, to fairer weather. Now for the east: Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire all rolled by. Perhaps it was the nearing of the ultimate destination,

the established cycle-eat-sleep routine, or the renewed availability of flapjacks, but I was feeling surprisingly good. Better each day, even.

My legs were utterly spent, mind, but pedalling felt natural and right. Newcastle was the last stop before savouring one more day of cycling through the Borders. I couldn't have asked for a more fitting finale than to be greeted by a piper playing in front of the Scott Monument on arrival of Edinburgh.

My thanks to all those who sent comments and engaged with me on social media during the trip – when you're fumbling on your phone at 6am in the dark, and wet trying to find a way around a road closure, that's the kind of support you draw on.

● Full details of the route and notes I made at the end each day are available at <https://bit.ly/ediMuc2022> while videos and photographic evidence were recorded on my Instagram @pipercycles. Feel free to contact me there if you would like to know about my trip or are perhaps also a student looking to embark on your own adventure.



Piper is greeted by a Piper in front of the Scott Monument on return to Edinburgh and the end of my journey