

# Cycle 2 the Circle

*London to the Arctic Circle by bike.*

*Lisa Baum*

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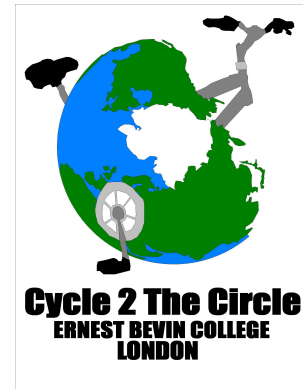


## 1.1 Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for helping to turn the dream into a reality.

In addition I would also like to thank: Ernest Bevin College for all the support and enthusiasm, in particular:

- The principals Mike Chivers and Rukhsana Sheikh for allowing me some extra time to complete the expedition, without this it wouldn't have been possible.
- Murray Beveridge and Charlie Lewis who helped co-ordinate the first leg of the journey from Tooting to the London Eye with 15 pupils which went very smoothly.
- Patrick Sullivan for joining us on the London to Harwich leg of the journey and returning to school with our first update.
- Fiona Wilkins for helping publicise the expedition (see appendix for media publications).
- Karim Isaac-Shaah, a year 10 pupil (at the time) who designed our logo.



Also: Dewi Roberts who kindly designed and maintained our experimental geo blog while we were travelling. Stratton Cycles for their advice and generosity in sorting me out with an excellent Dawes Touring Bike. Mike Lamb for inspiring me to apply for a WCMT fellowship after joining him in 2009 on his Livingston's Lake of Stars kayak expedition (Lake Malawi). The people we met on the trip who showed us amazing hospitality and kindness.

Finally Dale Dapaah who was up for a crazy idea and accompanied me all the way to the Arctic Circle!

## 1.2 Main aims

1. To cycle from Ernest Bevin College in London to the Arctic Circle in Norway.
2. To promote cycling awareness and safety for school children at Ernest Bevin College and within the borough of Wandsworth.
3. To produce educational materials from the films and pictures taken on the trip.

## 1.3 Supporting Objectives

1. To record the route on GPS to share with other cyclists.
2. To further my expedition experience.
3. To look into the possibility of Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme cycle expeditions.

## 1.4 Background

A few years ago I came across an advert asking for an expedition partner to join a WCMT Fellow who was planning to kayak up Lake Malawi following Livingstone's route. It was a perfect opportunity for me to gain expedition

experience. So even though I had never kayaked before I introduced myself to Mike Lamb and convinced him I would be a good expedition partner. Luckily there were kayak lessons going on in Wimbledon Pond and I learnt to kayak with a bunch of 12 year olds, perfect! I soon found myself on the lake with him happily avoiding the crocodile and hippo populations whilst kayaking 200km and wild camping along the lake. This expedition experience very much inspired me to plan my own adventure and I started to consider my options. It had to be short enough to do in the school summer holidays, something that would capture the interest of the pupils at school and be a challenge whilst still achievable as a first expedition. I spent many hours looking at the world atlas and 'Googling' ideas when I noticed the Arctic Circle in Norway. Not too far (it seemed), an achievable distance (~1500 miles) but a place that sounded so far and alien from an inner city school. To cycle there could certainly inspire my pupils to get out and about on their bikes, become more adventurous and learn about the Arctic and the places en route. For me it was the perfect first expedition to challenge myself, learn skills and get experience for future bigger expeditions.

Previously I had cycled on short tours with my friends Neil Shaw and Dale Dapaah (also a teacher at Ernest Bevin College) and they both were keen to join me and so I had my team! Unfortunately Neil had to drop out at the last minute as he was stuck in Namibia due to visa issues.

## **2. The Expedition**

### **2.1 Pre-Expedition Preparation and Planning**

#### **WCMT application process.**

Undergoing the application process for the travelling fellowship was really helpful preparation for the trip as I had to do my research and establish my aims and objectives quite early on in the planning process. This gave me a clear idea of what we were going to do and once I found out I had been successful in February 2011 I could then focus on the route planning and logistics.

#### **Planning the route**

This involved many trips to Stamford's map shop in Covent Garden, luckily we were able to get cycle maps for most of our route apart from Norway. We based our route on the national cycle networks and measured it out using a piece of string! Luckily we came across a really useful website for cycle route planning in Holland called [Fietsrouteplanner](http://fietsrouteplanner.nl) which gave us all of the cycle



route junction numbers we needed to follow and exact distances. Previous experience of cycling in Holland told me junction numbers were crucial if you wanted to avoid getting lost (due to the huge amount of cycle routes in Holland all of the cycle route junctions are numbered and used as a means of navigation). For Germany and Denmark we planned to follow the national routes. We knew we would

have to cycle on the main roads in Norway and take the smaller parallel old roads where possible. Norway didn't seem to have many roads north due to its terrain so we at least knew we wouldn't get lost!

### **Kit and equipment:**

I did a lot of research online and spoke to people who had done long distance cycle touring for advice on Kit (touring bike, lightweight tent, stove, camcorder, wide angle lens, handlebar camera, GPS to help navigate but also to record our route), solar chargers, waterproof gear, a durable but light netbook and hard drive). I also needed to ensure I had all of the right wires (of which there were many), SD cards and batteries. This all took a considerable amount of time and I would recommend looking into it all early on and taking the kit on a practice run so you can test it all and figure out how things work a kit/equipment list with reviews will be added to the website shortly.



### **Website and social media:**

I designed the [www.cycle2thecircle.com](http://www.cycle2thecircle.com) website using Moonfruit.com a simple website builder. This was used to gain interest pre-departure and to be a platform for blog posts, videos and pictures during the trip. I also set up a twitter account so I could follow other expeditions for ideas/inspiration but also tweet updates from the road. Twitter proved to be very successful during both the panning stage and the actual expedition. The website experienced over 10,000 hits during the expedition and over 12,000 in total.

### **Organising the logistics and training for day one with the pupils.**

We also had to arrange the first leg of the trip with the pupils and get them trained up, write hefty risk assessments and get their parents permission, this whole process was quite daunting. I was very fortunate that Murray Beveridge kindly organised/ran the training and sorted out the logistics for the pupils on the day.

## **2.2 The Expedition**

*Starting from Ernest Bevin College, Tooting, London (N 51°43'77") to the Arctic Circle, Norway (N 66° 33' 00") a total of 1500 miles / 2400 km's of cycling.*

### **Part one: July 15<sup>th</sup> – July 16<sup>th</sup> London to Harwich (110miles).**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> July myself and Dale Dapaah started our journey north from our school, Ernest Bevin College. Unexpectedly we were given a fantastic send off by the pupils and our head teacher, Mike Chivers. It was a really exciting way to start our journey and it now dawned on us quite what we were about to do, thankfully it was sunny, it gave us hope! We then had a relaxing cycle up to the London Eye with 15 pupils and 4 staff members. A lady from Transport for London joined us and took promotional pictures of the group of the new CS8 cycle route which was due to officially open 3 days later.

It was the first time the pupils had ever cycled in central London but they all enjoyed it, especially the sense of achievement when reaching the London



Eye. We took the safest and most enjoyable route possible as we wanted to enthuse the pupils not scare or put them off! This involved side roads from the school down to the River Thames path at Wandsworth Bridge, we followed the river east along the south embankment up to and through Battersea Park, crossing the River on Chelsea Bridge where we joined the brand new Cycle Superhighway no.8 which took us all the way to Westminster Bridge. We crossed the river again here to rejoin the south embankment at Westminster to the London Eye. We stopped to enjoy the sunshine (little did we know we wouldn't see much of it again for quite a few weeks!), had ice cream with the pupils and then myself, Dale and Patrick Sullivan headed North for 40 miles to North Weald, Harlow and the pupils returned back to school, they completed a 16 mile journey, the longest most of them had ever ridden.



The next day was a tough 70 miles in torrential rain on undulating country roads to Harwich Port where myself and Dale were to take the overnight ferry to Holland, Patrick returned to London with pictures and tales of rain for the pupils.

### **Part two: 17<sup>th</sup> July – 23<sup>rd</sup> July Holland, (254miles)**



Holland was a fantastic country to cycle through. Its national network of cycle lanes made the journey safe and easy. We only got lost once, where a sign post was missing. We even managed the first two days without our map with the planned route on (it had been left in London!).

The cycle network is easily navigated by junction numbers. These can be found on paper maps or maps found at junctions on route – which we used until we were able to buy a new map. You just record the numbers of the junctions you will be cycling through and follow the numbers. A great system if you can write them down or mark them on a map. Without them it is easy to get lost as the cycle route numbers are marked less often. We followed these routes for almost all of our Holland leg apart from a couple of times where we found the route twisted and turned too much so we used the GPS instead to find an alternative way and it wasn't long before we picked up another cycle route.

The amount of people cycling was impressive and the facilities for bikes by shops meant that it was easy to stop en route. It is amazing how different the cycling experience was from the first leg of our journey in south east England.



When cycling in a cycle lane you have priority over cars even when the lane crosses an adjoining road, all pedestrians stayed on separate pavements or were happy to get out of the way, probably because most people were cyclists themselves, it was such a positive experience cycling with respect from other road users, it felt so much safer.

Whilst in Holland we spoke via a live link up to our pupils in their end of year assemblies. It was a fantastic opportunity to update the pupils and further encourage them to follow our progress. They had an opportunity to ask questions and get their heads around the distances we were doing! It was quite humbling to hear them clapping and cheering us, especially considering we were speaking to them from a field in drizzly weather!

### **Part three: 23<sup>rd</sup> July - 28<sup>th</sup> July Germany (~200miles)**

When we entered Germany the poor weather had really taken hold and the torrential rain was unrelenting, luckily we found a hotel with cheap but very comfortable rooms where we could dry out, do washing and sleep in beds.

We found that the cycle routes weren't as good in Germany (but still much more advanced than English routes), as soon as we crossed the border the routes were on roads without marked off lanes but you are allowed to cycle on the pavement which we took advantage of occasionally on busy, narrow roads. Out of the towns we soon realised that the main roads had wide pavements that doubled up as cycle lanes so we opted for the shortest route



possible rather than the longer national cycle network routes, we cut out the city of Oldenburg and avoided major cities as much as possible. Our experience of leaving Utrecht in Holland showed us how much time you can lose navigating city streets.



An interesting cycling experience in Germany was circumnavigating Bremmerhaven port. We couldn't believe how big the port was, we cycled for 10km along side it looking on at the massive Chinese container ships. They were being loaded up with 1000's of BMW's and containers. We were then passed by many of these ships on the Kiel Canal which broke up an otherwise quite dull, long section of our route.

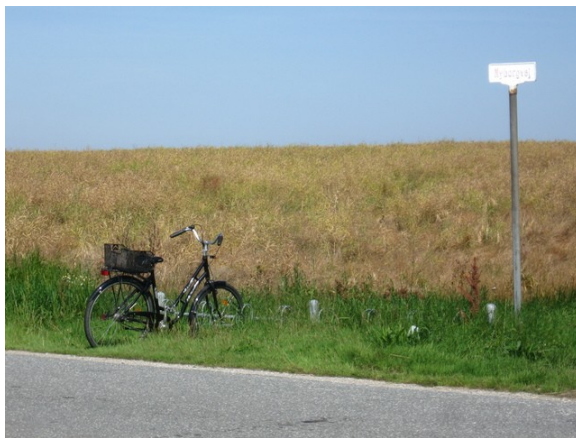
### **Part four: 28<sup>th</sup> July-3<sup>rd</sup> August Denmark (~200 Miles)**



Denmark provided us with a much needed 5 sunny days in a row! As we approached the border there was a huge and extremely busy supermarket full of Danes stocking up on alcohol, tobacco and everyday goods. We wished we could do the same to save some money but alas we could only fit a few more basic necessities on the bikes and unfortunately the shop didn't stock our staple food – canned tuna! We prepared to be much more frugal from that point on.



Danish cycle routes were more like we found in Holland, wide, well sign posted and incorporated into traffic signals and junctions, with cyclist having the priority right of way. On the first day we encountered something we hadn't experienced since leaving England – hills! The national cycle routes once outside of towns were much like our rural cycle routes – just following country lanes. However we did see a bike park stand with bike, at the edge of



a field in the middle of nowhere – fantastic bike facilities there! The problem was that they twisted and turned crossing over the same main road (the 170). We camped much sooner than I anticipated on the first night in Denmark, I was happy to push on but Dale was very much put off by the hills! The next day we decided to stick to the 170 main road – it was very straight and the hills less steep and fortunately like Germany the main

roads had bike lanes built into the wide footpaths at the side of the road. Having not yet had a day off we were quite tired but we had lost time due to some shorter than anticipated days in Germany and Holland. Norway and the mountains were getting closer and I was keen for us to push on and get to Norway sooner rather than later as we were in danger of having to increase our daily mileage in Norway rather than decrease it to take the mountains into consideration.



Unfortunately Denmark was to be the place of bike problems, I experienced two punctures in Denmark then Dale's back spoke broke which led us to cycle even more distance (on the day we decided to do less to get some rest) searching in vain for a bike shop open on a Saturday afternoon. We eventually got it fixed on the Monday and had to pick up the pace again with just two days to get to the ferry port Frederikshaven.

The camping experience was very different in Denmark compared to Holland and Germany, the campsites were much bigger and commercial and of course, expensive, £30 for a pitch in a couple of places!

### **Part 5: 3<sup>rd</sup> August - 24<sup>th</sup> August Norway (~800 miles)**

It was an 8 hour ferry ride from Denmark to Norway which gave me plenty of time to make friends with a Norwegian cyclist Lars. He had cycled from Denmark to Paris and had got as drenched as we had in Germany and Denmark! As we had yet to make plans for our overnight stay in Oslo, Lars kindly invited us to stay at his house in the western suburbs. We didn't really want to deviate from our route due to our time pressures but Lars kindly offered to drive us back the 7km's we would cycle to his once off the metro. We happily accepted and had a lovely evening at his comparing cycle adventure stories and getting the low-down on our next country of cycling. It quickly became apparent to us that very few southerners had much of an idea about Northern Norway but they knew enough to suggest we were crazy to cycle all the way to the Arctic Circle! Lars pulled out a contoured atlas map of Norway we wished he hadn't.

The next day we set off on our 20 day epic 800 miles cycle north through Norway. It seemed similar to Denmark but even the 'flat bits' were hilly (we quickly learnt never to trust a Norwegian when they said the route was flat!) and the countryside seemed vast, everything seemed bigger. Their cycle routes were more basic than Denmark but we were lucky enough to be following a national route north. It took half a day for the rains to start, they plagued us for the most of another two weeks and certainly tested us to our limit (we later found out it had been the wettest summer in Norway for 50 years!). Luckily the rains stopped just before Lillehammer so we were able to take in the lovely views across Lake Mjosa (Norway's largest lake that we had followed for 2 days). We could easily make out the ski jumps made famous for British people by Eddie the Eagle in the 1988 winter Olympics! The next day



the rain returned and we plodded on up north on hilly gravel tracks that hugged the steep lake side. Our first major climb came unexpectedly after a difficult day of steep inclines in the rain. We thought we could cycle alongside the E6 motorway for 8km to Ringebu, unfortunately that wasn't the case. We stopped and asked a driver at a petrol station and he said we had a steep climb for 6km,



this really worried us – a Norwegian was actually saying the word ‘steep’ and it was raining heavily. It took us over an hour, with some pushing to get to the top to find a sign stating that we had another 10km to go, we seemed to have gained quite a few km’s. We got there in the end, over a long gravel track and were happily directed to a guest house where we stayed for two nights, taking our first rest day of the expedition (not



including the ferry ride). We made the most of the day off and got our bikes a much needed service, our brakes had totally burnt through in the first week of Norway’s undulating landscape. We spent the rest of the day mentally preparing for our biggest climb yet. To leave Ringeby we needed to cycle 15km of 8% incline. It took us 2 hours to the top only to meet another rain storm in the cold! The next day we saw our first glacier and camped in zero degrees at Hjerkin then it was downhill all the way to Trondheim, unfortunately half of the route was actually on the E6 motorway which gave some rather exhilarating fast cycling!

Just before Trondheim we turned off and crossed Trondhemsfjord fjord, this was an important point as we now felt we had broken the back of Norway and were on the final leg some 400 miles to go. After a day and a half we joined the RV17 the road that would take us all the way to the Arctic Circle. We had heard it was picturesque and it certainly was, mountains climbed up out of the sea with clouds circling their peaks, the road was mostly flat and wide with little traffic for the majority of it. Here we started using the ferries that linked up the RV17 road and enjoyed a few breaks every now and again on the boats while stocking up with Norwegian waffles. The weather suddenly got better and the last week of cycling was certainly the most stunning. We



were able to step off the gas a day before reaching the Arctic Circle and had a lovely slow day of cycling before resting at Polar Camp. From here we actually had to take a small rib boat to the Arctic Circle as the road was cut off by the sea at this point and the ferry was the only way north. We didn't want to cross the circle on a ferry and so negotiated with a local boat owner to take us to the Arctic Circle monument on the other side of the bay. Finally, after 34 days of travelling we had reached our destination. It was a great feeling very much helped by the stunning scenery surrounding us. A couple of Swedish fishermen helped us celebrate that evening and even took us out fishing the next day, it was so nice to relax on the waters and really appreciate where we were. We still had two days of cycling to get to Ornes to catch the famous Hurtigruten ferry to Bodo where we had a train booked. On the very last day of cycling I took a detour from the 30km route



and cycled 70km instead, I was determined to visit the Svaritsen Glacier, for me it would complete the trip fully, to have cycled from London to a glacier in the Arctic Circle! It was such a lovely day of cycling and I enjoyed doing it on my own for the first time of the expedition. The views of the glacier as I approached it along the valley were spectacular. I then had to take a ferry, cycle 3km and then scramble another 1km to reach the glacier and it was well worth it. On my mad dash back to get the last ferry to Ornes I met another cyclist, Zdenek who had also cycled up from Oslo, it was fun to share experiences. Zdenek joined us on the Hurtigruten the next day. We then started our 16 hour train journey back south to Oslo, it was a fantastic way to travel south, giving us plenty of fine views and time to reflect on our journey.



## **2.3 Post-Expedition the Aftermath and What next?**

### **Geo-blog with embedded clips/GPS data**

I am busy editing the many hours of clips we recorded along the way with the go-pro handlebar/helmet camera and hand held camcorder. I plan to create a website that becomes an extension of the geo blog that we trialled. To do this I have started learning coding so I can make my site fully unique and interactive to be used by students and fellow cyclists alike.

The clips I am currently working on will give an overview for the whole expedition, overviews for each country and short snippets to be embedded into the map. Photos and the bog entries will also be linked to the map.

### **Ernest Bevin College Explorers Club**

I have set up an explorers club for key stage 3 pupils (years 7, 8 and 9) and it started off with a short talk from me on Cycle 2 the Circle. I will use this expedition and my Lake Malawi Kayak experience to discuss exploration with the pupils. Other members of staff are also going to talk about adventures they have been on and we will then take them out exploring in the summer term. The aim of the club is to promote exploration to the pupils and we hope they will go on to do the Duke of Edinburgh scheme once they reach year 10 to further develop their sense of exploration/adventure.

### **Duke of Edinburgh**

Cycling in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark was very easy and safe and I hope that we will soon take students on a cycle tour as part of their Duke of Edinburgh expedition. The GPS routes we recorded will help with planning and risk assessments and can be shared with other schools. At the end of February I am due to talk at the south London Duke of Edinburgh Scheme awards ceremony.

### **Ernest Bevin Pupils on their bikes**

The school now has 15 bikes for the pupils to use and additional secure parking for those who cycle to school. In preparation for the first leg of the journey when the pupils joined us cycling to the London Eye one member of staff (Murray Beveridge) trained as a cycle proficiency instructor. He then gave the pupils cycle proficiency lessons before the expedition to ensure they would be safe on the roads. He is now training more pupils who we will hope to take out on trips in the summer term.

### **Sharing experience and knowledge**

Since I have returned I have been in contact with another cyclist from Tooting who hopes to also cycle from London to the Arctic Circle. I plan to meet him and share our GPs routes and experiences.

### **The next expedition**

I have gained a lot of valuable experience planning and cycling this expedition and feel I can now plan my next successful but bigger adventure (6,000miles with tough altitude and road conditions) which will be announced shortly on [www.lisabaum.com](http://www.lisabaum.com) or twitter: cycle2thecircle. I learnt many lessons on this trip that will certainly help me plan my next one:



## **Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society**

Not only I have been awarded a travelling fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust but the Royal Geographical Society invited me to become a fellow after seeing an article in the Times Educational Supplement about the expedition.

## **Fundraising**

In total we managed to raise £1,130.50 for the Teenage Cancer trust and £1630 for the South London Motor Neurone Disease South London Group charities. The pupils who cycled with us also contributed to these funds, raising almost £300 between them.

## **3. Recommendations**

*Some things I learnt and/or can recommend:*

### **Planning**

- Get any new equipment early on and test it out.
- Bikes: My Dawes Horizon proved to be an excellent bike.
- Don't have too many aims/objectives keep it simple (we planned to film and produce educational clips on too many topics).
- Planning your route can be fun but be flexible, change your route depending on what you find/need (we shortened a lot of our planned route in Germany and Denmark by leaving the national cycle routes).
- Talk to other cycle tourers, its great to get ideas from them. A website I found very useful was [Travelling two](#) (see appendix for other useful sites)
- Make sure you fill your mp3 with your favourite tunes, good music on a long tour can make all the difference in both good and bad times!

### **On Tour**

- Buy food when you see it, opportunities may not arise again especially during weekends, Many cycle routes avoid towns and cities, bare this in mind when buying food.
- If you get offered hospitality take it if you can. We really enjoyed meeting people on the way and their kindness really made the expedition, not to mention getting out of the rain!
- Find out which supermarket chain is the cheapest (especially in Norway - Rema 1000).
- Wild camp when you can, it is obviously saves money and can be very liberating and surprisingly safe. We didn't do it as much as I would have wanted to which brings me on to my next point.
- Make sure you and your cycling partner have the same expectations and wants during a trip. It is important to speak about these things when planning an adventure together. I was surprised by just how much myself and Dale differed on some things. I wanted to wild camp, he preferred campsites and I wanted to push on and do more miles in the flat countries and he wanted to build up more slowly. No one is right here, it is personal preference but it is important to cycle with someone who wants or expects similar things. For my next adventure I will definitely speak about these things well before leaving especially if

we also have a limited time scale to get somewhere which can make differences of opinion stressful.

- My most important tip would be to experience the expedition in the moment without too much worry about what is on the road ahead. Some planning ahead is obviously needed but the thing that kept me sane and happy when the going got tough (and wet) was just to be appreciate what I was doing in the moment, knowing at the back of my mind I would get dry and warm again soon! An Mp3 full of your favourite music cannot be underestimated! Don't leave home without it!

## **4. Appendix**

### **4.1 Itinerary**

Our [original itinerary](#) turned out to be a bit ambitious; however it was very useful to have the distances between places marked out. To see our actual route and timings check [www.cycle2thecircle.com](http://www.cycle2thecircle.com) or email [cycle2thecircle@gmail.com](mailto:cycle2thecircle@gmail.com) for GPS routes.

### **4.2 Useful websites for planning**

For all blogs and additional information on this trip please visit [www.cycle2thecircle.com](http://www.cycle2thecircle.com)

**Travelling Two.** A very comprehensive website on all things regarding cycle touring. Extremely useful.

<http://travellingtwo.com/>

**Norway tunnel information:**

<http://www.eftel.com.au/~wheelbuddies/norway/norway2007/n2007tunnels2.htm>

<http://www.cycletourer.co.uk/maps/tunnelmap.shtml>

**Ferry routes on the RV17 (Norway):**

<http://www.kystriksveien.no/?page=ferjeruter> (you can also pick up booklets with all this information at most cafes and petrol stations along the route)

**Norwegian camping guide:**

<http://www.eftel.com.au/~wheelbuddies/norway/camping.htm>

**Cycle Tourer website – useful country profiles (European countries).**

<http://www.cycletourer.co.uk/>

**Holland route planning**

<http://www.fietsersbond.net/fietsrouteplanner/fietsroutes-recreatieveplanner/>

**Inspiring/interesting cycle touring blogs:**

<http://www.getjealous.com/judezebedee/map>

<http://tomsbiketrip.com/>

<http://www.alastairhumphreys.com/>



### 4.3 Media and dissemination

- [TES 'In the News'](#) (online and printed versions), 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011
- [Wandsworth Guardian](#) 'teachers set off on Arctic Trek' 24<sup>th</sup> July 2011
- South London Mercury. '*Going full circle*'. Front page, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011
- [Wandsworth Guardian](#): Tooting teacher hopes Arctic trek will encourage school cycles, October 2011
- Motor Neurone Disease Association, South London Group winter 2011 Newsletter 'Arctic circle cycling expedition'.
- [Wandsworth School's Bulletin](#) January 2012
- [Press releases on Ernest Bevin College Website](#)