

Yes we know Chris Evans writes for this magazine, but he also runs French trail riding holidays which are worth telling you about. Clive Garnham packed one of his passports and went to sample the Tour de Morvan...



FRENCH MADE!

Pause for a moment and picture if you will, your own particular trail riding Nirvana... Does it include glorious sunny days with deep river crossings to be negotiated - riding through clear, bubbling, boulder-strewn water? Loamy, dust-free tracks which are technical in places, yet totally rideable? Hills rolling away into the distance, criss-crossed with trails with just the odd picturesque little village to break up the scenery? The occasional walker seemingly happy to pass the time of day with you? Good food and refreshments every meal-time with plenty of wine to wash them down? Slim and attractive French dirt bike groupies with a penchant for muddy riders at each night's guest house? Okay, so I lied about the groupies, but the rest of it is all true.

Of course, everything comes at a price, and the price of this particular jaunt is £250, which pays for your accommodation and evening

meals, back-up van to transport your bags, and the use of the road-books. But it's also worth noting that you do have to suffer the infuriating wit and sarcastic humour of fellow TBM staffer Chris Evans... Every silver lining has its cloud, eh?

In order to make his newly re-invented Long Distance Trail Rides so successful, Chris packs a lot of riding into three hectic days, with a route which is both enjoyable, yet suitably challenging for the experienced rider. Despite dropping the term 'Raid' from the title (because Chris felt it mistakenly implied an element of competition), there's still a road book to be followed by each participant, and part of the enjoyment is in interpreting the road-book and following its directions. Something which was beyond my own limited talents on more than one occasion - but remember I am half Australian!

Working on the bikes is the least enjoyable bit



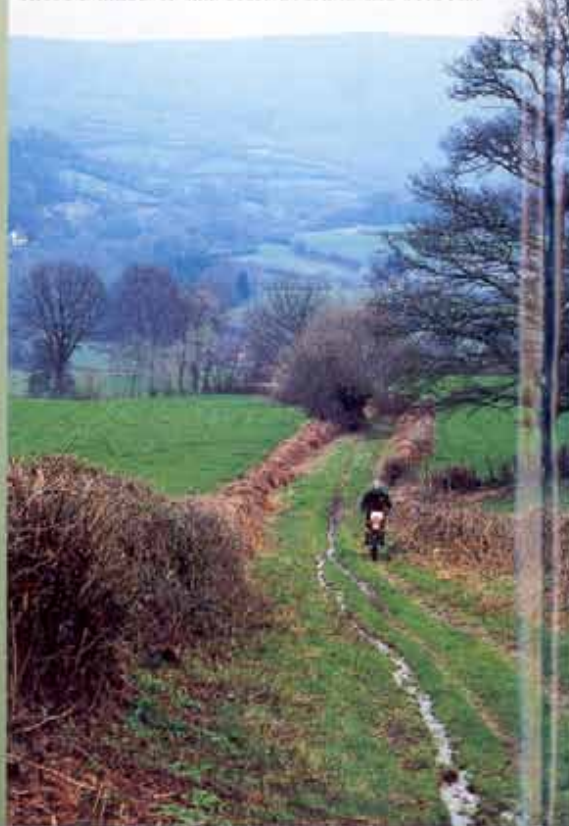
When I joined him for a Tour de Morvan recently it became obvious that Chris has some friends in pretty high places - in fact they don't come much higher. Because despite the torrential rain we'd left behind in England, all our days riding in France were warm and sunny. Not only that but Chris managed to arrange for the entire trail to be watered overnight (every night) just to keep the dust down - all 350 odd miles of it. I'd always suspected he'd sold his soul, but I hadn't figured it was worth quite so much.

So the riding conditions were perfect, with dappled sunlight filtering through the trees, onto tracks which swept through clouds of dandelion seeds stirred up by the rider in front. You really couldn't have wished for a nicer setting.

The trails themselves are pretty varied; rocky in places, muddy at times but also fast and flowing. By and large the tracks were ridden in third gear upwards yet there were often times when we had to pick our way down seemingly uncharted single tracks that looked like they'd never seen a bike along them before.

Other lanes were wider (twin-tracks), though refreshingly unlike a lot of British trails, these were smooth enough so that you could ride from the left-hand wheel track to the middle then to the right-hand track to get the best view around the corners. And then there's the water - lots of it. At least half a dozen stream crossings to be negotiated over the three days, some of which can be

There's miles of this stuff down in the Morvan



deceptively deep in places - as Chris knows only too well.

Each morning started with a riders' briefing to highlight any potential problems with the day's route, as safety is one of Chris' main concerns. There is also now the requirement for everyone to sign a Riders Charter acknowledging their responsibilities whilst taking part. Nothing too onerous, merely a gentle reminder that it isn't a race and that everyone has a part to play in the success of their own riding holiday.

The evening accommodation was generally comfortable, though obviously not above having 18 sweaty, muddy motorcyclist carrying big bags through to their rooms and showering a few kilos of mud down their bathroom drains! In fact I think one of the things that struck me most about the area was just how welcoming everyone was. From café and hotel staff to horse riders on the track, people waved almost without exception, even a group of picnickers eating by a river in the middle of a forest all waved enthusiastically as we rode past their idyllic luncheon spot - imagine that happening in the New Forest. Not!

The standard of riding required is pretty easy, though there are the occasional 'testers' thrown in to keep you concentrating. More importantly riders should be able to handle a dirt bike, follow a printed instruction and get themselves around the tracks without getting lost, offending people or riding like idiots, which on our weekend,

That'll be the deep water then, eh Steve...?



everyone did with ease.

So if you are seeking trail riding Nirvana and not looking to just go thrashing around French lanes then I can heartily recommend joining Chris for the Morvan event. The general consensus amongst the group was a resounding thumbs-up with most talking of future plans to return for another trip or to try the other locations from Chris' brochure. I guess the only real problem is having to suffer three days of Chris' dubious sense of humour! I just wore my ear-plugs and smiled occasionally...!