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## Cycle Camping in Victorian and Edwardian Ireland

This essay provides an overview of the main developments in cycle camping in Ireland in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, documenting for the first time the main individuals and groups involved, describing cycle campers' activities when they went camping and discussing what attracted devotees to take up this relatively new pastime. Fin-de-siècle cycle camping emerged in Ireland, it should be noted, following a rapid development in cycling as a participant sport and health-giving pastime towards the end of the nineteenth century. As cycling technology developed in the nineteenth century and different types of cycle were superseded by improved models, Irish people gradually grew accustomed to the sight of numerous varieties of velocipedes, tricycles and bicycles, including pedal-less hobby horses that riders propelled by using their feet to push their machines along the ground, cycles that were built to be propelled on water, giant unicycles that featured as circus acts, as well as Ordinaries or so-called "Pennyfarthings", and tandems, "triplets" and even "quintuplet" machines.<sup>1</sup> The 1880s were years of particularly rapid technological change in the cycling industry. At the start of the decade, the Ordinary (solid-tyred, tall, accessible only to the young, athletic and male) dominated Irish cycling, while the comparatively cumbersome tricycle allowed women, and men who were older and more timid than their Ordinary-riding counterparts, to participate in the new pastime. In the decade's middle years, safety bicycles were developed, although most young male cyclists continued to ride Ordinaries as they were quicker than the safeties, whose solid tyres meant that they progressed more slowly than the high-wheeled machines; a smaller number of safety bicycles for women were also in evidence, but most Irish female cyclists persevered with riding tricycles.<sup>2</sup> It wasn't until after John Boyd Dunlop developed the pneumatic tyre in

1888 and 1889 that pneumatic-tyred safety bicycles began to replace the Ordinary bicycle, solid-tyred safety bicycle and the tricycle as the machine of choice for male and female cyclists, respectively, but this transformation in the Irish cycling world did not take firm hold until the early 1890s.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, new models of tricycles and Ordinary and safety bicycles continued to appear on the Irish market. One of the oddest of the cycles that captivated the people who saw it was a singular contraption that first took to the roads of Dublin in the summer of 1888. The *Daily Express's* description of this "Cycling Curiosity" gives a good idea of its impact on contemporary observers:

A few days ago the habitués of Grafton Street were startled by the appearance of a huge cycle about 40 feet in length, and mounted upon it no less than ten riders, while attached behind was a large baggage wagon. The leviathan threaded its way through the traffic with the most surprising ease and precision, while on all sides the people stared and gaped. The machine, a "Victoria", made by Singer and Co., then proceeded along the Rock road to Dalkey, and everywhere excited the greatest attention. At Blackrock the band [stand] was visited, and as long as the machine remained in the precincts the musicians were deserted.<sup>4</sup>

The machine in question was a so-called Victoria "ten-in-hand" cycle, a machine consisting of five pairs of wheeled interlinked segments, which were propelled by ten riders. It was one of a series of similar machines that were developed by the Singer company earlier in 1888, with models consisting variously of two, three, four, five, six, seven or eight pairs of wheeled segments. Some of the "four-in-hand" machines were adapted for military purposes, while a Coventry brass band took to taking trips into the countryside surrounding

the English Midland city while riding a “sixteen-in-hand” cycle, with each bandsman, apart from the steersman, simultaneously pedalling his own segment of the machine and playing his instrument.<sup>5</sup>

The “ten-in-hand” cycle that both startled and intrigued the Dubliners who encountered it in July 1888 was acquired for a different novelty recreational venture, Ireland’s first large-scale cycle-camping expedition. An important part of cycling’s appeal was that it allowed urban cyclists to have easy access to the countryside in their spare time. This often took the form of day trips by cyclists, either by solitary riders, groups of friends or, increasingly, by members of cycling clubs who went on “runs” of several hours’ duration to scenic rural locations or favourite watering places. Some Dublin and Belfast cycling clubs also went on weekend outings, but increasing numbers of cyclists went on cycling holidays of longer duration. From the early 1880s, urban cyclists’ fondness for holidays in the Irish countryside was facilitated by the Cyclist Tourist Club’s (CTC) network of recommended hotels and inns in which CTC members enjoyed reduced tariffs for meals and accommodation, as well as a network of CTC volunteer guides who provided holidaymakers with information about local sites of interest and the condition of the local roads.<sup>6</sup> These holidays by CTC members required a greater degree of planning and organisation in cyclists’ vacations in the Irish countryside than had been the case previously, particularly as the excursionists were engaged on trips that usually lasted for at least one week. Richard James Mecredy, editor of the *Irish Cyclist*, displayed even greater organisational skills when he arranged two cycling vacations for *Irish Cyclist* readers, the first of which went to Killarney in 1886 and the second to Connemara in 1887. As was the case with CTC cyclists on their Irish vacations, the participants in the two *Irish Cyclist* trips stayed in various hotels and inns.<sup>7</sup> Building on the

success of these two trips, Mecredy decided that the next *Irish Cyclist* tour, which would be to Ulster in 1888, would be an experimental one, in which the cyclists would eschew the usual tourist accommodation and sleep under canvas instead.<sup>8</sup> It was for this purpose that Mecredy purchased the “ten-in-hand” machine, calculating that the lengthy composite cycle with its numerous riders would allow the tourists to easily pull a baggage waggon, containing a large bell tent and the requisite camping equipment, at the rear.<sup>9</sup>

The camping trip to Ulster turned out to be the beginning of a sustained enthusiasm amongst a number of Irish and other cyclists over the next two decades for cycle camping in Ireland. This strand in Ireland’s recreational history has not received any scholarly attention. An examination of cycle campers’ attitudes towards their pastime reveals that they had a lot in common with “muscular Christian” enthusiasts for sports. An exploration of Irish cycle camping not only offers important new insights into the cycling world of Victorian and Edwardian Ireland, but also situates these cycling pioneers as participants in a wider outdoors recreational movement that captivated enthusiasts in Britain, Europe and North America.

#### I

On July 31 1888, some ten riders set off from Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, on the “ten-in-hand” machine (Figure 1) on the first leg of their two-week cycle camping tour. In addition to the ten riders on the “ten-in-hand” – nicknamed the “tendam” by the *Irish Cyclist* – some twenty-two other cyclists on an assortment of tricycles and bicycles made up the touring party.<sup>10</sup> Their journey was well publicized in advance by Mecredy, with the details of the proposed itinerary being published in several newspapers.<sup>11</sup> The ride through Grafton Street and on to Blackrock (described earlier) was probably a pre-tour publicity stunt by Mecredy,

as was the trial weekend camping trip to Newrathbridge in Wicklow by the riders of the “tendam” some days afterwards, an event which was also documented in the press. A later trip to the Lucan bandstand also drummed up welcome pre-tour publicity for the “ten-in-hand”.<sup>12</sup> There is no doubt that the “tendam” made a big impression on the public, as large crowds, their curiosity piqued by the publicity surrounding the unusual machine, turned up to catch a glimpse of it as it passed through their neighbourhoods. Large crowds of excited people assembled on the streets of Dublin to watch the expedition of cyclists set off on their trip to Ulster, and according to the *Ballymena Observer* “from Dublin to Newcastle, nearly 100 miles, crowds were waiting at every little village and cross-roads, and the course of the monster was like one long triumphant procession”.<sup>13</sup> When the “tendam” reached Balbriggan, “The Balbriggan folk turned out in hundreds to see the wonderful sight, and the streets of the little town were thronged, while exclamations of wonder were heard on every side”. An “anxious crowd” in Drogheda awaited the cyclists’ arrival for several hours, and “a roar of delight went up” when the “tendam” eventually appeared in West Street.<sup>14</sup> When the party travelled through Dunleer “the wildest excitement” prevailed in the village, which was filled with a crowd attending the local fair, and at Warrenpoint “thousands of people were awaiting the arrival of ‘the thing’, as they called it, and hailed its arrival with loud cheers”.<sup>15</sup> Along the entire route from Rostrevor to Newcastle “the country people had, in some way or other, heard of the advent of the ‘Tendam’, and for miles its progress was like a triumphal procession, and might be traced by the tremendous cheering, which seemed to keep pace with them, and those riders of singles who went in front were constantly asked, ‘When is it coming?’”<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of the camping tour, some thousands of people assembled at Oldcastle to see the “tendam” as it passed through the town as the cyclists made their way from Lisnaskea to Dublin.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the descriptions of the large

crowds that turned out to see the “tendam”, the excitement that it aroused in contemporaries may also be discerned through a cartoon by George Moore which was published in the Christmas 1888 edition of *Bicycling News*, one of the leading British cycling newspapers (Figure 2). In this cartoon, Moore depicts the snakelike “tendam” as a source of terror to onlookers, with St Patrick intervening to save the day and banishing the fearsome creature from Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

Mecredy also stoked contemporaries’ fascination with the “ten-in-hand” by publishing detailed accounts of the camping tour in the *Irish Cyclist*. Percy French, who in 1888 was in the early stages of his career as a comic entertainer and contributed occasional articles and sketches on cycling themes to Mecredy’s newspaper, assisted his editor by contributing a humorous poem titled “The Tendam”, in which each stanza in turn provided a comical sketch of a different member of the ten-man team of the unusual cycle. It was not one of French’s best efforts, as one can discern from the poem’s opening stanza:

Some may sing of the ocean wave,  
 Some of cricket and football rave,  
 But the life for the good and brave  
 Is to be one of ten  
 Who, afar from all strife and care,  
 To the northern coasts repair,  
 Riding, in order to bring them there,  
 A marvel to cycling men  
 Called the ten-dam – oh! the ten-dam!  
 If you’ve a holiday, spend ‘em

Bowling along,  
Amid laughter and song,  
As one of the crew of a ten-dam.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the *Irish Cyclist's* coverage of the cycle camping tour consisted of detailed accounts of the campers' journey, interesting episodes that occurred on the way, and the enjoyable evenings that they had around their camp fire, with sing-songs, impromptu concerts and good-natured chaffing featuring prominently in the descriptions.<sup>20</sup> These accounts were accompanied by drawings that portrayed the campers' holiday in a romantic light (Figures 3 and 4).<sup>21</sup>

Despite Mecredy's efforts to promote cycle camping with the well-publicized tour in Ulster in 1888, the new pastime initially proved to be relatively slow in attracting adherents amongst Irish cyclists.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Mecredy's hopes of sparking an interest in cycle camping were not entirely in vain: a number of Dublin cycling clubs, including the Civil Service Cycling Club and the Phoenix Cycling Club, took to camping, with the Phoenix club organising at least one camping weekend at Glendalough in July 1889,<sup>23</sup> and other Irish cyclists participated in another camping tour which Mecredy organized in the following month, this time in the Scottish Highlands and eastern Scotland<sup>24</sup> (Figure 5). The numbers involved were relatively small.<sup>25</sup> One of the main obstacles to cycle camping becoming more popular in the ten years or so after the "ten-in-hand" tour in Ulster was the fact that there was no lightweight tent on the market in the 1890s and no convenient way of carrying a tent and other camping paraphernalia on bicycles or tricycles. Machines such as the "tendam" were extremely rare, and, although it allowed Mecredy and his companions to tow their luggage with them, it was cumbersome to ride and steer and was hardly a



practical option for most intending campers. Mecredy admitted as much when he stated at the end of the inaugural cycle camping tour of 1888 that it was “a great mistake” for campers to try to take their camping equipment with them and that they should instead send on everything that they needed by car or train.<sup>26</sup> This inevitably meant that cycle camping was an expensive and exclusive leisure activity at first, as well as one that involved careful planning. Mecredy excelled at this, with many of the documented instances of cycle camping in Ireland in the 1890s taking place under his stewardship. Most of these were weekend excursions from Dublin, with such destinations as Roundwood and Lough Tay in the Wicklow Mountains proving particularly popular with the campers; in summertime, some fortunate young men working in Dublin businesses were also able to “snatch a few consecutive days” during the week and escape to the mountains.<sup>27</sup>

Women cyclists took part in some of these weekend camping trips<sup>28</sup> (Figure 6). Mecredy and his friend, Gerald Stoney, provided an account of one such trip, stating that it was typical of these ventures.<sup>29</sup> They described how on one Saturday “A narrow, winding mountain valley, far removed from the haunts of men, with a merry little burn tumbling through it” was selected by the mixed party of men and women for their camp site, with the women pitching their tent “where the underwood was thick”. Readers were reassured that no unseemly behaviour occurred between the male and female campers: “It was an understood thing that none of the male campers were to invade this portion of the glen; and the ladies, six in number, were chaperoned by the wife of one of the gentlemen”. The men’s quarters were some 150 yards away from the women’s tent, completely out of sight of their female companions. The men and women busied themselves in their respective parts of the camping site until darkness fell, and they then gathered around a camp fire, at

which “Musical talent was plentiful, and good-humoured chaff, witty repartee, rousing choruses, sentimental and comic songs, made the time flit all too quickly, until about 11.30, when the ladies adjourned to their tent”. After breakfast on the following day, the campers cycled to the nearest church to attend “Divine Service”. After dinner, friends visited the campers and everyone went for a walk in the mountains; after tea, there was another fireside gathering, but this time, probably because it was Sunday, the campers were more restrained in their merriment, and merely chatted and sang hymns. A 6 a.m. start on Monday saw the party begin the process of making breakfast and striking their tents, in preparation for conveying them to Dublin, and by 9 a.m. the cyclists had left their camp to return home. Mecredy and Stoney were keen to emphasize that the campers behaved impeccably on the trip, adding that “Needless to say it is essential that the members of such a party should be all personal friends, and should know how to conduct themselves, and to conform to the rules of the camp”.<sup>30</sup> Some of the mixed-sex cycle camping trips were carried out by the Ohne Hast club, an exclusive cycling outfit founded in Dublin in the 1880s, whose male and female members went on leisurely cycle excursions (the club’s name means “Without Hurry” in German) to enjoy mountain scenery.<sup>31</sup> By the early 1890s Mecredy was captain of the Ohne Hast club, and its clubhouse was located in the picturesque grounds of his home at Vallombrosa, near Bray; amongst the entertainments that were put on for club members at Vallombrosa were lantern shows depicting amusing episodes of their cycle camps.<sup>32</sup> In addition to weekend camping outings, Mecredy also organised cycle camping holidays of at least a week’s duration, with Kerry proving a personal favourite destination for these expeditions.<sup>33</sup> Some fourteen members of the Ohne Hast club – six men, one boy and seven women – went on a cycle camping holiday to Muckross Lake, in Co. Kerry, in August 1894. The women slept in two tents “in a secluded

hollow behind some trees”, out of sight of, and some 200 yards away from, their male companions’ single tent.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the various outings that were organized by Mecredy, other cycle camping trips in Ireland in the 1890s included those undertaken by such individuals as the *Manchester Guardian’s* “Cycling Notes” correspondent, who spent a fortnight cycling and camping with “a merry party of friends” in Kerry in 1894;<sup>35</sup> the ten cyclists who camped on Glendoo Mountain in Co. Dublin in the summer of 1894;<sup>36</sup> A.D. Wolseley and five companions from Belfast who went on a cycling and camping holiday in Fermanagh and Donegal in 1895 or 1896;<sup>37</sup> and two friends who cycled and camped for a week in the vicinity of Lough Gill in the summer of 1896.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the decade, it was reported that cyclists could hire small tents from the Royal Hotel in Rathdrum if they wished to go camping in the nearby mountains.<sup>39</sup> The most important cycle camping holiday in Ireland in this period was that of Thomas Hiram Holding and three companions in Connemara in July 1897. Holding had his first experience of camping at the age of nine in 1853 on a plateau overlooking the Mississippi river, when he and his family, who had emigrated to the USA as his Mormon parents wished to live in Utah, were part of a wagon train of migrants heading to the West.<sup>40</sup> On his return to England he became consumed by what he called “Camping fever”, purchasing a canoe in 1877 and going on numerous canoeing and camping trips throughout Britain and Ireland over the next two decades.<sup>41</sup> He was also a keen cyclist, making his first cycling holiday in Ireland in 1876,<sup>42</sup> and he was a founder member of the Bicycle Touring Club in 1878,<sup>43</sup> which became the CTC in 1882. A tailor by trade, Holding designed a tent weighing a mere 14 lbs, made of “lawn”, a closely woven cotton cambric, and commissioned a Cheltenham fly-rod maker to construct tent poles which fitted into one

another; this tent fitted easily into Holding's kit-bag, providing the sleeping quarters for Holding and his fellow campers on their cycling expedition to Connemara.<sup>44</sup> Holding's *Cycle and Camp* (1898) provided a detailed and amusing account of the English campers' experiences in the West of Ireland. It included numerous cartoon sketches (Figures 7 and 8) and lots of useful recommendations for would-be cycle campers on such important topics as food and cooking and the best type of camping equipment to take on a cycle camping trip. The book made a favourable impression on contemporaries,<sup>45</sup> and several readers corresponded with Holding after its publication. Holding met with one of these, E.C. Pitt-Johnson of Oxford, to discuss the idea of forming an organisation for cycle campers. The Association of Cycle Campers (ACC) made its first camp at Wantage in August 1901, and held its first annual general meeting in February 1902. Holding was elected its first president, with the near-ubiquitous Mecredy becoming its vice-president.<sup>46</sup>

Mecredy suggested Connemara as the venue for an ACC camp, with the result that nine ACC members from England and 19 Irish cyclists<sup>47</sup> camped at Glen Inagh, near Recess, in August 1902, with Mecredy in charge of the "commissariat". The first evening almost proved to be the camp's last, as a swarm of midges descended on the campers as they were about to eat their supper:

When supper was being prepared a vast army of midges pounced down on the tender men fresh from the cities. For some time the annoyance was unbearable. Huge fires had to be lit, and every camper was compelled to smoke like a Dutchman in order to keep the rapacious pests at bay. After some hours there was a cessation of hostilities, and the men wearily sought repose in their tents. At daybreak next morning, however, the attack

was opened with even greater vigour, and it looked as if there would be mutiny or a stampede in the camp. The president [Mecredy] was looked on reproachfully, and was accused of having by false pretence called inoffensive strangers into this death trap. The Englishmen regarded the attack as a local demonstration against British tyranny and an attempt to avenge the wrongs of Ireland. Men talked of striking tents, of striking anything and everything, in fact. Breakfast was prepared under a fierce attack. It was consumed in spasms, the wily enemy taking their advantage of the campers to annoy them most when they were preoccupied with plates and cups. So determined was the attack that the breakfast was well nigh spoiled; the industrious insects all but succeeded in driving the campers out of Connemara. Fortunately there came a breeze from the north and it transferred the pests to some other district. The camp was saved.<sup>48</sup>

Although the midge (*Gobbleupibus Hibernicus*, according to one victim)<sup>49</sup> attacks were an extremely unpleasant experience for those on the receiving end, the rest of the fortnight's camp proved to be a success, with the campers enjoying bicycle trips to various scenic sights in counties Galway and Mayo, as well as picnics, mackerel fishing in Bertraghboy Bay, yachting in Killary Bay and the usual camp fire sing-songs and story telling at night.<sup>50</sup> Most of the Irish campers enjoyed their holiday so much that they supported a proposal for the creation of an Irish organisation to promote cycle camping.<sup>51</sup> A "representative number of old time campers" held a meeting to this end at Mecredy's Gortmore, Dundrum, residence in October 1902, resulting in the formation of the Irish Cycle Campers' Association (ICCA), with Mecredy elected as president, J. E. Blunden, a civil service tutor in Dublin, as vice president, Samuel Cunningham, a commercial clerk in a Dublin gas company as secretary, A.

R. Wayte, a cycle engineer and cycle agent in Dublin, as treasurer, and John Aimers, a commercial clerk from Howth, on the committee.<sup>52</sup>

The ICCA organised several large-scale camps over the next few years, including an expedition to Killarney, Derrynane, Ventry and other locations in Kerry in August 1903,<sup>53</sup> a trip to Glenmalur in June 1906,<sup>54</sup> another cycle camping holiday in Kerry in August 1907,<sup>55</sup> and a camp at Lough Dan in the Wicklow Mountains in August 1909.<sup>56</sup> Mecredy and other ICCA members also took part in a large cycle camp at Killarney which was organised in August 1906 by the National Cycle Camping Club (NCCC) of Britain, a breakaway organisation from the ACC which Holding set up in April 1906 after a disagreement over who should chair committee meetings of the latter body.<sup>57</sup> Few women participated in ICCA camps:<sup>58</sup> they appear to have preferred the more intimate camps organised by Mecredy for friends and acquaintances, such as the Easter 1908 weekend vacation at Oakwood, Co. Wicklow, in which five women and nine men took part,<sup>59</sup> to the larger camps that were organised by the ICCA. It wasn't until May 1908 that the ICCA elected its first female member – this was Nelly Grace Bacon, an Englishwoman with considerable experience of bicycle touring in Britain and Ireland.<sup>60</sup> The ICCA camps were merely the best-advertised examples of cycle camping expeditions in Ireland in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>61</sup> These undoubtedly helped to popularise the pastime with Irish cyclists, particularly readers of the *Irish Cyclist*, the main Irish cycling newspaper. For instance, the members of Belfast's Bohemian Camping Club, established in 1906, were inspired to take up cycle camping by the example set by the ICCA. The Bohemians camped over the summer months by the shores of Helen's Bay, cycling to work in the mornings and returning to camp

afterwards; their numbers in the camp were augmented each week by friends who joined them for the weekends.<sup>62</sup>

There is also evidence to show that some cyclists took to cycle camping without being influenced by press accounts of the ICCA's activities. For example, many male cyclists from Omagh began cycle camping at Lough Muck in 1900, some two years before the ICCA was established, and continued to do so throughout the Edwardian period. Organising themselves as the Loughmuck Campers, they took to camping by the shores of Lough Muck over the summer months, cycling to work in Omagh each morning and then returning to their camp in the evenings.<sup>63</sup> Neither Mecredy nor the ICCA that he helped to found had a monopoly on cycle camping in Ireland in this period, therefore, even if they were undoubtedly important influences on this new outdoor pursuit.

## II

Cycle campers participated in their pastime for a variety of reasons. For some, the relative cheapness of holidaying under canvas when compared with staying in hotels was an important element of cycle camping's appeal. Thomas Hiram Holding estimated in 1897 that two men cycle camping in Ireland could not spend more than four shillings per day between them, or, even if they wished to camp "luxuriously", they could not spend more than 30 shillings in a week; this compared very favourably with the estimated weekly costs of 70 shillings to stay in hotels.<sup>64</sup> In 1905 "an ardent camper", writing under the pseudonym of "Scamper", stated that one "cannot spend 1s. 6d. to 2s. at utmost" daily on a cycle camping outing.<sup>65</sup> R. A. McElderry of Ballymoney stated in 1908 that "The simple life can be done at 7s. 6d. a-week each; 15s. a-week will provide all the luxuries, amusements, and travelling

expenses that one can possibly indulge in".<sup>66</sup> R. J. Mecredy calculated in 1913 that a cycle camper could "live well" on a daily outlay of one shilling and sixpence, while a daily outlay of two shillings "will ensure absolute luxuries and leave a margin for considerable wastage".<sup>67</sup> The low costs of cycle camping were partly due to the generosity of Irish peasants, who frequently refused to take payment for milk, buttermilk, eggs, bread and other foodstuffs when tourists requested such items from them.<sup>68</sup> The price of tents had also fallen considerably by the end of the 1890s, making cycle camping a more feasible option for impecunious Irish white-collar workers than had been the case at the beginning of the decade.<sup>69</sup> Improved designs in tents and camping paraphernalia, by designers such as Holding and others, resulted in inexpensive, extremely light tents and in light and easily foldable camping equipment, all of which further heightened cycle camping's attractiveness compared to holidaying in hotels.<sup>70</sup> Some cycle campers, such as John Bleakley, a Lurgan cycle agent, and his cousin, went on numerous tours in Ulster without a tent at all, preferring to sleep in ditches in dry weather, with their feet wrapped in a cycling cape and using a mackintosh as a blanket and a waterproof sheet to lie on. They also slept on heather, on beaches or on tombstones, "or wherever we fancied and we enjoyed it". In very wet weather they slept in outhouses, asking permission of the owners to do so if they were nearby, but they would "take French leave" if there were no owners around and sleep in the outhouses without permission. They carried as much bread as they could conveniently tie on their bicycles, and usually bought themselves a tin of preserved fruit daily, and occasionally some butter. Apart from this, their luggage consisted of a small saucepan, two enamelled bowls, a small box of cocoa and one of sugar, some soap and two spoons. In 1902, in preparation for a fortnight's tour of Kerry and Cork, which he anticipated would have a much damper climate than Ulster's, Bleakley made himself a waterproof linen tent



“on the Holding pattern” which was big enough to hold four people, for a cost of 17 shillings. The group also purchased a small Dove patent cooker. The trip to Munster was “a luxurious trip”, costing the four campers one shilling each per day for provisions, with bread and tinned fruit being bought on a daily basis.<sup>71</sup>

Most cycle campers lived or worked in towns and cities. Camping trips in the countryside for a weekend or for longer provided them with a welcome break from the urban environment; for those who had sedentary or white-collar occupations, cycle camping represented a healthy, vigorous pursuit which got them out of their stuffy offices and brought them closer to nature. The *Northern Whig* explained on June 15 1906 that cycle camping:

is unquestionably a source of great delight to many cyclists, especially those from the big centres of population. The change of air and scene, the refreshing sights, sounds, and perfumes of the country, the enormous difference in the go-as-you-please negligee costume of the cyclist on tour as compared with that of the same man as a business man in the city, the good fellowship and sociability of camp life with well-known friends of congenial tastes, the songs, quips, recitations, and the friendly chaff all appear to be combined to make camping delightful, and to imbue all those who have ever tasted the sweets of cycle camping in good company “far from the madding crowd” with a love for the open air, which appears to grow stronger every year.<sup>72</sup>

Cycle camping in Ireland constituted one strand of a wider contemporary European and North American movement, in which mainly urban-based enthusiasts for outdoor pursuits

such as camping, hiking, rambling, canoeing and mountaineering, turned their backs – at least temporarily – on the comforts and constraints of the urban world and found a sense of psychic or physical release or renewal by living in close proximity to the natural world.<sup>73</sup> The attractions of living under canvas were described by a correspondent to the *Irish Wheelman* in August 1894:

Never is the ecstasy of living more keenly felt than when at early dawn the tent-flaps are untied and the pure, keen air of the morning is drawn in big draughts into strong lungs. When the camper takes half-a-dozen plunges into a gigantic bath, carved by Nature out of a vast rock, and filled with limpid water, icy cold, or breasts the waves of the lake with vigorous lungs, and then returns with keen appetite to the camp-fire, where a cheering hissing and a savoury smell mingle with the sounds and perfumes of the mountain side – what time the amateur cooks of the expedition deftly handle pots and pans – then can the modern dweller in tents truly affirm that a wild life is worth living, and that civilization is something of a mistake.<sup>74</sup>

The supposed release from the constraints of civilisation that cycle camping offered – even if this was only temporary – was frequently stressed by its Irish devotees.<sup>75</sup> A cyclist who camped with a friend near Sutton, in Dublin, in July 1902 recounted how “Civilization fell from us like a worn-out garment” as they “ran wild”, ate at irregular intervals and went swimming in the sea each morning, with no covering but a bath towel as they walked from their tent to their bathing spot.<sup>76</sup> Four Dublin cyclists who went camping in the Dublin Mountains particularly enjoyed their camp fire – one of them recorded that “we built up the fire and sat round it like bushrangers, feeling very elemental and primitive, and in the

wildest spirits”.<sup>77</sup> R.A. McElderry of Ballymoney, who went on a cycle camping trip to Donegal with nine friends, considered that cycle camping allowed one to “cast off all the unnecessary restraints of our over-civilization”;<sup>78</sup> according to the *Irish Times* of April 1 1910, cycle camping was popular with increasing numbers of cyclists as it provided them “with the means of getting about in the free and easy manner of the gypsy, living their lives in the open air”.<sup>79</sup>

For cycle campers, the lure of the open air included camping at various scenic locations and getting close to nature. In 1909 R. J. Mecredy provided a particularly evocative description of the beauty of Owenreigh Glen in Co. Kerry, asserting that a cycle camper in such a beautiful spot would be “a clod indeed” if he did not imagine that “he had wandered somehow into fairyland, and that any moment Queen Mab and her train might come dancing over the flower-besprinkled greensward between the giant clumps of bracken and Osmunda, to bid him welcome”.<sup>80</sup> As we have already seen with the example of the midge-assaulted English and Irish cycle campers at Glen Inagh in 1902, living close to nature was not always the idyllic experience that Mecredy depicted. “Guy Roper” recorded cycle campers’ similar unhappy encounters with midges on their trip to Connemara in 1908.<sup>81</sup> Midges were not the only insects that sometimes made camping miserable for cyclists: two campers near Howth in July 1902 had an unpleasant experience when an “army of ants [...] invaded our dwelling and ignominiously expelled us”,<sup>82</sup> while a group of cycle campers who were camped near Dublin in August and September 1904 discovered that the nearby shrubbery contained two wasps nests:

and the proprietors soon found us out, and came round in such swarms, especially at

meal times, that they became a perfect plague. If the tin box in which we kept our provisions was left open for a moment everything in it was immediately covered with the insatiable little insects. Repeatedly we were obliged to throw away pots half full of jam, owing to the number of wasps which had become embedded in it. After a while, however, everyone became accustomed to the little torments, and very expert at killing them.

This was particularly the case with the camper who was stung on his toe by a wasp after he stretched his foot outside his blanket. One of his companions described the aftermath:

This was an unfortunate occurrence for the wasp community, for the injured one declared war to the knife against the wasps, and during our stay he must have disposed of two or three thousands. One Sunday morning, in two hours, his bag amounted to over 1,800, his favourite weapon being a tent mallet. Of course, he did not come off unscathed, receiving fifteen or sixteen stings during the course of his campaign.<sup>83</sup>

Rabbits' cries as they were hunted by weasels disturbed the night-time rest of cycle campers in Donegal.<sup>84</sup> In addition to unwelcome visits from insects and the disturbing cries of hunted animals, cycle campers also sometimes had to contend with unwelcome attention from farm and domestic animals, such as dogs, donkeys and pigs stealing food from unattended tents.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps the most unpleasant encounter between campers and animals was that which occurred at Silver Strand in Wicklow in 1908, when some fifteen cyclists were chased off their campsite by an enraged bull.<sup>86</sup>

Such occasional episodes do not appear to have dampened cycle campers' enthusiasm for their pastime: on the contrary, they seem to have added to their enjoyment, to judge by the way in which retrospective accounts of these incidents often paint them in an amusing light or state that they enhanced campers' holiday experiences.<sup>87</sup> The cyclists whose camp near Dublin was inundated with wasps endured not only the wasps' unwelcome attention, but also a few rainy nights when their old hired tent let in a large amount of rainwater, obliging most the campers to try to sleep with their heads under their blankets, apart from two who protected their heads with umbrellas. Nevertheless, the camping trip was judged a success:

However, none of us cared for such trifles, we had come out to enjoy ourselves, and enjoy ourselves we did, and none of us were any the worse for it. It is not every temperament that can find pleasure in six weeks of roughing it such as we underwent, but we found that any inconveniences we had to put up with were more than compensated by the careless freedom and unconventionality of our life. The braving and strengthening effect of camp life is such that it seems almost impossible to be ill. Some people could never reconcile themselves to the discomforts inseparable from camping, but for any one who is a lover of nature, and fond of an open air life, I know of no more pleasant, healthy, and profitable way of spending the summer. The members of our party were all singularly well adapted to tent life, and although we originally intended to camp for two weeks only, we put off our departure and lingered on week by week until the middle of September, when we had spent six weeks under canvas. At the end of our sixth week we struck our tent with the deepest regret, and betook ourselves once more to civilized life with its many artificial restraints.<sup>88</sup>

To endure in the face of occasional brushes with wasps, midges or ants, or waterlogged conditions, was an outward sign of a camper's inner strength. For Thomas Hiram Holding, a keen advocate of the gospel of "muscular Christianity", the hardships that were part of cycle camping, just like the hardships that were part of the keen athlete's engaging in strenuous sports activity, led to increased physical and mental strength. The physical discomforts of cycle camping made one rugged and brought one closer to God: as de Abaitua puts it, "Muscular Christianity perceived nature as the countenance of God; to camp was to investigate His Divine works".<sup>89</sup> Although no Irish cycle campers were quite so explicit about the link between their pastime and the divine, they certainly believed that cycle camping strengthened them both physically and mentally, sharing the muscular Christian's views on the therapeutic and restorative nature of outdoors recreational activity. Although cycle camping was not, strictly speaking, a sport, as there was no competitive element to it, its devotees had a similar mindset to those contemporaries who believed that playing cricket, football or other sports significantly improved one's physical and mental well-being.<sup>90</sup> According to E. J. O'Reilly, after cycle camping "you awaken with more light in the eye, more elasticity in the step, more energy in the body, and more vigour in the whole constitution"; cycle camping in the Kerry mountains, he argued, "would magnetise a misanthrope and exhilarate a hypochondriac".<sup>91</sup> "The Tramp", an *Irish Cyclist* correspondent who visited a camp on the Hill of Howth in July 1906, stressed the invigorating effects of camp life on urban dwellers:

One has only to see the men to realise what a healthy game it is. They are all brown and bronzed, just the colour of the sands. There is no need to ask if they find it healthy sleeping under canvas. You see health in their bright eyes, and the brisk way in which

they hustle round leaves no doubt in your mind as to their physical fitness. If you want to see some splendid specimens of healthy young men pay a visit to the Howth encampment; or if my readers have any doubt as to the joys and pleasures of Bohemia, let them get inside its canvas portals, and all such doubts will speedily vanish, never to return.<sup>92</sup>

The *Northern Whig* particularly praised those Belfast cycle campers who persevered with camping in the face of heavy rainfalls: “It is a case of the survival of the fittest, and the hardy ones reap their reward in living like fighting cocks at the expense of comrades less impervious to the ‘radical moisture’ of dear old Erin”.<sup>93</sup> R. J. Mecredy asserted that cycle camping “made for strong constitutions – the campers never catch cold while under canvas, and have always returned from their tours with far more vigorous frames than before they started”.<sup>94</sup> Like so many other contemporary enthusiasts for sleeping out of doors, Mecredy was an ardent believer in camping’s therapeutic effects on urban dwellers.<sup>95</sup> He was particularly keen on sleeping in tents with open doors or flaps, believing – to the point of obsession – that it was impossible for campers to catch a cold if they slept with the doors or flaps open. This idea was planted in Mecredy’s mind by his friend and collaborator, Thomas Hiram Holding, who assured him that people did not catch colds but “caught heat” instead, from breathing germs in enclosed spaces, and that the infallible way of preventing this malady was to ensure the circulation of fresh air,<sup>96</sup> a message which Mecredy repeated on numerous occasions, detailing alleged examples of cycle camps in which the only people to fall ill with colds were those who slept in tents without keeping the flaps or doors open or who foolishly slept in stuffy bedrooms in cottages.<sup>97</sup> Mecredy was convinced that fresh air circulating in tents not only prevented one from catching colds, but also rheumatism,

pneumonia and such childhood illnesses as measles and whooping cough; furthermore, it cured colds, insomnia, anaemia and even tuberculosis.<sup>98</sup> He did not go quite so far as those French enthusiasts who considered that camping prevented alcoholism and even syphilis.<sup>99</sup> Mecredy was so keen on sleeping in tents with open flaps or doors that in the winter of 1905-1906 he and his wife (a late convert to the idea of cycle camping) gave up living in their house and instead took up permanent abode in a marquee tent in their garden, with their children following their example in two other tents soon afterwards.<sup>100</sup> The punctilious Mecredy, when signing his household return for the 1911 census, made an addendum stating that the return recorded details of all family members, visitors, boarders and servants who slept or lived in his house “or in tents on the grounds”.<sup>101</sup>

### III

The *Dublin Daily Express* of May 30 1908 observed that “The sublimest reproach to this age of hyper-civilisation is the craze for camping out – the outcome of a craving for the simple life”. As we have seen, it was a craving that was particularly marked amongst young men with sedentary occupations in Irish cities and towns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although it was not confined to them alone.<sup>102</sup> Part of the reason for cycling’s popularity in Ireland in this period is that the bicycle made the countryside much more accessible to a large proportion of Ireland’s urban population, enabling the urban dweller to escape the town or city for at least a few hours on weekends.<sup>103</sup> Combining cycling with camping meant that the escape could be prolonged for a week or more. This new pastime was indeed distinctive in many ways, but it also constituted part of the much wider enthusiasm for sport and outdoor recreation which took hold of much of Victorian and Edwardian Irish society, an enthusiasm which was shared throughout much of the Western world in the same period.



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<sup>1</sup> Griffin “Early History of Cycling”.

<sup>2</sup> Griffin, *Cycling*, 18-19, 29-32, 53-54, 103-105.

<sup>3</sup> Griffin, *Cycling*, 114-117.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Express*, July 17 1888.

<sup>5</sup> *Totnes Weekly Times*, June 9 1888.

<sup>6</sup> For the early history of cycling tourism in Ireland, see Griffin, “Bad Roads” and “The Tourist Gaze”.

<sup>7</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, August 3 1886; Mecredy, *Tour to Connemara*.

<sup>8</sup> Mecredy, *Through the North*.

<sup>9</sup> *Totnes Weekly Times*, 9 June 1888.

<sup>10</sup> The riders of the “ten-in-hand” slept under canvas, while the rest of the touring party slept in inns or hotels.

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Express*, July 14 1888; *Newry Reporter*, July 19 1888; *Tyrone Constitution*, July 20 1888; *Coleraine Chronicle*, July 21 1888. The cyclists’ route went from Dublin to Drogheda and from there to Dundalk, Newry, Newcastle, Ballynahinch, Belfast, Larne, Ballycastle, Coleraine, Derry, Strabane, Donegal, Belleek, Enniskillen, Cavan, Kells, Kilmessan and back to Dublin.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Express*, July 26 1888.

<sup>13</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1888; *Ballymena Observer*, August 17 1888.

<sup>14</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1888.

<sup>15</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1888; *Ballymena Observer*, August 17 1888.

<sup>16</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1888.

<sup>17</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, September 5 1888.

<sup>18</sup> *Bicycling News*, December 29 1888.

<sup>19</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 15 1888. French joined the cycling tourists in Cavan on the return leg of their journey.

<sup>20</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1888, August 15 1888, August 22 1888, August 29 1888, September 5 1888, September 12 1888. In a later publication, Mecredy conflated two incidents that occurred on the tour to create a fictional account. As originally described in the *Irish Cyclist*, the tourists camped on their first night on the site of the Battle of the Boyne, where they were joined by a number of cyclists from Drogheda as well as hundreds of “the country people” of the locality, who were intrigued by the novel sight of their camp and who watched their proceedings with great interest from the edge of a nearby quarry. The onlookers eventually dispersed, but during the night the sleeping campers were disturbed by an intruder who trod on a stick and thereby alerted the sleepers to his presence. This unwelcome visitor fled before he could be caught. On the next day, the tourists paid a visit to the round tower at Monasterboice, where they were met with “solemn silence” by the locals, who, because of their unusual cycle, mistakenly took them for emergency men who were taking part in an eviction some three miles from Monasterboice. A well-known cyclist from Drogheda named Harbison managed to convince the locals of the cyclists’ true identities: *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1888. Writing about the “tendam” tour more than twenty years later, Mecredy’s version of the tourists’ first night’s camp was almost unrecognisable from the version that had been published in the *Irish Cyclist* in 1888. In the later account, when the cyclists’ conducted their sing-song around their camp fire, “the whole-souled patriots of Drogheda jumped hastily to the conclusion that we were emergency men, and that the ten-in-hand was a new kind of battering ram. Hence it came about that just as we commenced our nightly ‘sing-song’ round the camp fire, the low hills to eastward, overlooking the camp, began to swarm with sullen, silent men, who sat biding their time”. Luckily for the tourists, Luke Healy of Drogheda – brother of the famous priest raconteur, Fr Healy – arrived with a cornet under his arm and began to play a selection of “Fenian” airs, such as ‘Ninety-eight’, “The West’s Awake” and “The Wearing of the Green”, and the hostile crowd eventually dispersed, “having no doubt come to the conclusion that men who favoured music of this nature could not possibly be traitorous emergency men”: Mecredy, *Health’s Highway*, 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> Some of these sketches were based on photographs taken by Jack White, one of the “tendam” riders.

<sup>22</sup> *Irish Society* proved to be wildly optimistic in its speculations on the beneficial impact of Mecredy’s promotion of cycle camping: “A certain number of ladies and gentlemen proceed to act on this idea, with the following result – They must purchase machines, that means employment for the makers; they must purchase the requisite costumes, that means employment for the costume makers; they must purchase tents, employment for tentmakers; they purchase food; result, money to purveyors. We need not trace the electric shock of activity once started through its multitudinous channels, but the reader can reflect that all those employed in the first instance will in turn employ other subsidiary workers for their own necessities. The result

to the cycling tourists is an increase of health, which means increase of energy and a consequent improved effect on the general work of the world”: *Irish Society*, September 7 1889.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, July 10 1889.

<sup>24</sup> Mecredy and Stoney, *Art and Pastime*, 122-127.

<sup>25</sup> “Nearly thirty cyclists”, who slept in five tents, participated in the *Irish Cyclist* camping trip to Scotland: Mecredy and Stoney, *Art and Pastime*, 124.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, September 12 1888. Mecredy considered round military tents to be the best available form of tent.

<sup>27</sup> *Irish Society*, August 23 1890; Mecredy and Stoney, *Art and Pastime*, 113-119. The campers used a variety of tents on these trips. These included waterproof gypsy tents made by the Waterproof Material Company of London. Measuring 10 feet by 8 feet, and holding from six to eight sleepers, they cost £5 8s. 6d. A canvas tent of the same size cost £1 less. Some campers chose bell tents from Pope’s of Downham Market, Norfolk, which cost £1 9s. The Pope firm had “an enormous stock of discarded military tents”, which explains why its tents were so cheap: Mecredy and Stoney *Art and Pastime*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> *Irish Society*, August 23 1890; Montgomery, *R. J. Mecredy*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Introducing their account, they stated that “A description of one will do for all”: Mecredy and Stoney, *Art and Pastime*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Mecredy and Stoney, *Art and Pastime*, 119-121.

<sup>31</sup> Griffin, “Irish Cycling Clubs”, 108.

<sup>32</sup> *Social Review*, March 30 1895; *Irish Cyclist*, May 30 1895.

<sup>33</sup> *Weekly Irish Times*, September 22 1894; *Irish Cyclist*, April 21 1895, September 11 1895, September 18 1895, September 25 1895; *Kerry Sentinel*, February 12 1896. Mecredy retained his fondness for cycle camping holidays in Kerry in the first decade of the twentieth century: Mecredy, *Health’s Highway*, 23-27.

<sup>34</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, September 26 1894, October 3 1894, October 10 1894; Mecredy, *Camping in Kerry*.

<sup>35</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, September 10 1894.

<sup>36</sup> A photograph of their camp may be seen in *Irish Cyclist*, July 18 1894.

<sup>37</sup> In March 1896, Wolseley gave a talk to the Ballymena Young Men’s Christian Association on “My bicycle tour and camp life”, which was illustrated by limelight views which he and his companions took on their tour. According to the *Ballymena Observer*, Wolseley’s presentation “abounded with humorous incidents connected with camp life, and was written in a fluent, racy style, which carried his audience with him from start to finish with unremitting interest”: *Ballymena Observer*, March 13 1896. The 1901 Irish census records just one A.D. Douglas Wolseley – this was Alfred Douglas Wolseley, the 27-year-old son of William Charles Wolseley, a Ballymena linen manufacturer.

<sup>38</sup> “Cycling and Camping, Lough Gill”, *Irish Tourist*, July 1898. The two friends spent their time in swimming or rowing on Lough Gill, cycling to nearby scenic sites or to Sligo town, or shooting game. One evening, while they were rowing on the lake, they were invited to participate as “honoured guests” in a wedding dance and party that was taking place at a cottage near the lake.

<sup>39</sup> *Wicklow People*, July 28 1900.

<sup>40</sup> Holding, *Camper’s Handbook*, 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> Holding, *Camper’s Handbook*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> “A Bicycle Tour in Ireland”, *Buckingham Advertiser*, October 14 1876.

<sup>43</sup> Reid, *Roads*, p.126.

<sup>44</sup> Holding, *Cycle and Camp*, 10-11, 202, 205-206.

<sup>45</sup> See the positive reviews in *The Scotsman*, June 6 1898; *Cycling*, June 11 1898; *Cheltenham Examiner*, June 22 1898; *Tamworth Herald*, June 25 1898; *St James’s Gazette*, July 5 1898; *Irish Cyclist*, July 6 1898; *The Globe*, July 18 1898; *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 10 1898. For an account of two men’s cycle camping tour in Ulster that was prompted by reading Holding’s *Cycle and Camp*, see *Cycling*, October 27 1900.

<sup>46</sup> *Cyclists’ Touring Club Gazette*, March 1902; Holding, *Camper’s Handbook*, 3-4; Constance, *First in the Field*, 15-21.

<sup>47</sup> The Irish contingent included George Halliday, a commercial traveller from Rathmines, William M. Conway, a cycle agent from George’s Street, Dublin, Patrick McGlynn, a grocer and draper from Clara, and J. C. Cooney, an ironmonger and cycle agent from Navan: *Irish Cyclist*, August 20 1902; *1901 Census of Ireland*.

<sup>48</sup> *Mayo News*, August 23 1902.

<sup>49</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 6 1902.

- <sup>50</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 6 1902, August 13 1902, August 20 1902, August 27 1902, September 3 1902; *Yorkshire Post*, August 22 1902; Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 109, 115-117.
- <sup>51</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, September 3 1902.
- <sup>52</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, October 15 1902; *Irish Times*, October 21 1902. Details of occupations from *1901 Census of Ireland*.
- <sup>53</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 19 1903, August 26 1903, September 2 1903, September 9 1903, September 16 1903, September 23 1903, September 30 1903.
- <sup>54</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, June 13 1906, June 20 1906.
- <sup>55</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 14 1907, August 21 1907, August 28 1907; Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 23-27.
- <sup>56</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, July 29 1909, August 13 1909. Lough Dan was a popular destination for Dublin cycle campers and day-trippers: Mecredy, "Open-Air Life", 581; Pyle, "Lough Dan".
- <sup>57</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, April 11 1906, September 5 1906, September 19 1906; Holding, "Cycle Camping Notes", *Cyclists' Touring Club Gazette*, October 1906; Constance, *First in the Field*, 28-29. Fifteen new members, including John Hilliard, manager of Killarney's Lake Hotel, were elected to the NCCC at the Killarney camp, bringing its overall membership to close to 200: *Irish Cyclist*, September 5 1906.
- <sup>58</sup> Only three women took part in the ICCA camp in Kerry in 1908: *Irish Cyclist*, August 14 1908.
- <sup>59</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, June 10 1908.
- <sup>60</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, June 3 1908. Bacon was the secretary and a founding member of the Mowbray House Cycling Association, a co-operative cycling club established in 1892 by W. T. Stead, editor of *Pall Mall Gazette*, to make bicycles accessible to working women who could not otherwise afford them. It also promoted rational dress for women cyclists. In May 1908 Bacon was sentenced to two weeks in prison, for failing to be bound over in her own recognisances for £1 and failing to provide a surety of £1, after a disorderly incident at 10 Downing Street when a group of suffragettes tried to present a petition to Prime Minister Asquith. In 1909 she went on a three-week solo bicycle camping tour in Munster. Details from *The Woman's Signal*, September 13 1894; *Irish Cyclist*, September 11 1907; *Manchester Courier*, May 22 1908; "A Bachelor Girl's Camp in Ireland", *Cyclists' Touring Club Gazette*, May 1909; Hanlon, "Mowbray House".
- <sup>61</sup> Smaller ICCA cycle camps included a weekend excursion by 11 members from Dublin to Silver Strand, near Wicklow, in August 1906: *Irish Cyclist*, August 29 1906.
- <sup>62</sup> Details from *Irish Cyclist*, February 2 1906, April 25 1906, June 10 1906, August 8 1906, October 9 1907; *Northern Whig*, June 29 1906, July 12 1906, May 24 1907. It is possible that Clonmel's Star Cycling Club's summer camp at Ardgeeha in the summer of 1906 was also influenced by accounts of the ICCA's camps: *Irish Cyclist*, September 19 1906.
- <sup>63</sup> *Tyrone Constitution*, July 28 1905, July 26 1907, August 21 1908, June 18 1909, September 24 1909. Loughmuck Campers whose occupations can be identified are William J. G. Roulston, a shopman in an Omagh hardware shop; Walter V. Bates, an assistant in an Omagh chemist's shop; and Armour J. Macfarlane, a photographer. Robert J. Waterson's occupation is not described in the 1901 census; his father was a corn and coal merchant in Omagh. Information from *1901 Census of Ireland* and *Tyrone Constitution*, March 30 1906.
- <sup>64</sup> Holding, *Cycle and Camp*, 11-12.
- <sup>65</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, June 8 1905.
- <sup>66</sup> "Camping Out in Donegal", *Coleraine Chronicle*, January 18 1908. The 1911 Census of Ireland records that McElderry, who resided at 4 Charles Street, was the son of a retired grain merchant. His occupation is listed as "grain merchant & manager of markets".
- <sup>67</sup> *Daily Mail*, August 2 1913.
- <sup>68</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, January 2 1895; "To the Source of the Shannon", *Weekly Irish Times*, October 3 1903; *Manchester Courier*, January 5 1912.
- <sup>69</sup> For instance, "Government bell tents" costing a mere 30 shillings, a fraction of their original cost of £6, from Andrew Potter's Wolverhampton tent works, were advertised in numerous Irish newspapers in 1897 and 1898. For just some of many examples, see *Londonderry Journal*, August 6 1897; *Coleraine Chronicle*, August 7 1897; *Kildare Observer*, August 7 1897; *New Ross Standard*, August 6 1898; *Belfast Weekly News*, August 6 1898; *Sligo Champion*, August 13 1898; *Mid-Ulster Mail*, August 27 1898. The advertisements in 1898 stated that the advertised price included carriage costs.
- <sup>70</sup> Descriptions of improvements in tent design, including the increased reduction in tent weights, may be found in *Manchester Guardian*, December 1 1902; *Ballinrobe Chronicle*, June 11 1903; *Irish Cyclist*, August 8 1906, August 21 1907; Mecredy, "Open-Air Life", 579, 581; Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 20-21. The *Irish Times* of April 1 1910 explained that, "Thanks to the enthusiasm of certain pioneers it is now possible for the

everyday cyclist to carry with him, whithersoever he goes, a temporary home with full equipment, including bedding, provisions, and cooking utensils, without overloading his bicycle or requiring more than ordinary physical exertion during his progress, his impedimenta only meaning the transportation of a few extra pounds of weight. Modern ingenuity has rendered it possible for all the cycle camper's requirements to be constructed on feather-weight lines. Complete tents only weigh a few ounces, and a similarly wonderful lightness is recorded for the various utensils and cooking stoves needful".

<sup>71</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 6 1902, August 22 1908. Bleakley waterproofed his linen tent by using boiled linseed oil. Other cycle campers who often eschewed the use of tents were R. Archer, A. Hopkins and Rhys Pugh (the last-named was one of the staff of the *Irish Cyclist*), who formed part of the cycle camp to Brittas which was organised by Mecredy in August 1906. As there was no room for them in the five tents used by the campers, they slept in a dry ditch under two waterproof rugs. Mecredy explained that they were "well used to this method of reverting to the simple life, for they are in the habit of carrying out week-end fishing excursions into the mountains and sleeping in the woods or under furze bushes": *Irish Cyclist*, August 22 1906.

<sup>72</sup> The Loughmuck Campers' entertainments provide a good example of how cycle campers entertained themselves when living under canvas. Picnics, cricket and boating formed a regular part of their leisure activity during the day, and they also competed frequently in eight-a-side rifle shooting contests with teams from Omagh and Portora Royal School, the latter of whom were holders of the All Ireland Shield for this sport. As was commonplace at cycle campers' gatherings, evening sing-songs were a regular feature of their camps, but the Loughmuck Campers's sing-songs differed from those of other cycle campers due to the fact that they had enough talented musicians to form their own band: details from *Tyrone Constitution*, July 24 1903, August 7 1903, July 8 1904, July 28 1905, March 30 1906, May 4 1906, July 20 1906, November 1 1907, November 15 1907, March 20 1908, April 17 1908, August 21 1908, June 18 1909.

<sup>73</sup> Young, *Heading Out*; Sirost, "Du Campement au camping"; Sirost, "Habiter en camping"; Sirost, "Débuts du camping"; Pye, *Fellowship is Life*, 50-51; Walker, "Outdoor Movement"; de Abaitua, "Art of Camping"; Gorn and Elliott, *American Sports*, 169.

<sup>74</sup> *Irish Wheelman*, August 7 1894. Organized camping became increasingly popular with various groups in Irish society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially organizations that were closely linked with the Protestant churches. These groups, in their various ways, believed that outdoor activities such as camping were not only healthy but would help to combat degeneracy amongst Ireland's young male population. The organizations were the Young Men's Christian Association (*Wicklow News-Letter*, July 2 1898; *Church of Ireland Gazette*, July 6 1900; *Wicklow News-Letter*, August 1 1903; *Leinster Express*, November 19 1911), the Church Lads' Brigade (*Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, July 27 1901; *Newry Reporter*, July 16 1910) and the Boys' Brigade (*Belfast News-Letter*, July 17 1909; *Tyrone Constitution*, July 30 1909; *Londonderry Sentinel*, July 31 1909; *Northern Whig*, June 30 1910; *Wicklow News-Letter*, July 9 1910; Power, "Irish Boys' Brigade"). Most of Sir Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts organization in Ireland, although it was denominationally neutral, consisted mainly of Protestant boys and youths, which is not particularly surprising, considering its overtly imperialistic ethos (Gaughan, *Scouting*; Totten, *The Tenth*, 1-6; Power, "Boy Scouts"). Na Fianna Éireann, the republican boy scout organization, could not have been more different than Baden-Powell's group in this respect, but it shared with its larger rival a fondness for camping: *Irish Independent*, August 18 1908; *Evening Telegraph*, August 13 1910, July 22 1911, August 26 1911, November 25 1911.

<sup>75</sup> It is revealing that those who went on cycle camping trips organized by R. J. Mecredy in the 1890s and early 1900s often referred to themselves as "savages" or "Mecredy's savages", or were described in these terms by others: *Daily Express*, June 12 1908; *Irish Times*, June 12 1908;

<sup>76</sup> "A Camping Out Holiday. A Howth Experience", undated *Irish Packet* article in *Northants Evening Telegraph*, September 17 1904.

<sup>77</sup> *Irish Independent*, July 5 1906. The camp fire was an essential part of the camping experience: not only did the cyclists do their cooking on it, but their evening sing-songs and other entertainments were conducted around it. One of the most unusual camp fire amusements was the mock trial which cycle campers in Derrynane held on one of their number, who was accused of stealing a cow after he had been heard to say that he would like to eat some ribs of beef, shortly before it was reported that a local farmer's cow had gone missing. The campers played the parts of spoof judges, jurors and defence and prosecuting counsel, watched by a crowd of almost one hundred local people, who enjoyed the amusing impromptu theatricals. Two real Royal Irish Constabulary men took part in the proceedings. The accused, a Dutch cyclist named J. C. Pretorius, was found guilty; the judge decreed that "the prisoner [should] be taken from the place he now stands and made to stand in the place he is taken to": *Irish Cyclist*, August 14 1907.

<sup>78</sup> “Camping Out in Donegal”, *Coleraine Chronicle*, January 18 1908. McElderry and his friends subsisted partly on rabbits that they caught in snares (in which they also caught at least one wildcat). A duck that one of the group ran over on a cycle ride also ended up in the campers’ cooking pot.

<sup>79</sup> Country dwellers were often puzzled by the desire of cycle campers to undergo the apparent hardship of camping or sleeping in tents, of living in “the free and easy manner of the gypsy”. For example, E. J. O’Reilly, a London-based Irish cycling journalist who wrote under the pseudonym of “The Scorcher”, who was one of the cycle camping party at Glen Inagh in August 1902, reported that the locals “seemed to be hugely delighted and not a little puzzled at the whole affair”. They were particularly fascinated by the campers’ habit of washing themselves each morning in a bath that they had installed near the tents: “This morning rub seemed to amuse the natives of the neighbouring slope of Lissoughter Mountain immensely. Like the Boers in the Transvaal they were invisible to the naked eye, and yet loud shouting and laughter proclaimed they were interested observers of our ablutions”. An “ancient dame” in Kerry in August 1903 considered Thomas Hiram Holding, who had erected his tent near Looscanagh Lake, to be an object of curiosity, “a harmless, good-natured man, she explained, but a little weak in the head”. R. J. Mecredy imagined that she considered the other campers to be “an absolute band of lunatics”. According to Holding, “the comparatively poor, untravelled, and innocent people” in Ireland variously mistook him for “a pedlar, a circus outrider, an exciseman, a bill poster, a political spy, a railway surveyor, a poacher, a wandering shoemaker, a tinker, and even a beggar” on his camping trips. The theosophist married couple, James and Margaret Cousins, were fond of going on what they called “miracle hunts” – cycle trips in the West of Ireland, to visit various archaeological sites and other locations connected with local folklore, travelling by bicycle and sleeping in a gypsy tent. While engaged on a two-month “miracle hunt” in the Clifden neighbourhood, many of the local children were so fascinated by encountering “a rare gentleman and lady in a tent” (the only tents in the district before this being circus tents), that they neglected their cow milking duties and visited the married couple in their tent instead: *Irish Cyclist*, August 13 1902, August 20 1902, August 19, 1903; Holding, *Camper’s Handbook*, 55; Cousins and Cousins, *We Two*, 143.

<sup>80</sup> Mecredy, *Health’s Highway*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> “With a Tent in Connemara”, *Irish Cyclist*, September 2 1908.

<sup>82</sup> “A Camping Out Holiday. A Howth Experience”, undated *Irish Packet* article in *Northants Evening Telegraph*, September 17 1904.

<sup>83</sup> “Six Weeks Under Canvas”, *Weekly Irish Times*, May 5 1905.

<sup>84</sup> “Camping Out in Donegal”, *Coleraine Chronicle*, January 18 1908.

<sup>85</sup> *Cycling*, November 9 1904; *Wicklow News-Letter*, September 16 1905; *Irish Cyclist*, August 14 1907, August 28 1907; “Camping Out in Donegal”, *Coleraine Chronicle*, January 18 1908.

<sup>86</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, July 15 1908.

<sup>87</sup> For example, one of the cyclists who were forced to abandon their tent because it was invaded by ants admitted that he did not enjoy either that experience or the experience of being flooded out of their tent after a particular heavy downpour. He wrote that, “I suppose I did not like those things at the time, but looking back on them now after two years’ perspective, they seemed to enhance the delight of that camping out holiday”. The bull attack at Silver Strand was the subject of a comical account in the *Irish Cyclist*, with an accompanying amusing cartoon which depicts the chased cyclists scrambling over and under a barbed wire fence and taking refuge in a tree. The *Irish Cyclist* also published two cartoons titled “Gilligan & McGurk Go Cycle Camping”, which poked fun at the supposed perils facing the cycle camper in Ireland: “A Camping Out Holiday. A Howth Experience”, undated *Irish Packet* article in *Northants Evening Telegraph*, September 17 1904; *Irish Cyclist*, July 8, 1908, July 15 1908.

<sup>88</sup> “Six Weeks Under Canvas”, *Weekly Irish Times*, May 5 1905.

<sup>89</sup> de Abaitua, *Art of Camping*, 32-34.

<sup>90</sup> It is no coincidence that many Irish cycle campers were also keen sportsmen. Not the least of these was R. J. Mecredy, who was a champion tricyclist and bicyclist in Ireland and Britain in the late 1880s and 1890s. Amongst the perceived benefits of cycle camping was a broadening of one’s mental horizons; as claimed by James Cousins, cycle camping “broadens one’s views of nature and humanity”: *Irish Cyclist*, July 1 1908. Mecredy claimed that “a cycle camp is a new Utopia, where every man works for the common good, where social position is counted as naught, and a man is judged from the standpoint of natural uprightness and courtesy”: Mecredy, “Open-Air Life”, 582.

<sup>91</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, February 21 1906; *Sports Argus*, May 25 1907.

<sup>92</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, August 1 1906. The Howth campers passed their time by hill climbing, cycling, swimming, walking and playing water polo and cricket.

<sup>93</sup> *Northern Whig*, June 12 1908.

<sup>94</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, June 12 1908. Other sources that referred to campers' bronzed features include the *Northern Whig* of May 24 1907 in its description of the Bohemian Campers, when it stated that "Judging from the bronzed features of the regular habitues, camping must be a healthy form of sport", and the *Irish Cyclist* of June 17 1908 in its description of the audience at an ICCA public meeting at the Leinster Lecture Hall in Molesworth Street, Dublin: "Young men, with features bronzed by the touch of much sun and good air, walked about, animated monuments to the advantages of existence as carried out by members of the Irish Cycle Campers' Association".

<sup>95</sup> de Abaitua, *Art of Camping*, 33-34; Young, *Heading Out*; Wenham, "Popularisation of Camping", 66-67; Sirost, "Débuts du camping", 607-609.

<sup>96</sup> *Daily News*, March 23 1906; Mecredy, "Open-Air", 578-579; Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 31-33. Mecredy explained that "Microbes require quiet to live happily and bring up their families", a situation which was rendered impossible by having fresh air circulating throughout one's tent: Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 43.

<sup>97</sup> *Cricket and Football Field*, June 13 1908; Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 18, 24, 30, 65-69; *Daily Mail*, August 1913.

<sup>98</sup> Mecredy, "Open-Air", 580; *Health's Highway*, 21-23, 28, 33, 35-36.

<sup>99</sup> Sirost, "Débuts du camping", 609.

<sup>100</sup> *Irish Cyclist*, March 14 1906; Mecredy, "Open-Air", 578; *Daily Telegraph*, November 1908; Mecredy, *Health's Highway*, 31, 34.

<sup>101</sup> *1911 Census of Ireland*, household return for 85 Oldconnaught, Rathmichael, Dublin.

<sup>102</sup> For examples of children as cycle campers, unaccompanied by adults, see *Irish Tourist*, July 1898; *Weekly Irish Times*, August 1 1908, January 1 1909, September 24 1910.

<sup>103</sup> Friss, *Cycling City*; McGurn, *On Your Bike*; Herlihy, *Bicycle*; Norcliffe, *Ride to Modernity*; Holt, "Discovery of Rural France"; Ebert, *Radelnde Nationen*; Taylor, *Claim on the Countryside*, 151-190.

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