Andrew Bibby
BACK ROADS THROUGH MIDDLE ENGLAND £13.95
gritstone.coop

IF YOU ASKED your friends what route they’d recommend for an eight-day ride in the UK, pedalling the 430 miles from the Dorset coast to the Humber would probably not feature in their suggestions. That’s one of the fascinating aspects of Andrew Bibby’s journey to try to discover ‘middle England’.

Following the line of the great belt of ‘Cotswold’ limestone through ten different counties, Bibby’s challenge was not the distance travelled, but rather what he could learn along the way about the factors that shape the land.

Sometimes cycle travelogues can seem formulaic: the author went from here to there and this is what happened on the way. In contrast, this book is an exploration of landscape, nature, rural life, social history, identity, and change. The bicycle is merely the conduit that permits Bibby to slowly take in and enjoy the countryside and its characters.

Full of detail and well researched, it was, however, Bibby’s hedgehog observation that struck a chord with me. He sees roadkill strewn over the back roads but not a single squashed hedgehog, leading to his conclusion that what we are told is true: hedgehogs are indeed a species in rapid decline.

Duncan Dollimore