

Picture by:  
Johnny Madauchlan



# I want to ride my bicycle

Books and bikes aren't an obvious combination, but, for one intrepid band of performers, they proved the perfect pairing, as *Lynn Gilmour* explains

If the words "marathon storytelling cycle challenge" inspire, rather than terrify, you then you're in good company. For a group of creative and intrepid performers, the challenge in question involved them travelling around Scotland over a 50-day period, while celebrated actor and performer Tam Dean Burn endeavoured to read all 195 of Julia Donaldson's books to children, young people and families along the way.

The epic journey, part of the Glasgow 2014 Cultural Programme, saw Tam Dean Burn and the Booksonabike Band undertaking approximately 150 storytelling sessions for children and families, across 23 local authorities, performing to more than 7,000 people in libraries, schools, a prison, hospitals and outdoor spaces.

During the Commonwealth Games, Tam and friends visited the Kelvingrove Bandstand, The Wee Zone, Riverside Museum, The Tall Ship, Holmwood House, the Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre, The Children's Wood, and libraries and community centres city-wide. Tam also regularly read bedtime stories to children at Yorkhill hospital, and there were 'Busking for Bairns' pop-up performances by Tam and the Booksonabike Band at Tramway and An Clachan café in Glasgow, in association with Glasgow Piano City.

Although the challenge offered a unique opportunity for the performers, it was not always easy. As Tam Dean Burn explains: "When the call was made for projects that could be part of the Glasgow 2014 cultural programme, I knew that this reading and singing of Julia's stories and songs

could work well for children across Scotland, but it was when I discovered that she has had 195 books published that I found the key to the project.

"Every day produced fresh challenges, but it was all an enormously rewarding and rich experience, not least because of the glorious weather we had virtually the whole way. The sunshine really showed what a beautiful country Scotland is and we really felt blessed to be given such a golden opportunity to see it all."

And the most memorable moments for Tam? "The whole experience of Books on a Bike and being part of the Culture and Festival 2014 programme has created some once-in-a-lifetime experiences. I was asked to take part in the pre-opening ceremony events at Celtic Park, which involved cycling round the track in front of 40,000 people. That was a daunting experience."

All the events were free, with certificates and stickers given to children along the way. There will also be an outdoor resource pack inspired by the challenge made available in September; aimed at nursery and primary school teachers and community groups. This pack has been created in association with the Children's Wood Education Committee.

● For more information about Books on a Bike visit [www.booksonabike.com](http://www.booksonabike.com) For more information on the free downloadable education pack, visit the Children's Wood website [www.childrenswood.com](http://www.childrenswood.com) The pack will be launched on 11 September, as part of the RSPB Garden Festival.

*"I took part in the pre-opening ceremony event at Celtic Park, in front of 40,000 people"*