



Advocate: Fiola Foley
Age: 40
Province: Munster
Club: Killorglin Cycling Club
Discipline: Track, Road, Off Road

What age did you get involved? First some road cycling in 2002 after stepping back from rowing the first time, to put my fitness to good use in some races. Then mountain biking in 2008 as something to do with some friends in Kerry and for adventure racing.

Why did you start cycling? Initially, to put my rowing race fitness to use but later I took up mountain biking for fun and to explore Irish trails.

What has been your involvement in cycling, your story? Although I tried some road racing under the tutelage of my uncle Fintan Foley in 2002, it wasn't until 2008 when I took up mountain biking that I really started to ride bikes. The mountain biking led to a stint of adventure racing but when I moved to Switzerland a year later I gradually became more interested in just cycling. For many years I was an elite, international rower. I attended Boston University on a scholarship and found myself on track for Olympic qualification for the 2004 Olympics. When that didn't work out, I hung up my oars for good. I had the engine of a rower, the advantage of a decent power to weight ratio and the competitive mindset of an athlete who had her mind set on the Olympics for many years. When I discovered cycling I found there were so many ways to test myself - whether against the mountain passes, alpine terrain or other cyclists! I also loved the social aspect of riding bikes. My world in Switzerland revolved around time on the bike with my friends, we were in the Alps every weekend and I started to race on the road (I raced with Bigla BMC) and also some brutal Swiss marathon mountain bike races.

Do you have a quote that you live by or inspires you? Not really. But I am constantly inspired by the early pioneers of women's cycling like Tillie the Swede (track cyclist in America in the 1890's), Alfonsina Strada (Italian woman who rode the Giro in 1924), and our own inspirational Dervla Murphy. My modern day heroes are my friends Emma Pooley, Lee Craigie in Scotland and Lael Wilcox in the USA.

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What is your favourite thing about cycling? The diversity of the sport and the people you meet. I like to ride on the road for the convenience and the challenge of staying fit, mountain biking is like playtime for me, and bikepacking and gravel cycling is where I feel real adventure in the great outdoors.

What have been your cycling highlights?

Track—Coming 2nd in the Swiss National league
Winning a 24 hour race in a mixed team with Cait Elliot, beating all the other male-only teams.

MTB—Winning my first marathon XCO mtb race in Einsiedeln in Switzerland and coming 8th place among the elite women in the Eiger MTB Challenge and the National park Bikemarathon.

Gravel/Bikepacking—Winning Grinduro Scotland in 2018! A trip to the Faroe Islands in 2018 and 10 days cycling in the West Fjords of Iceland in 2017.



How do you feel cycling has benefitted you? Although rowing opened the door to my education and initial passion for racing sports, cycling gave me my friends and my career and so many adventures in the past few years since I stopped racing. From my friends all over the world I have met through bikepacking adventures, my family of friends in Switzerland and my roles as Head of Global Communications at the bike brand BMC Switzerland to my current role as Director of Media Relations at komoot - I wouldn't be where I am now or the person I am now had I not taken up cycling.

What would you say to other females who may be interested in cycling? It's sad to hear about so many women being put off cycling because they aren't comfortable on the bike or they don't know where to start. To begin with, any bike will do once it is in good working order, the right size, and set-up properly for you so you are comfortable. When it comes to setting out on your own - try planning a loop with komoot on your phone. Have a look on the CI website for some clubs near you - in Kerry we have some great clubs doing fun beginners rides every weekend!

How do you feel about becoming a Bike Like Me Advocate? I'm so excited to get stuck in and help other women take up cycling or advance their cycling. I want to share my experience and knowledge with as many Irish women as possible and hopefully create a community of female cyclists in Munster. Especially off-road! Let's have some fun adventures together.

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