

Dear Diary - JOGLE 2009

by Alan Smith

<Max Bygraves> I wanna tell u a story <Max Bygraves>

I have several minor issues to deal with work-wise so last night I decided to do them at one session on Wednesday thus giving today a work-free day allowing for a decent ride; & lord knows I feel the need for one.

So I decide to ride to Lichfield & back. This will give me approx 100km over varied terrain without *steep* hills on a route that I have done before, the vast majority of which is minor roads & lanes. I fettled the Longstaff last night with a Barley to carry the usual tools, tubes & snacks because the clothes I planned to wear have only one pocket. In any event I don't like having pockets stuffed with all & sundry.

So this morning I'm up & dressed. Porridge for brekky 🍌 & off I go. I don't feel too enthusiastic about this for some reason. That's not unusual, I often don't find a rhythm/feel comfortable for the first twenty minutes or so. I decide to persevere & await the arrival of the endorphins. I feel cold. I should have worn an additional mid layer & some socks under my sealskinz. The air temperature is much lower than I anticipated. It's nice & dry & sunny but only 2°C. 😞

I get to the top of the first hill at 6km & am overtaken by negative thoughts having realised I don't have 100km in my legs & lungs & I am chilled to the bone. And I'm bored senseless. I need some new routes & scenery.

Go2PlanB.

Alter course in the general direction of home but decide not to waste the time & effort invested thus far & turn this into a shorter ride with some hills. I need the practice to improve my technique. I decide to have a go at my local bete noir hill: the one that tells me if I am fit or fat depending on if I even get to the top without stopping for a rest or even resorting to the 24" gear.

Glory be: I get to the top without stopping or resting: much to the disappointment of the two vultures(kites) circling overhead waiting to pick at the dead cyclist's exposed heart & lungs. Flushed with success I decide to take an indirect hillyish route to the nearest cafe: a.k.a. Jogler's kitchen.

During the scoffing of beans on toast at Jogler's cafe I decide that that more needs to be made of this AWOL workday so after a 20 minute rest I take the trike out on a flatish 10km burn just for the practice. I feel the benefit of the recently fitted spds on the upstroke more so than on a two-wheeler & I also realise that steering is best done as a series of almost continuous left or right "twitches". I also feel the benefit of an additional mid layer & some socks beneath my sealskinz. I do like the feel of the single speed two-wheel drive but think a bigger sprocket is needed to make some of the steep hills hereabouts do-able.

So, what started as a bit naff got better & I relearned some old lessons. I find it difficult to believe that only 7 months ago I was doing an E2E without any of this negative malarky. I am certainly out of practice in many ways 😞. Hopefully forthcoming Audax rides will sharpen a blunt blade.

Weds. 29:04:09. Home to Crewe station.2355hrs. board Caledonian Sleeper to Inverness.

Thurs 30 :04: 09. Arrive Inverness 1000hrs.
Depart Inverness 1038hrs
Arrive Wick via Thurso 1500 hrs.
ride to Feswick.20km.

Fri. 01:05 :09. Leave Feswick at 0900. 6km to John O'Groat's IIRC arrive 0930. Eat 2nd breakfast, sign E2E diary & have the official photo done. At £20 one feels "done" but there are enough copies for family & The Donna Louise Trust charity. Arrive in Thurso for lunch & the place is **heaving**. Turns out the World Surfing Championships begin today. Surfing! on the north coast of Scotland! They're having a laugh surely! It appears that California, Newquay & Bondi Beach have been transported to this wet & windy place.

Uphill from Thurso into a wind strong enough to take varnish off a ships hull. I actually need to pedal a low gear *downhill*. One or two proper uphill around Melvich & in Bettyhill up to the Bettyhill Hotel. In some places I am doing 4kmh into a headwind. Douneray comes & goes. It looks very, very busy considering it is supposedly being decommissioned. New buildings within the complex contradict this intention. There are some super views of the Orkneys en route & I am amazed that some of the beaches are white sand as in the tropics; & the breakers are impressive. It is clear that the World Surfing Championships have come here for good reason. A pity they don't have stereotypical surfing weather. Can't get Sloop John B. out of my head now 😊
Arrive Bettyhill 1900hrs. 92km.

No mobile phone signal. Can't speak to Marj. 48hrs since leaving her & it's the longest separation for many, many years. Quite depressing.

Sat 02:05:09 Wake to a bright sunshine & blue skies. The view from the bay window in the dining room was stunning; sweeping bay with white sand. The full cooked breakfast rests heavily within as I leave Bettyhill downhill into another strong headwind. I was warned that a north to south route might have this feature & so it was every day to journey's end. Into the Strathnaver valley as recommended by PH of this parish. Absolutely stunning. Big skies. Big panoramas. Beautiful countryside. Easy riding apart from the headwind. I travel more than two hours at a leisurely pace without seeing a soul & this feeling of isolation is mildly exciting. On the west side of Loch Loyal there are one or two wild campers & a caravan site at the southern end near Altnaharra. These people must be self sufficient 'cause there are no shops from Bettyhill to here & there is nothing in Altnaharra. The Altnaharra Hotel is closed: in liquidation! Bugger. That's lunch Plan A cancelled. Sit in the garden, sheltering from the wind to eat a Snickers bar & drink a Lucozade. Now begin the long, long ride up from Altnaharra, finding a steady rhythm & tell myself what a fine idea it was to have the transmission serviced & a dinner plate size sprocket fitted. The summit comes into view with a short sharp final rise. There is a passing place before the last climb so I have a short leg stretch, a drink & a Go bar then attack this last uphill. As I crest the top the wind blows me to a standstill. Resume pedalling & very soon the Crask Inn comes into view. Staying here has always been the intention & even though it is only 1530 I decide to sacrifice more miles to stop here. I expect to pass this way only once & the miles will still be there in the morning.

This place is fantastic. A marvellous atmosphere, excellent food & the beer tastes really good as you sit next to the peat fired stove in the bar. It really is a different world from Weatherspoons!

52km today (144km)

Sunday 03:05:09 What a tremendous breakfast. Porridge, bacon, eggs, beans, black pudding, sausage, toast & marmalade with lashings of coffee. It was a challenge but I won. The view over breakfast was another stunner: moorland with mountain tops on the near & far horizon all with snow capped peaks. You run out of superlatives trying to describe this area. It looked cold & when I got outside it bloody well was. The ride away from the Crask was payback for all that uphill stuff yesterday. Almost 20km of downhill with hardly a pedal stroke being necessary. In places I actually slowed down to take in the scenery; it's still big-country stuff. It's so desolate that it becomes unsurprising that the front door at the Crask which leads directly into the bar is never locked apparently, day or night. It's the only roadside building for 20 miles on a road that is barely more than a tarmac track for half that distance. As I arrive in Lairg it begins to rain. A neat & tidy place with a striking feature that there appears to be no buildings higher than ground floor level. Onwards to Bonar Bridge which is closed. Nothing open in the way of pubs & shops & even the public WC is closed. This is how the world would be after The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have visited. Not a living soul to be seen. Over the girder bridge that always appears to me as a mini-Arnhem. A road sign appears providing an option for routes to Invergordon & Alness. The main route is 25 miles. The alternative is 12 miles. Like a lamb to the slaughter I naturally choose the shortest route. It has stopped raining & the sun is very warm. What a big weather change in a short time. The road quickly ramps up, turns a hairpin bend & ramps up some more. And some more. Hells Bells. There's a mountain goat on the side of the road thumbing a lift. As I enjoy the latest of several cardiac arrests a lay bay appears & I turn into it to shove heart & lungs back into chest cavity. A plaque on the wall identifies this as Struie Hill. I've been told of this & it's reputation goes before it. Quite justifiably. As I recover a couple of Yanks amble over for a chat to tell me I am certifiable for riding a bike up here "y'all". I cannot disagree. I now consider the contents of two 25 litre panniers that I have lugged around the Highlands. It has become clear that some of it won't be used so I decide to generate some jetsam asap. I carry on to the top & enjoy the view down onto Dornoch Firth & the road bridge that crosses it. There is now a considerable number of downhill miles that require no pedalling to Alness. The few miles on the A9 from Alness to the summit of the Black Isle are a bit of a slog into this persistent headwind & the traffic is too close & too fast for comfort: a quick downhill on the dual carriageway over the bridge into Inverness. Manage to get a bit lost with all them roundabouts & then follow the signs to the rail station. I can orientate myself from here. Into the Pizza Express for a blunge up. Two hours later I waddle out to the bike, full as a bed tick. Wonder if I'm losing any weight. Find the SYHA in Victoria Ave.
102km(246)

Monday 04:05:06 The very worst night's sleep ever. In fact there was virtually no sleep. Turns out there's 80 14-16 foreign students accommodated above, below & both sides of my dorm & various groups were up & about all night long. Those responsible for them no doubt had ear plugs. Another old lesson relearned: get some earplugs for use in the hostels. I asked for a cooked breakfast & was offered muesli & yoghurt. Blurgh. The Caledonian Delia proceeded to give me a lecture on calorific values & intake, expressing pride in her breakfast giving me 400 calories. I explained that riding a bike for 8 hrs. uphills & into a permanent headwind required approx 6000 cal in my case a glazed expression overtook her lovely countenance. So I get my Alnav. all wrong exiting the gateway to the Highlands & find myself on a loooooong slog up the A9 dual carriageway. There is nothing in my legs: they would be more use holding a coffee table up. This is not enjoyable. At approx 16km a sign says Tomatin Hotel: all day breakfasts. See, there is a God. So two hours later I start to fall asleep at the table having consumed half the breakfast menu. It's clear that no sleep &

little food has emptied the tank so at midday I book a room for the night, crash out onto the bed & wake at 1630 feeling in need of a shower & more food. After a shower & a visit to the nearby shop I sort out the clothes & stuff that I now reckon I won't need. This results in one complete pannier full of unwanted weight. That's the load slashed by 50% & I am left with

2xbase layers(1xwear 1xspare)

2 bib shorts (ditto)

2 prs sox (ditto)

1x gilet

1 pr.tracksters

1 thin fleece

1x l/s cycling shirt

!x Goretex fleece lined jacket

!x Montane windproof shell

1 pr. legwarmers

1 pr. armwarmers

1 pr. sealskin sox

1 buff

1 Barbour waterproof baseball cap

1 pr.sealskinz gloves

1 pr cycling mitts

1 pr silk gloves

1 pr. neopreen overshoes

1 pr. Shimano spd sandals

the usual stuff for personal hygiene in small size versions

digital camera

relevant pages from a road atlas

mobile phone

wallet

computer

Alpkit head torch(no lights on the bike)

all the unwanted stuff neatly fills a pannier & this will be carried one side of the rear rack until I reach a post office from where it will be sent home. Given that at any one time I will be wearing nearly half the remainder, at least, & some stuff goes in the barbag I will then have two half empty panniers(in the event I send stuff home in a plastic bag inside a sturdy box, all kindly donated by the lady in the post office)

Evening meals start at 1800 so i am in the bar waiting for the starters gun at that time.

An interesting cultural mix of workers, shirkers, farmers, suits, a skinhead & a Hells Angel(I've never before seen the latter two socialising solo before) begin to take the piss out of the loopy Sassenach(sp) riding to the other side of a foreign country. I have an interesting "discussion" with the S/head & H. Ang. about the benefits of being a member of a conquered nation before others involve themselves to pour oil on troubled waters. I return to the bar after I've eaten to find that The Act of Union 1707 has reached this particular drinking hole & have a rather pleasant evening exchanging complimentary insults, assisted by various types of lubrication including Guinness & something called whiskey, 😊

A rather disappointing day in terms of progress.

28km(274)

Tues. 05:05:09 Clear skies but very windy (southwesterly again) Picked up NCR 1 out of Tomatin which was predominately uphill to a greater or lesser degree & Slochd

Summit appeared rather suddenly. It just didn't seem to take any effort or any time to get here. The loooooong downhill to Carrbridge was of the Geronimo variety & I entered the town grinning like a loon, spotted a cafe with a CTC window sticker & forced myself to stop for cake & coffee. Had a look at the ancient extremely arched bridge then to the post office to send the jetsam home. 3.8 kg it weighed. Set off again with the bike feeling featherlight following NCR 1 signs to Aviemore with the first glimpse of the Cairngorms indicating that the place where Ronnie was killed in September 1968 was approaching. I cannot linger here. Find a quiet place, allow memories to the surface, say a prayer, have a little cry & start pedalling again. Now following NCR 7 signs to Kingussie & Newtonmore. This is clearly the old A9 which is now a shared cycling, walking, horsey, very wide path with nature slowly reclaiming it. A red deer is running along side me approx 10 metres away in the trees. It appears to be spooked & panicky: it suddenly hangs a very sharp right which brings it across the front of me so close that I am almost wearing the antlers on the barbag. Frightening & exciting at the same time to have wild life so up close. I wonder if the deer felt the same way. The route becomes a normal road across flat moorland & it starts rain in biblical proportions 10km from Dalwhinnie. That's bloody Murphy's Law that is: my waterproof coat is in transit to home. The Montane windproof does a surprisingly good job of keeping the rain out for half an hour but eventually is defeated & my drowning rat impression is perfected. Dalwhinnie. What can you say about this place. In the middle of nowhere-ish. A railway halt. Not a station. A few houses. A petrol station & a hotel which seems overlarge for the location. The Dalwhinnie roadside placename has a sign below it saying "Twinned with Las Vegas" 🤪 Never have I seen two places at such extreme & opposite ends of the development spectrum. The only-game-in-town hotel is warm friendly, comfortable & full of Aussies: including the staff. They talk/shout all evening about something called crik-it. I thought it was a real pain in the neck. It's a stick/ball game which they are convinced that they are competent at..No shower tonight. A long hot soak in a bath. Bliss
78km(352)

Weds 06:05:09 Woke to a bright sunny day with not a cloud in a very blue sky. Stepped outside into a bitterly cold headwind. Same shit, different day. Stopped at the petrol station for food & drink knowing the next opportunity could be some distance/time away. The cycle path at the start of Drumochter Pass is only a few minutes ride away. A sobering sign states that there are no opportunities for food & shelter for 30km & the weather can close in suddenly. The gradient is hardly noticeable as it runs directly adjacent to the northbound carriageway of the A9 but the opposing draft from HGVs affects steering & progress. The view up the Pass is impressive & dark angry rainclouds are very visible in the distance. The summit sign is reached without much effort & much sooner than expected. The descent down Glen Garry is terrific. It's like a roller coaster thru the trees & heather. I am surprised that I notice the different colours: they must be spectacular to someone who is not colour blind as I am. Just before Calvine another red deer: or is it the same one as before stalking me: runs alongside in the trees before doing the compulsory right-hander across the path but this time a comfortable distance ahead..Arriving in Blair Atholl I am still buzzing from the morning's terrific ride. Perhaps bike riding in Scotland should be available on the NHS to combat drug addiction. This is proving to be a fantastic experience with an almost permanent adrenalin rush for one reason or another. Blair Atholl has that des.res atmosphere about it with an attitude familiar elsewhere in the country where they seemingly want the tourist £ but don't want to be arsed serving you or talking to you. Head/rectum interface .From here to Pitlochry on the signed cycleway was easy riding in lovely scenery. I experience the first SMIDSY of the journey as I enter Pitlochry.It's a Merc

driven by someone even older than me. He disagrees that he deserves today's Jerkinna Merc award. This place is rammed full of folk of many different nationalities making for queues for food everywhere. I don't do queues so nip into the excellent bike shop at the bottom of the High Street where I scoff snack bars & coffee & cake while enjoying chat & banter with the extremely personable staff. I manage to miss a turn somewhere on leaving town & end up on the A9. I get off at the first opportunity: leg over the Armco, across a field with bike on shoulder cyclo cross style, over a gate & onto a narrow lane. Head off in what I believe to be a southerly direction & very soon come across a sign for Dunkeld. Result. It starts to rain. Again. When I get to Dunkeld I am absolutely soaked thru' but have managed to stay warm by dropping a gear or two & spinning very quickly thus generating body heat. It's tea time & I don't fancy fish & chips from the only food place in town that appears to be open apart from one I have used before & I know to be scummy. Perth is only approx 20km away so I eat a Snickers bar, drink some Lucozade & set off feeling not at all tired after a day in the saddle. I was told that the training I did not do would not be a problem because after a few days I would cycle into fitness. Perhaps this is now occurring. As I pass thru' Birman there is a roadside sign outside a pub showing a super evening meal menu. Irresistible. As I sit at the bar drinking Guinness while I wait for the meal that I have ordered I know that this is the end of the road for today. Especially as they do B&B. Perth will still be there tomorrow. It can wait. This is not a race. Sometimes it's wise to slow down & smell the roses: & the food.
72km(352)

Thurs. 07:05:09 When I wake up it's a bright sunny day. When I leave after the compulsory full cooked breakfast it's raining & that headwind is following me, IYSWIM. Plod along thru' pleasant roads to Banksfoot from where the wind increased as did the rain. To stop pedalling meant to come to a halt. This is the strongest/worst headwind that I have ever ridden in & it's hard work: not particularly enjoyable. The Forth Road Bridge comes into view a little distance away & navigating easily thru' Inverkeithing due to a well signed route I arrive on the cycle path at the north end of the bridge. After a few days of p & q on minor roads with very little traffic, the volume & noise of all this traffic is almost a culture shock. There is no wind in the road cutting leading to the bridge but when onto the exposed bridge itself it's gale force. I have to lean heavily to the right to stay upright & steering in a straight line is almost impossible. I am being gusted across the entire width of the cycle/foot path. When I get to the first support I cannot resist looking up which induces a dizzy feeling. This is a seriously impressive piece of engineering. This is much more intimate than crossing it in the car. I notice little plaques fixed to the handrail at intervals. These say "SAMARITANS Ring *****". Looking over the edge is frightening. I cannot imagine what state you would have to be in to climb over this rail into oblivion. Whatever state that may be I doubt that your brain would even see those Samaritan signs. When I get to approx. the middle the wind is so strong I cannot remain on the bike & walking/pushing is a battle which drains energy. At one point I lay on the ground with the bike beside me just for a rest behind one of the workman's huts providing a little relief from the battering. I notice that EVERYTHING is bolted or strapped down to fixings in the deck or structure! As I stand up I get blown to the handrail & discover that adrenalin is brown. Without a doubt this experience is the highlight of the day. At the south end of the bridge I follow NCR1 signs for Edinburgh. I didn't realise that it would be 16km to the City. In this wind that is likely to be the best part of a 90 minute journey. The path is easy riding & well signed. I am struck by the obvious wealthy area being in close proximity to the obviously disadvantaged tenement homes & wonder at the massive difference between the have's & have-not's. I am not familiar with the geography of the City so the signs for various districts mean nothing to

me. I don't see one that simply says "City centre" so have a guess at an exit which leads onto a main road & lo, I recognise some of the buildings down the road. Make my way to St. James Square, check into a hotel, shower, change & find a place to eat.
101km(525)

So, somewhere near the Forth Road Bridge is one third of the way to Lands End. Only now do I realise how far apart are John O' Groat's & Edinburgh. I have a new perception on how big Scotland is.

Friday 08:05:09 Good grief! It's taken a week to do a third of the journey. Once again a bright start to the day turns to rain as I step out of the door after a full breakfast.

Today's journey starts with a little walk thru' York Place onto Princess St & then I mount the bike on North Bridge Street. Following the A7 out of town I contemplate the unnecessary mess they are making of a marvellous place with the construction of a tram system that seems to be wanted by no-one. I stop at a garage by the ring road to stock up on snacks & drinks then begin a tedious ride up thru' Dalkeith where it starts to rain heavily. After Gorebridge the open spaces re-appear making a steady ride as I absorb the scenery to Galashiels where the rain stops as I reach town. From here to Selkirk was a very enjoyable 10km on flat roads beside the river. I am enjoying this so much that I miss a turn signed for the town centre. Never mind, I'll take the next left. I did. Hellsbells: the town is on top of a mountain. There are traces of pain & suffering as I struggle up hill thru' the town & beyond where a garage appears shortly before the summit. A Snickers/Luozade break prepares me well enough for the last little uphill from where the road is a mixture of steady uphills followed by some long downhill of the Geronimo type. I am suddenly aware that I have a tailwind. How novel. How do I know this? My computer tells me I'm doing 23kmh uphill & when I stop pedalling the speed drops to only 21kmh. Uphill. Lands End won't be long at this rate but my new found fitness lasts only as far as Hawick. A nice looking Italian restaurant by the river seduces me to enter. (I am such an easy lay where food is concerned). As I eat a delicious lasagne I watch a heron standing on an island in the river. He is fishing for his tea & he clearly won't be hungry tonight. This place also does B&B so this is home for tonight. When I undress for a shower I see that I have a large blood-filled blister in a delicate location. If the doctor asked I could cough three times instead of the usual twice. This is strange. I did not feel this new appendage as I cycled. As I shower I become aware that there is almost as much blood draining from the shower tray as there is water. F***F ME! Is Norman Bates in here with me? It takes a lot of tissues & all the towels to soak up the bloody mess caused by the burst blister & I have to improvise a dressing that resembles a bow. This looks & feels really pesty. How odd though that there is no pain. Apart from this Dr. Kildare episode today has been really enjoyable. Even the hills seem o.k. on reflection.

81km(606)

Sat. 09:05:09 Today is Marj's birthday. I am not happy at not being home today. It's the first time in 40 years that we have not been together on this day. To ease my guilt I go into town to arrange an Interflora delivery but the florist does not do Interflora. I head off to Bonchester Bridge feeling a little off form. The bollock bandage which is uncomfortable on the saddle does nothing to improve my mental or physical morale. The road from B. Bridge seems to go up & up forever & ever plus it begins to rain in biblical proportions again & very soon I am soaked to the skin. The wind is very against me yet again. I begin to wonder if Noah will be waiting at the top with his Ark. Arriving at the obvious summit I have a Snickers/Luozade break. The descent is quite exciting with the wind affecting steering & as I turn a hairpin the wind resistance slows me from 58kmh to 16kmh within 100 metres. I have never experienced wind velocity

such as this. As I approach Saughtree an old fashioned red phone booth appears roadside & I take shelter therein. It's years since I did this & I note that they still smell of urine. When the rain abates to merely heavy I press on to Kielder. The road alongside the river is very picturesque & I begin to enjoy the ride despite the rain & wind. The need to keep pedalling keeps me warm at least. The "Welcome to England" sign appears roadside which is good for morale: I feel that progress is being made. A lunch stop at the cafe in Keilder Castle is made not least because I recollect from a previous visit they have a real open fire. I sit right next to it & steam profusely as I partially dry out with my coat, jersey, legwarmers, gloves & overshoes scattered around the fire on chairs etc..As I eat a waitress visits my table several times to mop up the drip-dripping rain water on the floor. The road from Kielder to Falstone is a dreary roller coaster & the only miserable part of the journey so far. As the pump tower at the southern end of Kielder Water comes into view the rain ceases & as I turn to Bellingham the wind strength diminishes. The few miles to Bellingham along the valley are really enjoyable & I stop at the Camping & Caravan Club site to get a coffee & a packet of Jammy Dodger biscuits from the shop. I know of a pub in Wark that does good food, drink & accommodation so I arrive there with the intervening 11km seemingly a doddle. No room at the inn. I press on slowly to Hexham via Acomb where I find a cycle path to Hexham which avoids the A69. I try several places for B&B without success during the course of which I meet the one & only miserable Geordie I have known in 40-odd years of working & playing intermittently in this part of the world. Next is an Italian restaurant where I pig out on pasta. I find a room at the Station Hotel. During the shower-session close inspection of the goolies reveals that no bleeding has occurred but there is likely to be a scar. I've heard it said that chicks dig scars. All things considered I conclude that their loss means I'll never know. Adjourn to the bar to drink Newcastle Brown & watch MoTD. They have no NookeyB. Unbelievable. Go to Plan B= Guinness. During conversation the purpose of my journey becomes known. There is a whip round in the bar; the landlady won't allow me to pay my bar bill so I put the same amount into the charity kitty with the Geordie donation. Marvellous people. Wonderful part of the country. I love it up here (pet).

91km(697)

Sunday 10:05:09 I am woken by the phone ringing. Good grief it's 0845 & breakfast finishes at 0900. As I eat breakfast I become aware that I am slightly hungover. It's ten o'clock before I leave the hotel with lead-legs. I think today will be short on progress. I watch a local youth league football match for a short while. The team in black & white stripes are very good & seemingly outplay the other team effortlessly. Wonder if they are connected to Newcastle United. A typically straight Roman road shows a steep hill in the distance & when I eventually get to the summit I am in Whittonstall. The weather is a complete contrast now: bright, warm sun, blue skies with very little cloud. I strip down to shorts, base layer & sandals. This is more like it. It occurs to me that I haven't shaved since leaving JoG & with this appearance & a Brooks saddle all I now need is a Carradice saddlebag to achieve a certain stereotypical style. Next is a very steep climb out of Ebchester. There is a disadvantage to building straight roads: they don't go round hills they simply go straight up them. I reckon if Caesar had got about on a Dawes Galaxy they would have had a different road building policy. I get to Lanchester & feel really crap. Too much Guinness, too many steep hills & the hot weather are not conducive to this cycling game. I lay on a roadside bench & fall asleep. When I wake an hour later I feel like shit plus I am slightly cooked on one side. Sunburn. As I approach Durham there is a decent looking pub on the junction so I call a halt to a naff day & stop here.

46km(743) just a few km short of halfway methinks

Monday 11:05:09 It's a bright sunny morning. Have the obligatory full English plate o' grease & as the digestion process begins virtually freewheel down into the town. A wander across the river & a gawp at the Cathedral is followed by a slow easy grind uphill out of town. The temperature has increased & I am once more down to s/sleeve base layer, shorts & sandals. This is what you hope for weatherwise. Even the headwind is hardly noticeable. When I arrive at Sunderland Bridge I realise that my AI.nav has missed a turning left somewhere. No matter, I simply turn next left which takes me into some very pleasant lanes heading in a generally southern direction: that's good enough. A period of excellent riding brings to me Yarm & onto North Allerton in a seeming blur of big ring & small sprocket averaging 32kmh which for me is a long way from shabby, particularly with the weight of my luggage, eleven cooked breakfasts, more than one pint of Guinness & who knows how many Snickers bars & Lucozades. This is terrific countryside with views in all directions, the hills on the far horizon & the knowledge that I will not be riding up them. Used an A road from Northallerton to Thirsk arriving there famished at 1630 so into a pizza place in the main square for pizza 'n chips & same again please. The woman behind the counter asked where I put all this food. First pizza'nchips in one leg: second pizza'nchips in 'tother leg. Simples. A road sign says "York 22 miles". It's only 1730 hrs, the excellent weather is holding up & I feel good. I decide to wait 'till 1800 to allow the going-home traffic to dissipate & risk a blast down the A19. 72 minutes later I am crossing the York ring road at the A1237/A19 intersection which is seriously quick for me. This is where I have an extremely close SMIDSY with a driver who I am certain to this day never even saw me despite the fact that we were close enough for me thump the rear offside window as he came into my nearside quarter from a road on my left. It would have been ironic to have travelled all this way to then have an accident in a cycling city such as York. On the main road in Rawcliffe is a likely looking B&B so this will be home for tonight. Coincidentally the landlady used to hold office on the local council as a cycling officer. So I have a shower, get changed & take a short walk to the nearest pub where apart from a Guinness I discover that although both legs are still full there is room in the tummy for a steak & chips. Today has been a great day & I feel that warm glow of satisfaction. Plus I am now very, very brown after two days in the sun. The sun has also bleached my beard to grey which is a nice match to much of my hair now.
120km(863)

Tuesday 12:05:09 It's another bright sunny morning. I like this B&B sufficiently to reserve & pay for a double room for the CTC York Rally weekend. Riding on familiar roads clear of rush hour traffic is enjoyable as I go into town, past the railstation, onto the Knavesmire & then the cycle route to Selby. This is easy riding with the added interest of the Milky Way. I must have missed a sign in Selby 'cause I ended up on a newish-looking dual carriageway then onto A1041 which seemed a bit of a high speed rat-run. I decide to take to the lanes heading for Rawcliffe. It's very flat hereabouts & I'm pleased that the wind is not againststerly for a change. I stop in Rawcliffe for a prawn salad pasta from a Spar-type shop & plod on to pass under the M18 heading for Thorne. I wonder if this straight road was built by the Romans. The road to Bawtree was also easy to the point of encroaching boredom. I now need to make a decision regarding the route from here to home. I even contemplate the possibility of getting home today even if it is late tonight or the small hours of tomorrow morning. I have been advised by someone whose opinions I hold in high regard to go as far south as Lincoln & then hang a right for a flattish last leg to home. Looking at the map I think this is too far East & decide to go for Worksop & Chesterfield: largely because I know the roads from Chesterfield without the need for a map & although I know a number of

hills will be involved my logic is "better the devil you know than the devil you don't" On reflection I suspect I made the wrong decision. I begin to feel tired at Clowne & a couple of steepish climbs around Shuttlewood further sap my energy & I begin to believe that getting home at all in this effort is over ambitious. It's getting dusk as I arrive in Chesterfield & I have decided not to trawl around for accommodation. I shall go directly to the Holiday Inn & if they have no rooms available I will rest up for a couple of hours & then head home on a crawl-stop-crawl basis at least until the Bakewell area where if necessary I can get some zeds in a couple of bothy-type buildings I know of. The H.I. has one room left. It's on the ground floor & "is a Disabled-equipped layout," apologises the receptionist. It strikes me as supremely appropriate considering the aches in my legs & back. I feel relieved that I shall be sleeping in my own bed tomorrow.
124km(987)

Wednesday 13:05:09 I wake with heavy legs & my shoulders ache. That's a pity in consideration of the hills to be climbed today but it's all part of the game. Let's not forget that there are downhills too. Saddle soreness has been conspicuous by it's absence which I am pleasantly surprised about. Even the DIY vasectomy in Hawick was only uncomfortable with a little soreness but without pain. This place only does those silly "continental" breakfasts so after museli, croissants ,coffee & fruit & a walk thru' the subway to cross the ring road it's off in the sunshine to the first climb of the day directly out of town. Nearly 10km of continuous climbing which at least allows a steady rhythm to be established. Near the top are signs indicating that the two uphill lanes are closed & the remaining third lane, normally the downhill only carriageway, will be used by traffic in both directions & controlled by lights. The motorists suddenly & clearly develop an aggressive style to get to the expected queue in front of the car in front & certainly in front of this cyclist at all costs. I find myself with the inside lane all to myself as I slowly undertake all those who rushed past, now sitting in a very long queue in the overtaking lane waiting for the traffic lights to change red-green ad. infinitum. At the point where uphill traffic crosses onto the "wrong" carriageway the roadworks within the slow lane are segregated from the traffic by Harris type fencing which allows me to continue in the slow lane aided by the workers to give safe passage without being in the traffic flow. I appreciate that & tell them so. One guy asks where I've come from & I can't resist saying "John O'Groat's" They are amazed & as I exit the roadworks they form a short line each side & applaud. Possibly the most amusing incident in the whole journey. Soon after the road works is a large pull-in layby with a mobile food hut. Too much temptation for me. Three bacon & egg baps plus two coffees provide a second breakfast & hit the sweet spot. As I continue the last bit of uphill 20 minutes later I am being overtaken by some of the cars who zoomed up the hill in their haste to join a queue as quickly as possible. Once over the top there begins a loooooong downhill to Baslow. This is Geronimo cycling. I max out at 76kmh on a straight stretch & even round the bends my speed does not drop below 49kmh. Not many vehicles overtake during this exciting descent. From Baslow a little gentle uphill & a short quick downhill brings me into Bakewell where I stop in the pedestrian area for coffee(1) & Eccles cakes: unfortunately they come in packets of three but I make the sacrifice necessary to ensure that only the wrapper needs to be binned as I leave. During this interlude two ladies ask the usual questions about where from/where to/what for & each give £10 to the fund. Total strangers giving money to a total stranger. It's enough to restore one's faith in human nature & as I pedal slowly up the hill out of town I reflect on those experiences which have turned me into a cynic. I conclude that I need to re-adjust my mindset. Next stop is The Smithy cafe in Monyash for a capucino & beans on toast. Then another uphill as I leave heading for Parsley Hay at the north end of the High

Peak Trail. This really does feel like home ground & spirits rise & excitement grows knowing that I will be home this afternoon without a doubt. I haven't seen my wife for nearly two weeks & I have those tummy-butterflies you used to get shortly before meeting at the agreed time & place when you were courting. I stop at the shop at Parsley Hay to fill my bidon & am introduced to the largest Eccles cakes in the world. I'm not sure if they are 700's or 29" but they certainly have a short shelf life! I can only manage one before wobbling off to the lovely downhill all the way to Hartington. As I pass thru' this busy little place I do something I have never done before in all my life. I pass the Berrisford cafe without going in during opening hours! I must be ill? A quick spin to Hulme End & onto the Manifold Trail which takes me thru' Ecton Tunnel after which I ignore the cafe at Wetton Mill, pass by Thor's cave & continue to trail end at Waterhouses. The shop is closed but at least the WC is open. That's relief. Another steady plod up to Cauldon & then a not so easy plod to the top of Cauldon Lowe. At the top I rest & enjoy the views. To my right is Leek. Straight ahead lies The Potteries & to my left are views to Cannock Chase. From here it is almost continuous downhill to Whiston & Froghall, the latter reached via an almost frighteningly steep downhill with an almost hairpin turn. You need nerve & a bit of skill to completely avoid the use of brakes all the way down. As usual there is an uphill after the downhill but at least it is short even though it is steep. While I have been away the road has been resurfaced which makes the ascent seem easier on a silk smooth surface. There is a bench at the top & as I sit here resting my Son-i-Law drives past tooting his horn & his mates gesticulating as they head for home. I hope he puts the kettle on. From here it's easy pedalling thru' Cheadle & then to home.

As I walk thru the front door the phone in the hall starts to ring & I instinctively pick up the receiver. It's Steve who I have known for 30 years. He is surprised I answer 'cause he is not aware that an overnight stop at home is part of the route plan. He says he has bad news so he intended to tell Marj so that she could pass it on 'cause he did not wish to tell me himself even though he has my mobile number. Well you've failed Steve so cough up. John has died. Sunday just gone. Pardon. He repeats it & I put the phone down. John & I have worked together intermittently for 38 years. Marj takes the phone & I find myself a dark corner. This can't be real. The funeral is 5 days away & there is no chance that I shall restart this journey until afterwards.

72km(1059)

Tues. 19:05:09 During the last few days I have refined my luggage packing even further so that the rear panniers have been dispensed with & replaced by a Carradice barley saddlebag. This carries my toiletries, spare/clean cycling kit & off-bike clothes. The bar bag carries camera, wallet, buff, hat, gloves, gilet, arm warmers, leg warmers & snacks. Found it very difficult to leave the house this morning to begin Phase II. I was unsure about the wisdom of having an overnight stop at home when planning (there was actually very little *firm* planning) this ride & some people suggested that I avoid it or shared my doubts. In the event they were correct: I could very easily have not continued & the necessary extended stay made it more difficult to leave the comfort of my own bed behind. The weather didn't help. Rain & an againststerly wind again. Progress seemed very slow & I attributed this to the fact that all these roads/lanes are all well known to me & boring. It's not at all interesting to know every bend, hill & feature on the road ahead for the next two hours. Went through Lichfield & onto Tamworth via Withington Barracks. This road was so busy & uncomfortably narrow I actually rode on the pavement for 2 or 3 miles which is something I have never done due to traffic issues. Somewhere along this stretch I lost my silk gloves from off the top of my barbag. I am seriously peeved about this as they were extremely comfortable, lightweight & warm even when wet. I shall have to replace them at the earliest

opportunity.

As I skirt round Tamworth the heavens open & I am soon wet through (well, it takes about half an hour with wearing my Montane featherlite windproof, which isn't too shabby for a windproof. It is exceedingly good even when wet at proofing the wind which allows me to remain warm even when wet.) I stop at a mobile food caravan in a lay by which serves an excellent egg bap. So good in fact that I taste test his bacon baps too. The food in conjunction with new roads & scenery lift my mood a little & I make a mental note of the exact location of the Camping & Caravan Club's Kingsbury site as I pass it. I also note the location of Aston Villa's Bodymoor training ground as I pass that but doubt that I will have need of their facilities any time soon. As I head for Meriden I note that the standard of driving hereabouts is bloody atrocious. Too fast, too close & lots of aggressive gesticulating. This on quiet lanes: these nutters must get to be apoplectic on busier roads with greater volumes of traffic obstructing their life or death journeys. This is most definitely the most unpleasant day of the journey traffic-wise of the whole trip so far (& subsequently remained so). Arrived in Meriden late afternoon in bright sunshine with a little warmth & together with the forever againststerly wind began to dry out. Lingered on the village green next to the Cyclists War Memorial & decided that's enough for today.

85km(1144)

Wednesday 20:0509 Wake to a pleasant morning: sunshine, blue sky & after the usual full English plate of grease I discover a noticeable lack of wind. The weather that is, not me. It's rather novel not having the wind on your face which by now has a definite growth which goes well with the saddlebag to promote a stereo typical image of a touring cyclist of veteran years. All I need now is for it to be warm enough to remove the socks so that my feet & sandals will have the J.C. style. Navigating on the many little lanes to Bidford on Avon was very pleasant with the only notable occurrence being a lane blocked by a Range Rover & a Audi parked alongside each other with the drivers remained seating within whilst conducting an animated conversation. Since they were both high gloss black vehicles I wondered if I had stumbled across a remote Mafia staff meeting or a CIA dead letter location! (I have had indirect dealings with the latter some years ago & discovered that the movie portrayal of these types is very often accurate) Turns out that the Audi driver is a famous retired Aston Villa player, a Scottish international striker of repute & now does the celebrity commentating thing on Sky Sports. Name? Try this quiz. Christian name clue = useful DIY guy: surname = off-white colour. Very pleasant chap who apologises for blocking the road with a SMIDSY comment & reverses to provide enough room for me to pass between them. My interest in Roman history encouraged me to travel from Bidford to Broadway via Ryknild Street which provided easy riding despite the development of a mild S.W. wind. I like Broadway & was tempted to stop here for a cream tea. It's too soon to stop for the day so I reckon a strike for Stroud is do-able & text Jaded for route advice from here to there. The weather is now warm enough to dispense with socks so I really do look like a CTC member: Brooks saddle: Carradice saddlebag :beard & sandals. As I climb that ridiculous hill: the one that needs an escalator installed: out of Broadway I wonder about the theory that says local route knowledge is a good thing. I have to stop at the top to shovel heart & lungs back into chest cavity before continuing on what turns out to be an excellent route via nearly in Cirencester, Compton Abdale, Chedworth, North Cerney, Daglingworth, Sapperton & Frampton Mansell. Somewhere along this route I hear the unmistakable sound of a Rolls Royce Merlin aero-engine, look up & sure enough see a Spitfire in flight. Marvellous stuff.

The run down into Stroud is terrific. Even the slight rise on the road at the bottom feels like downhill. I head into town to get my bearings & when I know I am close to

tomorrow's exit route start looking for accommodation. The nearest tallest building attracting attention is a hotel. That'll do. I have to go into the annexed pub to see the landlady. What a lorra lorra ladies in this bar. They are all very pleasant & interested in my travels: they are also DC.

I have made arrangements via text to meet Jaded tomorrow lunchtime at Stroud rail station for a ride with company so look forward to a lie & a late breakfast
123km(1144)

Thursday 21:05:09 Another lightweight cereal, toast & coffee breakfast. As I pack it becomes evident that somewhere on the road yesterday my overshoes went AWOL. At this rate of losing kit I may arrive at L.E. nekkid. A walk into town to find a proper breakfast & then a ride out to Cytek for new overshoes. It's a pleasant morning & I arrive early at the station so spend an hour people-watching for entertainment until Jaded arrives armed with cameras. A quick & short spin to Nailsworth (it rains briefly while we are on the road) To collect maps & off we go to "a mystery destination" I grind slowly up the hill at Avenir while Jaded dances on the pedals & he's away. We reconvene at the top & as we travel I get a lot of interesting info. from Jaded about the area we are passing thru: back of Highgrove, near to Westonbirt & Gatcombe. The weather has continued to improve. We arrive at the mystery destination. It's a page from an Enid Blyton book come to life. Almost surreal & even more so inside. The w.c. is an incredible thing to behold; almost a shame to use it. An elaborately decorated thunderbox. The cream teas are very good too & Jaded has his video cam. running during the ritual slaying of the sustenance. After scoffing we part company here :Jaded returns home & I have an easy ride to Marshfield where a likely looking pub with B&B and a decent menu brings an early halt to the day. It's been a really good day. Very casual with a late start & early finish together with good company & an interesting route & novel cake stop.
51km(1318)

Friday 22:05:09 I wake up feeling very tired: heavy legs, back ache, neck ache, sore palms. Thankfully no saddle issues due to my Brooks-shaped backside. Another cooked breakfast & into the lanes this side of Bath which I wish to avoid. Another Al.nav malfunction loses a lot of height down into St. Catherine's Mill where I do not want to be, not least because a steep downhill is usually followed by an equally steep uphill. The world is in it's proper orbit & sure enough a tedious climb brings me out onto the A46. I certainly do not want to be on this road so without a proper look at the map I unilaterally take a straight-on at the staggered cross roads I am on, onto a lane which rapidly becomes narrower & less of a road until it is actually a rutted track with a little stream running down the centre .It's very much like a drovers track such as you find in the Peak's & Pennines: a mountain bike is what's really need here. I dismount because it's not possible to ride safely on this steep rutted downhill track & I don't need the inconvenience of a tumble on this journey in particular. I arrive at (IIRC) Lower Hamswell. It's taken two hours to travel 6km.Not good. From here to Upton Cheyney, Britton & Keynsham is easy riding & easy navigating thanks to Jaded's route marked map. At one elevated location during this last stretch I get an impressive panoramic view of Bristol below & in the middle distance. Being close to Bristol gives me a feeling of progress for no particular reason but, there it is. Next is Chew Stoke & Chew Magna. Again for reasons that I cannot explain these places have conjured up a vision in my mind's eye of attractive architecture in chocolate box environs: based entirely on their names. The reality does not disappoint & I really enjoy riding the Chew Valley past the lake. The weather is much improved & it is now bright blue skies, sunny & hot: not a cloud in the sky. And not a drop of suncream aboard the jogler express.This feeling of

wondrous contentment is abruptly soured by the appearance of a steep(cubed) hill from West Harptree to the top of the Mendips. As I plod up here I stop a couple of times to administer TLC to heart, lungs & legs. The view back across the valley below is terrific. I like these elevated views but not the effort required to get there. Perhaps I should swap the Longstaff for a Harley or a Goldwing. The riding across the tops on the B3134 & B3371 is easy enough despite the resurgence of a slight againststerly wind. As I swing onto the B3135 heading for Cheddar Gorge the wind obligingly maintains its own course thus becoming benign to me. The road begins to drop & I look forward to the wondrous spectacle that is Cheddar Gorge. I was last here 50 odd years ago as a child but the memory remains vivid due to the impression this place makes. I have set the digital camera to auto & bracketing so as I ride down with my finger on the shutter release almost continuously I get dozens of shots from handlebar level. I also stop in a layby where the cliffs are at their highest & get some excellent shots illustrating the grandeur, using the bike in shot for the purposes of scale. Good job I have a spare memory card for the rest of the journey. I arrive at the bottom & nip into the Tourist Information Office to use their system for finding local accommodation. The lady is concerned that the nearest available place to suit my needs(it must have a bath) is two miles away. No problem to me. She seems to think that's a long way to ride a bike. I resist the urge to suggest otherwise. The B&B is in a place called Draycott. What a coincidence. There's a place of the same name not a ten minute ride from home. After a loooong hot soak in the bath I take a walk to a local pub recommended by the landlord. The food is excellent. This walk & evening meal give a satisfied feeling to the end of the day. However during the walk back from the pub a sharp stabbing pain materialises in my right knee. Should have used the bike; this walking game is not good for you dontyaknow.

61km(1379)

Saturday 23:05:09Wake to a brilliant morning. Sun shining, blue sky, no cloud. After the obligatory full English I'm full too & a quick nip back to Cheddar to the Outdoor Shop that was closed last evening when I passed thru'. They have some silk gloves in stock so I am able to replace those lost the other day.It's apparent from the rising temperature that I shall not need them now. I reckon Murphy's Law to be almost as reliable as sunrise & sunset. Within a few minutes I am down to sandals(no sox),bib shorts & s/s wicking base layer. As I progress across the Somerset levels: they really are level: I think this is cycling Nirvana, the only negative being this pain in the right knee which is apparent only on the down stroke from the 12 o'clock position. I stop at Wedmore for Ibuprofen & warp-factor sunscreen. The temperature continues to rise & I am aware of being slowly cooked. This is without doubt the warmest day of the year. Out of Wedmore to Westhay & I find myself being passed in both directions by lots of serious looking lycra-clad speed merchants on lots o'bling & carbon. There is obviously some sort of organised event going on. There are even two team cars in the procession. I reckon it must be some sportive type of thing. It's not the Wessex King of The Mountains for sure 'cause there are flyers all around advising of it taking place next weekend. Between Westhay & Sharpwick I get some good views of Glastonbury Tor which is in sight for long periods only obstructed by the taller roadside bushes & trees. From Sharpwick I navigate a medley of narrow lanes heading generally south west, under the M5 & heading for Taunton. Somewhere hereabouts: I forget exactly where already, it's an age thing: I take a cake-stop in the best tea shop of the journey. It's part of a bakery & all the naughty-but-nice stuff is homemade. It takes a while to do justice to the vanilla slices, Eccles cakes & cold Dandelion & Burdock. Nom nom 11 out of 10.When I arrive in Taunton I go to the library for info on local cycling routes. The woman in there has the rudest, most ignorant attitude I have come across in a long

time. I'm not sure which she disliked most. Being told about her personality defects or the fact that she is less use than an ashtray onna motorbike. I travel the A38 to Wellington for ease of navigating & am pleasantly surprised at the low volume of traffic using it. At Sampford Arundel I see a sign for the Grand Western Canal & knowing this goes to/thru Tiverton I drop onto the towpath. I like this no hills, no traffic, summer weather cycling by the water. The next 16km pass too quickly & I find Tiverton to be unimpressive so press on to Crediton. The road becomes a bit lumpy after Bickleigh & my previously tolerable pain in the knee becomes less & less so. Ibuprofen seems to be having less impact. I try two or three pubs & B&B's plus a 5* star hotel. All have no rooms available. Apparently the daughter of Lord somebody or other is getting wed on the morrow. So I press on gingerly. I call at a farmhouse with a roadside B&B sign assuming that his Lordship's chums won't be slumming it in a farm barn. He says they don't do b&b anymore & haven't got round to taking the board down. Buggerrit. She says so & so up the road are doing it & she'll ring to see if they can accommodate me. Yes but the room won't be ready for half an hour. So she forces farmhouse cake & sweet tea upon me to pass a little time & he then jumps in the Landy110 with a cheerful "follow me". This other place is really comfortable & the young couple are very sociable. Definitely "people" people & they deserve to succeed with the business model they have there. Finish the day with a farmhouse mixed grill & a long, long soak in the bath, but not at the same time.

105km(1484)

Sunday 24:05:09 It's another beautiful morning & after a farmhouse breakfast I freewheel down the lane looking & feeling like Billy Bunter Onna Bike. It's only 4km to Crediton but it does seem to have a lot of short sharp ups & the same type of downs. It also seems that there is always a bend at the bottom so I have to scrub off most of the speed round the bend thus preventing any inertia benefit going up the next hill. It's rather like stop/start cycling. From Tedburn St. Mary I choose to ignore the cycling route signs to Dunsford to avoid the chevrons on the map. I find my way thru a network of white lanes & as I cross the R. Teign I come to a hill that is so steep it nearly blots the sun out. I don't even try to ride this & begin to walk. Luckily I am in a forest which provides cool relief from the truly baking sun. I am really annoyed with myself over this walking bit. I wanted to actually ride the whole route: this was the reason for having a new cassette & chainring before the start. I take consolation that this is the sensible option considering the knee pain issue. As I arrive at the top the trees thin out & I get a view of Dartmoor on the horizon. Despite my elevation the distant moor is clearly higher still & I steel myself mentally for more climbing for most of the day. Right now though I have some super views in all direction & can see a castle a little distance away. Castle Drogo? Prestonbury Castle? Cranbrook Castle? No matter, press on. I arrive in Moretonhampstead & stop for a long lunch in a tea-room. Soup, bread, cakes, Vimto. It's obvious from the map that there will not be a Sainsbury's or suchlike from here to Tavistock so I stock up on fluids & snacks from the Spar shop as I leave this place. From here to Postbridge is completely exposed with some forever & ever ups. Some long & draggy: some a little shorter & sharper. All under a glaring sun. At one point I simply roll to the left off the tarmac onto the springy coarse grass 'cause I don't have the energy to stop & swing a leg off the bike. I lie there going from rare to medium grilled & doze off. That was a silly thing to do. I awake a little later truly feeling like barbecued cyclist with a pounding headache & feeling sick. Self inflicted heat stroke. What an idiotic state to get into. There are no options other than to press onwards & I do so by riding from one layby/rest area to the next & stop in the shade of tall vehicles such as caravans or motor homes to gather my wits & drink/eat or both. (I learn later that today's temperature is close to the hottest day on record hereabouts. There's that

Murphy's Law again) This performance continues 'till I begin the descent to Postbridge & I decide not to stop here to benefit from the gathered speed up the hill 'tother side of the bridge. The place was rammed with grockles anyway. Next up is Princetown which I avoid by bearing right just prior to the place & heading for Tavistock. Marj has family buried in Princetown churchyard & family connections there due to her great, great grandfather being a prison warder there. Just past Princetown is the highest elevation of the moor crossing. I rest here & eat the last of the onboard food & drink most of the remaining fluids knowing that I will not be long into Tavistock. From here is one cycling's most delightful downhills immediately followed by an uphill which will be mostly conquered by the downhill inertia providing my nerve holds & I choose not to or don't have to scrub off speed on the bends. I get lucky with the oncoming traffic as I go downhill & am able to use the full width of both sides of the road on the last bend before the uphill starts. At the top of this last hill I stop at a viewing area on the left from where there is a good view down onto the coast in the Plymouth area. This is not the reason for stopping here. I fully expect to find a Mr. Whippy ice cream van here (BTDTGTTS) & I am not disappointed. As I sit on the grass taking in the view I begin to get a satisfied feeling which is helped by the consumption of a second double-99 with juice, nuts, hundreds & thousands plus double flakes. This together with a bottle of Lucozade & I am buzzzzzzing! The descent to Tavistock is a gem, approx 7km. High speed, straight road with an earworm. This Flight Tonight by Nazareth. Seems rather appropriate methinks. As I get near to the town centre I spot a B&B on a roundabout so it's right-round right round onto the doorstep. Not only does she have a room available she is just serving evening meal. Would I like a roast chicken dinner with jam roly-poly & custard with either wine or beer? Is the Pope Catholic? A quick shower & change, a leisurely pig-out & a stroll round town to end the day. I really like Tavistock & as I window shop I realise there is no knee pain. Them 99's are great for pain killing eh what?
60km(1544)

Monday 25:05:09 A late start this morning: 10 o'clock before I leave Tavistock after the usual fry-up. The weather is a little overcast & thus a lot cooler than yesterday. There is a couple of spots of rain for the first half hour. Quite a relief really. I do feel rather drained & assume it's the effect of riding all yesterday in very hot weather. I suspect that I didn't take on enough fluid. My legs are heavy & I feel generally tired. Last night I contemplated getting to L.E. tomorrow evening but now feel that arriving in Marazion or Penzance tomorrow will do & finish the last few miles on Wednesday morning. I use the main road to Liskeard in the absence of any likely looking direct alternative. The drop down to the River Tamar at Gunnislake is steep & the unfortunate 180* change in direction after the bridge has left no inertia to begin the equally steep climb up to St. Anne's Chapel. I cycle a bit & then have to walk again for a short spell. The traffic lights near the top are on red thankfully. As I get to the top I climb off the bike again to have a sit on a bench by the side of the road. Three young chaps join me & it transpires that they left Oxford yesterday & plan to be at L.E. tonight. I find this impressive but not so the fact that they have no luggage whatsoever. All they have is a spare inner tube each & a pump/patch kit between them. Rock on guys. I press on to Lostwithiel & although the road is gently rolling I do feel all the up bits more so than usual. This is a clear sign of tiredness & convinces me that the decision to finish not sooner than Wednesday is sensible. The views off to the left over to the Tamar estuary are nicely panoramic. Next stop is Liskeard where I decide to be kind to myself & have a long, long rest before & after eating & drinking. I ring Marj to make arrangements to meet at L.E. at midday on Wednesday after which we will spend a few days at a quiet hotel we know of on the Lizard Peninsula. I feel in need of the rest & Marj deserves some waiting-on for being

alone for three weeks. My grand-daughter is coming too. I am looking forward to having a break with these V.I.Ps. Onwards & upwards;with too few downwards; to St Austell on the A390 using a creep, rest, go strategy. As I crest a rise out of St. Blazey I get a terrific view of St. Austell Bay below & in front of me with the high ground in the distance. The sea is flat calm, blue & reflecting the sunlight. It looks very welcoming as I realise that the last time I saw the sea close up on this journey was at Bettyhill, almost a thousand miles ago. I get a terrific buzz from this & am excited like a kid on holiday. I even ring Marj just to say

"I can see the sea, I can see the sea!".

With spirits boosted I travel on to St. Austell down a very welcome drop passing familiar signs to the Eden Project. It feels good to be in a part of the country so familiar as to be regarded as a second home. Knowing that journey's end is very close is also a boost 'cause I am ready for the finish line. I make a very slight detour into Charlestown where I take a half hour rest in the harbour ,watching the to & fro of the various workers & tourists in this attractive place. Back up to the main road & as I travel the ring road there are a few decent looking B&B's so I pick one at random, settle in, shower & change before visiting the Pizza Express just a 5 minute walk down the road. When I get back to the B&B I fall asleep on the bed for a couple of hours & wake up feeling ravenous so an action replay at the Pizza Express takes place. The bloke in there asks if I want a season ticket.

64km(1608)

Tuesday 26:05:09I wake to a sunny day with the trees betraying the presence of strong winds which as normal are against me. As a slave to habit I have a full English breakfast before spinning up the hill out of St. Austell. I have decided to take the main road as far as Truro for straightforward navigation & then decide which of the least hilly roads from there depending on how much zoom are in legs & lungs. It seems to take no time at all to arrive at the traffic lights at the junction on the top of the hill down into Truro. There is a bike shop in town which I wish to visit so, knowing it's on the west side of town I hang a right to go thru the side streets & avoid the main thoroughfares. I emerge on a T junction with a specialist map shop on the corner & turn left to get to the bike shop. It's not there. In the two years since I last visited it's either relocated or gone bust. Pity. I decide that I need a map showing contours to plot the least hilly route, off the main road, to Penzance & nip into the map shop. There follows an interesting & amusing 20 minutes.

Am I cycling? asks the bloke. I resist the temptation to give a sarcastic reply, relying on my lycra bibshorts, cycle specific s/s shirt & sandals with cleats to reinforce my simple "yes"

Come far? is the next question. When I say "From John O'Groats" he gets almost as excited about an end-to-end cyclist being in his shop as I am about nearly finishing the most stupid ride idea I have ever had.

He then asks, naturally, what I want. I tell him that I need a copy of "that" map which shows the known-to-cyclists-only traffic free, downhill-all-the-way-to Lands End road with pubs & cafes in all the right places staffed by Linda Bellingham clones. He denies the existence of such a map. My assertions that I am a Freemason, National Trust & N.U.F. member related to fox hunting Royalty all fail to solicit his co-operation & a copy of this map is clearly not going to be forthcoming. Even the offer of filthy lucre is insufficient as is the offer of the body of a certain uncle I have who contributes to a yetanothercyclingforum I know of. Some might say the latter refusal is his loss. It transpires that he is the Secretary of Truro C.C. (IIRC) with a lot of local knowledge, unsurprisingly. He suggests the least hilly route which involves the use of the A30 which is anathema. The old A30 he says. I didn't even know that there is an old

A30. That's because it's been renumbered but the locals refer to as the old A30. I love Cornwall. He then produces a map: not an OS map as I expected but a cyclist-specific map of Cornwall & traces out his route with his finger. I buy that; metaphorically & literally. I decide a short walk to the station is good for the legs & I get strange looks from some folk as I walk in the downpour with only sandals on my feet. If they were good enough for J.C. to walk on water with who am I to argue? Just as I break out the over shoes & windproof Montane jacket the rains cease & the sun bursts strongly through the clouds. Murphy's Law again. The ride to Chacewater, Scorrier, Mount Ambrose, Redruth, Carn Brea & Cambourne is a delight in warm sunshine on quiet roads. A long gentle uphill to Carnon Downs presents itself & I slip into an easy gear for a slow gentle smell-the-roses pootle up to the top. During this mellow mood period I begin to take stock of the highs & lows of this 3 week journey. I know it's not yet finished but knowing what awaits on the rest of the road I feel that such thoughts are not too premature. It is during these moments that I realise that I am about to fulfil an ambition that I have had for a decade: a slight adrenalin rush deepens my breathing, lightens my legs & swells my chest. I even get a little smug feeling: there are several doom & gloom merchants who will NOT be able to say "I told you so" I do hope that my head doesn't swell & I don't bore everyone with the verbal diarrhoea of the long distance cyclist. I am sure that the VIP appointment I have for midday tomorrow will see to it that I am reminded that it's only a bike ride. A little jinking on the roundabouts in Hayle provides a double pass under the railway viaduct & shortly out of town I pick up a Sustrans Route 3 sign to Penzance. This is new territory which I always enjoy & this quiet lane in the sun is very enjoyable. The P&Q is disturbed by the sound of two stroke engines alternating between high & low revs & as I round a corner a go-kart track comes into view. I am in need of snacks & fluid so I stop here in anticipation of there being a vending machine inside. Glory be, there is a cafe. As I watch the punters zooming round & off the track I scoff a couple of plates of chips with ice-cool mineral water. This reminds me of a lost summer on Guernsey in 1962. Fond memories of a carefree happy, happy time filled with sea & sand. Having had enough of nostalgia I continue on this pleasant route to a fork in the road with Penzance to the right via an immediate short sharp uphill & to the left is Marazion. I have a natural aversion to s.s. hills so go left. Anyway I genuinely like Marazion: there is a particular pub with a view....as I go round the corner immediately after the left turn there is an s.s. hill. Damn & Blast. I decide to attack the thing to get it over with & as I crest the top a superb view comes into view. Directly in view is St. Michael's Mount with the panorama of Mounts Bay as a backdrop. This is slightly obscured only by the gable end of the pub I have in mind. I could say I planned this but you would know that I am lying. Straight into the bar for a Guinness or two & food. It's only 5 o'clock & food is not served 'till 6 o'clock. I make a reservation for a table with a view at 6 then go across the road to a B&B recommended by the barman. A shower, get changed & back across the road: literally: to the pub for food. This is civilised living. The next three hours are spent eating, drinking & chatting with the locals. There is a distinct lack of grockles. In fact I am the only non-Kernow man in there. Apparently my lack of motorised transport & length of journey have elevated me to the status of temporary honorary Mezza. I retire to bed with a grin in anticipation of seeing family again tomorrow. Marj & Emily have stopped overnight near Lydford where Marj has introduced Emily to the sights of the ancestral home.

69km(1608)

Wednesday 27:05:09 Awake to atrocious weather. The wind is blowing a hooley & the lovely view of St. Michael's Mount from my bedroom window is distorted by rivulets of water running down the window glazing: it's lashing down. Looks like the last day will end in a similar way to the early days at the beginning, weather-wise. A certain

symmetry. I decide to walk thru' the village to aid with the digestion of the full English fry-up. It's only a couple of hundred metres. I mount the bike & decide to take the cycle path emanating from the west car park along the sea front. It really is blowing a gale but being stubborn I insist that this is a bike ride, not a ramble. Therefore I am down to the granny ring having to spin furiously to avoid adopting a grimpuer's style on the flat! As I pass Penzance rail station onto the promenade there is a little relief from the wind but the rain persists. I know that the lanes hereabouts offer an exercise in hill climbing I can do without so decide to stay on the main road, which in itself is sufficiently lumpy in places. This road is so familiar that I do not absorb the views. It's boring, raining & windy & I look forward to getting to the commercial monstrosity that is Lands End. There is actually a queue to get onto the car park so I filter past the cars & am waved thru, by the lady in the ticket booth. Bikes go free. I have a quick spin round the place to find the famous finger post & return to the car park entrance to meet Marj. With immaculate timing we approach the ticket booth from opposite directions simultaneously & when Marj explains that she has come to collect an End-to-Ender she is admitted f.o.c..

We do the usual photo thing at the finger post & adjourn to the bar of the hotel. As the barman is preparing 3 coffees he asks "have you come far" & when I say 1701km from John O'Groats he is incredulous. I would have imagined that they are quite used to this sort of thing here. He says the coffees & chips are free so I put that money into the charity collection. The tom-tom drums ensure that in a very short space of time every one in the bar knows that the nutter in lycra has just arrived from J'o G. & one or two folk thrust money into Marj's hands 'cause mine are full of food.

24km(1701)

When we leave the rain has ceased but the wind persists. No matter: next stop is a 4 star hotel for a few days R&R. It feels really strange to be travelling in a car. Upon arrival at hotel reception I book in & apologise for the Max Wall outfit & 3 weeks beard growth. She offers to swap legs & comments flatteringly about my grey beard. Grey! I didn't realise I was that grey that it's noticeable. The journey has obviously aged me. No matter because my granddaughter doesn't like the brillo-pad effect hugs so it will be shaved off. Tomorrow. After a shower & change into proper clothes I sit in the lounge scoffing a cream tea. Where was the adrenalin rush at the finish line? Where is the sense of satisfaction at completing a long held ambition? Where is the grin factor? All these things are absent. I have the biggest feeling of anti-climax that I have ever experienced.

Reflections & considerations for next time....

The route.

I chose a north to south direction purely on the logistics of getting home at the end of the ride. This was easier from L.E./ Penzance than J.o.G./Wick/Inverness using the train which was the intention of Plan A..It transpired that coming home via the train directly upon finishing the ride didn't happen.

My first route selection involved too many hills. I chose an East-side route because I particularly wanted to see the Forth Road Bridge, Edinburgh, Hexham & York.

I was advised to go as far south as Lincoln before turning West for home. I ignored this advice & regretted it.

Several people recommended a south2north route to avoid the prevailing s/westerlies being a headwind .They were correct. I had an almost permanent headwind which varied between gale force(particularly in Scotland) & tolerable. IIRC I was conscious of a tailwind on only two occasions during 20 days riding.

Favourite bits were....

Bettyhill to Lairg:the Strathnaver Valley was superb. This was done on the advice of the same chap who told me to go to Lincoln. Many thanks to PH..The Crask Inn is an experience not to be missed, the food, the location, the landlord, the bar, the ride up from Altnaharra, the 20km downhill to Lairg.

The Chew Valley, Cheddar Gorge, The Somerset Levels, the canal to Tiverton.

Crossing Dartmoor despite the stress & pain.

Least impressive bits.....

John O Groats

Lands End

Accommodation

The only advance booking I did was the first night in Feswick. I did this because the nature of my business is that I might have received a telephone call at any moment, the nature of which demanded an immediate return to the salt mines. In this event I would have ridden to the nearest rail station to get to either Crewe, Stoke or Derby. A concoction of good staff, reliable workers, accommodating clients & good fortune allowed the journey to be un-interrupted. The mobile phone was a godsend as never before. The only poor accommodation I had was Inverness hostel due to other guests. Other than that I used B&B's & pubs none of which were less than good. Several of them were excellent.

Food

During the majority of my waking hours I felt hungry despite a full cooked breakfast each morning & a 3 course meal every evening. In between times I consumed varying quantities of Snickers bars, Lucozade, mineral water, coffee, cakes, crisps, cream teas & sandwiches. On reflection it should be no surprise that I only lost 2kg in weight.

Luggage

I started with too much. I halved it after day four iirc & halved it again when I left home to begin Phase 2.In essence all that's needed for a long tour is what you would carry for a day-ride plus toiletries & a change into non cycle specific clothes, ideally of the lightweight quick drying type. Think Rohan & Tilley wear. Some folk like the luxury of a spare set of lycra. Assuming the use of B&B's or similar

The Cost

I'm not certain. I got to the budget figure before I got home at the end of Phase I so proportionally it was 30% over expectation. I stopped counting/keeping track after a certain figure was reached. In a nutshell £ 😞😞😞😞

The Timing

The idea to ride E2E was conceived in 1999 as one of those imminent-millennium notions. For several domestic/commercial reasons I put it to the back of my mind in that I thought about it weekly instead of daily. In 2002 I reached 50 & with the fortune of good health decided that the idea should be promoted to being an ambition to be realised while good health remained. Other things continued to intrude. In 2004 I found myself alternating between cardiac & neurology wards in my local hospital. While in cardiac I got chatting to the bloke in the next bed. He was in for a heart & double lung transplant. At 32 years of age. I am a little ashamed to admit that I used this bloke's misfortune as a wake up call & decided/realised that there are no pockets in shrouds & good health cannot be taken for granted. Still prevarication ruled. I made numerous plans for routes, accommodation, finance etc. etc. none of which got off the planning

board.

I was discussing these ideas with a member of this parish & seeking his advice/comment which he freely gave along with the comment that became the catalyst to make it happen. From a guy who had at this time done, IIRC, three E2E's came...

"The hardest part is getting to the start line"

I thought " enough already with all this proactive planning, JFDI!"

So I go to work, ask the bossman for a year's holiday in one go. He say "NO". I resign. Start my own business & have to wait 5 years for a window in obligations(the current recession helped).

So on a Wednesday I go to Stoke station & buy a ticket for me & bike to catch the Scotrail sleeper at Crewe at 2355 hours two weeks hence.

Murphy's Law (TMRTITU) occurs the day after when we get a project from a house-account client meaning I have to be there when it happens & stay until it's finished. This client ultimately gave me a three figure personal cheque for the charity involved. So I delay departure for a month. It transpires that we finish the work a few days early so I get away exactly 3 weeks later. This client rings me as I approach John O Groats two days later about some insignificant detail & accepts my polite invitation to go forth & multiply for a couple of weeks in the spirit it's intended 🙏

So ten years of waiting is about to end

Training

At one stage I had good intentions but I failed dismally. I did only one ride of any length in preparation & that's entirely due to the encouragement I received from TKP & Gill of this forum. I simply cannot climb on a bike & ride for the sake of it. I need an incentive & wattage output & the like are sufficiently abstract to be unattractive.

So I started the journey in the belief('cause someone whose opinion I hold in high regard had told me so) that I would ride into fitness. To a degree I feel that this is what occurred. The climb out of Altnaharra went well. I didn't disgrace myself going up Struie Hill. How much of this was adrenalin assisted is debatable. I also felt good from Durham to Chesterfield: from Cheddar to Tiverton.

Conversely I felt fit for nothing crossing Dartmoor; climbing out of Gunnislake; from St. Austell to Truro; from Penzance to L.E..

The Bike

A Longstaff tourer which had done a Lejog in a previous life before I owned it. It came into my possession via a widow who is a friend of Marj's at the ~~Witches Inquisition~~ Womens Institute. In fact I bought two Longstaff's off her. This bike is the oldest, scruffiest & cheapest of the entire fleet but is the favourite by a long way. Made in 1986 it is only slightly heavier than the full carbon Trek I bought in 2007 only a few months before I acquired the Longstaff. A YACF ride in the Yorkshire Dales which included the climb out of Arncliffe convinced me that some TLC was needed prior to the start of the JoGLE ride. So I left it with Longstaff's for a new cassette with a 32t sprocket to be fitted plus new rear wheel, inner tube & tyre, new handlebars & stem riser to give an upright posture, new twin calliper brakes front & rear & a new bottom bracket. It performed faultlessly throughout the entire journey. I didn't even get a single p*nct*r*.

The YACF Contribution

Numerous threads, comments, advice, suggestions & information contributed to my perceptions, decisions & expectations. Particular thanks are due to PH, Gill, TKP, Dave Martin, Deano, MSeries & Jaded.

The Next Time

will be a south to north ride possibly starting at Lizard Point & finishing at Cape Wrath or Duncansby Head. It will have a theme: crossing bridges or using ferries: it will likely be up the west side of the country. I shall carry less than last time. Cornwall has little to offer in the way of new sights so I may do the first 150 to 200 km as night riding just because I like it. I have entertained the notion of doing it fixed wheel. It will take place later in the year to benefit from warmer weather & more daylight.

Afterwards

I lost all interest in bikes. I didn't ride a bike for two months. I lost all/any fitness benefits & put weight on.

The only bike related thing I did was a spell as a volunteer at Thorne during LEL 2009. This rekindled my enthusiasm & provided an incentive to ride again.

When I got back on a bike I felt terrible: fat & unfit. No real desire to do the miles. This wouldn't get me from London to Edinburgh & back in 2013 so I needed something to provide an incentive.

I joined AUK & have since grovelled around 1x100km & 1x120km ride. Plus I have DNSx3 due to weather dis-incentives.