

Hugh's LEJOG

30 July - 5 August 2010



A quick photograph from the sole German tourist at Lands End, the most southerly point of the UK mainland, and then I was off on the most demanding physical (and mental) challenge that I have ever taken on.

I had never previously considered myself a cyclist, but major back surgery and a knee operation ended any hopes of adding to the 15 marathons that I had run all over the world. My surgeon suggested that, to retain fitness, I could cycle as much as I liked....I certainly do not think that he had cycling 886 miles covering the entire length of the UK in mind. I planned to do this the hard way, in eight days, un-supported and carrying all I needed with me on the bike. This meant averaging almost 120 miles per day and hoping to find somewhere to sleep at the end of each day.

Day one was all up and down on the never ending Cornwall and Devon hills, which I had heard so much about. On one particularly steep downhill I achieved a top speed of 48mph, with a fully laden bike this was rather frightening and would certainly not be exceeded as the week went on. Nevertheless, I exceeded my initial target, exhausted at the end of a long day I found a B&B in Tiverton, ran a bath and reflected upon 130 tough miles. Although I had trained for a few months for this mammoth challenge, the most I had ever cycled previously was 100 miles in one day. The following day was, surprisingly, a little easier and I was amazed how good I felt as I crossed the Severn Bridge into Wales and finally settled in Leominster after 135 miles. The only real hold up was to get a new tyre fitted in Bristol to replace one which was slashed by debris on the road, yet incredibly did not burst.

Day three was a little tougher, into a headwind, as I progressed through Shropshire, Cheshire and finally into Lancashire. By now I had realised that, if I was ever struggling, it was best to stop, take on copious amounts of food (usually cake) then start afresh. By dark I made it to Preston, pleased with progress I sat down to devour my 2 meals for £10 special offer.

After 20 miles the next morning I met with a work colleague from Swire, Heysham for a quick coffee in Lancaster. Then disaster: going downhill round a corner I lost concentration, hit the kerb and ended up on the pavement. I do not know which came off worst, me or the bike. I was sore but knew that the cuts and bruises would heal. I repaired the burst tyre and went to the nearest bike shop to get the handle bars straightened again before I climbed over the Shap, in the Lake District, and descended back into Scotland. The half way point had been reached and although sore I knew that I was now on the home stretch. Despite a lengthy delay to recover from my crash and get the bike repaired I felt strong late in the day and carelessly cycled beyond any town and hope of finding accommodation for the night. Fortunately, I passed a signpost for a luxury castle hotel, a quick phone call to reception (offering a very generous discount) and ten minutes later I was welcomed into Auchen Castle and had a fantastic sleep in a most comfortable bed.

The next morning, suitably refreshed, I set off into the wind and rain and by lunchtime reached Glasgow. After a very picturesque cycle along the banks of Loch Lomond it was a steady climb into the Scottish Highlands. I managed to get a room at the Bridge of Orchy hotel after 122 miles but tonight's accommodation, in stark contrast to the previous evening, was a shared bunk room with a smelly hiker.

Day five did not get off to a good start as I could not find my cycle computer which recorded all my distances and kept me informed of speed. Giving it up as lost I set off and soon was cycling through the wonderful scenery of Glencoe, into Fort William and up the Great Glen to Inverness. All day I was suffering from a sore right foot and continually loosened and adjusted the strap on my cycling shoe. It was only the next morning that I was to discover that losing my computer and my sore foot were not un-related events....incredibly I found my computer inside my shoe. By this time I had recorded my longest ever cycle of 142 miles reaching Tain in the dark late in the evening.

Friday 6 August I woke up early with great anticipation and excitement. I had left myself with "only" 89 miles to reach the most northerly point on the UK mainland, John O'Groats. However, this was far from a sprint to the line as I experienced a collapsed bearing on the headset as well as a slow puncture, just after I passed the second last cycle shop in Scotland. This meant stops at car garages for more air to enable me to negotiate the toughest climbs of the trip. As I climbed the last hill the sun came out for the first time since day one. Upon reaching the summit I could see the Orkney Islands ahead and it was a free-wheel all the way to John O'Groats...I had done it!!



886 incredibly tough miles, but completed ahead of schedule in 6 days and 7 hours. I was delighted ... not only had I completed this personal challenge but I was delighted that, with the support of friends and work colleagues, I was able to raise over £5,600 for Swire Oilfield Services Ltd nominated charity Cash for Kids.