

A detailed topographical map of Great Britain and Ireland. A thick red line is drawn across the map, starting from the northern coast of Scotland, passing through the central Highlands, then following the western coast of Scotland and Ireland, and finally ending at the southwestern tip of England. The map shows various geographical features like mountains, rivers, and coastlines. Labels for 'NORTH SEA', 'IRISH SEA', and 'ENGLISH CHANNEL' are visible. The text 'John Harkness LEJOG June 2011' is printed in blue in the upper right quadrant.

John Harkness
LEJOG
June 2011

Route

My route was based around the network of cycle ways that traverse the length and breadth of the country with a number of shortcuts. Wherever possible it avoided A Roads and for about 90% of the time was on minor B roads and unclassified roads and paths. I deliberately used my own route so that I visited places not often passed by Land's End to John O'Groat cyclists.

I took 11 full days and three half days to cycle 1113 miles and climb 71,600 feet in 101 cycling hours at an average speed of 11 mph . This was 8 hours a day cycling and approaching 10 hours including breaks. I normally started around 8am and finished at about 6pm



Bike

I purchased a new bike for the trip, a Trek 7.5, from Cheltenham Cycles who were immensely helpful advising on the project. It has 32mm Bontrager puncture resistant tyres which lived up to their name – I had no punctures on the trip. It is fitted with a rear rack and a removable pannier bag set.

Navigation was using a Satmap GPS unit which had my route preloaded onto 1:50000 Ordnance Survey maps. Spare equipment consisted of 2 tubes, 2 spokes, pump, multi tool and puncture repair kit; none of which was used!

Clothing

This was very minimal. Normal cycling wear was cycling shirt, cycling shorts and socks. Most of the time I also wore mountain bike shorts. Carried in the pannier were 2 spare cycling shorts, 2 undervests, 2 socks, light trousers, underwear, T-Shirt and light sweater for the evening,

Communication and record keeping

I had a Samsung smart phone and tablet. These enabled me to provide real time tracking of my progress on the school website, blog progress and take photos. I wrote a blog every evening and this is reproduced in the following pages interleaved with some of the photos I took and have downloaded. If you want to know more contact me at: jh@jharkness.co.uk

Fundraising

I raised nearly £5,000 for the new Pate's refectory. More details of this and how to donate can be found at: http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/johnharkness_2

Day 1

55miles and 4200ft of ascent in 5 hours 40 mins including 20 min stop at Lands End .Arrived at the Victoria Inn at Threemilestone, just outside Truro. It seems very nice, just the job. Pretty tired today. Up at 6am to catch the 7-22 from Cheltenham to Penzance, under way at 1-05. It would have been 1-00 but for the embarrassing revelation on Penzance station that I was wearing normal boxers not my cycling shorts under my jeans. Then cycle to Land's End back to Penzance then on to Truro. Time for Landlord's Mixed Grill and chips.



Self portrait at the start



The start



St Michael's Mount



Victoria Inn

Day 2



Hatherleigh B&B

A slow day, but not so tiring. 87 miles and 8200ft of ascent. 10 hours door to door, including one hour of breaks. To begin with there were more of the Cornish river valleys, down 100 feet so steep that you have to brake then grind back up the other side. Then a delightful run on the Camel Trail which as a disused railway line is very flat. Then onto Dartmoor which is also fairly flat after the initial ascent. At one stage a stand off between me and 100 sheep who, coming in the other direction, would not pass my yellow jacket, solved by the sheep dog biting a few by way of encouragement. Finally having left Cornwall on to Devon and its version of the river valleys, as Cornwall, but if anything steeper. Staying in Hatherleigh in a delightful B&B - Raymont House. Tomorrow with friends in Wells

Day 3

86miles, 5400 ft in 9 hours 40 mins. Got to Wells where a warm welcome awaited from our friends Lynne and Bob. Today didn't seem so tiring so maybe I am getting the hang of this. Got lost in Taunton due to relying on cycle signs, better to trust my trusty Satmap GPS. Finally left the hills of Devon behind to get to the Somerset levels which have lived up to their name. Obsessed with getting enough, roast fillet of beef tonight..



Planning error meant that I came along this track



The welcome entrance to Bob and Lynne's

Day 4



Cycle Path on the right of the barrier

99 miles and 3700 feet in 10 hours 30 mins. Long and a bit slow but not exhausting. Spent a lot of the day on cycle routes. Confusing around Bristol as a lot of cycle routes were not all that well marked. One that was excellent was the Strawberry Line from Cheddar to Congresbury. I then joined another cycle route that went over the main motorway bridge over the Avon, very scary being stuck between juggernauts and a 100 feet drop. Hot today, at one stage the bike thermometer got to 82. Special thanks to Shirley Park who managed to track my progress and wait in a lay-by near Cheltenham to encourage me for the last 10 miles and was then rather unfairly hugged by a sweaty cyclist. A week off now before resuming the trip to Carlisle. 328 miles done, 770 or so to go.

Day 5

Today, 97 miles in 8 hours cycling with a further 1 hour 20 in breaks, 5500 feet. Easy first half across the Severn glacial plain then more tiring after lunch. Had lunch in an idyllic pub in a small village in the middle of nowhere. They only did sandwiches and the only type available today was cheese so unsurprisingly I was the only customer. Only injury to date is trapped ulna nerves in my palms through leaning on vibrating handlebars so trying to ride slightly differently. £575 further donations in the course of the day total now £3,375



The only cheese sandwich pub



Wem B&B

Day 6

90 miles and 4000 feet in 8 hours cycling but with 2 hours breaks as well. I learnt today that cycling is like golf - not a pastime to do in the rain. It tipped down for about an hour. I tried sheltering under a tree but decided after a bit that I was getting wet without making any progress, so I carried on. Still obsessed about eating enough. Today: full English, four rounds of toast, cereal and banana, mid morning pastie, tomato and energy drink, lunch - chicken baguette, chips and salad, dinner - bruschetta, tagliatelli carbonara plus added garlic bread, tiramisu. Plus by way of snacks, 2 bananas and 4 energy bars. Don't feel all that full. Forecast for tomorrow is more rain so a tough day ahead as a lot of hills as well.



Preston Town Hall and my cheap B&B opposite

Day 7

Poured with rain after 5 mins as I was struggling out of Preston, but after that things improved to the extent that it was the best day so far. 90 miles, 6300 ft in 8 hours 30 mins cycling. Had to walk for the first time after my short cut turned out to be a rock strewn slope. Lakes were very beautiful some lovely bits along deserted minor roads that had been recently resurfaced, no government spending cuts in evidence here.

So over half way and feeling not too bad.



Morecombe Bay



Not a very easy cycle route



Lunchtime pub in Kendal



The Lakes

Day 8

A fast run down to Carlisle. 28 miles and 1800 ft of ascent with 3200 of descent, but felt easier than that. Only took 2 hours 20 mins. Bike in the bike shop by the station for a service. Sounds like a good idea as starting to rattle a bit. Very good run this morning mostly on a series of minor roads designated as cycle ways. Great views of the hills. Now on the train on the way back for the weekend to lend moral support for the A levels before resuming next week to the finish.

Day 9

47 miles, 2200 feet, 3 hours 45 mins Plus 30 mins breaks. Not a great day for luck. Train an hour late due to some sort of incident that required a posse of police to search the train twice for a suspect. Picked up the bike and set off only to realise 10 mins later that I had forgotten helmet. Then it started to rain which continued on and off for the rest of the trip. Reached Scotland. Took photos of Gretna Green chapel. Not a great cycle way thereafter as one of those where the cycle way is merely a marked part of the normal road. Last 30 mins nice as rain finally stopped and I went off the cycle way onto a minor road to Moffat. Seems quite prosperous. Pub fairly full of diners.



Gretna Green marriage house



Moffat Farmhouse B&B

Day 10



The Clyde

Today was an odd type of day. 87 miles. 5300 feet in 8 hours 20 mins plus about 2 hours stoppages. These were mainly for navigation. First 20 miles were nice, quite good paths alongside the B roads plus some where the path is just marked on the road. Then a rather depressing bit through the industrial heart of the central area. Then a very nice stretch on the Clyde cycle way that goes right into the centre of the city avoiding virtually all the roads. Then an equally good route out on the Kelvin. But then a bit more stretching. The map showed the cycle path continuing but in reality it did not. I ended cycling through a muddy field, then carrying the bike over a stile and up some steps. Getting a bit tired when met by Sue who had come to guide me the last few miles to their house. I may eschew off road from now on!

Day 11

94 miles, 8800 feet in 9 hours 15 mins plus 1 hour 45 mins breaks. Probably the best day yet, stunning scenery interposed with great cycle ways on a mixture of old railways, forestry tracks and minor roads. Had Phil, Sue and Catrina for company to start with which was a pleasant change, I can see the attractions of doing it as a group. With their guidance we started on the water route named because I think they said it was the track along the water supply from the reservoir to Glasgow. Not on any bike maps. Then onto some minor roads. Passed the oldest Pub in Scotland, the Clachan. Later in the day I saw the oldest Inn in Scotland, The Kenmore Hotel, which seemed 200 years older. The cycle way on the railway track was a fantastic example of Victorian engineering, cut out of the hillside by hand. Then the final ascent of the day a 900 foot climb up to the pass into Loch Rannoch. On the food front had my first ever steak and haggis pie.



On the Water Route



Lunch in Callander



Kenmore Hotel



The top of the pass to Loch Rannoch

Day 12

94 miles in 7 hours 20 mins plus 2 hours stops and 6000 feet. Met my first fellow Lejogger, Phil. He is going slightly slower so finishes the day after me at lunch time. We pedalled along together for an hour including an exhilarating run on the A9. We were on cycle ways or minor roads for most of the day. The A9, where it is part of the cycle route, has proper dedicated cycle tracks. They were resurfacing the carriageway and this involved closing a stretch of the cycle way. A service was available to transport bikes the 3.5 kilometres of the closure. As it was slightly downhill with a tailwind we decided to go on the main road, which was reduced to single carriageway with no overtaking. We flew down the stretch with a queue behind us but no real pressure as there was a 30mph limit which we were breaking on and off.



Where I was going to



Where I came from



Newtonmore cafe

I then stopped for a bowl of soup and he carried on. About an hour later I caught up with him having a cuppa with his wife who was his support vehicle and they made me one. Another great day. No rain apart from some early mist as I ascended out of Loch Rannoch. Three tough climbs to 1400 feet but rewarded with some exhilarating descents. Worth coming back to do some more trips round here. Not the same country pubs as in England but plenty of tea shops. Greeted with a warm welcome by Fred in the Atholdene B&B in Inverness and have now dealt with a substantial portion of haggis. 150 miles to go in two days.



Ruthven Barracks Kingussie



Last climb of the day



First view of Beaully Firth



Small self portrait

Day 13

79 miles, 5300 feet in 6 hours 30 mins Plus 90 mins breaks. Great start to the day along the estuary North of Inverness. A minor road on which one car passed me in 30 mins. Then heavy rain for a couple of hours. Then another pleasant spell high above the Dornoch Firth. Great views and an exhilarating run down to Lairg. Then phone packed up so no more photos. Then more rain for the final 21 miles. This was more or less dead straight, gently rising up about 800 feet then an adrenalin rush down. That's the difference from Cornwall where the descents were hard work as they were so steep and the ascents were so much tougher. Here ascents not too shattering and downhill great. Warm welcome at the B&B in Altnaharra and phone now working but no signal. Breakfast tomorrow will have haggis and black pudding. A full Scottish breakfast is a full English breakfast plus one or more of black pudding, haggis, extra egg. 75 miles to go before back to normality, enjoying it so much that I will have to plan the next trip on return.



Beaully Firth



Dornoch Firth

Day 14

80 miles, 5100 feet in 6 hours 45 mins Plus 1 hour 15 mins breaks. First a special mention to the B&B in Altnaharra. A great welcome with a cup of tea and unsolicited help offered to dry clothes, delicious cooked dinner and breakfast comfortable bed all for £30. The day started with a pretty and fast run along the loch and river – over 14 miles in the first hour, only small ups which you could power up, no traffic to speak of. Then it got a bit tougher once the coast was reached, longer climbs but then some good descents on excellent road surfaces. Top speed for the trip of 43.6 mph reached. Got to Thurso in one piece. Booked into hotel and left my luggage for the final 20 miles to Jog. Head wind meant a bit slow on some remarkably straight roads. Fuel for the final 2 hours purchased from petrol station - tuna sandwich, pack of jaffa cakes, 2 snickers all eaten by end of trip. Went to Duncansby Head, considered the purists end, then back to Jog harbour. This pretty dire, reminiscent of Land's End. Loads of tourists taking photos and tatty gift shops. Finished. Body creaking somewhat, so summoned taxi to Thurso. Need food and beer, more tomorrow by way of epilogue on train home.



Altnaharra



First view of the sea



The road goes over there



The home straight



Self portrait at the end - Duncansby Head



The tourists' end

Epilogue

Would I do it again - yes but not tomorrow. Highlights of the trip are the spectacular scenery in the lakes and the Scottish hills. Also the interesting paths along old railways and canals. Daily mileage was about right and it was good for the body to have to only do a maximum of six days on the trot. Choice of route was right for me, very little on main roads and lots of cycle paths. These were slower but much more enjoyable. As I had planned my own route, I also included some bits on farm tracks and bridle ways. These were generally hard and some too hard. Doing it on my own was probably a bit harder psychologically, but probably quicker as I only stopped when I wanted to. Doing it without a support vehicle was a bit tougher as I had to carry my own luggage but not too much of a disadvantage as my luggage was only 7 kilos including spare tubes, lights etc and the panniers. About the same as the weight I lost in training. The cycle way route was definitely longer and harder but also definitely worth doing. Bike was pretty much ok. I needed more hand positions which could be solved with bar ends. Injuries: sore knees - no real solution beyond less miles per day, sore bottom - should have used more cream and perhaps the cause was not wearing clean shorts on two occasions due to spares not drying overnight. Main injury was to my hands from the canal path vibration - more variation in handle bars needed. Let me know if you want more information and I would be up for doing at least part again, but I think next will be something different but similar - Lowestoft to St David's?

Finally thanks to: all those who have donated, and encouraged me, nearly £5,000 will have been raised for the Pate's Refectory; Alec and Shirley for sorting the website and meeting me on the way; Wallace for bringing my bike back and encouraging me generally; Cheltenham Cycles for their helpful advice; Ben and Paul for the inspiration to do the trip; Bob, Lynne, Phil and Sue for putting me up, Phil, Sue, Catrina and Lynne for cycling with me; Sarah for cajouling me to take photos and most of all to Helen for her understanding and support. ILYVM

Route in more detail – 1,113m 71,600ft

Day 1 - 55m 4200ft

Penzance - Land's End - Penzance – Hayle – Camborne – Redruth – Truro

Day 2 – 87m 8200ft

Truro – St Newlyn – St Columb – Bodmin – Camelford – Holsworthy – Hatherleigh

Day 3 – 86m 5400ft

Hatherleigh – Winkleigh – Chawleigh- Oakford – Taunton – Glastonbury – Wells

Day 4 – 99m 3700ft

Wells – Axbridge – Clevedon – Avonmouth – Berkeley – Frampton-on-Severn – Gloucester – Cheltenham

Day 5 – 97m 5500ft

Cheltenham – Evesham – Droitwich – Stourport – Bridgnorth – Wellington – Telford – Wem

Day 6 – 90m 4000ft

Wem – Whitchurch – Kelsall – Warrington - Orrell – Preston

Day 7 – 90m 6300ft

Preston – Carnforth – Kendall – Ambleside – Threkeld

Day 8 – 28m 1800 ft

Threkeld – Carlisle

Day 9 – 47m 2200ft

Carlisle – Gretna – Lockerbie – Moffat

Day 10 – 87m 5300ft

Moffat – Hamilton – Glasgow – Milngavie

Day 11 – 94m 8800ft

Milngavie – Callander – Killin – Kinloch Rannoch

Day 12 – 94m 6000ft

Kinloch Rannoch – Kingussie – Boat of Garten – Inverness

Day 13 – 79m 5300ft

Inverness – Dingwall – Alness – Ardgay – Lairg – Altnaharra

Day 14 – 80m 5100ft

Altnaharra – Bettyhill – Thurso – John O'Groats



Artist's impression of Pate's new refectory
