

# TEN DAYS IN THE SADDLE

As I mentioned in last months newsletter I was going to cycle from Lands End to John O Groats, in ten days hoping to cover 1000 miles on my old three speed bicycle here's how it went.....

## Day 1

Penzance-Lands End-Proboscis 60 miles

The ride from Penzance to get to Lands End was quite hilly, before I'd even got to the start I was beginning to wonder whether I had made a wise decision using the 3 speed when I had a £1000 27 speed mountain bike sitting in the shed.

The chances of me making a wise decision are pretty slim so decided to forget about gears and when I couldn't turn the pedals anymore get off and push (which I did a lot in the first couple of days).



The weather was good and it felt great to finally be starting the trip after a fair bit of planning. I was 'wild camping' for this trip and never having done it before was a bit apprehensive that I wouldn't find anywhere to pitch the tent. I found a little clearing in a small wood just off the A390, bit noisy but it was cheap!

## Day 2

Proboscis-Tiverton 100 miles

Very hilly going today lots of getting off and walking wondering why I had brought so much gear with me.

Stopped for a cup of tea and a Pasty at a little

shop at Minions which was great. Camped beside the Grand Western Canal. The weather was still good and this was starting to feel like a holiday! looking forward to being in Wales tomorrow.

## Day 3

Tiverton-Monmouth 105 miles

Had a great start to the day with a bacon sarnie and a cup of tea on the way out of Bridgewater. The roads had started to flatten and on the quicker roads it really felt like I was motoring! The morning was a bit wet but got to Western Super Mare as it started to dry out. Did a bit of people watching on the beach and grabbed a coffee from Maccy D's before heading off towards Bristol. I wanted to go across the Clifton Suspension Bridge as I'd heard the views were fantastic, it was a bit out of the way from the original route but I'm glad I went that way the weather was clear and you could see for miles. It's a long way up! Apparently it's a popular spot for jumping off if you want to end it all. The Samaritans have their phone number on boards on the Bridge, I didn't feel the need to phone them yet but wrote the number down just in case!



Managed to get a bit lost through Bristol ending up in a massive shopping complex on the outskirts of the town. Took the opportunity to grab a Maccy D's, seem to be thinking about food most of the time now. From there it was over the Severn Road

Bridge into Wales along the A466, a fantastic descent on a bicycle lots of fast sweeping bends. As I came up to Tintern Abbey a couple of dirt bikes pulled out of the carpark and wheeled up the road both of their numberplates had apparently fallen off. Stopped to take in the scenery and met a guy on a fully loaded Mountain bike total weight 85kg! he had started off in Germany ridden across France into England down to Lands End and was on his way to John O Groats. Made my bike look like a featherweight racer.

### **Day 4**

Monmouth - Somewhere near Chester 100 miles  
After a bit of a wet and sleepless night I really wanted to pile on the miles as the going was fairly flat but a broken spoke and a puncture put a stop to that. Met a couple of fellas doing the End to End (as those in the know call it) the other way both on lightweight racers being followed by a nice camper-van. A good way to do it but I wonder what the fuel bill is for the van? Found a nice little wood to camp in but the heavens opened just as I was about put up the tent and have dinner, another wet night ahead.

### **Day 5**

Somewhere near Chester - Kendal 100 miles  
Pretty wet morning mainly flat roads. Stopped in a transport cafe for a big boys fry up read about the rioting in London in the paper. One day seemed to be much the same as another now not much sight-seeing to do just cycle - food - cycle - food - camp. One puncture today and the hub started making funny noises when freewheeling, that was probably the only thing I couldn't fix if it went wrong kept fiddling with the cable adjustment and it seemed to sort it. Weather dried up a bit in the afternoon but was now riding into a strong headwind. Camped behind an old telecom building the sun came out and had quite a pleasant evening.

### **Day 6**

Kendal - Just past Dumfries 100 miles  
Riding into the wind all day mainly sunny though so stayed dry. Riding into Scotland through Gretna and heading west the country side got more remote found a nice forest to camp in was quite a pleasant evening. I think the wind I had been riding

into was the the start of a weather front which arrived during the night very heavy rain and strong winds kept me awake all night. Packed the tent away soaking wet.

### **Day 7**

Just past Dumfries - Claonaig 80 miles  
Rain Rain and more Rain and a lot of headwind just for good measure! Got the ferry from Ardrossan to Arran which was to be hopefully one of the nicest parts of the ride. I could see the potential of Arran lovely coastline to ride along but the weather wasn't helping much going across the island through a valley I thought I might get blown off the bike the wind was so strong. Getting on the ferry back to the mainland I asked the steward if there was anywhere to get some food when we docked. No was the simple answer I'd need to ride another 14 miles to find food. I tried to make the next town but riding into the wind and rain was too much I needed to find somewhere to camp and would make do with what food I was carrying. Knowing that my tent was soaked I past a big house with a for sale sign outside, no cars on the drive and the place looked empty. I had a look around looking for a shed or gazebo to shelter I checked the double garage and found it open. I set up the tent in there and managed to dry it out using old newspapers and found a portable gas fire which warmed the place up. I was lucky there I would had a right miserable old night in a field!

### **Day 8**

Claonaig - Fort William 100 miles  
packed up my gear all nice and dry now still raining and did wonder whether to stay in the garage until the weather improved. Rode into the town I couldn't make the night before and had a full breakfast. Decided to carry on and the weather started to improve over the day. As the weather got better I started to enjoy the riding again some big climbs but not as steep as Cornwall and lovely long sweeping descents. Still lots of evidence of the recent storms with a few flooded roads to ride through, I ignored one detour and ducked under the tape the water was two feet deep on one road for about a mile. I passed an artie that had been blown off the road at one point.



Rode some lovely canal paths had Fish and Chips in Oban (Haddock, Cod doesn't seem to be on the menu in Scotland) finally made it in to Fort William and treated myself to a Curry and a couple of beers!

## Day 9

Fort William - Alness 100 miles

Camped beside the Calendonian Canal and awoke to thousands of Midges which was my first experience of them!

They must have got into my eyes as they started to puff up even writing about them I'm starting to itch all over, awful things. Today's riding was mostly along the Great Glen Way a mix of canal towpath and off road cycle path all good fun and very scenic, not sure how a lightweight racer would cope with the off road bits and surprised I didn't get another puncture or break a spoke. Good off road descents nearly overcooked it going into some of the turns. One of the best days so far.

## Day 10

Alness - John O Groats 130 miles

After a wet night I wasn't going to ride all the way to John O Groats today but I hoped stop at Thurso Fire Station and ride to JOG the following day. Some of the places I rode through were really stunning riding alongside Loch Naver was the most beautiful part of the whole trip. A place I would like to visit again. I got to Thurso at about 3:30pm and found the Fire Station was retained and no one there. After Fish and Chips I decided to carry on to JOG and finish in the 10 days as originally planned, it would mean a long day in the saddle but the weather wasn't too bad, a bit windy and short showers along the north coast. I made it to

John O Groats around 6:30pm I sent a text to let friends know I'd finished and got a reply from one saying that his uncle lived in Wick after a couple of calls it was agreed that I could stay there the night after a 20 mile ride I had a nice hot shower, a shave, couple of beers and slept in a comfy bed!



Would I do it again? Yes but not on my own and I'd travel lighter on a lighter, geared racing/touring bike. Travelling lighter means sorting out accommodation beforehand either Fire Stations or Hostels (whatever's cheap!) using the shortest route over 7 days equate to around 130 miles/day. Next year late May could be good for me anyone feel like joining me?

Plenty of time to prepare!

Cheers Steve.

One of the reasons for making the trip was to raise some money for the Rainbow Trust a charity which helps families with terminally ill children. At the time of writing this I think I have raised around £700. I had set a target of £1000 so still have some way to go. I know some of you have donated and thank you very much, if you haven't and would like to please do it via my just giving page at:  
<http://www.justgiving.com/followtherainbow>  
 Donating is easy by card or paypal and if you are a UK tax payer then the charity gets more money from the inland revenue.