

Here is an account of our trip from Land's End to John O'Groats

15 days in June 2008 - AKA – 3 blokes to John O'Groats

The players – DR, DA, RK (Me)

The bikes – DR – Kona mountain bike, DA – Claud Butler Dalesman, RK – Dawes Super Galaxy.

Accommodation – DR and RK endeavoured to camp whenever possible. The good thing about this is the cost saving. The bad points are having to carry a tent, sleeping bag, cooker, kettle etc (which I would dearly have loved to ditch on several occasions during the trip). DA opted for B&B's and Youth Hostels.

13 June 2008 – the trip down to LE.

We managed to squeeze 3 bikes, all the kit and ourselves into a Vauxhall Zafira and sped off down the A303 to LE. An uneventful trip down, arriving in Sennen at 6pm. Reassembled bikes and cycled down to LE to register, got photos done and rode back to a restaurant for tea. Pasta and a bottle of red.

The weather was sunny and around 17degrees.

The B&B Treave Barns, was very nice and the owner made us very welcome.



14 June 2008

The biggest breakfast I had eaten in years (with a side helping of dog hair).

We set off at 08:30 towards Penzance and then took the B3280 to Redruth, then the A390 to Truro, arriving at 1pm and having lunch. Although rain threatened we managed to avoid the showers.

After lunch we continued along the A390 to St Austell where DA took out a couple of road cones, fought with road signage and narrowly avoided rear ending a parked car (such was his determination to get up a hill).

We got lots of positive toots from passing motorists.

Arrived at Penhale campsite at 3.30pm. Avery good, basic site. Tea was campsite cooked fresh tuna steaks, more penne and another cheeky red.

DA went off to Golant YH.
Mileage 61.

15 June 2008

Up at 5.15am, packed away tents. Breakfast was 2 tins of beans each. Yuk. Met DA at 8am and set off at 8.30.

Steep climbs along A390 and stopped at Liskeard for a bite. Met local cyclist who advised us much worse to come (quote "your arses will be hanging out by the time you get to Exeter" He wasn't wrong!!!!).

Passed another couple of LEJOGers, one pulling a trailer.

Big climb out of Gunnislake. DA making his mark as king of the mountains. Entered Dartmoor via Tavistock on B3357 and quickie started using 24 inch gear. Stopped at top of hill, opposite Broadmoor. Fantastic scenery. Bonk rations called into play. Took to B3212 via Moretonhampstead to Exeter, achieving speeds in excess of 40mph. DR lost a pannier – could have been worse – only going slow at the time.

Found Exeter YH thanks to Google maps arriving at 7pm (all in YH as no campsites near enough).

Tea in local befeater. Saw trailer boys from pub window at 9.40pm – they were still cycling. Wether – 17degrees again and overcast / sunny. No rain.

Mileage – 73.

16 June 2008

Breakfast in YH was very good. Bikes were secure and I would certainly recommend the place. DA has developed a wind problem. So bad, in fact, that both DR and myself avoid cycling behind him.

Leaving Exeter at 9am on the B3181, we headed for Cullompton and then picked up the A38 to Wellington.

On the Devon/Somerset Borders, met 4 young lads on 2 tandems doing LEJOG – we kept bumping into (or should that be being passed by) these lads all the way up to Lancashire.

Lunch in the sunshine in Taunton – quick stop at LBS for more magic power and pressed on to Bridgwater.



Arranged to meet a workmate (Chris) around Somerton area. Chris then guided us to Cheddar via lovely flat back roads. Our only delay was caused by a herd of cows on the road. I got the yellow jersey today for 2 reasons – 1 it was flat, 2 no way was I cycling behind DA. Arrived at campsite at 4pm. DA went on to local YH. Broadway campsite in Cheddar sticks in my mind for two reasons only. The site staff are rude and they tried to fleece us for £20 each (for a 1 man touring tent). Haggled and got it reduced to £20 for the pair of us.

Chris picked us up in his car at 5.30 and gave us a guided tour of Cheddar, a couple of pints in the local and a food stop.



Mileage – 70

Weather – fantastic – sunny and warm.

17 June 2008

Having experimented with Breakfasts and trying to avoid porridge, both of us settled on Alpen. Half a box each.

We left the campsite at 8.30, Chris having met up with DA and cycled up to us. Chris then rode with us along the strawberry way – an old disused railway line. Lovely and flat. Rode on towards the Avonmouth Bridge on M5, where Chris said his goodbyes and turned for home.

We cycled along the A403 towards the old severn bridge, arriving in Chepstow at 1pm. Chips for lunch. BIG mistake. I suffered low energy levels for most of the afternoon. That said, it was a fantastic ride on the A466 along the Wye valley to Monmouth. At Monmouth we (I) had a slight navigational error. We wanted to stay on the A466 but ended up on the A40. A very busy road.



We turned off at the first chance and made our way to A466 via backroads, encountering some steep hills.

Arrived at Cuckoos next campsite at 6.30pm. All knackered. Campsite was a bit grotty, and the shower block area listed heavily.

Tandem boys at the same site.

Weather – sunny but with a headwind.

18 June 2008

Left campsite at 8.15, following more Alpen. Rode up A4110/ B4385 / A488 in the rain towards Shrewsbury. DR and DA went off like rockets. Subsequently lost them in Shrewsbury so I pushed on alone.

Stopped for a breather on A49 and met up with DR / DA. Pushed on to Whitchurch. Arrived in B&B 5 miles north of Whitchurch at 4.45pm. DR and RK hijacked DA's B&B on account of rain. Splendid accom. Got driven to local pub for tea. Scenery was brilliant again today.

Mileage – 79.

19 June 2008

Another big breakfast.

Left around 8.30am and a few miles of country lanes led us back onto the A49. Ploughed on to Warrington. Got passed by tandem boys. Got through Warrington, enjoyed a nice lunch in Wigan and headed towards Preston. DA battling well with the traffic, DR and RK taking a more sedate, less suicidal approach to the congestion. After Preston we picked up the A6 to Garstang.

Found a really nice campsite in Cabus, just north of Garstang – Claylands – very clean, cheap and all the facilities you could want. DA also got a B&B on same site.

Tandem boys also here.

At this point we had not done our usual evening shop. We didn't fancy going back into town. The campsite shop had beans, spam, bacon and rice pud.

We swapped a tin of beans for a tin of tomatoes with the tandem boys parents.

And so DR & DA were introduced to "trainsmash" - mixed up bacon, toms, spam and beans – added special ingredients of garlic pepper and had rice pud for afters. Lovely. Not. A few beers and watched footie in bar. Very nice evening.



Weather – Sunny / cloudy – warm.

Mileage - 74

20 June 2008

Scheduled day off. Said our goodbyes to tandem boys. Noticed they got on their bikes and rode off. Parents broke camp, did washing up etc. Nice. Took bus to Blackpool, arriving at 11am. Back on bus by 1pm. Enough time to get more gas bottles and DA has new hoodie with matching specks. Enough said.

Spent an enjoyable afternoon in Garstang drinking coffee in the sunshine and watching the world go by.

Campsite cooked chicken chasseur for tea.

Mileage – 0.

21 June 2008

Met up with DA at 8am. DA has a flat. Left campsite at 8.30. Arrived in Kendal at 11.30. The rain started. Then it got heavier and heavier. We pushed onto Shap. Got the obligatory pictures taken of Shap summit in the pouring rain.

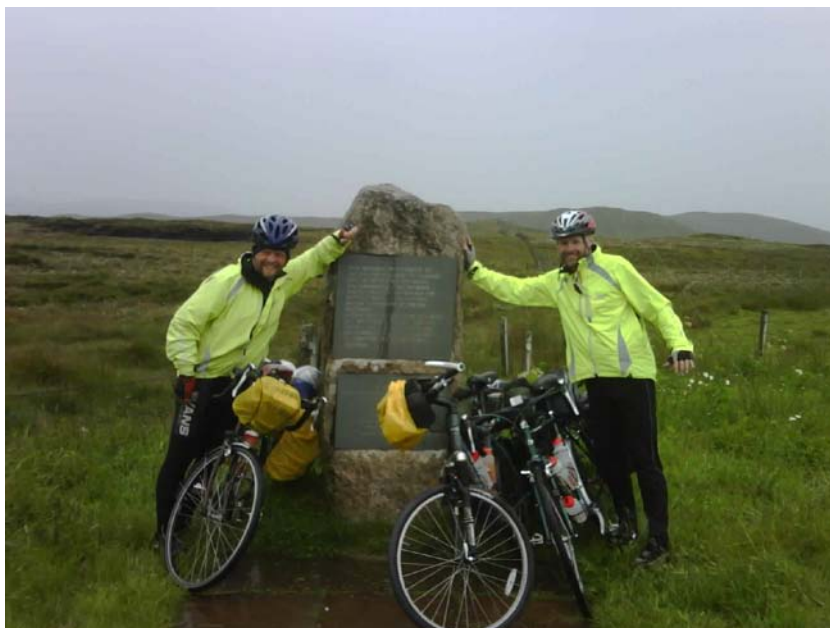
The climb itself was not problem. We had not been looking forward to this day because of it. But we stood at the top wondering what all the fuss was about, thinking “was that it”?

Arrived in Shap at 1pm in pouring rain. Booked into the Greyhound Hotel.

Played pool etc until tea time. Watched other bedraggled walkers and cyclists arrive.

Weather – pants.

Mileage – 52



22 June 2008

Left Shap at 9.10 in terrible weather conditions. Very strong SW winds and driving rain. Subsequently flew through Penrith and Carlisle and entered Scotland at Gretna around 1pm. Met boys with trailer from day 2. Then we picked up a nice side/head wind which slowed us down a bit.

Made Dumfries by 3.30pm (now nicknamed plumpfries on account of the vast amount of stretched denim wrapped around fat bottoms).

A Tesco stop and KFC for tea.

Made some calls for campsites – one wanted £17.50 each. Few more calls and 10 miles west of Dumfries (tough going) found us in Barnsouls campsite on A75. An excellent site. We were offered a wooden wigwam for £20. Heating, lights, kettle, toaster etc. Bargain.



Got washing done. Also got my first puncture. Rain still chucking down outside. DR has managed to find a telly and is watching footie. Big push to Lochranza tomorrow. Last ferry to Arran is 6pm Looks like a tough day.

Weather – as above.

Mileage – 72

23 June 2008

Left campsite at 7.20am following big bowl of Alpen.

Met DA 3.5 miles down road on A75 20 mins later. Pressed on down A712 and A713

Postmistress gave us a bag of fudge when we stopped to get log books stamped.

Arrived in Ayr via moors road which was a lot of up and down but a great ride, nonetheless.

Lunch at Irvine Tesco, followed by a balls out dash to Ardrossan. Arrived at 3.45pm and caught the 4.15pm ferry to Brodick on the Isle of Arran, arriving 55 mins later. Beautiful scenery.



We followed the coastal road around to Sannox which was lovely and flat. A stag ran across the road in front of us. What a place. After Sannox the road went inland and up a steep climb on tired legs.

We pitched up at the campsite (the only campsite) and applied mozzly spray to avoid being eaten alive. Mozzly spray not very effective and the midges swarmed around us. Very irritating.

Tea was at the onsite restaurant and we then rode in to town for a couple of beers. The wind dropped, the sun shone and it was a very pleasant evening.

We arrived at the campsite at 6.30pm.

We were all very pleased with our progress – Dumfries to Lochranza in 10 or so hours.

Weather – Sunny – slight headwind.

Mileage – 92

24 June 2008

Left campsite at 7.20 and met DA 20mins. Rode 1 mile to ferry and caught the 8.15 to Claonaig. A local on the ferry enquired about our ride and gave us £50 for our charities. Excellent.

We had not had the opportunity to shop the night before. Therefore breakfast consisted of maltloaf, flapjack and bananas.

25 mins later we landed in Claonaig. Windy, raining, bleak, desolate. A phone box and a bus shelter. Nothing else.

Having had no breakfast, spirits are running low.

Rode 15 miles to Tarbert and breakfast. Got our book stamped in the local post office. More donations.

Pressed on up the A83 to Lochgilphead and stopped for lunch. Coffee and donuts. More hills, more stunning scenery, more midges. Also some fantastic, seat of pants, downhill. 40mph is no longer a worry.

We arrived in Oban at 4.45pm, quick Tesco stop and found a nice campsite (RoseHill) just outside Oban.

Chicken and pasta for tea. A few beers and some peanuts. Living it up tonight. As soon as tents went up, it rained. Hard. Fortunately Rosehill has a covered eating / cooking area. It also has nice showers and washing area.

In bed by 9pm – still chucking it down.

Weather – overcast – sun came out on occasion.

Mileage – 63.

25 June 2008

Last night it rained. All night. It didn't stop in the morning. Subsequently, all gear was dragged into covered eating area and then packed away. Great start to the day!

Left campsite at 7.40 and met up with DA at 8am. Rode out of Oban in the rain along the A85.

Roads are, understandably, busy but no real hill. The scenery was, again, out of this world.

On rare occasions, the sun came out. If you stopped cycling you became midge bait.

We pressed on down the A828 then A82. (We had been advised not to use the A82 but a combination of bad weather and escalating cost of fuel meant that the road was not too busy and certainly rideable).

We arrived in Fort William at 1am. Drenched. Lunched, got tyres checked in LBS. It started raining hard before lunch. Now the roads are becoming rivers. The summit of Ben Nevis is obscured by cloud. You can't look up anyway as it is raining so hard.

We arrived in Spean Bridge and again, hijacked DA's B&B booking, due to the weather.

Our host at the Inverour guest house washed and dried all our kit. Bikes locked away in garage. Very nice.

Tea in local hotel and back to watch footie.

From DA's room you can now see summit of Ben Nevis.

Mileage – 63

Weather. Yuk.

26 June 2008

Following a good breakfast, we left the Guest house at 9.35am. DR has bad guts. 10 miles in, DA gets a puncture. A large piece of glass has penetrated through tyre.. Fixed it. 5 miles later it went again. We decided that a new tyre would be best. No bike shops in Fort Augustus, so, following lunch of coffee and donuts we took an unscheduled detour to Inverness. Also met 40 + LEJOGERS on a supported run. I'm very envious of the lightweight bikes.

Due to strong tailwinds and no hills, we sped along the A82 – DR doing really well as he has bad guts and DA on a half inflated tyre. The things I have to do, just to keep up with them!

We flew along the A82 alongside Loch Ness and made Inverness by 4pm. Found bike shop, got new tubes and tyre and headed off to Evanton. Met a nice young lady on the Kessock bridge who warned us against using the A9. Very busy. We thanked her for the advice, waited till she was out of site and pressed on. Up the A9.

Made campsite around 6pm, following a food shop. Supported LEJOGERS in same site. Chap in tent next to ours told us the tandem lads had passed through a few days earlier.

All in same site – DA in bunkhouse, DR, RK camping. Blackrock campsite is very well run, reasonably priced and clean.

Tea was trainsmash (beans, toms, bacon and corned beef and pasta)

Watched footie.

Bed – the midges are out.

Weather – sunny and warm.

Mileage – 73

27 June 2008

Left campsite at 08:30 following another bucketful of Alpen.

Rode up the B9176 to Bonar Bridge. Good views from Struie Hills.

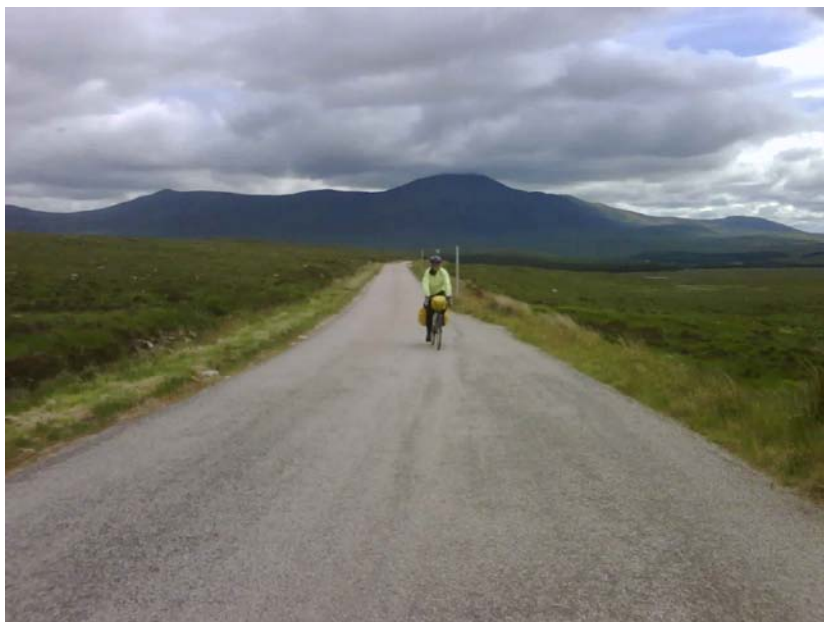
Pressed on to Bonar Bridge. A good downhill followed by a few steady hills on A836.

Stopped in Lairg for lunch. Found a great little restaurant – Crofters. Nice people and good food.

After Lairg, the A836 becomes single track. Very much out in the middle of nowhere. Desolate.

Having said that, we came across a pub! The Crask inn. Stopped for coffee. Met more LEJOGers.

We pressed on with lots more hills in front of us, passing through Altnaharra mid afternoon.



Scenery is now very rugged, especially around the Kyle of Tongue.

We B&B'd at Weavers, just outside tongue. A very welcoming host, nice rooms and great views over Tongue bay. Takeaway for tea. Pizzas, curry and plonk.



Weather – sunny / overcast.

Mileage – 69

28 June 2008

Yet another good breakfast – when asked do you want A full fried breakfast, cereal, or toast, I replied “yes please. The lot”.

We left Tongue at 9am in drizzle. The weather got worse as we approached Bettyhill. More heavy rain with the tops of the roads we were climbing obscured by mist. More rain. Lunch in Thurso at 1am. We pressed on. Destination very close now.

The roads flattened out after Thurso and we made steady progress to JOG, arriving at 4pm in the rain.

We took photos, quick call home and left.

Boys with trailer arrived the same time as us.

Seaview Hotel OK. Few beers, located car. Loaded car, set alarm for 5am.





Job done.

Weather – Rain / windy.

Mileage – 62

29 June 2008

Up at 5am, left JOG by 6am. 6 hours later, still in Scotland. Some bad weather on M6 but made good progress.

Dropped DA and DR off in St Albans around 5.45 and got home around 20 mins later.

Mileage – 700.

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A brief rundown of the route – LE > St Austell> Exeter> Cheddar> Hereford> Whitchurch> Garstang> Shap> Dumfries> Lochranza (Arran)> Oban> Spean Bridge> Evanton> Tongue> JOG

Would I do it again? How does tomorrow sound?

I had a party a few days after I got home and my wife had ordered a cake!:



(my 4 year old daughter looks impressed!!!!).

Plans for 2012 – LE > JOG> Baldock (North Herts)