

# Keith's Solo End to End for Doncaster's Civic Charity June 2005

05 June	Travel to Land's End
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4th June - I took the 7:52 Virgin Voyager from Doncaster to Penzance. Long journey, nearly thrown off train for blocking drivers exit with my bike. Pointed out to train manager that my bike had been there since Doncaster as per my reservation and that it was luggage piled against the bike that was blocking the exit. He threw another cyclist off instead! Stayed at Land's End Youth Hostel.

05 June	Lands End to Tintagel	69.93 miles	5h.23mins	12.8 mph
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Traditional rainy start. Note the lack of signs on the signpost. Photographer's notice said open from approximately 10:00 am. He'd never get away with it in Doncaster. I decided that he probably wouldn't bother, as it was raining hard so I asked a lady to do the honours. Her husband was walking to John O'Groats and she had just waved him off.



Rained all day with a thick sea mist at Tintagel Youth Hostel, which is on the cliff tops. Met Andy and Bob from Cardiff who were cycling to John O'Groats and Dave their support driver. I would meet them again later in the trip. Also John, a psychology student who was walking it and suffering with blisters. No point going out with the weather, so everyone stayed in and we had a great time. Lots of other people there including two Australian women so lots of banter.



06 June	Tintagel to Barnstaple	52.18 miles	4h.47 mins	10.8 mph
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Set off for Barnstaple in the sea mist. Rode through Boscastle and saw all the rebuilding work after the floods last summer. It was strange to recognise the place from the TV pictures. They have certainly achieved a lot in 9 months. Had to push the bike up a 1 in 4 hill to get out of Boscastle.



07 June	Barnstaple to Bath	111.31 miles	12h.36 mins	10.4 mph
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Set off at 6:00 am because I knew I was in for a hard day. Wall to wall sunshine all day. Hurrah for Factor 50.

My bottom bracket bearings started to crunch on Exmoor but luckily there was a good bike shop in Minehead that repaired it straight away for me. This was to be my only problem with the bike.

Cheddar Gorge was interesting; The Police closed the road so a man could come down the hill on an upright Hoover! Apparently they were filming a commercial for the Inland Revenue to be screened this autumn?

111 miles and 12 hours 36 minutes on the bike left me ready for a shower, food and bed. Unfortunately I had the worst nights sleep ever at Bath Youth Hostel with the loudest snoring ever from the bunk below. I had to wake him up in the end but the relief was short lived. I had about 3 hours sleep I reckon.



I was receiving and sending loads of texts each day and this was a great help, particularly on the really difficult days like today.

08 June	Bath to Leominster	76.31 miles	6h.40 mins	11.4 mph
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A pleasant fast ride through Bristol, over the Severn Bridge into Wales then up the Wye Valley and back into England. The big hills are behind me at last. Leominster is a nice little town and the Youth Hostel Manager was very pleasant and helpful. Met an 18 year old who was riding to John O'Groats averaging 100 miles per day. When he saw me washing my cycling gear he said he hadn't thought of that, so he must have been pretty smelly by John O'Groats.



09 June	Leominster to Stone	64.77 miles	5h.33 mins	11.6 mph
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My bottom is starting to really hurt after about the first 10 miles today and I signed my texts "Sore butt biker" for the next few days. Expected to cover 76 miles today but it was only 64 so a nice bonus. The AA route finder must have gone via the motorway!



10 June	Stone to Manchester	53.05 miles	4h.36 mins	11.4 mph
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Up and away early to get to Manchester to meet my wife Jo and a day off tomorrow will hopefully cure the sore bottom. Stopped off at the Boddington Arms near Wilmslow for a pint and had to wait for it to open. A bad sign? I used the cycle path under the runway at Manchester Airport and called in at a very special place.



It was lovely to see Jo again and we had two lovely nights out in Manchester. We stayed at the Travelodge in central Manchester. No need to get up early tomorrow - luxury.

12 June	Manchester to Kendal	74.01 miles	6h.23 mins	11.5 mph
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Up and away from Manchester early, heading for Kendal. A bit drizzly in the morning but nice and sunny when I stopped for a pint just outside Lancaster. When I got back on the road the heavens opened and water turned the road into a river. I arrived in Kendal very cold and wet. This was to be the story for the next three days - lovely!

The Youth Hostel in Kendal is a nice place and I met two cyclists travelling from John O'Groats to Land's End who gave me some information about my route. I also had a couple of chats with a Londoner who was walking the Cumbrian Way. He told me that he had cycled across America last year taking 3 months, camping mainly. Sounds like an idea for the future!



13 June	Kendal to Dumfries	75.31 miles	6h.26 mins	11.6 mph
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The ride out of Kendal involves a legendary climb to Shap Summit, which keeps going up and up and up to 316 metres. I had a bit of banter with a Land's End to John O'Groats walker striding up there in the rain, with a flag flying from his rucksack, as I slowly passed him using my granny gears. I managed to keep riding to the top and I didn't think it was as bad as it's reputation. I reached over 30 mph going down the other side though. When I reached Gretna Green and turned west towards Dumfries, there was a head wind which made the last 23 miles hard work, but at least it had stopped raining by then.



14 June	Dumfries to Glasgow	83.47 miles	6h.44 mins	12.3 mph
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A long day. When I had reached 50 miles and it was still raining I stopped at a pub in Cumnock and had a pint and sent a few texts. There were 4 old guys in there and I got the impression they met there every day. It could have been a

mafia meeting with one character obviously in charge. He asked me where I was going and I told them I was heading for Glasgow. They said it was 50 miles but it was actually 36 and then they spent the rest of the time I was there arguing about which route I should take. They were even arguing about whether I could go on the motorway. They were still shouting at each other when I left. They're probably still there now.



15 June	Glasgow to Fort William	101.1 miles	8h.07 mins	12.4 mph
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In good conditions, today would have been the highlight of my trip. Out of Glasgow at 6:30 and along the shore of Loch Lomond, I managed to get about 20 miles before the rain started. It continued for the next 80 miles over Rannoch Moor and into the Scottish Highlands, over Glencoe pass and down to Fort William. I have ridden all day in rain before, but this was the first time it got into my panniers. Fortunately most things were wrapped in plastic bags and stayed dry. When I stopped at a hotel in Glencoe, I couldn't stop shivering. I put a fleece on under my jacket and warmed up a bit during the last 15 miles to Fort William. I stayed at a Back Packers hostel, which was overlooked by Ben Nevis and was very casual with friendly staff. I went out for an evening meal and some shopping. Fort William was very nice.



16 June	Fort William to Inverness	64.79 miles	5h.31 mins	11.7 mph
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A thoroughly enjoyable day. I used B roads most of the way to Inverness, taking a single-track road along the southeastern side of Loch Ness. An occasional burst of sunshine was very welcome after the last 4 days. I thought a car driver was shouting abuse at me at one point, but it turned out to be "Hello Keith". It was Dave who I met at Land's End and Tintagel Youth Hostels, supporting Bob and Andy.

The southeastern side of Loch Ness involves some impossible climbs so I had to take to pushing power and it took me over an hour to travel 5 miles. The scenery was absolutely breathtaking though, with huge mountains all around. After that the road was undulating following the edge

of Loch Ness. I had my lunch overlooking the Loch and there were some interesting ripples but no sign of Nessie.



17 June	Inverness to Helmsdale	71.36 miles	5h.48 mins	12.2 mph
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A fairly uneventful ride over Moray Firth, Dornoch Firth and Cromarty Firth, until Bob caught up with me about 3 miles from Helmsdale. Dave was waiting in Helmsdale and we had about an hour before the Youth Hostel opened. A friend, Paul, had joined them at Windermere and ridden through Scotland with them. A very nice Warden called Maddy ran the Youth Hostel, making us very welcome and advising where the best pub was. There was another cyclist riding from John O'Groats to Land's end for the third time, and an older man travelling to the Islands to see relatives. We all went to the pub and had a great night.



18 June	Helmsdale to John O'Groats	55.19 miles	4h.28 mins	12.2mph
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The final day with only 55 miles to go. Bob, Andy and Paul intended to put the bikes on Dave's car and leave for Cardiff as soon as they had finished the ride and taken some photos, so they were up early and away for 8:00am. I was staying at John O'Groats Youth Hostel after my ride, so there was no point rushing today.

I got away about 9:15am and set off up the first of 3 huge hills, seeing a few other cyclists on the way. With about 10 miles to go Dave passed me in his car going towards John O'Groats, which I thought was strange, as I expected

them to be on the way home by then. When I arrived at John O'Groats there was Dave, but no sign of Bob, Andy or Paul as they had all broken down. Dave had picked them all up, taken them to a bike shop in Wick and then taken them back to complete the ride.

When I rode into John O'Groats there was a man on a picnic bench taking photos of me - all I could see was this big camera and I thought he must think I'm someone else, as I cycled past. When he stood up I realised it was my Dad! I'd been texting him at home all morning and he was here all the time. I couldn't believe it, my 70 odd year old Dad had borrowed a tent, jumped in the car and driven over 500 miles, camping on the way, to see me finish my ride. I was so proud that he'd done that and I felt very emotional.

I was really pleased I had managed to finish the ride. I would recommend it as an adventure for anyone, providing you have a decent bike and can train up to a level where you can comfortably manage a 60-mile ride.

I met some nice people and had lots of laughs along the way. I'm sure I'll do it again if I can get my pass signed, but I think I will take longer next time so I have a bit more time to look round some of the places I passed through.

Over two and a half weeks I lost 5 pounds in weight but this is up to 7 pounds now, as the extra muscle starts to disappear.

The bike suffered only one problem - when I had the bottom bracket bearings replaced in Minehead and I didn't have any punctures.



9 June	John O'Groats to Carbisdale Castle	100.35 miles	9h.21 mins	10.6 mph
20 June	Carbisdale Castle to Inverness	46.39 miles	4h.43 mins	9.7 mph

Over the next two days I rode back to Inverness to get a train home because it is quite difficult to get a bike on a train from Thurso or Wick and I had read of people having to wait days.

The first day was just over a 100 miles into a head wind, but the scenery was stunning and Carbisdale Castle, which is a Youth Hostel, is well worth a visit.

The second day was much shorter but again with lovely scenery and I saw some seals in Cromarty Firth.





