

LE-home-JOG-home - An unusual End-to-End

A few people have asked me to write up my LEJOG as it was rather different to all others, being actually an 'end to middle times two'. So stand by to be bored out of your skull.



The total route sweeps out a large 'S' shape up England and Scotland and is now public at <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=206887558355428599234.00048cae7b865ed95e9ed&z=5> It's an awful long link but GoogleMaps own search is famously dysfunctional.

It came about when I started to explore the options of getting to and from the start and finish points and found I was faced with long train journeys at high cost, and no certainty of service.

Day 1: After lunch rode 4 miles to EM Airport, bagged up bike etc. and by 5pm I was in Newquay. Cost inc. bike £31 -thanks BmiBaby. Then trashed my bike bag & just a ride to Truro for train to Penzance, or so I thought along with everyone else waiting over 2 hours for a train that could only go at 20mph in reverse. What did I say about certainty of service? I like Penzance YH but it's damned hard to find in the pitch dark -thanks Great Western Trains, not. 20 miles.



Day 2: Lovely fresh sunny day and 14 hilly miles later texting and photo time at Lands End, pleasantries exchanged with 3 guys setting off sans mudguards, their bags in a van.

Cycle Route NCN3 gains Mousehole by an easy road compared to the A30 until the final astonishing descent into this unmissable picture village. Stopped in Newlyn to buy more sun lotion as the airport security took my first bottle. Picture the scene, "Confiscating that Sir, it's a 150ml bottle and you're only allowed 100ml" Me, "But it's a clear bottle and you can see it's only half full as I'm saving weight" Security, "No matter, it's the bottle size that counts" Me, thinks, I'll bring a completely empty bottle next time and see if you confiscate that. But I held my tongue as airport security don't have a sense of humour, do they Tony.

Pressing on eastward by a beachside cycle path past St Michaels Mount to Golsithney then minor roads through Godolphin Cross and Stithians, then chanced upon a cute old tramway from Devoran to Penpool on the north shore of the Carrick Roads. Then on the Trelissick ferry to rejoin NCN3, a forking route here but I liked it, and reached Boswinger YH and shared a massive brick of ice cream with a mother and daughter from Holland, it just will not keep till next day in your pannier!
76 miles.

Day 3: Another sunny day and soon down in Mevagissey, brightly coloured boats on mirror glass harbour water under an azure blue sky. Then I spent 5 hours in the Lost Gardens of Heligan 2 miles further on NCN3, early for a rest day but unmissable. The 'Jungle' does exactly what it says on the tin. Slightly annoyed though that as a cyclist, needing a locker, the visit cost me more than the motorists and yet I was saving them a parking space!

Hard gradients and heavy teatime traffic through St Austell, but with the bonus of a Morrisons cafe for evening meal before arriving at Golant YH. Climbing up through Tywardreath I had to feel sympathy for the Dutch mother, last nights ice cream didn't smooth out the hills and they spent all day doing the same as me but without the Gardens or the Eden Project. She looked whacked, poor thing.
24 miles.

Day 4: Drizzle. Down to Fowey for the Bodinnick ferry and then climb and lose it, climb and lose it, again and again as I was taking in Polperro picture village, despite having seen it before. Very uncomfortable humidity, in waterproofs, through Looe to Plymouth, where it fined up. Starting to get concerned about making Exeter as it was already gone 1pm, and then I went in Morrisons for a nice lunch but slow service meant I was still in Plymouth at 2:15pm! From this point most E2E routes would go over Dartmoor but I was settled on the longer flatter quiet southerly route through Avonwick and Totnes to Newton Abbot. Fortunately I had a tailwind, helping so much I couldn't give it up, and let it push me right over east to Teignmouth where the sea forced me to grind north up through Dawlish and made the Exeter YH in time for a diy dinner at 8pm.
90 miles.

Day 5: A fine bright day, on the M5 adjacent old roads meant peace and quiet all the way to Taunton then west of Glastonbury through the Somerset Levels, Polden Hills and Wedmore into Cheddar. Struck me what a nice time cyclists living in Glastonbury area must have on such a dense patchwork of minor roads. CTC listed B&B 'Constantine' here was only slightly more, even inc a tip, than the YH, which had a school party in, so of course men in bulging Lycra are not allowed near them.
66 miles.

Day 6: Passed by last nights Fish & Chip restaurant, recommended, can't remember its name but has a kind of Georgian window appearance, just before starting up the gorge. Dull weather but just right for climbing the gorge, which let's face it, is easy. Well I do like a good climb, and at 9am it was pretty much car-free. Breaking out on top from the Cheddar Gorge onto the Mendip Hills gave me that feeling you get when you go up through the trapdoor into the loft. I mean you are thinking

to yourself 'look at all this open space up here'. Plus I found I had a tailwind again, which like the open loft door behind you felt quite fresh. Unfortunately the increased speed made me miss a turn and blew me up the west side of Chew Valley Lake when I was supposed to be heading for Bath. "What the hell am I doing in Chew Stoke" is probably the first ever utterance by any End to Ender!

Struck east for Chelwood and into Bath on a lovely minor Marksbury to Twerton road. I should say that I was using for all except Cornwall the Philips 2010 Motorists map at 4.2 miles to the inch, recommended by the CTC, and found in the Coalville Poundshop! But route finding with this scale needs a bit of luck some times, and coming out of Bath it wasn't with me as I spotted a cycle-route sign in the thick of traffic, seemed to be right direction, so took it. Really, I think a golden rule for End to Ending is do not take any cycle routes. By all means avoid the main roads, I did a lot of that, but stick to actual roads, which have a reasonable probability of going somewhere useful! By the time I realised the air was getting thin there was no way to get over the A46 and in the right direction again. Maybe the altitude had to be gained anyway, through Swainswick up to Cold Ashton, but the Romans didn't start the Foss Way up there. I got on it at Wraxall, but then it was great. Quiet, straight, smooth and with a dense tree covered stretch that was so dark I was reaching to light up when my chain came off on a grade, and like a holed Bismarck I was going over, firmly clipped in. Oh, please don't let me land on my bad knee I was thinking, when I suddenly realised I was in such a deep cutting I could just put out my hand to the bank and break my fall.

The ghosts of the Roman Centurions were probably laughing but bike and I were fine.

Carried on rest of the day Malmesbury-Cricklade-Bibury-Farmington-Bourton on the Water and into Stow on the Wold with a nearly flat tyre. Well it looked alright glancing down as I went along so I thought my frame had actually cracked, causing the jelly sensation. It would have been the fault of serious pothole hit at high speed dropping down to Chew. So, half the day done on a soft tyre. Thought it was a tough day.
91 miles.

Day 7: Thanks to the cooperation of the hostel manager had the comfort of the laundry room to fix the puncture and set off on the first home run straight up the A road through Moreton in Marsh and along the Fosse Way right past Leamington Spa and Coventry into Hinckley. What a fantastic long straight route this is, ticking off a large chunk of the country in a jiffy. Took tea and cake in the little Hinckley museum and was home for a late lunch just after 2pm. Could hardly believe it.
69 miles.

The next two days were spent at home pending setting off for Birmingham Airport to start the northern half.

Feeling somewhat shabby in a stained and creased up cycle jersey-the washing machine broke down the previous day and boiled everything-I was nevertheless intrigued to be boarding a 78 seater twin prop de Havilland Bombardier Dash 8 having never been on a propjet since childhood, and boy what a climb rate it had! Just an hour and a half later was collecting my Moulton in its bag at the Inverness Baggage Claim, with Richard Dawkins no less standing nearby, perhaps he lives there.

The approach to Inverness has its own appeal as there is no mistaking Loch Ness out the window as the plane lines up. So there was just a short bus ride then to Inverness YH, who do not do evening meals, so it was-you guessed it-Morrisons for tea! If you haven't noticed, I had switched bikes from my 700c Trek, so the next hour or so was spent assembling the Moulton and breathing a sigh of relief as it survived another flight without a scratch in a soft holdall.

Thanks FlyBe, and only £50 the ticket as no bike surcharge.

A point to mention here is that FlyBe also go all the way to Wick, but I fancied the Highland train journey and First Scotrail are very inexpensive off peak. It did afford lovely views the next day, and the curiously built Helmsdale Station, crafted out of rough tree limbs, is being preserved by a guy from Lancashire single handedly. One day soon he plans to open it for overnight stays which will ensure its survival. On talking to 3 other End to Enders on the train, heading for a JoG start, they were baffled by my news that I was half way through mine. Having explained the plan one commented "Cool, why didn't we think of that?" which rather made my day.

Took lunch at Thurso then steady ride to JoG YH taking in Dunnet Head, and keeping pace with the cruise-liner Sea Princess making a coast hugging voyage through the Pentland Firth for the benefit of the passengers.

27 miles.



Day 1(north): Not much to see or do at JoG, which gives an anti climax-something missing, kind of feeling when you have killed enough time to feel justified in setting off. Some people who end actually at JoG report an exhilaration, well good for them. Perhaps it needs a Morrisons. (only joking)

All of the route south through Wick and Lybster is quiet and easily graded with good sea views. The history of Lybsters fishing industry is worth a stop to read. Hard to believe there were 3200 herring workers there in 1850 and holds the world record of all time for barrels cured in a day. Read about it on transportheritage.com page 10.

From all the tales about the dreaded A9 from here on, I was in a 'here it comes brace yourself' frame of mind. But really it wasn't bad traffic and the road is plenty wide enough most of the time. Apart from the serious climb out of Berriedale you can make a fair enough speed not to annoy patient drivers unduly. If you have your walking shoes on the Badbea Clearance Village is worth a look. Then checked into Helmsdale YH, though there is a variety of accommodation in this small town. 60 miles.

Day 2n: Treated to a sunny start, which had been missing virtually since Exeter. But, the dreaded midge struck before I could even get going. They really liked the fresh meat in shorts in the hostel garden. The dilemma was, for me and two others in the same predicament, to find and apply the repellent or quickly load bags and get going down the hill as they can't get you over 12mph. With legs and forehead getting blacker by the second I started applying the roll-on over the creatures which brought some relief but what a mess. 200 metres from the hostel garden I was clear of trouble. If this was a taste of what might come in the Great Glen I'll be glad of the midge net hat. Turned out I never had another attack.

From Brora to Golspie the A9 is not wide enough for lorries and cars to pass you so you need your speed legs on here. Dunrobin Castle is a gem but I've seen it before so no guilty feelings about riding straight by. Quite a lot of the remaining A9 had a metre of tarmac refuge strip from here on so no worries. Tain made a nice break and a chance to call the Nigg ferry to check it was operating,

but no answer. 50 metres off the A9 turn I found, luckily, a pathetic cardboard sign 'ferry broken down'. So in disgust more A9 was taken to Alness, but rueful of missing the quiet Invergordon byroad turn. 3 miles of quiet road to then rejoin the A9 for 2 miles to the Cromarty Bridge. Now this last bit to the Dingwall offshoot really is dangerous. I saw maybe 150 vehicles held up behind slow End to Enders coming the other way, a recipe for trouble. There is a tiny back road between Alness and Dingwall-pls find it!

Note Highway Code Rule 169: Do not hold up a long queue of traffic, especially if you are driving a large or slow-moving vehicle. Check your mirrors frequently, and if necessary, pull in where it is safe and let traffic pass.

I don't recall being on a road at any time all the way from Dingwall to Inverness city centre. It's all cycle-route so long as you spot the start of more cycle-route to the city just after crossing the thundering Moray Firth Bridge. Inverness YH and Morrisons again.
75 miles.

Day 3n: Continental breakfast demolished and still hungry I felt unprepared for climbing roads south of Loch Ness. A bowl of porridge isn't an unreasonable expectation in the land of Scots surely. From Dores to Errogie is about 470metres of climbing and quite tough, but the view from the top is rewarding. You can also impress the astonished motorists at the viewpoint "You climbed this hill on your bike?" "Yes, but it was easier than Cornwall, which I did last week on the way here."

A long interlude of peaceful fairly level road ensued, the Stratherrick. It has no town or village hardly but a series of intermittent settlements in delightful locations. I noticed a few artists and craftspeople had realised they had found a tranquil paradise and set up their studios. Gorthleck has a small community and I heard TaeKwondo being taught in the hall. A Tesco's delivery van came past, so it is not that remote, it must be a nice place to live. The War Memorial shows evidence of the near total destruction of its male population, perhaps the area never recovered.

All height then lost in a blinding descent into Fort Augustus and picked up the A82 to Bridge of Oich, a very early suspension bridge by James Dredge (not Judge Dread) in 1854 -worth a close inspection, and Laggan Lochs by Telford, then at the Commando Memorial turned down the Gairloch road to follow the canal in sunny peace and quiet and a yacht for company. The tow-path itself looked rideable. Fort William to Glencoe YH finished the days riding.
89 miles.

Day 4n: All the hostels until Glencoe had been good or at least ok. I haven't got a good word for Glencoe. The rooms were stiflingly hot yet open windows let in the midges. The kitchen was positively a hazard, as boiling pans were being carried past your elbows as others jostled in the other direction. It is also the only hostel where I paid £4.50 for another semi-satisfying continental breakfast but was then expected to wash and clear up my own pots. Never mind, it was a warm sunny day and perfect for seeing Rannoch Moor at its best. The Black Mount and blue sky was fully reflected in the clear waters of Loch nah Achlaise, and the purple heather carpeting the foreground.

The whole day was spent on the A82 but it was not that busy and Loch Lomond has a cycle trail most of its length. Loch Lomond YH reached in good time for exploring this fantastic old building and a civilised sit reading the news in the drawing room with view over the loch. Then into the dining room for haggis, neeps, and tatties to start followed by lamb kofta with garlic yoghurt sauce etc. Not cheap and a somewhat small portion for carb loading, but very civilised. The wallpaper was 'yer actual cloth' if it gives you an idea of the standard of this baronial retreat.
66 miles.

Day 5n: Pretty much all E2E routes include some unpleasant city or conurbation riding; now Glasgow loomed. South through Renton, Dunbarton and north bank of the Clyde to Yoker was all easy enough though in light traffic. At this point a little toy ferry can be used to get over to Renfrew for about £1.60 and is preferable to the Erskine Bridge. You don't need to worry about the official rule of exact change and timetable, just wave to the ferryman if he is on the other bank and over he comes. It is treated as a joke by the locals (Geeya cam on thaa daaf lil ferry?) but I enjoyed it. You might remember the crossing on the BBC news as they tried an amphibious bus, but it went wrong at the first attempt. The ferryman said, now if they had asked us before they tried it we would have told them that when the river is low the concrete ramp starts with a sharp corner not a slope, and you would have saved £14000 pounds of damage to your bus.

At this point a gps let alone a detailed map would have been welcome. The roads go every which way and following my preprinted BikeRouteToaster sheet was quite tricky. Eventually I decided I was off even that and carried on by compass. Crossed the M8 on a footbridge and found myself on a cycle route by pure luck for a while and then made Barrhead. I think at this point the 5 degree magnetic compass deviation was enough to lead me down the Neilston road when I wanted Newton Mearns. So having got there I carried on through Fulwood and Stewarton, a hilly road but pleasant. More End to Enders coming the other way again, one with both knees in bandages.

Across to Galston, south through Auchinleck, and main road to Sanquhar B&B finished the day. 74 miles.

Day 6n: The Sanquhar folk must like their takeaways as there is plenty of choice and I was well stuffed last night by a huge chinese. Hey, don't start making up your own Larry Grayson jokes. B&Bs and hotels were also in plentiful supply. The A76 down Nithsdale is great for quick progress and has its own quiet charm so I had no need to take a non main road route, though there are plenty. Dumfries soon appeared and from there lanes to Bankhead on the estuary and the Duncan Savings Bank Museum to call in at. Enquired where do I pay the entrance fee and he replied "no charge it's funded by Lloyds Bank". "Oh, can I also see my name on the shareholders register then?" "No, and since you've lost 80% on them we owe you a free entry" True enough.

So, viewed the exhibits -ten bob notes, five pound notes the size of an A5 sheet, thrupenny bits, Pooh Bear savings boxes etc. Quipped to the attendant 'Do you know you can get four planets for a penny?' What? 'Yes, four far things make a penny' Groan.

On through Gretna and into Carlisle, early, not even 4pm and already checked into the YH which is the seasonal, university hall of residence, scheme. So had my own en suite room. 65 miles.

Day7n: You would think a little place like Penrith would be easy to get through. I think the secret for non-car travellers is to get off and walk the pedestrianised area so that you can pick up the right road the other side of the shops. Following the road signs means you are heading for the Lake District whether you want it or not. Also the cycle-route motto is best followed here, if you see one saying to Appleby in Westmorland ignore it as it goes Alston direction -north east!! Good Cliburn-Drybeck-Kirkby Stephen lanes soon dispelled feelings of frustration though and the steady climb up Mallerstang in fresh sunshine made Hawes appear almost too soon. Checked in the YH and walked down the street for Yorkshire fish and chips, can't be beaten. That evening was pandemonium with teenagers in the common room so went to bed early, to find all the hiking guys, some ex-miners, in there of similar mind and a long discussion ensued setting the world to rights. You don't realise it when you are living through momentous times that history is being made, and the miners strike was historical to the max. And those who lived without any wages for a year rightly view the quick bailing out of a failed banking industry with a mixture of schadenfreude, disgust, and indignation.

We will never know now what structural changes to society might have ensued had the banks been allowed to go down. I digress, well as an ex-draughtsman I am used to going off on a tangent.
63 miles.

Day 8n: Fortified by a proper cooked breakfast the drizzle seemed nevertheless a portent of much worse to come. I was lucky, all day, it never materialised. So far done the whole tour without the proper rain cape being donned. Wensleydale-Masham-Risplith-Harrogate-Leeds was all done in sunshine with a max speed for the tour reached on descent after Kirkby Malzeard, 42mph, and slightly worrying at the bottom as I shot past an unloaded bike rider that suddenly lost all momentum while my Moulton had about 500kJ left!

Why Leeds? Well, duty to my mothers grave. And what flowers did I put on? Cyclamen of course, what else! On through Rothwell and Wakefield to Woolley Edge services for last night in a Travelodge. Just got in the room, very comfortable, when the rain started, perfect timing.
82 miles.

Day9n: No pain no gain, is what they say, and this last day of the second home run was all pain. I was due for it. Barnsley-Rotherham-Thurcroft-Clowne-Sutton in Ashfield-Ilkeston was all headwind on hilly and very rough roads, even with the suspension of a Moulton, traffic of the white van variety and even a bit of rain. 'Let's not go there' is a phrase that should be taken literally where this route is concerned.
80 miles.

Wake up at the back! Hope I entertained you a bit, and given you an idea of how the E2E logistics can be done in an easy hassle free and inexpensive way. OK, it's not a continuous E2E but both halves meet at your front door, and the miles are the same. Would I do the E2E again? Being quite honest, no, I was just ticking it off the list of tours. Do I regret doing it, no, not a bit.