

End-to-End – John ‘O’ Groats to Land’s End

Sponsored Cycle Ride by Dr Roy Lodge : 19 June – 2 July 2011



After a year or more in serious physical and mental preparation; in choosing the route, planning overnight accommodation, assembling all clothing and equipment, the day had arrived for Gina and I to set off for John ‘O’ Groats to begin our journey south to the most south-westerly tip of the English mainland.

We left Stratford-upon-Avon on Sunday 19 June at 12 noon, aiming for a B & B overnight stop just north of Glasgow (Crieff) before continuing the following day to John ‘O’ Groats for my ride to begin.

I was fully prepared for any mechanical problem I might encounter with my bike such as a punctures, worn brakes, broken spokes etc. but not for what was to befall us just as we were approaching Glasgow when the front inside suspension of our car severed. Were it not for the AA and the hire of a courtesy car for 3 days which enabled us to continue to John ‘O’ Groats while our car was being repaired in Falkirk the whole epic journey would have been aborted.

Our daily routine would be bed at 9 p.m. – up at 5.30 a.m. and on the road at 7a.m.

The discipline had to last for 13 consecutive days. Our overnight accommodation en route in Youth Hostels and B & Bs had been pre booked so the onus was on us to keep to this tight schedule. How I managed to motivate myself with the prospect of cycling on average 70 miles each day and sometimes starting off in torrential rain is now beyond me. My wife Gina did not exactly relish the ought of following me in the car each day but was there to give me the support I needed.

Well wishers at the outset were concerned for our safety on the roads particularly mine on the bike. They had every reason to be so. The A9 in Scotland and the A30 in the West country particularly are no place for a cyclist who values his life and sanity. My route consisted of the A9, A73, A7, A6, A49, A38 and A30 with the occasional B road. These are fast and direct. They are also smelly, noisy and dangerous. The road brigade says, at on major roads you can expect some ‘near misses’. This was my experience especially negotiating with traffic on roundabouts. The cycle lanes on the arterial roads offer some safety and security but one can still feel intimidated by the proximity and speed of traffic which is frightening. In some areas the cycle lanes are not always continuous and often covered with surface grit. I did however survive the journey without a puncture!

The National Cycle Network wasn’t built for End-to-Enders with its meanderings and loops. Occasionally some of the off road sections are a little tough for a fully laden tourist bike, and once in a while, a Sustrans route can be difficult to follow. Travelling from John ‘O’ Groats to Land’s End is a constant trade off between speed and the need to progress, often best

achieved on flattish main roads with traffic: unpleasant at best, dangerous at worst and choosing a route which is enjoyable, safe but slower.

For the whole journey I found my mind focused entirely on the traffic, avoiding pot holes, uneven drains and grit, with a constant awareness of how vulnerable you are.

Occasionally one could take in the fantastic scenic views weather permitting. After torrential and light rain and fierce side winds on the opening days, the weather was generally benign. the journey included some very remote and inhospitable areas particularly the summit of Shap Fell in Cumbria just before Kendal.

In terms of gradients, hills and summits I soon realised at it is a psychological myth in thinking at travelling North to South is down hill! At times every muscle in my body was straining, sweat stinging in my eyes, breathing more an I ever have - I had to draw on hidden reserves of energy and shovels of grit. You are the engine of your machine at requires finding a rhythm at suits you. The 'End to End' is one of cycling's ultimate tests – I was determined to pedal every mile without having to get off the bike and walk. After 89.5 hours in the saddle, averaging 69 miles each day – covering 900 miles the pain was excruciating at times . . . and the greatest challenge of my life.

Support came from my wife Gina ahead of me in the car providing refreshment, support and encouragement – our mobile phones kept us in constant contact with one another especially rough the city conurbations. She can be forgiven for making one or two inexplicable decisions which left me without her support – basically she got lost! Overall she was my inspiration and strength, I cannot thank her enough – we achieved our aim together and shares in my success.



As you float into the State House Hotel at Land's End and receive the congratulations, the sense of achievement is terrific. You've done it, the 'End to End', 'Caithness to Cornwall', 'The Great British Bike Ride, John 'O' Groats to Land's End, the ultimate cycle ride in Britain and the dream of cyclists since the invention of the penny-faring. You then have to ask yourself Why do it? For fun, for a challenge, out of interest, escaping the rigours of the modern world or for a charity. Well, although having competed at international level in athletics many years ago and still retaining a degree of fitness, at the age of 73 I would not be doing it for fun, or personal enjoyment or even as a challenge so much as for raising money for a charity. So it has been an honour and privilege to use what competitive strength, determination and grit I still have to raise funds out

of sponsorship for the worthy cause of Parkinson's UK as part of the current Mayor's charity fund raising. I am grateful to friends, contacts and local businesses for their sponsorship.

My final advice would be at if you are thinking of doing anything like this yourself, do not wait until you are in your 70's! The achievement is satisfaction enough, there is joy and relief. But I am glad it's all over. There is, however, something about e rolling rhythm of cycling which is irresistible.

J O G L E : Dr R Lodge, MBE
- riding for Parkinson's UK in 2011

Day	Date	From - To	Est. Miles	Act. Miles
Day 1	Monday 20 June	JOG – Helmsdale	50	55
Day 2	Tuesday 21 June	Helmsdale – Inverness	75	68
Day 3	Wednesday 22 June	Inverness – Pitlochry	80	86
Day 4	Thursday 23 June	Pitlochry – Douglas	80	114
Day 5	Friday 24 June	Douglas – Longtown	75	66
Day 6	Saturday 25 June	Longtown – Kendall	55	56
Day 7	Sunday 26 June	Kendall – Warrington	70	82
Day 8	Monday 27 June	Warrington – Leominster	90	95
Day 9	Tuesday 28 June	Leominster – Chepstow	40	48
Day 10	Wednesday 29 June	Chepstow – Cheddar	45	40
Day 11	Thursday 30 June	Cheddar – Exeter	50	62
Day 12	Friday 1 July	Exeter – Bodmin	60	65
Day 13	Saturday 2 July	Bodmin – Land's End	60	60
Totals			830	897

Average mileage per day = 69
Average speed = 10 miles per hour
In the saddle = 89.5 hours.