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A 20 Year End to End in 14 Days

or

A 14 Day End to End in 20 Years

Started August 1981 - Finished August 2001

by Tony Wallis

Beginning My Attempt To Cycle Lands End to John o' Groats - 1981

Purchased Peugeot cycle April 1981

1st August 1981.

First stage. Took my Wife and Son by car to Leeds to stay with my In-laws.

2nd August 1981 Day 1

Weather Sunny

Up to an English breakfast cooked by Sandra. John took me to Leeds station. Fare single to Penzance £28.40.

Left Leeds. Rolling hills--- lots of open cast mining, slag heaps and a general air of sad industrial decay, with scrap yards in abundance. Through Derby and the countryside rather flat, somewhat like Sussex.

Birmingham --- noted that the wind was in the North and hoped very much that it would soon change.

Bristol Parkway and a little later another ambition was achieved when the train went down the river at Exeter and along the promenade at Teignmouth --- just as it was on the old B.R posters. Passed the red cliffs of Devon, a pleasant ride but oh! So hilly.!!! Arrived Penzance and glad to see that the wind was now Southwest force two. Unfortunately The railway line has to skirt around Dartmoor, it would have been nice to have seen the moors from the train.

Rode to Lands end and I have a photo to prove that I did start from the right spot. Met up with a couple of lads about to do the same trip, but after chatting for a while, realised that they were going to take several weeks, I planned to do it in six possibly seven days. Regretfully left them and pressed on. After a meal at a transport café started the ride. A30. a very good road for biking, with a 3-foot wide cycle track of smooth tarmac. Arrived Bodmin. Chose a "campside" on the embankment on by-pass. Awakened by rain - re camped under flyover - nice.

Lands End to Bodmin -57 miles Time taken 5 hours

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3rd August 1981 Day 2

Weather rain to fine. Wind southwest, force 1 - 2. Slept till 9.00.

Launceston 22.0 miles Soaked right through on Dartmoor, so stopped at café for cuppa. Okehampton and stopped for an hour for steak lunch. Sun out now. Via B3215, A3027 and A371 to Crediton (39.0) Continued on A3027 with very steep hill near the junction to Bickleigh. Seemed twice as high as (my local Ditchling Beacon), but not even shown on any map. Very windy at the top of the hill. Tiverton (12) and through on to A373 and A38. Now becoming very hot and the long open roads a little demoralising as the "A" roads keep crossing and recrossing the M5 where the traffic is flying along.

Wellington (15) and now rapidly loosing time and energy approaching Taunton (4) so struggled along the A358 and at Crowcombe after a deviation of ten miles and found a YHA Hostel which did bed & breakfast for £4.20. Had a meal of stew etc and a good nights sleep. (On looking back at this deviation, a guest house on the main road would have been a better idea), but then I would have missed the ride over the Quantock Hills, which were quite beautiful in the early morning sunlight.

Bodmin to Crowcombe. 103miles Total 160

Deviation 10 miles

Direct route 93 miles Total 150

Time taken 9 hours Total 14

4th August 1981 Day 3

Weather Sunny and warm. Wind w. s. w Force 3.

Deviation of ten miles back to Bridgewater. Direct route route from Taunton to Bridgewater eleven miles. Wind a bit worrying here, as it tended to blow me into the path of heavy goods vehicle traffic. Highbridge (6) On A38 and managed to tuck in behind a tractor and trailer. Not quite fast enough but a lot less hazardous.!!

Axbridge (8) and along hill to Bristol (18) Very hot at the top of hill so stopped at the "Wagon and Horses" for lunch of two cheese and onion rolls and two pints of local Cider. Very refreshing. Gloucester (34) A38 a very good road for biking. Tewkesbury (11) and took a photo of the dreaded weir our canal boat had sunk in the year before.

Out on to the A438 and had a race with another keen biker until I realised that it was in the wrong direction!!!

Great Malvern (13) after a deviation if thirteen miles and stayed at the Malvern Hills YHA hostel. Yet again I can see the stupidity of this deviation. On the main route there are no hills for miles and yet I chose to cycle over the Malverns just to stay at a

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hostel. Two pints at the "Loco" pub to cool off.

Crowcombe to Great Malvern 101 miles Total 261.

Deviation 13 miles

Direct route 88 miles Total 238

Time taken 10 hours Total 24

5th August 1981 Day 4

Weather Rain to sunny. Wind North West.

Left hostel after cleaning mirrors. A great rambling old place, but nothing special. Deviation of at eight miles Worcester. Direct route from Tewkesbury to Worcester 15 miles. Very warm. Down to shorts and shoes only.

Kidderminster (14) on A449. Called at local Peugeot cycle dealer for a small amount of oil for the chain, but he wouldn't give me any, or sell me any? Stopped at filling station and had the dregs out of one of there old cans.

Bridgenorth (14) on A442. Wellington (13)

Hodnet. Up to the top of the village and collapsed on the small green next to some thatched cottages. Had a bar of chocolate, a drink of orange and a long sleep in the very hot afternoon sun.

Whitchurch (22) and then gradual rise to flat roads, very good for biking. A little farther on stopped for a chat with a truck driver where the A41 crosses the Shropshire Union Canal. (My mother and Father had had holiday along this canal earlier this year).

Cardington (20) found picnic area and ate last of food.

After deviation of 20 miles arrived at Sale. Nice to Brother & sister in law.

Great Malvern to Sale 112 miles Total 373

Deviation 13 miles

Direct route 99 miles Total 337.

Time taken 11hours Total 36

6th August 1981 Day 5

Weather Rain-sunny-rain-sunny - very wet.

Good breakfast and stocked up with sandwiches.

Left Chris and Sandra. A lot of trouble getting through Manchester and Bolton. It was a bad mistake going through the city. Wasted a lot of time and energy for very little progress. All signs lead to motorways and then all directional signs stop.

Preston (35) a deviation but as the direct route from Cuddington to Preston is forty I was showing a profit of five miles!! At Chorley bought myself a pair of cycle mitts.

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Garstang (9) had an argument with an Austin 1100 that turned into a filling station and took me with him, new mitts came in handy as I punched dent into the rear panel.

Lancaster (12) and then the scenery changed radically again-to more hills.

Carnforth (7) and made use of a picnic area for lunch near the river Lune. This also marked the start of the dry stonewall area.

Kendal (15) and reached my pre- arranged hostel only to find that it was too early --- so pressed on up the first of the really long, remote, hilly roads, with steep inclines into the valleys.

This was a climb of 1 in 14 for one mile until, in the pouring rain, at Shap (15). Tried six B&Bs without any luck. Now very cold, wet and despondent until I called at what must have been the last place available.

Here a very nice lady showed me a dry shed for the bike, provided a hot bath, supper of chicken, chips and salad, rhubarb and custard and a very comfortable bed, to which I retired after a Scots guest. And all this for £7!!!! It was pouring with rain outside.

Sale to Shap 92 miles Total 465

Deviation plus 5 miles

Direct route 97 miles Total 434

Time taken 13 Hours Total 48

7th August 1981 Day 6

Weather. Rain, then just windy. Wind - Force 3 plus.

Up to a good breakfast.

Penrith (10). Carlisle (18) Via A7 and A74. Shocking road surfaces - no provision at all for cycles, very exposed to all directions of wind. Definitely a bad place to be on a bike. So decided to take North East route through Edinburgh instead. Gretna (8) A6071 and nice to turn on to a quiet road, but not so good really, as I had not planned to go that way. Long slow ride to Canonbie (8) in strong head wind. Langholm (6) Pretty scenery - but stamina very much tested by the hills to climb, but with no final pleasures at the top because the wind was blowing about force 5 - 6 northerly, So it was also a struggle to ride down the other side. Eventually it became a case of ONE STEP FORWARD TWO STEPS BACK. Snoot turnoff (21) the B711 and finally Snoot hostel. (6) A deviation.

Hostel is an old converted schoolhouse. Must be in the category of "simple" at £1.10 per night. Not to be visited twice, not worth going to once. Tatty, old and very basic. Had to sleep on an old straw mattress on the wooden floor.

Snap to Snoot 77miles Total 542

Deviation 6 miles

Direct route 71 miles Total 505

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Time taken 12 hours Total 60

8th August 1981 Day 7

Weather. Cloudy - WIND, North, Force 6 - 7

Awoken early to aroma of horse as about twenty trekkers walked over me. Away on empty stomach as I could not face breakfast there. Deviation of 7 miles to Hawick (9). Direct route from Snoot turn off to Hawick - two miles.

Selkirk (11). On to A708 and A72. Rode along in a pretty valley. Every so often signs of dis - used railway. It must have been a very nice run in the days of steam. Peebles (21) Stopped to buy food. Leadburn (9) Slow ride. Mileage per day becoming very low and with thought of my Family at home my enthusiasm for (more hills and this ferocious wind) waning.

Hillend (8) Sat on the side of the road for quite a while deciding whether to go direct to the forth bridge or to Edinburgh. If only this wind would calm down a bit or go anyway except head on.....When I made it to the city I must have known Id had enough.

Edinburgh (5) and obtained times of the trains to Manchester. Set off for the Forth Bridge but the nearer I got to it the stronger the wind seemed to get (5).

End of 1981 attempt.

Returned to Edinburgh and caught the first train back to Manchester. Met a couple of cyclists on train. Very sad ride to Manchester-----Three days to get here and just a few to get back.

Still I will come back one day and finish it off!

Snoot to Forth Bridge 68miles Total 610

Deviation 7 miles

Direct route 66 miles Total 572

Time taken 8 hours Total 68

Final statistics.

Departed Lands end 1830 on 2nd August 1981

Arrived Forth Bridge 1600 on 8th August 1981

Total time taken 5 days 21hours

Total travelling time 68 hours

Total distance covered with deviations 610 miles

Direct route 571 miles

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Average speed 8.9mph

Average miles per day 103.5

Total training distance 1377 miles

Gear taken

Tools and cycle spares. Spokes

Spoke key

Chain breaker

Tyre

Tube

Puncture repair kit

C/L crank remover

Free-wheel remover

Alan key

Tyre levers

Padlock, key and chain

Adjustable spanner

Front and rear lamps with batteries.

Clothing Three t-shirts

Two pairs of shorts

Windcheater

Waterproof legs

Woollen jumper

Two pairs of socks

Two pairs of pants

Swimsuit

Cycle mitts

Black cycle shoes

Brown slip off sleeves

Miscellaneous Sleeping bag

Bag, long polythene, to sleep in

Camera

Tinted glasses

Nylon money belt

Notebook

Address and phone number book

Money

Chequebook and card

Knife fork and spoon

Two maps

YHA handbook and cards

Penknife

Comb

Towel

Flannel

Soap

Toothpaste

Three handkerchiefs

Watch

Conclusions If journey is tried again, either:

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- 1 Cover as many miles as possible per day.
- 2 Go non-stop, again with back up car.
- 3 Take two or three months and have a sight - seeing tout.
- 4 Two cyclists with basic camping or guesthouses, however, a sleeping bag must be taken in case of bad weather.

Finally, it is most important to plan route thoroughly beforehand in order to avoid:
A Time wasting looking for A roads in the vicinity of motorways etc
B Too much time wasted on deviations to over night stops.

Completion of the End-to-End Cycle Ride (Twenty years later).

Training before ride: I cycle a total of 3 miles to work and back 5 days a week, and did two 30 miles rides (with my musician friends) in the terrain of the Blackpool area..... which is FLAT. Borrowed Falcon cycle off my Brother as the Peugeot had sadly worn out during the twenty year gap. I changed the high double chain ring for a low triple chain set off a mountain bike, and fitted a rear carrier and panniers. Rail ticket bought seven days in advance (do this earlier in the summer as trains are very busy). Blackpool to Wick return, named date going. Open on return £92.50

Thursday 9th August 2001 Day 1 (7) Inc 1981

Met Tony, fellow Fylde Rambler on Blackpool station, (he took photograph).

Connection at Preston 1 Hr late so did not arrive at Edinburgh until 2.30 pm. Light northerly breeze. City very busy got directions for Fourth Bridge on edge of city first heavy rain. Wet weather gear on. On 1st hill on dual carriage way heading for bridge chain dropped off and got jammed in bolt holding rear carrier. Not a good start. Still took wheel off, turned mounting bolt around----job cured. Two miles up road rain stopped. At bridge sun out and now really hot, cars have to pay at the toll but bikes go free. As I have heard this is a really high bridge took photo of boat sailing under (looks like kiddies boating pool now photo developed).

Turned off A9 and got a bit lost around Dunfermline, as they seemed to have made a lot of new roads around a new shopping industrial estate which were not on my map.

My right shoulder is starting to hurt at Kelty (bought Deep heat) to take away pain. B996 is a pretty road that whines down along hill through dense woods with a babbling stream on your left hand side. Unfortunately the A912 is a flat and tedious road to Perth, (sandwiches and drink keep me going).

48 Miles direct - 52 Miles including diversions. (662) Inc 1981

Stayed at Perth Hostel £9.25.

Hostel is old, but clean and warm. Spent a pleasant evening with

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two young schoolteachers from Bristol.
Bought 6 eggs, pack of bacon, bread and milk.

Friday 10th August 2001 - Day 2 (8)

Good sleep, breakfast of the eggs and bacon. On the road for 8.30am, at edge of town got carved up by large tipper truck, in the confusion ended up taking the wrong road.

As it turned out the A94 is quite a pleasant road although it did send me a bit more East than I wanted. Saw old SAXA SALT railway carriage on side of road (like the ones in the old hornby train set I had as a child) at Compar Angus. Turned left for Blaairegowrie. Tourist info are very useful for an idea of terrain and B&Bs between there and Braemar. Bought food etc for this leg of trip as this the only town for approx 35 miles of hilly terrain (Glennshee). Although Spittal of Glennshee had no vacancies, I thought I would try and get that far anyway.

Shoulder causing pain, so applied more Deep heat. The road to Bridge of Callyis fairly flat, between there and Spittal it is gradual climbs and drops so not too difficult, although I did walk up a couple of the very steep ones. Arrived at Spittal at midday, which was quicker than I had expected, so had a light lunch and spoke to the proprietor about the next leg of the journey. He said that before they had straightened out the road it used to be called the "Devils Elbow" and there are pictures on the wall of various different coaches etc going up almost vertical hills.

As it turned out the first two and a half miles is a steady climb, (on either side of the road there are poles which are about six foot high, I suppose they are to help pick out where the road is in the winter in the deep snow) not a good place to be on a pushbike at that time of the year. The final twelve percent climb which seem to go on for yet another few miles...I walked and took time to admire the spectacular views in the afternoon sun shine.

At the summit it is strange to see winches everywhere that are used for pulling up the skiers in the snow, but in the summer sun shine they look very out of place. I dressed in some warmer clothes for the decent, which got me quickly to 50 mph, (I chickened out of any higher speeds in case I fell off). At the Glen Clunie lodge it rained again, this truly is a beautiful valley with a small river running beside the road gradually getting bigger as you approach Braemar.

Arrived 4.00pm very tired. Sun came out so slept out side hostel until it opened. A young enthusiastic couple run this hostel, which is surrounded by trees and only a short walk from the village. £9.25. Chummed up with Martin (from Switzerland) and William (from Glasgow) for a few pints at the local pub.

47 Miles direct - 49inc Diversions.

Total 95.5 - Total 101 (711)
Bought food for tomorrow £8.50

Saturday 11th August 01 - Day 3 (9)

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Left Braemar hostel 8.30, stopped to look at Braemar castle (this is not open until 10.30am) so continued east on the A93 a quiet road through pine forests (Poss Balmorals property). Turned left just before Balmorals, steep climb up the B976. Had to get off and push for about 2 miles, sun shining all morning and great views at the top although strong wind blowing. Steep fast drop down to A939, followed by very abrupt 1 in 5 climb for about half a mile. Short burst of heavy rain. Dropped down into valley, coach went past me and I watched it climb continuously for about 3 miles in front of me, I followed at a different speed - slow. Very steep down to junction of A944 across the river DON. Round to COCK Bridge and strange little Langaff castle, looks like a fortified house. Steep incline past pub, could not pedal in lowest gear almost couldn't even push my loaded bike up this gradient. Pleasing to see that even cars were struggling to get up this bit, several motor homes stopped and had to engage 1st gear to get up it. This hill continued for about three miles up and up to Leaft ski slopes.

Met cyclist in the pouring rain at the top. (He said he had just completed the END-to-END West route with a friend two weeks ago). Very steep drop down and then through low woods and open fields to Tonintoul (1.30pm) YHA is closed at the moment (someone had told me for roof repairs). There is a lot of reasonably priced B&Bs in this little town; there are also a lot of whiskey shops here as well.

To early in the day to stop, so set off up another long steep climb out of the Bridge of Brown. Its very open along this stretch, wouldn't be a good place in a strong head wind (fortunately it was in my favour today). Could just make out Aviemore in the low cloud. Shoulder really aching now (difficult to change gear) more deep heat. Dropped down through woods to Spey bridge, (sign 99 miles back to Perth). A95 very busy so turned on to A939 into Grantown on Spey. Stopped for money at bank (there are not many banks or holes in the wall around here) and food for the rest of the day. A few miles north I spoke to some farmers who said it was all down hill from here to Nairn (Untrue) motorist seemed to not be aware of hills.

Last view behind me of all the mountains I had been over (rather sad to be leaving them) across Dava moor, yet again very exposed. Weather very kind to me as wind pushing me along although it did rain as well. Saw old AA box at junction of A940 & A939, I aimed for Nairn and followed the suggested route of the CTC and approximately half way between the junction and Nairn turned left on minor road.

One hundred yards down this road I came around a corner and found three Deers standing in the road. As they hadn't heard me coming they stood there for long enough for me to appreciate that this was a rare sight, and then they were gone. A little further on I stopped to watch a hawk hovering over a field (it was bigger than a sparrow hawk?). Stopped again at Bridge of Dalsie, this little stone bridge must stand about 40 feet above the un named, dark peat coloured stream that runs under it So peaceful. Rode for about 10 miles and never saw another car; I think I have found "Heaven for cyclists"

At Croy I rang Inverness hostel only to be told that as it was Saturday it was FULL. I suddenly felt very tired and didn't fancy

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sleeping in my survival bag on the side of the road, so started looking for B&B just East of Inverness.

I found a bungalow up a long track owned by a retired Naval commander and his wife, who were very hospitable and after a hot shower and a glass of red wine, I fell into a very deep sleep. £20

95 Miles Total 196 Miles (806)

Sunday 12th August 2001 - Day4 (10)

Set off 10.30 down to A9, went around Inverness as I had had such a peaceful day yesterday I did not fancy going through a town. A9 very busy and cycle way has a very bad surface, but it's safer than the road. Crossed bridge over Moray Firth cycle path is nice along this part although very noisy with all the traffic. So got off and walked across the road to go up minor road. Deceptive hills to Munloch, turned right on A932 to Chanory Point as I have been told that if you get there just as the tide is turning it is possible to see the Dolphins leaping about in the water. It was low tide when I got there, and not a dolphin in sight.

B9160 and then minor roads back to Culbokie where you can cut down the old road to the bridge over the Cromarty Firth again there is no provision for cyclists on this bridge and very busy. Yes you can ride on the pavement when heading north, but there are lumps of bitumen every 3ft, which makes for a very bumpy ride on my 700x20 tyres. I stopped to photograph the seals that Basque in the sunshine out on a mud flat well away from any noise or disturbance.

I turned off at Everton a really quiet road (the old A9) I think. At Alness turned north up B9176 a picturesque road although steep in places but well worth it to avoid the main A9 I would think. As the road whines up one particular hill there is a sign on the side of the road that says "View point" I looked around me and apart from a few trees on a distant hill I was a little confused as what is supposed to be so great. Then I realise this sign is put up for motorists that are doing about 60mph when they go past. Just over the brow of the next hill is this most amazing view, to the East you can see right out up the coast, North east to Benn Donull and North outwards Carbisdale which is where I head after a rapid descent from the view point. Fortunately Carisdale hostel had had a cancellation that day so there was a spare bed for me, (This is not a good place to be sleeping rough at this time of the year the midges would finish you off like some sort of flying piranha). Carbisdale Castle now what a place this is, what ever your doing up this part of the world, you've got to stay here. I found it an absolutely fascinating place and think most who stay feel the same. Stain glass windows, statues, oak panelled stairways, paintings and all in a youth hostel with all the great people you get there.

All this for £14.25 per night including Breakfast.

One spoke has broken in rear wheel, changed with spare. (I think I have brought too much un-necessary gear).

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38.0 Miles - Total 216.0 (844)

Monday 13th August 2001 - Day5 (11)

Weather overcast but dry as I leave YHA, midges biting well, head south approximately 50yds towards railway station then ride down path beside railway track to the railway bridge. A galvanised walkway has been bolted to its side. Story has it that so many walkers and cyclist have walked along the railway line in the past and met the train in the middle that something had to be done before somebody got run down. (its very narrow on the top). This saves you about 6 miles if you are heading north.

Pleasant ride to Lairg there are two grocers shops here, the filling station and a Spar. I say this because this is the last shop you will see before Durness some 60 miles away. Turned left on to A838 then it poured with rain and did so for most of the next 50 miles, which was rather nice in a way. Firstly it seemed to stop the midges from biting me, secondly a helped me realise why there are so many land locked Lochs up here. Met a very pleasant American couple that were on a prearranged hostel cycle type holiday, which meant they didn't have to carry all there, gear with them every day. We had a nice chat, which was good as I only saw 1 other cyclist all day. In fact only about 20 cars in total passed me in 40 miles of road. At Loch More the rain and wind was particular bad, but here the Loch is on my right with a sheer rock face going down into the water. To the left of me was a hill (Which doesn't seem to have a name) with water falls gushing out from every hole in it right down to the road. Unfortunately the rain found a hole in my map holder, and it was getting difficult to read. But other than that I wouldn't have wanted it to be dry. At the foot of Ben Stack I stopped to make sure this yellowy coloured toad (almost the size of my hand), which was sitting in the middle of the road, enjoying the rain found a more safe place to sit. At Laxford Bridge junction of A894 turned right, sign post 119 miles to John o groats. Strange really, different road, different weather. Rain stopped, sun came out and very hot. Heading northeast can see out to sea in places at Rhiconich the road climbs really high .I get off and walk. Met German cyclist riding in opposite direction. About 3 miles along the road I descended on what must the longest hill I think I have ever ridden down; it seemed to go on for miles.

Before arriving at Durness, sea a beautiful light blue colour and crystal clear, sand almost white. Bought food for the evening as I had booked this hostel from Carbisdale the night before.

Durness hostel is made up of two long brown sheds sitting [parallel to each other on the top of the cliff. It is most probably listed as basic but I really liked it. Warm, dry, comfortable and as before a great bunch of people there. PLUS drying room. (There is also an independent hostel in the villiage, which looked fairly new and quite clean. If the YHA is full)

Hostel £7.50

65 Miles - Total 281 (909)

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Tuesday 14th August 2001 - Day 6 (12)

I have wanted to cycle to Cape Wrath lighthouse since reading article in 1984.

Midges biting as soon as I stepped out of bunk house. Up at 6.00 kitchen not open until 7.0 so back to bed. Chicken curry for breakfast.

Down to Durness ferry by 9.00am warm and sunny, Myself and about twenty other people getting bitten by midges until ferry takes 10 of us at a time over to headland, £3.50 and £1.00 for bike. They now operate a mini bus service to take foot passengers along the eleven-mile track to the lighthouse.

I cycled. Later I spoke to one of them at the lighthouse and they said it wasn't very comfortable and possibly better on a bike.

10.30am I set off up the first gradient passed little Fiat 124 on blocks and an old Lada that had seen better days, at the top of the hill a small hollow with rotting Ford Pop in it. Strange little hut painted Black and Cream checks with warning signs about bombing and shooting, followed by a drop down to a wooden Army type bridge. The track then gradually climbs up over the headland, past a grey stone house with all doors and windows blocked up. Approximately 5 miles across the head land I get this beautiful feeling of isolation, knowing that there is definitely no more than twenty people within twenty square miles of me.

The track has a very thin layer of tarmac so you have to concentrate all of the time to avoid any potholes or stones, because the nearest cycle shop is about 80 miles away in Trurso.

The track passes over a high bridge next to another black and cream chequered hut, before dropping down to the lighthouse.

I have read other peoples write ups on the cycle ride and although I said I enjoyed the "rain" yesterday I'm glad it is not raining here as its very exposed and it ended up taking almost all of the day to get to the light house and back, by 4.00 pm. So any longer and I may have missed the boat, and I wouldn't fancy spending a night with the midges.

Fifty yards before ferry jetty I hit a large rock, while coming down a steep gradient and ended up going over the handlebars into a wall. It must be years since I last did that last, and this is not a good place to start. I laid there for quite some while before I realise that I had only a few cuts on my legs and arms.

Back at the hostel met up with three other cyclists, (Aquaman) Neil and Colin (who organises tours for the CTC including End to Ends) I hope I got that right, and an Australian Michael. Neil had a swim in the Snoo caves, then we all went for a drink up at the pub. (GREAT DAY)

Hostel £7.50

22 Miles - Total 310 (931)

Wednesday 15th August 2001 Day 7 (13)

Up at 7.00am Breakfast of sausage and beans, fine rain and midges

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really biting well today. In fact my arms and legs look as if I have got measles from yesterday. Colin and Neil going to Cape Wrath today.

Michael said he would join me for easterly ride. Good ride around Loch Eriboll, even though we did have to stop as there were some shaggy cows with big horns standing in the middle of the road. They wouldn't get out of the way until this car arrived, and even then they wouldn't move until he sounded the horn and shouted at them. So we followed the car through the gap, otherwise we might have still been there now. Climbed hill away from Loch and on the next descent noticed the back wheel was making a strange noise. Initially I thought the mudguard was rubbing on the wheel, and then Michael noticed all the spokes had come loose. I carefully rode for another six miles and walked the last eight to Tongue. Parted company with Michael and got details of a post bus from Tongue YHA. In this part of Scotland there you can travel in the post van, if there is room. For my cycle and I the fare to Thurso was £4.50 (Approx 45 miles).

At Thurso I found a cycle shop (Leisure Activities 0847 65385 No5 Princess St Thurso) that could build me a wheel with s/steel spokes, using my original rear hub for £42 and it would be done in one hour. The cycle shop owner also put me in touch with a violin player(George) who just happens to be playing in The Commercial Hotel later that evening.

This gave me time to check out where there was a hostel (Avoid----- this hostel, it's a dump). Far better to go to bunk house over fish and chip shop in Princess St or the Youth Club down by Thurso swimming pool, I was later told. Reserved a seat on the train from Wick (4.00pm tomorrow to Inverness and then a sleeper to Preston. Fortunately there had been a cancellation). I also managed to find a German couple in a mobile home that were heading in the westerly direction, I told them my story and they said they would take me back to Tongue. So with my new wheel, I was kindly transported back to the Post office in Tongue. To allow me to finish off my journey as planned. Later that evening I returned to Thurso, secured my bike at the hostel and got down to the pub.

I was made welcome by thirteen musicians playing, 8 violins, two bag pipes, one banjo, a mandolin, a guitar and a spare guitar that somebody had been kind enough to bring for me. So after numerous tunes a few songs and several pints of ale. What had earlier that day seemed to be a potential disaster, had turned out to be one of the best days of the whole trip.

70 Miles - Total 390 (1001)
Hostel £9.00 (Dirty?????)

Thursday 16th August 2001 - Day 8 (14)

Weather over cast but no rain.

Up at 7.00am as I couldn't face the hostel any more, the cycle shop had told me to go back the next day to have the wheel re-tightened at 10.0am, but I was a bit worried about missing my train as I still had about 45 miles to go.

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So straight on to the road, stopped in Castle town for gorgeous egg and bacon roll and mug of tea £1.70. Arrived at John O Groats 10.00am. Took a couple of photos next to "THE SIGN". I've sadly heard it said before that John o groats is a bit of an anti climax with its tacky souvenir shop, hotel and cluster of miscellaneous buildings. I rode down to the point. That is much nicer, but this is ... The end..Still there's no point in dwelling on how you had hoped it would end.

So off to Wick, views along A99 not very interesting along here apart from a couple of castle ruins on the coastline. I hope the A9 from Everton to Wick is more interesting than this for the cyclists that choose this direct route, because the north coast A836 is really beautiful. Yet more old cars rotting in a farmyard, just out side Wick (1940s Rover 6).

Arrived rather early for train, so had guided tour around Pulteney whiskey distillery. £2.50, which includes a good shot of there finest single malt.

Had pleasant chat to Jim the stationmaster at Wick.

45 Miles - Total 435 (1046)

Total including 1981 trip =1046 miles.

STARTED RIDE 1981, FINISHED 2001. Total time taken 20Years and 14 days.

The two-carriage train seems to rush along at great speed in comparison to my cycle pace. Chatted to Federica an Italian student, who had a rail ticket to travel anywhere in the UK, she seemed have been everywhere. There are all sorts of ways of travelling some more strenuous than others, I thought.

At Preston I had a two-hour wait for my B/pool connection, so I considered cycling the twenty miles home, but then realised that my feet had started falling to pieces as they had been turning the pedals in wet shoes for the past four days .

Question: Why did the back wheel collapse?

Metal fatigue, Rough ride to Cape Wrath or more likely over weight:

I have now listed everything I took and it weight, as the next time I go on a tour I would like to take a stringed instrument with me to play as well.

Weight ITEM

0zs Clothing

- 6.0 Waterproof shorts
- 6.0 Windcheater jacket
- 4.0 Water proof feet.
- 1.0 Wristwatch
- 17.0 Shorts (Fawn colour)
- 8.0 Zip on legs (for above)
- 9.0 Black T shirt

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8.0 Red T shirt (With Collar)
7.0 White T shirt
2.5 Under Shorts
2.5 Under Shorts
2.5 Under Shorts
16.0 Fleece sweet shirt
48.0 White Trainers (Wet most of the time).
1.5 Pull off socks
1.5 Pull off socks
1.5 Pull off socks
4.0 Cycle gloves
12.0 Crash Hat.
8.0 Day glow short sleeved jacket.
8.0 Casual shorts
0.5 Handkerchief

Bike and equipment.

Bike (Including mud guards)
2 of, Green rear pannier bags
Rear carrier with wire mesh sides
Front carrier

1.0 Front reflector
1.0 Rear reflector
2.0 Red Philips screwdriver.
5.9 Chain breaker
1.5 Small straight screwdriver.
4.0 Orange long nosed pliers
1.0 Cycle repair kit
1.0 Cycle repair kit
1.5 Metal combination spanner
2.0 2off metal tyre levers
0.25 1off plastic tyre lever
1.0 1off Alan key (Handle bar)
8.0 8-inch metal adjustable spanner
1.0 1 inner and outer F/Brake cable
4.0 1 inner and outer R/Brake cable
0.5 1 inner rear derailleur cable
6.5 Front light Inc Batteries & Bracket
3.0 Rear light Inc Batteries & Bracket
1.5 1 Roll of insulating tape
1.5 Rear hub remover (Metal)
2.0 Metal spoke key (Use adjustable spanner instead)
0.5 1 Spare front spoke
0.5 1 Spare rear spoke
5.5 Cycle pump
1.0 Water bottle carrier
37.0 Water bottle Inc 1 litre of water
3.0 Transparent map holder
16.0 Home made steel map holder & Bracket
12.0 Cycle lock & wire
24.0 Sys Cycle lock & wire
4.0 Crank remover
8.0 Fold up tyre

Untitled

0.5 Plastic container
4.0 Spare inner tube
4.0 Spare inner tube
1.5 Handle bar mirror
6.0 Metal toe clips & straps
Miscellaneous

10.0 Survival bag
5.0 Small red towel
3.0 Wash bag
4.0 Flannel (Damp)
0.5 Disp shaver
0.5 Soap (small piece)
1.0 Toothbrush
2.0 Tooth paste (End of tube)
0.5 Comb
10.0 Walkman radio & spare Batts
2.0 Earphone case
56.0 Sleeping bag (Damp)
2.0 Spectacles
5.0 Hard case
0.5 Soft case
2.0 Sunglasses
16.0 My Olympus camera
9.0 Paul's vain camera
0.5 Spare film
1.5 House keys
0.5 Bike keys
0.5 Pen
6.0 3 blue plastic container bags
3.0 Deep heat & Plasters
16.0 Blue front handle bar bag
3.0 Speedo/mileometer
4.0 Notebook
4.0 Sheet music

183 Lbs My un-clad body weight

Conclusions of 2001 ride

Be more careful about what I take with me to reduce weight.

Other written articles I have read all say that they never found it difficult to find B & B, so it is not necessary to take both sleeping and survival bags. (The only time I used the sleeping bag was in Thurso at a pretty grim hostel that I would not have stayed at, if I had had more time to look around).

Make sure I keep my feet dry. The wet weather protection I took for my feet were difficult to put on and designed to be worn with trousers. So they were baggy around my ankles (as I wore shorts all the time), and allowed the rain to run in. Also take a pair very light weight foam polystyrene sandals to wear while shoes are drying out (if they get wet), and to give my feet time to feel some fresh air in the evenings.

Untitled

Buy purpose designed handlebar bag with map holder, to reduce weight.

Spoke key is very heavy, and the adjustable spanner would have done the job just as well.

Only carry spare inner cables.

Tony Wallis

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