

## Day Twenty Blog

Wednesday, 25 August 2010 23:34

40 miles Latheron to John O'Groats

This should have been shorter, but I hoped to take a direct straight line route over the hills and past the Camster Stones, worth a passing visit. Successfully linked up with Alan in Watter for lunch, but then found the continuation of the road was closed, so had to access JOG via Reiss.

Finally met Alan at JOG after a short but demanding day. Have covered 1011 miles and enjoyed nearly all of it.

Much to learn and reflect on, but massive thanks must go to Alan for his unswerving and good-humoured support. Let no one doubt that this was a team effort from first to last.

Expected to feel anti-climax, but in fact feel elated.



## Day Nineteen Blog

Tuesday, 24 August 2010 21:57

44 Miles, Evelix to Laveron.

These two places you've probably never heard of are separated by 44 miles of the A9. We waited for the rain to blow out and I started riding at 11.00 a.m.

Discovered that the North East coast beyond Inverness is really quite beautiful, and Golspie looks a particularly attractive village. Brora Post Office obligingly stamped my end-to-end form and I thought it a very friendly place. We pulled up by the harbour for lunch.

Between these two villages, however, I witnessed an incident of staggering incompetence. A group of three workers in yellow hi-vis gear had stopped the North-bound traffic to fell a tree across the A9. However, they hadn't bothered to stop the South-bound traffic and a woman in a small dark green car drove past the spot exactly as the tree fell - on to the roof of her car! Admittedly it was just the twiggy part of the tree, but it must have given her a hell of a fright and cost more than a paint job.

After Helmsdale, the combination of extreme inclines and drops, plus the squally showers, combined to make my progress, er, challenging. I was glad to reach Laveron and look forward to the last 35 miles or so tomorrow.

## Day Eighteen Blog ADDENDUM

Tuesday, 24 August 2010 21:51

Forgot to mention one of the silliest things I've seen on this ride. Two cyclists closely (and I mean closely) following a support van across the Dornoch Loch bridge in the pouring rain and howling gale, followed by another van with a large home-made sign saying "danger Cyclists" on the back. If the front van had had to put its brakes on, both of the cyclists would have been in the back of it. Insane.

## Day Eighteen Blog

Monday, 23 August 2010 18:15

45 miles, Inverness to Evelix

A grey morning which started well enough cycling over to Dingwall, (there's dead, and there's Dingwall dead), having been seduced by NCN1 and then took the NCN1 back way towards Tain, which is in fact quite good, despite a couple of short, sharp climbs. Lunch stop was about four miles short of Tain and, later, passing the Glenmorangie Distillery, I opted for the shorter route over the bridge over Dornoch Firth, which saves 19 miles on the Sustrans route via Bonar Bridge.

Now, in good weather this is no doubt a scenic route which, although not providing a cycle lane, does in fact have a wide margin behind a single solid line. But by now the weather had turned quite nasty, both wet and windy, so I called it a day at 45 miles at Evelix.

Just 82 miles to go now - still on track to finish on Wednesday!

## Day Seventeen Blog

Saturday, 21 August 2010 18:28

38 Miles, Aviemore to Inverness via NCN7



A short but very tough day with near-gale force winds gusting from the North West. Heavy and dodgy going.

Met Alan for lunch near Slodch Summit (1,328 feet) where he made an irresistible picture. Were passed as we lunched by another crew of four end-to-enders but conversation was impossible in the howling wind. Then a long slog to Inverness, mostly via NCN7 which I only left with a few miles to go.

To all those who follow - DO NOT use A9 for this section - NCN7 is a little longer but far, far safer. Finally made it into Inverness and looking forward to a rest day tomorrow. Cynthia, the parrot's still doing well.

## Day Sixteen Blog

Saturday, 21 August 2010 09:19

71 miles, Dunkeld to Aviemore.

Leaving aside the dreadful Liverpoolian lady guest at Carra Beag, our stay was pleasant in Pitlochry. The story of the nauseating woman in question can be told off-line any time, price one pint. We found the Moulin Hotel which is one of only two outlets for the Moulin Brewery and enjoyed a good dinner followed by teaching bar billiards to an amazed French family. Sign of my misspent youth at the Halfway House, Sevenoaks.

The morning was very wet as I trudged up from Dunkeld back into Pitlochry. At the Golf Company shop, we met Linda and Lynda, the two supervisors who generously donated to the cause (see picture).



Then on to Blair Atholl, still pouring with rain. After lunch at the Blair Atholl Hotel (the other outlet which sells Moulin Brewery beer) the sun came out and I slowly made my way towards the Drumnochter Summit. I joined one Brian MacDonald from Perth, who was going the same way, but was fully laden. He was heading for Fort William (from Perth? in one day? fully laden?) for a relaxing Saturday climbing Ben Nevis (as you do). After several miles of enjoyable company on traffic-free tracks and roads, he insisted that I go ahead and I crossed the Pass at Drumnochter alone into a strong Westerly wind, although the gradient of the climb is in fact quite gentle.

As soon as I crossed the pass, the contrast was immediate and dramatic. The change in direction meant that the wind was now behind me, and I enjoyed what ultimately turned out to be a 30 mile freewheel (I do not exaggerate), mostly down a deserted old A9. The Spey valley opens up in front of you and I stopped at Dalwhinnie Tea Room for a bacon roll and a pot of tea

## Day Fifteen Blog

Thursday, 19 August 2010 19:20

70 miles, Cramond to Dunkeld the slightly pretty way.

I guess every LEJOG produces a really memorable day, and this one was just exceptional. Cycling across the Forth Road Bridge was a spectacular experience and considerably outdid seeing it from a car. The views in Fife and Perthshire are absolutely stunning and it was great to have the time to appreciate them. Terrain was up and down but not too steep, the sun shone most of the day and the wind was mainly South West, coming over my left shoulder.



Followed NCN1 into Inverkeithing and then lost the route, ending up in the backs of Rosyth where a man with a bull terrier, which was eyeing me up for lunch, politely told me that I wasn't in Dunfermline!

Found Alan by the shore of Loch Leven in Kinross where we road tested his new B&Q chairs for a coffee break. Then on to Perth where we found Fergus Clark and Bob Hogg at the Inveralmond Brewery who presented us with a case of beer for the auction - the last pick-up of the run. (That's Fergus in the photograph).

Finally made it into Dunkeld, having had to improvise heavily to avoid the main A9. Enjoyed brilliant tea and scones at Howie's Bistro, (and which was open at a sensible time) and we met Romy, who is in the other photograph.



Drove on the Carra Beag guest house in Pitlochry where we're staying tonight.

## Day Fourteen Blog

Tuesday, 17 August 2010 21:14

50 miles, B6461 junction on A697 to Barnton, Edinburgh.

A tough day, cycling across the Lammermuir Hills into a headwind. Stopped for a banana in Greenlaw but there are no bananas in the village. So, on the Lauder, banana-less and found Alan where we had a coffee at the Flat Cat Gallery.

Climbed over the pass and met Alan again at the roadside at the downside, after which I set off for Edinburgh. Poor self-navigation meant that I found myself at the Mound in busy traffic, but my mission to find Haymarket Station was rewarded with a terrific cycle path all the way out to Barnton. Tomorrow we regroup, visit the brewery and enjoy more of Andrew and Sue's excellent hospitality.

## Day Thirteen Blog

Tuesday, 17 August 2010 11:38

63 miles: Annitsford to a remote junction beyond Coldstream on the A697.

On arrival at the Premier Inn at Annitsford, we met one John Treacy, a Health and Safety consultant, who had just hit the jackpot on the fruit machine. He very kindly donated part of his winnings to the cause and proved to be a real character in conversation.



Really good day after the break. Slightly confusing trying to find the cycle path next to the A1 into Morpeth where I stopped for a quick coffee, after which I started to really get into my stride.

At Longframlington, bought a banana (23p) from the village stores and chatted with the assistant about the ride. Walked across the road to eat my banana when I was approached by Dave Carr, the shop owner, who made a contribution to the cause. Alan later followed up with a photograph following a phone call between us.

We met at Powburn for lunch to find a deserted pub (do they close on Mondays?) but luckily Alan had acquired a couple of huge and messy rolls. Then it was ploughing on up the A697 again to meet at Coldstream. As I crossed the border, I felt a great sense of relief that we had at least made it to Scotland. Believing that the weather forecast was poor for tomorrow, I had hoped to make Greenlaw, but the legs had decided that enough was enough.

Made it to Steve and Alison Taylor's near Duns where we were looked after magnificently. Thanks!



## Day Twelve Blog

Thursday, 12 August 2010 22:07

27 miles, Durham to Annitsford into a North head-wind.

A short ride to allow time to travel back to the Midlands for various events, and reflecting that I could have planned this better by setting off a week later. Hey ho.

Met a blind man in Durham and chatted about his dog and fund-raising, lovely man. Then joined another local for about four miles North of Pity Me (there is such a place).

Had coffee in the awesome Sage Centre, a venue for all types of music which opened as a new build five years ago in Gateshead, overlooking Newcastle on Tyne. Then on through the city (there's no other way really), past St James Park and out via Gosforth to Annitsford, where we will be staying on Sunday night and starting to head for the border on Monday.



Have a nice weekend all and don't forget to long on on Tuesday for Monday's blog.

## Day Eleven Blog

Wednesday, 11 August 2010 22:40

60 miles, Easingwold to Durham.

Firstly, an apology to the Hare and Hounds at Riccall, a few miles South of York, where I had lunch yesterday – the steakwich was superb and the landlady was very pleasant.

Now to today. Hammered up the A19 into Thirsk, where I stopped for a coffee and was accosted by a Dutchman who was cycling back to Hull to get the boat home, having cycled all over the North of Scotland. Minor mutual amusement when he kept on about visiting Birdlington, until I realised that he meant Bridlington!



Then on to a self-devised route through great countryside with excellent views which took me through Yafforth, avoiding Northallerton, and then on to Croft-on-Tees (*picture on left*) for lunch. Then on via Neasham to Sedgefield, where the Durham County Council park cafe shuts at 4.00 p.m. precisely, depriving Alan (and others) of an ice cream whilst the car park was still fairly full. So here we are again, a tourist attraction during the school holidays, shuts up shop when surrounded by customers.

Meanwhile, Alan picked up another case of beer from Durham Brewery.

Finally made it into Durham, where we'll resume tomorrow with the limited objective of crossing the Tyne before heading back to the Midlands for work on Friday and R&P's wedding on Saturday. If the purists think we should keep going regardless, tough.

Thanks also to Gary the Assistant Manager at the Premier Inn, who sorted safe storage for the bike and chipped in £3 to the cause.

## Day Ten Blog

Tuesday, 10 August 2010 21:30

61 miles, including NCN from York to Easingwold. Hannah's B&B was fine - the bedrooms were nice and we set off from Tickhill, me to cycle and Alan to the Railway Museum in York.

Suffered first accident quite early on, toppling over on precipitous and rough track outside Doncaster which claimed to be part of NCN 62. Only a scratch but my gloved hand went straight into dog mess so I wasn't a happy boy. A very kind local resident gave me a couple of antiseptic wipes and I later cleaned up. Not a great start.

However, hit the A19 to Selby and York sooooo boring, but the run in to York on NCN 65 was quite nice. A19 North of York was horribly busy with cars, so I switched back on to NCN which made it 20 miles instead of 13 to Easingwold.

The George Hotel is quite good, and is in fact better than the photograph. Easingwold has a large number of pubs and eateries and looks like a good touring base - it also has an arts centre whose repertoire equates with the Princes Pavilion in Falmouth, I'd say.

Off to Durham tomorrow.

## Day Nine Blog

Monday, 09 August 2010 19:30

56 miles, Tonge to Tickhill. Survived the first puncture of the trip and changed the inner tube at the roadside, something I would never have believed I could do a few months ago.

Alan went to buy some replacement tubes and Mike Hart, of Ultra Sport, of Beeston, very kindly GAVE us three new inner tubes. Once again, amazing generosity from strangers.

Then coffee with Caroline and Shirley at CP Sport HQ in Nottingham, followed by 15 frustrating Sustrans miles to Ravenshead, after which I decided to win ugly and take the A60, to Hannah's Guest House. Lovely double room with 4 poster, big shower,



(Alan's room also very nice) what more can you ask for?

Off now to get something to eat.

## Day Eight Blog

Saturday, 07 August 2010 13:39

64 miles, Stratford-upon-Avon to Tonge, near East Midlands Airport.

Well, I guess Nottingham was always going to be overambitious but thanks to Rob and Graham's pacemaking either side of Coventry, fuelled by Leanne's amazing sandwiches, and spurred on by a vast crowd outside the William Morris Building, including TWO photographers, we made it most of the way. Sorry Sophie's injury prevented her riding, but thanks for the send-off.

Plenty of flattish terrain, the exit North from Coventry along the canal towpath being surprisingly pleasant, and the leafy lanes of West Leicestershire, combined to make this a relatively easy day.

We met Alan at Tonge, close to the A42, and as we were loading the bikes, an Audi swept into the drive of the house outside which we were operating. The lady driver came down the drive and offered a glass of iced water to the thirsty cyclists. Turns out her name is Delia, she's a lecturer at Birmingham, and she fished out of her pocket all the change she had, as a donation, once Alan told her the purpose of the ride. What a lovely lady!

## Webmaster joins the ride

Friday, 06 August 2010 14:39



Rob (*on the right*), the *Cycle End-to-End* webmaster, joined Ian for the first part of today's leg from Stratford-upon-Avon. The duo set off in dull but pleasant conditions, pausing for coffee in Warwick before Rob peeled off just north of Stoneleigh leaving Ian to continue to Coventry for a photo-call at the university and then wend his way towards the East Midlands.



## Day Seven Mini-Blog

Thursday, 05 August 2010 13:19

16 miles, Broadway to Stratford. Just a brief tidying up operation preceded by a visit to Purity Brewery who have donated a stunning 6 cases of beer to the auction.

In position and ready now for Coventry, Nuneaton and the entry into the East Midlands - we \*may\* make Nottingham by tomorrow night, otherwise it'll be on Monday after the weekend break.

## Day Six Blog

Wednesday, 04 August 2010 19:55

40 miles, Malmesbury to Broadway. Had some logistical issues overnight which led to a late start. Heavy showers in the morning, the first serious rain I've encountered on this gig, but I plodded on to Cirencester on the A429/433 which wasn't bad.



Switched then to minor roads and headed due North before stopping on the flat Cotswold top for lunch. Then on into a fairly strong North-Westerly and a series of dips and climbs which slowed me down.

Decided to drop off the tops at Broadway via Snowhill and found that all the cafes shut at 5.00 p.m., so there's a gap in the market for you.

Will cycle in from Broadway tomorrow morning ready to start from Stratford on Friday morning as

planned. Feeling fine - as the Black Knight in Monty Python and the Holy Grail says, I'm not dead yet.

## Day Five Blog

Tuesday, 03 August 2010 22:42

60+ miles to Malmesbury and a much, much better day, apart from the computer still not working hence estimates. Fast run from Walton (near Street) to Leighton on the Shepton Mallet to Frome road where I met up with Alan and Suzannah at the Blindman's Brewery who'd kindly donated a T shirt.

Then on to Bradford-upon-Avon for a very good pub lunch at the Barge Inn, which was excellent and highly recommended. The landlady even gave us sponsorship for the ride. The pub has a garden and a canal-side apron for you to enjoy your meals.

Suzannah and I then cycled up to Yalton Keynell where Alan was waiting with the flask and a lift home for her. I begin to wonder about this - I find pretty girls to ride with, but Alan ends up taking them home - how does that work?

I then pressed on to Malmesbury unaccompanied and was lucky to pull up outside the Bell Hotel, the oldest (and snootiest) Hotel in England, since it had just started to pour down - the only rain I've seen in five days.

Heading for home and a rest day tomorrow, but given the twists and turns of this ride, watch this space.

Will sort some pictures when I get organised at the weekend.

#### Day Four Blog

Tuesday, 03 August 2010 01:48

Day Four, estimated 40 miles to Street. After three tough days, a reaction was inevitable and this wasn't the best day. However, after all the hills of Cornwall and Devon, canalside paths and Sedgemoor byroads were like therapy.

Big thanks to Katy and James for last night in Exeter and to Kath and Ken for putting us up tonight.

Tomorrow we're meeting Suzannah from the 2006 NODA summer school at Frome, so let's hope for a better day.

Still on target to set off from Stratford on Friday morning

#### Day Three Blog

Sunday, 01 August 2010 21:28

Day Three, 53 miles from Bude to Tiverton. Last evening I died and went to heaven in Mogsy's hot tub, followed by a very good dinner at the Bay View Hotel.

This morning, Mogsy and I met at the Bude TIC and set off in high hopes for Holdsworth and Hatherleigh (see picture) However, 9 miles in, Mogsy hit a pothole and burst BOTH tyres on her racing bike. Alan came to the rescue and returned Mogsy to Bude, but somehow resisted the temptation to plunge straight back into the hot tub. Poor Mogsy, she was so disappointed to miss out.

Meanwhile, yours truly soldiered on the Hatherleigh alone and then climbed up to Monkokehampton, Winkleigh, and then to Eggesford Station, all of which involved several sharp climbs. Finally made it into a layby just short of Tiverton, but with only a



freewheel to go down to the town tomorrow.

Now enjoying Katy and James' hospitality in Exeter with an Indian takeaway and a big thank you for use of their washing machine.

## Day Two Blog

Saturday, 31 July 2010 18:10

Day Two 60 miles to Bude. Had a great evening with Mike, Carol and Ian and then this morning the reality that I had to climb back on and do it all again dawned.



A picture taken in Wadebridge with Nicky and Dave Atfield on Saturday before the Camel Trail.

Great to meet Dave and Nicki Atfield in Wadebridge and a big thank you to Dave for riding with me up the exquisite Camel Trail to Wenfordbridge. Dave left me there and all I had to do was climb up to the highest Inn in Cornwall, the Old Inn in St Breward. Then a lot of top work across the Western flank of Bodmin Moor, followed by the descent into Bude. This was an interesting experience since, every time I thought I was coming down, another hill arose to greet me. Anyway, after having got lost in Bude looking for the B&B, I finally found the place and it's lovely. Off now to meet Mogsy, who is riding with me tomorrow.

## Day One Blog

Friday, 30 July 2010 19:16

Day One successfully completed - 53 miles to Fraddon. Good weather which enabled me to appreciate Cornwall, surprisingly not too hilly, and a case of beer from Keltek Brewery thrown in for the upcoming charity auction.