

## END-2-END JOURNAL : John Clemens

Preparation.

I still do not know where, or when the idea for the trip first came to me, but it was probably as I was perusing the Audax website looking at permanent rides, permanents are rides which AUK members organise and issue cards for, the beauty being you can do them at anytime providing you tell the organiser before you start, then gather proof of passage as you go along. There are three options a straight through ride in 4 days 20 hrs, 2 x 200km per day, or 14 x 100km per day, I am getting on a bit so decided that the 7 x 200km option was just about doable.

As with many endurance events planning was a huge part, and I spent many hours on Google maps putting the route together, to conform to the minimum 200k per day format and finish each day at suitable accommodation.

Quite how Steve was dragged in is something else which has eluded my memory, but he remained keen through-out the Winter and strangely!!! Seemed to accept my role as planner.

So by early April the route was approved, B&Bs booked, train tickets acquired, we had an enormous number with three trains from Stafford to Penzance, and three back from Thurso, the bikes requiring two tickets for each stage.

**1 May 2012** I am so nervous, the thought of the physical challenge is bad but, how many cock ups have I made in the logistics???

**2 May 2012** We are on the train all connections are good, the ride from Penzance to St Just YHA dry and sunny, only disappointment of the day no pasties on the pub menu. Couple of pints I am beginning to relax as we return to the hostel for a good nights' kip.

**3 May 2012** Lands End to Crediton

The ride begins, the hostel warden stamps my brevet card, we set off for Lands End with his good wishes ringing in our ears. Steve talks a hotel worker into taking the obligatory photo, and the nitty gritty bit begins.

A word here about navigation, I had written route sheets out Audax style, for each day using a combination of "mapometer" and Google Earth, the later allowing me to look at junctions without moving from my laptop, overall this worked well, the couple of errors I made on route were down to inattention on my part.

Back to the first day, arriving at Helston our first control town felt really good, this was tempered however by an off route visit to Redruth doh!!! We knew this would be a tough day, and so it proved hill after hill on our route through Truro, Liskeard, Tavistock and Okehampton. We had ideas that we could complete each stage, in between 10 and 12 hours, Okehampton was reached in ten and a half hours, still 30k to do, I ring the Band B to tell them we are running late, no problems see you when you arrive, this was a recurring theme throughout the trip with excellent service from all our overnights. Eventually we arrive at 8 40 pm only to find

that the local pub stops serving food at nine, no problem says mine host Weatherspoons in Crediton serves until 10.00, I will give you a lift into town, truly customer service above and beyond expectations. I drift off wondering how my legs are going to feel tomorrow, hoping the brain will not tell them that this is just the first of seven doses of pain.

#### **4 May 2012** Crediton to Hereford

Another recurring theme was our inability to get underway by what we saw as the optimum time of 8 am, so it was about 8.30 when we rolled out of Crediton, leafy rural roads provide a pleasant start before joining the A38 at Taunton, then began a long into the wind slog to Bristol, no navigation issues however!! I lived in Bristol for several years so we managed to slip through, and out to Aust without any problems, apart from my very close encounter with a large left hand drive lorry. Crossing the Severn bridge is a great feeling whenever I do it, this time it seemed even more special marking a real step forward on our journey up the country, Chepstow to Monmouth and beyond to Hereford were pleasantly tough. We arrived at the Premier Inn again quite late, but were quickly in our room complete with bikes, and eating our dinner

An aside about Premier Inns we used three, Hereford, Wigan and Inverness, in all cases the service was excellent and provided value for money accommodation. I heartily recommend them to all.

#### **5 May 2012** Hereford to Wigan

Friends Ros and Steve are travelling over from Stafford to provide us with a kit change at Wigan, so it would be good to arrive early-ish, not to be, I am afraid after about 30k of bowling along quiet roads I miss a left turn sweep down a brilliant decent.... too late I realise a blunder has occurred, stop consult the back up maps left, left again, and right will put us back on track!!! Two snags the second left is a long, long up hill and the right could be any one of half a dozen lanes not marked on my road atlas maps. Somewhat chastened we arrive at Harry Tuffins in Church Stoke for a real cyclists re fuel, more lanes lead us to Ellesmere and a chance encounter with an End2End signpost. We press on through yet more lanes, which I should know as this is my regular stamping ground, by pass Chester to pick up the A56 then the A49, a couple of calls to Ros ensure her we are on our way. We eventually arrive at 9.20 having put in 229k and a lot of faffing time, the Taybarn mega buffet and change of kit go down well, we say cheerio, and thanks to Ros and Steve after a far too quick meeting and settle in for the night.

#### **6 May 2012** Wigan to Langholm

We were pleasantly surprised by this stage, as ever getting through large towns such as Preston prove tricky, luck was with us escorted by a local out on his Sunday ride we quickly leave the town on the A6. The crossing of Shap had loomed in our consciences for some time but it was overcome in the best weather since leaving Cornwall, the only time on the trip I bared my legs. A quick photo call on the Scottish border, on to Langholm for a great welcome from Alison and Tom, end2end veterans with a delightful home, extremely comfortable bed

and delicious breakfast. A further bonus was the local hostelry serving great food and a welcome pint.

### **7 May 2012** Langholm to Perth

Tom was rather quizzical regarding our route for this day, but after a photo call we set off for Moffat. The initial kilometres were over delightful if lumpy lanes, to the first tea stop at Moffat, on to Biggar and going well but the clouds were ominous. The roads now are fairly level, but crossing the Glasgow/Edinburgh corridor presents problems, avoiding main roads is tricky we chose to go through Kincardine, crossing the Kincardine bridge in dull rainy conditions, a last food stop and off towards Perth. I suspect the route through Dunning is a great ride on a decent day, the incessant rain and cold however took their toll, and we struggled into Perth, found the accommodation then, “problems”, the only local eatery is a chippie close to closing. A quick aside here, Steve has chosen to travel very light so his evening dress consists of beach shorts, and flip flops not too bad in a hotel!! But walking through Perth in driving rain on a cold evening it was a bizarre sight indeed.

### **8 May 2012** Perth to Inverness

I had spent a fair amount of time looking at this stage during planning but it still looked very tough, with two ski stations to go through. Fifty kilometres pass by then we start the long drag up to the Spittal of Glenshee, eventually we pass the ugly metalwork that despoils ski hills in the Summer, and zoom down to a hearty lunch in Braemar. A few flat clicks’ then we turn towards Lecht and Tomintoul, after many ups and downs we go through Cock Bridge, the tarmac wall in front of us proves too much, we simultaneously succumb to gravity and “take a walk” the only time in 1500k’s. Cake and coffee in Tomintoul, last control at Carrbridge a turn onto the A9, and we speed into Inverness for another comfy night courtesy of Premier Inns. As we come on to the A9 Steve has concerns about his back wheel, it is making some strange creaky noises and the chain is slipping in some gears. After an inspection he says he is not comfortable carrying on without a professional opinion, the wonders of a Smartphone are employed, he finds a bike shop close to the hotel which should be open at nine.

### **9 May 2012** Inverness to John O’Groats

After a some deliberation Steve convinces me to carry on solo, as repairs/replacement may take some time, the hotel staff kindly copy the route sheet and I leave Steve looking for the shop before setting off on the A9 over the Black Isle. Strange to be on my own but I press on, nice lanes through Alness to Tain, back on the A9 but it is very quiet, cafe stop in Brora the signs say 44 miles to JOG but I know it is farther for me as I need to go through Thurso to ensure I do the 200k’s for the day. A txt from Steve he has a new wheel, and is on his way intending to stick to the A9 will see him make up some time, I take the left fork version of the A9 to hit a very unfriendly headwind. It is a real struggle to the Thurso Tesco, but once there buy some sandwiches, bananas and a milk shake sit on the car park wall for my last enroute feed, quick call from Steve he is making great progress.

I find it strangely difficult to leave that uncomfortable wall, to set off on the last lap, once underway though I have the wind behind me so make good progress on the final 30km, it is

about 8 o'clock so John O'Groats is shut, nobody about even the gulls seem to have vacated the place. I contrive a few pics of bike and sign, even resort to a self portrait with my mobile.

Then Steve arrives that makes it so much better, we have a somewhat formal handshake, then he sets off across the car park, to capture a young lady, who charmingly agrees to take some photos. That's it, pub is closed so no celebratory beer, ride 5km to the B and B, coffee and chocolate for me ginger beer for Steve, then a well deserved sleep.

**10 May 2012** Leisurely breakfast, easy ride to Durness Head (northernmost point on the mainland) on to Thurso overnight trains home in Stone at 7 next morning, more sleep then a ring round to friends for a happy few beers.

Stage	Distance	Climbing	Accomodation
1	214	3475m	Taw House, Crediton EX17 3BU
2	215	2297m	Premier Inn, Hereford, HR4 9RS
3	229	1994m	Premier Inn, Wigan, WN3 6XB
4	209	1790m	Waughope Cottage, Langholm, DG13 0AY
5	206	2393m	Albert Villa, Perth, PH1 5RP
6	210	2784m	Premier Inn, Inverness, IV3 5PR
7	206	1842m	Blackfield Farm, Gills Bay KW1 4YD.