

LEJOG with Dad 19 May 2012 to 01 June 2012

Thursday 17th May 2012

Dad leaves Dornoch to catch the sleeper train from Inverness to London complete with his bike laden with panniers.

Friday 18th May 2012

Dad cycles across London to catch the train from Paddington arriving in Didcot around 10.00. At 22.00 I arrive home from work, thankfully the bike and panniers have been packed for a week.

Saturday 19th May 2012 (Day 1)

Up at 05.30, briefly popped into work, breakfast by 07.00 said goodbye to Annie James and Ellen and left home to catch the 08.12 train from Didcot to Penzance. Initial problem loading the bikes at Didcot as Guard had no record of our booking; thankfully we both had email confirmation. Unfortunately the other cyclist on the platform was not so lucky having to wait for the next train. There were a few other End to Enders on the train so routes etc. were discussed. We grabbed lunch on the train arriving in Penzance around 13.30. A leisurely cycle to Land's End for 14.45 for the official start and then off to St Just to the YHA Youth Hostel via Sennen Cove. Arrived at the lovely hostel around 16.30, super meal and fantastic walk down to the coast afterwards. Met a lovely family and two End to Enders, one just finishing (having started in John O' Groats cut across to Norway, taking in Northern Ireland and Eire, some 1800 miles) the other like us just starting. Early to bed at 21.00

Daily Mileage 5 (mileage does not include 9 miles from Penzance to Land's End)
Cumulative Mileage 5

Sunday 20th May 2012 (Day 2)

07.30 good breakfast with fellow cyclists and donation to our charities from the family met the previous afternoon. 08.35 head off on A3071 to Penzance after breakfast, with Liskeard being our evening stop off. From Penzance we took the A30 to Hayle continuing along the A30 to A3047 to Camborne and Redruth along to the A390 to our lunch stop at Truro. Continuing along the A390 to St Austell, Lostwithiel and Dobwalls before joining the busy A38 dual carriageway to Liskeard arriving about 18.30. 3 course meal deal including pint and breakfast for two at Premier Inn for £44.00. Played tag with a group of around 8 End to Enders who were fully supported and still found it difficult to climb the hills without the added weight of panniers full of clothes, food and tools. First day was hard, sun very hot over 3 litres of liquid consumed, legs aching - Hot bath required!

Daily Mileage 72
Cumulative Mileage 77

Monday 21st May 2012 (Day 3)

07.30 standard Premier Inn breakfast, late leaving at 08.50. A3390 - very slow day, hills seemed to be taking it out of us. Lunched with the Ladies Bowls Club at Tavistock, thank you for the cash donation to our charities, use of kitchen to top up our water bottles and toilet facilities and advice on route to take around Dartmoor rather than over it. A386 out of Tavistock heading for Okehampton, picked up the Granite Way at Meldon, a super tarmac cycle path along an old railway track into Okehampton. From A386 to A3072 to Crediton and then on to Tiverton. Just short of Tiverton we stopped for an evening meal at 19.00. We took too long to eat our meal finishing at 20.30 with 4 miles still to go to Tiverton and a further 7 miles to the Travelodge. We eventually arrived at the Travelodge in pitch black at 22.10 after taking the wrong slip road along the A361. Played tag again with the same group of End to Enders, wondered if we would meet them on subsequent days. Another hard day, sun very hot over 3 litres of liquid consumed, legs aching even more! Pannier rack disaster for Dad as it decided to shed numerous nuts and bolts despite being nyloc nuts!

Daily Mileage 65
Cumulative Mileage 142

Tuesday 22nd May 2012 (Day 4)

07.30 standard Travelodge breakfast, half saved for mid-morning snack so had hot bacon roll at Costa Coffee leaving at 08.15. A38 through Wellington, Taunton, Bridgewater, Highbridge and Winscombe. From there we took the Strawberry Line, another old railway line (cinder track so very dusty but away from traffic) heading through Sandford, Congresbury, Yatton to Clevedon. From there we found the M5 Avon bridge cycleway and followed the A403 to Severnview Services arriving about 19.00. Another long day but a breeze compared to the first two days. Services at Severnview Travelodge were limited to Burger King so we did not eat well that night.

Daily Mileage 80
Cumulative Mileage 222

Wednesday 23rd May 2012 (Day 5)

08.15 left the Travelodge after breakfasting at Costa Coffee, better than Burger King the previous evening. What a difference in the weather, if only I had taken photos of the Severn Bridge the previous day, the mist was so dense we couldn't see the Bridge. 100 yards into Wales and the sun lifted from freezing cold to very hot – what extremes! Through Chepstow on A466 past Tintern Abbey and stopped off for tea and cakes at Tintern Old Railway Station. Off again heading for Monmouth but stopped for more refreshments at Redbrook. Continued on through Monmouth on A466 joining the A49 to Hereford towards Leominster but cutting out Leominster by taking B4361 to Ludlow, lost cycle glasses shortly before arriving at Ludlow after taking them off to check directions and leaving them on top of the panniers (Duh!). Arrived at the Travelodge about 6.15. Good pub nearby. Another hot day. Bought a pair of sunglasses to replace lost ones!

Daily Mileage 62
Cumulative Mileage 284

Thursday 24th May 2012 (Day 6)

We planned an early start around 06.00 but slept in till 05.40. Had a standard continental Travelodge breakfast and started out at 07.15. Very fast cycle ride along the A49 arriving at Shrewsbury at 09.50 so a bacon roll and latte was ordered at the Little Chef services. Continued along the A49 but cut off to follow the old A49 through Wem for lunch at 12.00, through Whitchurch, along known Cheshire roads through Peckforton, Beeston (second lunch at Flavours @ The Lock Gate Café at 15.00) and Tiverton then back on A49 to Stretton (South Warrington Services). Staff at Premier Inn very helpful and gave us a donation to our charities. Excellent cycling in cool mist until 12.00/13.00 then very hot.

Daily Mileage 81
Cumulative Mileage 365

Friday 25th May 2012 (Day 7)

Later start, dense traffic through built up areas of Warrington, Wigan, and Preston, (A49, A573 and A49). Took 2 hours to cover 15 miles. Met two cyclists at a petrol station, stopping for cold drinks, on the final straight of their Paris – Blackpool run (Tower to Tower), they were struggling despite having left their kit at home the night before. Morning was hard work but run to Lancaster along A49 was much more enjoyable, travelling through countryside. Took a diversion in Lancaster to Morecambe following a good quality cycle path, cycled along the front to Carnforth to Arnside. Youth Hostel not very easy to find but delightful property once located. A large number of cyclists but only two of us heading north, 3 going south and several teams attempting the coast to coast, some leaving at 05.30, some at 6.30 and one solo cyclist determined to have his full English breakfast left around 08.30 the following morning.

Daily Mileage 72

Cumulative Mileage 437

Saturday 26th May 2012 (Day 8)

Left Arnside Youth Hostel on B5282, joining A65 to Kendal stopped for refreshments etc. and then headed towards Shap on A6. A long slow climb up over Shap, very gusty at the summit, very nearly blown off bike as the wind caught the panniers. Lovely ride down from Shap summit. Had lasagne and a pint of lemonade for lunch in the Greyhound Hotel, Shap and continued along A6 through Penrith and along to Carlisle. Centre of Carlisle – there was no air, extreme heat, car fumes and takeaway smells made me feel quite unwell. Good Premier Inn, felt a lot better after a shower and a good meal.

Daily Mileage 65

Cumulative Mileage 502

Sunday 27th May 2012 (Day 9)

First day that legs did not ache at all! Followed the service road alongside the M6 to Gretna for a photo shoot at the 'Welcome to Scotland' sign. Travelled along the B7076 through Lockerbie lunching at a pub in Beattock at 12.00. Landlord from Nantwich, other cyclist a local but had lived for a number of years in Dornoch so chatted about the people and the area. The cyclist also made a donation of loose change to our charities. Joined the A702 at the A74(M) junction, stopped for a cold drink at Abington. Then took the A73 to Lanark and on to New Lanark, where we were staying at our first Scottish Youth Hostel. It turned out to be the best hostel we stayed in with en-suite facilities. New Lanark is a World Heritage Site originally a cotton mill with housing for workers, school for their children and a Church. Robert Owen was a man with extraordinary forethought. A tremendous place to visit.

Daily Mileage 77

Cumulative Mileage 579

Monday 28th May 2012 (Day 10)

Good breakfast and a reasonable start, continuing along A73 passing through Carlisle and Airdrie to Cumbernauld, then onto A80 and A872 to Stirling, 40 miles in under 4 hours. Now on home ground cycling along roads last cycled as a teenager in 1980. Spent an hour chatting to wee Davie, my old Scout Leader. Ate lunch below Stirling Castle and then off towards Callander along the A84 but took a detour to Thornhill, on the A873, called in at the Lion & Unicorn for a pint, then the B822 and A81 into Callander. Located the B & B, Glengarry House, showered and changed in time to meet up with Fiona. Evening meal was at The Meadows Callander, superb meal and company. Chef and owner donated to our charities and advised on our route the following day.

Daily Mileage 57

Cumulative Mileage 636

Tuesday 29th May 2012 (Day 11)

As breakfast was served between 08.00 and 09.00 we had a lie in! Excellent full Scottish breakfast, after fruit and cereal. Other guests and B & B owner donated to our charities. Taking the advice received the night before we took the scenic route along the old Strathgry railway for 21 miles, looking down some 200 possibly 300 feet onto the road we had anticipated cycling along. 4 miles short of Killin we left the cycle track and joined the A85 to Crianlarich for lunch and then on to the A82 to Tyndrum, Bridge of Orchy, climbing Rannoch Moor and then descending through Glen Coe to the Glencoe Youth Hostel for about 18.00. This was without doubt the most awesome day. Rannoch Moor is a desolate yet beautiful area, we anticipated rain as the clouds gathered but only felt a few small spots, and the sky was dark and brooding. The descent from Rannoch Moor was slow to start but eventually allowed us to free wheel at speed through some of the most majestic mountainous scenery; the mountains had ribbons of mist running around them. Simply breathtaking scenery. An excellent evening meal was had at the Clachaig Inn, with an amazing range of beers and whiskies. Donation to our charities from a railwayman in the pub.

Daily Mileage 66
Cumulative Mileage 702

Wednesday 30th May 2012 (Day 12)

Delighted to leave the Youth Hostel as one of the other occupants was rather ripe (!) otherwise a lovely place to stay. Along the A82 through South and North Ballachulish to Fort William for a Big Mac and coffee around 11.00. Decided to take the canal path alongside the Caledonian Canal, a delightful if slow ride from Banavie to Gairloch (stopping for lunch at Moy Bridge), then rejoined the A82 just north of Spean Bridge to see the Commando Memorial and then onwards along the A82 to the side of Loch Lochy to Laggan before taking a forest trail alongside Loch Oich (this was a mistake as the track was only really suitable for walkers or mountain bike riders). The third section of track to Fort Augustus was a good quality cycle path but the damage was already done, a tree root caused a severe jarring to my right knee. We were able to watch a cruiser navigate the canal locks at Fort Augustus with seemingly millimetres to spare and as the clock was ticking we took time out to have an evening meal. A relatively short but painful ride along the A82 through Invermoriston to Loch Ness side Youth Hostel. This was a very basic hostel but still reasonably comfortable.

Daily Mileage 58
Cumulative Mileage 760

Thursday 31st May 2012 (Day 13)

A painful and partly sleepless night despite use of Voltarol and other painkillers. A basic continental breakfast. A good half hour to get the right leg moving in the sweet Scottish rain. A stop in Drumnadrochit was required for a caffeine intake, rain eased off at this point, before taking the A831 and climbing onto the A833 down into Beaulay for lunch at the Old School Gift Shop and Café, white bean and chorizo soup with cheese scone. From Beaulay we continued on the A862 onto the B9169 and B9163 to Cromarty against a headwind for 16.00. Sandwiches eaten in Cromarty as we waited for the ferry, crisps eaten on the crossing. A short ferry ride across to Nigg to find a reception committee consisting of Mum, Agnes and Doreen, along with a bottle of bubbly and Tunnocks Caramel Wafers.....mmm! Along the B9175 to Tore roundabout, wave to Catherine and Philip as they drive past us navigating the roundabout, along the A9 bypassing Tain across the Dornoch Firth, cutting down to Cuthill and into Dornoch. Home cooked meal with Mum & Dad.

Daily Mileage 72
Cumulative Mileage 832

Friday 01st June 2012 (Day 14)

84 miles to go. Started later than we really wanted as temperature was expected to be as low as 3 degrees. Left around 08.00 through Embo Street, Skelbo Street alongside Loch Fleet joining the A9 at Cambusnavie, through to Golspie, stopping off to speak to the local newspaper group. From Golspie through Brora and the lovely smell of whisky from the local distillery. Continuing along the A9 through Helmsdale, climbing Navidale and Berriedale, small climb through Dunbeath, stopping for tea and cakes at Laidhay Croft Museum & Tea Rooms and on through Latheronwheel, Latheron, Lybster, Ulbster and on to Wick. Here we had almost resigned ourselves to stay the night, but Mum in her car and Doreen in her car had decided to drive all the way to John O'Groats to collect us. The wind had been against us all the way but after Wick it was blowing directly in our faces. Two cyclists passed us as we climbed Navidale, caught up with them in Laidhay tea rooms, passed them in Wick as they enjoyed more refreshments and wished them well as they passed us on the road to John O'Groats, (tooted the car horn as they entered their overnight accommodation on the way back to Wick). A long hard day we arrived at John O'Groats at 19.10. Fish and chips in a pub in Wick then back to Dornoch by 22.00.

Daily Mileage 84
Cumulative Mileage 916

Saturday 02nd June 2012

Relaxing day looking around Dornoch with Mum for gifts for Annie and the children and food for the train journey home to Didcot on Sunday. Evening wander down to the Square with Dad to watch the Highland Dancers and Dornoch Pipe Band, followed by a quick pint at the Eagle.

Sunday 03rd June 2012

Mum & Dad dropped me off in Inverness to catch the train to London, tube across to Paddington, train to Didcot, met at station by Annie, James & Ellen and home!

General Notes

Must mention the sheer professionalism of Lorry drivers, without exception they waited patiently behind until road clear to pass by us. Car drivers ok apart from two instances that could have seen death for Dad due to pure stupidity on the car drivers part; one female driver (between Preston & Lancaster) only just stopped from pulling out of a side road, apparently not seeing Dad until the last minute; the other driver (south of Wick) decided to overtake a line of traffic not seeing Dad coming towards him until the last minute, Dad had moved about two feet onto the verge to miss him. Drivers with caravans and motorhomes please remember your vehicle is longer and wider than your normal car!!

No punctures!