

Geoff's LEJOG

Preamble.

I decided to do LEJOG early 2010, spurred on by:

- (1) A relative who had cycled it the year before and gave me routes suggestions
- (2) An end to ender who I met leaving Bristol one night, he said 'How do you get to Chepstow', to which I replied 'follow me' and ended up giving him a bed for the night
- (3) Age, I was 51 and thought it was now or never.

Training consisted of following an on line schedule which had the attraction that I was already on month two as I was routinely commuting between Chepstow and south Bristol, a forty mile round trip. My last raining run was the Avon Cycleway circuit, roughly 90 miles when starting and finishing at Chepstow. I did this the Saturday before I left for Cornwall, felt totally fresh at the end of it and decided I was good to go.

I also had a copy of a DVD which gave me some good warm down exercises to follow which certainly helped.

Route planning was done by drawing highlighter lines on pages of a road atlas. I know more technically minded people use GPS etc but there was nothing more satisfying than throwing away the A5 map pages and route notes each night. Planning from a road atlas also meant that I was blissfully unaware of any major hills until I hit them.

Daily diet consisted of smallish breakfasts, huge amounts of malt loaf during the day. A packet of Jaffa cakes on arrival at the night's accommodation washed down with a recovery drink followed by a large pub meal in the evening and a few beers.

Equipment was carried in two rear panniers and a bar bag and consisted of as little as possible, the heaviest items being the two bags of sports drink powder that I mixed up each day, one for the ride and one for recovery afterwards.

I was very lucky with the weather and the roads – no punctures!

I hope other riders might find some of this useful.

Day One

Lands End, A30 past Sennen, right onto lane past Trevear Farm to St Buryan.

St Buryan, right at church along lane past Tregadwith to B3315 into Newlyn and Penzance.

Penzance, follow NCR 3 to Marazion. Cross A30 to roundabout and follow B3280. Right after 1 mile onto lane past Millpool, Godolphin Cross, Nancegollan, Porkellis, Carnkie, left to Stithians, Tubbon Hill, straight across A393 to Perranwell Station.

Next right after **Perranwell** Station across busy **A39** to **Devoran**. Follow lane alongside creek past **Point** and join **B3289** past **Trellissick Gardens** to **King Harry ferry**.

Turn left off B3289 along lane past **Philleigh**, next right to **Treworthal** along **NCR 3** and left onto **A3078**.

Past **Ruan High Lanes** and right onto lane at **Tippetts Shop** where left to **Goviley Major**

Right at **B3287** to **A390** where immediate right on lane to **Sticker**. Left on **B3273** at **London Apprentice** to **St Austell**. Follow **A390** around **St Austell** to **St Blazey Gate**.

Up at 7.30 and a quick breakfast, not supplied by Travelodge. Drive down to Lands End, seeing a group of five cyclists setting off, they seem to be camping and one of them was towing a trailer. Also saw a recumbent trike on the road.

The girls had made a banner and I posed for photos at Lands End while Lauren hid behind a copy of the 'Review'. I left about 10 to 9, the bike seems amazingly heavy and any little hill was hard work.

The roads were nice and quiet and I usually found the right one, or nearly anyway. Navigating slows you down as I have to stop at almost every little junction. The map case (on top of the bar bag) drove me mad as the written route and map slide about and by the end of the day the Velcro had come off completely. Also the chain is coming off every time I switch to the low cog – due to fiddling by the Lydney bike man I suspect as OK before. Didn't stop much and got to the King Harry Ferry about 10 to 1, much to the surprise of Peter and Margaret who had just put out the 'Geoff' sign. A great cottage with fantastic views, spent nearly two hours chatting whilst demolishing a cream tea lunch – good for sugar but not much else.

Passed the trike on a great little lane around Deveron. Didn't see any other obvious End to Enders. Pete said Dartmoor would not be too hilly so will go that way tomorrow. Crossed the King Harry Ferry for free and into more hills. Again only got lost a little and onto A390 near St Austell, uncalled for hills and main road, not a good combination to end the day. By now the map case is held on by string and the gears more reliable after my own adjustments. Got to Emms Cottage about 4.45, nice but very small room.

Shower etc and then sat in the garden reading about the Eden Project. I have forgotten the measuring scoops for drink mixes but that's about it so far. Tea in the Four Lords, lots of food and cheap but will have to leave before the roadshow starts up. **65 miles**.

Day Two

Follow **A390** through **Lostwithiel**, **West**, **Middle** and **East Taphouse**. Take next left after **E Taphouse** onto **B3360**. Straight on at cross roads with **A38** at

Doublebois onto lane. Follow lane past **Bokenna Cross, Redgate** and **Common Moor** to **Minions**.

Carry on down hill and cross **B3254** at **Upton Cross**. Pass **Rilla Mill, Halwinnick Butts** and turn right onto **B3257** to **Bray Shop**. At **Bray Shop** take left toward **Penhill Farm** and **Stokes Climsland** and onwards crossing the River Tamar to **Horsebridge**.

After the bridge take a left past the pub and first right up the hill to **Sydenham Damerel**. Go straight through the village and on over **B3362**. Right to **Tavistock** and left to cross **A386** on **B3357** to **Two Bridges**. Left **B3212** to **Moretonhampstead**.

A day of hills, it seemed that I spent the whole day going up. Long crawl along the A390, up and down and thankfully not too busy. Had a break by a weird pillar / stone near Minions, another five minutes on would have given me a tea shop but also lots more people. Found my way across the lanes – getting better at navigating on road atlas pages. Followed signs to Chip Shop and recognised the pub from doing the NCR South West Way when I saw End to Enders when having lunch.

Stopped at Horsebridge over the Tamar and watched a Kingfisher before up again. Just when I had had enough up, the Dartmoor inn at Merrivale came into view, at the foot of another big hill. Had lunch (£2.50 for lime and soda!), staring at the horrible hill, a tourer with no luggage crawled up. Actually after an hour off it was just another grinding hill. Between Two Bridges and Postbridge I caught up with some other bikes. Dropped down into Moretonhampstead, even then some of it was up.

Hotter than yesterday and felt a bit sunstroky by the end. Coathayes is on the main road, very old fashioned but with a nice big bath. Legs tired but knee muscles are OK. Down to The Union for tea – what a pub! Real Ale at £2 a pint, great steak and ale pie and Brazil v Ivory Coast on the big screen.

PS did 39. Something mph on Dartmoor and yelled. **58 miles (Total 123)**.

Day Three

Turn left on **B3212** towards **Exeter** and immediately right towards **Ide**. Pass **Ide** to roundabout with **A30**, straight across and follow main road to **Exeter**.

After crossing **A30** bear right and then left to **Exwicke**, right across railway and **A377** onto **B3183** then left onto **B3212**. At T junction go left to **Pinhoe** and **Broadclyst**.

B3181 signposted to **Broadclyst** and **Cullompton**.

Follow this towards **J27** then right to **Uffculme, Culmstock, Churchinford**. Left on **B3170** then right and right to **A303**. Left to **Ilminster**. Through town and then onto **B3168** to **West Lambrook**.

Right onto **A378**. Cross **A372** onto **B3153** to **Somerton**. Follow **B3151** to **Street** and **Glastonbury**.

The promise of a flatter day not borne out by the initial 12 miles to Exeter. Found my way round the city Ok thanks to the streetmap downloaded from tourist information.. Stopped for a smoothie and flapjack on the outskirts of the city. Then out on B3181, the first flat road in three days!, whizzing along, actually using the big cog for a change. Went past Diggerland at Willand. Decided to cut some miles by ignoring the prepared route which worked for a while. Was just thinking that lime and soda and food would be good when I arrived in Churchinford. Pub had signs up outside but after locking up the bike found it was closed. So across the road to the village shop, which had it's door open but had closed down. Ended up sitting on the pub windowsill eating malt loaf.

What I thought would be an up onto the Blackdown Hills turned out to be OK. Strange sign on a farmyard entrance at Staple Hill – 'Coastal Engineering' which doesn't seem likely. Thought I had done well to get to the A358 quickly, except it was actually the A303, so a wrong turn somewhere then. But the junction did have an open pub so not all bad. A303 to Ilminster was very busy but an almost hard shoulder helped keep away from the cars, also a very fast road, I got up to 38mph. It was very scary turning right at the roundabout into Ilminster. Good flattish roads again to Curry Rival and Langport.

Stopped for needed cold drink and chocolate at a garage. Occasional sharp pain from the muscle inside / behind my left knee which became more frequent as the afternoon went on. The Somerset Levels found me some late hills which was very unfair and I slowly got through Street and into Glastonbury.

The Market Inn is a terrible pub (no real beer) but I have a huge room with a double and single bed which is noisy as it overlooks the main road. The shower is a bit grim and I can't get the telly to work. Lots of people around as the Festival starts later in the week. Looked for health food cafe for tea but they all close about 5pm which is mad. So off to The Rifleman a CAMRA pub doing barbecue food which is good but might need more later. Drinking Potholer. About to leave the pub when I went through the bar to find a folk band playing, so another pint and sat and listened. There is a huge lintel over the fireplace which has split in half and is held together by a metal bar.

80 miles (203)

Day 4

Glastonbury A39 to Wells. Past Wookey Hole to Priddy. Left on B3371 then right on B3134 to Burrington, left A368 to Churchill. Right A38, left B3133 to Congresbury and Clevedon. Avon Cycleway to Avon Bridge and along A403 to Severn Bridge. Chepstow to Coleford via St Brievals.

Good bed but awake early by what sounded like fencing being erected – which it was, a street market outside the pub. A horrible but flat road to Wells and then the climb up to Priddy. That's the first time I have ever managed to get up that hill without having to get off and push. Took a photo at Priddy and then the castellated house on the road to Burrington. Lovely long downhill to Burrington, stopped at a cycle shop in the middle of nowhere and used their pump to top up my tyres.

I thought there was a cafe at Churchill, but not so so bought a hot pasty and drink in Budgens attached to the garage. The man at the till said 'any petrol or diesel with that?!' Stopped at Congresbury to eat and then on to Clevedon. Saw a fox on the lane to the Black Horse and did not stop at the pub as too early for lunch. As I crossed the A369 I saw a Little Owl on a street lamp. Stopped at the Kings Arms in Portbury for lunch. Riding was easy with a following wind and I stuck to the A403 up from Avonmouth, averaging 20mph with no effort.

Stopped at the bench up from the old bridge in Chepstow and then the crawl through the forest to home. Legs ache but the knee has behaved itself today. Re-stocked on drinks powders which weigh a ton and decided to post my wet weather gear to Keith's in Blackburn as the forecast is fine until at least then.

71 miles (274)

Day 5

To **Five Acres**, straight over to **Christchurch, English Bicknor, Lower Redbrook** where join **B4234** to Ross. In the middle of town bear left to cross **A40** to **Netherton, Brampton Abbots to Hole in the Wall**. Right to **Stocking** and then left on **B4224**, where this goes left, go straight across to **Hampton Bishop**.

Cross **A438** over railway and cross **A4103** then second left to **Sutton St Nicholas**. Over **A465**. At **A417** go left to **A49**. Right then left onto **B4361** through **Leominster to Ludlow**.

Seemed strange being at home after all the B&B's. Legs were aching a lot this morning. Packed up my wet weather gear and tights and left them for Jo to post to Keith's. Long downhill through English Bicknor etc meant that I was in Ross in 45 minutes – too early for a break. Found the small road I needed out of Ross as Jo had thought she knew where it was, left at the mini roundabout at the bottom of the town and handily called Brampton Road. Carried onto Hole in the Wall for a break, no sign of any kingfishers. Found my way across the lanes and was not lost even when I thought I was. Had another break in a bus stop on the A465 before back into more lanes.

Change of plan when I reached the A417, followed it to the A49 rather than more lanes as I thought it would be flatter. From A49, back road to Leominster where I stopped at a Spar for a sandwich. Making really good time, it's still only 1pm and about 10 miles to Ludlow. Stopped on the road near Richards Castle to take a photo of the 'Shropshire' sign. Lots of good half timbered houses, but never a good time to stop. Got into Ludlow before 2pm and planned to ring the B & B to make sure someone was in, but realised that I didn't have a number.

Tried to find the right road out of Ludlow but ended up on a slip road heading for Shrewsbury on the A49, so turned back into town. Got to the Mill House B&B about 2.30, a fantastic old house and a great room with an en suite whirlpool bath. The owner put the football on in the big lounge in this huge two storey living room with a balcony, pool table and huge fire place.

Discovered that I had left my jeans at home so a quick text to Jo from the bath! Watched football with tea and a Spar pasta meal wearing a bathrobe, very relaxing. Good result 1-0 for England. After a nap, into town for tea. I thought the pubs would be very busy but the whole town was quiet. Had a huge venison pie in the Church Inn and good beer. Chatted to a couple from Anglesey.

58 miles (332)

Day 6

Leave **Ludlow** on **A49** towards **Craven Arms**, right on **B4365**, right on **B4368**. Bear left **B4378** to **Much Wenlock**. Right **A458** and immediately left **A4169**. Follow to **A5223** where left round **Telford** and **Wellington**. Then **A442**, left to **Crudgington** where join **B5062** and cross **A442**. Left at **Water Upton** to **Meeson**, **Eaton Upon Tern**, **Ollerton**, **Stoke Heath**. Cross **A41** to **Market Drayton**. At **A529** left and then first left, then first right then bear left and cross **A53** to **Longshaw**. Right at crossroads and left to **Adderley / Lightwood Green**. Cross **A525 Newhall / Aston** to **A530**. Right on **A530** then left to **Ravensmoor**. At crossroads right into **Nantwich**.

A great night's sleep and away about 9, pausing only to return to hand in my room keys! Found the little lanes out of Ludlow and headed to Much Wenlock. Very easy cycling, by far the easiest day so far. Great descent into Much Wenlock but somehow missed the turn to Little Wenlock. Crwaled up a long hill out of Much Wenlock and stopped at a very welcome burger van at the top of the hill. Lovely egg and bacon bap. The woman who ran it said that she sees quite a number of End to Enders coming through. Watched another cyclist crawl up the hill, got ready for a chat, but he didn't stop! Got around Telford and Wellington via 10 roundabouts and stuck to the A442 up to Crudgington before retreating back into the lanes.

Absolutely ideal cycling conditions – flat and not as hot / sunny as other days, there was even a brief shower. Stopped to photo llamas near Ollerton. Had loads of time so frequent stops and went to visit Old Colhurst Manor, but it was not open so climbed into a field to photo it instead. Found Market Drayton, I have never seen so many empty shops in one town. Stopped for tea and cake and ordered Earl Grey for two, telling the waiter I was very thirsty, he still brought out two cups! Photographed the market hall and went in search of a t shirt. More lanes into Nantwich.

My legs were fine all day although I did take some paracetamol this morning. Main problem is a cramp like pain in my toes, had to stop on the edge of Nantwich to massage them. Found the Red Cow, a very old building that sells Robinsons beer. As I have the bike the landlord gave me a room

with a hallway where I can keep the bike. Room is nice but right on the main road so will probably be very noisy, also warm because I can't see me being able to have the window open.

Early tea at the Red Cow as they don't do food after 8. Got a text from Dave and tried to ring Mum. Watched Japan play Denmark and tracked down another CAMRA pub for a beer. Nantwich seems like a nice town, lots of half timbered places and much more prosperous than Market Drayton.

73 miles (405)

Day 7

Get to **A51**, at roundabout straight over to **B5074** to Winsford and then left **A54** into **Middlewich**. At roundabout with **A54**, right and then immediately left on **B5309**. First left onto **B5081** to **Byley** to join **A50** where left through **Knutsford**. Right onto **A5034**. Cross **A556**. At T junction go left over M56 to **A56** where left and first right to **A6144**. Right onto **A6144** first left to toll and **A57** where right. Left on **B5212** to **Culcheth** where right on **A574** towards **Leigh**.

In **Leigh** go left onto **A578** and right onto **B5215** and turn left onto **B5235** towards **Westhoughton**. Cross the A6 and M61 to **Chew Moor**. Pass the railway station at **Lostock Junction** and join the **A58** and go left. Follow **A58** north and turn left onto **B6402**. Over **B6226** and carry onto the **A675** where left to **Belmont**. Take a right off **A675** after **Old Man's Hill** and follow the lane to **Tockholes**. Cross the M65 and carry on into **Blackburn**. From Ewood Park **A666** to Wilpshire.

Fairly straightforward to Middlewich although I did go via Winsford which was not the plan. Had a coffee and tea cake in Knutsford and then off across more boring countryside. Spent the time compiling lists of why I don't like Cheshire – manicured, expensive etc.

Aggravating middle of the day as navigating was very tricky and I had to keep stopping to check where I was and to make minor corrections to my route. Lunch in Wetherspoons in Leigh, not a pleasant experience and then an annoying afternoon, getting vaguely lost and trying to avoid main roads. Finally got out of the towns and traffic near Bolton and out across the moors which was brilliant. Rang Keith and gave him an eta for Ewood Park.

A fantastic last few miles into Blackburn. Keith and son David appeared with David's bike and he guided me the last six miles to Keith's house, including the steepest hill of the day.

71 miles (476)

Day 8

At roundabout with **A59** take the 3rd exit minor road (not the A59) to **Whalley**. In **Whalley** follow the main road to **Clitheroe**. Take **B6478** through **Waddington, Newton** and **Slaidburn**. Left out of the village and begin to climb onto the fells. Follow the lane up over the apex at 1400 feet and drop down to **High Bentham**. Take right and then quick left across the **B6480** in the centre of town and carry on north to **Burton-in Lonsdale**. Follow lane north and join **A65** near **Ireby** and go left along **A65** to **Kirby Lonsdale**.

Out of the town join **A683** north and turn left onto **B6256** just before **Sedbergh**. Turn right onto **A684** and left onto **B6257**, under M6 and right onto **A685** into **Tebay**.

Keith promised me some more hills and he wasn't wrong. He gave me the local OS map so it looked like I was making rapid progress. The first long climb up from Waddington to Bradford Fell was the steepest of the day. A couple of tourers came past but it was gratifying to see other bikes stopped at the top, and they weren't loaded! The drop down to Newton was very fast, 39.8mph on the last drop. Stopped at Slaidburn on the way up the next hill. Sat on a bench and chatted to a couple marshalling a bike race / tour, which accounted for all the bikes and support vehicles I saw all morning. People kept asking me if I was on the event, which was weird considering I had panniers and a bar bag.

The lady was very impressed by LEJOG and her husband was totally unimpressed! The climb up to Great Harlow was not as steep as I had feared. Took photos of the scenery and the North Yorkshire sign at the 'Elephant Rock'. Nice picture of the river on the outskirts of High Bentham. Stopped for lunch and bought supplies of bars and cakes for the next few days. Made about another hour to Kirby Lonsdale for another break, the heat is very tiring today.

The main road A683 up towards Sedbergh was better, some good speedy sections. Cut off to join the A684, a fantastic bridge across a very small river. Needed another break and the bench outside Firbank church came in very handy. A woman cyclist came past and promised 'a bit of a pull' up to Tebay. The road between the motorway bridge and the A685 was terrible, luckily a bit of a descent until the A685 crossed the M6 and lasted until Tebay. Tebay is more of a village than I expected, two pubs and a post office. The B&B was good and featured a facilities cupboard!

Had a sleep for an hour and off to the pub, good beer and food – great steak. PS somewhere just south of High Bentham was half way.

58 Miles (534)

Day 9

B6260 from **Tebay** to **Orton**, bear left to **Crosy Ravensworth, Maulds Meaburn & Kings Meaburn** where left at T junction. Left at next T junction and first right to cross River Eden to **A66**. Right and immediate left to **Temple Sowerby** and

right to **Culgaith**. **B6412** then left on **A686**, right onto **B6412**. Right onto **B6413** at **Lazonby** to **Brampton**. Left on **A6071** to **Longtown** and **Springfield**.

A cloudy and cooler morning, although Helen at the B&B said that it is often like this in the mornings. Reasonably level cycling for the first while through Crosby Ravensworth. Signs said Road Closed but I gambled on it only being closed to cars – which it was. Lovely river photographed at Maulds Meaburn. Straightforward to Temple Sowerby where I had a break. Continued along quiet lanes and through small villages. Stopped for lunch at the roadside with an audience of interested lambs. I was making good time so I decided to try and get to the B&B in time for the England match. A quick stop in Brampton for chocolate and a drink and then the final 12 miles into Longtown. Good hills in the far distance, but not near me! Stopped at the turn to Springfield as my toes were cramping up and as the bike rested on a road sign, the distance mode on my computer managed to re-set itself to zero, but I had been counting down the miles and am fairly confident on my mileage.

PS shouldn't have bothered about rushing for the football! Nowhere to eat in Springfield on a Sunday night apart from a burger van which is OK after a few beers.

61 miles (595)

Day 10

Onto **B7076** alongside **A74(M)** to **Lockerbie**, **Beattock & Abington**. **B7078** to **J12** where left onto **A70** to **Muirkirk**. Left **B743** to **Sorn & Mauchline**.

Whilst getting my stuff together this morning I discussed my route with the B&B owner – an ex keen cyclist. He suggested going north instead of west and crossing west further up. The B7076 used to be the main road before the A74(M) was built and was a dual carriageway until one lane was dug up. Decided to take his advice, stopping at the Scottish border and Gretna blacksmiths for photos. The road was brilliant, all 60 miles of it to J12 on the A74(M). Not only was it very quiet but often there was a cycle lane and sometimes a separate bike track – I guess the old carriageway, wider than a lot of country lanes. Somewhere along this road was a piece of art which I have not yet had explained. Came off the road to stop at Lockerbie for a drink and cake. Saw a buzzard hovering which says much for the strength of the westerly wind and occasional spots of rain but missed most of it.

It took until past Lockerbie for my legs to get going and I was wearing both pairs of padded shorts as my arse was beginning to get tender.

Saw three cyclists going south fully loaded and overtook two French women. At one stage I was on a road bridge, crossing the railway, which then went under the motorway. Scenery good but not spectacular, another good reason for zooming along this great road. Came off to go through Crawford and Abington to try and find lunch but failed and went to the services at Junction 13 instead, 51 miles done by 2pm. Finally headed west at J12 Douglas onto the A70 into a very strong breeze and very soon heavy rain and mist. Something trotted across the road, which I later identified as a mink. Opencast coal mines around and fairly tatty countryside in general not helped by the weather.

Very heavy rain by Muirkirk, coat on, pannier covers on. Got my first Scottish £10 note at a service station. Saw Peewits, Curlews & Oystercatcher. Rain eased as I got to Sorn and eventually Mauchline, home of the Robbie Burns memorial water tower. Dykefield Farm is about two miles out of town. Had to empty the rain out of the pannier covers and my jacket back pocket when I arrived but the bin bags had done their job.

Still drizzling and didn't fancy 2x2 mile walks in it so ordered a huge kebab takeaway to be delivered, washed down with cans of Irn Bru. Watched Brazil beat Chile 3-0 and sdwallows going in & out of the barn outside my window.

89 miles (684)

Day 11

Lanes from **A76** then right onto **B744** then right onto **A719** and over roundabout with **A71** to **Waterside**. Left to **Fenwick & B778** to **Stewarton**. Right on **A735**, left onto **B706** to **Beith**. Right on **A737**. Left at roundabout onto **A760** then right **B786** to **Greenock & Gourock** ferry. **Dunoon A885 / 815** to **Strachur**. At **Cairndaw** left onto **A83** to **Inverary**.

Not a very good breakfast, although the farm's own eggs were very yellow. This combined with take away tea the night before and the amount of miles I did might explain why I struggled today, even on the flat. Lots of very small lanes, some with grass in the middle which is always a plus. Many short sharp hills and descents with big hills in the distance, unsure at this stage whether they will need crossing to get to the ferry.

After a couple of hours I stopped in Beith for tea and a Scotch Pie. More quiet smallish roads, scenery nothing special, lots of yellowhammers though. Difficult to get into any sort of rhythm because of the up and downs but still doing the 10mph including stops. A long, fast drop into Greenock past whole derelict estates. Followed the A770 round to Gourock which was interesting at four lane roundabouts. I could see a ferry at the terminal but had no idea what time it left. Into the ferry port and no cars queuing up and a sign saying queue here for the 2.20 ferry, time now 2.20! As I neared the ferry was raising the ramp but a very nice man lowered it again as I shot across the docks and cycled onboard!

Sat on deck and chatted to a coach driver from Liverpool on his day off from driving round Scotland. Saw a Gannet during the ½ hour crossing. In Dunoon a late lunch was needed but in retrospect maybe a cappuccino, hot apple pie and cream was not cycling fuel. Saw a Scottish two tone crow (hooded crow) from the tea shop. The scenery for the rest of the afternoon, about 40 miles, was just brilliant, all along the shores of various lochs with seemingly huge mountains behind.

The roads were much quieter than I thought they would be. Although flat compared with the morning, the wind often seemed to come from the wrong way and the bike slowed like mad whenever I stopped pedalling. I had both pairs of padded inserts on again but my bum still hurt and my toes kept cramping up. The Dunoon to Strachur stretch seemed interminable because of the wind. Luckily the last eleven miles from Cairndaw to Inverary had the wind behind me and was

generally downhill. I tried not to stare at the computer as the miles crawled past. Inverary looked fantastic in the evening sun. A quick shower and out for a walk round the town after the concierge person let me wheel the bike through the hotel!

My room is in a separate house owned by the George Hotel. Texted Jo to say that we have to move to Inverary, it is wonderful, a planned town built in the 1750's with grand and small houses, a venue, green by the loch side and it's own gaol. There is a tea shop for sale which we could run! Watched seals swim up Loch Fyne and took lots of photos, it's just wonderful here. George Hotel has good food, Scottish gastropub awards, two real ales, a CAMRA entry, millions of whiskies and is a wonderful old stone building with flagstone floors.

Finding it hard to eat meat, is this due to all the carb bars during the day? Definitely only 72-3 miles tomorrow and the forecast is good.

89 miles (773)

Day 12

A819 to A85. Left to Connel on A85. At Connel right onto A828 to N/S Ballachulish and Fort William.

Leisurely start with smoked haddock and poached eggs for breakfast. Decided to stock up at the Co-Op and behind me in the queue was a Victorian prison warder in full uniform – from the gaol next door. No gentle breaking in today, a 13% hill out of Inverary was not a nice beginning to the day. Apart from that the road to Lochawe was fine, climbing but nothing too vertical, in fact the ascents were gentle all day. Photographed Loch Awe and Kilchurn Castle between Cladich and Lachawe. I thought the pass at Brander could be steep but was reassured by the fact that the railway goes along it so it can't be too bad.

Stopped at a very nice cafe at Taynuilt for tea and flapjacks. Impressive girder bridge at Connel, climbing up to which I met a group of three cyclists, we crossed paths a few times during the day. My only problem is my bum, I'm still wearing both pairs of inserts and added extra crème at the cafe. Another good bridge with views at Creran Inn. A new cycle path kept appearing, but as these can be very winding I stuck to the main road until just after Appin where a track was signposted to Kentallen, 10 miles away. I couldn't see how this could be any longer than the road route so set off down it.

A great track, an ex-railway line passing an old platform and giving great views of Castle Stalker on an island. But after three miles I'm back on the road with no sign of the track. Officially in the Highlands now and took a photo of the sign to prove it. Stopped for a late lunch at Kentallen, a small track leading to a ledge above Loch Linnhe which was lovely. Found another cycle path to South Ballachulish and another good bridge.

I think I had a following wind and the road to Fort William was generally downhill, but even so the last ten miles to Fort William was very fast and I was there by 5pm. Just as I got into town my left pedal bearing seems to have seized, not sure if this is a problem or not. I tried dribbling oil into it to

free it up. All it seems to mean is that the pedal does not spin freely on the fixing, should be OK, just hard to spin the pedal to get my foot in the toe clip.

Rhu Mhor is a very old fashioned guest house, they do tea and biscuits in the lounge at 10pm and no TV in the bedrooms, but the room was very nice. Tea in the Grog and Gruel. Big group of spoonchallenges.com people in the pub. Also lots of walkers including an annoying man who wore hat, goretex jacket and backpack in the pub – yes we know you have been outside! Good beers and average food.

74 miles (847)

Day 13

Minor roads to join **B8006** where left to **A380**. At **A380** go left and immediate right to join **Caledonian Canal** and **Great Glen Cycle Route**. West bank of the canal to **Gairloch** where right onto **B8004** to **A82** where left. Stay on **A82** and at **Bridge of Oich** left to follow cycle route along the canal to **Fort Augustus**. Return to **A82** and follow to **Drumnadrochit** where left onto **A831**. Next right on to **A833** and right on to **A831** into **Beaulieu**. Follow **A862** to **Dingwall**.

Breakfast is fun. Mr McPherson serves in full Highland gear, I think this may be an excuse to wear a skirt! Everything is very formal and very exact, a bit too neat. Raining well when I leave Fort William so wet weather gear on including overshoes which work well. The B8004 alongside the canal is quite up and down and then a pull up to the Commando Memorial back on the main road. Realise how dark it is when I take off my blue lenses to photograph it.

In need of a break but Invergarry appears to be a name not a place and end up at Bridge of Oich. I am about to sit by the canal when I notice a tea sign and join four walkers for some tea. There was an Austrian couple taking the piss out of Scottish 'mountains' and a lady walking LEJOG! She is doing it all on footpaths, leaving Lands End in March and due in JOG in two weeks time. She also bikes so we talked bikes for a while. After a long chat I then rode the canal towpath to Fort Augustus between the canal and the river.

Nice road to Drumnadrochit and then found the turn to Milton, I knew it would be steep but half a mile of 15%! Bugger of a climb because even after the initial climb was over it was nowhere near the top. When it flattened out I stopped by a small lake for a pasta lunch, except that it began to rain again, so back on the bike. The good bit was that after the awful hill it was downhill virtually all the way to the A862 junction.

There was a big queue of traffic towards Beaulieu – big accident, so I rode to the front of the queue but the police would not let me through. Instead we talked routes as the policeman on duty was a keen cyclist. Once the ambulance was away I walked past the remains of a car on the grass and on to Dingwall. A nice last hour, sunny and flat roads.

Found the B&B where a rather embarrassed man gave me a note which neither of us could really read, which said the owner had tried to get in touch (nothing on the phone) and to try another B&B

instead. Instead I went to the very tartan National Hotel. Went to a pub for fizzy beer, no meals after 8pm and this was 8.01, chatted to a man at the bar who said he was embarrassed by Scottish hospitality. Back to The National for Haggis, Neeps & Tatties, very good and less than £6 but the place is empty.

80 miles (927)

Day 14

In **Dingwall** go under the railway bridge, A road goes sharp right and take next left up a residential street to join the minor road to **Mountgerald Ardullie** then to **Evanton** to **B817** where go left. Follow **B817** until it joins the **B9176** where turn left. Follow **B9176** (also NCR1) to the **A836** and go left into **Kincardine**. Straight on to the **A836** and left to **Lairg** & then towards **Tongue**. Pass the **Crask Inn** to **Altnaharra**. At **Altnaharra** turn right onto **B873** and then **B871** to **Bettyhill**.

Room was very hot but could not work out why. Quick breakfast and away by 9.15. Thought about going to the bike shop that yesterday's policeman had recommended but the pedals are spinning this morning and the tyres don't seem to need topping up. Climb up from Dingwall to Allness but the roads are nice & quiet. Great scenery across B9176. Met another LEJOG'er who started out the day after me, he's doing Inverness to Altnaharra today. I overtook him a few times and eventually left him behind. Stopped at Ardgay for tea and cake and then main road climb up to Lairg.

After the A838 goes off left the A836 becomes a single track road with passing places! – the cycle track up from Gretna was wider than this. A much flatter road than I was expecting so made good time. Saw Bullfinches, Wheatears and a weasel / stoat, the chestnut one with the white throat. Stopped at the Crask Inn, mentioned how flat the road was and the landlord gave me a book of road contours from the 1950's!

As well as being flattish I had a strong following wind. After taking a photo of the NCR signpost that says JOG 90 miles I shot down to the turn at Altnaharra, averaging over 20mph for the six mile descent. This B road was the same as the A road only even quieter. Zoomed along not worrying about traffic or sides of the road etc. Took photos of the River Naver (Strathnaver) although it was a shame to stop. Finally up onto the A836, a proper road! Fantastic views over Torrisdale Bay on the climb up to Bettyhill and even a good view from my room at the hotel. Went for a walk down to Farr Bay, watching the rabbits playing on the beach. A brilliant day, easy cycling, flowing wind and great scenery.

Spent the evening talking to a man who is kayaking round Britain, two months down, one month to go, he started at Skegness. Apparently no one has managed this at all in the last few years and it has only ever been done a few times – wow.

85 Miles (1012)

Day 15

A836 Bettyhill, Strathy, Reay, Thurso, Dunnet where left B855 to Dunnet Head and then lanes back onto A836 to John O'Groats.

A great night's sleep. At breakfast there are four cyclists all having small healthy meals & motorcyclists having the full works. It's only 52 to JOG and I am underway soon after nine. A couple of good hills straightaway and not much to see as the road moves inland. Sunny and a following wind so rapid cycling. At one stage there was a good picture of Dounreay with a windfarm behind it but the descent was too good to interrupt. Got to Thurso in just over two hours (31 miles) and stopped for tea and an egg roll. As I stopped at traffic lights after my break, the End to Ender from yesterday appeared alongside. We agreed to have a beer together at the end, but I didn't see him again, probably because I diverted to Dunnet Head. The diversion was actually hard work and the return even harder as the wind would be coming from the wrong direction.

The RSPB man said that they have a telescope trained on the cliffs so I went for a look, loads of Fulmars, Kittiwakes & orchids. I had the place to myself so I sat and ate lunch in the quiet and sunshine. Nice to find that I did not have to do the worst bit back to the main road and after another hour or so I arrived at John O'Groats – what an anti-climax, a real nothing little place. Realised afterwards that I never actually crossed the finish line as it was hidden behind the car park and signpost photographer.

Joined a short queue for the obligatory photograph, was not sure whether you had to have an official picture, so when the photographer retreated to his hut to change cameras or something, I got the man in front of me to take a couple of pictures so I could get away, it was starting to spit with rain and I was getting cold. So my signpost says 'Bolzano' as a left over from the Italian motorcyclists ahead of me in the queue!

Into the cafe / bar for a beer and you realise that your achievement does not mean anything to the other occupants, even the other cyclists. Two lads on the next table had LEJOG 874 tops on and looked very fresh – could be because when their support van appeared and took them and the bikes away it was clear that they had not carried any gear – but they had done it in eight days! Texted and rang everyone, no one was actually in to talk to. A more normal group outside the bar so I sat and chatted to them, their only breakdown had been 50m from a bike shop. They had done an entirely different route from me for exactly the same distance – 1072 miles.

Found the B & B and sat around for a while & two other cyclists arrived, due to start a JOGLE in the morning. We arranged to meet later in the pub and I walked to Duncansby Head. The stacks were impressive but not as good as the cliff ledges where birds were stacked by species with Guillemots at the bottom and one Puffin. About to leave when another couple called me over to view another ledge with another Puffin which I might have photo'd.

To the Seaview Hotel with the lads from the B & B plus two locals who joined us. A good evening spoilt by having to shout over the band. The lads have now seen the weather forecast for tomorrow – gale force winds and rain, I had decided not to tell them!

60 Miles (1072)

