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Land's End to John O' Groats at 60
by Esther & Michael Abrahams
September 2005

Have a cruise or ride the E2E to celebrate Esther's 60th birthday?

My 60th had drifted past three years ago. For nearly forty years my wife and I thought that we would cycle the 'E 2 E' some day. After being retired three years we thought this would be a good reason. Esther wanted to do it in comfort and style so we decided on using B&Bs and Hotels.

Our next thought was were we fit enough. Although we were capable of covering 60 miles a day when we were a lot younger we were worried that it would be difficult to cover 30 now. In the last 5 Years we had probably not managed 100 miles a year. We purchased Dave Smith's fitness book about 2 months before we started the ride. He advocates rides of between 30 and 90 minutes at a faster than touring pace. He advises to head for the hills and we have got plenty of them near our home around Ross On Wye.

We also managed to fit in two rides of 30 miles, one of 40 and one of 50 miles which gave us a bit of confidence. We duplicated the weight we would be carrying with Saga and CTC magazines, an Argos catalogue and Daily Mail/Saturday Telegraph's for fine-tuning, in the panniers. Esther's bike weighed 3.5 stone and mine 3.75 fully laden. I weigh 15 stone (I am 6ft. 4 inches tall) and my bike coped very well with it.

We both had Dawes Mountain Bikes, which we had converted for touring, adding mudguards etc. We found that we had to replace our cotton clothes with breathable, wicking and quick drying bike gear. We had had problems with sore behinds and in my case other bits. We removed our Gel saddle-covers and that improved things. Esther had a ladies gel saddle with a groove down the middle. I also purchased a ladies gel saddle, large enough to support my sit bones with a groove and coiled springs. We wore padded shorts and had no problems at all afterwards.

We also had problems with numb hands and tingling fingers. We got ergo handgrips for Esther. I shaped a piece of plastic pipe and placed it under my foam handgrip, which formed a lump in the palm of my hand. This cured our problems. Esther did not need her gloves afterwards.

Esther bought a pair of expensive cycle shoes from a well-known maker. She had to regularly stop to ease the pain in the balls of her feet. When we checked, the plastic ridges inside the shoe were cutting through the insole. We cut plastic insoles out of a margarine tub from a cafe. This helped a lot but did not completely cure it. Esther had her seat position etc. checked in case this was the cause.

We put Schwalbe Kevlar Marathon tyres on. I pumped my tyres up to

Untitled

the middle range of pressure. Within two days a spoke snapped on a training ride. I had the wheel rebuilt and the builder said he ran his tyres much softer, so I let them down to the minimum. We had no problems at all afterwards. We had already made some emergency spokes.

We bought some spokes half an inch too long. Cut the nipples off. Got the length right and bent two right angles. Not a 'U' shape. We could wind the spoke in and out. This means that you can fix it into the wheel, even without removing the block. I showed them to the wheel builder and he called them magic spokes. They are still fastened to the panniers now.

We oiled the bikes after rain or every four days. We took our 'Orange' mobile P/A/Y/Go phones and charger. We had to hunt for a signal in two places but otherwise we were pleased with the coverage. We adapted wing mirrors by keeping the bars short and sticking them in the handle bar plugs to make them rigid. We found them to be a great help. We took capes for extra cover and emergency porta-loo. We normally wear fluo yellow string type vests and put a fluo yellow cover on each outside pannier. We noticed a definite improvement with the closeness of traffic. Extras we thought were worth the carrying were a pair of light free-be Hotel slippers. Prunes to compensate for the stodgy fry-ups that we were expecting (never needed). Favourite toiletries, for a feel good factor.

We decided to go after the schools went back after the summer holidays and have a break at home for Esther's 60th birthday. We are members of the CTC so we sent for their routes and joined their breakdown service. Similar to the AA and cost £30pp. We looked for tips on the Internet. We had the LEJOG book from Phil Horsley. We looked at Sustrans routes but would have to buy too many guides. We saw that they were advertising a LEJOG book on their website we sent for it and ended up with an updated book from Phil Horsley. We sent for maps of cycle routes of Taunton, 01823 336 344 Gloucester, Edinburgh, (North Queensferry), 01383 417 759 and Perth 01738 450 600 from the relevant TICs. We purchased Philips Motorist Atlas. 3 miles to 1inch/ 1:200 000. We colour coded the CTC B&B and fast route on to it. Also Phil Horsleys. We marked every 10 miles on them. We decided on a route then wrote on the map, bike shops, TICs and where the B&Bs were and other information we might need.

We decided to book the B&Bs from Lands End to our home. This would be about 300 miles total and we would try to average about 40 miles a day and then decide what mileage we were capable of after we returned home. We couldn't take the chance of not getting a place for the night and having to cycle another 10 to 30 miles. We were only going to do it once and wanted to enjoy it. I tried to book the train tickets from my local station but they couldn't book the bikes. So I rang Wessex Trains and booked trains from Ledbury. They were very efficient and it was sorted out within a couple of minutes. Though when I rang later to book the train from JOG they said they could not help me as that No. was for people who needed assistance. We used the CTC leaflet and Tourist

Untitled

Information Centres (TICs) to find B&Bs. A few B&Bs informed me that if I had booked with them directly they would have reduced their price.

We decided from past experience that our mantra would be - WE WILL ENJOY YOURSELF. There was never a moment when it would not bring a smile to our face when one of us uttered it. Even uphill in a storm.

Travelling 1/9/05

Cycled 7m to Ledbury Station in the dark at 5am. We could not book our bike places to Hereford but there was no problem at that time of day. We had 15 min. wait for the train to Newport which had bike spaces booked and then changed for the train to Bristol, which had no booked spaces. The train for Penzance had bike spaces booked but people were sitting in our booked seats. All the trains were on time and we alighted at Penzance ahead of schedule at 1315 hours. We found our B&B, which was 5 min. from the station and left our bags there. The people there were quite difficult to communicate with but told us that the previous week a man of similar age to us had a heart attack on the first big hill. We hope he survived. We had a head wind going the 11.11 miles on the A30 to L. E. We averaged 9.5 mph. There was a welcome party for a lad who had just finished pedalling there and back to J.O.G. in 15 days. Otherwise we were pleased to get away from there. With the tail wind we averaged 11.7 mph back to the B & B. I was in granddad gear (gg) about 4 times going and once coming back

Day 2. 2/9/05

Penzance B&B We considered the B & B to be dated and poor value for money at £47.50 with shared facilities and dirty cups, in the room. Had good meal in The Turks Head. We rode to Marazion - Goldsithy - B3280 to Redruth (VG). A3047 to Scorrier - minor road to Blackwater - Three Burrows - A3075 to Newquay. Good route. Bought some fruit from a roadside stall. (I took my computer off when I walked around a town but not for hills and crossing busy roads etc.) 35.77 miles - Ave. 9.8mph. Max 36.7 mph. (gg) 5times.

Day 3 Sat. 3/9/05

Newquay B&B Wheal Treasure 01637 874 136 Good B&B on the route through Newquay. Away from the young and throbbing surfing set. A3059 to St Columb Major & A39 roads to Camleford. Busy with weekend traffic. Especially with bikes on cars going to the Camel trail. Quite a strong side and headwind. Quiet road from just past Hallworthy (Egloskerry). Big hill up through Launceston.

44.6miles - Ave. 9.mph. - Max 28.7 mph. - 4hrs. 57 min. - gg 4 times.

Untitled

Day 4. Sun. 4/9/05

Withnoe Farm Launceston B&B 01566 772 523 Very good indeed. Very attentive landlady and practically every thing you would want. Cake, biscuits and clothes washed etc. Also excellent award winning Chippie in L. with fish cooked in a choice of 4 ways. Used old A30 through Lewdown to Okehampton. Quiet but big rolling hills. Started thundering, lightening and raining at Okehampton (bought sandwiches) (B3215, A3072 & A377) and continued to Crediton. We sheltered under a disused garage canopy at Bow to have our lunch when two other E2E cyclists came in. They were trying to do 100+ a day and were having a friendly rebellion. They were hoping to average 12.5 mph but were only managing 11.8. They had set off at a similar time to us but had taken a less direct route. One of them wanted to come with us. Good route. Strong mainly southerly side winds.

36.19miles - Ave. 8.9mph. - Max 33.1 mph. - 4hrs. 32min. - gg 4times. In bottom chain wheel 50% of the day

Day 5. Mon. 5/9/05

Fircroft B&B Crediton, OK. 01363 774 224. Could not decide where to eat so we took a takeaway pizza back to our room. In Bradninch, We met an Australian couple from Wogga Wogga who were eating sandwiches on the village green. They had fold up bikes. The bikes travelled on the aeroplanes in cases. They were now trailing the cases behind them with about 8-inch wheels on the cases. They were doing similar mileage to us (at an Ave. speed of 8.5mph.) but was setting off at about 0630 hours to do it. We saw their entry in the Hotel in JOG and it had taken them about 22 days to do it. Three men from Kent turned up at the same time. They had back up and were doing 100+ miles a day at an Ave. speed of 14.5mph. We caught them up twice at cross roads looking at their map and when they were having lunch at Cullhompton. B3181 & A38 to Wellington. We had lunch and bought food for the evening, as there was nowhere to eat. Good route to Taunton. Followed signs for Bridgwater and ended up amongst 3 lane fast traffic around a roundabout and dual carriageway. We should have asked locals for a safe exit out of Taunton. We then got on to the A38, which seemed OK. We tried the canals for 2 miles but we both hit our heads on bridges so went back to the A38. We walked around roundabouts until we found some easier ones. A39 & minor roads to Bawdrip, OK.

49.01miles - Ave. 9.9.mph. - Max 30.8mph. - 4hrs. 55min. - gg 6 times. before Cullompton & twice after.

Day 6. Tue. 6/9/05

Kings Farm Bawdrip £20pp, 01278 683 233 The cheapest of the trip. Very good. Fresh breakfast food from the farm. Mrs. Norman was away watching cricket at Taunton. We eventually found her son in the milking shed. He looked the part, rosy, smiley face and smelly wellies. Cycle path to Crossington, B roads to Cheddar. Very good

Untitled

cycle track to Axbridge – tunnel through the hill to Winscombe. Minor roads to Brinsea. B3133 to Congresbury, good café. A370 towards Long Ashton, fairly good. Missed the B3129 and was directed up a steep hill, which was the first we had walked. Crossed the Clifton suspension bridge, well worth a visit. We met two cyclists who showed us to the cycle path below, next to the river, (right to the B&B at Shirehampton). They said they had helped three other E2E groups in the last couple of weeks.

42.16 miles – Ave. 9.8mph. - Max 25.3mph. - 4hrs. 16min. - gg once. Lots of big chainwheel. Good route.

Day 7. Wed. 7/9/05

Shirehampton. 01179 235140 Good B&B, Place to tether your mare evidently. Very good family pub, 10 min. walk away. E had a pint of local beer and I had cider. Used the Sustrans route out of Bristol and ended up too far out at Pilning. It would have been ideal if we were going over the Severn bridge to our home near Ross On Wye; (we found it difficult to know where we were in relation to the A38). We asked a father and son for directions but they argued, with opposing views. A cow escaped from a farm as we were going past. It was more scared of us than we were of it. It changed direction and knocked a fence down into a field. We waited until the farmer came. We eventually found the A38 and followed it to Gloucester. Good riding with tail wind. We had a bacon roll from a roadside caravan. We turned off at Tuffley Ave. and followed cycle tracks around Asda to North Upton. Then past Hucclecote – Brockworth – Shurdington to Cheltenham It seemed like a very good route. We called in at a farm shop to buy some fruit and couldn't see any body about. I shouted and was answered by a lady we hadn't seen, sitting amongst the garden gnomes. We were offered a free cup of tea on her seat amongst the garden gnomes. We stayed the night with our son, daughter in law and granddaughter Jasmine in Cheltenham.

49.86 miles – Ave. 10.9mph. - Max 27.8mph. - 4hrs. 33min. - gg 0 times. Lots of big chainwheel.

Day 8. Thur. 8/9/05

We went home via Staverton – Norton – Tirley – Staunton – Bromsberrow and Much Marcle, good lunch at the Walwyn Arms then off home.

28.35 miles – Ave. 10.6mph. - Max 30.3mph. - 2hrs. 40min. - gg 0 times.

We were ready to set off after Esther's 60th. Birthday. Esther did not want a bunch of flowers so I purchased a silk rose and tied it to her front light. It travelled all the way and was a great conversation starter for Esther.

Untitled

Day 9. Tue. 13/9/05

We thought that we were now capable of cycling 60 miles and booked a B&B at Much Wenlock. We went through Woolhope to join the CTC route at Mordiford and went on minor roads to Leominster, lunch of home made sandwiches at Ludlow castle. Then through Tugford to Much Wenlock. We arrived at 6oclock in the evening and it felt like a hard day. Good route.

59.67miles - Ave. 9.6mph. - Max 34.4mph. - 6hrs. 11min. - gg 4times.

Day 10. Wed. 14/9/05

Much Wenlock B&B OK, Shared facilities, 01952 727 892 cycling family who helped find the next B&B. on the internet. Not a lot of choice of places for evening meals. Went via Ironbridge and walked the hill out of there. There was a combination of poor directions from CTC, poor signposts, poor interpretation by us and poor directions from a local. His instructions were to go straight on which was OK until we came to a tee junction. We ended up about 3 miles off route. Booked 2 more B&Bs at the TIC in Market Drayton. (We decided to try and keep the mileage down, as distance was becoming more important than enjoyment). Found a good café while they were doing it. Had lunch and got sandwiches for the evening. We were given a slab of organic cheese from the stallholder near where we had locked our bikes. Minor roads through Lightwood Green. 2 young E2E cyclists travelling fairly lightly came past us. 5miles later we saw one standing on the side of the road, later we saw the other one coming the opposite way. About 1 hour later they both past us again. They were having similar problems to us getting around Nantwich. - Church Minnull - Wimboldsley (3miles south of Middlewich). Good route.

56miles - Ave. 9.6mph. - Max 34.4mph. - 6hrs. 11min. - gg twice.

Day 11. Thur. 15/9/05

Haply House, (farm) Wimboldsley B&B very good. 01270 526292 Private facilities across the corridor. Cake welcome. Raining when we left. B5081 to Knutsford. We used the TIC there to book another B&B. Evidently anywhere with a railway station in the Penrith area was fully booked because of the Great North Run near Newcastle We had to alter our plans. Bucklow Hill - Warburton (stopped raining). We didn't have to pay to cross the Manchester Canal as we didn't have an engine. - Leigh - Lostock. (big chain wheel most of the way, & small chain wheel after) Left the CTC directions and carried on up the hill to Bills Smithy. Started raining again with cold winds this time. We had worn short sleeve shirt and shorts up until then. We put breathable jackets and leggings on but were still fairly cold for the rest of the day. We felt like southern softies. Belmont - Tockholes & northwest edge of Blackburn. Good route.

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52.65 miles – Ave. 9.2mph. - Max 24.5mph. - 6hrs. 11min. - gg once.

Day 12. Fri. 16/9/05

Hotel in north-west Blackburn. We didn't like the look of the stains on the sheets and they had difficulty finding clean ones. We found we were in a room above the bar where they had the sound equipment for the quiz night. We found it difficult to hear the Television. There was also cigarette smoke coming up through holes in the bathroom floor. There was no cover for the bikes and we had to step over condoms to get to them the next morning. This was one occasion when we should have complained. We put on long and short sleeve tee shirts under our jackets as well as Ron Hill track bottoms. Headed for Whalley where we bought great sandwiches. Cow Arc to Slaidburn where we found a very good café a quarter of a mile from the route. Walked 5 times going over the Forest of Bowland to High Bentham – Burton In Lonsdale. The CTC directions did not coincide with our map just after Cowan Bridge and we ended up on the wrong road again. Luckily a very nice girl came past on her bike on the way from work and escorted us about 5 miles to the door of our B&B. Thank you Emma. Good route.

45.75 miles – Ave. 7.4mph. - Max 34.2mph. - 4hrs. 57min. - gg 0 times. Head wind and not in big chain wheel until 4 o'clock. Arrived at Barbon 6 30pm.

Day 13. Sat. 17/9/05

Barbon B&B Good, 015242 76322 Great meal at the Barbon Arms. Minor Roads then A683 –B6257 – A685 to Tebay. Then bought the most expensive sandwiches of the trip at the CTC café at Orton. £7 50p. for 4 slices. Walked up the hill out. Had a great run to Kirkoswold and Crosby Ravensworth where we stopped in a bus stop with a seat to have our sandwiches. A young lad managed to put us off our sandwiches. He had a caked up top lip with green slime on top running from his nose. He kept circling around us staring in the windows and would not respond to our attempts at polite conversation. Found a good cafe in the old railway station at Culgaithe. We had just started walking across the level crossing when a woman came out of the house next door. She asked if we were doing the E2E. She then invited us in for a cup of tea to meet her husband who wanted to do it as well. Our advice was, just go for it. There were further doubts with CTC directions out in the wilds. I waved a car down and asked the driver if he could direct us to Newbiggin. He said he could, switched off the engine and sat on the bonnet of his car. He chatted for 20 min. He told us there was a bit of a click up ahead and we were on the right track. The bit of a click turned out to be a hill of 20% going up. Good route.

49.88 miles – Ave. 8.9mph. - Max 32.5mph. - 5hrs. 30min. - gg 0 times. Walked twice.

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Day 14. Sun. 18/9/05

Newbiggin B&B very good, very friendly. 01768 896695. 4 poster bed. Very good three course evening meal. Hugs & kisses when we left. Good run to Brampton. Went to Langholm (good café) via Longtown. Fairly good flattish road, 2 miles longer but flatter than the alternative minor roads. Used the B709 (walked twice) to Eskdalemuir and on to the Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Centre. Mainly in big chainwheel. Good route.

46.32 miles – Ave. 10.5mph. – Max. 26.5mph. – 4hrs. 23min. – gg. twice.

Day 15. Mon. 19/9/05

Samye Ling, Tibetan Centre. 013873 73232 When we rang them they seemed surprised and told us that they were vegetarian. We had a choice of dormitories or a twin room with sink, which we chose. Our first impression was that the place was run down, with holes in the carpets and piles of junk everywhere etc. I was given a quill to sign in. There were two communal toilets, which were a distance away from the room. After our initial shock we started to warm to the place. We had to make our own beds but the room was nice and warm. You were required to take your shoes off in the food hall. Supper was started with freshly cooked bread and gruel (stew). You helped yourself out of a big pot. The main course was cold pasta, runner beans and rice. Breakfast was porridge out of the same pot and cereal. After each meal there was a quiet period of 1 hour. The people seemed to be there for the solitude etc. so we did not strike up any conversations. We are glad we went. We had a fairly strong wind, behind most of the time the next day. There were three long gradual climbs and three great run-downs to Traquair. It was a bit lumpy to Peebles. We decided to book two more B&Bs at Peebles TIC. We were informed that it would cost us £5 for the first, £3 for the second and £2 for the third booking. Any more after that was free. So we asked them to book the next six. After we were sure that they understood our requirements, (less than 50 miles within a mile of the route, cover for the bikes, ensuite and up to £30pp etc.) we went for lunch. They were very helpful; as we could not get the places we wanted and had to change the mileage around. There was a SNP conference at Aviemore. Good route.

35.21 miles – Ave. 10.9mph. – Max. 29.6mph. – 3hrs. 12min. – gg. 0 times.

Day 16. Tue. 20/9/05

Peebles, mean B&B We watched the cereal bowls being filled up. There was one small hand full of corn flakes in one bowl and a shaking of Muesli dust in an other. We each had to choose one only. We had a very good dinner of haggis neeps and tatties at the County Hotel. We left on (quite good roads) the A703 – A6094 – B7026 – A701 – A703 – 702 and came out by the back of the castle

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in Edinburgh. Where we got 10% off very good food at the Sandwich Stack (for being travelling pensioners). Tail wind and big chainwheel most of the way. Good route.

21.9 miles – Ave. 11.4mph. – Max. 26.5mph. – 1hr. 55min. – gg. 0 times.

Day 17. Wed. 21/9/05

North Edinburgh. We were a little perturbed by the man at the B&B. Whenever you moved out of your room to go to the toilet etc. he was watching you, through a window or mirror. He told us where to sit for breakfast. He also asked me to do my cycle maintenance on the pavement outside. The heater thermostat was locked at up to 18C. We got on to a cycle track easily and followed it to the NCN track. Reasonably easy to follow signs, We followed Queensferry then Fife signs. It was a very good track that took us over the Forth Road Bridge to Inverkeithing. We were sent free maps of the tracks from Edinburgh TIC. We followed 'B' roads to Kelty on the old Perth road. Great old-fashioned sit-in Deli with old-fashioned prices. Kinross to Glenfarg. Good fast quiet roads. We then went on to minor roads, which were lumpy; we walked two of the lumps. The A912 to Perth was OK. Tail wind. We went to the Railway Station to book our ticket back home. We wanted to find out the alternatives between Thurso and Wick railway stations, as we had to book the last B&Bs. They could not cope with that and we had to nominate Thurso. They finally convinced us to buy pensioner rail cards to save money. We could not get a B&B at Bettyhill so we had to book one at Melvich, which was further than we wanted to go. We rang JOG and could not get in at two places. Good route.

45.33 miles – Ave. 10.4mph. – Max. 35.3mph. – 4hrs. 34min. – gg. 0 times.

Day 18. Thur. 22/9/05

Perth B&B. 01738 628 466. VG Great choice for Breakfast. Perth TIC had sent me a written guide to Sustrans track NCN77 (&7). Shadows the A9 to Inverness. It took us to Almondbank (in the rain) and we followed signed minor roads to Bankfoot. It was very good but a bit rough in places. Katie's café in Birnam (Dunkeld) welcomed us in even though it was still pouring down and we were dripping everywhere. We had a meal and they made sandwiches for later for us. As we were walking out of the door Katie gave Esther a packet of Wuthers original sweets to keep us going. We took an alternative, NCN signed track around the Hilton hotel along the river Tay. Walked two hills just before Pitlochry. Carried on to Faskally. We were given a message to ring the next B&B, as there had been a double booking. We had visions of having to ride 10 miles out of our way up 'a wee glen'. We rang and found that our B&B had been upgraded. It was in the same village at the original price.

33.66 miles – Ave. 9mph. – Max. 25.5mph. – 3hrs. 42 min. – gg. 0

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Day 19. Fri. 23/9/05

Faskally. Good B&B 01796 472450. No place for the evening meal, hence the sandwiches. We bought more in Blair Athol for that day. Followed 'B' roads to Bruir. Then virtually traffic free with a slight upward incline to the top of the Drumochter pass (23miles). We really enjoyed this track apart from the stinging icy needles of rain and the strong mainly side but sometimes head wind. Mainly middle chain wheel. We found a sheep scrape to shelter in while we were having lunch. We met two cyclists at the top coming the other way. They had struggled up from Kingussie against a mainly head wind, where we were going. They were going to Pitlochry (22miles). We used tracks and 'B' roads to Kingussie mainly with a tail wind. It was great fun. We saw 3 red squirrels.

43. 24miles - Ave. 10mph. - Max. 27.8mph. - 4hrs. 18min. - gg. 0 times.

Day 20. Sat. 24/9/05

Kingussie Good B&B. 01540 661369 Large and very good meal (10% off, B&B concession) at The Topsy Laird in the village. We missed the turn off for NCN and met a cyclist who directed us back on to it. He had worked for Sustrans. It was a good road but it took us at least 5 miles off our ideal route. We met another cyclist who advised us to get off the route if we didn't want to do a lot more extra miles We went off it at Kingcraig and back on to the 'B; road to Aviemore. We then found the very good NCN track/road over Slochd. Because of the tail wind it felt like a fast route. We found a rock to shelter behind to have lunch. We met a cyclist who advised us to get off the NCN and on to the A9 near Craggie. We missed this and were directed past Culloden. From there on in, there were signs missing and at least one was turned around the wrong way. It was difficult to keep off busy fast roads. Mainly big and middle chain wheel. Hats off to Sustrans for their route from Perth to Kingussie and Aviemore to Craggie. It was definitely one of our highlights. 55miles - Ave. 10.5mph. - Max. 34 mph. - gg. 0 times.

Day 21. Sun. 25/9/05

Inverness Atherstone B&B good, helpful and friendly. 01463 240240 We had an evening meal at Weatherspoons. I asked for a pint of cider and was given one, which was made by Westons cider maker, close to our home. We bought sandwiches at the local Spar shop for lunchtime. We went out over the Ness Bridge and the Kessock Bridge to the Black Isle. We started off on a track by the side of the A9. We did not know how far it went but were directed off after a few miles. Walked one hill. We were again advised by a cyclist to carry on to Tore, (where most of the traffic turned off to Conon Bridge) and down the A9 to the causeway over the Cromarty Firth.

Untitled

The other recommended route was a lot hillier and further. The road was fairly good. We got back on to the CTC B&B route. We took the A9 and minor roads to Evanton. We had lunch on a rock by a snow gate in the sun. It was mainly large and middle chain wheel. B9176 - A836. Good Café at Ardgay. Bonar Bridge, A836 - A837 - B864 past the Falls Of Shin to Lairg. Middle and bottom chain wheel. The wind built up during the day and by mid afternoon it was a fairly strong head wind. We could see the smoke blowing from chimneys from our room and were concerned, as the next day's trip would be one of our longest and against the wind. The CTC route said that the distance from Lairg to Melvich was 52 miles but when you added up the individual miles it was 8 miles further. I should have checked before we booked the B&B.

49. 22 miles - Ave. 10.1mph. - Max. 28.7mph. - 4hrs. 52min. - gg. 0 times.

Day 22. Mon. 26/9/05

Lairg, Carnbren B&B Vegan. 01549 402259. We signed up for an evening meal. The other paying guests went to the local Pub. We had nice soup to start then vegetables and shepherds pie, no shepherd but it was a nice meal. Followed by apple strudel and special Soya ice cream. Porridge and cereal for breakfast with Soya milk, I didn't notice much difference. Caroline made up sandwiches of humous and vegetable pate and salad and threw in 2 peanut choc. bars. We both felt the experience was another highlight. (After lunch we had a lot of wind behind and a tail wind too). There was no smoke to see which way the wind was blowing but there were white horses blowing on the loch, which was a good sign. When we got outside we found the strong wind would generally be behind us. We seemed to be on a gentle climb to Crask Inn although we hardly noticed with the tail wind. We then had a fun run down to Altnaharra. We past a couple of our age fighting against the wind and they were struggling. We had a side wind going around Loch Naver. It was worrying as the gusts blew us around, luckily there was very little traffic about. When we left the lake, the sun came out and we had lunch by a plaque explaining the Highland clearances. We top geared down to Achagary. It was then a bit lumpy to Bettyhill and we walked one hill. 13.5 ave mph up to this point. OK café. Strong side winds, rain and mostly bottom chain wheel to Melvich. Walked one of the hills. The roads were very narrow and there were passing places. We tried not to slow cars down and would hang about in passing places to let them have a clear run. We were forever waving and being waved at. We did this for a small fleet of cars when Esther said ' I am sure that the Queen was driving that car and she gave me a stately nod of the head and a regal smile'.

59. 28 miles - Ave. 11.5mph. - Max. 29 mph. - 5hrs. 2min. - gg. 0 times.

Day 23. Tue. 27/9/05

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Melvich B&B, at £30pp the most expensive. 01641 531256 award winners and very good but only the second place that did not have any cover for the bikes. It had the most varied menu for breakfast including fruit compot, herring in oatmeal with gooseberry coulis, kippers and smoked salmon with scrambled egg, etc. The Hallivale Restaurant was ten minutes walk away and was also very good for our evening meal. Our main computer lost all its readings but we used the back up one, which had been recording slightly less distances. We had one longish climb out of Melvich, then slightly lumpy to Thurso then mostly gentle downhill to JOG with a strong southerly side and sometimes tail wind. There was a lovely rainbow over JOG when we arrived which we thought was quite apt. Two men arrived after us but loaded up their bikes on a car and went before we had chance to speak to them. A couple turned up later on and they had roughly taken the same time as us but had clocked up over 1100 miles. They were going back to the YHA at Canisbay that night. Cycling to Wick the next day. Catching the train at 0620ish the day after and arriving in Oxford around about 2200 hours. This was similar to one of the options we had.

38.35miles - Ave. 12.4mph. - Max. 32 mph. - 3hrs. 7 min. - gg. 0 times. The total mileage on the b/up computer was 1002 miles. After we deducted the 19 miles needed to get us to Lands End. The total distance LE to JOG was 983 miles. This included the extra day we put in by going via Cheltenham.

Travelling Wed 28/9/05

JOG Sea View Hotel. 01955 611220 fairly good but limited menu and very noisy plumbing during the night. Rode back to Thurso railway station with strong southerly side wind.

19miles - Ave. 10.4mph. - Max. 19 mph. gg. 0 times. Caught the train at 1306 hours and arrived at Inverness at 1648. We had a great meal at the Riverside Inn.

Travelling Thurs. 29/9/05

Back at Atherstone B&B. They put on a very good early breakfast for us. We caught the train at 0803. We saw a lot of the route that we had cycled. It was great fun. Changed at York and Birmingham and arrived at Ledbury at 1623. Our Son in law and grandson William were waiting for us and took us to see our daughter and grandson Ben, Where we had Fish and chips and a bottle of Champagne.

Conclusions

Thinking back about the route, we would change very little. The A3059 and A39 from Newquay to Camelford were very busy. We were told later that Saturday was the busiest day. Everything else was excellent. We followed Phil Horsley's route from near Camelford to Cullompton. The CTC route from near Ross On Wye to Edinburgh and

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from Inverness to JOG. We followed Sustrans signs through Crossington, Cheddar, and parts of Bristol, Edinburgh and from Perth to Inverness.

We rode all the hills until we got to Bristol. We could ride quite steep climbs but if we saw them stretching into the distance we found plenty of excuses to get off. When we walked we were looking for bits to ride. We realised early on that the amount of time we were on the road did not tie up with the times the computer was giving us. We realised we were spending a lot of time mainly listening to people who were interested in our trip.

We found that a few of our first choice B&Bs were full but that they would always pass on a couple of possible B&Bs. Two of the B&Bs in the CTC updated booklet had ceased to trade. I think both were in or near JOG.

We took 2 x 750 water bottles each and felt that was adequate. We made sure that our urine was kept fairly clear. We tried the local food where we could, fruit from roadside stalls. Local beer and cider, stovies and haggis in Scotland etc. We tried early on to get over half way before we stopped for lunch. But we found that we got the bonk after 2 hours or more. We built in biscuit stops and things went much better. We washed and well rinsed our shorts and shirt armpits etc as early as possible after each ride every day. We had to keep justifying the fact we weren't doing it for charity, to other people and why it was going to take us three weeks.

Reading this back it does not seem to reflect the fun and high points we had. We had one or two lows but every day we had times when we both were laughing out loud.

We had great expectations around every corner.

We felt it was a wonderful achievement and would say to anybody interested,

"Just do it, in your own way".

You will enjoy yourself.

Michael & Esther Williams

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