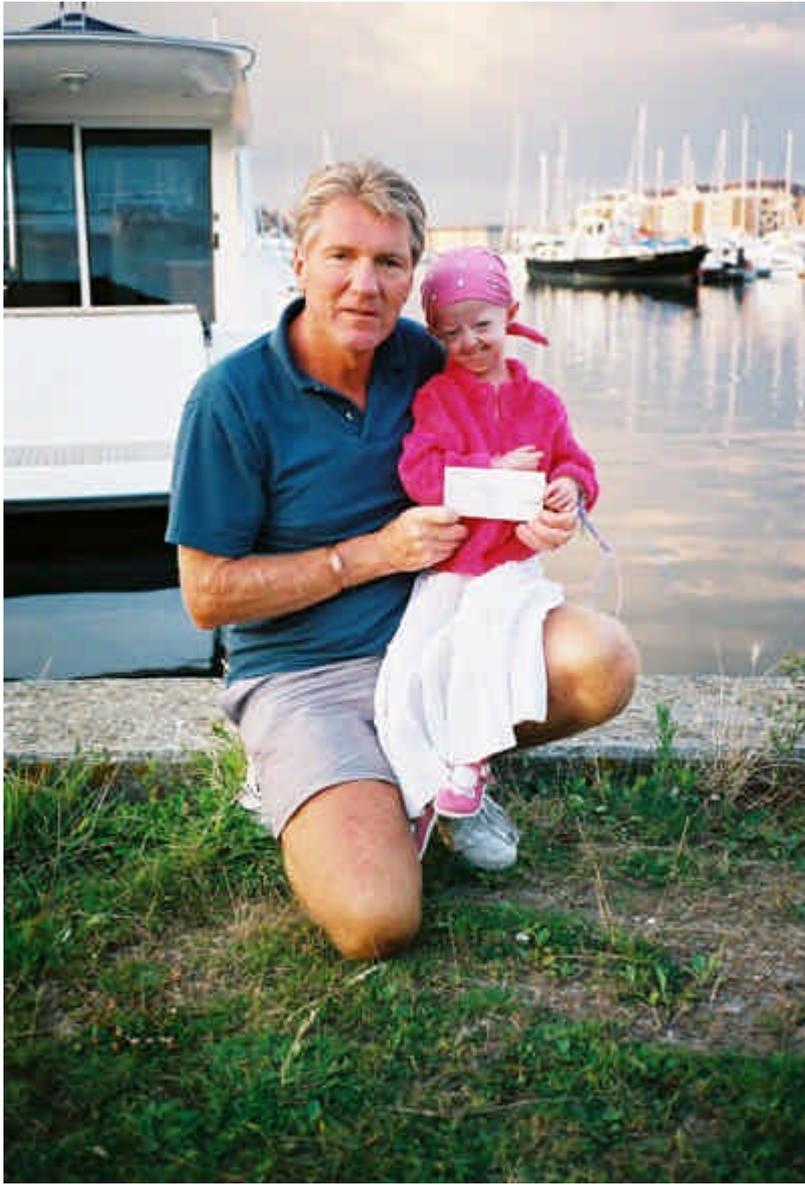


My 'End to End' by Steve Keens

FOR HAYLEY OKINES & THE PROGERIA FOUNDATION

If anyone had said I would be doing 927 miles 3 years ago I would have said they were mad. The last time I rode a bike as a sport was in the late 70s when I was 28 years old. I started cycling at the age of 16 with the Javelin C. C. a touring club in Forest Gate, east London and later with the Lea Valley C. C. I raced with them for a number of years before leaving the sport after I got married. I played badminton and tennis and weight trained up to the age of 50 when I had to give up all impact sports due to severe arthritis in the back, shoulder and knees. After a knee operation my surgeon suggested going to a gym and use the cycling machines to strengthen my leg muscles, he said this would help support the knee joint and put off the need for further surgery. Needless to say I got bored with this after a few sessions and got my old bike out, spruced it up and got right back in to cycling. I joined the Easterley C. C. and rode with them for a few years but now ride with the 40 plus Club in Essex. I have found that cycling improves my mobility and after warming up, I ride fairly pain free. I still needed a challenge, I tried racing again and did a few 10s but found it too extreme, so after seeing a Channel 5 programme about Hayley Okines I decided to do a charity ride for her and only one thing came to mind, the End to End. I don't know why I never did it when I was younger, because I toured every where else in the UK.





['Justgiving' link](#)

<http://hayleypage.com/>.

I left home 9.30 am on Tuesday the 14th of June and caught the late morning train from Waterloo down to Plymouth which arrived at 5pm. Jumped on the bike and rode west 8 miles to Landrake, where my friends Alex and Les live. They put me up for the night, fed me and supplied a few pints of beer as well!

Day 1. Wednesday 15th June.

Alex and Les had offered to run me down to Lands End, so after a good breakfast I put the bike in the boot of their Jaguar XJ said goodbye to Alex's parents (they live with her), and prepared for the off. Before I left I took a picture of myself with Len Eshouse, some of you may know him from your racing days back in the 40's 50's & 60's, he rode with the Becontree Wheelers and briefly with my old club the Easterly C.C. He was a top rider, holder of quite a few records and winner of many races. He still holds the Becontree Wheelers 30 mile tandem record of 1 Hour 4 minutes set in 1951 partnering Charlie Upson, amazing. He still rides, but at 86 finds the hills down there a bit too much. I got the impression that if he was a few years younger, he'd have loved to have joined me.



(Sadly, since writing this in August he passed away suddenly in early October, I'm glad he had time to read this report before he died.)

We arrived at Lands End at 10.30 am, put the bike together and went off to find the Lands End signpost to take some pictures and can you believe it, £9.50p to go inside the fence and stand under the sign, needless to say I stood outside and had the pictures taken with the guy in the kiosk looking on with a face like thunder! I can't believe that this area of outstanding natural beauty has been sold off to a business man and had a theme park built there, it should have been given to the National Trust and left as nature intended.

Anyway I set off in bright sunshine with a really strong S.W. wind pushing me on, I couldn't believe my luck, straight on to the big ring and ripping along. I joined the A 30 and just after Penzance, while hurtling downhill at 45 mph (with the brakes half on!) I hit a 'cats eye' and my rear tyre exploded!! Luckily I was able to stop safely and as it was only the tube I was soon on my way but now a lot more wary of those big hills. I stuck to the dual carriageway as I'm sure many of you know, the B roads are a lot steeper and there are so many of them. With the wind behind me I managed a good run (79 miles) back to Landrake for another night of good food, beer and company.



Day 2. Thursday 16th June.

I left mid morning with the intention of riding over Dartmoor but with low clouds, rain and mist I decided against it and used the A38 all the way to Exeter. The weather improved and I had a warm, sunny afternoons ride along the A30/A35 to Lyme Regis where I stayed with Judy, an old school friend of my wife. (86 miles)

Day 3. Friday 17th June.

I needed an early start today as my next leg was all the way to Cheltenham. At last I could start getting off the dual carriageways and onto the B roads I had sussed out on a recent holiday to the area. I went from Lyme Regis to Crewkerne, onto Glastonbury and rather than go over the Mendips I took the slightly longer route via the Somerset levels. On through Bristol on the A38 and on to Cheltenham to stay with Les, an old school mate of mine who took me out for a nice curry and a few lagers on a beautiful hot night (105 miles)



Day 4. Saturday 18th June.

The forecast for today was really hot (high 80s) music to my ears, as I love riding in the heat. I set off early, before 8am & continued on the A38 to Worcester, where I stopped & phoned Len & Therese Mason. They are both cyclists, who had recently completed the French 'End to End' equivalent (from south to north coasts). They had contacted me after reading about my ride on the 40+ web site and had offered a meal and/or bed for the night plus sponsorship. Unfortunately, as this would take me off route by 50 odd miles, and I had promised to visit an old friend of my Mother's in Stourport-on-Severn, I had to decline their kind offer but would like to thank them again through this magazine.

I intended to stop at Whitchurch that night but with a following wind and energy still in my legs, I decided to press on to Southport (nr Liverpool) helped by the knowledge that I had a rest day on Sunday. These last three days were all in temperatures of 80 degrees+, in fact I was still putting on sun tan lotion at 7pm, but I'm sure I found the energy by drinking gallons of water and religiously using the Maxim hypo tonic energy drink powder in my drinking water. In fact I worked out I had drunk 2½ gallons of water in one day! I headed up through Chester on up to Birkenhead intending to catch the 'Ferry cross the Mersey' however by the time I got there the service had stopped for the day, luckily Les had told me that there was a train that went under the river, so I found that and rode the final few miles into Southport by 9.30pm to stay with Carol, another old school friend of mine. Amazingly I felt fine after my longest ride so far, so by 10.15 we were both sitting in the pub having a drink and I didn't go to bed till after 12. (143 miles)

Sunday 19th June.

A day of rest. Lie in. Read the papers. Barbeque. Cleaned and oiled my bike. Lovely!

Day 5. Monday 20th June.

My route today was heading up to Brampton nr Carlisle. I used the A59 to Preston onto Lancaster and then I picked up the canal bike path in Carnforth and enjoyed a nice flat ride before rejoining the main road to Kendal. The A6 took me to Shap where I had arranged to meet someone many of you may know, Laurie Eason, a member of the 40+ who now lives in Brampton with Margaret, his wife. I had arranged to meet him in Shap village, but as I was slightly late, he kept on riding and we met at the top of Shap fell (sorry Laurie, I'm sure you appreciated that extra challenge!) It was nice to have some company riding for a change, and the last 40 odd miles back to his home flew by as we chatted and rode. I really appreciated him putting himself out and his hospitality as I have only ever met him twice before when he visited old friends at the club. Thanks to him and Margaret and for the lovely meal. I went to bed at 12. 45 am leaving Laurie writing up his diary for the day as he has done ever since 1951, after being demobbed from National Service. Had the full use of Laurie's bike workshop for repairs etc. but didn't need it, just a quick oil of the chain & that was that. (117 miles).





Day 6. Tuesday 21st June.

Laurie rode with me again this morning, we headed out for Gretna Green & for the first time on my trip into a strong head wind and it wasn't long before we got to the Scottish border, mentally knowing I was in Scotland helped me keep going although there was still 400 odd miles to go!

Laurie left me soon after and I carried on through Lockerbie, Beattock and following the B road that intertwines with the M74. I found this next 40 odd miles really hard as it was into the wind and climbing the southern uplands of Scotland. Finally I reached Blantyre just south of Glasgow, where I stayed with Alex and Margaret, a business associate, who once more kindly put me up for the night. I took the opportunity to catch up on some business with him as I don't get up there that often.. (96 miles)



Day 7. Wednesday 22nd June.

I left a bit late this morning as I overslept so I lost valuable riding time and wasn't able to make my planned destination, Glen Coe. I rode through Glasgow in beautiful weather and headed out through Dumbarton and along the bonny banks of Loch Lomond and on reaching Crianlarich started to look for B & B's as by this time I had run out of friends! As it was a more expensive area I headed on for Tyndrum and as I had been informed that there were no B & B's between here and Glen Coe, I decided to stay at the first reasonable place I found, which proved difficult as the place was full of walkers and climbers, so look out if you plan the same route! Fish and chips for dinner, watched some Wimbledon highlights and a early night. (75 miles).

Day 8. Thursday 23rd June.

Left fairly sharp this morning as I wanted to get as far as possible, the weather was appalling , low cloud, mist and light rain, followed the A82 through Glencoe, crossed the bridge at Ballachulish and on to Fort William, this was the part I was looking forward to the most but didn't see much of it at all. The weather forecast was right and by the time I reached Spean Bridge the cloud started to lift and by the time I reached Fort Augustus on Loch Ness the day was warm and sunny so I stopped for lunch and dried out a bit. Funny thing, there was a stall run by the Fair Trade / church to coincide with the G8 summit for Africa, they were after donations etc, so I got chatting to the vicar and showed him my sponsorship forms for Progeria and my sister's mission in Kenya and they ended up giving ME chocolate bars and tea! Pushed on along the banks of Loch Ness, fairly flat roads following the shore and a S.W. wind right behind again. I took the opportunity to take a few pictures of the Loch and the castles along the route as the

views are so stunning, shame I never had the time to spend more time there. Arrived in Inverness at 6pm and it took 5/6 attempts to find a B.B. with a bath, as all I wanted by this time was a long hot soak, after 800 odd miles my joints were starting to ache. (106 miles).



Day 9. Friday 24th June.

All I wanted now was to get the ride completed as soon as possible, but the owner of the B.B. said it was 150 miles to J. o G. I was looking at a further 2 full days more riding as a full on N. E. wind was blowing in off the coast and I would be heading into it on the A9. Rode out over the river and the first road sign I came to read Wick 103 miles, J. o G. 120 miles and I thought, I can make that. So I set myself targets, knocked off the first 3 miles and then aimed for the next 10 or 15 miles and didn't eat until I had got there. Did 50 miles and had lunch in Golspie, I was now looking forward ? to Helmsdale the biggest climb on the A9. A few cyclists I had spoken to before my ride had said the A9 to Wick was fairly hilly the whole way, but I didn't find it too bad apart from Helmsdale, a mini version of a Tour climb with hairpins etc. It wasn't helped by the fact that the whole climb had road works on it, traffic lights and temporary road surfaces etc, should be a nice climb once its all finished ?. The next few miles after Helmsdale were a bit stiff but generally the roads onto Wick were pretty fair. Ran out of water but luckily just before Ulbster there was a pub in the middle of nowhere, looked for a tap, no joy, so went in for a pint of shandy, I couldn't believe it, the pub was quite full and every one turned and looked at me, just like in the film 'An American Werewolf in London'. I had a pint and a bag of nuts, £1. 35p, better put this pub on the runs list ? Got into Wick at 9pm and found a B.B. I was so cold (1st day I had put tights on) that I showered and went straight to bed without any dinner. (103 miles)







Day 10. Saturday 25th June.

At last, only 17 miles to go, went to the station to get a ticket and found it shut, (its only part time) so I left for J. o G. worried about the train. Good fairly flat run all the way in and did it in just over the hour, arriving just before 11am. Super morning, warm, sunny and calm, so I took all the usual pictures and then went to do the last few under the signpost, and low and behold there's a guy in a kiosk charging to go inside the barrier. I went off to get my log stamped in 'The Last House', came out and he had gone off for a cup of tea, so I shot over, took all my pics. and he came back with a face like thunder, (must have been the same bloke who was at Lands End).







By this time I realised that I wouldn't make it back for the 12.37pm train by bike, so I had to get a taxi, no time for a cup of tea or any sightseeing, the reason for my haste was that I had heard there were engineering works on the rail lines out of Inverness on the Sunday and they were not taking bikes on the link bus. Made Wick with 10 mins. to spare and put the bike on the van that's put on in the summer for all the cyclists, then had a nice 4 hour + trip through the Glens to Inverness. By the time I had found my bike and the ticket office, I had missed the last train out that day (it was only just gone 5pm!) The ticket guy said with a smirk on his face that I was now stuck there until Monday. I must say I didn't find Scot Rail employees very helpful. Gutted ? you bet, shot round the travel agents to get a flight and there were 2 that evening, only trouble was I didn't think to take my passport for ID. Last resort was the bus station, but I knew they would not take a bike unless its in a box or bike bag. Tried 3 coach companies and they all said "no chance", so I waited for another coach to arrive bound for Glasgow

and London. There were 2 drivers, so I approached one and said "what's the chance of getting on", he looked at the bike and said "sorry its against the rules". He continued loading his passengers, I was now looking at 2 nights in Inverness or get back on the bike, I didn't fancy either. I tried again but this time I mentioned my trip for charity and showed him the picture of Hailey Okines, the little girl with Progeria for whom I was riding for, he stopped, stared at it and said he had watched the repeat TV programme the night before, I could see in his eyes it had got to him. He said "wait there", and off he went to see his mate, came back and said "get your bike you're on to Glasgow". The relief, a 4 hour + ride to Glasgow and I didn't have a ticket, so I bunged him 'a score'. I knew now I was round the rail works and could get a train Sunday morning, but the nearer I got to Glasgow the more I thought about staying on the coach to London and bunging him a few more quid. As we arrived and before I could approach him he came up to me and said "if there is a spare seat, its yours", but by now my luck had finally run out, the coach was full. I thanked him again and would like to write to his coach company to say what he had done for me but he would probably get the sack. I don't suppose he will ever see this, but THANKS MATE. I tried some more coaches but they were all full so decided to kip in the bus station after spending a few hours walking around Glasgow, having a meal and watching the locals on their Saturday night out. Spent most of the night half asleep and being woken up by rowdy Glaswegians. They were all very friendly, especially after I told them what I had done. I have to tell you this, it kept me amused for ages. A man, probably in his early 70s staggered up to the seat opposite mine, totally and utterly blitzed, he could just about stand up. It was just like you see a drunk portrayed on a comedy show, 2 steps forward, 1 back, 2 sideways and so on, he managed to sit down and then produced a packet of fags and a lighter, I thought this is going to be good, he then spent ages trying to find the end of his fag, pulled his coat over his head and lit it, I was ready to pounce and put the fire out when he stood up and proceeded to make his way to the waste bin to put his empty fag packet in it. He was that drunk but still had the decency to put his rubbish in the bin although it took about 10 attempts to find the slot. I can't help but think that he has probably spent most of his life doing the same thing week in and week out, amazing!

Set off for the station at 7am, had a wash and shave, then found out an earlier train was leaving from Queens Station (I was at Central). Jumped on the bike and made it in time. 8 hours later I was back home sitting in the sun with a gin and tonic, BRILLIANT.

It now gives me great pleasure to thank all those who have helped me to put this trip together, starting with all those mentioned above who put me up. My wife Teresa, I think she thought I was pulling off more than I could chew, but she knows how bloody minded I can be when I get an idea in my head. She did suggest doing London to Glasgow but it doesn't quite have the same ring to it. She has done a lot of fund raising on my behalf through all the people she meets with her job as a fitness instructor, also through her local church St. Andrews in Hornchurch even though 2 other church members were doing a charity ride from Lands End to Margate at the same time as mine and a lot of people there gave to both causes. Thanks to her Mum who collected on my behalf at all the clubs and associations she belongs to. A big thanks to Bill Young from our Essex A section who volunteered to collect on my behalf from the Lads And Lassies who ride out with me on Thursdays and Tuesdays, He said leave it to me, I can ring more out of them than you can, I have known them longer (his words). As I write I know he has collected a fair bit over £200 and he hasn't let me buy him a pint yet, well done Bill. Lastly thanks to all the Essex A section for donating so much and

quite few others who Bill has captured who don't ride out with us very often and I may not have met yet.

I also received a big donation of £100 via the Romford Recorder article from Kevin Leneham, in Hornchurch, fantastic, CHEERS Kevin.

If there is anyone I have missed out, sorry and thanks, there have been so many!

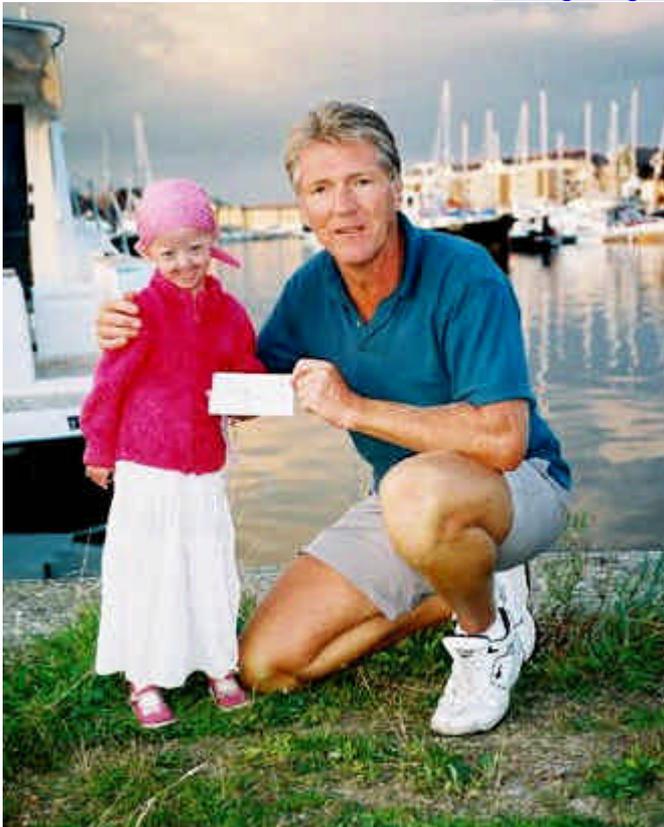
I'm pleased to say I have since met with Hayley and her family and handed over my cheque for £1,000 this is half the amount raised so far, the rest is going to another charity which I also support.

Back to the ride, I covered in total 927 miles, but found out on our club's 100 mile fun run that my computers out by nearly 2 miles in every 100, so I am probably nearer to 945 miles for the whole trip. I definitely won't be doing it again as a charity run, I think you can only do this once but I would do it again as a touring holiday and take at least 3 weeks, so as to take in the sights and use all the cross country B. roads. I must say the ride was the easier part, you can't believe how much paperwork is involved for the fundraising etc. That's all from me.

cheers,

STEVE KEENS.

Use the ['Justgiving' link](#)



Hayley's page at

<http://hayleypage.com/>.

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