News for October 2010

Thursday 28th October - report from Bill Balchin: After heavy rain on Wednesday night the roads were wet on Thursday but no more rain was forecast for our trip to the Castle of Comfort from Ashton. John Killick was the leader with a dozen followers out through Long Ashton, Wild Country Lane and up to the A38. With newly cut hedges and wet roads there was no way that we were taking Hobbs Lane. The last time that we turned onto the A38 towards Winford it was very tight with airport buses squeezing past. I had decided to ride on the path this time, and so had everybody else. I don’t know if it is an official shared path but there were no pedestrians and it felt a lot safer. As most people have ridden on practically every lane around the Chew valley the trick is not to try to find new lanes but to string together the ones we know in a different way to get to the destination around noon. John did a fine job taking us through the old hospital site, Felton, right at Winford Manor and on the long descent through Hounsley Batch into Chew Stoke. We then circumnavigated the Eastern side of the lake into Bishop Sutton and followed the lanes into East Harptree to get stuck into the big climb of the day - Smithams Hill. A few were forced to walk and I am sure that everybody was glad to reach the top and pile into the Castle of Comfort at a few minutes after twelve.

The Black Rat cider was favoured by many, some brave souls even going in for seconds. The pub started filling up as the Bath...
contingent arrived, followed by Clevedon, a few independants including Jane and the Winterbourne Wheelers - without Alan Bracey today who was at the South Glos planning meeting to see cycle route 15 from Coxgrove Hill into Shireway gain approval, shame it was not all the way into Yate but it is a start. In all I counted thirty four cyclists as well as a dozen or more civilian customers - not bad for a pub in the middle of nowhere. Before leaving Berry presented Alan Picard of team Bath with a seventieth birthday card. Surely seventy is the new fifty (whatever that means).

By the time we left for home there was actually a bit of sunshine for the blast down the Wellsway and around the Western side of the lake, back into Chew Stoke, Chew Magna and Norton Malreward. At the junction of Norton Lane and the A37 most of us went on to Queen Charlton while Pete Hobbs guided a few down the cycle track to Temple Meads, a handy route to know if you need to get into Bristol. The rest of us headed for the Bristol - Bath track and home. Thanks to John Turton for supplying me a GPX file of today's route. I hope the link will work - I have never tried this before.

Click here for a route map from Aston to East Harptree and back to Bitton

Monday 25th October - message from Jon Usher, Project Officer, Infrastructure Cycling City Team: we overcame a large hurdle on the Connect2 scheme this afternoon when we received planning approval from Bristol's Development Control (South & East) Committee for the Ashton Court scheme.

We now have the small matter of the North Somerset application to overcome on the 4th November. If you haven't already supported this application - may I urge you to do so? We received over 80 supporting comments on the Bristol application - and this went a long way to persuading the committee.

To support the North Somerset application click on the link on the "links" page. Today has proved to be a good day in planning terms on the Connect2 scheme as we also received planning approval for the link to the Brunel Swivel Bridge - we now have a great deal to do to get these projects on the ground.

I would like to thank those who commented on the Ashton Court planning application - and remind you that there's still time to support the final piece in this particular jigsaw!

Thursday 21st October - report from Pete Campbell: I commented two weeks ago that it's autumn now, but this Thursday started more like winter. Cars and roofs were covered with frost, and a cold breeze from the west was expected. So there was a reasonable turnout at Bitton station (13 riders) for John Turton to guide us to Luckington. It seems to me, after nearly two years of BTOTC Thursday rides, that more people turn out in winter than summer. I can't tell if that's because we mostly look forward to hard riding conditions, or because old riders get soft in the head.

John took us through Bitton, along Golden Valley and up Redfield hill, and within a
A couple of miles was already whipping the group into shape - none of this dropping off the back was going to be happening today. At the regular stops to regroup, John gave us summaries of the route we would be following which, for me at least, meant that the day was not the usual one of following the rider in front, without any real idea of where I've been or where I'm going.

We progressed through Abson and Doynton, and then up to the Cotswold escarpment on the north side of Dyrham Park. Crossing the A46 was the usual game of looking for a gap in the traffic and diving over to the other side (everyone made it, yet again, I'm pleased to say). We took the long gradual descent via Burton, Acton Turville, Littleton Drew and Grittleton, into Luckington for lunch. By now the sun was up, although still a bit chilly, but with wind was behind us and with very little traffic, it was another of those days when everything seems right with the world (apart from the Chancellor's cutbacks, of course, although for anyone who's retired and has paid off their mortgage, even that seems a small problem).

We will be back at the Old Royal Ship in six weeks time for the Christmas lunch. Yesterday's turnout for lunch showed what a good choice that is. About fifty cyclists were there, which is more than I've seen on a Thursday for a long time, and just like at previous visits, the food is good, brought to the table quickly, the staff are very pleasant. Don't forget to book your seat for Christmas lunch there on 2 December: see Berry Parker or John Bishop. And don't forget to pay in advance: it only costs £15. Berry is also organising an order for Bristol CTC clothing (short and long sleeve jerseys, and a winter jacket), so let him know asap what you need to complete your wardrobe.

Time to ride back home to Bristol, Bath, south Gloucestershire, north Somerset, and who knows where else the fifty diners came from, but not before some of us spent a few minutes admiring John Upward's new bike. It has has a titanium frame, and weighs less than my water bottle. There is no way I could have one of those: I need the hills to be a challenge. (You don't have to believe that last comment if you don't want to.)

John Turton led a gradually diminishing group homeward into the wind via Badminton, Old Sodbury and Dodington. South Gloucestershire residents peeled off at Wapley, while John took a group of five to Pucklechurch and the Bristol/Bath cyclepath. The final split took me into central Bristol with two others. Another good day out!

Also, have a look at the Links section and go to the local authority planning sites to register your support for the proposed cycle paths. Bristol/South Gloucestershire/North Somerset are unlikely to spend money on cycle improvements unless they get a solid vote in favour of providing cycling improvements.

Click here for the route from Bitton to Luckington.

**Thursday 14th October - report from Bill Balchin:** The previous Thursday was unseasonably mild for October but today was much more normal so longs and big gloves were the order of the day - except for Pete Campbell still in shorts. Tell me,
what was that fetching shade of blue on your legs? Despite the drop in temperature it was dry with no noticeable wind, good enough to tempt twenty two starters from Rexam to follow Tony Weaver along the Old Gloucester Road to Tyleryngton, Baden Hill, Cromall, Damery and into Wick. Nice dry roads although every gateway seemed to have a trail of concrete-hard mud lumps to bump over - but then cyclists always have to complain about something. At Stinchcombe we turned left at the church to the A38 by the Prince of Wales, then left and right through Breadstone, Wanswell and into Berkley and Ham at smack on noon. A very pleasant twenty miles of not too demanding cycling through attractive countryside, can't beat it can you.

The Bath group had arrived just before us so there was a bit of a queue at the bar but husband and wife team Don and Sue soon dispensed the drinks from a range of local ales and cider (at reasonable prices) before bringing out the buffet. Pizza, sausages, samosas and chips may not be the ideal diet for athletes but it filled a hole very nicely.

Getting close to leaving time Alan Bracey rose to his feet and announced that the planning application to continue the cycle track from Coxgrove Hill into Yate was continuing but in danger of having many more objectors than supporters. Pete Hobbs then stood up and made a similar speech regarding Bristol cycle routes. The funding made available as part of the Cycling City Initiative must be spent by March 2011 or it will be withdrawn. There has been plenty of planning, consulting etc but very little actual building yet. Please look out on the "Links" page for schemes that need our support otherwise the objectors will have their way. Finally John Bishop was able to
take the floor and present Tony Weaver with a card for his seventieth birthday - and Tony, you look every bit as youthful as Cliff Richard who also celebrated his 70th today.

Back outside the temperature was still low, but still dry and wind free as we left a table of CTC riders in the pub and rode the flat roads of the Berkley Vale back to home. After a seventy mile trip last week I was probably first home today with under forty miles on the clock. Swings and roundabouts.

Click here for the route map to from Rexam to Ham and almost back to Bristol.

Tuesday 12th October - report from Bill Balchin: The last official Tuesday ride of the year took place on a cool but dry day with even a bit of sun later in the afternoon. The disappointment for leader David Woodward was that only Bill Balchin and Dave Stevens joined him after carefully planning the route, finding first class stops for tea and lunch, and even researching local history around the tour. The photo shows us at Brockhampton church - a little gem of Arts and Crafts design featuring a thatched roof, wooden tower and more. With a mixture of forest trails, cycle paths and rolling countryside this is a day out that will be on the list for 2011 when it will hopefully attract more riders. We certainly had an enjoyable sixty two miles.

Thursday 7th October - report from Bill Balchin: Into October when the weather turns cold and dull and John Bishop moves into longs until Spring - except today we had sunshine and blue skies all day and even JR was in his shorts - making some painful pun about "knee-ding them for the sunshine". Fifteen was a large turnout for an Ashton start and Brian Trott had a route planned to do the hard stuff before lunch and an easier trip home. After Long Ashton high street and Wild Country Lane we were about to take to Hobbs Lane but the freshly cut hedges looked like puncture traps so we went up the A38. An airport bus had to squeeze past on one of the pinch points giving us very little space but his only alternative was slow down and wait so that was never going to happen. Left into Winford and on to Winford manor it was all quiet lanes and considerable drivers pulling in for us - one even reversed! It was a delight pedalling around the rolling hills along Thrubwell Lane and through Butcombe. Blagdon brought the day's big test with the two stage climb up to the main road then on up again to the top. I said "good morning" to a woman walking by in
Blagdon, she smirked and replied "You haven't got to the hard bit yet".

Once on the top of the Mendips we turned through Charterhouse towards Shipham and Brian informed me that we had done 2.048 feet of climbing in twenty miles.

It was reward time soon as we descended first a 15% drop then a small climb followed by a long 9% descent almost into Axbridge where speeds approaching 40mph were hit by some. Soon after the main group arrived at the Lamb the Winterbourne contingent arrived with England's latest medal winner. Not from the Commonwealth games in Delhi but the Brompton world championships in Blenheim in the shape of John Huish.

The Lamb was on top form as usual rapidly serving up the meals and dispensing a range of Butcombe ales. With the seniors two course meal at six ninety five plus a pint of first class Butcombe Gold both for under a tenner it is no wonder they had plenty of customers as well as the thirty odd cyclists.
There was a bit of furtive passing around of secret packages during lunch and all was revealed as we prepared to depart when Berry presented John Bishop with a signed card to wish him a happy seventieth birthday. Yes, despite those youthful good looks our John will be a septuagenarian next week. There were tears in his eyes as we burst into an impromptu chorus of "why was he born so beautiful". Was it the singing or finding there was no money in the card?

Some of those living to the East of Bristol decided to make their way back via Cheddar Gorge and get a bit more climbing in their legs. The majority settled for the flatter route planned by Brian and were soon presented with a choice - take the roads
to Winscombe with a hill to go over or get onto the flat cycle track and go through the tunnel.

It was a roughly even split, I get a bit disorientated in that black tunnel so went with the road group and we rejoined the track at Winscombe station just before the tunnelers arrived. On towards home and at Yatton station we were mesmerised by a wooden post with a device built in so that you could wind a handle and be told the history of the Strawberry line by what sounded like Fred Wedlock - surreal. After that it was over the Kenn Moors back into Long Ashton. Half a dozen called into the buttery on the dockside for a brew before the final push for home to finish off a perfect day.

Congratulations to next week’s venue for 14th October the Salutation at Ham on being a regional winner in the pub of the year competition by the campaign for real ale. A much more worthwhile award than the evening post award to a certain joint in East Harptree.