

## News for April 2011

**Thursday 7th April - report from Bill Balchin:** For the second time in recent years we were joined by an Australian lady cyclist. Katrina is a long way from Sydney and currently working for the University of East London looking into the culture of cycling. So as part of the project Kat rode with us from Ashton to the Hunters Lodge on the Mendips. Don't bother asking if they need anyone else, I am first in the queue.



Having a stranger in the group made me think about what they see when we just take so much for granted. The trip along Long Ashton high street is pretty awful really (maybe we should consider a new start point, perhaps the suspension bridge) but it was more than compensated for by some great scenery as Jane took the sixteen starters along Wild Country Lane, Winford Manor and through the charming village of Regil. The hedges are just that bit high to block views of Blagdon lake as we navigated around Nempnett Thrubwell and on to Compton Martin where Jane's intention to lead us up the Wrangle became clear - well it is the most direct route. Once on the top of the Mendips it was not too long before the official group met up with dozens more cyclists sat out in the garden enjoying the sunshine and the traditional cider at two twenty a pint. Is the Hunters Lodge a listed building? I hope they keep it just as it is. It has not changed much in the last forty years.



Right, time to go home - what route shall we take? With the sun still shining and Cheddar Gorge just down the road a big group went that way to show more of our great local scenery to Kat, although several took a more direct route back. Your correspondent felt duty bound to stick with the leader on a splendid descent of the gorge, on to Axbridge on the cycle track and onto the Strawberry line. Lara showed us the way even though she had passed her home. Then when we got to the tunnel at Winscombe it was blocked by steel mesh barriers due to loose masonry - although work to stabilise it is almost complete. Showing her feisty side, Lara said "Follow me" squeezed past the end of the barrier and through the tunnel towards a second barrier and couple of workmen at the far end. "Ere, its dangerous here" said the guy. Our heroine looked him in the eye and said "Well you're stood here, AND you haven't got a helmet on" go girl! So we carried on into Yatton where the Strawberry Line Cafe had unfortunately closed at 2:30. But we rode down the high street into the precinct and had a quick cuppa before saying farewell to Lara and riding back over the moors and the Flax Bourton cycle track (now resurfaced after the weed damage with a layer that looks several inches thick) and into Bristol.

Many thanks to Martyn for escort duties taking Kat to the start and back again at the end. Kat really enjoyed her day out with us and hopes to do it again in June with her colleague Rachel. [Click here for a link to Kat's map of the day with photos.](#)

### Thursday 14th April - report from Pete Campbell:

Alex von Tutschek normally organises the first car-assisted ride of the year, and in 2011 the BTOTC continued this fine tradition. Close by Langport's free car park, the Parret Coffee House is a very pleasant place to take tea or coffee before setting off to see some of Somerset's lesser-known features. Seven riders turned up for the 10:30 start, including two people new to Thursday rides: Alex arrived with Murray who brought his immaculately restored pre-second world war cycle sporting a four-speed hub gear, and Arnold brought his neighbour's father (visiting from Hull), who apparently never goes anywhere without taking his bike.

Alex reprised his architectural day out, passing by Muchelney Abbey and stopping in Milton at a fine



example of a farmhouse built in the honey-coloured local stone. Then a motor repair shop in Martock, typical of many that have been demolished over the past few decades, and a road sign installed by the Somerset Motor Club outside Stoke Sub Hamden.

Time for a break from the education, so we climbed the steep slope up the Ham Hill country park, and rested while taking in the view across the levels. I'm not sure how much rest Lara managed, as she was having to explain how to use an Iphone camera to Alex - 35mm still ranks as cutting edge in the von Tutschek household.

Only one puncture today - which is of course one too many. This came just after crossing the busy A303. Everyone was able to do the usual in these situations: stand there looking knowledgeable, giving advice and thanking the cycling gods that its not their tyre that's given up this time.





in South Petherton we stopped at a Fives wall (now a garden ornament). Take a look at [www.etonfives.co.uk/articles/westcountry.fives.html](http://www.etonfives.co.uk/articles/westcountry.fives.html) to find out how the west country version of this game was played. There is another Fives wall in Shepton Beauchamp close by the Duke of York where we stopped for lunch.

This pub is a very pleasant place, with a range of four or five beers (not sure about the cider situation) and a reasonable choice of food, including a pensioners two-course menu for £5.50. One more rider soon arrived, and we settled in with about half a dozen locals who were clearly there for the bargain oldies lunch. Alex's birthday was only a couple of days ago, and he generously bought a round for those who'd arrived on two wheels (i.e. eight of us - the locals had to buy their own).

The journey back to Langport included a look from a distance at a grade II listed 13th century church in Stocklinch, the 16th century Barrington Court, the grade 2\* listed 15th to 17th century Rodwell Manor in West Lambrook, and a good example of the type of bungalow which used to exist everywhere but most of which have been demolished. Have a look at the pictures attached to the day's route map to see more about these places. And then back to Langport, where tea, coffee and cake at the Parret cafe rounded off a very pleasant day.

[Click here to see the route map and pictures of what we saw.](#)



#### **Thursday 21st April - report from Bill**

**Balchin:** I don't remember April 2008 but apparently there was snow in Bristol on this week. Looking back through our reports in 2009 and 2010 the previous two years were dry and sunny but a bit chilly. Today the weather continued its warm, sunny spell much appreciated by the twenty three riders in shorts, many with short sleeves and summer bikes. Berry led us via a traditional route via Mathern and Caerwent arriving at Magor around twelve fifteen.

The Golden Lion is one of our longest standing venues so it is obviously somewhere special. They have the most delicious crispy coated, chunky chips that you can get anywhere, maybe not the most healthy option although they do include a bit of salad with most of the meals. Sitting out in the sun-trap of the garden who would want to go abroad?

Nice to have Sam Swaby out with us again but

he suffered a bit with gear problems on the outward trip. His STI shifter for the rear derailleur changed to the biggest cog but the smaller lever was too stiff to drop the gears back down. Come to think of it, the shifter was called Shimano Viagra (stop this now Bill - Ed). The technical team slackened the cable to shift onto a middle cog giving Sam three gears by using the front changer.

With a fairly flat route we made good time back to the bridge via Rogiet and the track along the railway to Portskewett. Once over the bridge nine of us called into Old Down Country Park where the chunks of Rocky Road were the size of half a brick. A fine end to a fine day.

[Click here for a Garmin Connect track of today's route.](#)

**Tuesday 19th April - report from Bill Balchin:** What does it take to make a great day out on the bike? Some good company for a start; a route on mostly traffic free lanes passing through attractive villages - yes, with Tony Conibear doing the organising that was a cert; and the weather - well it was perfect today with constant sun, hardly any wind and mild temperatures. Fourteen arrived at the Castle Combe start, possibly a record number for a Tuesday.



Tony did the honours taking in Grittleton and Westonbirt on the way to Tetbury for morning coffee. Then North up to Cherington, Tarlton and Kemble before arriving at the Bakers Arms at Somerford Keynes before noon for lunch. The flat terrain and lack of wind meant we had kept up a good average speed - justification for a leisurely lunch in the garden. Past the lakes of the water park on the way back we were riding along a lovely little lane when I got that all too familiar bumping sensation from the rear wheel - puncture. The team soon pitched in to help, Mike Chouings ripped the tyre off with his bare hands and I was soon back in business - take a look at the picture in the photo gallery. Malmsbury garden centre was the final refreshment point with several riders still finding room for cakes with their brew.

Out of Malmsbury heading towards Foxley, Tony took us along a left fork unknown to most of us leading to Corston and onto Upper Seagry where we followed the line of the M4 back to the cars. A brilliant day out, hopefully the start of a whole season but realistically the weather is going to kick us in the teeth before long. Let's just enjoy days like this when we can.

[Click here for Tony's GPS trace of the route.](#)

**Thursday 29th April - report from Bill Balchin:** April 2011 will be remembered for at least two things, first the wedding of Wills and Kate at the end of the month, but also for some uncharacteristically good cycling weather. Today continued the theme of dry and bright with a cold breeze early on (but then it is only April). I wore the longs to Bitton but took them off to ride in shorts, same as most of the other twenty one starters being led by Sue Britton to the Queen Vic at Priddy. Along the cycle track to Saltford the sun was shining brightly in a clear sky as we climbed Redlynch Lane, across to Queen Charlton and bumped down the awful road surface through

Norton Malreward. A brief spell on the main road took us into Chew Magna before taking Denny Lane into Bishop Sutton then East Harptree for the climb of Smitham Hill. Berry rates this, along with the Wrangle, as one of the toughest climbs to get up onto the Mendips. I reckon it is two and a quarter miles from the crossroads at the bottom to the tower at the top with a gain of 767 feet. The bunch were well strung out but we all made it. From there we continued to the crossroads by the Hunters Lodge where a few could not resist a slightly earlier lunch stop no doubt influenced by the first class pub, excellent cider and the surface dressing on the road into Priddy. The main bunch carried on to make the numbers at the Queen Vic up to over forty.

Team Yate had made their own way and had encountered some road works where workmen were patching up potholed roads with strips of new tarmac. They must have been bemused when Tony Conibear rode over the freshly laid stuff. Can a layer of tarmac give you a bit more life out of your tyres? The Hunters group joined up for the trip home. Geoff Roberts observed the assembled crowd and remarked "What a marvellous organisation", well, yes I think we all agree.

We descended the Wellsway at a rate of knots for the trip home and round the lake to Chew Magna again where the usual traffic problems in the high street were made worse by a large lorry barging his way through. We took the Norton Hawkfield option back - a bit safer with such a large group. Dropping off riders along the way a dozen stopped at Bitton for a quick brew in the sunshine before heading for home at the end of another first class day.

[Click here for Lara's map of day.](#) It starts from Axbridge but the section from Bitton is the official route.