

News for February 2011

Thursday 3rd February - report from Bill Balchin: This Winter started early and harsh and shows no sign of ending. But some freak weather conditions must have conspired to give us some descent conditions today - well, compared to what we've had. Over twenty people were impressed enough to meet at Ashton Gate after battling through really heavy Bristol traffic in all directions. John Killick was the designated leader, but did not feel up to it so Malcolm Hanson stepped up. Now, all the leaders do a good job of selecting our routes but I am sure that Malcolm had a bit of a twinkle in his eye today.



After climbing through Aston Court towards the suspension bridge we then turned left before leaving the park, past the railway and squeezed through a small gap onto Abbots Leigh Road just before the junction with Beggar Bush Lane. We took the cycle path beside the road up to the George pub before turning left past the Old Priory (possibly a haunt of the Abbot of Leigh) and through the little lanes to Failand and dropped into Portbury. I was all set to ride ahead on the Gordano valley to get some photos, but no, we crossed the motorway and took the Sheepway into Portishead. I have been along the road past the Windmill pub many times - but only in the other direction. It is a fine descent but a bit of a slog to climb. But hey, no rain, wind not too bad, dressed up for the cold and cycling with your pals - what's to complain about.

Along the coast road admiring the views of the Bristol channel in the sunshine we passed through Walton in Gordano then turned right for the last climb of the morning into Clevedon. I wondered what was going on when we were overtaken by a cyclist who had a nipper in the

baby seat on his bike. Turned out it was Malcolm's son and grandson who saw us pass by and came along to join us for lunch. Who picked up the bill granddad?



Some pubs would crumble with forty nine cyclists in addition to a fair number of other customers but the Salhouse coped admirably. But by one twenty five it was time to saddle-up. We had already arrived by the usual homeward route so what did Malcolm have in mind? We turned right out of the pub and past the church that leads to the path by the edge of the channel. Instead of turning away from the water and taking the road past the golf club, we kept to the path that follows the edge of the channel - including a gate where you had to wheel your bike through on the back wheel and our second episode of off-riding on a dirt track. Eventually we were at Kingston Seymour and on familiar ground across the moors, into Backwell, along the railway cycle track and into Long Ashton. With the skies still bright several riders decided to keep this enjoyable day going with a last cup of tea at Brunels Buttery on the docks before the last push for home. I hope my photos look alright in the photo gallery.

Friday 4th February - message from Malcolm: I thoroughly enjoyed leading and riding yesterday and appreciated the tolerance of those not used to off-riding! Unfortunately, the late afternoon and evening did not turn out so well as I was violently sick. In The Salhouse I had the steak and kidney pie which tasted fine but which I now have my suspicions about as my son ate something else and was perfectly fine. Did anyone else have the steak and kidney pie and if so did they survive the experience intact?

Saturday 5th February - reply from Pete Campbell: Sorry to read about your problems with your lunch, Malcolm, but I don't think it was down to the steak and kidney. I had the same small mountain of suet and a heap of chips. The only problem I found was that I couldn't find room for any cake when we reached the Brunel Buttery, and that evening I was forced to sit back on the sofa and doze.

Thanks for organising the day, and I'm especially impressed that you were able to arrange a following wind so we could get home with minimum effort.

Thursday 10th February - report from Bill Balchin: It is always a bonus when the weather turns out better than the forecast, and today was no exception as the forecast heavy rain actually turned out to be lightish rain - although it was to stay with us all day apart from a few lulls in intensity. Dawn was the leader today taking sixteen starters from Rexam along the Old Gloucester Road to Tytherington and then up New Road.



After crossing the motorway we went right then immediately left into Brinkmarsh Lane. This is not a well known lane to those living to the South of Bristol but us Northerners know it as a dirty track where farm vehicles constantly replenish the muck. Today's rain saw it in extra messy mode but no problem to ride as it brought us out onto the A38 near to Eastwood garden centre. After a short distance on the A38 we took a left into Sundays Hill Lane, nice and quiet - and no mud - to bring us into Rockhampton. At the end is a farm where the owner keeps a collection of U.S. army vehicles. I sprinted ahead to take a photo of the group with the vehicles in the background but there was only one tank tucked away in the farmyard.



On the flat roads of the Berkley Vale we were running a bit early so took the left turn opposite the Salutation at Ham, came back into Berkley then headed off to Sharpness. Most noted for its dock and canal, I don't think we saw a soul in Sharpness although a bit of noise was coming from the dock. A nice lane took us straight to Brookend and into the Lammastide just on twelve.

Time to praise the pub again? Well yes, and they deserve it. Baguettes were the most popular item on the menu with a variety of fillings and served with chips and salad. And Cheddar Valley cider available to wash it down. They seem a very happy and smiley bunch working in there as well - I guess an extra thirty plus customers on a wet Thursday lunchtime would bring a smile to most pub landlords. Back out in the rain it was still not enough to soak you, more of an irritation as Dawn took the group back via Damery. I joined a sizable splinter group taking the way back through Rockhampton and Thornbury. Getting home before three lets me get the website upsite updated before tea time so a double bonus today.

Thursday 17th February - report from Pete Campbell: You can tell the worst of the winter has finished when you see the snowdrops in flower, the bluetits looking for nesting boxes, and old cyclists deciding that they need to brush the cobwebs off their machines. We had twenty eight starters at Bitton station today, which is more than most recent weeks (although to be truthful, most riders have put in appearances all through the winter, with the sensible people avoiding icy Thursdays). There were a few new riders: welcome to them, and hope to see you again.

Who knows which way next? John Tyler was in charge today, and led the group down the cycle path to the Saltford turnoff, across the A4, and then south past the golf course and on towards Stanton Prior and Marksbury. Just south of Marksbury, we stopped at a junction and John offered a choice between a longer hillier ride, or a shorter flatter ride. Obviously, most riders really really wanted to take the challenging route, but it seemed that John was taking the flat road and no-one else knew the hilly road (or so they said). And I was forced to go with the leader as I was writing the report. Anyway, although the road wasn't as lumpy as some I've seen in the Mendips, it was enough to slow us down and make us look forward to lunch.



So, skirting the eastern side of Farmborough, then through Timsbury, and onto the A39 at High Littleton, we went up Cuckoo Lane to Clutton Hill and the Hunters Rest.

This is one of the pubs we visit where they don't depend on gangs of cyclists to keep them in business. Okay, I know they were happy with the thirty or so riders who turned up, but there were at least another dozen civilians eating in the bar. There always seems to be good quality food here, and it was delivered speedily. Bath Ales Gem was available, which is one of my favourites, so I was happy. One day when we visit, we might find the miniature steam railway in the garden is giving rides which would make a perfect day.

John decided we couldn't sit chatting all day, so we were back on the bike, into Farmborough and on to Hunstrete. John took the main group north to Compton Dando, and then towards Bitton, while I and a couple of others headed into Bristol, via Woolard and Whitchurch. Coolish, but no rain and no wind - more than you can expect for February.

Thursday 24th February - report from Bill Balchin: Numbers are still healthy for our Thursday rides despite the dull weather - although today was the best (or least bad) day of the week. Seventeen set out from Ashton with Brian Trott leading the way through Long Ashton and onto the cycle track where we turned left at the end into Backwell. The number rose to eighteen as Andy Baker caught up on his sparkling clean, rebuilt bike with new rims and headset among other refurbishments. Andy was keen to point out that he belongs to Thursday Old Timers - Junior division (yeah right). Straight across at the main road took us onto the climb of Backwell Hill up towards the airport. This caused the peloton to string out but we all made it up then regrouped for the swooping descent of Brockley Combe. With a large group and a convoy of vehicles in amongst us there were not going to be any speed records broken but it was nice to free-wheel for a while to the traffic lights where we went straight over to Chelvey and the West End of Nailsea arriving at the Moorend Spout at around a quarter to twelve.



It was then that we realised that we were missing a few people and later discovered that Andy had broken the chain on the rebuilt bike. Luckily Ian Fulcher riding independantly from home had found the marooned group and produced a Shimano "black pin" from his bag to rejoin the chain. I expect Mr Shimano's ears were on fire as the merits of Hyperglide, SRAM and powerlinks were debated. With the various groups of cyclists there were about three dozen at the Moorend Spout choosing from a restricted "cyclists menu" which although short

containing something for everyone. If it helps a pub to cope with a sudden influx then I'm personally all for it. And they did cope well, plus Butcombe bitter still below three quid.

Nailsea is a place that I have difficulty in fitting in to my mental map of the area, every time that we visit I am glad the somebody else is leading the way. I had a quick look on the Interweb about Nailsea and found that it has quite a history of coal mining and glass production that I never knew. I could not find anything to confirm John Bishop's story regarding the name of the pub. Apparently it is on the end of the moor (Moorend) near a sluice gate to regulate the water level (the spout). But I think we can all agree that Nailsea's most famous son was Adge Cutler of Wurzels fame.

Back on the road there was no general agreement for the homeward trip with the official party now reduced to a dozen turning right out of the pub and the others turning left. We even had some sunshine and blue sky. An uneventful and flat journey took us back to the cycle track where Brian said goodbye then back into Bristol. A police car with sirens and blue lights came rocketing past on Long Ashton high street, possibly to get to the Buttery before we did and finished all the rock cakes. I can't tell you if they were successful as I detoured off through Ashton Court for home but I'm sure it was a great end to the day.