

# News for October 2009

**Thursday 1st October - report from Bill Balchin:** The first of October started perfectly with bright skies, little wind and a crisp feel in the air for the eighteen starters from Rexam with John Huish in the lead. It gets hard to make a different route between two well used points, so after Swan Lane, Frampton End, Chaingate Lane and Mapleridge Lane John took us half way up the hill out of Horton then turned left past Horton Manor and church along to Hawksbury. Although we often return on this road it is seldom used on the outward trip. The views over the Berkley Vale to your left were excellent in the clear air and bright sun. After the climb towards Hawksbury Upton we went left and right into Starveal Lane. Then just before Didmarton took a left turn to cut out a bit of main road riding.

The perfect weather brought out a large contingent of cyclists from Bath to the Royal Oak, plus several others from Bristol and also a fair number of civilians - among them our own John Bishop who had previously ridden to Ashton but had got there a week early. Yes, a lot of us have done that. The pub struggled a bit with the numbers, some had the two course special and had an hour wait between main course and dessert. At two o'clock there was a mass departure into the afternoon sunshine.



Unusually, the both the Bristol and Bath pelotons set off together on the same route. (see picture left). But we went along the A46 for a short stretch before turning right for Kilcott while Bath (plus a few Bristol riders) descended through Tresham. At Hillesley we all met up again for a second round of goodbyes then took the fork

towards Sodbury and Inglestone commons for the split-up for home. A first class day out on the bike.

**Thursday 8th October - report from Bill Balchin:** John Bishop is looking for a few more ride leaders so Malcolm Hanson made his debut on the ride from Ashton to the Windmill at Portishead. Malcolm's plan for the eighteen strong group was to supply a variety of terrain so we started with the usual urban run through Long Ashton followed by the cycle track alongside the railway line then left into Backwell. All flat so far then across the A370 and the long climb of Backwell Hill Road through the woods towards the airport. Then it was right into Brockley Combe to get back down again and onto the flat stuff across the moors to Kenn. The sun continued to shine brightly in a clear blue sky as we rode past the golf club into Clevedon. The views over the estuary were remarkable - I always thought that the water was brown but today it was blue and Clevedon pier was sparkling as if it had been polished. Along the coast road from Walton-in-Gordano (does somebody keep putting extra hills into this stretch?), and we arrived at the Windmill after a two hour journey.

Some people prefer a more intimate, low key pub but I am happy to go to the Windmill because they are so well organised, plenty of staff, reasonably priced meals

and decent beers. It is probably the only place we use where the other customers outnumber the cyclists. There was a bit of confusion over delivering meals - brought about by some of our people giving the wrong table number when ordering. The girls managed to hide their frustration with us - just.

Back into the sunshine for the homeward leg we descended into the town, negotiated the junction at the bottom of the hill where the traffic lights had bags over their heads and onto the Sheepway. Although it is theoretically "follow the leader" some riders are hard wired for the route they know at regularly visited places. So there was a bit of splitting up to get onto the Sheepway, then the leader carried on to the end to cross the motorway bridge into Portbury as others turned off to go past the car parks and under the motorway. But then . . . that is the BTOTC way, a group of individuals doing their own thing but doing it together. Whichever way you went I hope you had a safe journey home and enjoyed the day as much as I did.

**Thursday 15th October - report from Bill Balchin:** After some superb Autumn weather during the early part of the week today started a bit dull and cloudy, but at least it was dry and not windy as we set off along the cycle track from Bitton towards Bristol turning off at the first road crossing. John Bishop led a twenty strong group through Wick, Doynton and into Dyrham where the climb up to cross the A46 was not anticipated with much enthusiasm. Once over the main road a light drizzle started but not enough to dampen our spirits as we rode over those lovely South Gloucestershire single track lanes past West Kington and through Nettleton, Grittleton, Alderton and arrived at the Old Royal Ship at Luckington just after noon.

What a good pub the Old Royal Ship is, despite the beer being on the expensive end of the scale. No wonder it is our regular Christmas lunch venue. I didn't get a chance to count all the cyclists but there were dozens of them from all over, including Cyril who did his own motor assisted ride. Good to see Roy Williams out and about with the twinkle back in his eye after a brief stay in hospital - and that was despite shelling out thirty quid each way on taxis to get there. Several people handed over cheques and cash for the Christmas lunch. John Bishop or Berry Parker will be pleased to collect yours if you have signed up.

When the time came to drag ourselves out of the warm and dry it was still cold and wet outside - what can you expect in October, despite what the forecasters tell you. The official route home was Sopworth, Hawksbury Upton and splitting up at Horton for either Chipping Sodbury or Mapleridge Lane. Did the wet get us down? Well, I was a bit cheesed off after bringing my bike with no mudguards and getting a muddy back. But would I do it again? Like a shot, but on my tourer (and wearing an extra top).



**Thursday 22nd October - report from Bill Balchin:** After a spell of wet and windy weather the forecast for Thursday was more of the same. But fifteen people who looked out of the window were sufficiently inspired by the bright, cloudy sky and lack of rain to risk the ride to Magor with John Bishop leading the way. Although the roads were wet after overnight rain we had a pleasant ride from Rexam, down Hortham Lane, Fernhill

and onto the Severn Bridge. Here we lost Dave Ashton (Grandad duties) but gained Jane Chapman to maintain the numbers. We spent some time at the bridge studying the food menu from the Golden Lion and rang the orders in. Crossing the bridge nearly brought a crash for John Turton when one of the many workmen who bring vans onto the cycle track wandered out from behind his vehicle. Only a quick shout from Dennis prevented a pile up as the embarrassed workman leapt back out of the way. There was more hassle before leaving the bridge when Martyn got a puncture (rear wheel of course) just near the end. Four others stayed back to watch him replace the tube and then rode a five man team time trial to get back on with the rest. The road through Mathern was completely scalped in preparation for resurfacing so should be silky smooth soon. The group was back together again by Caerwent, then as we turned left off the main A48 towards Five Lanes the heavens opened - it bucketed down. Some sheltered in a bus stop until it eased off to pouring down and then it was just a matter of "head down and splosh along" to the pub.

Phoning ahead with food orders seemed to have some benefit as we had hardly parked the bikes and got a drink before meals were appearing, although numbers were low with no team Bath and only Hamish Smith and Jerry Croome as independent travellers. James the landlord had lit a real log fire which not only gave out heat and a cosy glow but that nice wood-burning smell. It was lovely sitting in that pub drinking Reverend James beer - but the rain refused to stop and eventually we dragged ourselves out in it again - much lighter by now.



The homeward route was along the main road to Rogiet, cycle track from the Severn Tunnel railway junction to Caldicot, Portskewett and back into Mathern - the resurfacing was not even started so we bumped over the rough stuff again. There were a few spells when the rain eased and the sun even made a few fleeting appearances but overall you would have to say that the weather was dire.

**Tuesday 27th October - report from John Killick:** Just two riders set off from Aust, Malcolm Hanson and John Killick, at just after 9 am on a warm overcast morning. It remained cloudy for most of the ride, almost threateningly so at lunch time, despite the improvement promised in the forecast. But it remained dry with a strongish SW wind.

The wind was OK for the first leg, which was up the Wye valley on the main road to Monmouth. We took a minor detour between Bigsweir and Redbrook, using the old railway track which may eventually be adopted by Sustrans, perhaps not the best idea as much of the track was covered in leaves making it difficult to spot the pot holes. The Wye valley looked splendid in autumn colours. A little sunshine would really have enhanced it.

Coffee at the Whole Earth Cafe was up to the best standard. Which was reflected in the price!

From Monmouth we took the Monnow valley road to Tregate Bridge, then climbed the hill to St Maughans Green and Maypole. We continued following the switch-back route passing the Hendre, Nant Wachan, Pen-yr-Heol, Tregare and Bryngwyn to the

Raglan Garden Centre for lunch. The section of road between Pen-yr-Heol and Tregare was more like a field than a road. It has been bad in the past, but the conditions today made it mountain bike territory. Malcolm could have enjoyed it give the right machine. I will have to look for an alternative lane and avoid this section of the route, if I hope to repeat the ride.

After lunch we took the quick route home past Clytha Park, through Bettws Newydd, Usk, Gwernesney and along the B4235 to Chepstow. Tea, in the form of a hot chocolate and a coffee, was taken in the Aust Services, at about 3.30 pm. (Early enough for me to get home without using lights.) Unfortunately the cycle track on the North side of the Severn Bridge was closed for maintenance, forcing us to use the South side, where there is just no shelter. An unfriendly wind saw my average for the ride fall from 13.1 to 12.9 mph in the mile or so crossing. It also saw Malcolm arrive the other side of the bridge sometime considerable time before me.

Ride statistics: Total distance 59.2 miles, riding time 4h 35 min, Ave 12.9 mph. Climbing, thanks to Malcolm's altimeter, 1183 metres.

### **Thursday 29th October - report from Pete Campbell:** The ride was a

fairly strenuous outing planned and led by Jane Chapman to the Waldegrave Arms at East Harptree. I've been riding with the Thursday group for less than a year, and I'd not realised that Jane's rides have a reputation for going over a few challenging ascents. Well, now I know.



We left Ashton, quickly in and out of Long Ashton, under the bypass, and then via Barrow Common up to the top of Dundry. Obviously a short rest was needed (the pub was closed, as it was only about 10:45) and then on past Winford Manor, Butcombe (I think - well, some village that didn't seem to have a sign), and then another climb, this time up Burrington Combe.



By the time we reached the Waldegrave Arms we were ready to eat. This was a new lunch stop for us. Seemed like a good idea when John Bishop suggested the pub that had been voted the Evening Post Pub of the Year. Check out their website ([www.waldegravearmseastharptree.co.uk](http://www.waldegravearmseastharptree.co.uk)) and see how good their food is. Our buffet was universally regarded as poor and poor value. Still, you can't win them all, and we should at least thank John

for going to the trouble of arranging a new venue, and putting up with the hassle of collecting everyone's £6.50.

So, not feeling as full of lunch as normal, we set off home with most people riding towards Bitton and hoping for tea and a bun at Bitton Station. We had a brief halt to check directions in Bishop Sutton and were entertained by a local walking his dog across the A368 without bothering to check for traffic, who was then shouting abuse at a driver who had somehow managed to avoid hitting him.