

News for September 2009

Thursday 3rd September - report from Bill Balchin: Where has this year gone? September already but at least we had some reasonable weather, bright and dry, as nearly thirty starters from Rexam set out for the Salutation at Ham. It is quite a challenge to make a decent length route but John Tyler did a great job taking us along Swan Lane to Winterbourne, then along Frampton End Road, Nibley Lane and onto Chaingate Lane. Some of us were wondering when we would head towards Ham before we skirted Wickwar, went through Charfield, Huntingford and Wick, then across the A38 and lunch at the Salutation - the usual buffet.

The pub was pretty full and we overflowed from the skittle alley into the bar. Our number had been increased with a couple of youngsters. Lewis Welford (who has ridden with us a couple of times before) and his cousin Cate from Australia who is currently on a world tour visiting friends and relatives around the globe. After Winona joined us from the USA a while back I am beginning to detect a pattern of visiting lady cyclists. Lewis and Cate are pictured with John Tyler on the listing page.

Some dark clouds were threatening for the homeward trip but they soon dispersed and we rode through Hill and Rockhampton, still in sunshine but by now into the stiff wind. At Morton there was a general parting of the ways as the main group climbed The Hacket and across the A38 past Wyevale garden centre for a drop into Tytherington and more splitting off for home. What else can you say, other than another super day.



Tuesday 8th September - report from Bill Balchin:

Tony Conibear was offering four white horses and a windmill for this Tuesday ride starting from Silbury Hill and eight others took him up on the offer. Those going to the start via the A4 spotted a bonus white horse at Cherhill. The weather was a bit dull and windy as we went through the stones at Avebury and onto the climb of Hackpen Hill past the first horse. I started with thoughts of photographing each one but when you are struggling up a big hill into the wind those silly ideas get put into their proper place. Once across the Ridgeway it was rolling countryside until the drop into Marlborough. I was glad to

be following Tony as we went down a lane, through a car park, carried our bikes down some steps into a courtyard and took a welcome cup of coffee in the Azuza cafe.

After a short detour to see a second horse we took a very picturesque route through the villages of Mildenhall, Axford and Ramsbury with plenty of thatched roofs on display. Following the path of the Kennet and Avon canal we had lunch at the Cross Keys pub at Great Bedwyn. While we refreshed ourselves the sun got it's act together and the weather was much brighter as we ticked off the windmill section of the visit.

My sense of direction is hopeless these days. I wondered what we were doing near Salisbury Plain as the road signs gave us warnings about tanks crossing, but Tony did not put a foot wrong as we spotted horse number three - easy to miss as you had to look back as you bombed down a big hill. Then afternoon tea at the Waterfront Cafe at Pewsey Wharf on the canal, good stopping place as it is open all day. And finally

back to the start between two big hills both vying for the title of highest point in Wiltshire, past the final horse and return to the cars. Sixty miles covered, no incidents, no punctures - fabulous.

Thursday 10th September - report from Bill

Balchin: Our third September ride, and another day of good weather - certainly putting August to shame. John Killick was the leader from Ashton to Hinton Blewitt. Superstitious people could have been worried with thirteen riders but we soon picked up John Upward in Long Ashton and rode on through Winford, past the Bung Inn at Redhill, up and down the little lanes through Butcombe round the lake and along Breach Hill past the obelisk. Dennis had a heart stopping moment when his video camera attached to a pole on the back of his bike worked loose and bounced down the road. Luckily it was still working afterwards although bearing a few scars. Through Chew Stoke and past the lake picnic area we rode through Bishop Sutton, up the big hill and onto the Ring Of Bells arriving smack on noon.



There was no hanging about waiting for food or drinks as the service was like lightning, no doubt helped by several riders making their own way to the pub and staggering the arrival time. It was good to see Alan Bracey out on his bike again. Not only has his hip replacement been a success but he has had the trusty Claud Butler completely overhauled by Terrys of Yate (including a striking gold metalflake respray) so both bike and rider are in good nick.

There was a variety of routes for the homeward trip depending if you wanted Bristol, Bath or South Gloucester. Whichever route you took the sun was shining in a blue sky so it was great pub, great company, great weather, great roads - just a great day.



Thursday 17th September - Report from Bill Balchin: Nine is a typical number for a motor assisted ride these days and that was the total leaving the Trojan Cafe in Gloucester (after a very reasonable bite and a brew) for a trip designed and lead by Arnold Mayes. The first task was to get out of Gloucester on a variety of cycle paths along the West side of the canal, past the docks and across the A40. I take my hat off to Arnold for a virtually

traffic-free route - but I don't think I could ever repeat it on my own, we seemed to be twisting about all over the place and riding over a mixture of shared paths, abandoned bridges and gravel tracks. The weather had started bright but chilly at eight o'clock but by the ten-fifteen start the sky had dulled over leaving just the chilly bit. But at least it was dry and not too windy as we followed the lanes to Tibberton, Kents Green, Cliffords Mesne and Gorsley for lunch. There were road signs warning of weather damage and they were not kidding. The poor lanes must have taken a real hammering during the last bad winter and there were large potholes everywhere.

The Roadmakers Inn at Gorsley is a fine pub stop. It is run by four ex-Gurkas who apparently have 76 years army service between them. One of them must have been a boy soldier, although their smooth complexion makes it difficult to judge ages. With a fine selection of ales and a good choice of meals we were ready to take to the road again - hopefully in some sunshine. But no, the sun was still AWOL so the extra clothing stayed on as we headed towards, but not through Newent.

At Highleadon there were a couple of impromptu stops. One where some removed layers of clothing as others put more on, and then another when Hamish glanced at a house and spotted an ex-work colleague that he had not seen since 1992. Well they say it is a small world but I would not like to cycle round all of it. Back into Gloucester the cycle paths were as baffling as on the way out but our leader took us deftly back to the dock area for a cup of tea in the cafe of the new Sainsbury supermarket before we made the trip home. No sunshine all day but a pleasant day nevertheless. Looks like Autumn is not far away now. A few pictures from the day are in the photo gallery.

Tuesday 22nd September - report from Bill Balchin: For cycle rides into Somerset it is really handy to drive to the Ship and Castle pub at Congesbury, park in their car park and go off on your bike. However, changes at the pub mean that some spaces are reserved for pub residents, some are limited to 2 hours and others are subject to a vague enforcement that suggests that a bandit with a wheel clamp could rob you of a hundred pounds. So all those arriving by car for George Martin's latest mystery tour turned into Kent Road (between the two sets of traffic lights on the main road) and parked in the public car park without incident - or payment. The forecast was for sunny intervals and the sky was just like the weather graphic with the sun peeping out as we rode the short distance towards Weston and turned left on the Strawberry Trail cycle path. The missing section taking you across the A368 by the old Sandford station opened in August which cuts out a bit of main road. Leaving the path at Winscombe we passed the Webbington Country Club and on to Rich's cider farm at Watchfield for a morning coffee. We crossed the M5 a few times as we passed through Bason Bridge and East Huntspill before joining another cycle path at Cossington. You may know this one where a dispute with the landowner means that you have to lift your bike over a locked gate - but not any more. A short detour avoids the disputed area and brings you out in the same place as before, then alongside one of the many drainage channels of the Somerset Levels on another cycle path towards Moorlinch and Ashcott for lunch. The Somerset cycle paths are lovely and flat and traffic-free but the gritty surface doesn't half make your bike dirty.

At the Ring O'Bells we were up to thirty miles, sun shining and a leisurely stop for a meal and a drink. With only six cyclists turning up there was none of the hassle that you get with a group of forty.

Coming back across the levels we went on that straight road beside the channel with a right angle bend - yes, I know they are all like that, and signposts are few and far between, but George knows this lot like his own back garden and we looped back through Loxton on the old A38 (about fifteen feet wide) and onto Banwell garden centre for afternoon tea. One feature about a George ride is the local history that you get. When he saw a photo on the wall of the cafe of a steam powered lorry, George told us how they used to deliver limestone to the docks and return loaded with coal. On the way back they had a police escort. The reason? If they were unobserved they would rake the ashes out of the firebox and dump it on the road as they went along instead of correctly catching them in their tray and disposing of the properly. With the

police watching they could not get away with it. The clouds were building up with a bit of drizzle in the air for the final section back along the Strawberry line to Congesbury but it did not come to much. Just enough to turn the dust on your bike to mud. Still, an enjoyable 58 miles. Some pictures in the photo gallery.

Thursday 24th September - report from Bill Balchin: The 24th of September, and now officially Autumn. The weather for our first ride of the new season started cold, damp and misty but by the time we were assembled at Bitton the sun was shining and the temperature just right for cycling. With Berry Parker in the lead we left Bitton down the cycle track to Bath. Instead of the Sustrans route we stayed next to the river until the bus station then took to the roads and joined the canal towpath. It seemed to work better for our twenty strong group than negotiating the town centre. At Bathford we took the left fork up the long drag past Kingsdown golf course and through Colerne, Biddestone and onto Yatton Keynell on some very pleasant lanes that were new to many in the group.

The Bell was it's usual model of efficiency coping with around forty cyclists, plus lots of civilian customers - quite a rarity for country pubs these days. Several people took their lunch in the garden to enjoy the early Autumn sunshine. John Bishop had a hectic time selling copies of the new programme - a pound each or two for two quid, you could start a new career in sales John. Incidentally, the new programme has omitted 22nd October which will be the Golden Lion at Magor from Rexam. And the 29th October venue will now be a new (to us) venue - the Waldegrave Arms at East Harptree - still from Ashton.

Berry took the group homeward through Grittleton and Nettleton. When we went to Ham the fortnight previously we were joined by a lady visitor from Australia called Cate. Well Cate was with us again today so we just had to show her the sights of Castle Combe. Five of us took Cate on the tour, it looked quite splendid on such a fine day. I suppose we take all these things for granted but an outsider coming in must be impressed by the rolling scenery, quiet lanes and the sight of a bunch of hippies living on canal boats on the Kennet and Avon. So - good pub, some different roads, sunshine all day, minimal wind, good temperature - it does not get any better. Shame my camera battery was flat so no pictures.

And now a message to the BTOTC from Cate our Australian visitor:

Hello to all and it has been great meeting you. I have been asked to add a little something for the website which I have happily obliged to do. In fact I am writing this having just had a shower from my return trip, enthusiasm hey. This has been my second ride and would have to say you cycled me under the table, twice. I am glad though that I didn't see any fixed wheel bikes on today's ride because I was getting passed enough on the hills and a fixed wheel going by could have been demoralizing. I hope when I get back from Europe I will have the time to come again, however you better keep the sunshine for me or I won't be happy.

Today's ride was really tough for me, I tried and I think succeeded to keep up, not an easy task but felt great pain and victory on return. I have broken many previous records, which adds to the highlights of the day and thoroughly enjoyed the scenery, conversation and generally the cycling, oh ok I enjoyed the hills too, the down hills anyway. I was fond of the bike tracks to Bath (City) they have similarities to home, bar the blackberries and general green colour. The little winding roads of the previous ride were certainly out of the usual and a new experience. My new experience for today I think was the canals, we don't have them in Australia, probably considered a

little inefficient to cross thousands of km's intercity at 4miles/hr (6.437376km/hr). Another new experience was the hill that never ends, however ignorance is bliss and I am glad I didn't know about that before I agreed to come. I must say there is nothing that can deter me now, accomplished hill hiker and long distance rider.

The free additional extras have been good to. The high end cultural and educational insight welcomed, not necessarily useful edification but indubitably high end. The view and tourist likability is top notch, thats an untapped market there you should look into.

How many tourists can say the cycled to the arguably prettiest town in England, Castle Combe. Oh and I can't forget my other sidetrack to see the village green, duck lake included. I don't know why they haven't added that to the must see guide of England. I am also going to have to have a little look for Dr Doolittle, the OLD version, it will be vital to complete the whole experience. Thanks boys it was a great view and picturesque town I do appreciate not telling me it is in a ditch and I had to climb another hill to get out. Again ignorance is bliss. It is a real pity I didn't have a camera but I will be on the list for the DVD to fulfil memorabilia requirements.

On another note, I think I will fulfil age requiements over the next few days. I am sure to be hobbling around, I will probably resemble more of an oldie than any of you. I have stairs to my room so I will be grumpy, tired, hunch backed, requiring the hand rail and moaning under my breath. But I would do it all again given the chance.

Once again, I hope to see you all again on my return and I hope you have enjoyed my days review.

Cate.

Aussie add in.