

News for January 2011

Thursday 6th January - report from Bill Balchin: Happy New Year to all, and if you made it to our first group ride of 2011 you will have been happy to get out on your bike with your pals again. After the coldest December since records began, the weather has not looked promising all week with snow on Monday, slush on Tuesday then rain and wind on Wednesday. Our region probably had the best weather in the UK today with white cloudy skies but no rain or wind, and most importantly no ice for our trip to Hawksbury Upton from Rexam. There were problems at the start with John Bishop due to lead but still suffering from an aching leg that almost prevented him riding home from last week's trip to Marshfield. John Huish was called in but suffered a power blackout during the night so had to stay home. So many thanks to Tony Weaver for stepping in today. We took the usual route to Tytherington - luckily for Dennis who met the other twelve along the way - and then Baden Hill to Cromall. Some of the lanes were covered in mud with recent hedge cuttings everywhere, punctures were on everybody's mind. At Cromall we went right then left into Cowship Lane to Wickwar and over Inglestone Common where Martyn had the distinction of the first group ride puncture of the new year. From there it was just the climb up by the monument and along to the Beaufort Arms.

Good to see that John Bishop had decided to join us by car and also bring Cyril along. We had a bit of a discussion about how every pub that we use gets described in glowing terms. Well they deserve it, and the Beaufort Arms is right up with the best. Anyone who drank the Dursley Steam bitter will agree, crystal clear and tasting like nectar, well like delicious beer - I have never drunk nectar. There was another discussion regarding the thirtieth year of the BTOTC which starts in Autumn this year. Should we have some kind of event to mark the occasion, maybe something that former members who have now hung up their wheels could join in with? Any ideas then don't keep them to yourself.

Before leaving the pub I persuaded everybody to assemble for the first group photo of 2011 when...flat battery - what a nit-wit, the story of my life. The skies were a lighter shade of grey and still no rain as we made our way along Sandpits Lane and dropped into Horton, then Mapleridge, Tan House and Chaingate Lanes into Iron Acton and the split for home. All those clean and shiny bikes got dirty but it was well worth it for an excellent day out.

Thursday 13th January - report from John Bishop: Dire wet weather on Wednesday; dire forecast; would anyone turn up? Of course they did, even though there were only 6 cyclists, all well prepared for whatever was in store for us. We set off in damp conditions but not actually raining, which was to be our lot for the rest of the day. Through Bitton, Left along Golden Valley and immediately we encountered flooded road surfaces, the like of which I have rarely seen before, at least not on a bike. Into Wick and onto Doynton where we stopped to blow noses and pull on some additional wet-weather gear and have a drink. This caused a slight split in the group with Mr Chouings first up. We were now cycling along Frightened Horse Lane and had not gone far when we were confronted by a huge expanse of water.

Mike, riding a "fixed" was already struggling through with water up above the chain, indeed at hub level. He was soon around a bend & lost to view. No amount of shouting got any response. Dennis decided to give it a go, just managing to get past. The rest of us turned tail, eventually having to climb Hinton Hill, meeting up with the 2 amphibians at the A46. From then on we played safe, via Tormarton then straight to Acton Turville.

We rarely visit the Fox & Hounds, mainly because of its close proximity, but it is a very cosy pub with a large white cat stretched out in front of the fire. Altogether 16 turned up so there was plenty of good conversation.

The homeward journey was uneventful, just a plethora of puddles. However mention must be made of the presence of Lara from Axbridge. A two hour car journey there and back then a 30 mile cycle ride in those conditions deserves a medal. Happy days !

Cheers, John.

Thursday 20th January - report from Bill Balchin: After a low turnout last week because of the floods, numbers were up again - missing two weeks in a row is more than the human body can stand - despite the low temperature and threat of ice. Most of the roads were OK but there were enough sections of frost, slush and ice to demand constant attention. John Bishop continued with his winter leading duties causing a double headache. Firstly, what route could we take from Rexam to Bath avoiding dangerously icy lanes? And second there were fifteen starters but we had told the Dolphin to expect thirty and they were laying on a hot buffet to suit - who would want to be an organiser?

Along the Old Gloucester Road we had our first incident just before Perrinpit Road when Jon Lane found a patch of ice and despite the road being flat and straight, ended up on the deck. Fortunately no damage to man or machine but the threat level was raised to "Critical".



Through Coalpit Heath to the Badminton Road and right into Nibley Lane towards Westerleigh it was all going well bowling along in the bright sunshine. But climbing past Wapley church proved impossible with the road completely iced over. In fact it was difficult to push as your feet slipped and you bike wanted to skid away. Gradually working our way up I was surprised to see Dennis coming down the hill. He had stopped with a couple of others for a, ermm, hedge inspection and gone along the main road to the crossroads not thinking that we would be daft enough to attempt the Wapley climb. Regrouping, we decided that a bit of sense was in order so carried on through Pucklechurch, down Shortwood hill to the cycle track and rode the lovely, flat, ice-free cycle track to the Dolphin.

Fears of insufficient numbers were unfounded as there was a mass of bikes parked in the garden and thirty eight cyclists to enjoy the buffet. And what a good spread they put on. Self service from dishes of turkey curry, pork in mustard sauce, a beef dish, veggie option, rice, pasta, chips and veg. There was even salad and a choice of different bread rolls - all for a fiver, bargain. And the draft Old Speckled Hen was good.



John offered a choice of routes home, either back down the track or via Lansdown, I think it was a joke otherwise he may have ended up in the river. No doubt he was relieved that a day with the potential to become a disaster had been as good as you could get in the circumstances, fine job.

Thursday 27th January - report from Bill Balchin: The last Thursday of January, a bitterly cold day (but thankfully no ice) and twenty something starters at Bitton ready for the trip to Chew Magna. There were several new faces in the peloton including Mary Doyle - welcome to all of you. And good to see Ian Sparrow again after he broke some ribs falling on the ice.



John Bishop took us down the cycle track to Saltford where we crossed the main road and climbed up to Burnett before swooping back down into Compton Dando, apart from some who took the route with probably less climbing through Chewton Keynsham and down Fairy Hill - and why not. Despite the cold and lack of sunshine it was pleasant enough bowling along past the bare trees through Woolard to Pensford on roads which were dirty but fairly dry. Crossing the A37 we went under the arches, through Stanton Drew and onto Moorledge Lane where a timecheck showed that we could up at the Queens Arms at about eleven thirty. With plenty of options available we headed towards Newtown (where the Pony and Trap were recently award a Michelin star - "Michelin Star!" scoffed Martyn "I can't even afford Michelin tyres") but took the left turn into Hollowbrook Lane with the intention of making a circuit of the lake from Bishops Sutton. However, with the leader in the middle of the pack and the front runners on auto pilot we headed past the picnic site and on to Chew Stoke to put the miles in. I say "we", I was forced to take the direct route along Denny Lane to answer the call of nature at the pub.



Getting to the Queens Arms early was a double blessing as the young ladies running the show were overwhelmed with forty four cyclists in total all demanding to be fed and watered. But they worked hard, did not panic and kept smiling so I guess they were excused the delays. It was just nice to be out of that cold wind and sitting down.

By one thirty the road was calling us home. For the return trip the wind was a double whammy not only chilling us but making it harder work as we climbed Norton Hawkfield and Norton Malreward. The Bristol contingent took the Whitchurch cycle track as most of us carried on through Queen Charlton to Chewton Keynsham and back to Saltford and Bitton.

This marked the end of our December/January programme where John Bishop leads each time - thanks John for keeping things going during the winter months. Back to 10am starts now - will we notice the difference?