

News for May 2011

Tuesday 3rd May - Report from Bill Balchin: Our second longer Tuesday ride of 2011 attracted nine starters to Aust for John Killicks "Free entry into Wales" excursion. Yet another bright, dry day with a cool breeze saw us take the main Wye Valley road as far as Tintern before turning left for the climb up to Trelleck followed by a storming descent into Monmouth for coffee in the Whole Earth cafe served by some charming Thai ladies. Brian Crumpton had been irritated by a rattle from a loose spoke on his fancy new racing bike, but he was even more irritated when attempting to tighten it at our stop the nipple stripped its thread and disappeared inside the deep section aero rim to rattle around and leaving the spoke waving around. After watching the antics, plus seeing Tony Conibear wander into the lingerie shop next door to the cafe when looking for the loo, we said farewell to Steve Fay who pressed on to Abergavenny and set about the climb into the Forest of Dean, through Staunton on the main road (thankfully not too busy) before getting back onto lanes through English Bicknor and Lower Lydbrook to reach our lunch stop at the Inn on the Wye at Kerne Bridge.

Sitting out in the sunshine it was warm enough to remove a layer of clothing. It was celebration time with Mike Chouings's birthday, he did not let on how many years but I expect his bus pass is not new.



For his age, Mike must be one of the fittest cyclists around. When we visited the Golden Lion at Magor recently I commented on the excellent chips. Well the Inn on the Wye has Mega-excellent chips, chunky, soft and fluffy on the inside and golden and crispy on the outside. Tony was a bit bewildered when he looked inside his cheese ciabatta and found a distinct lack of cheese. The waitress dragged the plate and Tony into the kitchen where the chef remedied the problem. The

next thing we knew they both came out again, each carrying a plate in both hands - that's one way of getting a helping hand.

Those still wearing longs moved into shorts with the sun still shining brightly in a clear blue sky as we went the short distance into Symonds Yat and rode the Perigrin Trail alongside the river into Monmouth and then back onto the main Wye Valley road. I don't know what it is about this stretch of road but whenever I am in a group it always turns into a team time trial with speeds around eighteen to twenty. We kept that up to the old Tintern railway station cafe where we enjoyed the tea and cake outside again before riding at a more sensible pace back to the cars. Another cracking day on the bike - and no bridge toll to pay.

[Click here for Tony's GPS track of the day](#)

Thursday 5th May - report from Bill Balchin:



John Killick has had a busy week, leading a ride in Wales on Tuesday then another from Ashton to Axbridge today. John showed his versatility after the Welsh hills by taking the eighteen strong group to the Lamb via all flat roads on the Flax Bourton cycle track, over the moors into Yatton, and along the Strawberry Line. The tunnel is now open with the lights set into the ground operational - but it is still a strange experience to ride through without lights. I cheated a bit by following Lara who has

every aid known to cycling on her bike including a nice bright headlamp that comes on automatically, it will get a good workout at the weekend in a 300K audax - good luck with that Lara..

The flat route meant that we at the Lamb just after noon and despite the sudden onslaught meals were soon being delivered as we all sat in the garden enjoying the sunshine, even JR who always dines indoors. With groups from Bath and Clevedon numbers were up to thirty six, many enjoying the seniors-special two course meal for seven quid - delicious. We had one of those "what is favourite pub" conversations and the Lamb was right up there, along with another dozen or so.

Time to go and after all that flat stuff it was time for some hills - Cheddar Gorge for a start. Who should come charging past me but John Bishop. I was immediately suspicious that an alien being had taken over our John's body but had given itself away by eating in the garden and climbing too strongly. However it has also taken over John's silver tongue and convinced everybody that there is nothing untoward - I am going to keep an eye on him though. Down the Wellsway, past the lake and into Chew Magna we went the back way into Norton Malreward and then split up for the cycle path into Bristol, Saltford or straight into Keynsham, several calling in at Bitton for a final brew to round off yet another fine day.

[Click here for Tony's GPS track of the day](#) [and here for Pete's Everytrail map](#).

Thursday 12th May - report from Bill Balchin: Only twelve starters at Rexam for the ride to Marshfield led by John Huish. After a bone dry, sunny April - May is starting to cool down with widespread showers but it was dry as we set off along Swan Lane into Winterbourne then turned right and left at the end to bring us out by the Cross Hands on Winterbourne Down. The road now has a lovely smooth surface as we crossed the Badminton Road, left by the golf course and then straight on past the cricket club. We were expecting to go on the cycle track but first John took us to the left for some local history. The photo shows some of us at the Ram Hill Colliery where coal was mined (hence Coalpit Heath) since the 14th century and later transported to Keynsham by dramway. Bouyed up with culture we cycled along the track to Wapley. Despite the surface being a mixture of dirt and grit it was smoother than many roads. The last time we used this route everybody had to carry their bike through a section of quagmire but no such problems today. Up Wapley then down towards Doddington we climbed up and across the A46 through Tormarton and West Kington making excellent time. Just before Marshfield we changed direction to enter the village and the reason for our good progress became obvious as we battled the wind to the Catherine Wheel just on noon.



It was bit of a surprise to see John Bishop in the pub wearing civvies. John has injured his Achilles tendon and aggravated the injury stepping down a kerb the previous day, so he put the folding bike in the car, drove close to Marshfield, and cycled the last mile or so. John hopes to be back out with us again soon. Numbers were well down with only twenty dining although a small group from Bath turned up shortly before we left. Possibly many were at the funeral of Severn Road Club stalwart Syd Marks who died on Good Friday.

As we left the rain which had been threatening all morning started and the temperature dropped making a fairly unpleasant trip back into the wind through West Littleton. But as we descended Hinton Hill on another smooth stretch of tarmac the rain started to fade and by Pucklechurch the sun was out again - April showers but a month late. Can't beat English weather for entertainment can you.

[Click here for Tony's Garmin track of the day](#)

Tuesday 17th May - report from Bill Balchin: Our third longer Tuesday ride started at Caerleon in cold, cloudy conditions for the six starters. Malcolm had a moment along the road through Llangybi on the way to Usk when his Garmin GPS unclipped itself from the handlebar mount and bounced down the road. Luckily there was no traffic about so it did not get run over and was returned to its proper place still working. After coffee and teacake in the Nags Head we continued towards Abergavenny on the lanes through Bettws Newydd. With the sun coming out it was time to remove a layer of clothing. By the time we had skirted around Abergavenny alongside the river up to the stone bridge at Lannfoist it looked warm enough for lunch outside in the garden of the Bridge Inn overlooking the river Usk. But no, council regulations said that you could eat sandwiches outside but cooked meals must be taken indoors. Hard rider Steve Fay found us at the pub on one of his regular trips into Wales and joined us for the next section up to Bryn-Mawr. This took us on a gently rising cycle track on a disused railway line passing spectacular quarries with superb views over steep valleys to our right - a first class ride.

At Bryn-Mawr Steve turned off as we climbed the B road to take us to the Big Pit at Blaenavon for afternoon tea as a shower gave us a hosing down. There was another brush with officialdom as we were told off for going directly to the cafe rather than through the proper entrance - if there were a fire they would not know if we were evacuated, hmm. Now my favourite section, eight miles of gently descending cycle track, this time with the valley views to your left side into Pontypool. Shame about the rain but even that could not spoil the descent. After a bit of up and down past the Llandegfedd reservoir and some more wet and dry intervals we were back to the cars at Caerleon by half past five with fifty three miles done and a very enjoyable day. [Click here for Tony's GPS track.](#)

Thursday 19th May - report from Bill Balchin: John Tyler had another fifteen riders assembled at

Bitton for our ride to Yatton Keynell, but only one in a splendid retro track-helmet. Andy Baker had spotted it somebody's garage, fallen in love with it, and persuaded the owner to swap it for a modern helmet. Personally, I always thought they look like a trio of sausages on your head. Anyway, off down the cycle track in the sunshine and just a gentle breeze we took a wriggle through Bath (including crossing Henrietta Park where the loo was a welcome relief to some) then



the canal towpath to Bathampton where we left at the George and went over the toll bridge. Some of the motorists got a bit shouty as we passed them in the queue to pay - should get yourself a bike mate. With the turning to St Catherines Valley approaching I was ready to switch to climbing mode but we carried on to Bathford to take the long drag up to the golf course. The weather had really warmed up in the sunshine now as we kept our height gain to the Box Fiveways junction then on through Corsham (where the group numbers increased as we picked up team Bath) and Biddestone to arrive at the Bell at twelve fifteen.

Well over thirty cyclists and friends were eating and drinking, but despite the sudden invasion the simple meals like baguettes appeared in super-quick order. Items needing a bit more cooking naturally took a bit longer. By leaving time the temperature had dropped a bit but was still fine as we went through Castle Combe, out the other end and turned right onto the nice little lane with the rough surface - except the worst sections have now been resurfaced with smooth tarmac. By-passing West Kington we crossed the busy A46 at Tolldown where cars from both directions stopped to allow our large group to cross. I may have seen Lord Lucan riding on Shergar in a nearby field as well - probably more likely. Another descent on smooth new tarmac took us down Hinton Hill and into Pucklechurch when one of the largest homeward groups that I have been in for ages finally split up at Coxgrove Hill for the final stages.

[Click here for a map of the ride to Yatton Keynell.](#)



Thursday 26th May - report from Bill Balchin: May 26th was a significant day for the BTOTC with a new cycling destination (Weston Super Mare) and a new lunch stop (The Old Colonial) but for most the lasting memory will be of the weather. Showers are nothing much to worry about but throw in a relentless headwind for a longer than normal journey and it can seriously affect your enjoyment of the day. Eight keen types turned up at Ashton at nine-thirty to follow Malcolm to the Flax Bourton cycle track, Backwell and join the Strawberry Line at Yatton station. The sun popped out between the showers and the strong wind actually dried some areas of road amongst the puddles as we battled on to Sandford. Going along the new section of track through the orchard which takes you up to the station the wind whipped up so strong it threatened to blow you right off. Taking the main road for a bit we got back onto lanes at Banwell and made our way through Hutton, past the hospital and onto the sea front. Anybody who thought they had been riding into a strong wind had to think again as we got to the promenade. It was howling. You needed a strong grip on the bars to stay upright and the sand being blown into your eyes and mouth was an experience you could do without.

We actually arrived at the Old Colonial on the sea front at about ten to twelve so must have made reasonable time. After about twenty minutes Arnold arrived alone having just missed us at the start. We were all glad to see him - especially me as the meals were on offer where two people buy meals and the cheaper is free. Hence you need to pair-up and I was Billy No-Mates. The numbers increased

to two dozen with Brian Trott and George Martin making their own journey (and managing to dodge the showers) plus groups from Bath and Clevedon.



After the obligatory photo, this time featuring the pier in the background rather than the pub, we set sail for home expecting to pedal once and then coast the rest. Of course it never works out like that but it was much easier. The only ways that I know from Weston to Bristol are the A370 or the M5 but Malcolm had a different route going through Kewstoke and Wick St Lawrence that brought us back to the Strawberry Line at Congesbury. The cafe at Yatton station was still open so in the spirit of investigation rather than the need for a break we called in for a quick brew. Going back through Nailsea, Malcolm took us on a new cycle track from the Tesco store. I don't think I would ever use it on my own because I would never find it or know where it was going - and I suspect I am not alone in this. But it was great to be able to let somebody else lead the way. Well done Malcolm for all the planning - try and sort out the weather next time.

[Click here for the route to Weston and back.](#)

Tuesday 31st May – Report from Tony Conibear: The Mendips and Levels from Congresbury (subsequently tagged by Brian as ‘The Green Bottles Ride’ . For leaders of these Tuesday rides events start on the previous Monday evening with anticipation of incoming phone calls. It's customary to wait till after the local evening weather forecast to decide if any pending tsunami will cancel the ride and now even Richard Angwin has deserted us for sunnier climes (but he's welcome to the 40+ of Doha !). I was fielding the calls for Brian Trott who had been uncertain of riding. However he was first to call at 7pm on the dot, weather a bit unsettled with a possible shower but he would be at Congresbury at 9am to lead the ride. Expectation was that attendance might be low due to various holidays, medical absences and the like. The phone rang red hot ! Jane called to say she was riding down with a couple of her own Tuesday followers and I later e-mailed Brian to confirm there would be at least ten on the ride. Then after some deliberation re the weather forecast I disappeared in to the garage to ready the mudguard shod iron bike (Brunel probably designed it !). Tuesday morning awoke to bright sunshine and clear blue sky, although it was a tad on

the chilly side. A gilet and arm warmer day but a definite no no for the iron bike. Nice bike comes down off the garage wall hooks and gets loaded into the car. Remarkably easy drive to Congresbury due to the school holiday but the Radio Bristol weather forecast announces possibility of light showers but a heavier variety over the Mendips. Oh s**t !. Thirteen riders assembled at the free carpark in Congresbury and only three of us with cars. Thirteen green bottles sat upon the wall

Our route would take us past Langford College to Burrington and up the Combe to Castle of Comfort then continue towards Wells turning off to Lower Milton and Wookey Hole for Wookey and our coffee stop at Fenny Castle House. Well that was the plan and the route sent out by e-mail. Riding past The Burrington Inn the coffee and toasted tea-cake sensors were imposing fierce left turn forces on my bars but we proceeded to trudge over the cattle grid and up Burrington Combe with field now beginning to string out as it inevitably does. Shortly before the Charterhouse turn we stopped for the customary re-group alongside the road. Now depending on your relative position along the road, and which conversation you may have been engaged in, probably determined what happened next. At this point John Upward, who had only come out for a short ride and a bit of socialising, was turning back for the Burrington cafe and home. Jane said she had a knee problem and would return via Cheddar and still manage 60 miles. So after about 5 minutes and with Brian's call of 'time to move on' returning little in the way of acknowledgement, we continued on our way. A little further on, at the Charterhouse junction, Jane turned off with two of her companions following. We crack on setting a fair pace on the long straight gently undulating sections, until looking back from fourth in line I realise we are alone. Puncture ?, mechanical ?. We wait for while but with no one in site back along the long straight John Killick sets off on a search, eventually returning having retraced to the Charterhouse turn with no sightings. So the surviving four of us continued on to the Castle of Comfort and the prescribed route to our cafe stop at Fenny Castle House to find five bikes occupying the bike racks. They had only arrived a few minutes before and the subsequent debriefing confirmed our suspicion that they had followed Jane. A kink in the road either side of the Charterhouse turn had put us out of site of the last ones to move off from the regrouping stop. Passing that turn they spotted cyclists in the distance and chased after them towards Charterhouse only to be informed when catching them that this was not the main ride. Fortunately some of this group knew the location of Fenny Castle which they reached via Priddy and down the Ebbor Gorge.



This new cafe is a very fine place indeed. Clearly a lot has been spent by the owners to create a quality establishment with decent fare on offer at reasonable prices. The chalk board menu had some tempting lunch options. Now back up to nine riders we set off across the levels towards our lunch stop at The Red Tile, Cossington. Nine that is until the first crossroads whereupon Steve Fay turns off for Wedmore to get some eggs. He seems to have a passion for long distance shopping by bike. On our previous ride from Caerleon he turned up as we were parking the bikes at the Abergavenny pub declaring 'Just popping round to Waitrose' !! So eight of us wend our way across the levels in what was now a decidedly fresh breeze, passing in and out of sheltered sections as we negotiated the sharp lefts and rights that characterise the levels. The Red Tile provided their usual excellent service and such well filled platters that left us in no urgency to resume pedal pushing. We eventually set off in a northerly direction via Bason Bridge and past Ricky's Cider Farm at Watchfield (another good cafe stop on another day), the through twisty narrow lanes past various farms to Rooks Bridge. It was on these lanes that encountered Boadicea's Chariot. I'm always a bit twitchy when I hear something agricultural behind me. Might be anything from a semi-knackered land rover to a combine harvester. This was a tractor towing a stonking wide empty trailer that was pruning vegetation from the verges, and the silly begger overtook us. The air was blue, especially as only a hundred yards up the road he turned left into a farmyard.

The remainder of the ride was rather uneventful as we continued through Webbington, Winscombe, Sandford and Churchill with the option of a tea stop at the Burrington Inn before returning via Wrington to Congresbury with 60 miles on the clock. A good day out with a nice addition to the cafe list.