

News for November 2011

Thursday 3rd November 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: Into November, the clocks have gone back and it starts to get dark soon after four, we are certainly getting into the tail-end of the year but it was still warm enough for shorts for some of the twenty raring to go at the Swan, Winterbourne. The group reduced a bit as team Winterbourne made their own way and the main peloton took Swan Lane and Hortham Lane to get to the A38. A possible typo in the programme saw John Upward down as leader although he lives on the other side of Bristol but our John, Garmin equipped, was up for it taking us through Tockington and as far as Elburton before the threatened rain began. Typically by the time those pulling on their waterproofs were ready the rain had stopped giving that familiar dilemma of cooking by excessive clothing or risking a soaking when it started again.



After passing the White Hart at Littleton John was open to suggestions for a route to Ham so we turned to Oldbury then on to Shepperdine for a quick look at the river Severn. There was not much of a view in the mist and murk and within seconds the rain began in earnest. This time the waterproofs were really needed. The two people on the right of the photo that you may not recognise are David and Shirley on their second outing with us. We will not see them for a while as they will be cycling in Cuba soon - sounds like an adventure. Luckily there was not too far to go as we splashed along the puddles and mud to arrive at the Salutation a minute or two before noon.

JayAre had rung the Sally when we set out, just as well as they were not expecting us! With thirty hungry cyclists expecting to be fed it could have been awkward but they put together

a fine buffet including bread and cheese, sausages, chips, pizza, samosas and even a bowl of salad for the healthy eaters - not bad for a fiver. As usual the ale was excellent. I am not familiar with OT from Wye Valley Brewery but a light hoppy beer is right up my street. I took the opportunity to canvass some opinion for a potential event in 2012 as part of the BTOTC 30 year celebrations. I am planning a cycle treasure hunt where teams of four ride a prescribed route spotting features on the way and solving clues, you probably know the sort of thing. Most people seemed in favour so watch out for that one when the next programme is published.

By the time we left the pub the rain had stopped and the sun was making a brave attempt. My first decision was whether to turn left with team Yate for my direct route home or right towards Berkley with the main group and get some extra miles in. Yep, through Berkley, over the A38 by Applegates coaches then through Wick, Tortworth and Tytherington. I peeled off after Tytherington with a fairly meagre forty two mile trip. Tomorrow's job will be cleaning my bike which is absolutely filthy - and I don't expect I am alone.

[Route map to Ham? Click here.](#)

Thursday 10th November 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: The big story for the weather forecasters on the Wednesday before our Thursday ride was a huge swath of heavy rain overnight through Somerset. But how far East would it reach and what time would it finish? In the event we did not see any rain all day although the roads were pretty wet and muddy in places. Meeting at Bitton the first announcement was that John Tyler was indisposed so John Bishop and Mike Chouings would take over. Then Frank Thompson (of two tunnels fame) reported that the cycle track into Bath was blocked at Windsor Bridge (I thought that was a card game played by British royalty). Sixteen starters took the cycle track into Bath then continued alongside the river until, sure enough, we had to get onto the road. I reckon Bath is a wonderful place to walk around but for driving or cycling is a dead loss. Riding past the bus station junction we carried on the A36 where an attempt to take the route along the river by the rec brought a shout of "carry on" from the yellow jersey and we kept on the main road for the short distance to the canal towpath. Here we were joined by vintage cycle enthusiast and local property tycoon Alex von Tutschek. After the towpath had sprayed everybody's bike with muddy water on the way to the toll bridge it was just the small matter of Bannerdown hill and we were in Marshfield and at the Catherine Wheel by a quarter to twelve.

Meals and ale were up to the usual high standard, most of us were tucking in by twelve fifteen. Eventual numbers rose to well over thirty. Our table were having a bit of a discussion about the future of the BTOTC when John called a few in for an impromptu committee meeting - despite the BTOTC having no committee, no secretary and no members. It was generally agreed that we should carry on the same relaxed manner. John

will plan the hand-over during the preparation of the April 2012 programme which will be an important programme as it will be thirty years of the BTOTC - cue some special events! More details as they become clear.

As we were leaving the barman came rushing out with a pair of spectacles which had been left behind. Not knowing who they belonged to, or even if the owner was a cyclist he decided to keep them behind the bar and wait for the owner to get in touch - so if you lost yours you know what to do. The sun came out for the homeward journey. And with the mild temperature it was difficult to believe it was November cruising along through Doynton, Pucklechurch and down Coxgrove Hill to head for home. Shame about the filthy bike again but a small price to pay for such a good day out.

[The filthy route? Click here.](#)

Thursday 17th November 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: What a great weather day for the middle of November. Bright sunshine lighting up the Autumn colours, no rain or wind, and not even too cold - although all the thirteen starters at Ashton Bridge were in longs for the trip to Hinton Blewitt led by Malcolm Hanson. Through Long Ashton, Wild Country Lane, over the A38 and once through the site of the old Winford hospital we were on the single track lanes. Approaching Winford Manor with a car stuck behind us we pulled into the manor driveway to give him room to pass - wouldn't you know it, he wanted to go into the manor. Pressing on along the wet lanes with various amounts of mud through Nempnett Thrubwell we made a cautious descent down the aptly named Awkward Hill passing close to the lake on to Ubley. Passing through West Harptree then East Harptree there was some booing as we passed a sign for the Waldegrave Arms - still not forgiven for the duff buffet they put on for our first and last visit. Around eleven thirty there was a signpost saying Hinton Blewitt one mile - but that was not on the plan so we carried on past the Kings Arms at Litton before getting back on the small lanes and up a dirty great climb bringing us to the Ring O'Bells just before noon.



Baguettes were the popular lunch choice and as a special treat - Stowford Still. Cider heaven for two fifty five a pint. I sat outside with two Petes, Lara, Arnold and Malcolm to enjoy the sunshine for as long as possible. Eventual numbers rose to thirty or so with a big Bath group, Brian and Sue and George among others. By twenty past one there were a few clouds in the previously blue sky but not threatening rain. Malcolm gave out the warning to leave at half past. A bit of information here - when Malcolm says "depart at one thirty" then at one thirty and ten seconds he is on his way. This resulted in a staggered departure as others collected their stuff and found their bikes although we were back together less than a mile down the road when Malcolm had a puncture. I'm surprised there were not more considering the amount of hedge cutting debris we had ridden over. (Note from Pete Campbell: Arnold, Pete and I can confirm that Malcolm didn't ask for any help while we stood there basking in the sunshine.)

With thirty miles to cover before it got dark I decided to let the rest watch Malcolm sort it out and plunged down Stowey Hill and caught up Rob Shiels and Frank Thompson at Upper Stanton Drew. They were taking it easy after Rob's rear mech had broken a spring and was now relying on baling twine to put some tension in the chain. As we rode through Pensford, Publow and Woolard the scenery was just excellent. Everywhere you looked you could take a photo and put it into a calendar called "The British Countryside". Joining the cycle track at Saltford I was just behind three cyclists - one lady, one man with a saddlebag and one man riding with a wide-knee style - yes it was Dawn, John and Alan returning from their own trip to St Catherines Valley. Certainly a day for every cyclist to be out on their bike.

[The route to Hinton Blewett and back to Whitchurch.](#)

Thursday 24th November 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: The previous week's ride to Hinton Blewitt was on a glorious weather day and although there had been some rough days in between today's weather was about as good as you could reasonably ask for at the end of November. It was a shame that Alan Bracey could not be there to enjoy it. After stepping up to lead and planning a route Alan's hip misbehaved and he had to cry off. Hope it improves soon pal. John Huish took over with his own route (how many options are there for this journey?) starting with seventeen at the Swan in Winterbourne and ending up with twenty two at the bridge. Mike and Lara left Winterbourne after the main group but managed to arrive before them, even though they missed out Moor Lane which was surprisingly devoid of mud. Once over the bridge we took the main Wye Valley road as far as the garage then turned left on the Usk road bringing us to The Huntsman by about a quarter to twelve.

There were not many staff visible but they still managed to get most people eating by twelve fifteen and the Reverend James was his usual persuasive self, talking some into two pints. Lara was looking very smart in her PBP jersey although will have to wait until February for the finishers medal. John made an announcement that our 8th December ride from Ashton will now stop for lunch at the Windmill, Portishead and not the Moorend Spout as the Nailsea pub have a large party for lunch. Am I the only one finding cycling hard work these days? It was an effort to drag myself out of the pub onto my bike for the trip home.

With a bit of brightness in the sky, no rain and dry roads conditions were still good - just a pity about the steep hill just feet from the pub exit, and when you are full of lunch. In Shirenewton village instead of the Crick road we took the left turn down the recently (well, in the last two years) resurfaced lane for a lovely descent almost into Mathern then the usual way back to the bridge. One of our shorter rides, just the job these days when it is getting dark at four. See you next week at the Christmas lunch. Last year it was icy, what will this year bring?

[Click for the route to Shirenewton.](#)