

News for October 2011

Thursday 6th October 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: October already. The sky is still bright, the roads are dry - and the temperature is way down from the unexpected heat of last week. Shorts were still preferred over longs by about two to one among the fifteen riding from Ashton to the Lamb at Axbridge with Jane leading the way. The wind was pretty blustery as we took the regular route to the Flax Bourton track, Backwell and into Claverham. Some of the motorists got a bit frustrated on the road to Congresbury, one passing a keep left bollard on the right to overtake us, but once over the Weston Road heading towards Churchill things became a lot quieter. Going past the Mendip Spring golf club Jane's planned road featured a "Road Closed" sign with a man in a van posted on guard duty. There was a conversation on lines of "You can't go through, the whole road is being resurfaced". "We can go on the footpath". "There isn't one". "We'll go on the grass verge". "There isn't one". At this point one of the golfers interrupted his game to say that the turning to the golf club entrance marked with a no through road sign would take us to the Strawberry Line via a rough track. Well he was not kidding about the roughness. Once the tarmac ran out it was potholes, mud, gravel and wall to wall puddles. Paul picked up the only puncture on that section finding a thorn the size of a small dagger that needed a pair of pliers to remove it.

John Upward and Tony Conibear stayed with Paul and once mobile again they took the direct route to the pub via the Strawberry Line. Damn, the two blokes with Garmins not on the official route. The rest of the group followed the short stretch of Strawberry Line to the road then instead of turning through the new orchard to Sandford station we stayed on the road through Sandford village then into Winscombe. At a signpost showing Abridge two miles straight on we turned right towards Loxton - well we were on a Jane special. Making a westward loop past the Webbington country club the sun became really bright in the blue sky - for about two minutes before the heavens opened. The next signpost declared three miles to Axbridge which we covered in the rain to arrive at the Lamb some time after twelve thirty to find the puncture team already settled in.

The Lamb never lets us down, good food, good beer and good service despite a whole crowd of customers in addition to thirty or so damp cyclists. By about a quarter to two the sun was out again and we dragged ourselves outside. One group turned right for the Strawberry Line and the larger group went left to tackle Cheddar Gorge. The gorge looked absolutely splendid in the bright sunshine but the strong wind threatened to blow you off your bike on the bends at the bottom as one moment you were being blown along then fighting a headwind the next. I was glad to get home after a tough day of eighty miles. Thanks to Tony for a Garmin track that shows the direct route from Winscombe to Axbridge rather than the loop around Crooks Peak but has the Cheddar route home. [Click here.](#)

Thursday 13th October 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: Our second time starting from the Swan at Winterbourne brought out twenty two starters for the ride to Leighterton. Tony Weaver was the designated leader but continuing back problems caused Tony to hand over to John Huish with Tony joining in for a short distance before the inevitable hills. There is a saying in the newspaper world "Don't assume that everybody has heard of Charlie Chaplin". We could have a similar saying - "Don't assume that everybody reads our website". Despite what I thought was extensive warnings a few still turned up at the Amcor factory to discover that the road closed signs are for real.

Yet again the weather was kind to us, no rain, light breeze and still warm enough for shorts. Several had over-dressed expecting cooler conditions and were soon stripping off as we took Frampton End Road, Chaingate Lane and Mapleridge Lane onto the common. The climbing kicked in on the way to Hillesley then the steep down and up at Alderley which had a few people crashing gears and cursing, then the main climb of the day up to Tresham. I was riding with Clive on his first time on this route, and wearing a heart rate monitor that was beeping like a burglar alarm. When I asked what we should do if it changed to a continuous tone he gasped "dig a hole and roll me into it".

By a little after twelve we arrived at the Royal Oak, our second visit since a complete refit after a long closure. The previous time we had all remarked how up-market it had become (with prices to match). And it is still maintaining high standards - all the decor immaculate, food orders taken at the table, all meals beautifully presented. Yes it does cost a few quid extra but you are only young once, give yourself a treat. Pete Brown and Alex Rendu decided to sit outside in the balmy conditions and eat the sandwiches they had brought. Until they were politely informed that it was pub food or nothing.



Who ate the pies? Mike enjoyed his.



Numbers at the pub were around thirty. For some reason everybody was itching to get going. Without a word being said people started to prepare for departure at around ten past one. Maybe the rumour had been spread that John had something special for the trip home. Still cracking weather as we took single track lanes through fields towards Didmarton, over the main road to Sopworth then right onto the lanes through the Beaufort estate, just perfect for cycling. Over the estate towards Little Badminton we turned right to Hawksbury Upton then Sandpits Lane to Horton for the split up at Mapleridge Lane. It is a simple strategy to pick out the best cycling lanes between the start and finish points then join them together but it works for me every time.

[13 October route map from Winterbourne to Leighterton.](#)

Thursday 20th October 2011 - report from Bill Balchin: We have not seen much of John Turton this year so I was glad to see him at Bitton to lead the ride to the Old Royal Ship at Luckington. For those who don't know, John has been receiving treatment for prostate problems - a mix of radio therapy to kill the cells plus implanted hormone treatment to reduce the level of testosterone which can hamper the recovery. The combination knocks back your energy level and puts on weight so bit of a problem for cyclists. (I did check with John that it was OK to put this in print). Anyway there was no sign of testosterone deficiency in the route that he had obviously put a lot of planning into for the seventeen strong peloton setting out from Bitton in bright sunshine but a definite chill in the air.



Along the cycle track towards Mangotsfield we left the track at the third bridge into Oldland Common and were soon climbing Redfield Hill, the first of many. Once over the top it was time to bomb down Beach Hill which took us onto the more familiar territory of Golden Valley road into Wick and across to Doynton. Rather than the direct route to Hinton we turned left at the Cross House towards Pucklechurch to put in a loop before climbing Cock Lane (otherwise known as the Hinton bypass) and Field Lane over the A46. With the sun still bright, no rain, little or no wind, nobody minded the extra distance.

Once on the top the lanes were up and down through West Littleton, West Kington and Nettleton before joining the main Castle Combe road at Burton. I have been past that junction many times and wondered where the road went - and now I know. Turning left under the motorway into Littleton Drew it was just after twelve and thoughts of lunch spurred some riders on causing a split in the group as some went through Alderton and others didn't but we all arrived at near enough the same time, apart from John Upward who picked up a puncture right in Luckington.

The pub was heaving with our friends from Bath, Team Yate/Winterbourne, Ted King on his new electric bike plus it was great to see Cyril and Mary who had driven there. The ORS were efficient as usual and we were soon tucking into the food and drink. I get some flak

from my wife about my choices of meals. The burger with chips and salad was five pounds 85p, last week at the Royal Oak twelve pounds 95p. Was one really worth twice the other? It was after one thirty before anybody made a move to leave, possibly because of the welcoming atmosphere, possibly the cold outside. The forecasters had predicted a cold, dry day. Not too windy with sunny spells in the morning and clouding over in the afternoon - and they were spot on. I was glad of my extra top for the trip back along Luckington Lane into Badminton, Old Sodbury and Dodington.

[And to see how we got there and back, click here.](#)

Thursday 27th October 2011 - report from Pete Campbell: To the Castle of Comfort on the Mendips today where I've never been before. I've heard that this is one of the more upmarket pubs the Thursday rides go to, and so I was concerned not to put my colleagues to shame and thought about maybe getting a new outfit. You will be appalled to learn that only two seconds later I decided to save my money and keep turning out in the same old rags. I could put the money towards a new bike. How much does a new titanium model go for these days? I expect I could get a lot of advice from you all if I was seriously considering one of these.



I was expecting some rain today, and was not disappointed when I pulled the curtains. A dampish journey through the middle of Bristol took me to Ashton, and by five past ten we had three riders: John Upward, Martyn Hallet and myself. This was the worst turnout I've seen in nearly three years of Thursday rides; there have been more for rides on ice in the dead of winter. Very poor show chaps! Original leader for the day John Killick is not able to ride so often currently, and his stand-in Jane issued a sick note, so they had excuses. I don't know about anyone else.

John Upward took the lead and we headed back into Bristol, past Temple Meads and Arnos Vale, and then the Whitchurch path past Hengrove to the A37. The rain was easing off by now and a case of overheating legs was quickly fixed by removing my waterproof longs. Before too long the rain was coming down again, but how wet can you get? Onwards towards lunch through Chew Magna and Bishop Sutton, and after South Widcombe John managed to find some lanes avoiding both East Harptree and Chewton Mendip which deposited us almost at the Castle of Comfort. I can vaguely remember some hills on this section today, but nothing like some of the others we use when getting onto the Mendips. Maybe I was distracted by the rain, or maybe I'm getting fitter (no, I agree, that's not very likely).

At the Castle of Comfort there were eight other cyclists (three rode and the rest drove). We sat in the bar next to a large fireplace which unfortunately didn't have a roaring fire in it, or indeed any sort of fire, which was a shame as it felt cold sitting there in damp clothes. This appears to be the lower class end of the pub (although they do have a carpet), so my lack of a stunning new outfit was not a problem. Our lunch arrived quickly although Brian and Sue had to wait nearly half an hour for theirs. But they had driven and were sitting there in warm clothes, so no sympathy. A pile of chips later and we were ready to go. In fact, it's probably fortunate that there was no fire lit, otherwise we would probably still be sitting dozing in the bar. As it was, the rain outside beckoned, so back on the road.

John Upward headed northwest towards Backwell, while Martyn and I were joined by Mike Chouing as we headed north to Whitchurch, this time on the west side of Chew Valley lake, through Chew Stoke and into Chew Magna, where we picked up the route we'd taken in the morning. It was still raining but it was getting lighter, and it's never so bad when you're on the way home. At Whitchurch, Mike and Martyn continued north and I took the path back into Bristol.

Yes, the weather could have been better, but there was a new route, no punctures and no road rage, so overall a good day.

[And click here to see the route we took.](#)