

News for September 2011

Thursday 1st September - report from Bill Balchin: There have been many partnerships in cycling over the years, Jacques Anquetil and Raymond Poulidor; Bernard Hinault and Greg le Mond; Mark Cavendish and Mark Renshaw. And now Martyn Hallet and Mike Chouings. Martyn checks out the pubs for lunchtime venues and then Mike applies his encyclopedic knowledge of the lanes to make a route. And that was how fifteen riders came to leave Bitton down the cycle track to Bath for a trip to the Carpenters Arms at Sherston. Coming off the canal towpath for the Batheaston toll bridge we were soon on what Mike declared to be the one climb of the day - up St Catherines valley to the Bannerdown road. That is one tough climb and split the group but once at the top we had the bonus of seeing the Three Shires Stone which marks the intersection of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Somerset(shire).



Apparently there is a photo of the BTOTC there from the early nineties, anybody got a copy? It would be interesting to compare it to today's picture. The weather forecast was for sunny intervals but there was only one all day - lasting from 8am until early evening so on we pressed in the sunshine past the front of Colerne airfield to Grittleton where Mike put in a loop to Hullavington but those in the know took the more direct route into Sherston. What with the climb, the photo op and the longer than usual distance (about 28 miles) it was getting on for 1pm when the official group arrived to find the short cut group and several independent travellers already sat in the garden.

The Carpenters Arms has been a BTOTC venue years ago but went out of favour. They did alright today with most people going for either sandwiches (with optional chips) or jacket potatoes. I sat with Andy Baker and heard tales of PBP which Andy, Lara and Alex Rendu (who was also out with us today) completed within the time limit. Grabbing a couple of hours sleep on a concrete floor, eating soup and croissant for every meal and grinding out mile after mile does not sound like fun to me but Andy said that the local villagers who turned out to cheer on the entrants made it all worthwhile. Well done to you all for doing it, a fantastic achievement.



Eventually we had to stir ourselves out of the sunny garden for the road home. After the obligatory group photo for the new venue we took the lane opposite the Rattlebones pub that passes the local school and takes you into the Badminton estate - just a perfect section with smooth surface, sun on your back, no traffic and slightly downhill. All too soon I branched off towards Didmarton to go home via Kilcott and Hillesley (more superb lanes) as the main bunch carried on into the estate. Uncanny how the weather often improves at the end of school holidays.

[Click here for the route taken by the short-cut group](#)

[and here for the Hullavington route.](#)

Thursday 8th September - report from Bill Balchin: One of the differences between a longer Tuesday ride and a Thursday motorised ride is that for the Tuesdays riders phone the leader on the Monday evening to confirm their attendance - no phone calls, no ride. When you get a wet Thursday the leader feels obligated to turn up at the start just in case any keen types are up for it. With a pretty poor weather forecast for today there would have been a strong possibility of the ride being called off but actually the morning started a bit damp and breezy but not too bad. The usual HERBS (Hard Riding Early Birds) rode the twenty miles from Berkley to the Trojan cafe to find John Upward and Wayne Tasker already enjoying a brew, Arnold arrived shortly after to swell the numbers to six. By the planned departure time of 10:15 we had scoffed a variety of bacon butties washed down with a mug of tea at very reasonable prices when the Bish arrived having mended a puncture with Pete Campbell who had spotted him at the roadside. Sorry chaps, no time for you to take any refreshments on board. The roads were dry under a grey sky as Arnold led the way on cycle tracks that take you out of Gloucester avoiding the criss-cross of busy trunk roads that surround the city. I have been on this trip five times and each time the route out has been different but always confusing. Hats off to Arnold who confidently found the way without sat-nav or checking the map.



Once we had burrowed under the A40 we were on quiet little lanes through small villages, just how we like it, heading on a Northerly bearing with the wind at our backs to the lunch stop at Forthampton. The Lower Lode Inn is at the end of a dead end road which stops at the bank of the river Severn. On previous visits the meals have been a bit slow to appear as they like to prepare everything fresh, but by ringing our order ahead that problem was overcome and all eight of us sat around one large table to enjoy the food.

For the homeward leg the sun actually made an appearance, I was gradually removing clothing during the day especially as the wind was now against us making us work a bit harder. The hedge cutters are out in force, John Upward had picked up a puncture just before lunch and Wayne had a flat as we re-entered Gloucester by the Telford Bridge. As he fixed it a group of old blokes on bikes going in the opposite direction stopped for a chat. They were a similar group to the BTOTC from the Tewkesbury area, know the Lower Lode Inn well, and were doing a similar ride to us but the other

way round. Calling in for a last cuppa at the Sainsburys cafe by the side of the canal (another good value stop) we said our goodbyes as some returned to their cars while others were looking at twenty miles into the wind back to Berkley. Riding with Mike and Martyn I was out of my depth and had to sit on Mike's wheel most of the way just to keep up. It comes to something when you have to slipstream a seventy-six year old, but I'm not proud, just happy to get home with 99.4 miles done. And no, I did not go round the block to make it up to a hundred.

[Click here for the route from Gloucester to Forthampton and back.](#)

Thursday 15th September - report from Bill Balchin: After several days of wild, windy weather as the remnants of hurricane Katia blew themselves out across the UK, today was one of those September days that you wish for - dry, still, bright sky and although cool it was still warm enough for shorts. With the excellent Hunters Lodge on the Mendips as the lunch stop this was shaping up to be a fine day out. John Upward was determined to do his part as well. Even though we cycle around the Chew Valley/Mendip area every few weeks John was planning something different for the group of a dozen, including three new faces. After the Flax Bourton cycle track and skirting the Eastern edge of the moors past Nailsea and through Chelvey and Claverham we arrived at Yatton. I have only ever joined the Strawberry Line at the station but John found a route through the houses that joined the track between the station and the A370. We stayed on the Strawberry Line until just before the tunnel at Winscombe where we said goodbye to the flat stuff and got onto Shipham Lane to begin gaining height. Some steady climbing with some fine views took us into Shipham where we took a right and a left to continue climbing on the quaintly name Cuck Hill.

We all carefully passed a girl on a horse as the road descended for a bit before going up again. The clip clop was still behind as the climbing kicked in again and then she started overtaking the cyclists - obviously superior horsepower. Shipham hill is a route often used to descend into Axbridge but I am told this was the first time for climbing. Once at the top the road levelled out (sort of) through Priddy and we arrived at the Hunters at almost one o'clock after a thirty mile trip - enjoyable though.

No Bath riders today and apparently there had been a group on the previous Thursday who were unaware of the programme change. But half a dozen independent riders from the Yate region were enjoying the faggots, pasties and ploughmans with a choice of local cider or Cheddar Ales Potholer (what else would you expect?) making one of our smaller lunchtime totals.

Going for a direct route home we passed the Castle of Comfort, bombed down the Wellsway and split up at Chew Stoke. I rode with a group on the regular route through Chew Magna and Norton Hawkfield up to the Whitchurch road where Russell on his folding bike had a disaster when his handlebar stem broke out of the steerer tube. Nothing to be done in the way of roadside repairs but at least he was not far from home.



Just a bit further on we stopped for another bit of roadside, stone themed history. A milestone reading "From Bristol to Charlton church 7 furlongs 15 poles". Been past it many times, never noticed it, amazing. You may have to expand the photo to read the writing. (right hand mouse click and select "view image").

[Click here for the route.](#)

19th September - Postscript to 15th Sept ride from Russell Coles: In case anyone was worried, I got home fine by wheeling the bike. The fork column or steerer tube snapped probably due to a weak point caused by the slot for the quick release clamp. The forks are now at Argos cycles having a new fork column (without the slot) fitted.

Thursday 22nd September 2011 - report from Bill Balchin. After the Tuesday ride planned for this week was postponed because of the weather it was a bonus for Thursday to start fine and dry with the forecast of staying that way for the rest of the day. One of our biggest groups of the year assembled at the Swan pub in Winterbourne high street, our first time here because of the closure of the Old Gloucester Road by Trench Lane. For the second week running some new faces joined in plus some familiar ones that we have not seen for a while. Colin Bosomworth and John Turton were both riding out to the Severn bridge before turning back, and Tony Weaver was up for the whole trip to the Huntsman at Shirenewton. Around two dozen set off along Swan Lane to turn right towards Hortham Lane, apart from Bill who quickly detoured left to take a photo of the roadworks affecting our start point. Although the day was dry the roads were still a bit damp from overnight rain so we

rejected a possible mud bath in Moor Lane in favour of Tockington and Olveston to the bridge where we lost two and gained three.



The route today was pretty direct, up the Wye Valley road for a short distance then left near the hospital to climb up to Shirenewton dropping down the final short hill to the pub at around ten to twelve. With only a couple of girls serving and no pre-ordering we could have been struggling but they coped admirably with about three dozen cyclists all together. John did some brisk business selling the October to April programme which contained the bombshell that he will be stepping down as CEO next year. Candidates interested in the position should have a chat with John (and Bill Balchin will not be one of them). I had not realised that on the outward trip Berry had taken a tumble. Despite wearing long sleeves and leggings which survived without damage he had nasty grazes to his left knee and elbow - but not bad enough to prevent him from riding up the near-vertical climb from the pub into Shirenewton. You can't keep a good man down.

That hill saw several walking and caused the bunch to spread out. I ended up at the back where I think our little group must have gone a different way but with only a couple of route choices we were soon back together at the cycle track for the return over the bridge. The temperature was dropping and the sky clouding over but the rain held off to end another successful day.

Tuesday 27th September 2011 - report from Tony Conibear. Brian's Mystery Tour.

Following a weekend of persistent severe weather reports for the coming week (something about high pressure, no rain, no wind, unusually high temperatures and other such unbelievable nonsense !!), it was slightly disappointing that only 5 set off from Congresbury for the last scheduled Longer Ride on Tuesday of 2011. Brian Trott had stepped in to lead George Martin's annual mystery tour and we were pleased to learn before departing that George should be joining us for coffee at the morning cafe stop. No idea where that would be, it's a mystery tour, but we headed west along the A370 through Hewish then off into the lanes before being guided through the outer urban limits of W-s-M, the first encounter with an upward gradient and onto the Kewstoke road. Coming onto the Weston sea front there was a comment 'nice to be riding along here without being sand blasted' although 'blasting' was Allan Picard's description of our riding style on arriving in a state of near collapse at the cafe. Some of us must have been suffering a hangover from repeated viewing of recordings of Wiggo's 35mph final lap of Sunday's world championship road race. Wasn't that awesome. Team GB stuffing the rest of the world.

We are now in Uphill, or to be more precise Uphill Wharf and the new Wharf Side cafe. This was George's suggestion and he was waiting to give us an update on his improving recovery from various joint and ligament defects. Seems that a spot of steady cycling beats the pants off physiotherapy. We reckoned surgical insertion of a grease nipple in each shoulder would solve the problem. The cafe itself was very fine conversion of a chandlery. Coffee, toasted teacake and jam (the cyclists reference for comparing prices for 11's) came to £2.60.



After a 40 minute stop we pushed off in the company of George out through Bleadon with our numbers briefly jacked up to 6 before he left us to make his way back to Wrington as we turned South onto the Somerset Levels. I think we all guessed that our lunch stop would be The Red Tile at Cossington, a popular stop for these Tuesday rides which we arrived at spot on 12 noon after 30 miles ridden.

The pub had a welcome addition to its board menu, a range of £5 specials. Ample proportions as well, and it took some considerable effort to drag ourselves away at 1.30. The sun was now beginning to show it bit more frequently as Brian led us out through Shapwick and back onto the levels. Despite how many times I come here I find with all those 90 degree turns negotiating the waterways I lose all sense of direction. Thank goodness for the frequent sightings of Glastonbury Tor, which we almost reached before heading north through Godney to our final stop at Fenny Castle Tea Rooms. This is a first class establishment. Do good lunches also according to Brian, and a notice on the counter announced attainment of an alcohol licence. We however stuck to the tea/coffee and cake in anticipation of some forthcoming hills. Dave had two chocolate brownies which he claimed was one for each leg. The sun was now fully up to speed so gillet now in back pocket. Not been down to this level of undress since April.

The ride had been pretty flat all day so it was a bit of a shock when after 51 miles we arrived at the hill. Only about 200 yards of it but awarded two arrows on the OS map. It's called Daggs Lane. A sharp right off the levels towards Bagley. We were now entering the slightly lumpier section of the ride and average speed dropped to our more customary level. Arriving at Cheddar we took the more direct cycle path around the reservoir, then straight up the Axbridge bypass to a short stretch on the A38, before turning off through Winscombe to head back to Congresbury to complete a very

enjoyable 67 miles. Another 6 and that would have been a mile for every year of the average age of the group ! [Map of the route here.](#)

Thursday 29th September 2011 - report from Bill Balchin. Cycling in short sleeves at the end of September? Right from leaving home in the morning? This crazy weather was not only dry, bright and fairly wind-free but warm - temperatures in the mid to high twenties. No complaints from the twenty starters at Bitton with another five left behind in the cafe to make their own way rather than the John Bishop/Mike Chouings devised route. John requested a chorus of "Oh what a beautiful morning" before the depart but after a couple of bars of unharmonious vocals called enough. Coming off the cycle track at Saltford we were soon on the first climb towards Stanton Prior. The whole area South of Bath is relentlessly up and down but Mike claimed that he was minimising the climbing riding through Priston and Nailwell before we turned right at the crossroads to get to Wellow. That climb is a slog with a cruel ramp up at the top before storming down into the village. That nice sunshine and heat was very pleasant but made the climbs hard work, especially coming out of Wellow when instead of going straight on following the signposted way to Hinton Charterhouse up the big climb we turned right signposted in red for "deep ford" and climbed up towards Norton St Philip. A left at the top took us to the Rose and Crown soon after noon.



It was almost a party atmosphere with nearly all of the thirty plus cyclists sitting outside in the sunshine. Many of the regulars were present. Four of our new recruits - Pete, Paul, Clive and Mark were there. John Turton had tried a shorter ride the previous week and was now riding strongly back in the fold. Joe Prosser and Heather had made the trip from Scotland for this weekend's tasty Cheddar audax so had a bonus ride with the BTOTC. Jerry and Lynne Croome joined John, Tony and Dawn to make their own way there. The Bath Boys were out in force. Plus Brian Griffiths and birthday boy Bill Boyd celebrating his eightieth birthday. There was another round of singing as we all sang "Happy birthday to you" but he was spared the bumps.

Previously we have dropped down to the canal towpath at Freshford for the trip home. Today we headed for Wellow down the big hill then took the right turn onto the Colliers Way. By Spring of 2012 it should be possible to get into Bath on cycle track when the two tunnels project is complete (although that could be an optimistic target). Today we had to negotiate Monkton Combe and the slalom course through the college to get on the towpath track and take the flat route through Bath and back to Bitton where a large group stopped for tea to finish off not just a bike ride but a grand day out.

[Click here for the day's route.](#)