

Steps Bridge

Kentisbeare Junior Cycling Club

Ride Report 26/27 October 2008 Diane Jolly

The team:
20 kids, 12 adults.

The distance:
78 miles



Kentisbeare to Dartmoor and back

The Kentisbeare Junior Cycling Club - having pootled along local lanes, trundled along the towpath to Tiverton, braved the busier backstreets of Cullompton and blazed a trail to Budleigh Salterton beach - was about to embark on its very first long-distance residential cycle ride. The children would spend the night in a hostel, and we all faced the challenge of thirty-five miles on each of two consecutive days. The day dawned fine and the Village Hall Car Park was heaving with excitable children on bikes and parents brandishing cameras.

Stuart McFadzean - having organised the route, the accommodation, the mealbreaks and the ride leaders - was directing the proceedings. Ride Leaders - Rick Fisher, Elise Ellicot, Richard Bray, Phil Squires and Richard Stanbury - were checking brakes, adjusting saddle heights and dispensing advice as needed. Chris Lorimer was loading his capacious car with kitbags, water, chocolate and, seemingly, enough homemade biscuits, buns and flapjack to feed a small army.

Finally: tyres pumped, panniers secured, layers of clothing added or removed, twenty children - aged nine to fifteen - and twelve bold adults were good to go. And we were off!

After brief stop at The Merry Harriers and Bradninch to collect more riders, the miles flew by and in no time we were greeted by members of the Thorverton Womens' Institute. We were soon sipping a hot drink and wolfing some of our own delicious traybake as well as some WI biscuits. (How did they manage to hold their post-coffee morning meeting with us making such a racket?) Onward - and, indeed, upward - to Sandford, and to The Lamb Inn for a delicious lunch: sausages, chips, sandwiches and ice-cream for the children, and toasted baguette, salad and crisps for us, all washed down with lashings of squash! Staff and customers alike at The Lamb were all fascinated - not to mention impressed - by our ambitious expedition. Soon Sgt Major McFadzean was cracking the whip and we were once more on our way.

The bridge over the A30 proved an excellent venue for a Florentine 'n' flapjack break and for Chris Lorimer to continue his sterling work on water-bottle filling duty. It also proved a suitably dramatic - and noisy - photo opportunity, accompanied, as we were, by the cacophony of many horns from the busy motorway below. An unscheduled stop at Cheriton Bishop for Neurofen for those of us with dodgy knees and bad backs, and we were on the home-strait, and - although we didn't yet know it - minutes from our only spill.

We were only about a mile from our destination when Chris Wilson-Date lost concentration and nudged his bike into the hedge with disastrous results. I was directly behind him and witnessed his spectacular tumble. Fortunately, his mum, cycling with one of our nurses, was just behind me, closely followed by Chris Lorimer in the support-vehicle. Chris Wilson-Date was brave but bleeding, in pain and very shaken up.

The Steps Bridge Hostel just outside Dunsford was a welcome sight: set among acres of woodlands with a blazing wood-burning stove in the living-room and a pan of bolognaise bubbling on the hob, courtesy of Sean and Tina Henry. The children raced about exploring and sorting out the final sleeping arrangements, whilst we adults collapsed in a heap clutching cuppas and staring into the middle distance. As Chris and Mary Lorimer had drawn the short straw, they were on House Mother duty. So, after puddings of spotted dick and syrup sponge with custard, the grown-ups shuffled along to their beds off-site, leaving the Lorimers to their fate! Sunday But, we needn't have worried. They were all very well behaved, and even slept! We arrived to find Chris and Mary looking in control and remarkably rested, and the children breakfasted and raring to go.

We swapped Stanburys - Rachel for Richard - and we set off leaving Jo and Siobhan, our volunteer chambermaids, pulling on their Marigolds. And before we knew it we were getting to grips with the most challenging hill of the return leg. The return journey had a rather different flavour to it: it drizzled constantly, if lightly, all morning and the roads were much busier.



It was essential that we all stayed focussed and responsive to the commands from our leaders. We were largely able to travel in a fairly tight group, but given our size and the nature of cycling - punctures, errant chains and discomfort - it was inevitable that we were sometimes in smaller groups.

Those in the rearguard were always cheered by the knowledge that a leader, usually Rick, and frequently accompanied by others in similar circumstances, were always right there. Making our way through the beautiful valley of the River Yeo we found we were able to admire the scenery - whilst wondering how far we were from elevenses - and then minutes later we were admiring the nerves of steel of our leaders as they negotiated our way through the most trafficked junction of the trip - the A3072 at Creedy Bridge. We soon turned off at the Newton St Cyres Golf Club Cafe for hot drinks. We were ravenous by this time, but tried to stay away from food as we would soon be tucking into a delicious roast beef, Yorkshire puddings and an array of vegetables at The Thorverton Arms. We tucked into 'dessert' - a tin of chocolates - in the car park before setting off on the penultimate leg of our adventure.

As riders began to peel off at Bradninch, we had one last surprise treat in store: Adam - who many of us know from singing with [VoiceWorx](#) - and his mobile apple-press, and theatre production, 'Cider with Roadies', was parked in front of the [Bradninch](#) Guildhall! What better thirst-quencher at the end of a day in the saddle than a glass of Vitamin-C packed, freshly-pressed apple juice? During those last few miles a 'de-mob happy' induced delirium seemed to set in: we bowled along, and we were all delighted to see the large welcome committee - cameras held aloft once again - at the Village Hall. In a flurry of thanks and congratulations, kitbags and children were collected, muddy bikes were either loaded into vehicles or ridden slowly home. We were planning cups of tea, glasses of wine, hot baths ... and, of course, our next ride.

We all live an increasingly nannied life and this was an excellent opportunity for children - and grown-ups - to participate in real-life, day-to-day, potentially dangerous cycling: no guarantees, but plenty of risk-assessment and decision-making. Add to that the sense of achievement at completing the physical challenges and the warmth engendered by the camaraderie and team-spirit, and I thought that we spent a weekend which would be difficult to beat. So, when's the next one?

Diane Jolly.

