FALMOUTH WHEELERS MAGAZINE 2024

Chairman's Xmas Message

Well, that was an interesting 2024!! Having taken on the chairmanship in February, I'm in shock that I'm still here presiding over the club! My therapist told me it might even help with my mental health as a form of exercise for my mind. I find that debatable to say the least. It's more like being punched in the head numerous times!

This is what being chairman has done to me! I've been driven to drink. And is it any wonder I'm not well?

I'd like to thank my fellow committee members, Amanda, Kath and Steve, not only for their hard work but for guiding me through the year relatively unscathed!

Being a chairman is a formal position and is a bit alien to me, as there are procedures and protocols I should evidently be following. I suppose I just like getting on with things, and maybe my methods are a little unorthodox. But they do get a reaction and prompt discussion. That discussion is, if you like, an investment in the club and its future.

How do I see the future of the club? Falmouth Wheelers has always had a strong social foundation. We regularly come together for social events, such as the beach barbecue, the Roastie Ride at Christmas, an evening at Verdant Brewery and, of course, the monthly meetings. Most years, several holidays, both home and abroad, are organised by members. We've raised money for many charities, individually and as a club, over the years. A great example this year was Danny raising funds for Waterloo Uncovered, a charity supporting veterans and military personnel who have been impacted by their service. This year the club donated to two local charities: St Petrocs, working to end homelessness in Cornwall, and Pendennis Community Centre, a volunteer-run charity offering many services, including health and fitness activities. One of its long-term aims is to bring a swimming pool back to Falmouth.

Now let's turn to the actual cycling part of the club. One worry for me was our ever depleting numbers on Sunday mornings and what we could do about it! We've had a look at our ride structure this year and how we can attract new, younger members to the club, as we are an ageing cohort of riders! This will hopefully benefit the club with new ideas and inspirations. To facilitate this, we created a short introductory ride that would appeal to those not wishing or able to ride forty-plus miles. My thanks go out to Dean for taking this on board and his willingness to lead these rides. They have indeed proved worthwhile at recruiting new riders and attracting back some former members. It is also popular with existing members!

I must mention the Pathfinders. They have been a tradition in the club since before I became a member. The idea behind the Pathfinders is to organise a ride further from home that caters for every member regardless of which ride you normally go on. This year we organised six, although one, Camelford (mine), had to be cancelled due to inclement weather, so that one will be in the bag for next year. In the new year, we'll have a rides group meeting to sort destinations for 2025. If anyone has a part of Cornwall or further afield they would like to explore, please come forward and share your views. We can help you devise a route and plan.

I know I've been banging on about safety for most of the year, and I'm not about to stop! There have been numerous accidents this year with many contenders for the brake award. Next year I want zero contenders. Concentration and observation are key. Sometimes it's like riding with a gang of unruly six-year-olds! I don't know what happens. It seems we evolve from childhood with very little responsibility into adulthood with lots of responsibility, and finally into a Wheeler when it all goes out the window!!

I also think the club has an important role to play in the community. Along with the walking and cycling campaign, we are promoting active travel and getting people out of their cars, especially for shorter journeys.

This is not an easy task, as I'm beginning to find out! It seems nearly impossible to get any meaningful cycling infrastructure put in place in Falmouth and Penryn! Somehow we need to have a greater presence, raise the volume and make our voices heard by our politicians.

One of highlights of the year was welcoming Ian Negus into the club. After a horrendous accident in May 2021, Ian is making excellent progress with support from Neil and Robin. Ian now has a trike specially built for him by Neil that is giving him a new lease of life.

Christmas is a time when we reflect back on the year. Sadly this year we said farewell to Steve Hudson. Not only was Steve an accomplished cyclist, a member of the Wheelers and a friend, but in some ways a mentor to me. If any of you wonder why I sometimes ride a single speed, it's all thanks to Steve! I first rode Steve's single speed in Ireland in 2013, and when we arrived home he suggested turning an old frame I had into a single speed, which after a bit of trial and error is the machine I ride today. So cheers mate, wherever you are, I will always have something to remember you by!

Finally, I'd like to wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a great New Year.

Ian

P.S. I look forward to being voted out at the AGM in February!

Treasurer's report

As we near the end of 2024, I am writing to update you all on the club's finances.

We have a healthy balance in the bank with over £700 in our charity account – £613 raised from Phil Conroy's Falmouth Audax and a further £70 coming from the bike maintenance course run by Neil Selwood. Members also donated to the Trike project for Ian Negus that Robin and Neil Selwood set up.

Our membership has increased from fifty-five in 2023 to sixty four in 2024, due to the new members' introductory rides and a number of former members rejoining.

Having only changed our banking to Lloyds Bank in January 2024, we are currently looking at other banking options due to Lloyds levying a monthly management charge on our account from January 2025. I will update the club members on any changes to the our banking arrangements as soon as the information is available.

By offering members a twenty percent discount on our large stock of club kit, we have managed to shift some of our older stock items. Going forward, we plan to hold less stock. Due to sizing and cost issues, we are currently looking at new suppliers for club kit.

During 2024 the club purchased some small first aid kits and a stock of emergency mylar blankets, both of which have been issued to members.

We continue to support the Falmouth, Penryn and Area Walking and Cycling Campaign with a number of events planned for 2025.

Wishing you happy and safe cycling for 2025.

Steve Lightfoot

Treasurer

Charities

In 2024 Falmouth Wheelers donated £500 to two worthy local Charities:

Homelessness in Cornwall

PENDENNIS
COMMUNITY CENTRE

Pendennis Leisure is a charity set up to galvanise community support for the Ships & Castle leisure centre. Their long-term plan is to transform the centre with a 25m pool at its heart
along with modernisations to reconfigure space and make the site more sustainable and energy-efficient.

Man on the moon: my ascension to the top of Mont Ventoux

Mont Ventoux, also known as the Giant of Provence, is a huge lump of a mountain. It isn't pretty in the traditional "alpine jagged peaks" kind of way, and it sits more or less alone, rising from the low-lying fruit-and-grape-growing plains of the Rhône Valley, topping out at around 6,000 feet

above sea level.

Above the tree line it becomes a wilderness of broken limestone, giving the appearance of snow from afar, but up close, when you break through the forest covering Ventoux's lower flanks, you enter a weird alien landscape with little to no vegetation, just shattered white stones and snaking ravines.

From a distance it looks oddly like Carn Brea, its immense weather station/observatory topping the mountain, in a similar way to the Brea's own summit monument. But then you realise just how far away from Ventoux you actually are. Driving from Avignon, you quickly see the peak some 35 miles away, whereas I definitely can't see Carn Brea from my place, despite being some three times closer.

Well, I'd been in the Wheelers for almost a year and had even made it to such far-flung places as Portreath and Tehidy. I'd conquered Truro Hill not once but twice. So surely Mont Ventoux should hold few terrors?

Wife Nancy and I, along with Nancy's best friend from school (who slept on the sofa-bed where we stayed and encouraged bad drinking habits) were staying at a little tourist enclave near Aubignan, with Ventoux in plain sight. I had my bike with me. I announced I that was going to have a crack at it at some point during the week (to be announced). The muted "there, there, of course you are" response, only doubled my resolve.

I grabbed a "Cycle Up Ventoux – Beware" leaflet from the local tourist office. Yes, it said things such as: have a medical first (I didn't); cycle a thousand kilometres in the weeks leading up (I hadn't); take extra clothing (the temperature difference from bottom to top can be 10–14°C). No worries, I'm a positive guy who's already conquered Truro Hill twice.

I did embark on a training run through the vineyards. It wasn't perfect, admittedly: On the way back, crossing a main road and seeing a car in the distance, I stopped, deciding discretion was the better part of valour. I promptly got jammed in my cleat and toppled elegantly over. It hurt, and my derailleur looked a bit bent, but I stood up, pretending this was all part of the plan, and graciously waved the car past when it slowed down. Given a choice between Death or Embarrassment, a true Englishman abroad will always choose Death.

Hobbling across the road, I discovered I only had one working gear, but the injuries to man and machine did give me a valid reason not to attempt the ascent the next day. Instead, I found a bike shop in Beaume (nearby village, very good sparkling wines) which had the good grace to fix my derailleur for cash and not ask how it had happened. That night, after the third course of a very good dinner, I made my announcement: the ascent is tomorrow; yes, I feel absolutely fine; no, I didn't need a lift to the foot of the ascent – I will rise very early and cycle to Malaucène to start the climb.

The alarm went off just before dawn, and I felt like death. But, as you now know, a true Englishman abroad will greatly prefer that outcome to Embarrassment, so off I popped. The ride to Malaucène, in the early light and with virtually no traffic, was glorious.

Whilst a fairly direct road, the slight snag was my uncanny ability to ignore height contours on the map. Turned out there was a great big ridge between Aubignan and Malaucène, the start of the climb. Really big. I remained undaunted. It's a wonderful ride from Malaucène up the lower slopes of Ventoux: glorious woods, relatively calm gradient, glimpses through gaps in the trees of the receding valley floor. The gradient then kicked up to 8 percent, but I was feeling confident, smug almost. Wouldn't it be a great idea to race myself a little; see what speed I could get up to? Turns out it was 12mph. Turns out also it was a bad idea. Remembering that the advice in the leaflet didn't include a section on suicidal bravado – but assuming that, if it had, the advice might be to not be so stupid – I slowed.

My legs grumbled. I realised I'd been drinking water for fun rather than out of need with 15k still to go.

The gradient kicked up again and, from what I'd read, it wasn't going to relent again until the summit. There is a simply brutal section towards the top of the treeline where the gradient goes into double figures but the road becomes relatively straight. That's just cruel. With no bends to break up the ride, and with my legs now starting to get a little hysterical about it all, I caught a glimpse of what eternal purgatory might be like. But then I saw a bend. Around the bend, is it real? I could see the top of the Ventoux's tower on the horizon! Touching distance!

A sign on the road said another 7k to *le sommet*, but that was obviously a mistake, surely. By now I had breached the tree line and was into switchbacks through the blasted limestone and ravine landscape. Stark beauty surrounded me, and the valley floor seemed miles below. It was hot and I was having to ration the remaining water hard.

I started to make stops to catch my breath and happened on a parked car with English occupants who gave me an extra bottle of water (I feigned casual, but probably the sweat-streaked neediness showed in my face). The summit seemed close enough to touch, but those lying road signs still claimed another 4k to go. I started to wonder whether I would make it.

Another painful kilometre crawled by, but, on rounding the next bend, I saw in the distance one of those photographers who make a living by taking pics you can then buy from their website. He'd spotted me, and I remembered a quote from, I think, Sharp's Rifles: "die like a man in front of these Frenchies". Obviously, that's far preferable to Embarrassment, so I spent more of my reserves in straightening up, trying not to cry and pedalling with feigned vigour.

Still two kilometres left. Do I stay or do I go, as The Clash once said? I heard a car behind me. It passed with shrieks of encouragement – Nancy and Friend of Nancy, lunatic Cornishwomen shouting encouragement to lunatic Cornishman on a stark French mountainside!! That, and a daughter's present stuffed in my pocket, got me through the last 2k.

I dragged my failing carcass atop its mighty two-wheeled steed up the last couple of hundred metres (conveniently steepened further to enhance the cycling experience). I crossed the painted line that marks "topping out". I heard a weird, strangled croak, then realised it was actually me attempting a roar of triumph. I threw myself back on my saddle, inadvertently producing an unintended wheelie, and just had enough strength left to stand off the bike rather than fall off it.

Nancy rushed up and helped me to not fall over. "How

are you feeling?" she asked. "Ihmrghaokbtrffrddded", I replied. "Pardon," she requested, reasonably. "I dbbnrgh rbfwrrohbd bldaggerrfoo," I replied. "OK," she said, "eat this banana." I did. "Now drink this water." I did. "Now eat this Snickers bar." I did. "Now drink some more water."

After all this, her medical judgement seemed to be that I was now fit enough to rejoin the human race, possibly even to the extent of being able to communicate by way of the spoken word. "Will you be able to cycle back down to Malaucène to join us for lunch?" Yes…but…first…must…buy… T-shirt" (which was cheaply made, like everything in the surprisingly tacky shop at the magnificent summit, but which I still have).

I'd been carrying up with me the vintage polka dot jersey that my youngest daughter, Sophie, had given to me earlier that year. I felt I could now, justifiably, put it on, and I posed for my summit pics.

You have to be very, very careful descending Ventoux – you're filled with happy endorphins; you're tired; and you are very possibly excessively confident. The descent is technical, exhilarating and contains many hazards: tight bends, ravines, unbending trees, 2 or 4-wheeled vehicles always possible around every corner. Caution is reinforced not so much by the tiresome potential Death thing, but by the necessity to avoid the Embarrassment of having to be peeled off a conifer or hoisted out of a drop. But what a rush!

I made it back down to Malaucène's official start of the climb in, I suppose, 25 minutes or so, and I stopped to look back and bask a little. A French couple on their bikes arrived a little after me. Ironically and in my best Englishman abroad French I observed "*C'est facile n'est-ce pas?*" After a puzzled stare from them and a "Vous pensez?", I gave up trying to be funny and just said "*non – c'est dur, très, très dur*."

I headed for town, wondering why people kept smiling at me (later finding out that many cyclists come back down with a particular wild-eyed look and fixed grin that amuses the locals) and found the girls. Lunch was the best goat's cheese and honey pizza ever made and the most refreshing lager ever brewed. Afterwards, "Will you cycle back to Aubignan, then?"… "No." "Good call." So Man and bike squeezed into the back of the car, and away we went.

Final stats (including the ride from Aubignan over the ridge):

- Distance: 61 km (38 miles)
- Total ascent: 2085 metres (6842 ft)
- Calories burned: bloody loads
- Lunch: best ever

As a small postscript, a few years later I took the then partner of my sister-in-law (let's call him Lord Lucan to protect the innocent) up Ventoux via the far easier route from Sault. The route starts higher and from another side of the mountain. The gradient is relatively kind until it joins up, just beyond the treeline, with the third possible route (which winds up the mountain from the village of Bédoin).

Lucan's strategy to cycle uphill is to attack at the bottom and go as fast as possible, so as to get it all over with. He has a bull's constitution but is philosophically opposed to restricting his intake of self-rolled fags. Given those two factors, and after taking a look at him on a test climb up one of the hills in the nearby Dentelles de Montmirail, I'd decided to avoid the two toughest routes (from, respectively, Bédoin and Malaucène).

We drove, with the bikes, to Sault and off we pedalled. The initial two thirds of the route is long and hard at times but relatively benign overall. We were reaching the top of the forested section when His Lordship asked for a break, so we pulled into a handy stopping point. I assumed Lucan wanted a breather, and in a certain sense he did. A French coach party had pulled in just behind us, and the passengers looked on in profound respect as His Serene Highness lit up a fag and dragged deeply thereupon. Ventoux? Pah! Shortly after, we joined the Bédoin route and pulled into Chalet Reynard, where Nancy and her sister were waiting with refreshments.

Your Lordship, I cautioned, the ascent will kick up from here, and the final third will be tough. I set off first, Lucan then followed me at speed, passed me and disappeared around the next bend. It became very tough, and with every bend you expect to see the end in sight – to the point where disappointment becomes routine. I caught up to Lucan after just a few hairpins and respectfully tucked in behind. He waved me on, saying he'd probably have another fag break.

I reached the summit, knackered but nothing like the state I'd been in on the Malaucène ascendancy previously. Nancy and her sister were already there (by car). Her sister confided that she'd taken a picture of Lucan, unbeknownst to him, slumped over his bike. Nancy whispered to me "It's not a contest. I know it's not a contest. BUT YOU WIN!", accompanied by a triumphant chortle (the sisters are quite competitive, including by proxy). Lucan did make it, though, shattered, about 30 minutes later, and he photo-bombed my summit pic.

I haven't yet had a crack at the third route up Ventoux, from Bédoin. Maybe next year?

– Michael Wall

ACIB and sometime amateur cyclist with delusions of grandeur

Words of wisdom

- *Ride it like you stole it.*
  Lee Sutton
- *Few articles ever used by man have created so great a revolution in social conditions as the bicycle.*
  U.S. Census Report, 1900
- *I'll tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world.*
  Susan B. Anthony, American women's rights activist, 1896
- *We are not blocking traffic; we are traffic.*
  Critical Mass bicycle advocacy slogan
- *Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of riding a bike.*
  John F. Kennedy
- *When the spirits are low, when the day appears dark, when work becomes monotonous, when hope hardly seems worth having, just mount a bicycle and go out for a spin down the road, without thought on anything but the ride you are taking.*
  Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- *You never have the wind with you — either it is against you or you're having a good day.*
  Daniel Behrman
- *Don't buy upgrades. Ride up grades.*
  Eddy Merckx
- *You are one ride away from a good mood.*
  Sarah Bentley, British cyclist
- *I had been familiar with that street for years and had supposed it was dead level: But it was not, as the bicycle now informed me to my surprise.*
  Mark Twain

It's just a hill. Get over it!
Gradients

What is a gradient?

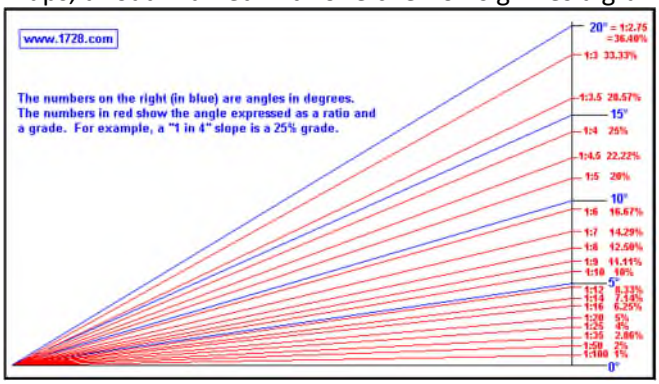
Gradient (US: grade), also known as the slope, incline, pitch or rise of a physical feature) expresses the steepness of the angle it forms. Understanding gradients is essential for cyclists as it helps in planning routes, training and preparing for climbs. Knowing the gradient of a climb can give you an idea of the effort required and help you to pace yourself (or conserve your battery) accordingly.

There are three main ways to express slope:

1. As the **angle** of inclination to the horizontal – from 0° for horizontal to 90° for straight up.
2. As a **percentage**, calculated as the rise divided by the run times 100, where *rise* is the vertical distance and *run* is the horizontal distance (not the distance along the slope). Percentage is the most commonly used method for describing slopes in Europe and the US. Note that a gradient of 100% is equivalent to an angle of 45° (not 90°). (A related method commonly used in Europe to denote the incline of a railway is the per mille figure (‰). It is expressed as the rise divided by the run times 1000.)
3. As a **ratio** of one part rise to so many parts run. For example, a slope that has a rise of 5 feet for every 1000 feet of run would have a slope ratio of **1 in 200.** This is generally the method used to describe railway grades in Australia and the UK. It was used for roads in the UK until the 1970s. To convert the slope ratio to percentage, multiply the ratio by 100. For instance, a gradient of 1 in 20 is 1/20 times 100 = 5%.

Of these 3 ways, slope is expressed as a ratio or a grade much more often than an actual angle and here's the reason why. Stating a ratio such as 1 in 20 tells you immediately that for every 20 horizontal units travelled, your altitude increases 1 unit. Stating this as a percentage, whatever horizontal distance you travel, your altitude increases by 5% of that distance. Stating this as an angle of 2.8624 degrees doesn't give you much of an idea how the rise compares to the run.

For us cyclists, anything above 10% is significantly steep. You can estimate the gradient on topographical maps by looking at the contours. The closer the contours are to each other, the steeper the ascent. On OS maps, a road marked with one chevron signifies a gradient of more than 14% (1 in 7). Two chevrons is a teeth-gnashing ascent of over 20% (1 in 5).



Steepest roads

Guinness World Records sets out a definition for the steepest street. It is based on its maximum gradient over a ten-metre distance.

Steepest roads in the UK

Vale Street, Bristol

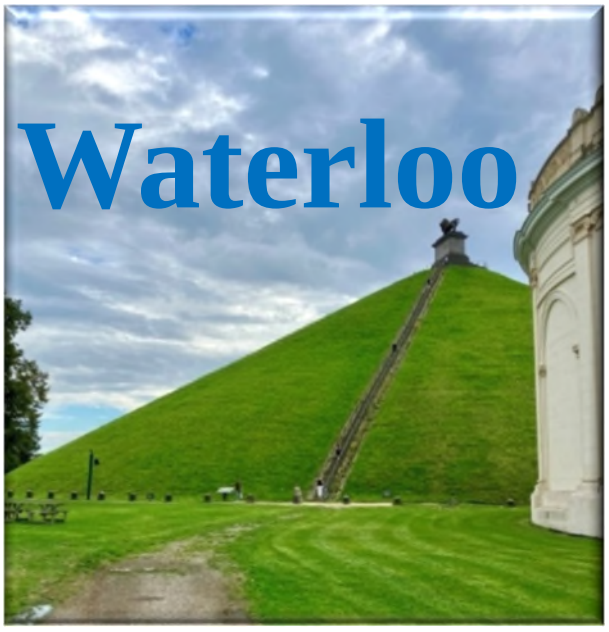
Vale Street in Bristol, where residents tie their cars to lampposts, is the steepest residential street in England with an average gradient of 25.6%. The steepest non-residential road in the whole of the UK is Bamford Clough in the Peak District with a bone-grinding gradient of 36.5%.

Steepest road in the world

The title of the world's steepest road is often debated, but Baldwin Street in Dunedin, New Zealand, is widely recognized as the **steepest residential street**. Baldwin Street has a gradient of 34.8% at its steepest point. However, Ffordd Pen Llech in Wales also claims this title with a gradient of 37.45%, though there have been disputes and reassessments over the years.

– MC

Waterloo to Waterloo



The battle of Waterloo took place on the 18th of June 1815. The allied army under the Command of the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon and brought to an end a period of unrest that had plagued Europe since 1792.

Although Waterloo took place over 200 years ago, the battlefield has changed little since the day of the battle and attracts visitors from around the world. The battlefield also forges a link with the past and is used by *Waterloo Uncovered,* a charity that utilises archaeology as wellbeing tool for armed-forces and ex-armed-forces personnel coming to terms with mental health and physical injuries resulting from their service.

The opportunity to combine my passion for the Battle of Waterloo, cycling and the wellbeing of our Armed Forces personnel was too good to miss, and I was delighted to be selected as a member of the team that would ride from Waterloo Station to the battlefield in Belgium.

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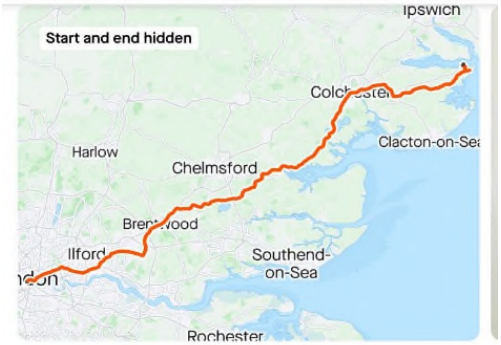
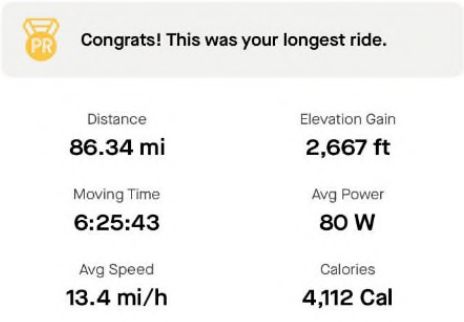




Day 1 – London to Harwich

The first challenge was to get to the start point on time! The ride was due to start from the Brewdog pub underneath Waterloo station at 9.00, and all riders were asked to meet at 7.30 for introductions and briefings. For those living in London, this didn't seem too much of a problem, but being over 300 miles away, I needed a bit more planning and pre-positioning to within striking distance to arrive on time. I achieved this with an overnight stay in Wantage with an old army chum, a 6.30 train from Didcot Parkway and a ride from Paddington to Waterloo. My adventure had started.

The ride across Town was dry, but having put my kit in the van and prepared for departure, the skies darkened and we started stage 1 of our

ride in the rain. The route skirted the South bank, crossed the Thames at London Bridge and left London via Whitechapel, Stratford (2012 Olympic Park), Dagenham and Hornchurch. Thursday morning traffic was fairly heavy, and with rain falling and traffic lights at every junction, initial progress was relatively slow. There was only one fall and a close shave with a dustbin lid, so all in all our departure from London went well.

Ready for the off at Waterloo station

When we stopped for coffee at Shenfield just after Brentford (26 miles), the rain had eased off, and our group of four (Wheelers style!) had got to know each other fairly well, gained an understanding of individual riding styles and had even achieved some simple 'through and off' routines! Morale was high, the weather was improving, London was behind us and the hills beckoned.

A gentle prod was needed to get the group back on the road, but once back in the saddle, we had a great ride through the Essex countryside toward our lunch stop. The rain had stopped but the wind had picked up considerably, and we were riding into it! Our 'gung-ho' point man began to 'blow' and quickly realised that we'd happily sit on his wheel all day long unless he asked for some help. With a bit of prompting, he managed to get us to come through and do our turn, and we worked well as a team, catching the first group (oops!) and arriving at Heybridge, our lunch stop (47 miles), ahead of schedule.

Lunch at Heybridge

A good lunch was followed by a tough ride toward Colchester and onward to Harwich, where a BBQ and ferry awaited us. The rain kept away, but we continued to battle a strong headwind, which began to challenge some of the less regular riders. A puncture, school pick-up time in Colchester and a couple of navigational challenges added to the 'fun', but we arrived safely at the Royal Oak pub in Harwich, where we celebrated the first days 86 miles with burgers and chips and a few beers! A short ride to the ferry marked the completion of day one. Once onboard, we showered and reconvened in the bar for the all-important Day One debrief and a couple more beers!

BBQ and beers at the Royal Oak to end Day 1

Boarding the Harwich ferry

Day 2 – Hook of Holland to Bruges

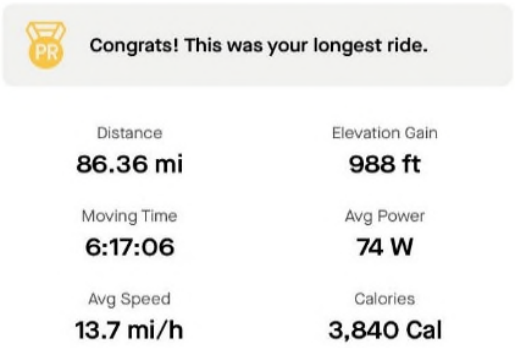
Day two started early as the ship's broadcast let us know that we'd be docking shortly and announced the procedure to follow for disembarkation. With another 86 miles ahead of us, the group was a bit apprehensive, and some were feeling the effects of the previous day's miles and maybe a few too many beers!

There were no incidents getting off the ferry or through customs, and we met up with two other riders, one of whom was an injured military veteran who'd lost a leg in a landmine incident in Bosnia. Setting off in one group, we enjoyed riding on the fantastic network of cycle paths that crisscross the Netherlands. With room to ride two abreast in both directions, smooth road surfaces and no hills, riding was easy, and we quickly settled into a tempo that suited everyone. The weather was good, although, predictably, the wind had changed direction, and we were riding into a headwind again.

A couple of navigation errors, another puncture and an incident with a reversing car broke the group up a bit, but looking after each other in smaller groups worked well, and we made good time to our first coffee break at Ouddorp Beach.

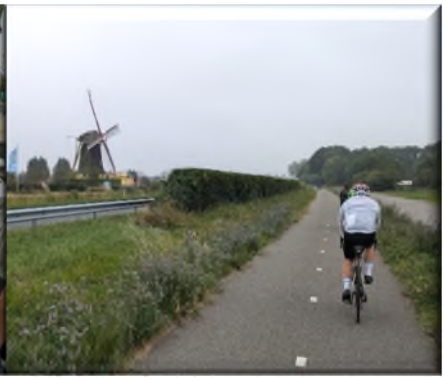
We continued island-hopping along the coast, crossing bridges and using ferries where necessary. The pace was relatively brisk at times, and in the hour before lunch, the main group covered just over 20 miles. The views along the coast were spectacular, and we enjoyed the sunshine and beaches as we made our way to the last ferry of the day at Vlissengen. Regrouping over a beer while we waited for the ferry, one of the team decided that they'd done enough for the day and would do the last leg in the van and help the support team unload our kit at the hotel. Purely by coincidence he made this decision just as the rain was starting, but I don't think that influenced his decision (much!) 😉

The ferry trip gave us a chance to get our rain coats on and get ready for the relatively short (22-mile) ride from Breskens to Bruges, our overnight stop. The route took us away from the coast and across the border between the Netherlands and Belgium. The weather was fairly Cornish, with drizzle and wind taking some of the fun out of the ride. Morale was still fairly high though, and a core group of nine made good progress toward Bruges. Rumblings of a beer stop were heard as we passed various taverns and eventually the temptation became too much, and we stopped in Damme, just four miles short of our hotel! It was beginning to get late and slightly dark when the ride co-ordinator called to find out how we were getting on. A simple "we've had a mechanical" seemed to pacify her, and we finished our beers.



Riding with Edwin, a veteran injured in Bosnia

Waiting for the ferry at Vlissengen



Windmills and cycle paths

Chatting in the sunshine

The last four miles were ridden in good humour with nobody really noticing the rain or cobbles as we rode toward our hotel. Bikes were put into the baggage store and showers taken. Walking at a fast pace, we just about arrived on time for our table at Ribs and Beer. Day two had been fairly uneventful, and we were less than 80 miles from the battlefield at Waterloo!

Riding into Bruges

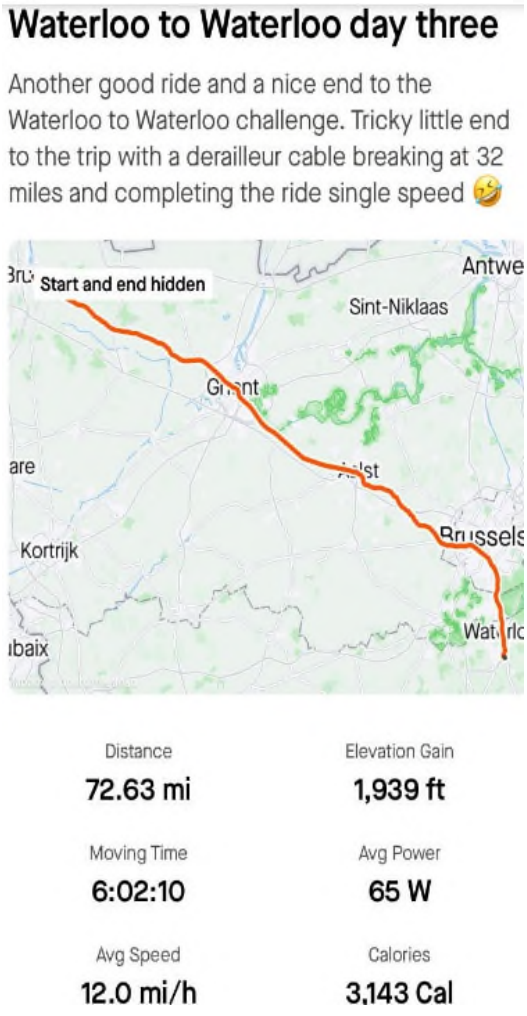
Ribs and beer in Bruges

A nightcap in Bruges

Day 3 – Bruges to Waterloo

Day 3 had another early start, and not everybody made it after a late night out in Bruges! The ride co-ordinator was keen to get us on the road so we could make the 5.00 pm arrival at Waterloo. With 72 miles, nearly 2,000ft of climbing, two coffee stops and a pre-booked lunch, this was going to be a challenge, and the challenge was upped when the hotel said they couldn't do an early breakfast! Undeterred and determined to complete the ride on time, our support team collected the van, which was a thirty minutes' walk away because it was too tall for the underground car park, we packed and set off. The pace required to keep on time was always going to be difficult for some of the group, and we quickly split into two smaller 'gaggles' and made our way across the cobbles and into the countryside toward Ghent, Anderlecht, Brussels and Waterloo.

The rain of the night before had stopped, and the wind had eased as we rode in our groups along the Belgium cycle paths. Slightly inferior to the ones we'd experienced in Holland (still better than most of the ones we have here), they provided good protection from the Saturday traffic and gave us priority at all road junctions! Day three had been spoken about as being particularly hilly, and as soon as we set off, the 'three hills' were being spoken about with some trepidation. The first of the hills was at 45 miles and came after lunch, but on the route profile it looked to be a short rise to 200 feet.



We were making good progress, and I was looking forward to coffee in Ghent, when I changed gear and my derailleur cable snapped! I was limited to 38 x 12 and stopped at two bike shops en route to see if they could replace the cable. Saturday wasn't a great day for bike mechanics apparently, and I rode onto the cobbles and tram lines in Ghent with my now single speed Dolan! The tram lines only claimed one victim from our group, and at the coffee stop I adjusted the 'end stop' and managed to move the chain up two sprockets 😊 We were falling behind schedule, and as the van wasn't at the cafe (road works), the first

group set off without coffee and made its way toward a pre-arranged lunch at Aalst.

The route now became quite interesting (challenging!), as the planner had picked a few tracks, trails and other off-road sections to avoid some of the main roads. A gravel bike would have been more appropriate than my single-speed road bike, but keeping my balance, sense of humour and a certain amount of grit and determination, I made it through unscathed!

Spaghetti Bolognese at Aast

We arrived at the lunch stop to a welcoming spaghetti Bolognese and, true to form, some of the group ordered a bottle of red wine to accompany their meal. It appeared they'd abandoned all hope of making the 5.00 arrival, but I was fairly confident that our group could make it if we got our heads down, were lucky with the traffic and had no mishaps. We had just over thirty miles, three hills and two-and three-quarter hours to make it on time!

We worked well together, and despite the traffic lights, a festival in one of the Brussels parks, some tricky hill starts and some more off-road riding in the Forest of Soignes, we arrived at the village of Waterloo at 4.50. We were two and half miles from the finish and were confident that we would arrive on time. A quick adjustment of clothing to make sure we looked good for the cameras, and we were off.

I'm not sure who, but someone in the group decided to make sure we arrived on time and set off at pace. The rest of the group saw this as a challenge, and the pace got quicker and quicker as we approached the Lions Mound, where we were welcomed by Waterloo Uncovered staff, beneficiaries, support staff and some bemused visitors to the battlefield. After handshakes, hugs and photographs, we took some time talk to the charity beneficiaries and heard how the money we'd raised was used to support them and help them overcome the mental and physical health challenges they face daily as a result of their service. Talking to the beneficiaries really put the fund-raising into perspective, and they and the Waterloo Uncovered team were very appreciative of our feat of riding from Waterloo to Waterloo and raising valuable funds for the charity.

Having met everyone at the Lions Mound, we cycled the short distance to Mont St Jean farm, which was used as a hospital during the battle. There, we were given a presentation about the Waterloo Uncovered charity and archaeology undertaken by the beneficiaries this year. We took the opportunity to have a celebratory beer from the farm brewery, to laugh and joke about the ride and wait for the third group to arrive!

We had another short ride to our hotel, where we showered repacked our kit and went out to celebrate with a meal and a few more beers! The post-ride gathering in the hotel after the night out was fairly messy, but everyone was at breakfast and set off on time for their journeys back to the UK, which is another story…

Ride statistics:

- 245.4 miles, 18 hours and 45 minutes cycling, 5,594 feet ascent, average speed 13 mph
- Within the group there were three punctures, four crashes and no serious injuries.
- Beers and wine drunk – Unknown!

A big thank you to all those who sponsored me for this event and helped me raise £1,400, the largest individual contribution to the total raised.

Donation link: https://waterlooncovered.com/donate/

Video link: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ px62wdxpypuxxwvtewwwa/Video-09-09-2024-20-15-37.mov?rlkey=k3p638ekwhruju37dmnydgbu7&dl=0

– 'Danny' Daniell

The Fallopians

"With an unexpected Sunday morning at home, due to miscalculations by the BBC weather Department, I fired up the laptop to spend an hour or two searching the National Newspaper library. Some of you may remember that I found a copy of an old club ride report a couple of years ago, which then featured in this worthy magazine. Well, luck was shining on me again, as I came across a copy of the Falmouth Mercury, dated 26 November 1868. It isn't a newspaper I had previously been aware of. Apart from a Notice of a Diversion in Bowling Green Road – they had them even then – the only item that might be of interest to fellow Wheelers was a report on the Annual General Meeting of The Fallopians, an antediluvian society of adventurous High Wheelers. It could well be that it was via The Fallopians that our esteemed club was born, but there is, alas, no evidence that this is the case. The Fallopians were, of course, all men – and real men at that! – as women were discouraged from taking part in this and most other strenuous activities. The meeting had taken place in the back room of the Seven Stars in Falmouth, another reason why women were not admitted to club membership. Now, instead of copying it all out, if this works properly I can cut and paste a facsimile of the article for you to read yourself."

On Thursday last, members of the Fallopians gathered in the back room of the Seven Stars Hotel to celebrate 10 years since the inauguration of this esteemed Society and to mark their change of name, to the Falmouth High Wheelers. In attendance were Harry Truscott Esq, Rch'd Fuller Esq, Robert Browning Esq, The Rev'd Samuel Pascoe, William Fox Jnr, Robert Fowler Esq, and David Roseweare. Mr James Williams was in the Chair.

Thomas Webber Esq, the Mayor of Falmouth was guest of honour.

Mr Williams began by describing the year that had passed.

The highlight of the year had been the Bicycle Gymkhana that had taken place at the Recreation Ground over the August holiday. 14 events had taken place with several members being successful in winning cash prizes, presented by the Chairman's wife, Mrs James Williams. Also, for the first time, a novelty bicycle race had been included into the Quay regatta, which attracted a number of entrants, and was won by a Penryn man. Fellow Fallopians had not taken part as they disagreed that such a noble sport as High Wheeling should be considered as a novelty.

John Beckinsop Esq, the Society's Secretary, stated that there had been several enquiries from ladies in the town about joining the Society. Mr Williams responded to say that this was just not possible, adding that many would agree with him over the matter. Robert Fowler said that it had been reported that the constant strain needed to keep a bicycle steady would lead to women getting permanently contorted faces. "We do not want to see the ladies of Falmouth develop a Bicycle Face".

Rch'd Fuller expressed his dismay that Fallopians were moving over to riding high wheelers. He was quite content with his Velocipede and saw no reason to change to one of these new fangled machines. "The novelty will soon fade", he said.

A general discussion took place about the future of the Fallopians, as, according to the Chairman, "the Membership was falling off".

The evening concluded with a vote of thanks to Mr Williams and with Three Cheers for the Mayor.

The J Passmore Edwards Challenge

When Dean first announced this new ride a year or so ago, a seed was sown in my mind, but I have to admit it was a pretty small seed, and it showed no signs of amounting to anything until February this year. Maybe a few days gently going in search of Mr Passmore Edwards' 20 buildings in Cornwall would be an interesting experience and a chance to blow away the winter blues.

Just to recap, 2023 was the bicentenary of the birth, in Blackwater, of John Passmore Edwards. The son of a carpenter, he became a journalist, a social and political reformer, an anti-slavery and anti-capital-punishment activist, a delegate at the Paris and Brussels Peace Conferences, an MP and the most significant newspaper owner of his time. Having acquired his wealth through the labours of others, he believed that by funding the ladder through bequests and philanthropy, he might encourage the poor to climb it. He funded 70 public buildings, including libraries, hospitals, schools, art galleries and convalescent homes. In Cornwall, he funded 20 such buildings, all of which have survived.

The Challenge set is to visit all 20 buildings by bike in one or as many days as you wish. There is a suggested route of 300 km. You can still have the option to choose your own route and start from home and to transport your bike to the point where you previously stopped . A "medal" is awarded for completing the ride and to celebrate the bicentenary.

So with Deans's list of 20 buildings in hand, I set off on a foggy day in mid-February along the NCR 3 route from Carharrack towards my first JPE objective, the old Redruth Library in Clinton Road. Having worked in Truro for many years, I had often seen the name Passmore Edwards on the large library building in Pydar Street, one of the city's landmarks. Now I would begin to appreciate the distinctive style of these buildings as my search progressed. West of the town amongst some new housing is the JPE Redruth Women's Hospital, Children's Ward. This has a more functional, simpler design. It now serves as residential accommodation. As I looked for the footway across the railway, I met a local dog walker who knew enough about Passmore Edwards buildings to comment: "They were built to last." Seconds after I crossed the mainline, the lights changed, and a train emerged out of the fog.

On through Brea the cycle route took me through Pengegon to the town centre and the fine JPE Camborne Library with its dramatic statue of a very determined-looking Trevithick in front. Passing through Gwinear and reaching Hayle, the sun came out and the fog cleared. The JPE Institute is a bit plain but it's another good reason for a quick stop and photo with my bike. (Dean needed proof of passage!) Soon I was at St Ives gazing at the JPE Library, another attractive building situated on a corner.

As I rode back towards home in the dark, I followed an owl gliding silently along the lane ahead of me. A nice finish in the crisp air. I had bagged five buildings already after 77 km and was looking forward to my next sortie.

It was St Pirans Day in March, and the days were getting longer. Falmouth was next on my list. I had decided to follow Dean's route if possible, so it was up Hangman's Hill to warm up before reaching the JPE Free Library on The Moor with the Science and Art School on the right and the Municipal Offices and Council Chamber on the left. It's a rather grey stone building, but with pillars and curves that soften it. I did notice it was in need of some weeding on its ledges. Maybe Councillor Evans can bring this to the attention of those who look after these things. On up Killigrew Street to the JPE Cottage Hospital, which is just how you would picture a cottage hospital. Just a pity about the makeshift porch on the front. It's now Age UK's day-care centre.

Dean's route towards Helston got interesting. It's the "assassin" route to Gweek – left at Argal crossroads, right past Higher Tregarne, left at High Cross into a narrow, green, gritty, wet and steep lane, past Gweal Mellin (are you still with me?) to Polwheveral. Now the killer. At Nancenoy, the two successive hills are between 1 in 5 and 1 in 7 (20% to 14%). I reached the point of falling off on the second one and just managed to get unclipped in time. Has Dean ridden this bit, I wondered? Gweek at last, and onto Helston feeling desperate for a coffee and hot soup courtesy of JPE at the Helston Science and Art School, now known to us

as the Cast Cafe and Arts Centre. There's a bit more colour in this stonework.

On to Newlyn next through Breage and Godolphin Cross, until a moment's inattention to the gritty, muddy lane near Millpool led to a puncture. At last the wintry lanes were behind me as I coasted through Marazion and around the excellent "Seacycleway" to the JPE Newlyn Art Gallery. We often pass this, certainly on the Mousehole Lights Ride, but have you ever stopped long enough to take a good look? On the front of the building, as the new information board with a photo of JPE says, there are four beautiful copper plaques representing the elements of earth fire, air and water. The cafe had just closed, but I managed to grab the last pasty in Warrens just round the corner. Behind the Gallery in the parade gardens is a notable and very evocative statue dedicated to seamen. By the time I got home, I had clocked 111 km for the day. My JPE tally was now nine.

My third ride was a short but productive "bagging" day up to Perranporth from home. The Chacewater Institute in the centre of the village (now domestic properties), Blackwater JPE Institute and Village Hall on the old A30 near the war memorial, the very pleasing St Agnes Miners & Mechanics Institute, which has been brought back to life in the last ten years as a cafe and very active community centre. Mithian JPE Institute eluded me. As Dean's note says: "blink and you will miss the Mithian Institute opposite the pub." Typical! I did miss it, even after asking some locals! On to Perranporth and the JPE former Convalescence Home in Granny's Lane, now converted to apartments. Another five bagged with an easy 46 km.

The next two stages would not be so easy but would be taking me into areas where we seldom venture. I was looking forward to the next day's ride. So first back to Mithian, after consulting Dean, who instructed me to look inside the less-than-beautiful porch of the village hall, and there over the door were the gleaming JPE letters in gold leaf. Now it was onto Bodmin. Much of the route was new to me. After the first big hill after Bolingey it was through Rose, with more big hills at Hendra Croft, before reaching Rejerrah, where I bypassed "the dip" and dipped deeper through the village. After a brief stretch of main road, the route took

me into some very narrow green lanes, across a tricky ford in the middle of nowhere, past three farms called Trerice 4, 3 and 2 (presumably part of the Trerice NT estate) to White Cross. From there, the route twists and turns, avoiding "Major" (St Columb of that ilk), but I needed a coffee from the cafe bakery in the village. I rejoined the route as it got hillier, but they were all interesting new roads. Then I went wrong after St Wenn and turned down through Withiel. (Looking at the map, I could have saved myself quite a lot of unnecessary climbing). It had started to rain steadily as I pressed on through Withielgoose and down to Ruthernbridge, then up and over to Nanstallon, before climbing again up to the steam railway line and into Bodmin via the back door. Soon I was standing in the now pouring rain in front of the old Bodmin Library, another very fine JPE building in the centre of town. A plaque put up by Belgian refugees from the First World War expresses their gratitude to the local people for their kindness and generosity in 1914–15.

I needed some hot soup! Taking the new cycle path route, I rode over to Lanhydrock cafe and enjoyed soup and a big roll, as puddles of water collected under my table. As soon as the rain eased off a bit, I made a dash for home. Flagging a bit by Indian Queens, I radioed for a lift from Clare as the light began to fade. Why? Good question. After a pause, I could have plodded on, getting drier as well. Modern life has its comforts though! Only one JPE bagged, but some quality miles covered (89 km).

A month later, I returned to Lanhydrock to continue my quest. I was full of anticipation for another venture into much less familiar territory. It was a fine day. The route took me down to Fletchersbridge for a steep climb over to Mount and on to St Neots. After the village the map shows a steep descent into Fowey Valley, followed by a two-chevron climb out of it. I found an alternative that keeps more to the contours before dropping down by Golitha Falls. From there, it's a

gentler climb up onto the moor (but avoiding the twisty route via St Cleer).

It was getting hot, so I stopped for a well earned cold drink and lunch in Minions at the highest cafe in Cornwall at 980 ft. offering great views. You lose a lot of that

height descending to Upton Cross and then onto Rilla Mill, which spans the Lynher River at 230 ft. Inevitably, it was another climb from the river, though it wasn't too bad. The bad ones were waiting in the wings for later – when I would be feeling more weary. North through Coad's Green to a small bridge over a stream just after Newtown. The map said this was my first two-chevron climb of the day: my Garmin registered 23%. I was glad I had swopped over to my Bob Jackson from the Lynskey. I inched up its 300 yards of pain until it allowed me to get out my lowest gear past Trewinnow to reach the B road leading to Launceston, my next objective. Hardly had I got there than I was descending even lower to the Trekelland Bridge over the Inny River. There was another taxing climb up to South Petherwin. Then there were two more valleys to cross before I finally reached Launceston. I spotted something odd on the front of the White Hart Hotel. Somehow the W had slipped or been moved sideways, so it could be an S. Mmm….an amusing moment on a hard day. I needed a bit of a tour of the town before I found JPE's building, the Launceston old Library and Reading Room (admission free), described by Dean as "a rendered and terracotta building, easily missed". How right he nearly was!

Time to turn south towards my last two objectives for the day at Liskeard. The map showed me there were seven more streams and rivers to cross before returning to Upton Cross. It was a different way back that avoided some of the steepest hills, but there was enough of them with a gradient of about 15%. There was a 1 in 5 (20%) descent into the Inny Valley, which I thanked Dean for avoiding on the way out. But by the time I climbed up to Upton Cross, I was feeling the effort. It was a big relief to freewheel down into Liskeard to JPE's Cottage Hospital, now part of a sheltered housing complex. It bears similarities to the one in Falmouth. My last building for the day was the Liskeard Library, another pleasing building of paler coloured stone.

It was a very beautiful evening as I began to head back to Lanhydrock in the lanes. I dropped steeply down into the valley of the East Looe River by Coombe Junction Halt on the Looe branch line with a view up to the

main line viaduct. Up more 15% climbs, as several more streams and the West Looe River had to be crossed. Finally things eased along a short section of the A38 through the Taphouses before I turned off into the woodlands of the Lanhydrock Estate. After a steep descent to the old Respryn bridge over the Fowey River and the railway, the final quite sharp hill led me back up to the car park at Lanhydrock.

It was a wonderful day's riding despite the hills – 87 km, though it seemed longer. Three more JPEs bagged with two to go. Nearly done.

A week later, I completed the Challenge in Truro at the end of an OGIL ride to Perranporth. A fair bit of ascent on the way back was involved before I stopped by what may be JPE's finest building, the Free Library and the Central Technical Schools for Cornwall. It's a handsome grey and yellow stone building, pleasing to look at and possibly the most fitting memorial in Cornwall to Passmore Edwards' name and his legacy to the local people.

I highly recommend this ride. You can ride it as gently or as energetically as you like. You will not be disappointed.

– Simon Jones

William Bligh – a maligned Cornish hero

William Bligh, a name synonymous with the infamous Mutiny on the Bounty, is a figure whose historical reputation has been marred by Hollywood sensationalism. While film adaptations have characterised him as a tyrannical and volatile captain, such portrayals overlook his astonishing accomplishments as a naval officer and navigator. A closer examination reveals that Bligh, born into a proud Cornish lineage, was an extraordinary sailor whose contributions to British maritime history have been unfairly overshadowed by dramatic retellings of his life.

To set the record straight, we should not refer to William Bligh as "Captain Bligh". It is customary to refer to military figures by the highest rank they achieved in their career. In William Bligh's case, that was Vice-Admiral of the Blue. In fact, Vice-Admiral Bligh was not even a captain at the time of the Bounty mutiny. He was a Commanding Lieutenant.

Wall memorial in St Tudy commemorating Vice-Admiral William Bligh

Cornish roots and early life

William Bligh was born at his family's ancestral home of Tinten Manor near St Tudy in Cornwall on *9 September 1754*. Though his family relocated to Plymouth shortly after his birth, Bligh's ties to Cornwall remained a defining aspect of his identity. Cornwall's rich seafaring tradition likely influenced Bligh's early interest in maritime pursuits.

Bligh's early promise as a navigator was evident by his mid-teens, when he joined the Royal Navy as an able seaman. Rising through the ranks, he became a protégé of Captain James Cook, serving as sailing master on Cook's final, and fateful, voyage to the Pacific. It was here that Bligh honed the navigational skills that would later define his career.

Naval Achievements

Bligh's contributions to navigation and exploration were nothing short of remarkable. Perhaps his most celebrated feat occurred after the mutiny aboard the HMS *Bounty* in 1789. Set adrift in an open boat with 18 loyal men, with no charts to guide him, Bligh navigated an astounding 3,600 nautical miles to safety in Timor, relying solely on a sextant and his detailed knowledge of Pacific currents and trade winds. The 47-day journey remains one of the most extraordinary achievements in maritime history, demonstrating Bligh's unmatched skill and determination.

The mutineers turning Lt Bligh and some of the officers and crew adrift from His Majesty's Ship HMS *Bounty*. By Robert Dodd

Bligh's navigational prowess extended beyond this harrowing ordeal. He played a key role in introducing breadfruit to the West Indies, an endeavour aimed at providing a cheap and sustainable food source for enslaved populations. Despite the ill-fated first attempt aboard the *Bounty*, the Admiralty never lost faith in Bligh, and he successfully completed the mission in 1793, underscoring his commitment to the scientific and practical advancement of naval expeditions.

William Bligh, 1775 by John Webber

Moreover, Bligh's career included numerous victories during the Napoleonic Wars. As Governor of New South Wales, he also demonstrated his determination to uphold justice, though his efforts often sparked resistance from entrenched elites.

The Hollywood villain

Despite these accomplishments, popular depictions of William Bligh have tarnished his reputation. Films such as *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935, 1962 and 1984) portray him as a cruel despot whose tyrannical leadership provoked the mutiny. These portrayals, influenced more by the dramatized accounts of mutineer Fletcher Christian's descendants than by historical evidence, exaggerate Bligh's temper and downplay his fairness and professionalism.

In reality, Bligh's disciplinary methods, while strict, were not unusual for his time. Compared to many of his contemporaries, he was relatively lenient, favouring verbal reprimands over corporal punishment. The mutiny aboard the *Bounty* probably had more to do with personal grievances and the allure of Tahitian life than with Bligh's leadership. In October 1790, Bligh was honourably acquitted at the court-martial inquiring into the loss of the Bounty.

Later, as captain of *Director* at the Battle of Camperdown, Bligh engaged three Dutch vessels: *Haarlem, Alkmaar and Vrijheid*. *Director* captured *Vrijheid* and the Dutch commander, Vice-Admiral Jan de Winter. For his actions during the battle, Bligh was awarded the Naval Gold Medal. Bligh went on to serve under Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Copenhagen on 2 April 1801, in command of *Glatton*, a 56-gun ship of the line. After the battle, Nelson personally praised Bligh for his contribution to the victory.

Bligh died of cancer in Bond Street, London, on 7 December 1817 and was buried in the family plot at St. Mary's, Lambeth.

A reappraisal of William Bligh

William Bligh's Cornish connections, coupled with his extraordinary maritime achievements, deserve greater recognition. As a son of Cornwall, he exemplified the region's proud seafaring legacy. His navigational skill and scientific contributions mark him as one of Britain's finest sailors, and his vilification in popular culture is an injustice to his memory.

Bligh's tomb, surmounted by an eternal flame, sits in the Sackler Garden at the Garden Museum.

It is time to view Bligh not as the tyrant of Hollywood's imagination but as a maligned hero whose courage and expertise left an indelible mark on British naval history. To celebrate William Bligh is to honour Cornwall's enduring influence on the maritime world.

– MC

Coast to Coast

Yes, there are lots of coast-to-coast (c2c) routes in the UK, but perhaps the best known is that from west-coast Cumbria to east-coast Yorkshire. Alfred Wainwright, the well-known author of countless guide books to walks in Cumbria, established the route from St Bees Head to Robin Hoods Bay across the north of Lake District National Park, the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors as a walking trip. Inevitably, cyclists wanted to have some of the action but were unable to copy Alfred's cross-country route. They finally settled on a road route from Whitehaven, a fishing harbour and now a busy marina in the west, across Cumbria and the Pennines to Tynemouth in the east, covering some 135 miles.

Initial planning by Fred was based on self-catering accommodation and navigation, but he soon realised that "for a few dollars more" a hassle-free, all-in commercial tour looked ideal. And so it was that by courtesy of Phil Conroy stagecoach limited, the four wheelers, Phil, Simon Jones, Dean Evans and myself (a last-minute replacement for Fred, who was unavoidably detained due to a pressing social engagement at the Albert Hall playing the ukelele, or some such) set off, bikes on the roof, 430-odd miles up to Penrith, where we stayed the first night.

The following morning we were ferried by coach to Whitehaven, accompanied by some 35 or 40 other cyclists, some e-bikes and a few mountain bikers who were set to tackle an off-road route. The sun was shining, the roads were clear and the scenery was epic. We zipped past Loweswater, resplendent in the spring sunshine, up Whinlatter Pass, past Skiddaw and Blencathra, catching a glimpse of Helvellyn, on to Keswick, along a disused railway to Threlkeld and on past Greystoke, keeping our eyes peeled in the hope of meeting up with one of Tarzan's descendants. Having covered 52 miles and 3889 ft the first day, we spent the second night in Penrith. In keeping with the local cuisine and custom, we ate Italian that night. Hey ho!

Day 2 took us 44 miles and 5251 feet into the North Pennines. The weather was still fair with some challenging climbs past places with such charming names as Garrigill, Flinty Fell and Nenthead, including one nearly vertical ascent (well 20-plus degrees anyway), which saw Dean and me push from the start and Phil soldiering on for a while. But Simon disgraced us all by zig zagging the whole way up without stopping, though by the time he reached the summit, he had turned a subtle shade of purple and was very quiet for a few miles, until we stopped at Dirt Pot for a coffee. The patron there was doing his best to dissuade would-be tourists, avowing that he'd seen no sunshine since July the previous year! but the scenery made up for any shortcoming in the weather. The route was very well marked and so easy to follow that even Mr Garmin was given short shrift.

After a long ride, Paul decides to put his feet up.

After a stiff climb up Hartside to a bleak and windy high point with views as far as Scotland, we were met by the tour boss, Richard, who drove the rescue wagon and who ghosted our progress from afar. Clearly noting our dishevelled and weary state, he admitted to occasionally questioning the age and health of his customers who signed up for the coast-to-coast trip. On one occasion, he had kept a close eye on a gentleman who admitted to being 80-something and who looked a bit pale and

underfed but always seemed to be up with the pace. On further questioning, it turned out the octogenarian had recently completed an around-the-world bike tour. Richard no longer takes appearances for granted!

Food, beer and sleep that night were courtesy of the Eastgate Inn, and it started to rain.

The final ride day covered 40 miles and a little over 2000 ft of climbing, an easy OGIL day. Or it would have been except for the steady rain and the stonking headwind Nature sent to keep us company. The road on the Pennine plateau was a challenge, There was no shelter anywhere, no trees, not even a bush to hide behind. Mr Garmin reckoned the temperature hovered around 2 degrees, but the windchill factor made it feel some way below that. Muggleswick Common it was called, and it made Dartmoor feel positively balmy. Fortunately the bikes behaved well, and we weren't forced to stop, 'cos we wouldn't have been able to hang around for long.

The long descent to Blaydon (no races that day) and on towards the east with some fiddly navigation took us through the suburbs of Newcastle and along the river banks and under the multitude of bridges that span the Tyne. Time was pressing unfortunately, with precious little time to stop to take in the vibes of this iconic city. Tynemouth beckoned, and our transport awaited, a welcome opportunity to strip off totally and don dry clothes without a hint of self consciousness, much to the amusement and entertainment of passers by.

Back to Penrith in the coach, we picked up the car, loaded the roof rack and headed for home.

Altogether an excellent trip that was well worth the effort.

– Paul Crudgington

Lost and Found

It was time for my weekly pilgrimage to buy a newspaper with crosswords to puzzle over at the weekend. So one fine afternoon I set off on a short journey by bike to the local Spar shop in Constantine. All went well, but when I got back home, I discovered that I had somehow lost one of my precious hearing aids.

Now I don't know how familiar you are with today's hearing aids, but – take my word for it – they're miniature marvels of modern engineering. Certainly they're a boon for the hard-of-hearing cyclist. You can once again enjoy the hum of rubber on tarmac, the scrunch of fallen leaves beneath your tyres and the whoosh of wind past your ears. And you can hear what your fellow Wheelers are saying. Of course, there is also a downside. Hearing aids pick up and amplify every irritating squeak, creak and rattle your bike can muster. And you can hear what your fellow Wheelers are saying.

Before retracing my route, I cast my mind back, trying to figure out where I might have lost it. Then it struck me: I had removed my helmet before entering the shop. Could the hearing aid have been snagged and pulled out by the helmet strap when I unclipped it? I immediately phoned the shop. A nice lady told me that, yes, some kind person had indeed turned in a hearing aid which they had found on the ground outside the door. "Great," I exclaimed. "I'll drop by tomorrow and pick it up."

So the next morning, I kitted up and rode back to the Spar. When I arrived, the till was manned by a man. "I believe my hearing aid has been handed in," I said. "I was told it's in the till drawer." The shopkeeper rummaged around, found the little blighter and was about to give it to me, when suddenly, peering over his spectacles, he snatched back his hand. "Can you describe it?" he asked suspiciously. Taken aback, I replied, drawing on my formidable descriptive skills, "it's a little thingamajig with a tube sticking out of it."

Did he have a drawer chock-full of lost hearing aids and needed to make sure he gave me the right one? Or had people been coming in all morning trying to claim my lost hearing aid, but I alone was able to describe it with such uncanny accuracy? Or maybe it was something in my look or tone that made him realize just how daft his question was. In any case, satisfied that I was the rightful owner, he handed over the device. I pocketed it, thanked him and returned home much amused.

– MC

The Fastest Times from Land's End to John O'Groats

The journey from Land's End to John O'Groats spans approximately **874 miles** (**1407 km**). This iconic route, often abbreviated as LEJOG, has captivated adventurers and athletes for decades. Enthusiasts have completed the journey using a variety of modes of transport – from the conventional to the quirky.

For reference, it typically takes just under **15 hr to drive** the distance by car.

Bicycle
The record by bicycle (male) is **43 hr and 25 min**, achieved by Michael Broadwith (UK), from 15 June to 17 June 2018. The female record is **51 hr and 5 min**, set by Christina Mackenzie (UK), in July 2021

Recumbent tricycle
The **overall** record for cycling from Land's End to John o' Groats is held by Andy Wilkinson, who completed the journey in **41 hr and 4 min** on a Windcheetah recumbent tricycle.

Unicycle
The fastest journey from Land's End to John O'Groats by unicycle was **6 days, 8 hr and 43 min** achieved simultaneously by Sam Wakeling and Roger Davies (both UK) in September 2009.

Tandem cycling
Dominic Irvine and Charlie Mitchell set the tandem record on 19 June 2015, completing the journey in **45 hr and 11 min**. This remarkable feat required not only incredible stamina but also flawless teamwork.

Triplet bicycle
The fastest journey from Land's End to John-O'-groats by triplet bicycle (now there's an oxymoron!) is **4 days, 11 hr and 35 min**, achieved by Daniel Harty (Ireland), Simon Nasta and Graeme Knott (both UK) in July 2021.

Quadricycle
Hugo Catchpole, George Unwin, Tom Bethell and Richard Nicholls completed the challenge in **10 days and 15 hours** on a four-man recumbent bike weighing 114 kg in the summer of 2012.

Penny farthing
The fastest time by penny farthing is **4 days 11 hr 52 min** and was achieved by Richard Thoday (UK) from 20 to 24 July 2019.

Running
The record for running the LEJOG (female) is **12 days 30 min** and was achieved by Carla Molinaro (UK) in July 2020.

Running backwards
Arvind Morarbhai Pandya (India) ran backwards from John O' Groats to Land's End, UK in **26 days 7 hr**.

Electric mobility scooter
The best time on an electric mobility vehicle is **22 days 6 hr 16 min** and was achieved by Adam Stanton-Wharmby (UK) in April 2023.

Inline skates
Damian Magee roller-skated the distance in **9 days 5hr 23 min** in June 1992.

Lawnmower
The fastest journey from John O' Groats to Lands' End on a lawn mower is **5 days 8 hr 36 min** and was achieved by Andy Maxfield (UK) in July 2017.

Wheelchair
The time set by wheelchair (female) is **44 days 1 hr 43 min** and was achieved by Lexi Alyx Chambers (UK) between August and October 2024.

Powered paraglider
The fastest journey from Land's End to John-O'-Groats by powered paraglider is **1 day 12 hr 19 min** and was achieved by James Du Pavey (UK) in July 2019.

Oldest person to cycle the LEJOG
The oldest person to cycle from Land's End to John-O'-Groats (male) is 86 years and 355 days and was achieved by Martin Harvey (UK) on 17 September 2022. The oldest female to achieve the feat was Gina Harris (UK), who was 82 years and 38 days old when she completed the distance on 27 May 2022.

Mum's gone to Iceland

A trip to Iceland had been on the cards since the beginning of 2020, when our son moved to Reykjavik, and we eventually decided to make the trip this year. Four years of research had yet to resolve the nature of the visit. While I was looking at hot springs and northern lights, Martyn seemed to be immersed in daring-do accounts of gravel roads, fords and headwinds. A Thorn Discovery double marathon touring tandem with S&S couplers somehow joined our fleet, first mysteriously named Bike X, but quickly acquiring the name Pedro (Pedro X – geddit?) and proving a very reliable and comfortable machine on roads and cycleways in Brittany and nearer home.

Extra insulation: Our idea to make our own quilt, doubling as a pair of camp-blanket style capes. The 21st Century high-tech fabrics nearly defeated us, but 19th century sewing machine technology came to the rescue.

Finally we committed to a "summer" trip, flying with EasyJet from Luton (the only carrier who would take Pedro's weight) and taking our camping equipment that we had beefed up for Icelandic July weather. We would have a week in Reykjavik and then try for a tour in the hinterland. I was still not entirely convinced on the camping or the gravel roads, and looking at the experience of other cyclists, we agreed we would need to be flexible and work with the weather.

May and June were spent in a whirlwind of planning, preparation and panic. Lots of sewing, glass fibre/cardboard engineering, weighing and measuring, culminating in a fraught reintroduction to air travel and a final sprint to the gate. Our last flight had been in 2005 with two solo bikes and, as we ruefully remembered once seated on the plane, we had vowed then never to do it again.

The week in the capital was dominated by strong and bitter winds with plenty of rain showers thrown in. Our son and his partner took us on the "Golden Circle" of tourist sites, which includes the Thingvellir National Park, the geysers and the Gullfoss double waterfall, but it was great to also have the tandem as a means of transport. Reykjavik has excellent cycling infrastructure which, combined with junctions that give priority to pedestrians and cyclists, made cycling in the city and its outskirts relatively safe and easy. However, we did not see many cyclists – the cycleways seem mostly to be used by electric scooters, either in transit or lying across the path.

Loading at Luton: Customised bike box containing most of Pedro and squeaking under the 32kg limit. Cardboard, box courtesy Clive Mitchell, and wheels cannibalised from charity shop suitcase.

Our "cycle-camping tour" is hardly going to make the annals of adventure cycling – a total of about 300 km over six days – but we did get to ride on a gravel road and finally nailed pitching and striking camp in the rain without misery or complaint.

First stop was the Mosskógar campsite just beyond Mosfellsbaer, which is about 12 km east of Reykjavík. The site was owned by an artist who had lived many years in France but returned each summer to his smallholding and planted shelter trees. Despite local disbelief, these have flourished and make the site an oasis of shelter for campers and for salad crops. Even better, cooking facilities are provided in a large polytunnel, where people also leave unwanted food supplies and gas bottles – a pity we'd already bought a canister at a fuel station. The site is cash only, so we rode back to Mosfellsbaer to find a cash machine before enjoying our supper, enlivened with some free additions, and had a comfortable night in our little tent.

The next morning was on-off rain, but we mostly managed to dress and pack up in the "off". We continued the climb east on the main road, then turned

north on a road that sweeps down to the Hvalfjörður fjord, continuing around the fjord to the Bjarteyjstdander campsite. Once off the main road, the cycling was relaxed, as a tunnel under the mouth of the fjord now takes the heavy traffic.

This day saw some of the most dramatic weather changes of the trip. We took a break at Hvammsvík Hot Springs shortly after reaching the fjord. It had turned sunny and warm, and we were positively basking as we enjoyed a coffee outside. Martyn took the opportunity to spread out the tent to dry the canopy, while I investigated the swimming options. Luckily I baulked at spending over £70 on a brief dip, as by the time I returned to the bike I was needed to help furl the tent in the rising wind. We set off up the fjord into darkening cloud and a strong headwind, which soon included driving rain. After a few miles of pretty unpleasant riding, the squalls passed as quickly as they had come, and by the time we arrived at the campsite, we were dry-ish and able to pitch in pleasant evening weather.

Bjarteyjstdander campsite is part of a family farm. It too offered indoor cooking facilities, though no free leftovers this time. We had brought our evening meal ingredients and some emergency stores, but we were caught out when we found the nearest place we could buy any more food supplies was in Akranes, 35 km away! So the next morning it was cous-cous for breakfast and a round trip to the town. Once again the weather was capricious, but this did lead to one of our most treasured memories of the trip. When we emerged from the cafe after a much needed warm-up, coffee and cake, the shopkeeper from the adjacent jewellers rushed out with a cloth and dried our saddles before wishing us a pleasant journey.

Shopping trip: *The emptiness of the Icelandic landscape. Breathtaking – and challenging when it comes to finding supplies.*

The shopping trip gave us a chance to check out the route possibilities for moving further afield. We had to briefly join the "1", Iceland's ring road, which was taking the tunnel traffic on to the north. We only had to cycle a few hundred metres between junctions but came perilously close to being taken out by a caravan. Obviously not a good route, except perhaps to travel by night. We also got a look at the gravel road alternative, but it seemed to rise steeply from the tarmacked road and was running mud in the rain. We had also now lost a day's potential move-on, so we settled for staying on at the Bjarteyjstdander campsite.

The following day may have been "static", but this proved a real bonus. We found that we could use the family's hot tub on the shore of the fjord for about a fiver each, and we spent several hours enjoying hot water and warm sunshine in outstanding surroundings. I even had a paddle in the fjord, though the tide was too far out for a swim. Then we took a late-afternoon ride back to the gravel road and explored a bit further, eventually completing a loop of about 42 km. Once up the muddy slope, the surface was not too bad, and Pedro's 50 mm Schwalbe Marathon Mondial EVO tyres coped well – as did I. It would have been a hard ride with full touring luggage, however.

Hot tub bliss: The Bjarteyjstdander hot tub built into the rocks and overlooking the fjord.

Gravel road: A pleasant evening ride around the lakes in the Svínadalur valley.

The next morning we returned to Mosskógar by the same route as we had come – but as everyone knows, it looks different in the opposite direction. I was rather dreading the ascent back up from the fjord as it had seemed a long way down, but in the event it was a nice steady climb, which we rather enjoyed. We stopped at the Þórufoss waterfall – apparently used as a location for Game of Thrones.

We felt well worked despite having only 64 km on the clock, and we were pleased to find a tub of hot chocolate powder and plenty of salty snacks amongst the donated items in the polytunnel. We feasted well and had a good night's sleep before returning to Reykjavik and the joys of repacking the tandem and suitcases for a slightly more civilised airport experience and flight back to the UK. A final sting in the tail of the trip was a nightmare drive back to Cornwall and the positive Covid tests the next day.

The final verdict? We got a lot of value out of having the tandem in Iceland, and we did and saw things we would have missed otherwise. Food and accommodation prices are high, though camping and cooking ourselves eased the pain somewhat. It may not have been the most hardcore of adventures, but it was an achievement nevertheless (and a lot of fun, Type 2 or otherwise) for a couple of septuagenarians. We clearly spent a lot more time, effort and angst on travel and preparation than could really be justified, and we'd know better how to do it next time. But... Never! Again!

– Margaret

POETRY

I have been playing with ChatGPT, that's AI to you, for the last few months. Before some of you start sniggering; by AI I mean Artificial Intelligence. One test, with the club Christmas magazine in mind, was to ask it to create a Haiku about cycling. A Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry consisting of three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables. Within a few seconds it produced this

Wheels hum on the road,
Wind whispers through spinning spokes,
Freedom rides with me.

– Dean & friend

MORNING CYCLE

Emerging onto Killigrew street,
I start my morning round,
Market onto Church Street,
My feet spin round and round,
Arwenack onto Grove Place,
Screeching past Trago,
I thunder down Marine Crescent,
And I go like merry hell,
Like lightening round Pendennis Point,
I loop back to Castle Beach,
I nod, I smile, I wave my hand,
I cheery say 'Hello!'
All I get in their reply is,
'Where's your ruddy bell ?!'
Down Castle drive then Cliff Road front,
I briefly glance the sea,
Finally round to Swanpool,
Then home for cups of tea.

– Sylvia

Cycling Insurance

Bicycle insurance: protecting your ride
Cycling is a fantastic way to stay fit, enjoy the outdoors and reduce your carbon footprint. However, accidents and thefts can happen, which is why bicycle insurance is essential. All Wheelers members are now required to have third-party liability insurance. Here's a brief overview of what's available:

Cycling UK insurance policy
Cycling UK provides comprehensive insurance options for its members. By joining Cycling UK, you automatically receive **£10m third-party liability insurance** provided by Bikmo. This covers you if you accidentally injure another person or damage their property, such as crashing into a fellow rider or hitting a car. Cycling UK members also have access to legal assistance on a no-win, no-fee basis through their partner, Bikmo. For those looking for more extensive coverage, Cycling UK also offers a 10% discount on additional bicycle insurance policies through Bikmo. Other providers of comprehensive cycle insurance include Yellow Jersey and Pedal Cover. These policies can cover theft, accidental damage, events, and travel, providing peace of mind.

British Cycling
British Cycling similarly provides its 130,000-plus members with no-excess third-party liability insurance for claims up to **£20m** and legal support in addition to many other member benefits. It is another option worth exploring.

ETA Cycle Rescue Service
ETA offers a specialized **Cycle Rescue service** that provides 24/7 recovery for cyclists in the UK. For just £24 per year, you get unlimited callouts, coverage for punctures and flat e-bike batteries and even reimbursement for taxi costs if you prefer to arrange your own transport. The service also includes coverage in Europe for up to 90 days per year.
With over 30 years of experience, ETA Cycle Rescue ensures that if you suffer a breakdown on your bicycle, e-bike, trike or cargo bike, their team will arrange transport to a repair ship, railway station or home.

– MC

WHAT THE HIGHWAY CODE SAYS ABOUT BICYCLE LIGHTS

60 **At night** your cycle **MUST** have white front and red rear lights lit. It **MUST** also be fitted with **a red rear reflector (and amber pedal reflectors**, if manufactured after 1/10/85). White front reflectors and spoke reflectors will also help you to be seen. Flashing lights are permitted, but it is recommended that cyclists who are riding in areas without street lighting use a steady front lamp.
Law RVLR regs 13, 18 & 24

Janet and John go for a ride

Meet John our Hero, a very experienced cyclist (known affectionately as a know-it all). John is always looking for a challenge ... something new ... no task too great.

It was a fine, sunny morning. Lambs were frolicking; birds were singing. You get the picture. John awoke early feeling super fit. He went for a 20-mile run followed by a 10-mile swim, then a quick workout in the gym. After a quick energy bar and some horrible-looking green stuff from his new liquidiser, he was ready for the day.

A luverly day for a bike ride, John thought. I will call up my friend Janet and see if she would like to go for a ride. Janet was super excited about the idea and suggested they head for the coast. "Good idea," John said! "I'll make some lunch for us," Janet said. "See you soon." See Janet set to work preparing Marmite and sardine sandwiches for John and strawberry jam ones for herself. She then filled her water bottle, checked her tyres and waited for John at the usual place.

Just then a message appeared on their WATTSUP group. It was Mrs Twickersneed. "What's up," John asked. "My wheels won't go round," Mrs Twickersneed replied, "OK I'll come and have a look," John replied. As soon as John got there, he could see what the problem was. "Your brake fluid has gone all hard," he said. "I'll have to change it. It won't take a jiff." So our hero set to work, and within minutes he fixed it. "Thank you so much. How can I repay you?" she asked with a saucy smile. John quickly retreated. "No problem, he said. Janet and I are heading for the coast. Why don't you come along?"

And so our threesome set off for the coast. It turned out to be a very hot day, and they soon built up quite a thirst. They stopped at a roadside fountain and replenished their water bottles while pouring quite a lot over themselves. After a while, they reached a luverly deserted sandy beach, so they decided to stop to eat lunch. As it was so hot, Mrs Twickersneed jumped up and said "I'm going for a swim." Taking off her clothes, in she went, leaving Janet and John open-mouthed on the beach. John couldn't help but mention what a fine body Mrs Twickersneed had, which rather annoyed Janet, so she jumped up, stripped naked and joined Mrs Twickersneed in the cool water. "Come on, John!" they both yelled. John didn't really have a choice so off he stripped and in he went.

After a long refreshing swim, they quickly dried in the sun and prepared to set off. Janet noticed she had sand in her derailleur, so John cleaned it off with a rag he had in his pocket. He then started to explain how that wouldn't have happened with Hardy Bowman and Blowoff hub gears. He then proceeded to explain the workings of hub gears and the ratios. Then, looking up, he noticed that the ladies had ridden off!! He soon caught them up and asked where they were going. Janet said they thought they would head over to the Bent Orange cafe to meet some of the other club members. "I know a shortcut," says John. "Oh No!! Oh No!!" the ladies shrieked. They had experienced John's shortcuts before, always twice as long and very hilly. They all headed for the cafe for a quick cuppa (never quick with the Wheelers), and then home saying:

"You never regret going."

– Fred

Cycling is bad for the economy

Cyclists are a disaster for the country's economy. They don't buy cars They don't take out car loans or purchase car insurance or fuel. They don't have their car serviced and repaired or pay for parking. And crucially, they don't get obese. Let's admit it: healthy people do nothing for the economy. They don't buy medicines or use the services of hospitals and doctors. By contrast, every new fast-food outlet creates – in addition to restaurant staff – at least 30 jobs: ten cardiologists, ten dentists and ten weight-loss experts.

So what's better for the economy? A cyclist or a KFC? It's worth thinking about.

P.S. Walkers are even worse. They don't even buy a bicycle.

How did the chicken cross the road?

Recovering from knee surgery and other ramblings

At the end of October I had surgery for the total replacement of my right knee. I was coping surprisingly well before the surgery, so it's a bit of a shock to find myself pretty much incapacitated now. 😱

An hour or so before going to theatre the surgeon told me that I might end up having some regrets and maybe not want the hip surgery I had also planned. I guess he was just dealing with levels of expectation – he probably has to do so with all his patients. After all, he's not performing miracles!

I haven't been able to get involved in any distance cycling for quite some time, so I saw this as a new and different type of challenge, one that didn't involve endless days of energy-sapping, bum-numbing pedalling! I could train in much the same way, but this time I would be preparing myself for a long journey of recovery and not an epic ride! I was up for anything and considered myself to be in good shape, though the information regarding recovery is varied and often conflicting.

I've always kept myself reasonably fit and I enjoyed both running and cycling. I was good at cross-country running at school, and when I arrived in Falmouth in my early twenties and was asked to run the Duchy Marathon for a charity, I jumped at the chance. This marked the start of my short career of running marathons, which was both a good and a bad thing. I was clearly good at it, and I ran my first sub-three-hour, very hilly Duchy Marathon a few years later. But then things started falling to pieces – really quite rapidly. I developed shin splints, then knee pain and finally stopped running because of pain in my hip. I knew nothing about proper training methods and, though I had just joined Cornwall Athletics Club, I was too demoralised to carry on running and concentrated on my leather business.

Gill and I now go to the gym to be coached in strength and flexibility, a life-changing experience for us both! It gets us on the move early in the morning twice a week come rain come shine, and we get to meet others like ourselves at the small gym in Truro. It's become a bit of a social occasion that we look forward to and a world apart from most people's understanding of what "going to the gym" might mean.

I was initially lured into the "dark world" of weight lifting by Rob Smalden. I got to know Rob many years ago when he ran spinning classes at Tremough for the Wheelers. After I announced my intention in 2017 to attempt the age category "world hour record" at the Newport Velodrome, Rob insisted I start weight training with him and his coaching partner, Sam Guy. Up until then, I couldn't see the point of weight training, as I felt I got all the strengthening I needed for

cycling from being on a bike. But eventually I gave into the pressure and agreed to trial their course of strength and flexibility training. And after only a few months, I saw I was getting noticeably stronger on the bike, so I stuck with it. A year or so later Gill joined me.

I occasionally back-squat using a barbell from a rack and deadlift using a framed track bar. But around 75% of what we do doesn't involve heavy weights at all. We could be training explosive power and throw a 2-kg medicine ball vertically from a starting in the seated position or slam the same ball to the floor with as much force as we can muster. Or we do heel lifts, rear elevated squats, pull-ups, pull-downs, bench presses and cable rows. Essentially, we are trying to strengthen as many muscles in the body as we can to improve our overall strength and help deal with most of what old age will throw at us.

In 2013 Simon Jones and I were invited to join a study at King's College researching the physiology of ageing cyclists. The study's aim was to see if exercise optimises the ageing process and, if so, how much exercise is needed. From the collected data they hatched the "set-point theory". They concluded that if you did little to no exercise, your health span would be compromised, resulting in extended morbidity and indicating you were below the set point. However, if you did a moderate amount of daily exercise your health span could be optimised, resulting in compressed morbidity – the set point. There didn't appear to be any advantage in exercising above the set point. Indeed, intensive training can lead to injuries and stress that might counter the good effects of exercise.

Lying on the bed, I reflect on all this as I ponder how long this journey of recovery is likely to take. For someone not used to being inactive for very long, the prospect ahead is daunting. Still, I've agreed to write this, along with a number of long overdue emails. And I have a pile of books I've promised myself I'd read!

I notice small improvements but they're almost imperceptible, and I feel that my aspirations to return to the track for another record attempt are slightly ridiculous. I'm wondering if I'll ever get back to walking properly, never mind riding a bicycle! There appears to be no shortcut, but clearly some patients will cope better than others. I'm due to see the physiotherapist, and I'm hoping all the strength training I did before the surgery will stand me in good stead. At nineteen days, the wound has healed, and I have nearly full flexion of my knee. And I haven't needed a walking stick or crutch much after the first week, certainly not for the three to six weeks they suggested when I left the hospital. The physiotherapist was impressed with my progress and with the strength and range of movement I had, which was hugely encouraging.

There is a lot of talk now in the media about improving strength in old age, so Gill and I feel lucky to have been in on the "conversation" at the beginning. Though we can all get valuable exercise on a bike, and it will keep us fit and healthy and likely at the "set point", it does nothing to increase bone density and comparatively little to improve strength. And this becomes more and more important as we get older, so that we are able to continue functioning properly: to climb stairs, to open jars and, should we end up there, to pick ourselves up off the floor! It is said that, as we age, we lose muscle mass, and that will result in a loss of overall strength. This is described with a degree of fatalism that it is inevitable. But that's not necessarily true. Nor is it true that we lose power.

Nine years after visiting King's College, Simon and I returned to be prodded, probed and scrutinised in every part of our physiology! Lactic acid, CO_2 and O_2 levels were calculated, and blood, muscle and fat tissue samples were taken. Our bodies were tested, measured and

scanned. At a very recent King's College webinar, they revealed some of the results. There was an overall decline in strength, power and VO2 max (VO2 max refers to the maximum amount of oxygen your body can absorb and use during exercise) within the cohort of individuals in our group who were retested. My VO2 max still put me in the elite category for my age, as was the case for many others in the group, though it had declined since we were tested in 2013. However, some of my results were at odds with the overall trend. The power I achieved at exhaustion during the test was nearly the same as the result I achieved nine years earlier. What was most startling was that both my instantaneous power and quad strength results had increased by a massive 25%! And all I had done since I was last tested was to continue cycling and take up strength and flexibility training. (Simon likewise showed an increase in his quadriceps strength of about 10% along with only a very small loss of instantaneous power, though he hadn't, like myself, been going to the gym in the intervening time.)

By the time you are reading this, it will have been nearly eight weeks since my operation. At four weeks post op, I'm experiencing highs and lows. A little too much exercise and the knee becomes inflamed; too little and it becomes stiff. All the advice says to listen to your body. The pain at night often keeps me from sleeping. Finding a comfortable position in bed is difficult and is not helped by a badly bruised rib cage after hitting a pothole on a night ride two weeks before the operation! Lying on my left side, which is the side of the hip I'm waiting to be replaced, is only possible with a pillow placed between my legs. Lying in the recommended position on my back is just out of the question, since tendon inflammation behind the knee – from long before the operation – has kicked off again. The inflammation has become an additional obstacle in my recovery, and I'm forced to carefully navigate a path between strengthening the knee and aggravating the tendinitis.

Still, my knee does appear to be ever so gradually improving as the surrounding muscles get stronger, but I'm noticing other changes. It's a bit weird, but the new joint is quite noisy! It knocks and creaks as I walk and now, as the swelling reduces and there is more space around the joint, that noise has become much louder! Once more I google "knee replacement surgery", and I'm reassured that all will be fine. They say it will quieten down as the muscles and connective tissue grow around it – which is a relief as I'm not sure I could cope with a permanently noisy knee 😱.

At nearly five weeks post op, I'm feeling a lot more positive about my recovery. The tendinitis forces me to keep the knee exercises to a bare minimum – certainly well below the three or four daily sessions recommended by the hospital. My knee is no longer swollen, and the tendon inflammation is much improved. The strength and flexibility exercises before the operation are standing me in good stead.

I've just read an article in the Guardian headed, "The cruel reality of facing a three-year waiting list for a new knee". The article centres around the experiences of a retired nurse who's unable to get an appointment to see a knee specialist. It's a familiar story. She eventually paid to see a consultant privately who confirmed she will need a knee replacement. Because she is told she could wait three years, she elects to travel abroad for the surgery. Before she finalises this arrangement, she is given a date for the operation and ends up having the knee replacement carried out by the NHS at a private hospital. In all, she waited just 18 months.

The article focuses on how incapacitating her condition became and how awful the NHS is. She apparently does nothing to alleviate the discomfort of her arthritis and degrading joints – no change of diet or strength and flexibility exercises or any attempt to lose weight. Quite

the contrary, the doctor recommends counselling as she falls into despair. “My world now was really just in this house pretty much all the time. I couldn’t walk, I got depressed, I put on about two stone, then the more weight you put on the more depressed you get, you eat more chocolate because you feel so fed up, and so it goes on.” Should we be taking more responsibility for our own health? Maybe as a retired nurse she would know that carrying an extra 2 kg is only going to worsen the condition.

I recently watched a video of Dr Chris van Tullekan talking on the subject of processed food and the trap that is laid for the consumer. “All the diseases we associate with diet are caused by predatory transnational food corporations turning our ill health into money. Obesity is not caused by a lack of willpower, by failure of personal responsibility, or by misunderstandings. It is caused, very deliberately, by companies who engineer food for us to overeat.”

It’s been a long time since I saw my own doctor. I last made an appointment to see him in the spring as I was in a lot of pain and wasn’t sleeping. For the very first time in my life, I felt I wasn’t coping. Looking back, it’s unbelievable that I got into this state, but old age does concentrate the mind. We’re lucky to have a large garden, and it gives us a lot of pleasure. It’s also a wonderful playground for our grandchildren and provides the space for gatherings of family and friends. But painful joints and a lack of sleep left me feeling incapable of managing it any longer. The doctor told me that the NHS is stretched to breaking point and says that his job is equivalent to shovelling shit up a hill with a fork! I presume that, in the analogy, I’m the shit and the fork is his lack of knowledge in knowing how to treat me! He said I needed two things: a gardener and counselling. Wow! I now realise that he fully believes it is inevitable we fall into decline as we age. He thinks we should downsize and employ help rather than attempt to remain strong and healthy!

The meeting with my doctor certainly focussed my mind. What was I thinking when I made the appointment? I could sort this out myself! I went on a strict diet and cut out inflammatory foods – meat, refined carbs, fried food, alcohol, etc. I cut out caffeine almost completely. I trod a careful path between exercise and rest. I ate as many anti-inflammatory foods I could think of – fresh fruit and vegetables, oily fish, nuts, seeds, turmeric and ginger. I maintained the strength training and kept up my cold-water dips – and I started distance swimming. The pain lessened and I began to sleep better.

I think there is a lot wrong with attitudes to health care, but also with our relationship with food. A cynical food industry bombards us with addictive, ultra-processed foods resulting in large numbers of people becoming obese and suffering myriad health issues and leaving a crippled health service to pick up the pieces. Yet we don’t endlessly criticise the supermarkets; we save that for the NHS!

It’s now Sunday 1st December, a little over five weeks since my operation. My acclimatisation to the prosthetic knee is going really well, and I can get around the house and up and down stairs just fine. I regularly go on my WattBike for ten minutes to keep the legs turning, and in the three weeks I’ve been doing it, I’ve doubled my average power, from a modest 48 watts when I started to a staggering 96 watts this morning! Walking is getting easier, too, but I don’t go any great distance, as I soon get tired. The tendinitis still gives me a few problems, and the pain can keep me awake a fair bit in the night, so I’ve resorted to taking ibuprofen and paracetamol again. And last night marked a big change – my first night without being woken up with the pain. I really feel I’ve turned a corner.

We’ve recently bought a small blender and I can now mix anti-inflammatory cocktails! The mixture of turmeric, ginger, black pepper, lemon and honey packs quite a punch. So much so that I’m already convinced it’s doing me good. 🤣🤣

– Robin

Some sobering thoughts

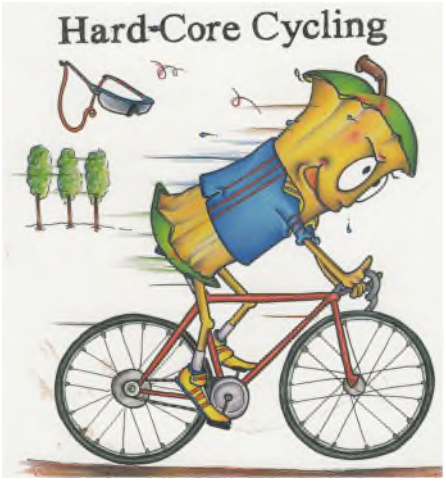
Cyclists in Japan who use or just look at their mobile phone while on their bike now risk jail terms of up to six months or fines of £500 under tough new rules designed to combat a surge in accidents. Nearly a quarter of all traffic accidents in Japan last year involved bicycles, and in the majority of those cases, their riders were using phones at the time. Cyclists caught riding while drunk face jail time of up to three years or fines of £2,500. Lesser tar-

iffs include a £25 fine for cycling with an umbrella. In the first half of 2024 there was one fatality and 17 serious injuries stemming from incidents involving cyclists using their phones. Meanwhile, Dutch police have handed out an average of 850 fines a week since a ban on using mobile phones while cycling came into force two years ago. Using a non-hands-free phone while cycling has been a traffic violation since 2019 across the Netherlands, and anyone caught in breach of the rules faces a €100 fine.

Earlier this year a cyclist in Queensland, Australia was fined A$1,000 (£548) for talking on her mobile phone while riding.

In the UK, where motorists are banned from using a handheld mobile phone as a communication device, punishable by a £200 fine and six penalty points, there is no specific offence for using a mobile phone while cycling. However, doing so could result in police fining the cyclist for careless cycling, which carries a maximum penalty of a £1, 000 fine.

The law firm Slater and Gordon states: "Although it is an offence to cycle under the influence of alcohol in the UK, a police officer cannot force you to provide a breath, blood or urine sample. They can ask, but if you refuse and are subsequently charged with cycling under the influence, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) wouldn't be allowed to use your refusal as evidence against you. The maximum penalty for cycling whilst under the influence of drink or drugs is a £1,000 fine. This is also the case for careless or inconsiderate cycling. The maximum penalty for dangerous cycling is a £2,500 fine. You wouldn't, however, get any points on your driving license should you have one, as it isn't a driving offence. Cycling under the influence of alcohol is never a good idea. It affects reaction times, causes inhibitions to disappear and can render you incapable of controlling a bicycle. Recent research has shown that intoxicated cyclists are 10 times more at risk of being injured in a cycling accident than sober cyclists."



– MC

RECIPES

Jan's Muscle Protein Energy Balls

These yummy balls are useful as a healthy pre- or post-exercise snack.
They can be prepared in advance and eaten more or less straight from the freezer.

Ingredients (makes 10 balls):

2 tbsp protein powder (e.g. salted caramel or vanilla flavour)
1 cup dates
½ cup coconut flour
1 cup nuts of choice
1–2 tbsp raw cocoa powder
3 tbsp almond butter

- Place all ingredients in a blender.
- Blitz and roll into balls.

Danny's Honey Flapjacks

Ingredients

- 300g rolled oats
- 175 g butter
- 4 tablespoon honey (runny honey)
- 125 g demerara sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon or cardamom

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C and line a baking tin of approximately 20x25cm with greaseproof paper.
2. In a large pan, melt the butter and stir in the sugar and honey over a low heat. Stir with a wooden spoon to combine the ingredients until the sugar dissolves.
3. Tip in the oats and cinnamon (or cardamom) and take the pan off the heat. Stir well so the oats are all coated in the honey mixture.
4. Spoon the honey oats into your lined baking tin. With a spatula or the back of a wooden spoon spread the oats evenly into the tin, including into the corners. Pack the oats down so they are in an even layer.
5. Bake the flapjacks with the tin in the centre of the oven for 20-25 minutes. Check at 20 minutes! The flapjacks should be light golden brown in colour.
6. Remove the tin from the oven and leave to cool for at least 5-10 minutes, before slicing into 12 squares with a sharp knife. If it is still very soft at this point, leave to cool for longer as it will crumble. Then set aside to cool completely before removing the flapjacks from the tin.

Summer Cycle/Camp Tour in Cornwall: 3 Days, 4 Girls – Sonjia, Sheila , Kath & me – & Martin!

This trip was my first Camping Cycle Tour. Having done a lot of touring over the years, I had always stayed in B&Bs, hostels, etc., and so I was a bit apprehensive about camping!

Sheila planned the route, taking advantage of the good weather forecast. We travelled light, just carrying tents, sleeping bags & carry mats and taking minimal clothing & snacks.

Day 1: Falmouth to Blisland – 47 miles (3600 ft)

We set off at 9:30 and had our first coffee stop at the rather quirky Cows & Sows Craft & Farm Shop just past Idless

Woods! We then followed country lanes over to Trispin and on to pick up some extra drinks at M&S at Kingsley Village, as it was so hot! We then stopped for picnic lunch in the shade along the cycle path. We crossed Gosmore, skirted Bodmin and then had more drinks at the Borough Arms, followed by a nice flat ride on the Camel Trail before the steep ascent to the moors and on through Blisland to the first campsite at South Penquite Farm, a lovely camp site with good facilities and reception area including a kettle and microwave and plugs for charging the batteries for our e-bikes. Martin (a friend from Gylly Swimmers) was the only one on a racing bike! We walked a mile and half into the village to have a delicious home-cooked supper and beer at the Blisland Inn. We entered the pub quiz, but it was far too difficult for us, and we were too tired to stay to the end after a long, hot ride. We all slept well with just one light rain shower overnight.

Day 2: Blisland to Minions via Port Isaac – 43 miles (3675 ft)

Another beautiful day greeted us as we set off early at 8:30 to head for the Kew Farm Shop on the Atlantic Highway. After a couple of miles, Martin got a puncture, and we spent an hour trying to prise off the incredibly tight tyre to fix it! We were glad of the coffee and bacon rolls for brunch at the Farm Shop. After that, we

headed to the north coast through St Endellion, where we stopped to look at the church and were invited to listen to the local orchestra practising for a concert that

night! Then on downhill to Port Isaac, where we'd hoped to stop for a swim, but the tide was too far out, and we were running late. Also the place was teeming with tourists, so we pushed the bikes up through the narrow streets to escape the

crowds and then followed the hilly coast road via Port Gaverne & St Teath. We detoured into Camelford to the Coop to buy some food for the evening, as there was no pub near the campsite. After squeezing as much food as possible in our panniers, we headed across Davidstow airfield on Cycle Route 3 and stopped for an afternoon break there with stunning views over to Rough Tor. Then a brilliant, long descent via Polyphant and under the A30 and several very steep climbs on really narrow lanes, reaching the second campsite just before Minions at 5:30. Another lovely site with stunning views and an accommodating host, who provided extension leads from the hook-ups for our bikes to charge and overnight storage in the barn! There was a hut with microwave for our meals and again a kettle for tea. We sat out in the evening sun eating supper, then watched more of the Olympics on our phones! We all slept really well again after another great day.

Day 3: Minions to Falmouth- 51 miles – (3075 ft)

After tea and snacks for breakfast, we set off at 9 am for home. Lovely weather again, but after only a few miles crossing the moorland roads, Kath was knocked off her bike by a speeding young motorist who took a junction too fast, swerved and hit her bike pannier. Sheila was ahead of her, and Sonjia, Martin and I were just behind, so we were able to get the driver's details, administer first aid and call the hospital in Liskeard, only 8 minutes' drive away, as Kath was unable to ride with injured wrists and cuts and bruises. Luckily, the driver was able to take Kath and her bike to A&E, where she was looked after very well, and Clive came up to fetch her. Subdued, we headed on through St Neot to the nice cafe at Lanhydrock for much needed coffee and bacon rolls. Then an easier ride home back through Roche, taking a short break on the Ladock road, and then on to Tresillian and along the cycle path to Truro. We reached home at 3:30.

It was a great 3 days of cycling with lots of new roads and lots of hills, only marred by Kath's accident.

Another reminder to everybody to have British Cycling insurance.

Sonjia and I have bought new Vango one-

man tents, as I don't think she could stand another trip sharing my tent with me snoring away! Sheila, Martin and Clare also had another trip riding the Dartmoor Cycle way in September, which Sonjia and I couldn't make, but we're looking forward to more cycle-camping adventures next year – one nighters and longer, depending on the weather!

Paula 👍 🚲

Jan's Five Tummy-Flattening Exercises

Forget traditional sit-ups. Focus instead on these core-strengthening exercises to trim and strengthen your lower, underlying abdominal muscles. Carried out once or twice daily in conjunction with your cardio (cycling) exercise, they will improve your core strength and reduce the risk of injury.

Plank
2 x 30 seconds.
Keep the body flat and parallel to the floor.
Progress by lifting alternate legs (or arms).

Roll up to seating X 6 – 10
Start using band/towel.
Keep lower back and feet on floor.

One Hundred
Keep the lower back on floor and count to 100.
Breathe in 5 counts, out 5 counts.
Lower legs to make it harder.

Glute Bridge
Lift up to shoulders, keep hips high. 50 bum squeezes.
Make it harder by lifting a leg without dropping the hips.

Oblique bicycle crunch - no more "love handles"!
30–50 each side

Raleigh Cycles

Founded in 1887 by Frank Bowden in Nottingham, England, the Raleigh Bicycle Company quickly became a major force in the cycling world. Bowden purchased a small bicycle business and transformed it into one of the largest and most recognized bike manufacturers in the UK. Raleigh's early success was driven by its commitment to quality and innovation, producing bicycles that appealed to a wide range of riders.

Raleigh's heron-head badge

In the 20th century, Raleigh expanded its product line to include bikes for racing, leisure, and children. Iconic models like the Raleigh Sports and the Raleigh Chopper, introduced in the 1960s, solidified the brand's place in pop culture. The Chopper, with its unique design, became a symbol of youth culture during the 1970s. In total, Raleigh sold over 1.5 million Choppers.

However, by the 1970s and 1980s, competition from foreign manufacturers, particularly from Japan, led to a decline in Raleigh's dominance. Thanks to restructuring and a change in ownership in the late 1980s, Raleigh maintained a significant presence. In the 1990s, the company

The Raleigh Chopper

embraced new trends like mountain bikes and electric bikes, helping it to regain relevance.

Although much of the production has moved overseas, Raleigh maintains its legacy of design and quality. The brand continues to hold a special place in the hearts of cyclists around the world, particularly in the UK, where it is seen as a symbol of cycling history.

———-

The BBC Radio 2 presenter Paddy McGuinness, recently completed the Children in Need Challenge, riding a Raleigh Chopper from Wrexham in Wales to Glasgow, covering a distance of 300 miles in five days. He raised over £7.8 million for the charity.

– MC

Cog Cycle Repair & Design

01326 374 708

A blast from the past

The Bowden Spacelander, a strikingly futuristic bicycle, stands as one of the most iconic designs of the mid-20th century. First introduced in 1946, it was the brainchild of designer and inventor Ernie Bowden, who envisioned a bike that would look at home in a post-war world of space-age optimism. The Spacelander was characterized by its sleek, streamlined appearance, which featured a fully enclosed body, a distinctive tear-drop shaped frame, and an unconventional front fork.

The bike was produced by the Bowden Manufacturing Company, but despite its innovative design, it was never a commercial hit, being too ahead of its time and too expensive for the average consumer. Only a small number were ever made — estimates suggest fewer than 1,000 units. Over the years, it has become a sought-after collector's item. Today, depending on its condition and originality, a Bowden Spacelander can fetch anywhere from £5,000 to £20,000 at auction, with some rare, fully restored models fetching even higher prices.
– MC

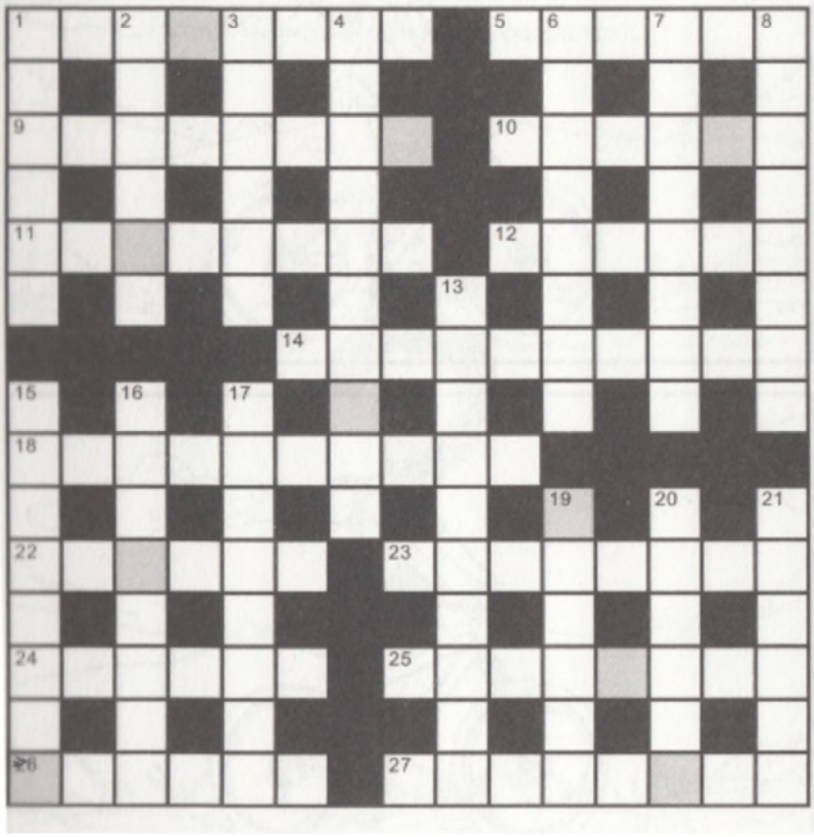
Café Corner

The first member to try all 21 coffee types in a month wins a free bottle of sedatives!

PUZZLES

CROSSWORD

Solve the clues and discover in the shaded squares what can be a short but challenging race. Not one for the faint-hearted! What is it?



Across

1 Tyre problem (8)
5 Stopping mechanism (6)
9 Make easier (8)
10 Brief look (6)
11 Overshadowed (8)
12 Prohibited (6)
14 Training wheels (10)
18 Agreeing (10)
22 Track cycling event (6)
23 Charitable gift (8)
24 Trying experience (6)
25 Flying (8)
26 Rider's seat (6)
27 So gained (anagram) (8)

Down

1 Overtook (6)
2 Agile (6)
3 Spring flowers (6)
4 Found on mudguards (10)
6 Dependable (8)
7 Good deed (8)
8 Buyers (8)
13 Leaving (10)
15 Cutting instrument (8)
16 Trespassed (8)
17 Run away (4, 4)
19 Bike frame material (6)
20 Wispy cloud (6)
21 Mean to (6)

MISSING PART

Insert the name of a bike part so that, reading down, five five-letter words are formed. What is the bike part?

C	H	D	L	A
O	E	E	I	L
E	R	A	I	R
R	T	Y	D	T

A cycling riddle

My first is in racing but not in sprint,
My second is in help but not in hint.
My third is in race but never in speed,
My fourth is in repair but not in need.
My fifth is in first as well as in last,
And my whole can help you go fast.

What am I?

R753's Quick & Easy Quiz

1. *What connects Glastonbury, Davidstow, Falmouth and Barnstaple?*
2. *Acer pseudoplatanus is the Latin name for what?*
3. *In which English county is Diss?*
4. *Who was the Norse God of War?*
5. *Which British car manufacturer produced the Somerset, Maestro and Atlantic?*
6. *Norwich has two, York and Chester have one each. What?*
7. *Common, herring and black-headed are varieties of what?*
8. *You may kneel in front of it in a church, and so may she in the habit. Name the Cornish village.*
9. *Valetta is the capital of which country?*
10. *Which Russian leader resigned in 1999?*
11. *Which of the following is the furthest North: Bridlington, Horsham, Swindon, Coventry or Penrith?*
12. *Who played the lead role in the film A Man For All Seasons?*
13. *He designed the famous red telephone box. and there is one inside the Anglican cathedral in Liverpool, for which he was the architect. Who was he?*
14. *Which King of England followed Edward V?*
15. *What was the name of the last steam locomotive built for British Railways?*
16. *Who won the Tour de France in 1983 and 1984?*
17. *With which singer do you associate the songs "Return to Sender", "It's Now or Never" and "Wooden Heart"?*
18. *Which of the following in the British Army holds the highest rank; Major General or Lieutenant General?*
19. *Harry Webb is better known as which singer?*
20. *In Cornwall we have Egloshayle and Egloskerry. What does "eglos" mean?*

Answers: Crossword *Across: 1 puncture, 5 brakes, 9 simplify, 10 glance, 11 eclipsed, 12 banned, 14 stabiliser, 18 concurring, 22 sprint, 23 donation, 24 ordeal, 25 airborne, 26 saddle, 27 agonised. Down: 1 passed, 2 nimble, 3 tulips, 4 reflectors, 6 reliable, 7 kindness, 8 spenders, 13 abandoning, 15 scissors, 16 intruded, 17 turn tail, 19 carbon, 20 cirrus, 21 intend. The challenging race that appeared in the shaded squares is "cyclo-cross".* **Missing part:** *valve.* **A cycling riddle:** *gears.* **Quiz** *1. A39 2. Sycamore 3. Norfolk 4. Odin 5. Austin 6. Cathedral 7. Gull 8. Atlarnun 9. Malta 10. Boris Yeltsin 11. Penrith 12. Paul Schofield 13. Giles Gilbert Scott 14. Richard III 15. Evening Star 16. Laurent Fignon 17. Elvis Presley 18. Lieutenant General 19. Cliff Richard 20. Church*