

Fife Wheels

CTC Fife and Kinross Newsletter

Autumn 2013 Issue 77

In this issue

- West Highland Way Tour
- St Crispin's Day Nocturne
- Highland Bike 'n' Hike
- A Brompton in New York
- My Favourite Things

Autumn is upon us...

... as I'm sure you'll have gathered by the amount of leaves you are having to cycle through these last few weeks!

There's not been much frost yet though... but if my usual form is true... as soon as I've mentioned that we haven't been getting much of a particular type of weather (such as rain, wind, frost, snow etc.) it's sure to come along pretty soon!

Hopefully my theory will be proved wrong on this occasion!

Is it just me?

It seems to me that the seasons are coming much later these days.

Spring seemed to drag on for ages this year before Summer finally arrived.

We can't complain though as Summer lasted almost to the end of October...

and it was a lot drier than last year's Summer (but that wouldn't have been hard, would it?) I was even cycling in shorts until just a few weeks ago.

Articles

We have a wide selection of articles for you to enjoy in this Autumn edition.

The stories of tours, trips and events have come from several contributors... some new ones as well as our trusty regulars. Reading about their exploits has given me some ideas and really whetted my appetite for planning next year's cycling trips... an ideal pastime for over the cold winter months.

I hope you enjoy the articles as much as I did when first reading them... please let me know if you have, and what you enjoyed about them, so I can pass it on to the 'roving reporters'... I don't pay them much... so your compliments will go a long way to encourage them to continue writing articles for our enjoyment!

CTC Scotland

Gary Cummins, one of our very own Fife & Kinross members, is now Vice Chair of CTC Scotland.

Congratulations to him for being elected to this post. I'm sure Gary can rely on the Fife & Kinross Membership and Committee for support if required.

Finally...

any suggestions for new (or resurrected) events would be greatly appreciated e.g. Sunday Run routes, a Night Ride route, a Hostel trip etc.

Hmm! That reminds me of a weekend Hostel trip a group of us took ages ago to New Lanark. We cycled down Saturday and returned Sunday... worth re-enacting??

Cover Photo... Stuart Allan's West Highland Way trip. East side of Loch Lomond, north of Rowardennan.

Tour dates: 9-11 November 2013

Having used up all my work leave during the summer and in need of some cycle camping action I decided to have a long weekend away somewhere. Having been on tour with the road bike a few months back and with the mountain bike being left alone in the garage all summer I decided to dig it out, dust it off and strap on a borrowed old Carradice saddlebag. A friend had walked the West Highland Way in the summer and he had lots of good stories to tell. Going on his recommendation I decided to cycle the route.

With the short days and the limited time off I decided to start half way up Loch Lomond at Rowardennan instead of the official start at Milngavie. I had also heard some unfavourable stories about the east side of Loch Lomond, tales of steep drops, slippery rocks and tricky rooted sections. I was hoping by skipping a few miles I would avoid some of these obstacles and would be able to make it to Fort William two days later.

With a drybag holding my tent to the handlebars and Carradice Nelson long flap packed up with my sleeping bag and warm gear I headed off first thing Saturday morning. The path to start was excellent, smooth access road but this quickly turned into a narrow path, which then lead into a rock staircase. So the carrying began, I had to either push or carry the bike up and down rooted rocky sections pretty much the whole northern part of Loch Lomond. This did seem to take a while but I didn't really expect much else considering it is a walker's path. The track was wet and slippery because of all the Autumn leaf fall and I pushed on until reaching the northern end. The track now opened into a mixture of narrow walking paths and farm access roads. Following the way-marked route I made my way north making a short detour down into Crianlarich where I had a late lunch and stocked up on chocolate bars.

A short section along the main road led me back to the way again and I continued on into Tyndrum where my plan was to camp or stay in the hostel. I was quickly disappointed however as I discovered the site wasn't open to tents and the hostel was full.

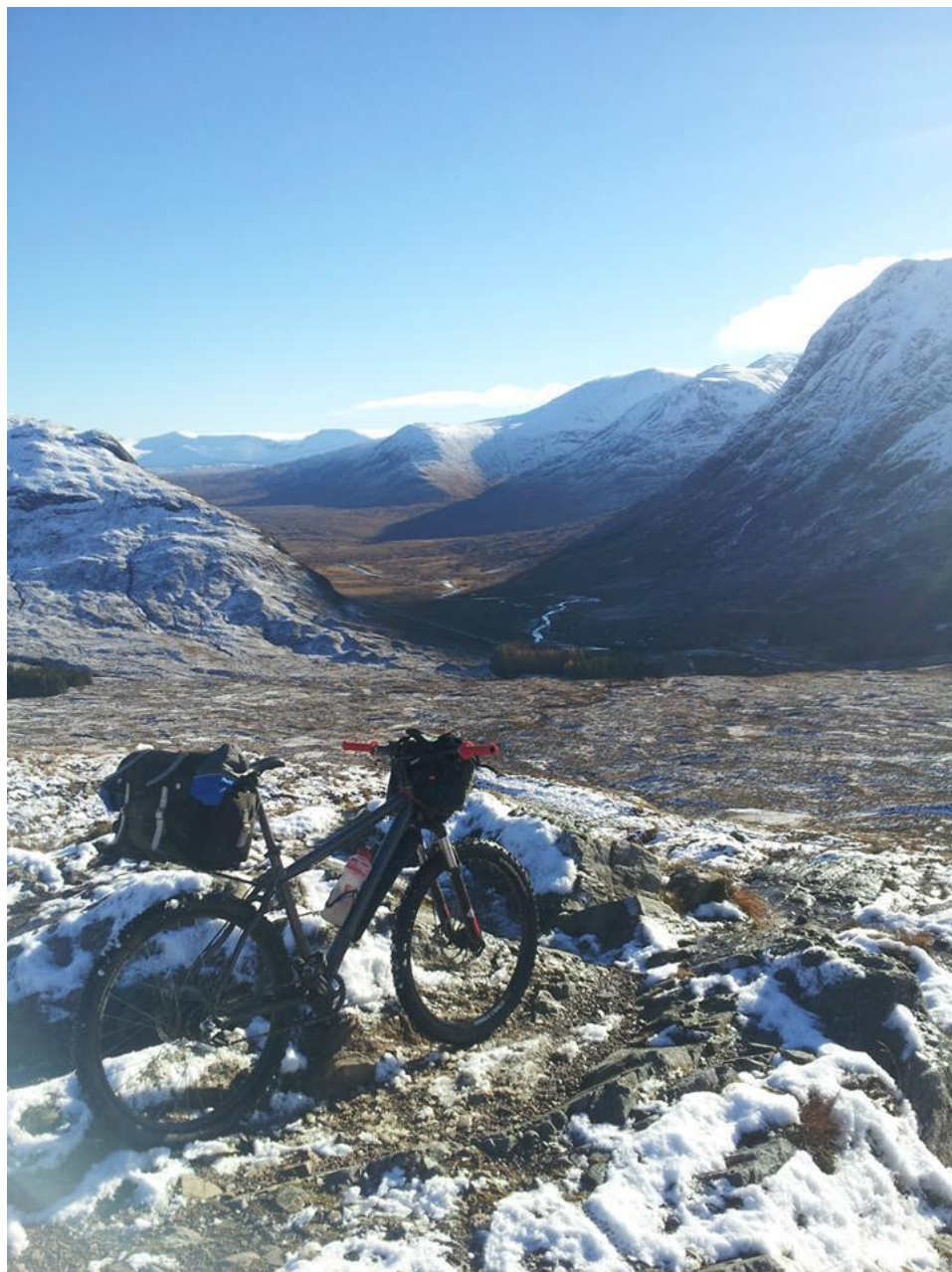
The site did however have an available mini lodge which I opted to use for the night after the site warden had warned me that temperatures were due to go down to -7. With a sound sleep and feeling fresh I got up early the next morning I cycled out of town not long after sunrise.



The route was covered with a thin layer of ice and the puddles on the route were iced over. The section from Tyndrum to Glencoe was excellent cycling with only a few steep sections to walk and a couple of stiles to cross. The path was a mix of access road, narrow path and with the last section being an old drove road which at times had some snowy sections. The drovers road led you through some spectacular scenery and left you facing east towards Buachaille Etive Mor, a mountain that never fails to impress, especially in clear skies and when its covered in snow. From here it's only a short cycle down the Ski Centre drive and across the main road towards the Kings House Hotel where you re-join the way as it runs alongside the road until you reach the start of the climb up the Devils Staircase.

The route here again became pretty much impossible to cycle especially with the gear on the bike. With the sun out now it was a warm slog all the way to the top, shouldering the bike at times to get it over steep rocky sections.

I reached the top and turned round to be presented with one of the best views I have seen in a long time, snow topped mountains and an expansive view out onto Rannoch Moor.



Spurred on by the view and knowing I wasn't too far away from my destination I continued on down into Kinlochleven, making my way gingerly down the path on the shadowed north side of the Staircase which was covered in an ankle deep layer of snow.



A few miles later as I got further down the hill the snow all but disappeared and I could make good time down into town. I stopped here for a while to grab some lunch and fill up with water. With daylight running out I pushed on out of Kinlochleven climbing high out of the valley on foot again as the path was too steep to cycle.

By this time I was growing weary of all the pushing and it felt at times as though my bike had square wheels. I soon reached the top of the climb though where I joined an old military road which led me round and down into Glen Nevis.

With daylight fading further I decided to put the lights on the bike to help illuminate the path a little better, and as I reached the edge of town, it was almost completely dark. I made my way to the official finish in the centre of town, here I stopped for a few quick photos before heading back out into the countryside to find a suitable camping spot for the night. This was easier said than done with it being fully dark with only my head torch and bike light to help me find a suitably stealthy camping spot. After a short search I found a place to pitch my tent and I settled down for the night.

The next morning after a chilly night under the canvas I packed up my stuff and headed back into town to catch the train back home.

Stuart Allan



DAVE'S BIKE SHED

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Sustrans volunteer ranger; Fife CycleStart ride leader and Bikeability/Cycle skills trainer - kids and adults.

I understand the needs and requirements of the touring cyclist! Tandems and folders - no problem. Visit the website; phone, email or call at workshop to discuss all your bike needs.

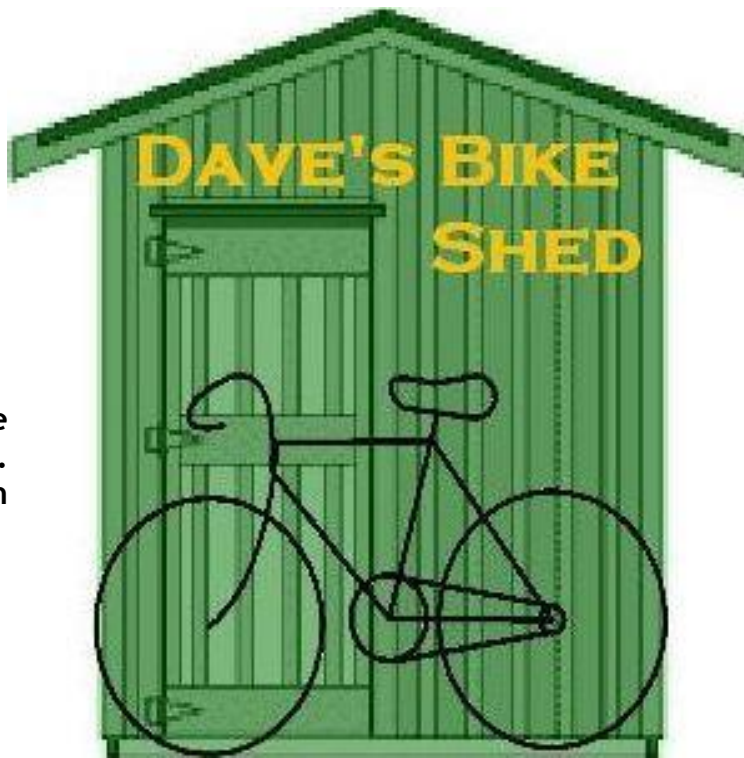
"My mission is to look after your bike so it gives you the performance you expect." David Seaman



@davesbikeshed

City & Guilds

Qualified



Annual Lunch 2014!

Upper Largo Hotel, 12:00 Saturday 4th January 2014

(check website for final arrangements and menu... to be posted soon)

Photo from the well attended
2013 Annual Lunch



Before going on a recent trip to New York, I searched the “worldwidethingamabob” to see what, if any, opportunity there might be for a wee bike tour in the Big Apple while my better half was off looking for Robert De Niro's likely haunts, Tiffanys, etc. As it turned out, my luck was in as one of the Brompton dealers offers several half/full day guided tours with the Saturday afternoon version coming for free – a 'no brainer' for the Aberdonians amongst us...or maybe it's just me! NYCeWheels (www.nycewheels.com) is a small LBS on the Upper East Side of Manhattan which is handy for mid-Central Park and, indeed, that is where this tour was eventually heading (if only the rain could stay off...).

In the event, a small but perfectly formed, non-lycra group assembled (myself, two cycling newbies and a guy who had bought an all singing/dancing Brompton some months before but still came every Saturday for some on-road practice) and after a short familiarisation talk from our guide, Jack, we were off into the city traffic.



the author, Ian, (in non F&K gear) is on the left

Now, some folk might have the idea that riding a bike in New York is some kind of avoidable madness but it seems there has been something of a Renaissance in cycling over there, too, and the busy streets are now alive with all manner of urban fixies, vintage racers as well as city hybrids/mtbs (some real wrecks but kept that way to discourage theft) with good numbers of electric bikes complete with baskets, pannier bags, etc for hauling the shopping home. There are designated cycle routes but, better still, the majority of motorists seem fairly considerate (with the usual disclaimer concerning taxis, white vans and trucks) and, in my experience, tolerate slow-moving, middle-aged men in a manner hard enough to find here in Fife.

The tour, itself, lasted about 2 hours and consisted of making our way across town towards central park, entering near the Guggenheim Museum before joining the Saturday fitness fanatics jogging, walking and cycling their way around the park roadway itself. Motor vehicles are largely excluded so, if you can avoid the horse poo and keep moving in the right direction, it's pretty straightforward. As can be seen from the photographs, I spent some time “cruising” with the attractive young lady in the checked shirt. She was working on Wall Street but home was Singapore, originally, and she became more and more exhilarated - “It make me feel so good!” - the longer the ride went on.

Alas, it wasn't my natural wit and debonair charm having this effect on her so much as the raw fun of cycling - I take her point, what a way to see Central Park - so she promptly went off to buy herself a new Brompton as I headed for the subway and a dinner date with our hosts. These things obviously sell themselves, despite the horrendous price asked for a few bits of jointed heating pipe with a saddle and a Sturmey Archer gear. For my part, I learned that the late October weather in New York can be wonderfully mild and the Shimano hub dynamo is less of a drag than I imagined...and might make it onto my list for Santa!



Finally, Jack was telling me these tours carry on throughout the year and venture all over Manhattan if you are looking for a novel way of seeing the place. And if Bromptons are a bit too weird for your taste, you can always try an old Schwinn instead.....and, what is that coconut for exactly? ***Ian Nicol***



THESE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS...

Back by popular demand 'my Favourite Things' is a feature where a member is asked to list up to 5 items that they find indispensable and the reason why. As long as it is cycling related, it can be clothing, equipment, tools, bikes... anything!

As I didn't have anyone lined up for this I thought I'd share my 'favourite things' (they're in no particular order).



SHIMANO BAR-END SHIFTERS

Their near legendary reliability and simplicity had me wondering if I could fit them on mountain bike type bar ends (as my preferred bar of choice is of the straight variety). I tried a pair on my Audax bike. **It was a huge success! 20+ years later, nearly all my bikes sport them.** My main reason initially was chiefly reliability (I was then cycling into some pretty remote places and I didn't want to be left with no gears in the middle of nowhere!) They do however have other benefits such as being able to easily trim the front derailleur position, being able to change up or down through any amount of gears at a go, and you can 'switch off' the indexing in the event of a bent derailleur. **I still use my first pair.... even though the bike has long gone!**

BROOKS SADDLES

My first Brooks saddle was a B17 Standard. I got it 1 week before embarking on an End to End and I wondered if it would be wise to try it for such a long trip... I needn't have worried... I had no problems at all in the seating department. I now own several Brooks saddles of varying shapes and types, all are equally comfortable. It is testament indeed when after a long ride that you haven't even noticed your saddle. The build quality is near perfection, as is Brooks' aftercare service. The one exception to their comfy tag was a 'Colt' with too thick leather. Solution- cut a slot in it! Perfect now.



'SPD' PEDALS SPD stands for Shimano Pedalling Dynamics... Mr Shimano has so dominated the market with his design that the name has stuck. Cyclists now refer to all makes of 'clipless' pedals as SPD's (a bit like how the name Hoover is used for vacuum cleaners I suppose!)

I started cycling seriously just when SPD pedals started to come on to the scene.

An old 'war wound' prevented me from using the old cage and strap type of pedal (they never really appealed to me anyway). It made perfect sense to be attached firmly to the pedals via a cleated shoe but still be able to release in an instant.

I bought a pair and was promptly told by several people (that use them now) that "the idea will never catch on. Harumph" I do hope they remember telling me that!

Simply put, they are efficient tools for cycling. I feel more at one with the bike when wearing them and would only endeavour to cycle very short distances without them (if I absolutely had to)



MOUNTAINOUS ROADS

Ok some of you will be saying 'what a saddo' he is to yourselves. Some of them take a real effort to grind up, and I know I'm not the fastest up them, but I genuinely enjoy the physical workout. It's not a machismo thing... I'd liken it more to hillwalking... something I know I'd do too if my body wasn't so beat up.. so cycling is my only way to get up hills and mountains, only if they have a road over them of course! Whether they be in Norway, the Pyrenees the Quiraing on Skye, or the Bealach na ba the effort of the climb is more than amply rewarded by the stunning views and the feeling of achievement. And if that doesn't work for you... then perhaps the huge freewheel I will seal the deal. *DougieLatto*



What's on your list? Not your Christmas list or your bucket list- your cycle list. Mine was to do 100 miles and a nocturne. Then a couple of months back a colleague at work mentioned the St Crispin's Day Night Ride (SCDNR) and as he talked about it I realised the two things on my list could be done in one fell swoop. So, we went on the website to see what it was all about. "Starts at midnight on the Saturday of St Crispin's Day (25th October) and follows a figure of eight beginning and ending in Chiswick in south-west London". This also coincided with the first bottle of wine of the season from a local vineyard being available and for us to collect as a trophy. A bottle of wine – well that's a bonus.

We touted the idea around some other cyclists on our staff mailing list but strangely we got only one other combatant willing to sacrifice themselves for a bottle of wine, or the others were a bit more savvy than us. And so it was that three of us, Chris, Alun and me, signed up for the event and word got round the office that three 'nutters' had signed up! All we had to do was a bit of training and much praying for good weather.

Much praying did not seem to work and as the days got closer the weather man did nothing to instil us with confidence. He was focussing on the storm that was brewing in the Atlantic and was due to arrive with us – hopefully after we had finished the ride. The weather had been wet and blustery all week and the forecast for us was much the same but more so. Should we do it? We had a back-up plan (but on hind sight should have called it a bailout plan) that if the weather was dangerous then we would go home. Needless to say, the bailout plan was not considered.... must have been the adrenalin.

So it was that on a dark, dank, damp and blustery St Crispin's night that the three of us assembled at Dukes Meadows in Chiswick along with four hundred other nutters.

Just before midnight we were asked to line up and true to the weather forecast a light rain started. At the word "Go" we set off and so did the heavens. The rain was bouncing off the road and by the time we reached the first set of traffic lights we were soaked. We were committed. We just tried to keep together and keep safe. We saw a lot of riders who were making emergency repairs to punctures and the like, the wet conditions were taking its toll already.

The first part of the figure of eight was to cycle into town so that cyclists from other parts of the country could enjoy the sights and lights of London in the early hours of a Sunday morning. We could hardly see the Albert Memorial and then we skirted around a soggy Albert Hall. At this point I realised that my GPS was cleverer than me because the rain had made it malfunction and it was plotting a route home rather than following the course. Should have taken the GPS's advice but heigh-ho! we kept going. The GPS gave up in disgust and went into freeze mode which meant we had to navigate using the triangle markers the organisers had set out. Eventually, after about an hour, the rain stopped; so I took time to reboot the GPS and it must have felt sorry for me because it started and picked up the course.

The organisers had set the first tea and cake stop at 40 miles in and I had my heart set on a bit of Victoria sponge or the likes, but when we finally got there the boy racers had obviously beaten us to the cakes and we were left with biscuits which were not a disaster but deflating. The café must have been at the side of a lake but we could not see much in the gloom - we could only feel the dampness.

Still we pressed on and as we did so the lights of Greater London stopped and we were cycling in the dark and this was an experience I found strange. You had no sense of speed because there were no visible markers to get a reference from. It was like cycling in a black tunnel with the occasional sodium lamp street light reflecting orange on the wet roads.

The wildlife was non-existent, although we did manage to see a couple of foxes but the rest of the animal kingdom must have been tucked up wisely in bed.

Still we pressed on with the route tracking the River Thames Valley westward which meant that the route was generally flat. Through Eton and Windsor then back out to the darkness of the countryside and thankfully the GPS was keeping us informed of the way ahead. Having never done one of these events before I had thought that big groups of riders would assist each other in peleton fashion but this was not happening and we found ourselves cycling together and keeping our spirits up by riding side by side and having a chat.

The main meal of the night was to be had at the 60 mile point in Twyford where we were promised a hot meal and our bottle of wine. My hopes of fine food had been dashed at the tea stop, so I downgraded my optimism and would have settled for a BBQ'd badger if necessary.

Refuelled, revitalised and rejuvenated we got back on our bikes and headed south on the far loop of the figure of eight avoiding the huge puddles that straddled the road after the last deluge. This section was a lot lumpier than the outward route basically because we were not in a valley anymore but up in the rolling hills. Eventually as the sun got up we found ourselves on the south side of Virginia Water with its Giant Redwood trees lining its walled edge and this meant that we were nearly at the tea stop again, the same one as on the outbound. This time we could see the beautiful duck pond and surrounding gardens and I made a mental note to come back some time. Lo and behold my prayers had been answered and guess what? Some mini cakes had arrived and so my tea and cake intake was fully sated.

Onwards, not far now, and that is the time when things go slightly awry. The GPS had run out of battery and we were using the direction triangle to follow but we missed one and detoured a mile down a dead end. That was when Alun got a visit from the puncture fairy. Not quite on par with Formula One but pretty quickly we were back on the road.

The last part was back on the river again through Richmond and onto the main road for the run back to the start.

We crossed the line together in true team style. Got our photo taken on the podium with the glamour girls and then upstairs for a bacon butty.

At 11 hours and 35 minutes it will not be the fastest ever century but the challenge had been met... and we had a certificate and a bottle of wine to prove it!

From your foreign correspondent and honorary CTC Fife & Kinross member *Richard Hope*

Team: Richard Hope, Chris Meloy and Alun Tlusty-Sheen.

www.stcrispinsdaynightride.com



Some of you will know Richard from the Kelso, Barncross, Islay and Fochabers trips... he's on the right of the three cyclists and looking remarkably fresh for having just cycled 100 miles through the night starting at midnight. **Ed.**

Having failed to plan any kind of tour this year and with many of my new Fife & Kinross cycling chums off to Fochabers and beyond, I settled on a leisurely week-long hostelling trip from Ullapool up to Durness and back down to Inverness before the summer weather disappeared entirely. That, at least, was the plan before my elder son, Graeme, arrived back from Beijing (with one day's notice) having failed to renew his visa in Hong Kong...

Despite a lack of cash in his pocket, a wonky bike and no suitable clothing, he would now join me on this little adventure and, by the way, he would also like us to throw in a few hill climbs, some other side trips and a few beers!

In the event, a decision was made to start with a hill climb, Cul Mor, a Corbett which lies in Assynt (incidentally, the original Clan MacNicol lands) and then a wee pedal round to the SYHA howff at Achinver. This went surprisingly well and I didn't feel as knackered as I had first thought - all that draughting a'hent Dougie Latto must be paying off - but a large plate of pasta and a good night's sleep was in order after battling the wind for 10 or so miles into deepest Achiltibuie.

Next day, the boyo was keen to scramble up Ben More Coigach but, despite this, took what seemed like hours to climb out of his pit so, by the time we were breakfasted and walking towards the hill path, we now had persistent rain to accompany the very low cloud - we went anyway but what should have been some of the most spectacular views in Scotland now became a pea-souper with 5 meters maximum visibility - that is, a good day to practise our compass work! Only bare rations left that evening but a wee cycle along to the Summer Isles Hotel and back kept us in cheerful mood before bedtime.



Suilven from Cul Mor

Next morning and the hills were clear of cloud, once again, but the wind was fairly getting up. The plan today was to cycle up the coast to Achmelvich Hostel and maybe climb Suilven en-route - that would entail about 20 miles each of walking and cycling - but the 'late riser' curse (let's call it jet lag) struck again plus with more strong headwinds and a hilly bike route, we decided to make do with a walk up to the Inverkirkcaig Falls in the now swirling winds and lashing rain - my waterproof socks filled up like reservoirs and Graeme got a deer tick for his troubles - nice waterfalls but it was two very drookit loons that sat down to coffee and a dram in a Lochinver pub. Despite the sign outside, I'm not sure these particular cyclists were very welcome! Once warmed and revived, there was a final 3 mile trachle over the hill and another well earned kip - by now, the 4 loaded panniers on my bike seemed less and less like a good idea and, when we met up with young lad whizzing around the North over 3 days on a lightweight racer plus saddlebag and wearing some thin lycra, I began to doubt my current touring strategy...



Achmélvich Youth Hostel

Next day was meant to be some more cycle/walking (10 miles to and from Quinag) but, once again, the weather forecast was poor and, on the other hand, the pie bistro and pub were at the end of a nice wee footpath back over the hill in Lochinver - so a leisurely lunch it was then and the bus back home with more grub for our supper - this was more like it!

Another bleary-eyed West Coast morning and the weather was now really threatening to deteriorate from rubbish to complete pants so heading up to Durness in contrary winds and horizontal rain was looking way less than attractive, especially over the humps and bumps of the North Assynt coastal route. A quick change of plan was in order and, once formulated, saw us undertaking a wee coast to coast excursion into friendlier climes across in Tain - via a localised hurricane at Inchnadamph which saw my top speed reduced to 4 mph for about 9 miles heading south - a long day in the saddle but, after a worrying series of no vacancy signs, some excellent grub and a comfy bed were secured for the night. A true cycling day at last and no great inclines to overcome!

With the move East, we had taken a day off our trip so the last day of cycling saw us travel across Easter Ross to the Nigg/Cromarty Ferry then over the Black Isle to Inverness for a train home the following day. En route we planned a visit to an old ancestral home at Balblair, The Ferry Inn, an ice cream cone at Fortrose and a visit to Chanonry Point to watch the dolphins but along the way we still had to grind our way up and over the spine of the Black Isle - probably the toughest rise of the entire trip due its length - before cruising downhill, into Inverness, over the Kessock Bridge.

Some lessons learned:

- Make sure the bike-bus driver protects your bike from damage in transit.
- Respond to adverse changes in weather conditions.
- Have 2 lots of outdoor gear for any last minute companions.
- Carry tick removal tweezers.
- Enjoy yourself – it's not a competition.



Ferry Inn, Balblair

At 160 miles total, this was not Le Tour de France but, nevertheless, an enjoyable way to spend a week with a son I'd not seen in 2 years. His nibs heads back to China now and I head back to the drawing board as regards my continued ability to lug a loaded tour bike around Scotland over the coming years... I suppose I could always train for it next time!

Ian Nicol

Fife Wheels Album

(photos from the Fochabers week)





and a few other snaps for fun...



Sculptures or Bike Stand? I couldn't decide! Greenwich, London

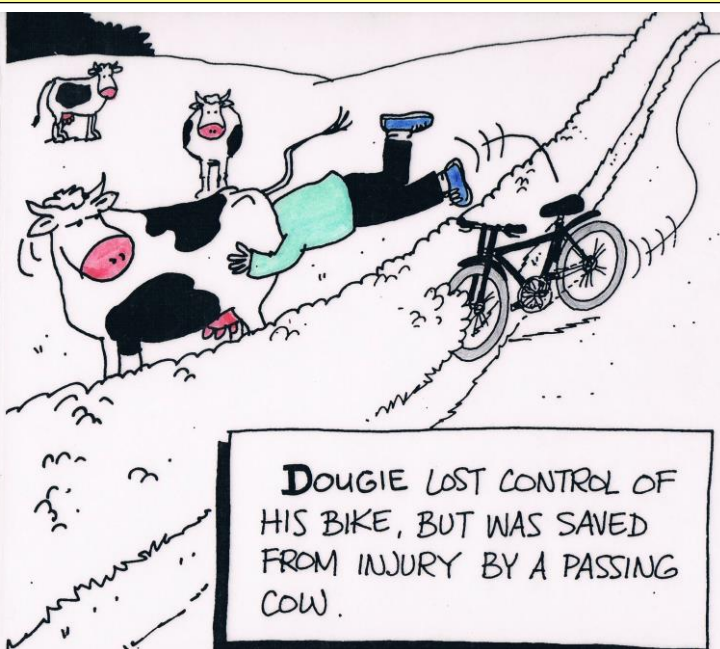


Shhh! Don't tell anyone you've seen me in hiding up a close in Arbroath.



Pub in St.Bees (C2C)

Deadline for Winter Fife Wheels articles and photos - JAN. 31st 2014



DOUGIE LOST CONTROL OF HIS BIKE, BUT WAS SAVED FROM INJURY BY A PASSING COW.