

Fife Wheels

Issue 83, Dec. 2016.

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The newsletter of Fife & Kinross CTC, part of Cycling UK.

December 2016

Well here we are again. 2016 has almost gone already! My, doesn't time fly as we get older? Compared to many in the club, I'm a relatively late starter to cycling, so I've tried to cram as much as I can into my cycling time since discovering it was the thing for me.

The style in which I've become accustomed to (namely biggish miles at no more than a brisk pace... and if I'm being truthful, mostly at touring pace now) gives me plenty of time for contemplation. It was on one of these longish days that I got to thinking (well actually I was reminiscing) about when I first discovered that long distances were achievable on a bike and that cycling was exactly what was required to keep my poor old battered body fit after a long, hard, sporting career. The muscles I'd built up over the years in my previous life transferred very readily to cycling endurance and power... but what was intriguing was that somehow those muscles and power didn't help me climb the hills? Which brings me to the whole point of this story.

When I first started 'putting the miles in'... every hill was a real chore!

I'd go as far as to say every hill, no matter how long or steep, was like a cycling up a mountain. Fortunately it didn't take too long before I got used to climbing on a bike... and even enjoying it! Those mountains became hills... and then eventually the hills were downgraded to being mere slopes... and slopes they have remained for countless years.

Now I don't know when it happened? It kind of sneaked up on me (as did the 'significant' birthday that is fast approaching) but I've been noticing that some of these mere slopes are no longer 'mere'. I'd go as far as to say that some of those slopes are reverting back to being hills again. Let's hope they become no more than hills... I well remember how tough cycling was when I first started out... when they were all classed as mountains!!

Weather... cold, sunny, windless.

Perfect you'd think? What more could you ask for? Well maybe a bit of cloud cover would make it safer. I can't remember the low sun being such a problem in past years... or the glare from the wet roads being quite so bad either.

The cycle paths could do with a bit of leaf clearing and salt spreading too. That 'wished for' cloud cover might help keep the temperature up a bit, negating the need for salt on the roads and paths. Oh, but the clouds might bring rain/sleet/snow, even wind! **Wind? No thanks!**

Actually... I think I'll stick with what the weather has been giving us lately... **and be thankful for it!**

Cold and frosty as it is...it's actually perfect if you can find that elusive mix of thermal and windproof layers. But see what could happen if you don't get it right! The Dysart and District Daunderers looked pretty cold when they arrived at Loch Leven's Larder recently.

Dougie Latta, Editor. (cover - Berneray, Spring 2016)



It all started with a Committee discussion about the Club Hut and its apparent lack of support or custom from the current F&K membership. Had the hut's appeal become a thing of the past and had its usefulness run its course? Was it worth the, albeit negligible, upkeep? Would it not be easier and cheaper to knock it down, clear the site and take it all away to the dump? It's true that use by members has fallen away enormously over recent years but the landowner's gift in the 1930s was costing us no more now than then, i.e. nothing. Surely a little TLC, now, with an appeal to the members for greater patronage would be appropriate and the right thing to do. It was agreed, therefore, to use a small amount from club funds to make this happen and so it came to pass that, on the weekend of 20-22 May, a few brave souls (mainly OAPs as it turned out) ignored the pessimistic weather forecasts and made their way along the wee single track road on the south shore of Loch Earn.

George Berwick, our intrepid leader, hut guardian and inspirational guru, stayed for the duration, making tea and barking out instructions (Don't stop! Work harder!) and doggedly nagged things along via intermittent help from John O'Reilly, George Shepherd, George Budd and Ian Nicol. All the while, said Guru George was being filmed by Rob Page for a short documentary about, putting it politely, "interesting people" in Fife - www.scheduledproductions.com if you are interested - the results might be worth a show at the next AGM if he ever gets it finished. I just hope he filmed my good side.



After delivering the necessary materials, George "The Slave Driver" Berwick and his lurid green Brompton, on the Friday evening, yours truly high-tailed it back home as recent health issues forbade me physical exercise of the lifting things above the head kind, for some weeks yet, plus Mrs N doesn't like me sleeping with strange men. If they were still alive on Sunday, I would be back with yet another George (Budd) to paint stuff, pick up litter and finish off the Hobnobs...

The weather gods were very kind throughout the weekend with predicted rain only appearing towards the end of our stay. John O'Reilly had appeared on the Saturday and taken command of the felt roofing (though measurement is clearly not a strong point) and put in a full shift to ensure that Georges 1 and 2 could have some bragging rights re progress when the late shift arrived the following day. Unfortunately for the walls, the two likely lads had employed modern technology, in the shape of expanding foam, to seal a few minor gaps in the weatherboarding, resulting in general carnage as several great blobs of white "gunge" had to be removed before painting could begin - that's it, they're never getting anywhere near any of my bikes!



Roof done(ish) and part way through painting...for anyone interested, the bike "in shot" is the (excellent value and highly rated) B'twin Triban 500 SE model belonging to film maker and newbie cyclist, Rob:

This view of two Hobbits (one in what appears to be the remains of UCI approved clothing) clearly shows the hut's fine exterior following repairs and painting:



Between the constant banter and irregular coffee breaks, the day went quickly enough. George S left late morning to cycle home, towing the heaviest trailer known to mankind - is he home yet Nan? The stragglers followed him home towards teatime. Despite a fine selection of rubber gloves, I'm still trying to remove green paint from my fingers - a souvenir of a grand day out.

Birds of note, for the RSPB types amongst you, included some with feathers and hoots, a couple of pipers on the sandy shore, three kinds of twitterpating tits, lots of wee broon warbling things and something nearby that was driving us all cuckoo - 'nuf said!

Given its age, there's always more to do at the hut, of course, and another working party will have to tackle the internal redecoration and repairs during high "midgie" season - so it's a case (pun) of Skin So Soft at the ready and don't all rush at once! - unless, that is, you need the old folks to shame you all once more...

If you've never been to beautiful Loch Earn, this final image shows the shore and view below the hut and offers a fairly reliable indicator of how far it is to the nearest pub:



The hut is available to hire throughout the year for a relative pittance, via our club website, and I would encourage anyone who wants to experience a little of the cycle touring style of yesteryear, or even just likes a bargain break, to get in touch and get out among those bonny banks and braes. True, the facilities are pretty basic and water is fetched from the burn but it's better than camping and, you never know, you may just enjoy it. As a bonus, the sun is guaranteed to shine - shrouded in clouds, maybe, but I'm assured it's always there (who knew?).

In July Carol and I spent 14 days cycling the Canal du Garonne and the Canal du Midi. Originally inspired by the Prunella Scales barge trip along the Midi which would have been too short to warrant travelling all that distance a search of the interweb soon threw up the Canal des Deux Mers route and we were hooked. I purchased maps on the internet and we started to plan our journey. We left Kirkcaldy on a blustery and wet Friday afternoon heading, hopefully, for the sun in France.

We took our own bikes, mine a Genesis Tour de Fer 20 Carol on a 20 year old Peugeot Camargue which attracted some comment from the staff at Eurodespatch when we dropped them off for onward transportation to Paris. Despite what you might read a painless operation as long as you book in advance.

The original plan was to ride approx. 50Km per day taking it easy with as much comfort breaks and picture taking stops as was required. As I looked at accommodation options it became clear that we were not going to be able to stick to that especially on the Garonne. Our first night in France was in Bordeaux and it was surprisingly difficult to find accommodation and rail travel from Paris. All became clear however when a football fan friend of mine explained that something called Euro 2016 was on and that Bordeaux was the venue for one of the semi-finals! So we ended up in a budget hotel on the west side of the city about as far from the canal as we could get!



We left the city following the canal for a short while on the Voie Vert Roger Lapebie an excellent cycle path which took us to the bottom of the hill at Frontenac and our first stop on the route. I had used Booking.com, and two French sites to book the accommodation and had a mix of budget, business, chambres d hotes and one luxury stop.

The Garonne was a pleasure to ride on, paved all the way with clear route markings and many info-boards along the way our time on it flew in. As the days progressed we developed a routine which suited both of us and led to great days of pleasant cycling.

Our stops on this trip were dictated by two things:- distance between beds and that other wee bike race called the Tour de France.

After Frontenac our next stops were Marmande, Agen and Montauban our first day at the tour.

We had found that cycling in the heat wasn't too bad with the cooling breeze but the heat whilst waiting for the tour to come through was uncomfortable even in the shade.



After the tour passed through we headed down the Canal du Montech to our next stop Grenade, the next day was a short ride to Toulouse and the end of the Garonne.

Our first stay on the Midi was at Donneville just a short ride from Toulouse and a chance to get some kit washed and hung out to dry.

Castlendraudray was our next stop and in order to see the tour we had decided to stay for two days in the home of cassoulet. When we arrived barriers were piled by the side of the road just ready to slide into place for Le Tour. The next day was a Rest day but we cycled into Revel where that stage of the tour was finishing. Revel was well decked out with the town square being the hub.



We headed back to our hotel and went out for food and when we returned we bumped into this motley crew having a late dinner at our hotel.



The following day we picked our spot on a bend about 100m from the hotel and waited till the riders went by. After that it was a real dash to Carcassonne as we were being "fined" if we booked into our room late!

The room at Carcassonne was billed as being 500m from the Canal, not the way we went which was a convoluted route through a retail park and industrial estate. Of course when we arrived the owner showed us the short cut from the canal!

We were staying at Gite d'Ostal a holiday camp type arrangement about 5Km from the centre of town. We would see the tour here again this time a 'sign on' and 'roll out' to the start.

Another reason for choosing Carcassonne was the Bastille Day fireworks display which, this year, was rather dampened the following day as the horror of Nice unfolded.

As we got closer to the Med the quality of the path deteriorated and at times was little better than rutted singletrack not entirely suited to fully loaded tourers.

After Carcassonne we stopped at Le Somail, Beziers and the final stop on the trip Sete.

On the way to Sete we took a small detour to the lighthouse which marks the end of the Midi at Etang de Thau.

The total miles covered was 465.



LADIES WEEKEND 2016

Article and pictures from **Linda Body**

Ladies Weekend at West Lodge, Comrie.

28th to 30th May 2016

The weekend started off well with a meet up at Linda's home in Dunfermline for Linda, Lin, Lorraine, Kaye and Nicki. We then cycled off on a lovely warm day and headed towards the CTC meet for that day at Castlehill Reservoir where we had lunch and met up with the other two on the weekend, Nan and Jessie. We also met up with the other CTC members who were out on a ride for that day.



After lunch we headed north to Comrie and arrived at the caravan park late afternoon. Beds were allocated democratically by picking a number and then rejigging it to meet our needs! We had two caravans so plenty of room.

First night's dinner was a chippy [well you have to don't you!] but we also bought groceries for breakfast and lunches etc then walked back to the caravans for a blether and a nightcap before bed.



Next day we cycled around Loch Earn on the north side and down to Strathyre where we stopped for some lunch. There was a festival on so we headed towards it but spent more time in the stalls which sold cakes and home baking etc. Well we didn't have dessert with lunch!



After that we headed towards Balquhidder, where there was another festival on. Must've been there on the right weekend? Then we headed back to Comrie on the south side of Loch Earn making a stop at the Club Hut so that we could check out the painting job and roof repairs which had been carried out the weekend before. Well done guys, brilliant job.

Weather had been great again, so we stopped at Ardtrostan for a beer. A bit of R & R, just what was needed! Then back to Comrie for a shower and another walk into town but this time for a sit down meal in the beer garden. Don't you just love the Scottish weather!



Monday morning was here before we knew it and it was time to head back home again. Believe it or not, the weather was still fine, so we had a good ride home and said our fond farewells till the next time.



Cycle Fife

This is a helpful Council-led initiative of general interest to all cyclists in Fife, whether locals or visitors. Their website is under continuous development and covers a lot of matters of interest to F & K CTC members so regular visits are recommended. As well as giving appropriate cycle routes around Fife, there is an online journey planner both of which Fife Council are interested in gaining as much feedback as possible.

It describes current infrastructure projects and their status in terms of development and priority, for example, improvements are currently being the existing cycle links between Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes at present plus a major new cycle path is planned to link the new Waid Academy campus, in Anstruther, with nearby villages Pittenweem, Cellardyke and Kilrenny. The latter is being driven by the local community in partnership with external funders, the former will still involve road sections through Thornton but will widen and improve surfaces where practicable. These are primarily seen as improving existing commuting and/or local access routes in order to benefit the greatest number of potential users but will aid recreational cycling on busy routes. There is also a programme to renew/replace signage for designated cycle routes which is ongoing and partially rolled out.

Regarding maintenance and user feedback re existing routes, all cyclists' observations are welcomed and can be reported directly through the website (or, indeed, via our committee) and the Council takes the view that our members are a valuable aid to recognising current road issues throughout the year. It was also recognised that, although road inspections are routinely carried out each month, broken glass and loose debris continue to be a problem in certain locations. Your reports can include comments on walking/cycling signage, temporary road/pavement works, leaves, debris, ice or any other related issues so go ahead and use it.

Further details can be viewed on the dedicated Cycle Fife website: www.cyclefife.com.

We cycled out of Dunblane Station half an hour later than expected and in the wrong direction. Not a good start to the weekend really. The former could have been my fault for encouraging the wine to flow too heavily the night before, and for so long that the time between my head hitting the pillow and being summoned awake was so short I never even once had to get up to go for a pee. Of course, Gregor insisting that his dad's old Carradice saddlebag would fit his bike and the inordinate amount of time it took to simulate some kind of connection might have contributed to us missing that first, intended train. The direction problem was definitely not my fault though. I knew we should be on the Old Doune Road and the dual carriageway we found ourselves on just didn't seem right. 'Trust me', the first of many times I was to hear that phrase over the weekend and, luckily, the only time I didn't. Trusting in technology instead, my Garmin told us to retrace our steps past the train station and in the direction I had at first intended to travel. The Old Doune Road met us and off we set properly. It soon turned out that 'Road' was pretty much a misnomer. Gregor had wanted to do some rough stuff this weekend, with stretches of the West Highland Way ahead of us, but this was starting really early. The track soon ran out altogether, however, at a T-junction. The map showed it passing straight on through the farm in front of us, which was suitably barricaded to show travellers they were not welcome, so instead we skirted down to the proper road and headed into Doune and onwards to Callander and Loch Katrine without further hindrance.

After a leisurely late breakfast in the Katrine Café, and a quick catch-up with friends from Glasgow I hadn't seen in years, we set off now knowing for sure we'd never catch the 12:30 ferry from Inversnaid to Tarbet. This didn't really matter as it now meant we were able to enjoy the ride around Loch Katrine to Stronachlachar without any pressure.



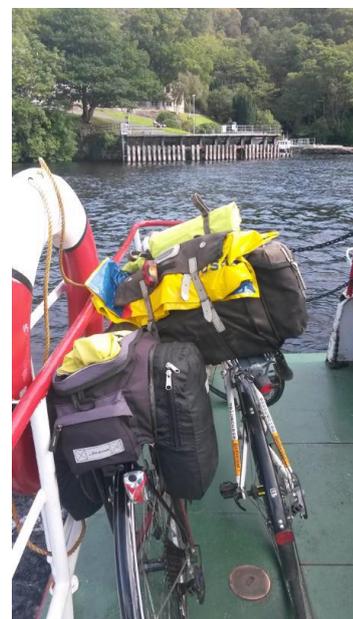
Waiting for the ferry at Inversnaid

I've ridden around Loch Katrine many times and, don't get me wrong, it's a lovely ride. Being a supposedly car-free road, however, seemed to have escaped the notice of many car drivers on this particular day, which was rather annoying. I'm assuming they were locals requiring access and not just idiots but it's hard to tell. The good weather, however, and the wonderful views, made up for it. As expected, we missed the ferry by a good margin and so had lunch on the eastern side of Loch Lomond rather than the western side, at the somewhat unpleasant Inversnaid Hotel.

I suppose they have a captive market so can afford to serve up half-baked bread. At least it was filling, which is what I needed most anyway, and surprisingly it wasn't to be the worst meal of the trip, not by a long shot.

I'm glad ours were the only bikes expecting passage on the ferry as it wasn't exactly designed to take them. However, a cheery ticket conductor got us to position them against the railings to the stern and we set off for Tarbet, some two or three hours behind schedule. It was always going to be a very loose schedule anyway. I read an interview recently with a seasoned cyclist of mature age who was speaking in quite despairing terms about the 'new age of cycling'. He was saddened in the rise in numbers of audax and sportive riders and the decline in the numbers of those, 'who just cycled because they enjoyed it'. When asked how long it would take him to complete a particular route he replied, 'As long as possible', and so it was with this attitude in mind we'd planned the whole weekend.

The tiny ferry tutted across the unusually still waters of Loch Lomond, past Lover's Island, so called because newlyweds were left there overnight and if they were still talking to one another in the morning, then their marriage would last. A pair of cormorants, high on treetops were silhouetted against a wispy sky, suitably spaced apart as though they hadn't quite managed the lovers' test. We looked at our watches and wondered if 'as long as possible' was really a good idea as Bridge of Orchy was a long way still to go, and we had dinner reservations for 7:30pm!



On the Inversnaid-Tarbert ferry



The two cormorants on Lover's Island

We probably could have made 7:30pm quite easily but you can't cycle past the Drover's Inn and not go in, can you? It was mobbed! I suppose it was the September Weekend and so many Glaswegians had decided the best thing to do was to drive the short distance and get paralytic on good beer in slightly different surroundings. Fighting past them, determined that I was going to sample a real ale now I was here, having clocked up a decent mileage, and the fact that it was warm and I wanted to sit in the beer garden, even though it was full of motorbikes and loud tacky 'Scotch' music, I eventually made it to the bar, the queue and the wait.

It was worth it in the end, of course it was. A good pint of Real Ale is always worth the stop. We left feeling giddy and the prospect of leaving tarmac and joining the West Highland Way on our totally ill-equipped road bikes seemed to be just the great adventure we always thought it was going to be. At least Gregor did. I was dreading it. Cycling the West Highland Way on road bikes? Mad. Or drunk. Happened to be both!

We balked at the intended joining spot, however, clinging to the tarmac for a little longer like two old men, touching our toes in cold water and refusing to enter all at once scarce the sudden change would give us heart attacks.

But we eventually plunged in at Tyndrum, which was only 7 miles from our final destination. We had time, it was Landrover track all the way ('trust me') and it was what Gregor really wanted to do.



On The West Highland Way, through the vennel

It only took about 10 minutes to be facing a sheep track heading up a 1 in 3 slope impossible to cycle. I fell off after coming to an abrupt standstill and we studied our surroundings carefully. The railway line was between us and the road, with high fences on either side so no way over without going back. 'There's a vennel close by I'm sure goes under the railway, trust me', he said. I knew there was as well having walked the route back in the early eighties but I couldn't have told you if it was 100 yards ahead or 100 miles. We continued on, walking, pushing our bikes. God I hate rough stuff.

Luckily the vennel appeared at the other side of the almost vertical rise and fall of the shoulder we had just scrambled over and we stumbled towards it eagerly, much to the amusement of two other cyclists who had sensibly left their bikes at home, were wearing hiking boots and carrying their luggage on rucksacks on their backs. We squeezed through and looked at the long stretch of Landrover track we assumed would lead us to Bridge of Orchy, and then at our watches which were close to announcing dinner.



Escaping the West Highland Way

Heading in the opposite direction, the track looked as though it would head up to the road. Using telepathy to communicate what we should do, along with some hard stares from me, we tested this theory out and found it to be true. Joining tarmac again, we covered the remaining few miles into Bridge of Orchy in no time at all, checked in, locked up our bikes, showered, and presented ourselves for dinner with a good three minutes to spare. And now was the worst meal of the entire trip as our reward.

Cullen Skink: A Scottish soup made from smoked haddock, potatoes, onions, and milk. Well, the poor folk of Cullen will be incensed to discover that the Bridge of Orchy Hotel is serving cubed, al-dente potatoes floating in warm milk and naming it after their famous dish. Not a sign nor a taste of any kind of smoky fish could be found, nor any type of allium in any shape or form. It really was just warm milk with crunchy cubes of potato floating in it. Quite rank. And no bread served with it either. Horrid!

The main course, I honestly can't quite remember it was so painful. I do remember cold chips (how can you get chips wrong?) and some sort of vegetables or salad or something with some kind of thing sharing the space on the plate. My mind has obviously found it to be too traumatic to remember properly and has decided to protect me from remembering it clearly.

A couple of reasonable pints calmed me down before heading back to our room. Our room, a little box in a row of boxes a short distance from the hotel building. I thought we had paid our £180 for a nice room in a hotel, not a box akin to a backpacker's lodge or seedy motel across a muddy gap. So, since they could provide no accommodation for our bikes, anywhere, we took the opportunity of the easy access to bring them into the box with us, which had a short hallway perfect for the purpose.

It took Gregor about 20 seconds to fall asleep and about 21 to start snoring. And I mean snoring. Really snoring. Big time snoring without a pause at full volume snoring. I thought I would cope, honestly, and turned this way and that for about three hours, trying to pack my ears with toilet paper, wondering if I should just hit him, maybe really thump him, or fill a water bottle and skoosh him. In the end I grabbed my duvet and pillows and moved into the small hallway where the bikes were, moving his into the room to make space for me, and curled up next to mine and slept fitfully for the remaining one and a half hours before the alarm told us we needed to get up.



Leaving Bridge of Orchy behind

After a poor breakfast and I got my bike packed, I went to check out while Gregor wrestled with his dad's Carradice again. The poor man on the desk asked me how my stay had been. Being as polite as possible, I told him 'ok', and would have left it at that but he pressed me.

'Just ok? Not really good?'. That was it, I let rip and told him exactly what I thought of his hotel, his rooms, and his 'food'.

Apparently 'they' (whoever 'they' were) had only taken over the hotel two weeks previously and were keen to learn of people's opinions. So, as I had 'helped' him with this endeavour I was given a discount card for when I returned, even though I insisted that I would not. And I really will do my utmost not to. Ever. Really!

Back on our bikes, we set off on tarmac. This was to be our day entirely on the West Highland Way but all reports were that heavy rain was forecast. That, and with our short experience of the day before, we decided to Head to Fort William via Glen Coe on the A82, with perhaps a detour to Kinlochleven if the weather wasn't too bad. I've never been so pleased for a poor weather report!

As it turned out, the rain really never came to much. Everyone had been reading the same reports though as we were warned by everyone we spoke to, 'be careful, the rain's coming and it's to be heavy'. A little bit of dampness around Kinlochleven and later, after Fort William as we headed to Spean Bridge, but that was about it.

Cycling round the detour to Kinlochleven was absolutely stunning.



It was lovely to escape the traffic for a short while, even though it was 16 miles where 4 would have taken us direct to North Ballachulish. But remember, we weren't doing this to win any time prizes.



On the detour after Loch Leven

We sped through Fort William without a stop, heading to a café Gregor knew ('trust me') just to the north, near Caol. We got there just in time, as it closes early on a Sunday, for a lovely, massive bowl of soup and a filled roll each and a welcome cup of coffee. Gregor couldn't eat his roll, which was just as well as it was to come in very handy the next day.

We then headed north up the west side of the River Lochy, punctuated with a couple of stops to allow the loch-keepers let boats pass along the Caledonian Canal.

Heading for Rannoch, we had decided that Spean Bridge would be our end point for the day as going any further would provide little shelter while we waited for the only train that would get us there. Taking our time heading up the west side of the river and canal was far preferable to staying on the A82 any longer, especially as we were in no rush now, having made excellent time with a fairly good tail wind since Onich.



Lock Gate on the Caledonian Canal



The Commando Memorial

After seeing little or no traffic at all on the lovely undulating road, we faced a steep climb up to the surprisingly busy Commando Memorial. This popular bronze sculpture stands in an impressive spot with the three Commandos facing south towards Ben Nevis.

Dropping down to Spean Bridge, we were able to find comfort in more coffee and then shelter in the train station until the great iron horse arrived and deposited us at Rannoch Station, facing the Moor of Rannoch Hotel, our choice of hostelry for the night.

More unlike the Bridge of Orchy Hotel it could not have been. Welcomed in person by Steph, one of the owners, and given a guided tour, without even having to say who we were, made us feel as though we had arrived at a friend's house. In fact, the immediate feeling of warmth, the log fire, the few guests sitting leafing through books, chatting quietly, gave the impression of a cosy sitting room and not a hotel.

I suppose it was much smaller than the Bridge of Orchy Hotel, having only a half-dozen rooms, no TV, radio or Wi-Fi signal (and for me, no mobile phone signal either). However, a hotel doesn't need to be small to be nice. I think Scott and Steph could run the Hilton and it would feel as warm and friendly.

The food was also excellent. Superb in fact, so much so I had a sweet because I didn't want to stop eating, and I never have a sweet normally. And later in the evening, after long chats with everyone, a complementary cheese board appeared and I felt I'd definitely, must have definitely, walked off the train earlier and straight into a little corner of heaven.



The Moor of Rannoch Hotel, Rannoch Station

After a breakfast consisting of the best, and biggest, mushroom omelette I'd ever attempted to eat, as well as all the usual 'help yourself' goodies we set off on the only road out of Rannoch Station with very little plan in our heads as to how we would eventually end up home that evening.



The infamous 'Frog' of Rannoch Moor

Passing the infamous 'Frog of Rannoch Moor', we skirted round the south of Loch Rannoch and headed over Schiehallion, deciding we'd probably make for Loch Tay and perhaps over to Amulree and through the Sma' Glen.

The sun was out, it was a Monday when others were probably at work, we'd seen perhaps only one car in 2 hours, and we were obviously still in heaven.

Well, Gregor was struggling a bit on the hills so perhaps not quite as heavenly for him but there was a reward after the top of the Schiehallion road of a near 10-mile downhill which was just incredible.

In fact, we were enjoying it so much we decided not to head down to Kenmore but to take a short detour to Fortingall to see the Yew Tree, reportedly one of the oldest living things in Europe at between 3,000 and 9,000 years old, though most experts stick closer to the 3,000 figure. And, according to local legend, perhaps more difficult to believe, Pontius Pilate was born under its shade and played there as a child.

After a coffee in the adjacent hotel, and feeling it was almost but not quite lunchtime, and the fact that we didn't want to re-trace our steps back to the Kenmore road after all, and we weren't ready to make a decision on how exactly to get home, we headed west for Glen Lyon. Apparently there was a road at the end of the glen, tarmacked and everything, that would take us over the hill to Killin, and there was a Post Office come Café in Glenlyon the town where we could get a late lunch, 'trust me'.

The Fortingall Yew



The solitude of Glen Lyon

It was so quiet, however, the promised café was closed for the week, which wasn't so good. We'd had a big breakfast over 3 hours and 44 miles earlier, plus a quick cup of coffee at the Fortingall Yew, but nothing else, and it was still another hard 20-odd miles if we were to go to the end of the Glen and over the hills to Killin, rather than head direct from Bridge of Balgie. So, we filled our bottles from the river and examined our bags for what sustenance we had with us.



The main ingredient for lunch was the filled roll which Gregor hadn't been able to eat the day before just outside Fort William (glad it was veggie so he could share it - whew!) plus an energy gel each (saving one for later), a biscuit from the Bridge of Orchy Hotel, an energy bar each and a handful of mixed nuts and raisins. It would have to do!

At the very end of the road, where Loch Lyon hits the Lubreoch Dam, there was indeed a road heading south and up over the hills towards Killin, despite it not being marked on the map.

As a reward for the knowledge of this road, Gregor was gifted with the one and only puncture of the trip right at the foot of the climb. Well, his description of tarmacked, whilst not quite as bad as the Old Doune Road right at the start of the trip, was perhaps slightly imaginative, so maybe karma was catching up with him by now.

It was a lovely wee road with, unsurprisingly, no traffic. The climb up was steep and the drop down the other side made more difficult by the poor surface.



The Lubreoch Dam at the end of Loch Lyon

However, it was a nice 12 or 13 miles and the last of the traffic free routes for this weekend. Now, having covered some 65 miles or more since breakfast, and having only snacks for lunch, we went looking for food!

We found a café and treated ourselves to soup and pasta, and then thought more about how we were going to get home. It was now late afternoon and we still had a long way to go if we were to cycle all the way back to Edinburgh. We consulted maps and muscles and decided, in the end, we'd head for Dunblane. This would take us back to where we'd started and we could get a train from there to Edinburgh. We thought it would be about 33 miles, so should just take us a couple of hours, so we reluctantly headed out of Killin, towards Lochearnhead, and the road south that would eventually end up at Dunblane and the end of our trip.

It turned out to be a fast road for us and we did manage it in the two hours we needed to catch the train we wanted, though it was sitting in the station and we had to carry our bikes over the footbridge waving frantically so the guard would notice us and not signal the train to leave without us.

Exhausted, pleased we'd made it, sad it was over, we parted company at Haymarket where Gregor pedalled off up towards the canal path that would take him home in minutes while I waited for the next Fife-bound train that wouldn't get me home for at least another hour.

However, despite not travelling any distance on the West Highland Way as we'd originally planned, we'd had an absolutely brilliant weekend and cycled on some fantastic roads, many of which I hadn't cycled on in perhaps 30 or 40 years. We didn't break any records, we didn't publish any books sponsored by corporate conglomerates, we just went cycling for a few days, taking as long as we needed to cover the distances between the places where we wanted to be.

That's what cycling's all about.

George McDermid, Gregor Russell, 17th – 19th September 2016

MacNasty

the decline and fall

It looks like my time is in the balance on Phil's fancy tandem. He's always been hankering after a fastie rather than the braw slow lad frae the Kingdom of Fife. Phillip got his just desserts by recruiting Dick McT from Gala. Phil gets annoyed when we share a room on our travels and the loo floor mysteriously becomes flooded. I was given an ultimatum either sit on the throne like a lady or bring wellies for the captain. I don't think my ex-partner was enamoured with all my bad habits.

I'm just falling apart as an Audax rider: Aging fast, slowing and a bit du-lally. I'm not bothering now since gaining the trophy for completing 100,000 kilometres. On a lighter note Christine Minto recently presented me with the meritorious trophy for the 1974 Mersey 24hr. She discovered it when clearing the house of the late Les Lowe.



Auld age brings on many problems like how to wear out all the bikes and clothes. Most of my flash gear has been donated, such as shoes from Phil's partner, socks from Reg, black tracksuit from the wee wife (a going away present from our wedding 35 years ago). Racing vests from big Ronnie and jackets from my china's Peter and Phil. Gloves and hats are picked up from the road. Bikes from Al Sutton and Jean Harris. Al is 6ft and Jean 5ft.

I've never bought a new bike in 65yrs of cycling. Clothes used to come from the Army and Navy stores. I would like to thank all the audax event organisers who let a seventy year old shilpit nyarf slope off a few minutes early which keeps me in the body of the kirk.

After 40 years of audaxing I'm beginning to think my time is nigh. I'm now fantasising about my demise, dreams like struggling to stay ahead of the leading pack to the prime. Here I'm overtaken by 20 virgins who give me a wheel to the pearly gates. The high heid yin gives me a choice of receiving life membership to Audax UK, this must be hell on wheels or join the 20 virgins in paradise. Having just escaped from the clutches of Phil and his tandem, the 20 virgins sounds like a lot of fun.

Back to the living. In 2015 Phil and I took part in April in the 10th running of the Moffat Toffee 200km, arranged as usual by the fair Lucy with help from friends and Dick. On arriving at the finish my captain gleefully proclaimed that he and Dick will be going to the Parry Brest (Paris-Brest-Paris Audax).

I looked on in interest during their qualifying rides. It was music to my ears on hearing about their many misfortunes. On ascending the Fife hills on the 200km their tandem broke down. The 300km brought punctures galore so the last 25 miles had to be done on a flat rear tyre. In the wee small hours during the 600km the tandem was doomed near Moffat. A taxi was hired to take the duo to Gala then a bus back back to the start at Ponteland.

On the only other 600km available I was due to be stoker and powerhouse to Phil. I graciously gave my seat up to Dick on hearing about the fierce weather forecast. Graeme Wyllie cancelled the 600km Kintyre event because of the inclement storm. Our cosy couple wrestled with the elements to finish within 40hrs. I heard that they suffered (not enough for my liking) in heavy rain and gale force wind on the trip to Campbelltown. I'm sure this triggered Phil's illness a few weeks later while on a walking trip in the Alps.

The Parry Brest was out, as was our forthcoming Mersey 24hr. During late June I rode the Twilight 600Km (permanent) with a tailwind in both directions. The good will always receive their just rewards. On arriving home Margaret ran me a bath. She put in plenty of relieving luxury bath cream. I should have been on my guard for there were no rubber ducks for company. On trying to get out of the tub I fell backwards several times due to the slippery surface and cracked a few ribs and my head. Maybe I should wear a helmet in the hoose? Later on I noticed my life insurance policy was open on her desk.

I had to organise a train trip to Chester with the folding bike to ride the Mersey 24hr. A kind helper for Jane and Mark on the tandem trike gave me his super carbon fibre bike, complete with lights.

The saddle pin was too big so he took it to a garage and a bit was sawn off with a wood saw. I enjoyed pedalling along on a modern machine but only managed a mileage which once I could do in a 12hr in my pomp. I got good value for my entry fee in the food tents. This was my 40th Mersey 24hr.

The Ninewell's hospital cardiologist tells me that my irregular heartbeat is due to riding too many endurance events. he informs me I should wear it like a badge of honour. Gosh, I'm only a junior to those ultra-riders



MacNasty & Alex Pattison (not Phil)

The next weekend I started the National 400km run by Steve Carrol from Dingwall. Along the Sutherland hilly coast road my left foot took up a curious angle to the pedal. I finished up on the train from Tain. The following weeks I managed a 300km from Gala to Alston and return in a different pair of shoes without trouble. The lovely, lovely Lucy let me have an early start.

With the Parry Brest out Phil is soaking up to me for the 2016 season. I'm again thinking of stoking Phil's tandem if only to spend many happy hours on a 600km and 24hr watching that sexy derriere. A bit of useless information I'd like to divulge to the many men who are losing their hair. I was in that state in 1981 so I decided not to cut my hair anymore. I still have a happy mop.

Also Mrs MacNasty awarded me with a Brompton so that I didn't travel too far away. Lovely. I'll cycle 20 miles with the wind and jump on a bus for the return. I've taken the folder on the Golden coach to Inverness. You are plied with two scones, Irn-Bru and sweeties. What a wonderful life with a bus pass. All is good nearing the end, apart from Phil's saddle. I'm putting out a plea for a young damsel to pilot an auld mannie who wants to go faster.

I've made a will stating that my remains be used as a base for a 'Drum-up' fire. After toasting me with a Creamola Foam the gathered should put out the blaze in the Scottish tradition.

MacNasty

A True(ing) Story from Alec Robertson

Returning from a Wednesday meet at Ceres a few months ago I dropped by the Leslie Bikeshop with the intention of purchasing some Loctite to address a small problem with my back wheel. For the second time a spoke had loosened and lost its nipple. The shop had nothing in stock to solve the problem except the advice from the bike mechanics to ensure the same tension in each spoke! "That would be the cure for a radially spoked wheel" I spoke(!) to Andy outside and he opted for the Loctite!



Tony collected two new tyres, very kindly transported to the station by Don who looked, as I remarked, like Sylvere Maes as he cycled through Thornton with a tyre crossed over each shoulder. Don is of course too young to remember Sylvere Maes, but only just!

Back to the back wheel, I returned home and removed the wheel and tyre to tackle the repair, it can be tricky to recover the nipple entrapped in the rim and then locate it back on the end of its spoke. This done I tightened the spoke to a reasonable tension and then considered the advice from the bike shop, the equal tension requirement!

The spokes if plucked made quite different notes and it occurred to me at that point that I could utilise the electronic tuner for the mandolin. If not familiar these tuners clamp on the end of a stringed instrument and indicate the produced note. I therefore clamped the tuner on the rim and read the notes produced by the different spokes. This may be a novel way to true or "tune" a wheel, I don't know, but I tuned my wheel to B flat an ominous note perhaps for a bike wheel?

As I return to the road with my tyres singing, not very loudly, I leave you with three considerations.

- Is the back wheel still true?
- Is the story true?
- And well, Would I lie to you??



Annual Lunch

Saturday 14th January, 2017. 12:00 for 12:30.
The Upper Largo Hotel & Restaurant,
Upper Largo. KY8 6EJ

3 Course Meal with tea/coffee £16. Presentation of Prizes for

- **Most Attended Saturday & Wednesday Meets**
- **Best Newsletter Article**
- **Photo/Caption Competition (bring your photos to be judged during lunch)**

Please let Nan or George Shepherd know if you intend to come to the lunch.
You can let them know either at one of the Saturday Meets or by phone/email
phone day 01592 751500 night 01592 612942 email shepherd_45@hotmail.com