



Gartshore Bing, near Kirkintilloch



Riders refuelled at Hooe, the halfway point

South East England

Battle & Hastings

Dawn Eldridge describes the tenth anniversary ride of the 1066 Cycle Club

BEFORE LOCKDOWN, THE 1066 Cycle Club in East Sussex celebrated a decade on two wheels with an anniversary relay ride through the area around Hastings. We planned five different sections, and members were invited to ride as many of them as they wished.

The ride started in Robertsbridge, with more members joining in Battle. At the halfway point in the village of Hooe, we had a celebration cake and coffee. Then we continued in wet and windy conditions to Bexhill-on-Sea and Hastings.

Club Chair Sue Burton, who led the second section, said: "The relay ride was a great way for riders of different levels to join in and celebrate our anniversary"

The complete circuit of 45 miles was due to finish in the historic town of Rye. It didn't quite go to plan. Geoff Frost, who would've lead the final 14-mile section from Hastings to Rye, said: "Those of us who made it to Hastings were beginning to get chilly and damp. Plus it was getting dark, so we abandoned the ride in favour of one of the best fish-and-chip shops on Hastings seafront. After that, some of us cycled home and others caught the train."

Despite only four of the five sections being ridden, 19 members enjoyed taking part, logging 287 miles in total. We can't wait to ride the whole route in summer!

The club's website is 1066cycleclub.org.uk.

Scotland

Backyard touring

Exercise rides in lockdown let Clive Parker learn more about his local area

Lockdown, day one: for the first time, I found myself thinking that cycling on the road was safer than the cycle route. I headed west from Kirkintilloch along the Starthkelvin Cycle Path to Stathblane. This former railway line is popular with walkers and dog-owners; social distancing was a nightmare compared with the parallel, traffic-free road. Much safer to come back along that!

I then devised other journeys to explore the lanes that still exist in my corner of urban Scotland: the triangle between Glasgow, Cumbernauld and Airdrie. It's amazing how many new routes I found in the first eight weeks of lockdown, during which I cycled from home almost every day and clocked up over 1,500km.

Cycling some roads frequently gave me an insight into the farming timetable. Fields began as muddy clart, then were ploughed into heavy furrows, and then flattened with rollers. Finally the green shoots of barley appeared, reminding me there would be life after the virus.

I've enjoyed seeing relics that

show I live on the former Lanarkshire coalfield. Gartshore Bing is a prominent landmark, and the workings are still visible round the village of Annathill. Erstwhile mining villages such as Moodiesburn, Twechar and Auchinstarry are tranquil now.

It has thrilled me to see new views – not just from the two roads over the Campsie Fells but also realising that the peaks of Arran are visible from both Cumbernauld and Airdrie.

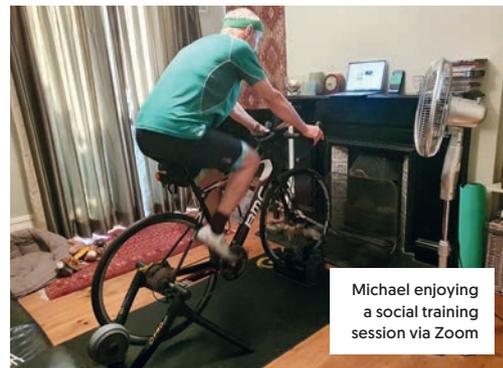
Will the lockdown see a new dawn, with more people cycling safely on roads? My experience has been consideration from motorists. Younger people I know have bought bikes. The future looks good.



Meikle Bin in the Campsie Fells, seen from Carron Valley



Dawn breaks: a mere 6,800 metres left for Laurence to climb



Michael enjoying a social training session via Zoom

Indoors

Turbo charged

Virtual training transformed Michael Nelson's lockdown

SINCE MARCH MOST of us have been hunkering down, not cycling far from home. I took the opportunity to try something different: Turbo Beat.

For a year, people in my cycling club had been saying I should come to the Turbo Beat sessions at Crystal Palace. But I was too tired; I was meeting friends; I was washing what's left of my hair.

After a while, I realised the real reason I didn't go was fear. Fear of being humiliated by fit cyclists who would show me up for the pathetic, weedy cyclist I am.

Except, as I now know, it isn't like that. Paul Mill, Turbo Beat head coach, took me to one side, and explained how "the wall" of performance brought everyone to the same level. Yes, you had to work hard, but it was to your own standard. He then sold me a turbo trainer so I could join his online sessions from my back room.

They are brilliant. But it is more than just getting fitter. It is, once again, a group activity. Tiny faces on Zoom stare out from my laptop perched on the mantelpiece. The titans of my cycling club are there too, suffering as I seem to. After one session, I mused out loud: "Why am I doing this?" Paul replied: "Because you don't have anything better to do." He's right: there isn't anything better to do than cycling.

On recent, longer 'real life' rides, I hear Paul's voice: "Dig. Push. You can do this."

London

Everesting Ally Pally

Laurence Kilpatrick rode up the hill at Alexandra Palace – many, many times

I had committed to the longest ride of my life, one that included three times the amount of elevation I'd ever managed in a single day. I was about to Everest the North London lump known as Ally Pally. I ignored the naysayers. A short sample: my chosen hill wasn't steep enough; too much flat was involved; I hadn't trained enough [at all!]; I hadn't thought it through.

The night before the attempt I ate my body weight in curry. At 2am I was out in the chilly London night. The streets were empty and I made excellent progress. Dawn broke at 6.30am. I had scaled over 2,000 metres – a quarter of the ascent.

Right on cue, a friend arrived to pace me up the hill for a few hours.

My conversational skills were already limited. He stuffed me full of food every 30 minutes and steered my thoughts away from towel-chucking.

Celebratory landmarks brought only gloom. Little joy can be taken from passing the 4,400 metre mark when it's 1pm and you still have ten hours of cycling uphill to contend with. My mood swung up and down.

Darkness fell on a roasting day. I was left alone with the hill. Ally Pally turned into a playground for the fast and the furious – car drivers, that is. I continued to toil: "Just one more lap, then see how you are," I told myself.

In the last hour, with only ten loops left to do, I began to think I might fail. I ate sugary gels. Friends pedalled alongside me. Their support was vital.

A sudden surge of energy coursed through me on my penultimate lap. I dropped my comrades and pelted up the nauseatingly familiar hill. Out of nowhere, tears spilled, relief that I would soon be able to stop pedalling. I fairly sprinted up the final ascent and tossed my bike down onto the grass, looking out over London and collapsing onto the floor. After 350km and 8,848m of climbing, I had just completed the hardest day of cycling in my life.



It's not a big hill – unless you ride it all day...

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