

My Favourite Ride # 2

The Devil's Staircase and Llyn Brienne Loop

A circular ride starting and finishing at Llandovery.

Distance 45 miles. Total ascent 3,500 feet. Max elevation 1,600 feet.

Terrain: Lanes, B Roads, some short sections of A Roads. Challenging.

This ride starts at the West End / Castle car park at Llandovery, SA20 0AN
51.993371,-3.798465 Google Plus Code X6V3+39 Llandovery

This is one of the most spectacular rides in Wales, there are views on this route that look as if they are in Austria or Switzerland as if you have cycled through a portal into another world. There are some lumps on this ride and one great big one namely the Devil's Staircase. Yes it is very steep but there isn't a hill in Wales that you can't walk up and you can walk up this one if needs be. Once upon a time on my trusty Dawes Galaxy touring bike with a very low Granny gear, I could cycle all the way with some zig zagging, these days, I don't have the legs or the gears so a short walk is quite acceptable and the sensible option.

From the start at The West End car park Llandovery we head toward the Station then right onto the A483 for about 4.5 miles, this is a busy A road so keep in single file and allow the group to spread out to allow traffic to pass, we do this because we are nice considerate people! There are some undulations and after 4.5 miles we turn right at Cynghordy toward Tirabad, get in a low gear to prepare for this turn because there is a sharp climb at the start and although it softens a bit, the upward slope continues for about 3 miles. There are some great views at the top of this slope so take some time to get your breath and share some wine gums! Continue onward with some undulations to Tirabad. Keep left and through the forest then along to Cefn-gorwydd, left turn here on NCR43 so take care not to overshoot, this takes us to Llanwrtd Wells. We are about 15 miles into the ride at this point. We can stop for a coffee here or get some refreshments from the convenience store, there isn't a formal lunch stop so a picnic is the plan at a viewpoint above the reservoir.

From Llanwrtd Wells we follow the Afon Irfon up through Cwm Irfon, a lovely ride alongside the river, we can stop for a pause at the wash Pool and share some more wine gums, then onward as far as Abergwesyn (20 miles). Note the very old post box at this junction. A left turn here up and along the Gwesyn valley, the Irfon is now on our left side. Some short climbs to get into the valley and then the rewards of the magnificent views and soon you will get the first view of the Devil's Staircase in the distance going up and up, at about 22.5 miles we will arrive at the foot of the Staircase and the 25% sign, just beyond the sign at the end of the trees is the first climb to the first hairpin and shortly afterwards the second hairpin, if you have successfully cycled past these, you are over the worse and "should" make the rest of the hill. If for any reason you have to stop, getting going again is very difficult indeed. There a couple of other problems on this climb, motorbikes, cars and Landrovers, these prevent the zig zags often needed to make the climb. Spread out and watch for a quiet period to start your climb.

Assemble at the top and prepare for a very fast decent of 1 mile and take great care for a left turn at the bottom of the hill and then we cycle though and along the Tywi Forest and follow the Afon Tywi on our right side all the way to the Llyn Brienne reservoir. There are some undulations on this road and some short sharp climbs until we reach our designated picnic stop at a viewpoint overlooking the Llyn, we are about 29.5 miles at this point. After our picnic we have a magnificent decent down

in the valley but as always after a decent, we have to climb back out of the valley but the views take the pain away! When we get to the top after this climb, one ride leader may exclaim “no more hills after this,” not totally correct but nothing painful from this point onward! About a mile or so later we have the option of turning right and going up to the dam for the views, toilets or refreshments. Afterwards we continue along the same road through Rhandirmywn (36 miles) and back to the start at Llandovery. Refreshments at the West End Café are always very welcome at the end of this ride.

The Gwesyn Valley



The first view of the Staircase



Here we go then



Our picnic stop



Devil's Staircase, Llyn Brianne Loop 45 miles, 3,500' total ascent



