

Ride Review.

Date: **Friday September 4th – Sunday September 6th 2015.**

Written By: **Dave Charlesworth.**

Shropshire Cycling Weekend, 4th – 6th September 2015. **Onibury, near Craven Arms (that's a place, not a pub!)**

It was with great anticipation that we all met up at Middleton Arena on the morning of Friday 4th September. The sun was out and the forecast was good for the weekend, so conditions looked to be ideal for our cycling holiday. We quickly loaded the bikes and everything else required for the weekend and it was then time to set off.

After picking up the M60 motorway, we were soon turning onto the M56 and heading for the more picturesque A49. With traffic flowing well, we continued to Whitchurch for a quick coffee stop at Sainsbury's. It was then full steam ahead to our destination at Onibury. Almost there and with just a mile to go, it was up a steep hill to the cottage we had hired for the weekend. Rod was quick to point out this hill would be the final stage of each of our rides with tired legs! It was however noted that the Apple Tree bar at the bottom of the hill may help to ease the pain!

With the key left ready in the door of the cottage, we all went in to see what we'd booked. We were met with a huge kitchen and dining room and a long corridor that ran the length of the building, from which the 6 bedrooms lead. This corridor was to also double as the perfect garage for our bikes. With a swimming pool and tennis courts at the rear of the property, everyone was happy that we'd made a good choice. After quickly choosing our bedrooms, it was time to get changed and get out on the bikes.

Friday's ride had been planned prior to our arrival and was a 45 mile round trip heading to picturesque Ludlow and its racecourse, on through Wooferton and down to Leominster.



Stunning Monkland lanes

The route then made its way over to Monkland. Whilst travelling through the beautiful lanes of Monkland, we noticed an oddly parked Peugeot car on the other side of the road. The vehicle had one wheel on the grass verge and had the rear wheels pointing out at a steep angle. Whilst passing the car, we were beckoned over by the elderly female driver. We parked the bikes on the verge and went over to offer our assistance. On approaching the vehicle, with its engine still racing at high speed, the cause of the problem quickly became evident, as the distinctive smell of a burnt out clutch wafted towards

us. The driver seemed most concerned at being around five miles from home in a car that refused to move forward. However, all was not lost as she had apparently experienced the fault before and had a cure. We were asked to rock the car from side to side and despite our assurance that this was unlikely to rectify the problem, it was clear this assurance was falling on deaf ears. We therefore duly obliged and car and driver were suitably rocked as instructed! Unsurprisingly, on restarting the engine, it was clear this car wasn't going anywhere further until a replacement clutch was fitted.

Whilst contemplating our next move, a police car arrived, followed soon afterwards by a second one. It seemed a passing motorist had either reported a car and bicycle accident, or possibly the harassment of a local driver by four Middleton cyclists! The headline in the local paper was already being written; Yob cyclists attack defenceless driver!

After confirming with the police that no accident had occurred and satisfying them that we weren't carjackers either, we left the car and its owner in the capable hands of the local officers.

Continuing on after our unscheduled break, we rode along further picturesque country lanes towards Mortimer's Cross and up towards Leintwardine before crossing back towards Bromfield. With a brief run on the A49, we then picked up the quiet back roads once again and headed back to Onibury. After 44 miles we were almost home with just the mile long climb between us and the cottage. However on such a glorious day, Rob couldn't help but notice the beer garden at the Apple Tree pub was being bathed in sunshine. His suggestion of a quick pint met with everyone's approval and in we went.



Post ride pint at the Apple Tree

One drink and some sunbathing later, we were on our way up the hill; somehow it didn't seem half as bad as we had anticipated!

It was soon time to think about our meal, so Dave, with the help of sous chef Chris, prepared fajitas and tortillas, which went down very well. A selection of wines was also available to accompany our meals; this was culture as well as cycling! An easy night followed, as a longer ride was planned for Saturday.

Unfortunately, Brendan had to pull out of the cycling weekend at the last minute, however his granola breakfast choice had made the journey! As a tribute to Bren, all felt compelled to try it on Saturday morning and dare we say, everyone thought it was actually very good! Following breakfast, we decided a short relaxing dip in the swimming pool would be the ideal way to set us up for the day ahead.

It was then time to set off for the Saturday ride. The route had been planned by Andy from Ludlow CC, who Rob had contacted the previous week. Andy had done a great job and the ride turned out to be a spectacular route covering 85 miles of predominantly traffic free roads and spectacular scenery. After a short run up the busy A49, it was a left turn onto a quiet 'B' road towards Clun and a chance to see the remains of its castle. Passing through the spectacular Clun Valley, it was on to a great descent into Kerry, continuing on towards Newtown.

A steady run on almost traffic free roads followed, with mile after mile of pretty villages and stunning scenery. With just under 50 miles covered, it was time for a cafe stop and Berriew provided the perfect establishment. Unfortunately, after going in, we were advised that hot food had finished for the day. However, after a bit of sweet talking from Rob, hot food in the shape of spicy parsnip soup was on and was it good! There was also the offer of a steak baguette and Rob immediately ordered one to accompany his soup. Thinking this was an excellent choice, Rod placed a similar order, only to be told the last steak baguette had just been sold; he was not amused! After soup, sandwiches and various other savoury and sweet offerings, it was time to get back on the bikes.

Suitably refreshed, it was on to Montgomery and then a climb to The Bog and Stiper Stones in the aptly named 'Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. The views from the top at Stiper Stones were simply spectacular and the steep climb to it was soon forgotten. After taking in the views, it was then a fast descent into Bridges. Unfortunately, just at the bottom of the hill into Bridges, five rather bemused sheep were evenly spaced across the road providing a very effective sheep barricade; it was clear they had no intention of allowing a group of cyclists to pass! After a short stand-off, it was 'every man for himself' to run the gauntlet of passing them, a task involving much noise and arm waving! After everyone had successfully completed the challenge, it was then a rolling run back along Long Mynd ridge, through Wistanstow and back to our cottage at Onibury.



Good food, but no steak left for Rod!

Chris had offered to cook Saturday's evening meal and without the need for a sous chef, prepared a great pasta dish with all the trimmings. With a glass of wine or two and a good chat, all were now refreshed after the day's riding.

Sunday morning was a glorious sunny day and we were keen to get out on the bikes as soon as we could. Our ride had been arranged with Ludlow CC and we were to join them for part of their regular Sunday run. We met up with them at Church Stretton, not least to thank Andy for his Saturday ride planning.

Joining their group of around twenty cyclists, we made our way through a variety of yet more picturesque roads, culminating in a final fast run through Craven Arms and back to our cottage at Onibury.

This was, unfortunately, the end of the weekend's cycling and all that was left to do was pack away our things and clear up the cottage prior to returning home.



On the road with Ludlow CC

With the exception of a short hold up around Oulton Park, the journey home was easy and uneventful and we were soon back in Manchester. All were in agreement that the whole event had been a great success and one we should definitely repeat next year!