

Day 10 – Following the world championships

When I arrived at Bolton Arms, Downholme, wet and cold, though the late afternoon sun was warming me up, Nicola greeted me and showed me my room.



There are only two rooms above the pub, mine was for up to three people and the other is a straight double. The rooms share bathroom and loo but when I arrived John from Gloucestershire with his two Labradors had not yet arrived so I was able to get washed and changed. I was, however faced with the problem of drying things out.

I went downstairs and found the pub busy with people eating, including John, a similar age to me, who was up in Yorkshire for a few days. We made small talk and then he went off to eat whilst I sat at the bar and had a couple of pints of very good Timothy Taylor Landlord bitter. There was a couple, again similar age, already eating in the bar and we got chatting. They have a house in the area and another in London. They

were very interested in what I was doing and over the course of a couple of hours we generally put the world to rights. By now I, too, was eating, a very nice seafood pancake followed by liver and bacon, cooked to perfection, with seasonal veg. I finished it off with an Eton Mess and the whole meal was excellent. The pub menu was substantial but everything was cooked to order, as confirmed by my new chums who often eat there because the food is so good. I persuaded Gail behind the bar to turn on the radiator to give me a chance of some dry clothes and by morning they were largely dry.

Breakfast this morning was a good FEB prepared and served by Nicola who has been managing the pub with her husband for 21 years. Until quite recently it and the whole of the village of Downholme was owned by the M.O.D in connection with the Camp at Catterick which is about 4 miles away. The M.O.D needed to do their bit for austerity so all the houses in the village were offered to the tenants and Nicola was able to buy the pub.

The morning was bright and sunny but still quite chilly when I left at 0857. There was a short bit of climbing but the general trend was downwards but with a lot of ups and downs, some quite steep, in the first 20 miles.

Now out of the hills, land use had moved from livestock to arable and farmers were hard at work putting the new crop back into the rich loamy



soils



There were hedge-trimmers out in force, scattering twigs and thorns all over the narrow roads, but my tyres were up to the punishment. At West Tanfield I crossed the River Ure whose upper reaches I crossed

near Hawes in 2016 and



soon after I was in Ripon which has made great preparations for the World Cycling Championships that are to be held in Yorkshire at the end



of September: indeed I have followed the route of the main road race all day and every junction has had a yellow sign preparing people for the disruption.



I stopped for a cup of tea and a leg stretch outside the Cathedral and then continued on towards Boroughbridge.

Before I set off I made a list of likely stops for lunch but up until today the only one that I have kept was the shop in Ecclefechan. However at around 1pm I spotted the Victoria Inn at Cattal, just before a railway crossing and remembered that it was my lunch stop for today. I went in



and ordered a beer and some crab cakes, both very good, and ate and drank in the garden in weak sunshine.

I was now just over half way to my destination and feeling sore but I had to keep going on what was the longest distance that I shall do in a day on this trip.

Through Tadcaster, home of John Smith's brewery I stopped at a bike shop as I was having trouble with my front mudguard and hoped that they might provide a solution but no joy.



Beside
the

brewery someone has been artistic with some scrap bikes to welcome

the UCI championships.



The last 25 or so miles were over flat countryside but the traffic around Selby and the Drax power station was heavy and made for an unenjoyable ride to Thorne where I am staying tonight. However, it has been dry all day with little wind and the general trend has been downhill.

narrowboats



Very light cloud and the promise of a warm day meant that I had shed my coat but had some removable sleeves against sunburn. The road soon crossed over the canal by a bridge that looks very similar to those seen in Holland and with the wind turbine farm close by we could easily

have been in the Netherlands.



I fairly soon found myself cutting across country on very rough roads, poor planning on my part but I was soon back on tarmac, very straight but narrow roads with the odd inconsiderate driver. I managed to draft behind an old David Brown tractor for a couple of miles: a bit noisy and smelly but it gave my legs a rest as it dragged me along at 12 mph.

The tractors were out in force in the fields cultivating and sub-soiling for the next crop. The black fen soils look good enough to eat.



At East Stockwith my planned route took me along the River Trent but the track was so bad that I abandoned it after only a few yards and worked out a different route to Gainsborough along the tarmac, adding a couple of miles to an already long day.

The A631 to Gainsborough, charmingly known as the Flood Road has a shared cycle and pedestrian path so my way was eased considerably. I stopped just the other side of the bridge at Gainsborough to consult the map and as I started off again the back wheel was a flat as a pancake. I put in a new tube but could see no sign of foreign objects in the tyre. As it was now about 1230, the time I had expected to be in Lincoln (still 20 miles away) for lunch, I stopped at Aldi to buy a couple of Scotch Eggs, a punnet of English Plums and a bottle of elderflower water.

The road to Saxilby was good and easy cycling but there was a fair bit of roller coasting which sapped the energy. Here I ran into my second planning issue when the road along the Fossdyke Navigation waterway was blocked by an industrial unit. Again I had to work out an alternative route adding another couple of miles but I eventually ended up beside that waterway as it made its way through Lincoln.

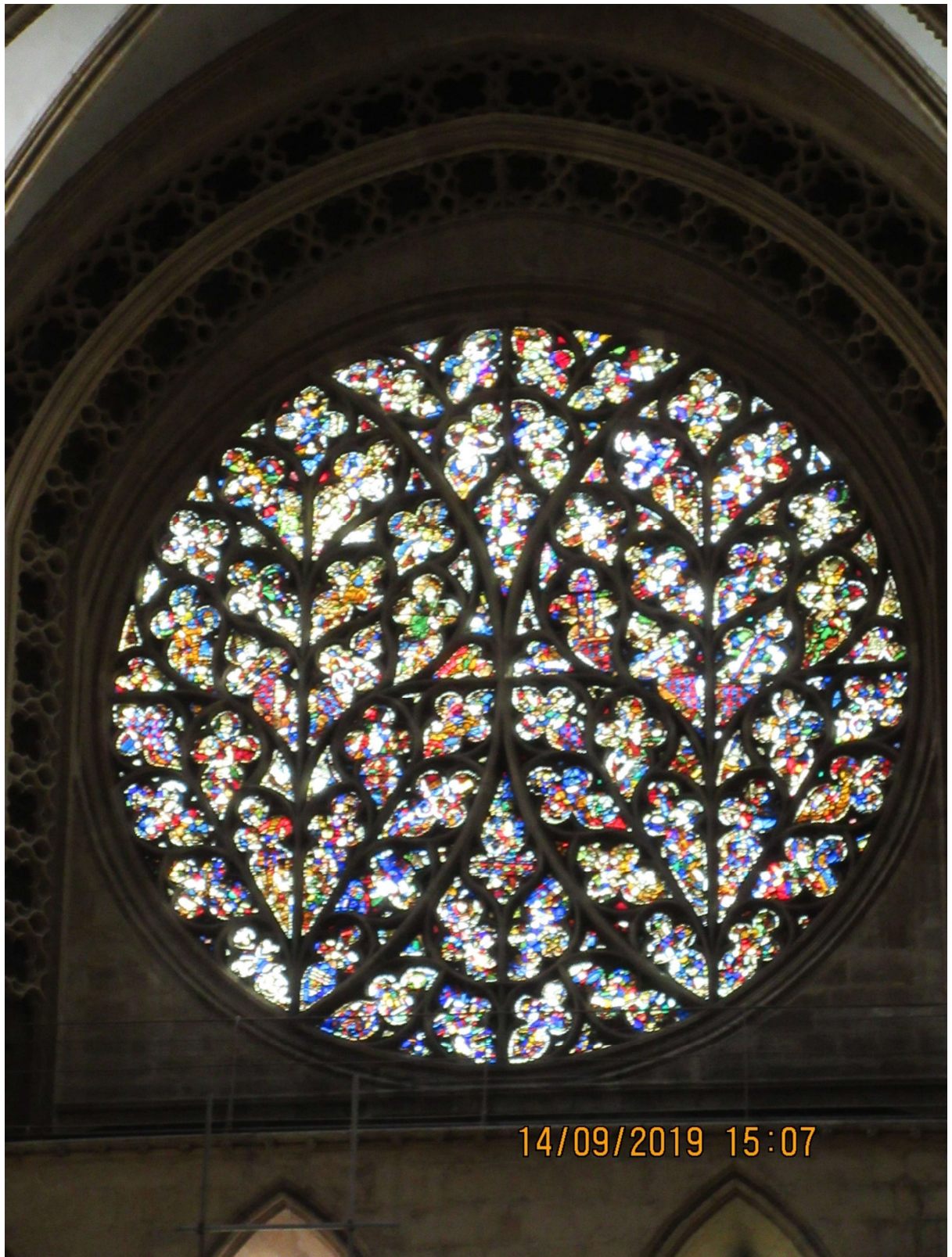
It was now after 230pm and I still had at least another three hours cycling to reach Boston but I wanted to go into the Cathedral as I had only seen it from the outside on my previous trip in 2016. I figured as long as I was away from Lincoln by 3.30 it would be OK. The problem with Lincoln is that the main City and Cathedral sit on top of a steep hill, so I had to cycle up that before I reached the Cathedral which is swathed

in plastic and scaffolding



The interior is stunning with some beautiful stained glass and stone carving and I'm glad to have made the effort





Apart from anything else it put in perspective my puny efforts of cycling long distances, against the faith and effort of those who raised this

beautiful building. I was certainly uplifted when I left to continue my journey.

What goes up must come down and I raced down to the bottom of the hill and joined the large crowds who were promenading through the shopping centre at the bottom of the, so called, Steep Hill.

I then had to cycle up another hill to get out of Lincoln. Fortunately this had a good shared path the full 4.5 miles to Branston (not, I find, the home of the eponymous pickle which comes from Branston ,Staffs).

Past Branston I had to cope with a busy B road until I turned off to Dunston and the attractive village of Metherringham which seems to be a busy place with plenty of amenities.

Shortly after I left the village my route took me down a road closed to cars which made for easy cycling until I came to an unmanned and close gated railway crossing where I had to telephone for permission to cross. I was given the Ok and continued until I reached another busy B road which took me to Billingham which I reached at about 5pm with, at least, another hour and a half to travel.

I was now in real Fen country, long dead straight roads, the one across Holland Fen 5 miles before it turned slightly. Just past Dogdyke the bike felt strange and I had another puncture, this one in the front wheel. I don't know what it is about punctures, but they seem to invariably come in pairs. I fished out a spare tube and again could find nothing in the tyre. I Whatsapped the family to let them know that I was unlikely to be in Boston before 7pm and set off. Just as I started pedalling, I went to hitch up my shorts, lost my balance and ended up with a bloody knee when the bike came over on top of me. Grrrr.....

The surfaces were OK but the roads narrow and quite scary when infrequent cars came past at speed, but I was now getting very tired as the light faded and the last 10 miles or so seemed to take forever. Fortunately the last 5 miles or so were on cycle paths. To crown it all I

had a plan on the Garmin which took me to the wrong hotel and I then had to find the correct one, fortunately very easily and I landed, as suspected, at about 7pm to be greeted by Bev who showed me my room and where to put the bike for the night.

Day 12 Wiggling round the Wash

Boston, Lincs is best known for “The Stump”, the 267 foot tall tower of St Botolph’s Church. Like Lincoln Cathedral it is undergoing some restoration but I took a picture of it last night, that disguises the cladding, on my way back from eating Mexican food at Los Burritos. It was good and cheap and very noisy with some exuberant diners



shouting and banging the tables. Boston on a Saturday night is well set

for trouble with Security Guards outside most of the main pubs, but they were having a quiet time as I walked past.

I was staying in the Magnet Tavern, a pub with rooms, and the room I was



given was fine in all respects with a decent shower, The clothes that I washed on my late arrival were dry by morning and I paid £6 extra for a FEB which was good and sufficient.

The day was bright and sunny, and I had loaded up and left by 0900. My route was designed to stay off the main roads, though, being a Sunday, the traffic was light. For the first ten miles I wiggled my way across flat, open countryside with few trees or hedges, through small villages with the faithful attending church services. I saw hardly any cars, indeed it was 9 miles before I was passed by a vehicle and that was a tractor.

I was making for Fosdyke Bridge which takes the busy A17 across the River Welland but, fortunately, there is a narrow cycle track so that I

avoided tangling with the traffic.



Although there was a head wind and my legs were not feeling especially good, I still managed 11.7 miles in the first hour and that increased to 25.3 by the end of the second. I avoided the A17 by wiggling through the Holbeach villages to the south of the Wash and was enjoying the ride. There were all sorts of crops growing including a field of pumpkins, presumably for Halloween, though many of them seem well advanced.



There were wind turbines taking advantage of the stiff breeze



At Sutton Bridge I had to join the A17 as it crossed the River Nene but, once again, there was a cycle track along the side of the rather magnificent swing bridge.

My planning let me down and I had to wait a considerable time to cross the main road to take to a parallel track which quickly deteriorated from tarmac to deep potholes. At the end of it I then had to re-cross the main road and realised that I could have stayed north of it all the way.

Now 30 miles into the journey I was able to follow the road through Walpole Cross Keys and Terrington St Clement before crossing the Great



Ouse River just south of King's Lynn.



As it was close to lunchtime and I was getting short of water, I went into the town and bought some pork pies and plums from Lidl and a lime and a bottle of fizzy water. I squeezed half a lime into each water bottle and topped up with the sparkling water, a refreshing drink without any sugar.

I was quickly back on route once more and found myself climbing into very different countryside. The climbs weren't steep, up to about 4% but went on, with a few descents in between, when they topped out at 300 feet after about 26 miles. The landscape was now punctuated with trees and hedges, very different from the start of the day and I went past a chalk quarry at Castle Acre that had turned the roadway white.

I must say I hadn't anticipated quite so many hills, but my legs had picked up and I was feeling much better than when I set off. The only

thing that hadn't improved was my bottom which was feeling sore and I made a point of getting off the bike regularly to get some relief.

It was now predominantly down hill all the way to Dereham, a substantial town but with a centre full of charity shops and cheap stores. I stopped for 20 minutes to recharge my batteries with some more water and chocolate.



Just out of the town centre is the railway station which is operated by the Mid Norfolk Preservation Trust as part of the Dereham to Wymondham heritage railway. There are plans to link it into the main railway system to provide a service between Wymondham and Fakenham.

The final 12 miles of the journey were on back roads with light traffic until I arrived at my destination the Premier Inn at Norwich Showground. It was another long day in the saddle but trouble free so a lot easier than yesterday and I was in my room before 5pm. Tomorrow, all being well, I

shall tick off my third “extreme” at Lowestoft Ness.



Day 13 – The third extreme

Premier Inn’s beds certainly live up to their reputation for comfort and, despite the traffic noise from the nearby A47, which I had spent much of yesterday avoiding, I slept as well as on any day of this trip.

I had managed to get a very good deal, Bed and Breakfast and a two course evening meal for £61.99. The meal was fine but not outstanding, mushroom soup followed by steak and ale pie with veg. I ordered some extra veg which were surprisingly well cooked, including some baby broad beans. A pint of Doombard was included in the deal but I had another, so, with extras, the whole night cost under £70 which was a bargain. The icing on the cake was that the receptionist offered to wash and dry my kit for me. Well done Whibread who not only brew some quite good ales but gain 70% of their profits from Premier Inns.

The weather this morning was a complete change again, fine mist which soon fogged my glasses, but equally soon cleared as I wiggled my way round the south of Norwich. I managed several wrong turns but the whole way through the city was either on proper cycleways or shared paths along busy roads. Occasionally I had to cross a major road but that was easily done at traffic lights. However it was a slow process and I managed less than 10 miles in the first hour, slow by even my standards.

Because it was such a dreich day I took few pictures and most of them are so bad that they're not worth publishing but the countryside between Norwich and Lowestoft varies considerably with some rolling hills and vales



with hedges and trees down to the levels reminiscent of Somerset as one crosses the River Waveney at St Olaves, by a bridge with a decent cycleway to keep away from the traffic. I passed Somerleyton Hall, a grand Anglo-Italian mansion mainly built in the mid 19th Century with gardens designed by Joseph Paxton. Apparently the lake was used by Christopher Cockerell in early experiments for the Hovercraft, but gardens and Hall were both closed so no chance to explore.

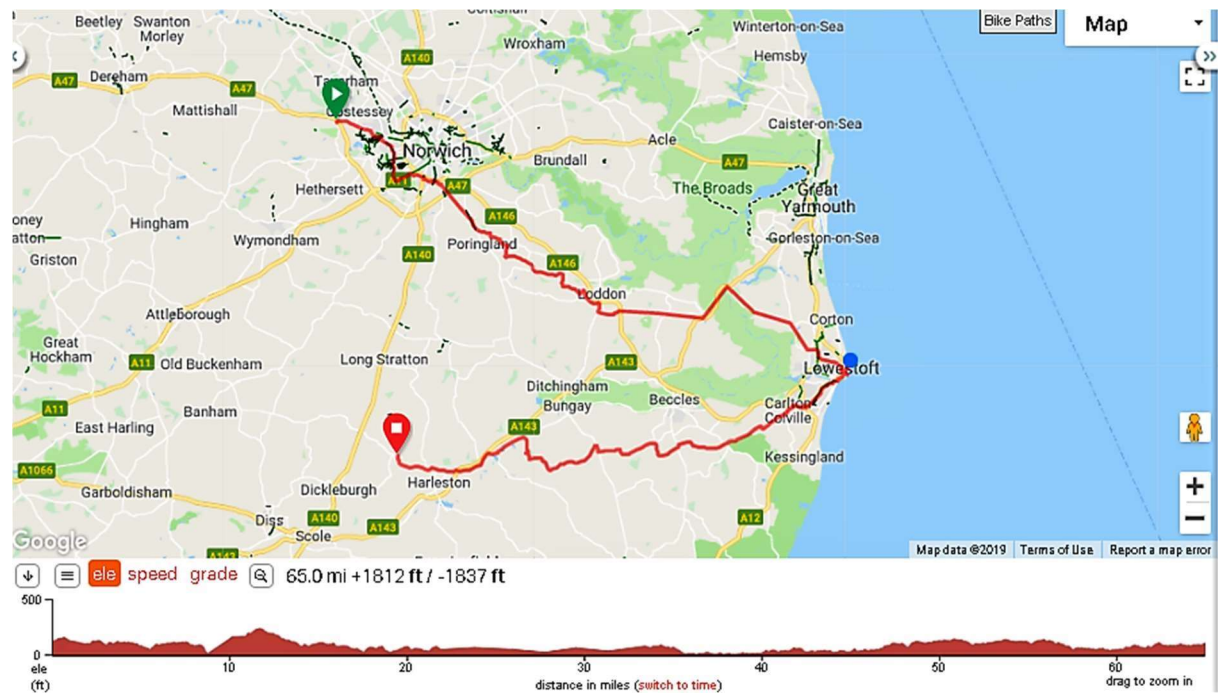
I was soon into Lowestoft and made my way to the centre, again along good cycleways, and then lost my bearings in my attempt to find Lowestoft Ness, the extreme easterly point of Britain. It actually stands at the end of the prosaically named Gas Works Lane and indeed the old gasometer with buddleia and other plants sprouting from its roof is on the route. I avoided a lorry backing slowly into an impossibly small yard space but the skilful driver managed it and I tipped a metaphorical cap to him as I found the seafront. The site has a large stone circle known as the Euroscope showing directions and mileages to points of interest.



When I arrived there was no one handy to take a picture but a couple turned up with two spaniels and, as I spoke on the phone to Rob at home, were trying to set up their camera to take a selfie. I wheeled my bike down to the Euroscope and offered to take their picture in exchange for one of me. It transpires that they own a holiday chalet in Lowestoft but live at Freeland in Oxfordshire very close to where I shall be in Cassington in a couple of days time – a small world indeed.

I cycled back towards the centre of town and found a burger van where I sat down for a cup of tea and a cheese and tomato roll in the shadow of the giant wind turbine known as Gulliver.

Inner self satisfied, I carried on along more good cycle lanes and paths through the 'burbs until I reached open countryside and had a delightful ride, in somewhat improved weather, through small Suffolk villages and hamlets for the final 25 or so miles to my destination Pulham St Mary where I am staying with cousins Tim and Jo Webster.



Despite the weather it's been a pleasant day of cycling helped by the achievement of the 3rd extreme.

Day 14 Newmarket and Cambridge

Jo and I share a great grandfather which, we decided, makes us second cousins. She and her husband Tim have lived in East Anglia for many years but, about seven years ago, bought a 1930s house in the village of Pulham St Mary. They immediately knocked part of it down and built a very eco friendly extension using Structural Insulated panels. The result is a lovely warm house with a great feeling of space and light and it was here I spent last night.

Three years ago when I was visiting every County Town in England I stayed with Jo's sister Lindy and her husband Freddie, who I know well, in Birmingham and Lindy suggested that I stay with Jo, who I had not met, on my way from Norwich to Chelmsford. Jo and Tim were kind enough to put me up on that occasion and, as I was passing again on this trip, they welcomed me once more. We had a great chatty evening enjoying eating the fruits and veg of the garden and Tim gave me some

useful tips on building and I got him going with Ride with GPS. It was lovely to relax in good company, eat well and benefit from the washing machine.

I had a rather restless night but felt OK when I came down at about 8 for breakfast and, having packed everything, was on my way at 0904 on another bright but chilly day. A couple of days ago I was attempting to download today's route onto Gary Garmin and somehow managed to delete it completely. The result was that I had two different routes on Gary and Rita which was confusing. As Rita's route seemed shorter I decided to take her advice and hope that she didn't sulk too much as has been her wont lately. For some reason she doesn't record the route properly, failing to follow the roads and, too often, fails to give me a verbal cue which means I have to stop and check that I am going the right way.

For the first 30 miles the road twisted and turned through wooded landscape and cultivated fields. There are some picturesque villages with beautiful churches to see on the way.



Because my route was un-edited I found myself going down narrow grassy lanes and across wooden foot-bridges, at one point avoiding a

ford.



I took to several dirt tracks, flushing a large covey of partridges hiding on the edge of a wood



The countryside was largely flat with few climbs of any consequence but at one point I nearly fell when my wheels bogged down in loose sand. I

had to push through it but was soon out the other side.



My route was skirting north of Bury St Edmunds on quiet lanes with occasional forays for a mile or two on busy roads. I was making for Newmarket, home of English flat racing with about 3500 horses in training and one in three local jobs benefitting from the industry. The roads straightened and undulated and I didn't reach the town until about 145pm. I stopped at a Burger Van in the High Street for a bacon buttie and a cup of tea and carried on past the race course and another unusual road sign to add to the Scottish otters. The horses even get their

own traffic lights.



It was now about 13 miles to Cambridge and I was surprised to find there were no cycle lanes or paths along the straight roads that

encouraged fast driving. It was not until I reached the Missing Sock, a quirky restaurant and wedding venue at Stow cum Quy, about five miles from the city centre, that I picked up a



cycle track. I could have stayed off road the whole way but opted to take the most direct route which meant cycling along pavements

Cambridge is a city for cyclists: there are thousands of them, and they seem to co-exist with pedestrians. I cycled across Midsummer Common looking across the River Cam at the university boathouses



And then on over Jesus Green meeting with more than one bike/pram three- wheeler – it seems to be the way for mother and baby to travel in Cambridge.



Past the children leaving school in Park Street for the day and down past St John's College and

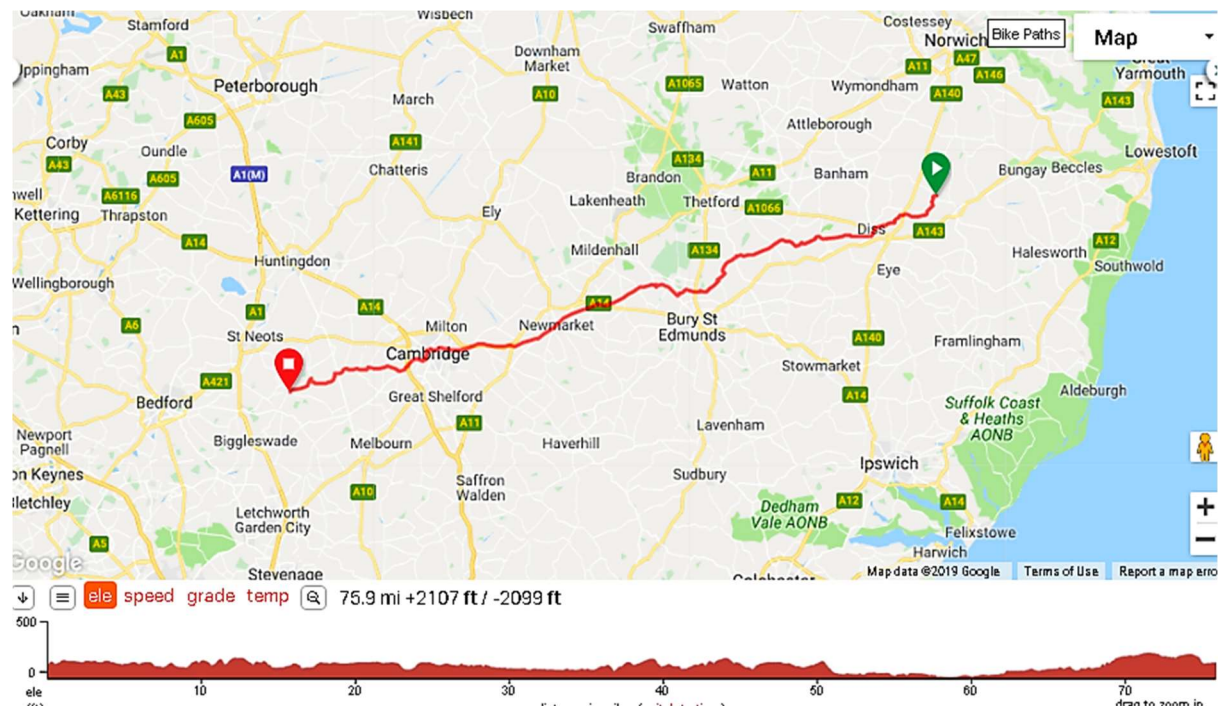
Gonville and Caius and the grandest edifice King's College Chapel

before crossing the river once again at Scudamore's boatyard, with the punts standing ready for hire.



Along Newnham Road for the last hard 15 miles to my

destination at Gamlingay. My energy was flagging badly but the good cycleways as far as Comberton helped. After that it was mind over matter as I battled the final stretch to Taylard House where Sue greeted me with a cup of tea and biscuits.



Day 15 – Beds, Bucks and Oxon

Andy and Sue bought the old rectory in Gamlingay when they had young children and were both working. Some years later they were both made redundant at the same time and decided to buy the local pub which was as redundant as they were. Having made a success of that, they bought another pub and having got that working well, decided it was time to step back and relax. By this stage the children had left home, so they sold both pubs to concentrate on turning their family home, Taylard House, into a Bed and Breakfast business which they have now been running for 12 years. It's slightly unusual having shared bathroom and loo facilities but it's very homely and I spent a comfortable night that was improved by an excellent breakfast. My fellow guests were two ladies who were "facilitating" a meeting for the RSPB at Sandy - no I don't really know what that means either, but Polly from Suffolk and Helen from Bath had been drafted in to do whatever it was that was necessary. We had a pleasant chat and went our separate ways.

I was a bit late setting off on a lovely bright sunny day, when I realised that I hadn't downloaded the route onto Gary Garmin and had to unpack the computer to do so, so it was quarter past nine before I got going. I'd arranged to drop in on an old rugby mate of mine from Bedford who lives on my route and I turned up at Bob and Sally's house in Haynes at about 1045. We had a cup of tea and a good natter and I moved on at about 1130. The way was relatively flat, a few ups and downs but nothing too testing until I reached Woburn where there is a steepish section up to the main park,



over a cattle grid at either end with notices telling motorists to kill their

speed not the deer. I saw no deer but picked up a bit of speed the other side and added to my quirky list of notices with this one.



At Little Brickhill I joined the A5, a major road with very fast-moving



traffic. There was a rather poor cycle lane along-side but I felt far from safe. I turned onto another A road by-passing Milton Keynes when I felt the back tyre going down just as I was going through some road works. I managed to find somewhere to pull over and changed the tube but when I blew it up saw that the problem was with the tyre – there was a big hole in the side wall and the tube was pushing through. This is where the wonders of the internet prove their worth. I googled for bike shops and found one in Bletchley about a mile away. No, the owner didn't have a 42mm tyre to replace exactly the faulty one but he did have a 40mm x 700c tyre that would do the job. I slung everything back on the bike and made my way gingerly back through the roadworks and into Fenny Stratford High Street to P and D cycles, an unlikely looking Raleigh agent who provided what I needed for £12. I'm not sure how puncture proof it will , but it got me to my destination.

That wasted about 40 minutes of the day, so I was now well behind schedule. I'd hoped to get to Cassington by about 5pm but it was clear that wasn't likely to happen. In the mid Seventies I lived near Bicester and regularly travelled to Bedford to play rugby and that should have been roughly the route I was following but, amazingly to me, I was going along roads that were totally unfamiliar. Just past Verney Junction the navigators asked me to take a route that I couldn't see, incurring a 5 mile detour through the Claydons.

I wiggled my way down towards Blackthorn where we lived when first married. I'd determined to pass Woodbine Cottage and take a picture. I stopped outside and walked up the path to knock on the door to ask

permission but there was no-one at home, so I took a picture anyway.



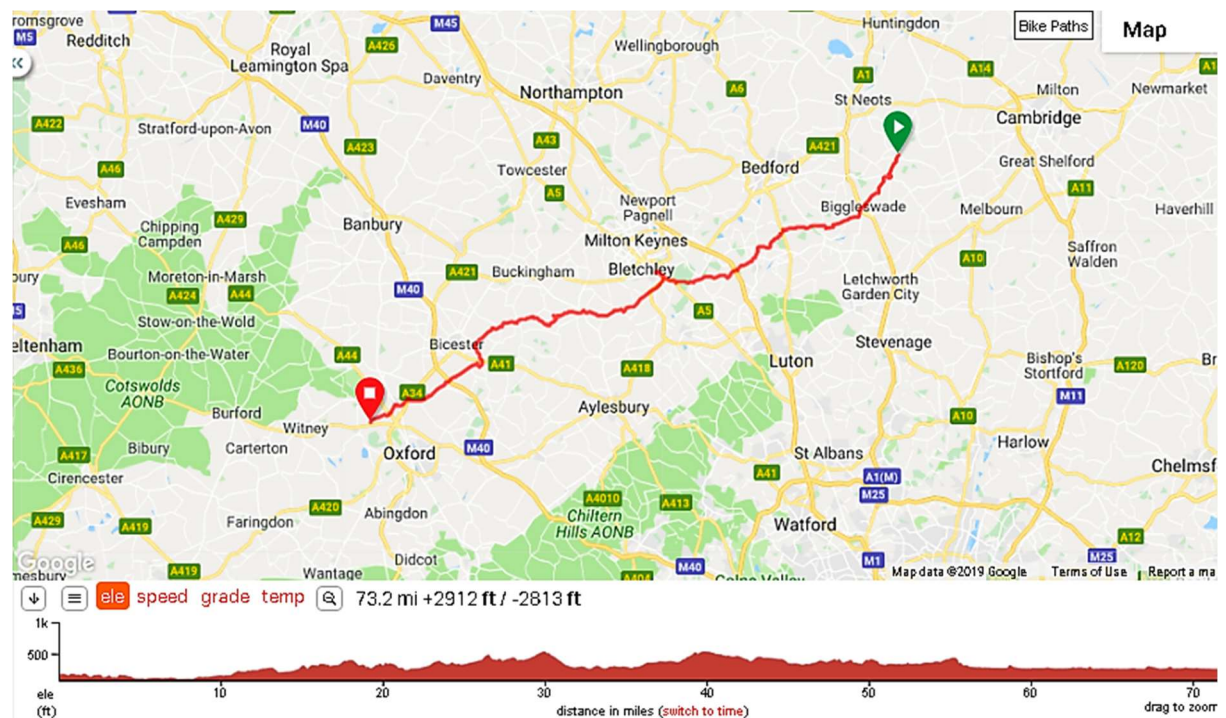
From the road the cottage looks much the same apart from the fact that the wooden garage has been replaced with something more substantial but the extension that housed our kitchen has been improved greatly with a glass fronted living room. I was sorry not to have found the present owners at home to talk about the house but I needed to move on.

Through Ambrosden and Merton and along the arrow straight road
across Otmoor



with traffic whizzing past, and the early evening traffic coming from Oxford to the surrounding villages.

I was feeling tired again, a long hot day with the tyre incident was exhausting, with ten miles still to travel. On through Islip and Kidlington with lots of cars to contend with then taking to an unmade track with lots of potholes before emerging onto the tarmac at Yarnton for the final three miles to cousin Annie's house at Cassington, arriving at about 6pm.



Day 16 Biking to Brizzles

When I finally arrived at Cassington last night, after what seemed an eternity in the saddle, cousin Annie was out in front of her house talking to her neighbour. I was quickly ushered in and given a pint of Fursty Ferret to improve my humour. We are first cousins and know each other well so there was no standing on ceremony. I had a shower and changed, and my clothes went into the washing machine before an excellent supper of broccoli and blue cheese soup, cottage pie and veg and fruit and ice cream. We chatted whilst I did the blog and didn't get to bed until after 11. I had a decent sleep and Annie cooked me an excellent FEB with her winnings from the meat draw that is run in aid of the Sports and Social Club – particularly good sausages from the local butcher.

The morning was bright and sunny, but there was a chill in the air which had me in my wind jacket until after lunch. I set off at about ten past nine, heading for the A40, main road from Oxford to Cheltenham. I had to follow this for about 5 miles to Witney: there is a reasonable cycle path that keeps you away from the traffic but it was nice to turn off and enjoy a bit of peace and quiet before I cycled through the centre of town. On the way to the centre there is a shared pedestrian and cycle path that takes you across the water meadows. There were a lot of people walking in the sunshine and dropping children at school.

I crossed back over the A40 on the way to Brize Norton, its RAF base now the centre for repatriation of British military personnel since the closure of RAF Lyneham. Mercifully there have been few casualties in recent times.

The route was essentially flat with small fields surrounded by high hedges and the cycling was easy. I passed through Fairford, its large 15th century church



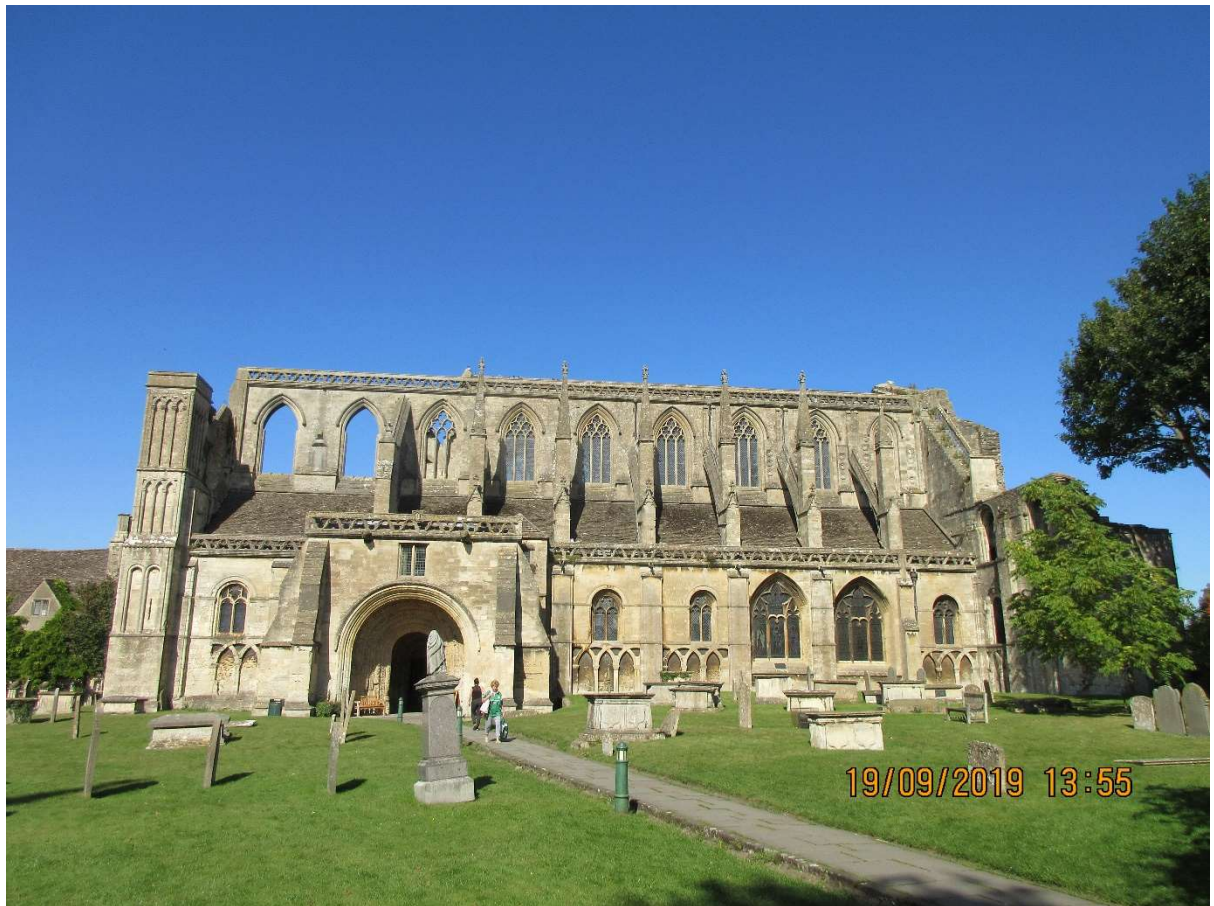
built on profits from the wool trade that was, for many years, the main money earner in the Cotswolds. The nearby RAF base was used by the USAF bombers in the Iraq war and prior to that in the early 1970s Brian Trubshaw flew Concorde 002 from there during its testing.

On through Down Ampney, widely known as the name for the music of the Hymn "Come down O love divine", composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams who was born in the village.

I was now entering the Cotswold Water Park an area with about 150 lakes formed after the extraction of gravel for the building industry. Gravel mining largely ceased in the 1970s and the lakes now form habitat for birds, plants and reptiles as well as some that are set aside for water sports: indeed when at college at Cirencester in the early 1970s we used one of them for rowing.

38 miles into the journey I joined the busy A429 close to Malmesbury where I stopped for lunch and a break at the Malmesbury Garden Centre. My route took me through the centre of the town where I stopped to take a picture of the Abbey, much smaller following the collapse of the spire and tower in about 1500, but still an impressive

structure.



Little change in topography but the roads started climbing imperceptibly. I joined the arrow straight Fosse way for three miles and shortly before Grittleton was taken down a dirt track that soon

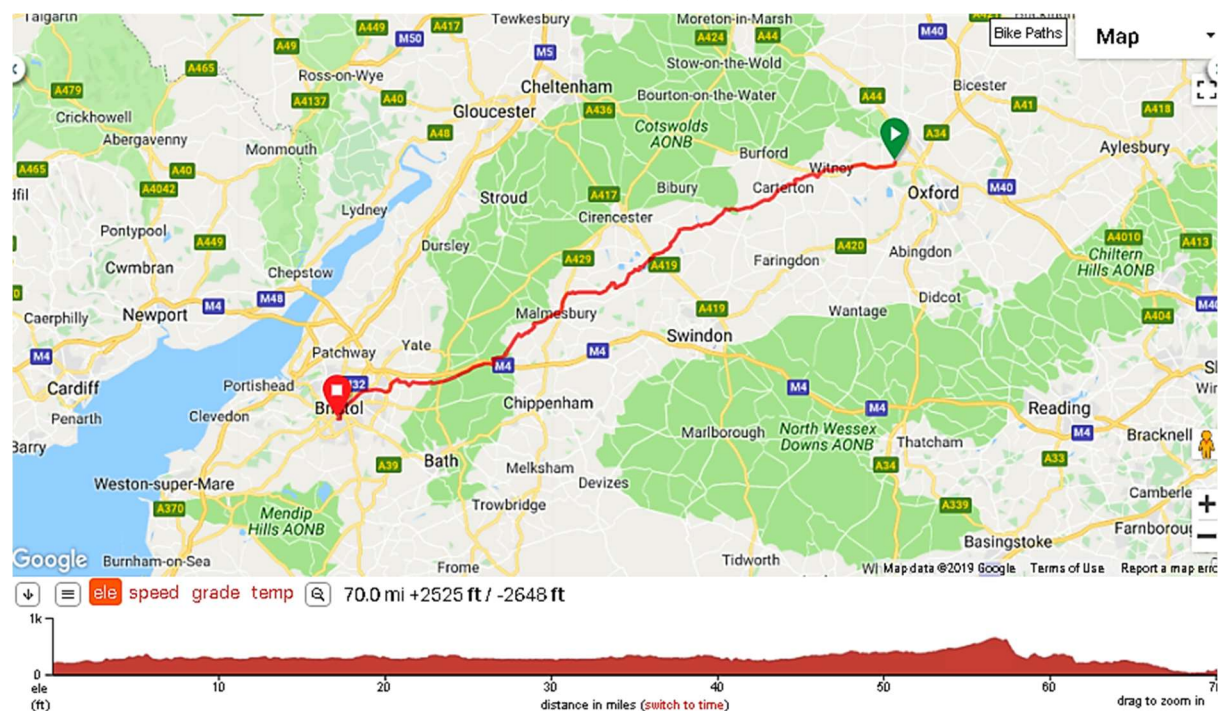
deteriorated to grass



I kept one foot unclipped for the mile or so before I emerged at Littleton Drew where I crossed over the M4. The ground now started to go up until I was climbing 3-4% slopes for about 5 miles. It was enjoyable in the sunshine and I was feeling much better than of late. At Tormarton the Cotswold Way crosses the A46 which was nose to tail traffic in both directions. I had to wait for a good five minutes by the Crown pub until a motorist took pity on me and allowed me to scuttle across.

The general trend was now downhill with a few sharp rises around Pucklechurch, shortly after which I joined the Bath to Bristol railway path which is one of the jewels in the crown of Sustrans used by millions of people for cycling and walking. This kept me off public roads until I was close to the centre when I joined cycle paths all the way to my son Tom's house close to Victotia Park. I was staggered by the number of cyclists using the railway path: admittedly it was towards the end of the working

day but I have never seen a busier cycle path.



Day 17 – Across the levels and into the hills

Tom's new-found culinary skills were put to the test last night. I arrived in reasonable order after a fairly easy day in the saddle, though the saddle sores persist and make life uncomfortable for the last part of each day. He stuck a beer in my hand and then went off to prepare an excellent lasagne which was followed by millionaire's cheesecake which would not have disgraced a restaurant. Another beer (or was it two?) and I was ready for bed and a decent night's sleep.

No FEB this morning; I had to make do with a bowl of cornflakes and a mug of tea but it kept me going until mid-morning when I stopped for an egg sarnie and some apple juice just outside Cheddar. I left about half my kit with Tom to take back to Horsington in the hope that I won't need it for the next couple of days.

Getting out of Bristol without competing with the traffic meant wiggling round the back streets and through parks, so was a bit slow and the first hour saw me less than 10 miles from the start.

At Congresbury I joined the Strawberry Trail, a cycle route that goes from the north coast of Somerset to the South Coast of Dorset. The main part of it is an old railway line from Yatton to



Axbridge and, as I got to Winscombe there was a good turnout of ladies jogging north as I made my way south. After a false start heading for Cheddar I doubled back and joined the A38 where I was able, most enjoyably, to undertake about 50 cars moving slowly uphill towards some road works. Soon after I turned off across the Somerset levels, flat but with a considerable head wind that slowed me down. Through Mark village and on towards Huntspill with a sharp climb as I made my way towards Bridgwater.

Realising acutely that my rear tyre, acquired in Bletchley, was far from puncture proof, I toyed with the idea of stopping at SJS Cycles in Bridgwater, who specialise in all things to do with touring bikes to buy a replacement, but decided to push on to my lunch date with Rob's parents-in-law who live just north of Taunton. Inevitably on the

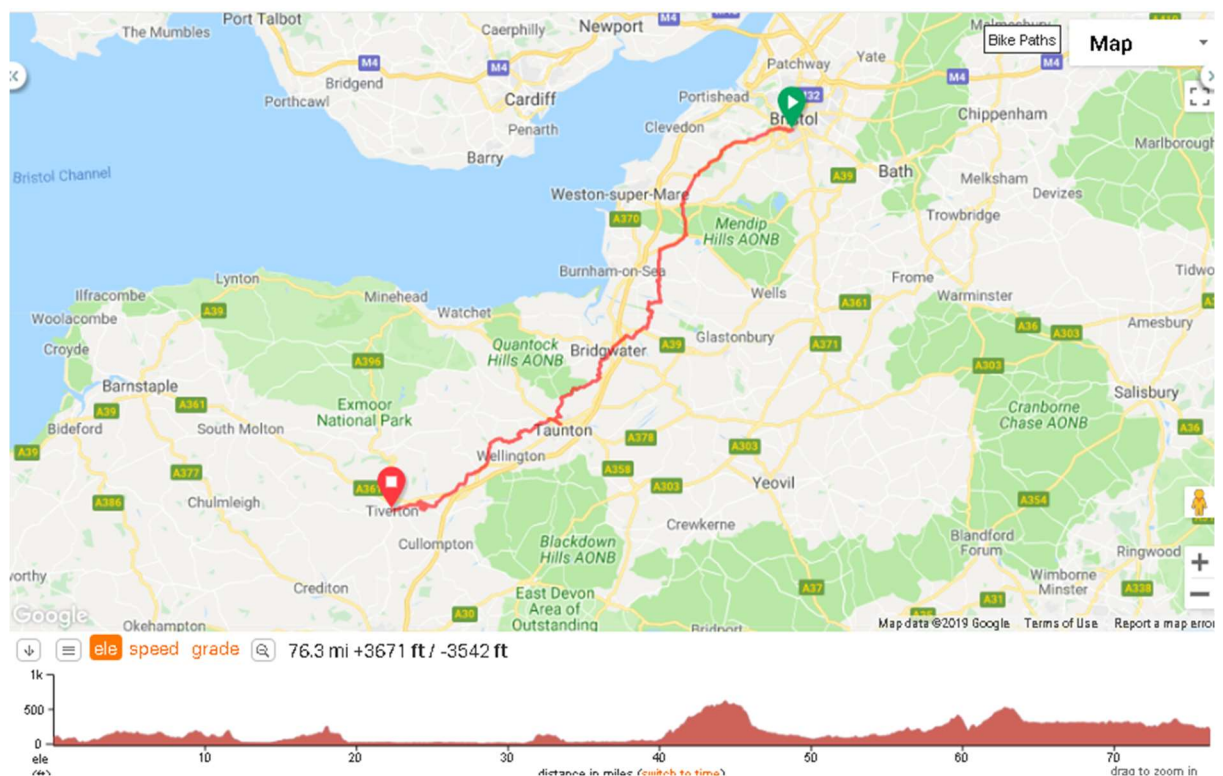
outskirts of Taunton I felt the back tyre go down and had to stop to replace the tube. There was a thorn in the tyre and, as every farmer around seems to be hedge trimming, this will be ever more likely. My planning was far from ideal as I toiled up significant climbs on my way to my lunch date but eventually arrived an hour or more behind schedule. Anyway, thanks to a nice lunch and a break off the bike I felt better for the second part of the ride.

Knowing that I still have two full days of cycling ahead of me it seemed pragmatic to have a back tyre that was as puncture proof as possible, so I Googled bike shops and found that Bike Chain had a depot close by. They were able to supply a suitable tyre which is now in the pannier in case of another puncture.

I still had another 25 miles or so to travel, much of it along the Grand Western Canal but before I got there, I had a lot of ups and downs. After a brief but hard climb up the A38 I joined the canal just past White Ball and had a nice run enjoying the swans and ducks.



There were a lot of people walking dogs, or just themselves, and narrow bridges which involved slowing down and unclipping. I managed to take a totally unnecessary detour through Halberton, going around in a complete circle before realising that the best thing was to follow the road signs to Tiverton. I passed Blundells School, advertising an Open day before making my way through the centre of town to the Bridge Guest House. Here I met up with Simon, who lives in Horsington and has kindly volunteered to join me for the final two days over Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor to the Lizard. He had taken a train to Taunton and cycled on to Tiverton: I shall be glad of his company on the punishing journey ahead.



Day 18 – Hills, hills and more hills....

The Bridge Guest House in Tiverton is run by Richard and Ling and provides basic accommodation at a reasonable price. I met Simon, who lives in Horsington, at the property and we each had a single room with a shared bathroom. A good FEB this morning and a bill for £35 each was perfectly acceptable.

We went over the bridge to the local Wetherspoons inn for a drink or two and then next door to an Indian restaurant that has only been open for about 7 weeks. It was very

good and was doing good business in the early evening. We probably each had one more pint than we should have done, so both felt slightly under par when we left at 0915 on a beautiful sunny morning.



We were immediately into some hefty climbing, making our way out of the town on the well-named Longdrag Hill. Neither Gary nor Rita recorded the first bit of the trip so there is about a mile missing but, having decided to make contact they both behaved impeccably for the rest of the day.

Longdrag Hill turned into Tombstone Lane and there were some very steep pitches, including one where I had to get off and push for about 50 yards. We were making for Okehampton along narrow lanes with high hedges so only occasional views of the rolling countryside with its red clay soil



Chiefly livestock farming but with some fields newly planted with crops, the, by now, strong wind was blowing the red dust across the road in front of us: fortunately the high banks protected us from the wind for most of the day.

We had a lunch-time rendezvous with family members at the Castle Inn in Lydford where I have stopped for lunch in the past. By the time we reached Okehampton it was clear that we wouldn't be joining them at the appointed hour of 1pm and by the time we had climbed up the steep hill from the centre of town to the railway station which is the starting point of the Granite Way it would be close to 2pm before we met them.

The Granite Way is an excellent cycle/pedestrian/horse trail that runs around the edge of Dartmoor for about 9 miles from Okehampton to Lydford. It has a well maintained tarmac surface for the entire length except a strange little section in the middle which is a permissive path that has not been adopted, and runs through scrubby woodland with a hardcore track and gates at either end. It's a bit of a nuisance but it doesn't prevent access and we were soon through it and on our way to the pub. Towards Okehampton is the Meldon marshalling yard and station that runs a few trains a day back to Okehampton and is the location of



the magnificent Meldon viaduct built to take the London and South Western railway in 1874 but unused by rail traffic since the 1990s. The Granite Way now runs over it and it was the breezy crossing today. When the only existing rail line to Cornwall was seriously damaged at Dawlish in 2014, thought was given to re-establishing the line; but the Meldon Viaduct was not deemed safe enough and the main line was soon repaired.

We met up with Annie, Kate, Davide and two year old Matteo who had been at the pub since about 12 and were now more than ready to leave for the journey back to Horsington. Knowing that the weather forecast for later in the day was not good we had a quick snack and kept going.

The way switch-backed up and down. I have covered this part of the journey twice before, from south to north when I completed Lands End to John O'Groats and the same direction as today in 2016 when I cycled between Exeter and Truro to complete my bag of County Towns.

Shortly after Lydford Gorge, a National Trust site, the road rises up to Brent Tor, an 1100 foot high weathered volcanic plug on which St Michael's church was built in the 13th Century

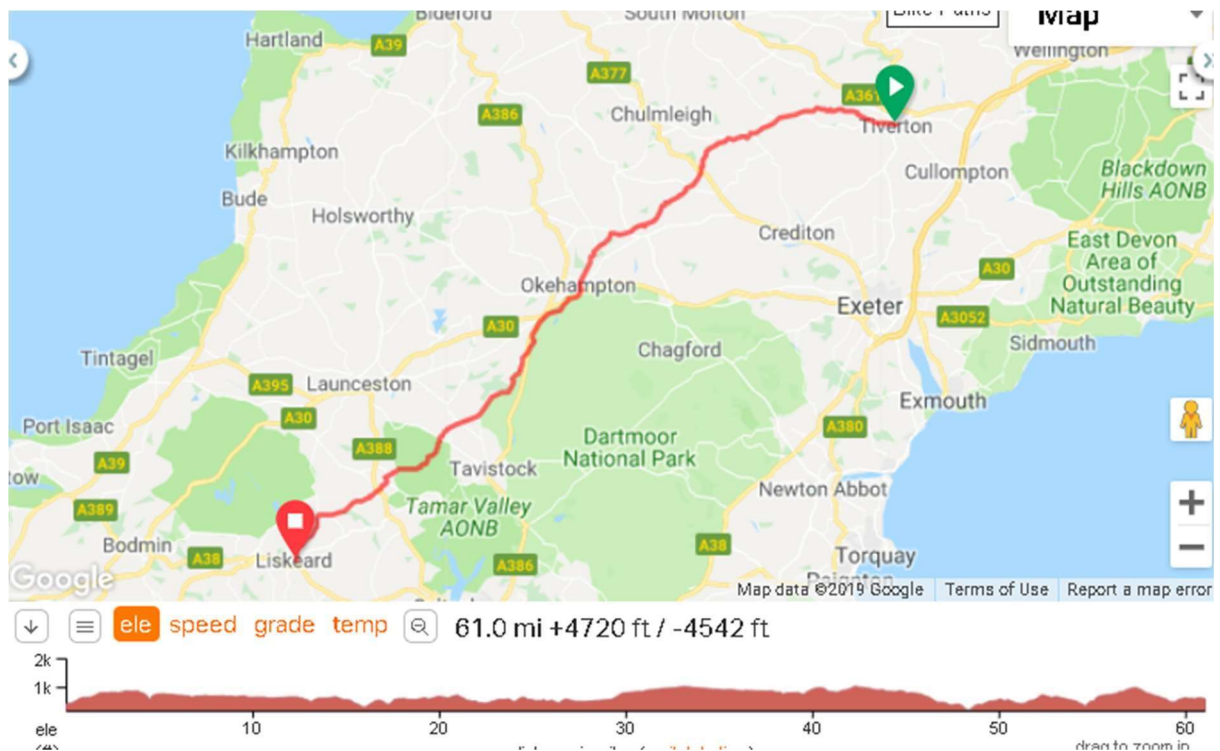


At this point the weather was starting to worsen, cloud was moving in and the forecast was for rain. The road continued level for a while and then dipped sharply to Sydenham Damerel before descending to the River Tamar which is crossed by Horsebridge an ancient six arch stone bridge which has stood, largely undamaged since 1437.



As always happens what comes down must go up and there was climbing to be done and between Golberdon and Pensilva, Gary Garmin registered 15% and we were both struggling to keep going. The first spots of rain started to fall and when we reached Pensilva we pulled in under the bus stop and donned wet weather gear. As we made out way along the main road to Liskeard the rain became heavier and going over the open common it was hard to see. Fortunately it cleared and we reached our destination the Nebula Guest House at about 5.30 to be greeted by Debbie and Peter who made us most welcome with a couple of beers.

It has been a hard day, as I knew it would be, but strangely satisfying. I felt better at the end of the day than many previous days. Having Simon as a companion helped get me through the worst bits but I generally felt stronger: here's hoping that it continues tomorrow when the weather forecast is for rain and winds all day with a distinct possibility of thunder and lightning.



Day 19 – This is the end

Debbie and Pete have been talking about giving up their jobs in East Sussex and starting a B&B for a long time and at the start of this year

bought The Nebula Guest House in Liskeard and spent time and money on turning it into the sort of place they would like to stay in themselves. Debbie met two rather bedraggled cyclists at the door and we were invited to put our bikes in the front storage room as Pete's "shed" was too full. There is a nice sitting area and, unusually, for a B&B, a well-stocked bar which we immediately made use of. After a good shower and change Simon and I made our way down the hill, for Liskeard is built on the side of a steep one, to the Wetherspoon's pub for something to eat. With Wetherspoon's you get cheap food and drink but no frills. Ordering from the bar takes ages because there are not enough staff members and most of them are rushing round fulfilling orders that people have made on the app. However the food is fine, my fish and chips and Simon's chicken burger well prepared and tasty enough. Real ale at £1.69 a pint and lager at £2.99 is way cheaper than you'll find elsewhere but it's a bit like a motorway service area – zilch atmosphere and bouncers on the door every night of the week. However I decided to test the app and ordered apple crumble and custard, paid with my card on-line and 5 minutes later it arrived at table 43, as requested: impressive.

The weather forecast promised rain all day so we were pleased that it was still dry when we came down for our FEB including bacon that Pete had cured and smoked himself; it was a bit too salty, and I told him so, but quite a nice sweet cure. It was a pleasant stay with some nice people and Debbie came to the door to wave us off.

We started out down the steep hill into the town centre and then further down to the A38. I had hoped to stay off this completely but could not get onto the the parallel road that runs through the trading estate so we had to put up with it for a mile. Fortunately, being Sunday, it wasn't too busy and we turned onto the A390 which we stuck with

pretty much all the way to Truro, up and down like a roller coaster especially out of Lostwithiel where it steepened considerably. We had some spits and spots but it didn't come to anything as we made our way through St Blazey and around St Austell or, as Rita, who operates a text to speech system insists, Street Austell.

The hill out of St Austell is a brute, about two miles of steady climbing but just out of the comfort zone so we were glad to take a rest at Probus where we bought food and drink at the Village Store. We saw the creek at Tresillian, the tide only half way in but we knew we were close to Truro, Cornwall's capital city with a fine Cathedral viewed from the harbourside



But before we got there we had a vicious climb up past the Rugby Club as the rain came down hard. We were able to shelter under a tree successfully and the storm passed quickly.

Another energy sapping climb up the hill to Highertown, past a stranded motorist whose car was blocking one of the lanes in heavy traffic and through Playing Place and Carnon Downs and back down to sea level at Devoran.

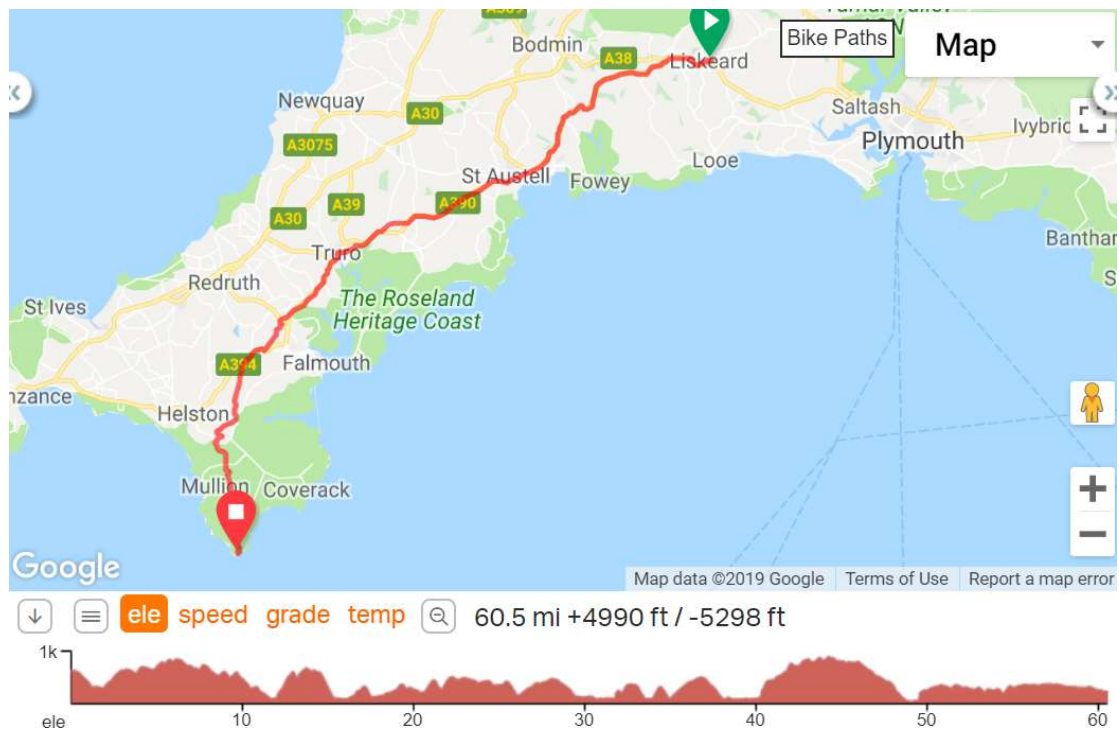


Finally we were able to leave the main road just past Perranarworthal and caught a glimpse of Carnon viaduct as we cycled up the steep hill. The original viaduct was designed by I.K Brunel and had timber arches supported by masonry. The timber is gone but the stone remains beside the replacement 9 arch masonry built structure that rears about 100 feet over the Carnon river.

We continued along narrow lanes, which was a blessed relief from traffic noise until we had a mile or so on the A394 to Helston before turning onto back roads to Gweek. This was when the rain really started and we stopped to put on extra jackets as it was also quite cold. We stopped at the shop in Gweek for drinks and biscuits and then took the sharp climb from the Helford River back to 500 feet above sea level, passing RNAS Culdrose and onto the A3083 for the final 12 miles to Lizard Point. The last 5 miles in spitting rain and head wind seemed to take forever but we finally arrived in the National Trust Car park at about 1545, only 15 minutes after my ETA, to find Tom waiting to pack the bikes and us in the car for the return journey to Horsington.



We took the photo beside the lighthouse in spitting rain, with the signpost to Lowestoft clearly visible, and then Simon and I were able to change into civvies in the loo block. We drove at great speed back to Somerset, stopping for some food at Exeter services which has become a food court with all sorts of cuisine on offer, certainly a great deal better than Abington where I stayed 11 days ago, and arrived at Home Farm at 8.25pm.



So that's that, another challenge completed without major mishap.
Time to think about the next one.....