

News for March 2015.

**Brian Griffiths joins the 300 club:**



You may not know that there is an organisation that recognises people who have cycled three hundred thousand miles. That is a lot of miles in anybody's language - half a million kilometres. Those of us who know Brian, how long he has been riding and how much time he spends on his bike could do the sums and work out an annual average total that would appear to be fairly modest. The thing is that you have to provide evidence of the distance covered so his true distance would be a lot higher. Here is photo of Brian at Compton Martin with his badge pinned on his chest.

**Thursday 5th March 2015. Bitton to Hinton Blewitt - report from Bill Balchin:** There were mixed emotions turning the calendar page from February to March. On one hand it means that more grains of the sands of time have gone but on the other it is now officially spring with the promise of better weather and new growth sprouting up all round. As it turned out for our first ride of spring the hedgerows are still bare, chewed-up branches and the whole peloton was in longs and jackets but at least we had a break from the rain - and even saw the sun a few times. Pete announced that he would be reprising his route from last August which was ridden in the wet. I didn't remember it but of course that was during my "vertigo" period of being off the bike. I brought out the on-board video camera again today hoping for some better recording with some light for a change. My two big problems are vibration shaking the camera going over the rough road surfaces, plus trying to get ahead, film the group, then having to chase back on again. Have a click to view.

With (mostly) dry roads today the descending must have been a lot safer than the previous visit. Woolard Lane needs all your attention in the dry so it must be a handful in the wet. I tried to stabilise the shaking camera by putting one hand on it while I used my back brake only but soon gave up on that to use the front brake as well. Going along Publow Lane over the bridge past the church always looks like a typical English countryside scene so I hope that bit came out alright. The lanes got a bit muddier after Pensford

under the arches but dried up through Upper Stanton Drew as we cruised to the lake end of Denny Lane by half past eleven. That's a bit early if you are going to Hinton Blewett - unless you turn right through Chew Stoke and go along Breach Hill Lane. This was looking a bit serious, getting close to the Butcombe Triangle. But we only went as far as Awkward Hill before turning towards the eastern end of Blagdon Lake and heading towards Hinton Blewitt again. Take that Butcombe Triangle, we're not afraid of you - Pete said so, not me sir.

The closed road after the Blue Bowl took us into West Harptree once we had squeezed past a gang of workmen installing huge water pipes. On through East Harptree and Litton and then it was time for a left turn into Back Lane and begin the climb to Hinton Blewett. What a swine! But then there is no way of getting there without some serious climbing - good job it is a good pub. I was almost on my knees. There just one lady taking food orders and selling beer so a bit of a queue formed as we enjoyed being away from the cold wind. We had a hard but uneventful ride so it was a surprise when John Turton and Jane rolled up asking if we had seen the rest of the easy rider group. A bit later Roy Benney and Dawn arrived having lost contact with Tony Galpin and John Bishop. Eventually John arrived to explain that Tony's tyre had split and exploded his inner tube requiring motor assistance. So eventually we (nearly) all got to the Ring O'Bells. I thought that the numbers were pretty near Pete's default estimate of twenty five but their facebook page reckons thirty seven!.

[Today's dry road surfaces - where were they? Click here to see.](#)

**Thursday 12th March 2015. Ashton to Axbridge. Report from Bill Balchin:** Another dry Thursday although still not particularly warm. Just me and Ian Deegan had any skin on display with the three-quarter longs leaving a few inches of lower leg to absorb the vitamin D from today's occasional sunshine. John Killick led the way to Axbridge today for the group of fifteen on a route with minimal climbing. When I first rode with the group as a youth of fifty-nine in 2007 I thought that John was one of the senior guys. I could not keep up with him then and still can't now. So while JK was cruising at the front of the pack I was pushing along as the back-marker.



The first hour of the ride saw us arrive in Congresbury via the Festival Way, railway path, Backwell and Claverham. The usual team trial along the main road from Congresbury to the Puxton turning was ridden at eighteen mph. We then eased off on the lanes through Puxton and East Rolstone to enter Banwell past the Brewers Arms. I have been through Banwell a few times by car, always on the narrow rat-run through the middle. Not today though! John took us across the main street and on more little lanes, now with plenty of ups and downs, that took us over the M5 and through Christon where we could now see Crookes Peak on the left. Swinging around in a left loop we rode the ups and downs of the ridge that looks over the Somerset lowlands.

Dropping into Cross past Frankie Howerd's old house the Mendips proper were now in front of us - but no need to climb them before lunch with Axbridge just up the road. We can sort out the return route after lunch. And what a pleasant lunch it was. The Lamb is another five star pub in all departments - two course menu for seven fifty, Cheddar Valley for the cider heads and Butcombe Haka for the ale drinkers. It was practically compulsory for a two pint strategy - but that brings problems to the unwary. You can be lured into crazy things like going home via the climb of Cheddar Gorge, which is how I found myself grinding along behind a rocket propelled peloton. I think we should insist on a one pint limit for Cheddar Valley drinkers. Martyn was off to the races as usual and Mike Sennett was pushing the pace for the rest as we took the familiar route past the shooting range, West Harptree and a split in Chew Stoke for Bristol or South Glos. I was glad of the vitamin D boost after clocking up 79 miles today, or then again it could be the Haka that kept me going.

[Click here to see those vitamin D enriched roads.](#)

**Thursday 19th March 2015. Amcor to Brookend. Report from Bill Balchin:** There is a lot going on in the solar system at the minute. The Spring Equinox, a lunar perigee or supermoon and a partial solar eclipse all coming on Friday. But here on Earth, Thursday is the highlight of the week with a ride from Winterbourne to Brookend for the BTOTC. Although David Woodward was planning to lead he was laid low by flu-like symptoms and confined to bed by Mrs Woodward. So we wish David a speedy recovery and thank Pete Campbell for stepping in to take over the leadership role (again).

The weather yesterday started cold and misty but cleared up eventually to a glorious sunny day. Today was expected to be similar and it certainly started with mist and low temperatures. Mark proudly showed off his new fingerless mitts from Lidl but I was glad to have big long finger gloves as the sixteen of us rode the Old Gloucester Road to Tytherington before crossing Milbury Heath and dropping down to Rockhampton. Pete had led this route previously so had some extra loops in reserve in case of arriving before noon. We took cycle route 41 through Hill and Ham into Berkley where a few nipped into the Berkley Tea Rooms, so say to check it out for a Tuesday coffee meeting venue. The rest continued on the generally dry and flat lanes under grey skies into Wanswell. Only a couple of miles from the Lammastide and still half an hour before they open the door we carried on to loop through Halsmore and into Purton for a look at the canal. After the bridge keeper had moved us off the bridge he swung it round as Pete had arranged for a canal boat to pass by for our entertainment.



With still a few minutes in hand we took the turn into Sharpness and then into Brookend arriving right on twelve. The Lammastide always does us proud and gets a big crowd of cyclists. I think somebody reckoned there were forty bikes outside. I did not check but would not argue. In among the crowd it was good to see both Phil Hodgson and Berry Parker who made their way independently. A quartet from Bath and eight easy riders boosted the total. Sitting around the lunch table the easy riders had a serious debate about whether "easy rider" or "pootler" was the more suitable name. John Bishop even passed me a copy of a newspaper article decrying exercise and expounding the benefits of pootling - although it was written by a bloke who edits a magazine called "The Idler". He sounded like a lazy git to me. But just think - would Peter Fonda have had much success with a motorcycling film called "Pootlers"? I reckon it's got to be Easy Riders.

With such a big turn out I had to get a group photo. As well as printing it here, I will also put it in the photo gallery (in give us your best shot) with names underneath so you can check how many folk you can put a name to. The sun made an appearance as predicted for the photoshoot and gradually burnt off the cloud to give us a sunny ride home. Back into Berkley there was a nasty incident when the group stopped and Steve Hicks was shunted up the back by another cyclist. At first glance it looked like just a bent spoke until somebody noticed a dent in the rear stay of the aluminium frame - bummer. Steve was able to ride it home. Let's hope some bike shop wizard can sort it out.

Route map? Everytrail is not accepting updates, so click [here](#) for the ride of 21 February 2013, which was more or less the same. Pete will keep trying to upload today's route.

**Thursday 26th March 2015. Bitton to Compton Martin. Report from Bill Balchin:** For the second Thursday in a row Pete led the ride, this time from Bitton to the Ring O'Bells at Compton Martin. Despite overnight rain the fifteen starters were expecting a dry day with sunny spells. Pete introduced new boy Alf on his first BTOTC ride before summarising the route as sections of cycle track with hilly bits in between. Also riding today was Catherine who turned many heads in her supermodel-chic, red and black, leather-look cycling top. Into Bath, the two tunnels and onto the Wellow trekking centre provided our first bit of cycle track immediately followed by the first hilly bit - a plunge into Wellow and climb out the other side. Heading towards Shoscombe we did not see the Apple Tree pub but did pass one of those nice road signs that says no through road - except for cycles. The sun started it's policy of popping in and out all day, and the views over the rolling hills in the sunshine were super. If a cyclist from London were to have joined us after battling with metropolitan traffic they would have thought they were in heaven.

The next section of cycle track took us into Radstock. It must have rained more out this way than Bristol as there were numerous puddles and those on bikes without mudguards soon had splattered backs. Back on roads for a few hundred yards in Radstock we rejoined more flat cycle track into Midsommer Norton where it was time to put on your climbing legs again to get to Clapton where the lanes flattened out and on to Ston Easton, over the A37 and A39 to bomb down a drop into Litton. At last I had a clue where I was as we continued through East Harptree into West Harptree and a cruel slog up with the hunger pangs kicking in before we reached Compton Martin. Pete had predicted a twelve thirty arrival and that was pretty spot on. For a guy living in central Bristol to find out all those lanes and tracks then ride it a few days before to check the timing - well that's beyond the call of duty. Thanks Pete.

The Ring O'Bells was pretty full with a garden crammed with bikes - mid thirties was the total. Another big contingent from Dawn's group who have now decided that they wish to be officially known as the easy riders. Plus our regular south of Bristol folk – John Upward, Brian and George.



Two non-riding diners were Phil Hodgson and Steve Hicks. Steve has started the ball rolling with the first BTOTC/CTC insurance claim after his bike was damaged last week. The supplying dealer has declared the frame as non-repairable and due to Cannondale's pricing policy a replacement frame and parts transfer would be more expensive than buying a new bike. It will be interesting to see how this whole business

works out. After a longer ride before lunch there was no dissent against taking the direct way home. It's always a pleasure to use Undertown Lane and Bickfield Lane to get back to Chew Valley Lake before negotiating Chew Magna and Norton Malreward for the third time this month.

On the way back I had a text from Martyn. While we conquered Compton Martin he conquered Alpe d'Huez - show off. (Above, Martyn's bike with actual alpine snow in the background.)

[And click here for the route map, using a new tracking product called Ramblr.](#)