

## Humber Bridge 400k Cycle

Here I am on the start line with 33 other cyclists. Nervous of course! But also excited and very curious as to how I will handle cycling through the night. It's a glorious day, bright sunshine, barely a cloud in the sky. Neil calls us together for a photo and send-off. "All look this way" says Eric, "Just one more" and we are off ...

But before we start the cycle, how on earth did I get here? "I'm not a cyclist, I'm a runner really" at least that is what I used to say and I meant it. Last year I cycled 12 times and, although about half of those were long cycles, i.e. over a hundred miles, I still thought of myself as a runner who threw in a few bike rides. My final cycle last year was a 60 miler early in November. It was cold, it was hard work, and so I gave up cycling completely for the winter which confirms I'm not a cyclist, doesn't it?

Cycling resumed on 1<sup>st</sup> March when training began for this event. But what on earth made me decide to ride a 400k? I mean, it's not easy, it's bound to hurt and it could hurt for a really, really long time. Well, for me, three factors:

- If Neil had not cycled it I would have continued to consider it totally beyond my capability; something to be left to the super fit and more than slightly insane.
- Neil encouraging me, which made it "well, maybe one day I might, possibly, maybe think about it".
- The clincher, my friend Martin having a very nasty accident made me decide that if you wait for "well, maybe one day" you might not get it.

So training began; I made up a schedule based on how a runner would do it and set myself some goals:

- 100 mile cycle by end of March. **Failed that one!**
- 100 miles every Sunday through April. **Failed that one!**
- Building up to 200 miles in a week. **Failed that one!**

I had this idea that I would gradually build up the distance and it would be very manageable. Nothing like that, I had so many really tough cycles! The 200k in May which was 141 miles and included horrible weather and falling off my bike – I had to dig deep for that one; the 150 mile Ripon ride at a rip-roaring 16 mph average was fine at first and just sheer pain for the last 30 miles; the White Rose Challenge – 112 miles, 12,500ft ascent, legs giving way on the steep hills; the 300k practice ride – worried about the distance from start to almost finish, bottom burning towards the end.

I learnt the hard way about eating constantly and what I needed to keep my legs going. I learnt that throwing in a marathon as a change to the training was a really bad idea.

However, now when I look back on the training, the tough cycles were the ones that taught me all I needed to know and the main lesson is you can have a really bad time and you can still get through it.

So here I am with Dave Wilkie, Chris Millican and Chris Martin and we are off with Dave and Chris leading the main body of cyclists and taking us at a rip roaring pace to the checkpoint at Howden. So fast we catch Neil completely unawares, not even time for him to open the malt loaves and lay some food out! Too warm to eat but forced a cheese slice down and a bit of cake, water top up and off again.

I had this great eating plan which went a bit to pot. Probably because of the heat it was a struggle to eat and impossible to eat the amount I'd planned, but I stoically stuffed food down me on a regular basis knowing the consequences of not eating enough (a lesson well learnt).

A quick stop at Stamford Bridge and then on we go. Lovely scenery, blue sky. Good slog up Terrington Bank until disaster when my chain snapped! Fortunately it was my quick link which had unlinked and Dave put it together for me. Into Helmsley to a great sight of so many cyclists in the square enjoying the sun.

The four of us, plus Matthew (a mere youngster of 20) continued on to Malton together, and late afternoon found us climbing Birdsall Brow, me feeling slightly sick, probably the heat. Over the top, wonderful views and that lovely drop down into Thixendale. I love this area, reminds me of how lucky we are having such super quiet roads with pretty scenery right on our doorsteps.

Up to Huggate, then the climb out of Warter before dropping into Market Weighton where the guys ogled girls with their skimpy dresses and tottering in their heels. I remarked rather peevishly that "I bet they couldn't cycle even a few miles" but really I was slightly jealous that they were clean and probably smelt nice whilst I was by now a sticky mess of suntan cream, sweat and dust.

North Newbald, big climb then mostly downhill to the Bridge. Fantastic rolling into the car park at 9.05pm to find we'd taken over quite a large corner with the caravan, lots of chairs and tables. Teas, coffees, soup & roll, sandwiches and cakes. Great support Neil, Rebecca (daughter of Deans) and friend Deebs, Jeffrey, Brian and Eileen who topped cyclists up and helped them on their way. After 45mins we were sorted for night cycling: lights; more clothing; more food and off over the Bridge.

Yet again I slowed us down when my front light bracket fell apart leaving my lights wagging around. Chris and Chris worked out the problem, tools out and fixed it whilst I stood about stupidly.

We had a gorgeous view of the sun setting over the Humber ... but that was the last nice thing I can say about the night cycling.

It was a long section from the Bridge to Bawtry, 40 miles, and I really did not like it. Nothing to see, having to concentrate to see pot holes. I worried on downhills in case of hitting unseen objects. I couldn't work out how far we'd gone, how long we had been going or where we'd got to. I don't think I said a word throughout the whole of this section and I suspect my entire body was putting out "bed time notices". Worse was the fact that I had expected the bad section to be from Bawtry onwards ... so, how much worse could it get?

Bawtry, 12.45am. Coffee, more unwanted food. Next step 25 miles to check point. I had learnt to only focus on the next stopping point since thinking about the whole ride is a sure fired way of not getting round. So, I was now concentrating on getting to Brattleby. On this section I felt much, much better. Maybe the caffeine, maybe using more A roads which were smoother and less worrying, whatever, it meant that I had an easy run to Brattleby, now 2.30am and for the first time I enjoyed eating something.

Now 28 miles to Louth. During this section I really began to tire but was spurred on by a glimmer of light in the sky at 3am. A few birds marking the dawn at 3.30am and building up to a frenzy by 3.45am. The sky turning red and the sun rising some time after 4am which was really uplifting. Around 5.10am we peddled into Louth car park to be greeted by Neil, camping stove, cups of tea, rice pudding, crisps, cake. Chris Millican had been

struggling but I think the rice pudding sorted him out as he was back on form for the rest of the cycle.

Off again, 36 miles to go. I was going to make it. Next stop 17 miles, and I was feeling good as we climbed out of Louth and enjoyed the lovely, early morning views over the Lincolnshire Wolds. We climbed, dropped, climbed, dropped, climbed... you get the idea; with a final big climb up towards Caister on complaining legs.

Thankfully mostly downhill to the Humber Bridge from now on, as it was really starting to get tough, but I was doing better than Matthew who had a rather spectacular cycle up a verge in his tired state and thankfully kept upright. My head was whinging "everything hurts". I fought back "it can't be everything that hurts" and no, it was only "nearly everything hurts". What hurt: neck, shoulders, arms, hands, back, hips, legs, right foot, bottom (of course) and my ribs were a bit achy too! I consoled myself that my head, tummy and left foot were fine.

Dropped into Barton, tears welling up when we neared the Bridge. I put this down to the Bridge being so beautiful, not me being a softie. Over the Bridge into the car park, gulping tears again. We signed in at 8.32am.

Lots of congratulations in our group since, for 4 of the 6 of us, this was our first 400k cycle. We probably had the best weather conditions we could hope for, we had a lovely route taking in the Yorkshire Wolds in the daytime and Lincolnshire Wolds in the early morning, and the support on the cycle was excellent.

I am very proud of myself for managing this cycle, the most difficult challenge I have ever taken on. A really big thanks to Dave, who will say "I did nothing" but he led me round (getting lost was my biggest worry), for fixing my bike (bike breaking was my second biggest worry) and just having such an experienced cyclist to be with me.

**Notes:** The cycle took us 20 hours 32 mins of which we were peddling for 17 hours 4 mins. The average pace was 15 mph. We climbed approximately 9,500ft.

### **My friend Martin and why we should all do things now**

Almost 3 years ago Martin was out cycling with friends and his son when he had a tragic accident resulting in severe brain damage. Martin now has a very limited life style being restricted to bed and wheelchair. His communication is very limited and he needs full time nursing care. Prior to this, Martin was an active person being a keen squash player and Hull FC supporter. Martin's accident shows that you do not know what tomorrow will bring and since this happened it has made me appreciate how lucky I am to be healthy and that I should do things now and not put them off until later or never. For more information visit <http://www.najdean.karoo.net/cycle4mart>