

DARTMOOR CLASSIC

Cyclosportive

28th June 2009

This was my first attempt at a Sportive event, although I had earlier signed up for the North Cornwall Tor, but had to pull out due to a flu-type virus. Several fellow Falmouth Wheelers entered – some for the 104km (64 miles) route, and the dafter ones like me for the 163km (104 miles) version. In fact, two of us were amongst the three over-65s taking part: it certainly seemed that we were generally amongst much younger company! The hills would certainly take their toll – later.

We started at Kingsteignton, which is near to Newton Abbot in South Devon. It was an early start, with the first of us setting off at 07.20. We were off in groups of 100, with a total of about 2200 starters for the two distances. There was a deceptive few miles of flat or undulating country to lull us into false sense of ease when, suddenly, we hit the first big climb up on to the High Moor from Bovey Tracey to Manaton. Worse was yet to come.

One blessing was that the forecast temperature of 29 degrees C was not to be – rarely did it go much above 10; and it rained, which turned out to be a blessed relief. There were now various ups and downs of moorland roads – more ups than downs? - with the younger and fitter riders pulling ahead. It was really becoming hard work, with the Classic certainly living up to its reputation! A reasonably fast descent towards Ashburton was nice, only to be followed by more and more climbing through Holne and Hexworthy before dropping briefly to Two Bridges. It was then up again to our first control and food stop at Princetown – famous as the location of Dartmoor Prison, which looks pretty grim and gaunt, even when the sun is out. One can imagine the inmates thinking twice about getting out of there.

Being a Sportive, we were expected to keep below a certain time – failure to achieve this meant that, at this point, riders would be diverted onto the shorter route. I had been quick enough thus far to avoid this happening. It was, however, to get worse! Adequately stuffed with banana, cake and fruit drink, we left Princetown and headed off across the Moor again before arriving at Horrabridge: aptly named, I once thought, as I remember the rather ugly iron railway bridge there – back in the days of the Southern! Next came a super fast and winding downhill to Tavistock: speeds in the upper 40s can be fun – especially as the traffic here was quite light. My Mercian has quite high gears, so I was able to maintain this sort of rate on the level, so-to-speak.

After Tavistock we immediately hit a succession of nasty hills and long drags – the gearing now became more of a hindrance: you cannot have it every way – I don't subscribe to too many 'on the back', and certainly not a triple. I paid the price, though, on one particularly nasty nip and ground to a dead stop!

We grunted on through Chillaton and Lydford – famous for Lydford Gorge, before heading South through Mary Tavy. Again we headed towards Princetown, climbing Pork and Merrivale Hills on the way to Rundlestone: this was probably the hardest of the climbs on the route – or was I just about knackered by now? The grub stop in Princetown was again most welcome, before heading off onto the High Moor again and successive hard drags before eventually dropping into Moretonhampstead.

Word was that here-on-in it would be pretty much easy and downhill all the way to the finish. Well, for a start, there was something of a stinker of a hill out of Moretonhampstead – well, it seemed that way to my legs! Eventually, after Dunsford, we turned South for the welcome long descent towards Chudleigh. That's that, then, so I thought: just as the going should have been lovely and gentle, my legs decided to do their own thing – a sort of 'semi-bonk', I guess! This is when riders you have seen earlier suddenly go flying past – offering words of sympathy, which I thought to myself I could do without. They all meant well, I guess!

I finally arrived at the finish at Kingsteignton as, possibly, the slowest Falmouth Wheeler on the long way round, but at least I made it on my first attempt. Should have done better, though. There were times, several times, on the way round when I thought that would not make it – and said 'never again'! However, on reflection at the finish, I thought 'bring it on the next time!'

I can say that overall I enjoyed the experience and would most certainly recommend it to any of you; I would say to those yet to do so – have a go at a Sportive event. I guess it is rather like a slightly quicker Audax; although the 'qualifying' speed is only just above that level – but quick when you look at the terrain of Dartmoor. Details can be found on www.dartmoorclassic.co.uk and there are various links from there. Do also have a look at our website: www.falmouthwheelers.co.uk Hope to see you all again sometime - At the York Rally 2010, if not before. I do look forward to each issue of the Woldsman which keeps me in touch.

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