

MEMOIRS OF THE EPIC END TO END

Not since Johnston and Boswell's Tour of the Hebrides in 1785 and Alex Kirkpatrick's Ayr - London ride of 1955 had anyone planned such a suicidal mission.

Bob McLean's End to End proposal was formally adopted at the 1989 Annual General Meeting, as part of a celebratory programme of events.

Reaction was that 'he wis aff his heid'; but being cyclists, two other self appointed nominees, namely Alan Bonsor and Malcolm Inch were selected and a third (yours truly) after much soul searching put his name forward.

Organisation and planning of the event took many weeks, bearing in mind that it had to be self financing, by way of commercial sponsorship. It was also agreed that individual sponsorship would be pursued, in aid of the respective charities chosen by the riders.

The assistance of Blair Wyllie, Club Treasurer was, and continues to be, greatly appreciated since the others cannae coont.

The weeks leading up to the event were extremely busy ones, with all participants seeking sponsorship, but more importantly getting themselves acclimatised by 'big miles' (at least doon tae Girvan and back) - without stopping!

Without the assistance of a support vehicle and helpers, such a cycle marathon of 880 miles in six days cannot be contemplated and we will forever be indebted to Bob's wife and family, Margaret, Jillian and young David for their support. To see the mini-bus at a lay-by 100 miles up the road on your last legs was always welcome, as were our bunks being made up at night and our luggage humphed up and doon stairs. Thanks from us all.

The planned itinerary was that we would drive to Slimbridge Youth Hostel on the Saturday, with the remainder of the journey to Lands End on the Sunday.

The weather on the Saturday and indeed for the whole week was tremendous.

Slimbridge proved to be an excellent Youth Hostel and adjoins Sir Peter Scott's Wild Fowl Trust grounds. It happens to have a smashin' wee pub, where we partook of light or was it heavy refreshments on the Saturday night, joined by the company of Margaret's brother Ian and his wife. It cost Ian £20 for sponsorship, a round of drinks and a bottle of whisky!!

As Boaby became more inebriated he related stories about his dental treatment and the fact that he was treated by a dental practitioner named Lance McGum - or so it sounded. I am sure the sassenachs wondered what had caused the hysteria at our table. Alas all good things must end and on the morrow we were off to Lands End.

A stop at 35 miles found us awheel and motoring at evens and above along the A30. We were in Lands End before the bus - hitting a 'sleeping policeman' at 40 miles an hour. It means a ramp!

Lands End is like Sauchiehall Street, without the stores. A visit to the museum to worship John Woodburn's steed, a photo-call, more food and we retired to Lands End Youth Hostel! I shall not dwell on our experiences there, other than to say that the warden was formerly a member of the Hitler Youth Group.

We met two young fellow cyclists, who were doing the journey over nine days and wished them well with their task ahead and the two hundred bananas given them by Fyffes. We later saw them at the Drumochter pass in wild conditions with long arms, swinging from tree to tree.

Monday 23 July 1990 arrived, dry but with a strong cross wind from the Atlantic.

We set off just after seven a.m. and soon got down to it.

For those who have never cycled in these airts, Cornwall and Devon are not flat. There are long drags and the A30 crosses inhospitable Bodmin Moor.

It was evident that on busy roads single file only could be contemplated and we rode in Team Time Trial fashion most of the time in England.

Each of us electd to be pathfinder for a day and the first day was Alan's responsibility. I'll never forgive him for taking us from Crediton to Tiverton, south of Taunton in Somerset. As Bob said when he was cajoling me uphill, 'they don't have summits, they just go up and doon!'

The hostel at Street was our destination on Monday night, the first leg of our journey over. A Chinese meal and we were ready for action for the next day - 171 miles completed.

Pathfinder Bob led us through pleasant countryside, with the first climb of the day of three miles early on. Thereafter we skirted Bath, came through Cheltenham - a truly lovely town, with lovely sun-tanned maidens whom Lance McGum tried to talk to, but alas they did not understand Forehill vernacular. We literally time trialled along the A38 to Worcester and beyond skirting the Malvern Hills.

Ironbridge Youth Hostel lies in a gorge on the River Severn and to get to it is a bit like Shangrila - you have to climb. The last fifteen miles seemed never ending. Even Alan's pal Chalkie, a coloured gentleman, whom we met walking the road almost got to the Youth Hostel before us.

Again, Ironbridge proved well worth a visit - a super hostel. Pains were creeping in and I personally must admit to being concerned about my personal well being over the next few days. However, my physical condition seemed to improve overnight. 140 miles completed.

Yours truly took the Pathfinder role for what proved to be a much easier journey than anticipated. After the climb out of Ironbridge, we took the A442 and A530 routes through Cheshire and on through Warrington, Wigan and Preston, where we met the old A6. Stops were numerous because of the heat and at one, just south of Garstang mayhem almost took place caused by a life like squeaky rubber alligator nine inches long, which Boaby stole from a wean and discreetly sat beside Alan. We were later to enjoy similar pleasure at Kendal Youth Hostel when we put it in Boaby's sleeping bag.

A mountain biker from Devon, just returned from the Emerald Isle took our wheels for a good 30 miles and was only dropped at Carnforth. We were knackered trying to lose him.

An Italian dinner at Kendal and we were set for the Scottish part of our journey. We were now half way. The point of no return. 133 miles completed.

Kendal to Loch Lomond was Malcolm's pathfinding day. There being no major towns to negotiate, it was completed without trouble.

Shap was negotiated at a gentle pace before a puncture caused an unplanned stop south of Penrith. Gretna was reached in no time at all where we met our helpers.

An average speed of 25 miles an hour on the A74 until a stop at Beattock was sustained. Three of us plunging into a roadside burn to cool off.

A welcome sight of Blair and Bert who met us at Douglas when they accompanied us to Strathaven boosted morale. All of us enjoying an afternoon tea break in Strathaven.

The last two climbs of the day being the Erskine Bridge!! and I'm not joking and Cameron Hill.

A pub supper at Balloch proved most enjoyable.

Unfortunately there was almost an international incident in the dormitory that night, when oor Boab almost punched a Frenchman for taking his bunk. Little did Bobby know that David hadn't made that particular bunk up. How do you apologise to someone you have just called a numpty. Bob's excuse in Spanish, of course, was 'me no comprendez senor'. 163 miles completed.

Second last day and we were headed for Loch Ness via Glencoe, a truly superb day, with great stops at Bridge of Orchy and Fort Willima. Alan having also taken photos on the bike speeding through Glencoe.

We were even given £3 at Fort William from three elderly ladies on a bus outing. Perhaps they thought that Lance McGum was a benefactor - he certainly looked knackered.

Loch Ness was reached and we even had the energy to complete another twelve miles to see us over the 1 in 6 climb at Drummadrochit, rather than negotiate it first thing next day. A search party led by young David was sent down the hill to look for Bob, whom we thought had been accosted by highlanders from Glen Urquhart.

Midgies at Loch Ness were unbearable. Both Margaret and I having to negotiate with the warden to let us off with duties, until she saw Bobby, who she assigned the cleaning of the septic tank. On second thoughts she felt he may cause a smell and let him away with it. 136 miles completed.

Journey's End and I must say a hard hard day that was. An uneventful journey to Bonor Bridge, having the welcome company of Malcolm's buddy Phil Ross of the Ivy CC for quite a few miles.

Beyond Bonar Bridge there are a few climbs, culminating with two of the most wicked - Helmsdale and Berriedale, the latter I think the hardest. There are others beyond at Latheron.

On the first climb at Helmsdale, Bobby remarked to Malcolm that Arnie was climbing well today, followed by a muttering under his breath which Malcolm discerned as 'the wee b-----d' Malcolm being such a gentle giant conveyed these remarks to yours truly, who proceeded to up the pace to everyone's annoyance. As I said to Bobby later I don't mind being called names, but if he had said 'humphy backit wee ----- ' he was in trouble.

The most welcoming sight was undoubtedly the Lighthouse at John O'Groats and the Orkney Islands, which lay ahead in a very calm sea.

Champagne opened, congratulations all round and we were ready for our celebratory meal and drinks. 137 miles completed.

For the statisticians, we cycled 880 miles in six days, 147 miles per day average. We crossed nineteen former county boundaries and took an on the road time of 48 hours 24 minutes and 1 second.

We had three punctures, 1 buckled tub and two broken spokes.

A sponsorship sum of £4,000 was raised.

The presentation took place on Thursday last 9th August 1990, when Bill Fyffe of Ayrshire and Arran Health Board received the cheque on behalf of all the charities from Harry Fairbairn, our sponsor.

Would we do it again? Bobby and I say no, Malcolm and Alan say yes, at a lesser pace.

My personal thanks to my fellow clubmates who completed the journey with me. I have no doubt that we will talk about it for many a long day and bore everyone on a Sunday morning when we are partaking of our coffee at the Balkenna Cafe. Above all we again thank Margaret, David and Jillian for their assistance and unstinting support.

YOUR WINTER DIARY

The 1991 Race Calendar Meeting will be held in the Wellington Leisure Centre at 7.00 p.m. on Monday 27.8.90. If you cannot attend but are willing to organise an event contact the Club Secretary before the meeting.

Clothing Orders - If you require any club clothing either for winter or for next season contact the secretary with your orders, before or at the above meeting. The order goes away at the end of this month.

The 1990 A.G.M. Will be held at the above venue on Friday 2nd November, 1990 starting at 7.00 p.m. PROMPT

Club Dinner Dance - On this the clubs 60th Anniversary the Dinner Dance and Presentation will be held at the Gartferry Hotel, Ayr on Friday 9th November, 1990 it requires your support to succeed so don't come alone bring as many friends as you can and if you know any past members persuade them to attend this Soiree.

Cups & Trophies - All claims for club cups and trophies should be submitted to the club secretary by the end of September. Information required is best 1990 times at all distances and 1989 25 Mile best time. Claims for other cups or club records won during the season should also be notified to the secretary.

Scottish National Championship Hill Climb - Bobby McLean is organising this event on Sunday 21.10.90 up Carrick Hill. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated to make this event a success. If you can help contact Bobby.

Turnberry Circuit- The club cup is up for grabs in this Handicap event to be held at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday 23.9.90 Circuit starts at Corton Crossroads - through Alloway and out the Coast Road bypassing Dunure to Pennyglen then through the Maidens to Turnberry then left onto the main road and back to Corton Crossroads via Kirkoswald and Maybole.

The winter club runs will be leaving Beresford Terrace at 9.30 a.m. every Sunday morning. It would be very much appreciated if everyone would get back onto winter bikes fitted with mudguards. As the racing season is virtually over perhaps the poseurs could slow down and let everybody enjoy a relaxing club run which is what winters are all about. I have every confidence that the club captain will bring offenders into line.

Tam Tak's A Tumble Mentioning winter club runs - in January last, the club took it's first venture into the high hills. Glenalla was the first climb, and although we went above the snowline the roads were clear, except for one wee ice patch, which stretched across the road, cunningly concealed at the Devils Elbow descent, before the rise to the summit. Big Tam L. ended up in an ignominious heap on top of his poor bike. Why do these things always happen miles from anywhere. We carefully extricated the bike from Tam, and gave it a close inspection to see the damage, and ascertained that it would travel no further that day. When Lo and Behold a good samaritan appeared over the brow of the hill, driving a Volvo. Although he wasn't aware of the good deed he was about to undertake, the driver was forced to stop, by the Redoubtable Chairman jumping up and down in the middle of the road. Before he could protest Tam's bike was gingerly placed in the boot of the car Big Tam was peeled off the road where he had lain all this time, He was told to stop Greetin' and Bleedin', hurled into the back of the motor, the driver was thanked for his kindness, and we all jumped back on our bikes and dissappeared over the horizon. (To be fair the driver very kindly took Tam and his bike home).

Place to Place - The clubs, Ayr - Stranraer - Ayr Place to Place record set by Mick Mason in 1955 with a time of 5 hours 00 minutes 58 seconds, updating Harry Fairbairns 1949 record of 5 hours 26 minutes 23 seconds, came under attack by the same Mick Mason - 35 years on. Taking the Chairmans early season remarks about doing something special in 1990 the 60th Anniversary of the Club, Mick decided on a Nostalgia Trip rerunning the Ayr - Stranraer - Ayr - We - Every club member bar non, treated the venture as a run down membry lane for Mick, but Mick had other ideas and to completely dumbfounded us all, he returned a time of 5 hours 12 minutes 35 seconds which on a day of high winds none of us expected. Goodness knows what would have transpired on a good day what with the 35 year gap and the conditions this was really a quite outstanding performance