

Tuesday, June 7, 2016

Lands End to John o'Groats - Mike Bissell



As a part of my celebrations for my 65th birthday in June this year I have just completed the iconic ride from Lands End to John o'Groats (picture attached) over 13 days. It was a fully supported ride staying in varied accommodation: hostels (pretty basic), B&B's and one hotel, in Perth, with spa, swimming pool, and Jacuzzi which was very nice. As we were taking 13 days the ride followed a longer route than the classic "record" route, which meant a lot less main road riding but also a lot more hills.

Total mileage for the trip was 1,000 miles at an average speed of 13.3 miles per hour and with a total ascent of 62,739 feet (Mount Everest is 29,030 feet – so we cycled up it twice in two weeks) and my fastest descent hit 45 miles per hour. The full statistics are on the table below. For those who don't know, the current LEJOG record is One Day, 20 hours, 4 minutes and 20 seconds set by Gethin Butler in 2001, he was on a recumbent.

We were fortunate to have good weather for most of the trip, staying ahead of the incoming bad weather as we progressed North and until the last four days there was either no noticeable wind or a modest tail wind, and no rain at all until the last two days. Most mornings were a little overcast and cool but we came to expect that by midday we would have clear blue skies, little cloud, and temperatures above 20 c. During the first ten days the only exception to this pattern was day four from Chepstow to Clun which started at 12 c and seemed to get colder as we headed North into Wales, at the 50 mile support stop I put on extra clothes including long bottoms and full finger gloves. The weather during the last four days in Scotland was variable but most of the time we were cycling into a very strong North, North Easterly headwind. On the leg from Perth to Ballater we rode over "the Spittal of Glenshee", the road rising to 2,200 feet in quite a short distance. The road is a pass with mountains on either side, which form a wind tunnel. The already strong wind is accelerated by this and the ride up the Spittal, with the gradient and the wind (estimated at 20 mph) is perhaps the hardest 10 miles that I have ever cycled. Over the top we had to pedal to get down what is quite a steep descent. The ride from Dingwall to Tongue was all into a very strong headwind and largely uphill, with some rain, across very barren and exposed land. The first half of the final day was in low cloud/mist with a strong wind and heavy rain, but by the time we got to John o' Groats the skies had cleared and the temperature was up to 18 c. We concluded that last couple of days was a salutary reminder of how hard the whole ride could have been if we had suffered rain, headwinds and low cloud (no views) and low temperatures the whole time.

There were 12 riders of various abilities, including one female, the youngest rider being 18 (male) with me as the oldest, the others ranged from mid 30's to 60. One rider had to abandon two days from the end due to a boil on his backside (this was surgically removed at Inverness hospital) and two other riders left the ride at the end of day five due to knee problems but returned for day nine to complete the last five days (they intend to ride the missing sections at some future date on their own). Four riders, including myself and the 18 year old,

1	22/05/2016	Lands End	Liskeard	5.17	76.6	14.5	38.3	5878	5878
2	23/05/2016	Liskeard	Tiverton	4.56	66.0	13.4	40.6	6222	12100
3	24/05/2016	Tiverton	Chepstow	6.32	92.4	14.1	34.6	5217	17317
4	25/05/2016	Chepstow	Clun	6.02	79.2	13.1	33.3	5400	22717
5	26/05/2016	Clun	Congelton	5.01	76.5	15.2	42.2	3267	25984
6	27/05/2016	Congelton	Skipton	6.20	79.0	12.5	34.8	6081	32065
7	28/05/2016	Skipton	Birdoswold*	6.55	94.0	13.6	45.0	5394	37459
8	29/05/2016	Birdoswold	Peebles	6.02	75.0	12.4	29.8	5175	42634
9	30/05/2016	Peebles	Perth	4.23	63.7	14.5	43.0	3198	45832
10	31/05/2016	Perth	Ballater	5.05	66.6	13.1	31.4	3636	49468
11	01/06/2016	Ballater	Dingwall	6.41	89.0	13.3	33.7	5740	55208
12	02/06/2016	Dingwall	Tongue	6.27	77.3	12.0	29.4	3700	58908
13	03/06/2016	Tongue	John o'Groats	5.39	65.0	11.5	29.6	3831	62739
	Total			75.20	1000.3	13.3	45.0	62739	62739
		* Near Brampton, on Hadrians Wall							

I have several other "65" year events planned, including going to Glastonbury for the first time!

Mike Bissell