

Sunday, August 13, 2006

## Wheel Easy! Ride Report No. 15

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An unpleasant morning? I pedalled to the start at Hornbeam Park station buffeted by stormy winds under leaden skies threatening much worse than the light drizzle already falling, and wondered if anyone other than my wife would turn up, and whether I could get away with a minimal 10 mile ride and home in time for elevenses.

Oh faint heart (and also faint hope)! A sturdy group of 16 hard core cyclists (others on vacation) and one toddler assembled, keen as ever, for their weekly Wheel Easy! ride. Their Yorkshire grit was rewarded for in the event, it turned out to be a fine day for biking as the wind eased a little and the rain held off.

Seven opted for the shorter route, starting out along to the end of Hornbeam Park, up Fulwith Mill Lane and across the A61 into Stone Rings Lane. Quiet roads and the Rossett bike path led to Whinney Lane, and eventually to Harlow Carr Gardens where we admired the fabulous collection of vintage cars, some over 100 years old, parked for a rally while their owners enjoyed refreshment at Bettys.

Then into the Pinewoods towards the Valley Gardens and out onto Cornwall Road. Here Peter discovered that his rear wheel had developed a massive kink which meant that he needed to take the shortest route back, escorted by a support group of four riders.

The remaining three continued to Asda, along the bike track to Bilton Lane (avoiding the trail of smashed beer bottles below the bridges), up to the A59 and then via Bogs Lane and Kingsley Drive back to Claro Road. Crawford took his direct route home, and so two remained to return to Hornbeam, noting the superfluous new No Cycling signs now defacing the Stray. My total distance was an almost effortless 23 miles.

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A break in the weather was always going to sort out the true diehard Wheel Easy men (and women) from the boys (girls). So it proved on Sunday when, with the wind blowing a force 6 (pure guesstimate!) and rain in the air, a hardy band of just 9 riders opted for the long ride led by Keith Paley. Setting off in the direction of Leadhall Lane and down into Pannal, we crossed the by-pass and on to Kirkby Overblow.

By now it was clear that it was one of those days sent to tease cyclists the world over - to wear, or not to wear, the wet top? In the event, those who did managed to intimidate the rain into holding off all day, thus ensuring that those who didn't stayed cool as well as dry. Thanks Gia !

Our drop handlebar, smooth rubber colleagues were less than impressed by the rough bridleway cut-through from Sicklinghall which took us across the river and through East Keswick, heading for Wyke. For some this was indeed foreign territory. 'It's nice round here - where the ..... are we ?'.

The outskirts of Leeds (the posh end though) hove into view. But no time for any more than a quick water/power bar break as the many short but often quite stiff uphill pulls, combined with a tricky side/head/following wind, was beginning to make finishing by lunchtime a very fond hope indeed.

We next skirted Leeds Grammar School, taking our lives very literally in our hands to sprint across the Leeds road, and the survivors (all of us, thank goodness) rolled down past Eccup reservoir and into the hinterland known as 'somewhere in that general direction - I think !'. This turned out to be a wide arc around Harewood estate where three alert, right-thinking, corporate cyclists turned right towards Weardley hamlet, whilst six dreamy, unthinking, renegade types bore left and achieved what is known in the parlance as 'separation'.

Thankfully, 'reintegration' was also achieved with equal aplomb, simply by the three hanging around by a farm gate long enough for the rest to intuit their way round a back lane and find them. Clever chaps these cyclists ! Debate continues to rage about which group went 'the right way'.

The ride back over Harewood bridge as far as Dunkeswick was not ideal from a traffic point of view, though improved by the sighting of a magnificent red kite. At that point a small break-away group decided it was time to make a quick dash for home via Kirkby Overblow and the outward route. Six steelier spirits determined to complete the ride according to initial marching (pedalling) orders, via Weeton, Huby, Almscliffe Crag, North Rigton, Beckwithshaw, and the Otley Road.

This involved more stiff climbing, into a prevailing headwind. The gaps between riders grew, the conversations lessened, and by sheer willpower the prospect of indulging for real in the promises of food, tantalisingly offered by every pub we passed en route, was finally achieved (I hope) by all those arriving home at around 2.30.pm.

A 25-30 mile route in the planning, though probably more like 35 miles in reality, was turned in the event into an even longer marathon by the adverse conditions. But didn't we enjoy it ? Once more with feeling everyone. Didn't we .....?.

KP

