

Peak District cycle camping weekend – 30th April to 3rd May 1999

Kevin, Phil and Bob rode out to Kingsbury on Friday night meeting Sheila, who had ridden from Warwick. The campsite was fully booked, being a Bank Holiday, but the owner took pity and found us a quiet corner: one advantage of cycling.

The sound of roaring petrol stoves banished any further thoughts of sleep, so after a leisurely breakfast we packed and set off for elevenses. Unfortunately we found that the craft centre at Wall was permanently closed so pressed on to the crypt in Lichfield: somewhat busier with a Saturday market than on our normal Sunday visits. Fortified, we set off north along the very pleasant cycle tracks round the lake by the Bishop's Palace and branched off into unknown along an unsigned cycle track that seemed to be going towards Nether Stowe: fortunately it did.

We crossed the River Trent just north of Handsacre and were interested to see an old iron bridge, beside the modern road bridge, that had been cast in Coalbrookdale. The next point of interest was lunch at Blithbury followed by an abortive attempt at some roughstuff, near Dunstal: it looked very inviting on the map but the plethora of notices made it all too clear that we were not welcome down that lane. So, back to the B road and into Uttoxeter for tea and shopping. A disposable barbecue seemed to fit the bill so we bought a selection of meats and accompaniments, plus sponge and custard for afters.

The scenery changes dramatically immediately north of Uttoxeter as do the hills and, needless to say, our campsite was at the highest point in the vicinity, just north of Alton Towers. I think we were the only people not going to the Towers the following day. The camp site was pleasant enough although when we first saw the site we were worried, needlessly about finding somewhere suitably flat to put the tents. As we rode through the campsite we were delighted to see Cath, Tony and Andrew Benn who had set off from Coventry at 6 o'clock in the morning to cycle up. Andrew (11) was, rightly, pleased with himself and proudly showed us his clockwork torch which he had bought in America..

The site owners had had a bad experience when someone had put a lighted barbecue into their rubbish skip and in consequence they were now banned from the site. A shame, but nothing daunted, we pooled all our resources and lashed up a very satisfactory meal between us.

Tony had to get back to Coventry on Sunday for his father's birthday so the three of them impressed us by a silent departure at about 6.30 on Sunday morning. The rest of us took more leisurely breakfast and set off for the Manifold Valley, definitely a favourite of mine. We stopped to scramble up to Thor's Cave to get our feet warmed up and Kevin experimented with his new digital camera – very impressive and who knows we might be treated to a digital slide show next winter.

The weather seemed to brighten up after coffee. We pressed on to Hartington and the Tissington Trail, which we followed north past its junction with the High Peak Trail to lunch in a pub at Sparklow. The last section of the trail was somewhat rougher than the rest, but still easy riding and a very good way of making progress through the Peak District.

In the afternoon we returned back down the High Peak Trail to Longcliffe - very good views of the surrounding area. A sprint into Ashbourne for more shopping proved somewhat problematical as we were too late for the supermarkets. It's all about being adaptable and we dined that night on pasta with a bacon, mushroom, garlic, cream and cheese sauce. Plan "B" would have been the pub, but that would have been far too easy.

Monday was a beautiful, slightly cloudy day and we made good time as we headed back to Coventry, lunching at the Beehive Falconry Centre near Barton-under-Needwood. Thank you Sheila for organising an excellent weekend.

Bob Tinley