

Beautiful Birthday Rides

'That was one of the most relaxing holidays we've had in years,' said my wife on return from ... well where would you guess? The Bahamas? Not quite in my price range; The Greek Islands? – nope. Bear in mind that we went with our two teenage children and you might be surprised that we had just returned from a week's cycling holiday in Derbyshire's Peak District.



We went on this holiday at the suggestion of my 16 year old daughter who is just getting back into cycling. Originally she was going to the New Forest but travel difficulties prevented this and in the end we all went on the CTC Birthday Rides week. This is an annual event but despite having been CTC members for 10 years we had never gone. We checked out the comprehensive website and thought we'd give it a go. The week was packed with events and rides some of which puzzled us – for example the '1.75 AAA' Audax event. We booked some things in advance but left most to sort out once we arrived. It seemed complicated and I wondered if it would be an organisational nightmare. Trying to balance everyone's wishes on the family holiday always presents a challenge. In the event I needn't have worried.

The relaxing began the moment we arrived at the (beautiful) campsite near Bakewell. There were signs and stewards guiding us in and a very friendly welcome. Once we were pitched we relaxed even more helped by the fact that everyone was friendly, helpful and chatty. We went to register and pick up our 'welcome' pack. The first thing we found inside was a set of personalised 'Peak Rides' badges with our names on – I didn't wear mine much but it is a great souvenir. Also included was a set of route descriptions and maps for the 'birthday' rides.

It was soon clear that everything had been very well organised and there were plenty of CTC staff and volunteers to explain all the events – though I never did find out what the '1.75 AAA' was all about. We then discovered the bar in the main marquee, which featured Black Sheep and Timothy Taylors beer – the relaxing was in full swing now. However I had other things on my mind as I was set to do the 'Phil and friends challenge ride' of 150km the next day (see postscript below).

The rides varied tremendously from 200 km to 10 mile family rides. For most of the rides you set off when you wanted though there was a 'buddy stop' where you could meet up with others if you wanted company. We preferred to go at our own pace but found we kept meeting up with other cyclists either on the road or at the all important tea stops (often laid on especially for the ride by the WI). The route descriptions and maps made it hard to get lost and each day there was an A, B and C ride (long medium and short) which all went in the same direction. This

meant you could set off and see how much you fancied doing. If it was a hot day and the hills were steep we just stuck to the shorter route. In addition to these rides there were events like children's cyclo-cross, the hill climb race and the more fun freewheel downhill race!

In the evenings there were quizzes, campfires, dances and so on or you could have a pint and chat. With over 700 people you were bound to find good company to reflect on the day's rides. Being in the Peak District did make hills unavoidable but there's always walking followed by a cooling freewheel. We were also on the Monsal Trail that provides a flat run into Bakewell for pudding and other essential supplies. My daughter and friend enjoyed this. My son came on a few rides and I did a couple on my own.

The most inspiring aspect of the week was the camaraderie – setting off on a ride where there were lots of cyclists made it safer and enjoyable. It was a bit like a polite Critical Mass on holiday. Also inspiring was the 90 year old who cycled to the event and camped! He was joined by the youngest participant (5 months) to cut the birthday cake – the CTC is now 126 years old and I came away realising just what a great organisation it is. (My daughter was amazed by the veterans who cycled prodigious distances and then helped her put her tent up!)

The volunteers (this year it was organised by Manchester CTC members) worked incredibly hard both before and during the event helped by the amazing Melita and her husband Alan from Leeds. It was a wonderful week and we all want to go again next year – location is not quite finalised yet – what about an LCAG contingent? If you want more info check out the CTC website on www.ctc.org.uk which has a link to the birthday rides site.

Postscript and appeal

Although I attempted the 150km ride in the end I missed out a loop (and a 1 in 4 climb) reducing my distance to 135km. I was disappointed especially as Tom (90 years old) and Jodie (11 years old) both completed it. However I still cycled a long way up some big and steep hills. One aim of the rides is to raise money for the Cyclists Defence Fund.

The Cyclists' Defence Fund was set up by CTC in 2001 in response to the outrage of cyclists', parents, lawyers and journalists when Provident Insurance threatened its contributory negligence claim against Darren Coomb's parents and childminder, partly because he had cycled without a helmet. With fighting funds of £40k raised so far, the Cyclists' Defence Fund is now established as an independent organisation and is seeking charitable status. It is working with interested legal parties considering possible cases. More funds are needed to continue this important work.

I didn't get any sponsors beforehand but I urge readers to support this very worthwhile cause – send your cheque made payable to CTC Cyclists' Defence Fund to CTC, 69 Meadrow, Godalming, Surrey GU7 3HS.

Jon Farley