

## Dragon's Ride

01 September 2008 Ocdt Squirrell picked up Ocdts Hicketts, Hughes and Taylor and headed North in the team minibus to begin Exercise Dragon's Ride. They arrived at the youth hostel in Canisbay (2 miles south of John O'Groats) at 2200, having left at 0400.

02 September 2008 After a few pictures at the sign we began our journey south. The days cycling consisted of a rest stop after 20 miles in Wick, and a lunch stop after 52 miles, which was taken in Helmersdale. Our stop for the night is Donarch caravan site 80 miles south of John O'Groats. On the whole, the days cycling went well, and everybody seems in high spirits. 03 September 2008 A short break was taken after around 20 miles, and we stopped for a roadside lunch 8 miles south of Inverness (44 miles in). The mornings ride was a bit of a slog with 3 pretty long and tedious climbs to the summit of a cairn, but fortunately there was a winding descent, which made the afternoons ride seem quite easy. Our accommodation tonight is a youth hostel in a town called Aviemore. Morale still seems fairly high, but were all planning on an early night, and feeling the beginnings of some aches and pains.

04 September 2008 We decided before we left that it would be a good idea to cycle straight to our night's accommodation in Stirling, rather than stop short and get a lift. This meant we needed to cover just over 100 miles. We took a break 30 miles into our day's cycle, and then lunch at 60, which left us with another 47 miles to cover before we reached Stirling. There was a fairly emotional hill climb just after our lunch stop in the small town of Aberfeldy, but other than that the afternoons' ride went fairly smoothly. The day finished with a climb up to Stirling castle a fairly expensive (but certainly deserved) ice cream and a few pictures next to Robert the Bruce. 05 September 2008 In an expected fashion, Stirling presented us with a chilly morning. After taking a few wrong turns we finally made our way out of the city and embarked on our journey south. For a change of scenery we decide to take our morning break in a petrol station, which proved to be rather expensive and unsatisfying. We stopped for a roadside lunch at about 50 miles, just outside of a small village called Abington. We ate lunch inside the minibus on account of the less than desirable weather, and weren't too keen on getting out of the warm and dry when the time came to get back on the bikes. Despite the fact that it was cold and wet, we finally had a stroke of luck with the weather in the form of a tail wind, which made the afternoons cycle fly by. We managed to get another 20 miles in before the weather got the better of us, and took the 30 mile journey back Northwards to a hostel in New Lanark. The youth hostel pointed us in the direction of a plush hotel where we paid a small fee to use their sauna/wet room/ pool fitness suite before we retired to our beds for the evening.

06 September 2008 The minibus dropped us off on the roundabout where we rendezvoused yesterday afternoon, and once again we headed south (in the rain, again). After hearing on the radio that much of the country had seen 2 weeks rainfall in a day and that there were some severe flood warnings, we counted ourselves lucky that for much of the day it was just overcast. We reached the border at about 1100 and decided to take our morning stop in between countries. The afternoon ended up being a bit of an uphill slog through the northernmost parts of the Lake District, but the last 5-10 miles was a nice freewheel with some very fast downhill sections into Kendal, where we are stopping for the night. 07 September 2008 We left Kendal (without any mint cake) at 0830, and after taking a wrong turn and having to hop a gate to get back on the right road, we were ready to go. The day went relatively smoothly, but by this point we all seem to be feeling the effects of 6 days cycling. After passing through Preston and Wigan we were all fairly happy to see a little bit of countryside again, and we finished our day in Warrington. Our stop for the night is Manchester with one of Rob's friends. 08 September 2008 We were back on the bikes by 0830 this morning and we intended to cycle a relatively short 60 mile day, but due to the weather system moving over South Wales and the ensuing weather warnings we decided to cycle 90 miles to Leominster so that we would have a short leg to Chepstow, and with any luck get into our accommodation before the rain starts. We took our lunch stop just south of Shrewsbury, which left us with a 30 mile cycle

into Leominster. Our current accommodation is a youth hostel, and were all in recovery preparing for our next days ride.

09 September 2008 As predicted, the weather came in this morning and was unrelenting. Today's ride was, however, far more scenic than the last few, but unfortunately due to the appalling weather, visibility was very poor and we couldn't fully appreciate what was around us. Although short, the ride was interesting, with two very long steep climbs, a road closure due to land slips and a quick look at Tintern Abbey. After 45 miles in the saddle we finished our day opposite Chepstow race course, and headed back to Cardiff to spend a night in the comfort of our own beds. 10 September 2008 After breakfast and a comfortable night at home, we headed back to the race course and started our days cycle at around 0830. Today's highlight was crossing the old Severn Bridge, where we stopped for a few pictures and then headed onto Avonmouth. Bridge number two was Brunel's Clifton suspension bridge which was a nice change of scenery from the buses and cars on the trunk roads through Bristol. We finished today at 1600 in Wellington, 20miles East of Taunton, and are spending the night at Tim's house. Everybody now seems to be suffering from a few aches and pains, but with 730 miles behind us and just two days of cycling to go, there does finally seem to be light at the end of a very long tunnel.

11 September 2008 This morning, we left Taunton at approximately 0800 and were cycling by 0900. By 1100 we reached the A30, which is the last road that that we will be cycling on. The day's ride was particularly tedious. Intermittent heavy showers broke up mile after mile of long hills on the busy dual carriageway and we were all happy to get through the penultimate day in one piece. Tonight we are staying in a youth hostel on the coast of North Cornwall in the village of Tintagel. 12 September 2008 The weather on our final day of cycling wasn't the glorious sunshine and mild September temperatures that we had hoped for. Instead we got an overcast morning followed by heavy showers in the afternoon. The ride was hard and the last 10 miles of Cornish countryside was depressingly hilly. None of this mattered though because it was the last day, and the rain let up for a few minutes whilst we took a few photos at the sign in Lands End. After a short lived celebration we decided to head back to the minibus, dry off and warm up for the final time. I don't think any of us have yet registered what we have achieved over the last 11 days, but I'm sure after a few days of sleep and rest we will all realise that cycling coast to coast really is something to be very proud of.