

Club Tour of the Lakes and Dales Loop 21-24 August 2018

Over the last 12 months, around the Kirkby Lonsdale, Sedbergh, Levens, Grange and Cartmel areas, we had frequently passed signs for the L&D Loop. Not knowing much about it, but correctly guessing that it stood for Lakes and Dales Loop, I resorted to the much-maligned Google search and found that there was a great circuit of 196 miles (plus the distance from home to the closest part of the route at Farleton) and there is a total ascent of 5172m (16,968 feet). This could be accommodated in a reasonably challenging 4 days, with breaks at Dufton, Cockermouth and Broughton in Furness. A mini tour was therefore planned and 6 other hardy souls joined Len and myself on this wonderful challenge.

Participants met up at our house in Bolton le Sands, including Ken and Gwen who had driven up from Garstang. Tracey, Pete, Nigel and Roy all cycled to the start from their various homes. We were further joined on this first day by a selection of day riders who fancied a ride out to Sedbergh and back. Geoff, Ken, Neil and newcomer Dave came along and provided moral support for the panier-laden tourists (but they didn't offer to carry our panniers!).



Early showers soon cleared and Miles met up with us and we had a pleasant run up through the Kellets and Burton to the road around Farleton Fell, winding steeply up Aikbank where we encountered the seasonal dread of flailed hedge cuttings. Unsurprisingly we had a puncture on this section. Gwen said she never had punctures and this was a novelty. She was to be proved wrong later in the same day! After some energetic pumping with a tiny pump the tyre was repaired and we all enjoyed some exhilarating swoops down from Hutton Roof to Kirkby Lonsdale, then on to Casterton Golf Club for our morning brew. We were briefly joined by John Jackson at Biggins to Casterton, filling in time before going swimming. John and Miles dropped back after Casterton and we continued.





Suitably refreshed we carried on above Barbon village to the steady climb up through Barbondale,



then down to Gawthrop and left to Sedbergh, dropping steeply down off the moorland through the golf course to the town. Most of us had sandwiches by the cricket pitch, washed down afterwards with a brew in the quirky little “3 Hares” café.



We said a fond farewell to the day riders and set off on the climb up to the “Fair Mile” route, which is more like a fair 7 miles through the Lune Gorge, around the base of the Howgills and above the M6 motorway. We briefly joined the A685 as we passed under the motorway, then headed off left just before Tebay. Len had been suffering from cramp from Barbondale and decided to leave us here and take a less hilly route directly from Tebay to Appleby. The rest of us climbed up Loups Fell and had another unscheduled stop at the top to

fix Gwen’s second puncture. Once this was sorted we carried on along this little-used route through Greenholme and Scout Green, before passing back under the M6 and continuing into Orton.



Having been delayed by the puncture we failed to meet up here with Len, but stopped anyway to enjoy ice creams bought at the chocolate factory.

Our route then took us into wilder country, skirting Grange Scar en-route to Little and Great Asbys. A touristic loop through the latter village set us on our northward route into Appleby, passing the castle before sweeping down into the town centre and having a brief stop for a bit of shopping at the Co-op before completing the final 4 hilly miles into Dufton Village. It was after 6pm by the time

we got to the Youth hostel, so no time was lost in showering, changing and heading over the road to the Stag Inn pub to enjoy a well-earned meal and a pint or two of fine ales.



Len had safely arrived some 45 minutes before us and had recovered from his cramp.

Wednesday dawned pleasantly sunny and we set off in good spirit after a hearty YHA breakfast. We made good progress through Knock, Milburn, Blencarn, Skirwith and Langwathby before turning right onto the climb up to Beacon Hill above Penrith. Len and Roy kept to the less hilly main road and we subsequently met them at the train station to the south of the town centre. We made a beeline for Booth's Supermarket café for morning coffee and to purchase our picnic lunches.

An excellent cycle route avoided the horrendous motorway roundabout to take us west of the town and we crossed under the motorway on a farm track, which led us into the grounds of Newton Rigg College. Our route undulated through Newton Reigny, Little Blencow, Greystoke and across to Mungrisedale, where we were dwarfed by the northern slopes of the Blencathra Range, passing under Bowscale to Mosedale, then around the foot of Carrock Fell. Close to the former Carrock Fell Youth Hostel the signs on the road didn't match the route marked on the maps, so we briefly separated into two parties, with the greyhounds at the front following the road signs and the tortoises behind taking the map route up to Calebreck. We had a cheerful reunion at Heskett Newmarket where we ate our sandwiches and called into the small village café afterwards.



Continuing generally westwards we passed through Caldbeck, then turned south-west over remote roads to Longlands and Bewaldeth, with views down to the northern end of Bassenthwaite Lake. Scenic lanes took us across the River Derwent and along the flanks of Watch hill before the final descent into Cockermouth and the welcoming arms of our respective hotels

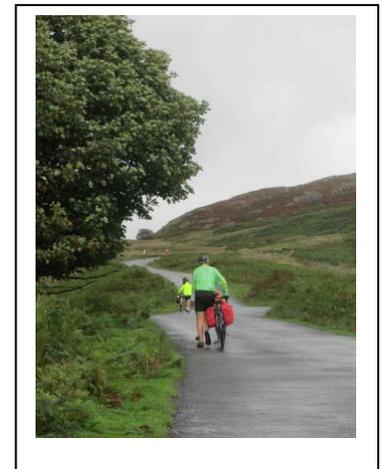


and an Italian restaurant for our evening meal.

We woke up to grey skies on Thursday and another puncture, this time on Tracey's bike after overnight storage. We sheltered in the hotel reception whilst this was fixed, and were relieved to miss a heavy shower. Our route out of Cockermouth was followed a couple of weeks later by the Tour of Britain riders on their Team Time Trial day. Our pace was considerably more modest and we enjoyed the wonderful views of the north western fells as we headed generally southwards to Low Lorton, Thackthwaite and the tail of Crummock Water. Heading past Loweswater we had a big climb up Fangs Brow and round the back of Loweswater Fell before dropping back down to the end of Ennerdale Water at Ennerdale Bridge. The planned morning coffee stop became a lunch stop at the pub in the village and we were glad to see that another shower was dodged as we dined.



More climbing followed over Blakely Moss and past Swarth Fell and Cold Fell with views across to Sellafield Power Station and the Irish Sea before we descended once again to Calder Bridge. We had no choice but to ride along the busy A595 for 3 miles into Gosforth, then it was back onto quieter roads over to Santon Bridge and Eskdale Green. We girded our loins here for the big climb up onto Birker Fell. The Wilds and Ainsworths sailed up to the top, with the rest of us resorting, as on many other climbs, to walking. The views were impressive as we traversed the fell tops but all the time we were pursued by an ominous black cloud. On the steep descent to Ulpha the cloud finally caught us and became a massive downpour, turning the already hazardous descent into an epic experience.



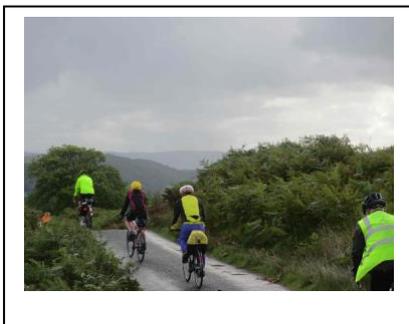


The tortoises and greyhounds sheltered out the worst of the downpour and then agreed in unison



that nobody felt like adding in the additional climb up to Hall Dunnderdale, Dunnderdale Fell and over to Broughton Mills in the rain, and we took the more direct route down to Duddon Bridge and across to Broughton in Furness for our final night.

We had booked ourselves into the Keppleway outdoor Activity Centre in an old school, which turned out to be an inspired choice as they had a huge drying room where we were able to store the bikes overnight and to dry out our wet shoes and cycling gear. The centre was huge and our group of 8 were the only residents that night. The staff made us a wonderful meal and we were given the run of the place, complete with table tennis, pool table, games rooms and TV. Having had a strong recommendation for a local pub though a few of us (the tortoises!) headed into town to try out a local hostelry – perhaps that's why we don't climb the hills so well!



Friday morning saw us climbing out of Broughton over Eccle Riggs, then up a broad flat valley before climbing up into the fells via Blawith Knott, then dropping down to meet the River Crake at Lowick Bridge. Entering more familiar territory now, we cycled through Spark Bridge, over Tottlebank and across to Bouth, where we met up with Catriona from Barbon who had decided to join us on our last day.





We continued to Newby Bridge, getting soaked once again in a shower and we piled into the massive Swan Hotel for a coffee and scone, lowering the tone as we shared the dining area with well-dressed motorists and posh tourists.

We had the usual fun crossing the A590 before heading south to Seatle, Field Broughton and Cartmel, turning left towards the familiar sights of Grange over Sands. Still feeling full of scone and our cooked breakfasts, we eschewed a lunch stop at Grange and turned our weary eyes northwards to Meathop and Levens. As we arrived in the village we saw a sign for coffee and tea in the church and dripped in for a warming drink and biscuits and friendly, but slightly bemused welcome from the locals who normally only get a couple of villagers partaking.

Settling into automatic mode we made our way homewards over the Moss to Storth, Silverdale and Carnforth. This epic and satisfying ride has much to recommend it, but dry weather would be preferable in future!