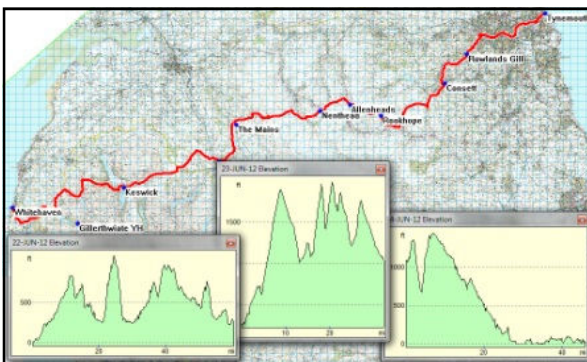


C2C Whitehaven to Tynemouth June 2012



Anne & I recently completed the C2C cycle ride from Whitehaven to Tynemouth in three days. The three days we chose and planned in advance were the long sunny days of midsummer so that we could stop to take in the views. Ice creams and coffees at picturesque little villages en route were all part of the plan with hours and hours of daylight to complete the miles at an easy pace enjoying the experience.

Then came the rain. In sheets. In stair rods. We cycled through the Lake District with ad hoc lakes in every dip in the road. We crossed the Pennines well inside the clouds. Even just as we thought that Tynemouth was going to be reached in sunshine, in came the heaviest, coldest thunderstorm soaking us through every layer. The experience became one of dogged endurance and the satisfaction came from completing it under such harsh conditions if not from appreciating the stunning views. But we did it, 140 miles or so in three days.

The logistical problem of how to get to the start and back from the finish with bikes and some changes of clothes etc was solved when we discovered a brilliant service offered by Robert & Julie Pickthall from the Mains Farm, Kirkoswald near Penrith. It's just off the 'official' route but staying there doesn't add unwanted miles or hills. Julie & Robert provide a friendly welcome, well equipped facilities in either a campsite or bunkhouse accommodation, a bike store, lifts to the local pub if required and, crucially, a minibus with bike trailer to take riders to Whitehaven and collect them back from Tynemouth. Find out more on www.c2chasslefree.co.uk.

We took the option to cycle all the way back to the Mains Farm in one day. Other people take two days and stop at Keswick roughly half way. We then cycled a short but high day to Rookhope where we stayed in a B&B. Then our third day was a ride into Tynemouth which, after two long, steep slogs to start to the day, ended with nearly thirty miles of gentle downhill cycle paths.

Arriving at the Mains Farm on Thursday evening we were shown to a beautiful campsite overlooking the dale. There was electric hook up if we'd wanted it and a cookhouse and converted barn to use as a dining room. It was warm and sunny so we cooked and ate al fresco and turned in for the night.



The rain began in the dark small hours. Our tent was fine and our sleeping bags warm but crawling out into the downpour in the morning was horrible. Still, plenty of space in the shower block gave us a good changing area and a farmhouse kitchen breakfast prepared us for the day.



Two other groups of guys were staying in the bunkhouses and a large minibus with a long cycle trailer turned up to load all our bikes and all of us. We left spot on time and were soon unloading at Whitehaven where we dipped a wheel in the Irish Sea and set off in the rain. It rained all day.



It rained every minute of the day. There was variety between heavy rain and torrential rain. We knew we were to ride through the Lake District and had expected a bit of rain there but this was the day when it rained proper!

The route out of Whitehaven is on an old railway track which gently climbs away from the coast. Then we were on country lanes up and down until the haul into Whinlatter Pass. This is where I'd advise a detour from the signed route for riders like us. Either to keep cyclists off the B road into Keswick or to let them enjoy the forest, whoever marked the route sent it off onto forest trails. This is fine if you have the tyres and confidence for stony surfaces with steep climbs and drops. We hated the first taste of this so much we took the B road down to the village of Braithwaite.

After a few problems locating the C2C route we found a tiny lane opposite a pub from where the route is a pleasant ride into Keswick. On the way we went through Portiscale and discovered a large café right on the roadside with parking for bikes and outside, under cover seating. We enjoyed a well deserved break there.



In Keswick the rain stepped up a gear and the flood defences were already doing a good job. The trail is signed right past the front door of the local swimming pool which seems very odd but is correct. At first there's a new, broad, wooden bridge type construction built into the steep bank of the river. Then the trail joins an old railway line which follows the curve of the river valley crossing from one side to the other several times on great iron bridges. If it had not been for the monsoon, this would have been fantastic.

After Keswick came the worst part of the day. Steep slopes next to a main road with spray hitting us from the larger vehicles. We saw the Cycle Café in Greystoke and chose to press on to Penrith. Other riders we spoke to had enjoyed the excellent if quirky hospitality which included hot water bottles to warm them up (in June!).

To be honest the drop into Penrith, stopping to buy evening meal supplies and then pressing on over the big hill and on to the Mains Farm was simply a battle of will and determination given the weather. We made it and arrived wet, worn out and Anne had some bad cramp pain but the feeling of achievement was almost worth it.



As there were two larger groups also staying at the farm, Julie & Robert at Mains Farm were busy helping people get wet stuff into drying rooms, bikes locked away, and making sure the showers were staying in a clean condition. They took time to pay attention to us too and we appreciated being given the use of 'The Cobbles' a barn converted into a dining room to use as our own bunkhouse instead of having to crawl back into the tent. They provided an electric heater and camp beds too without any extra charge.

We heard that one group with much younger riders, had bailed out at Keswick and rung the farm for a lift back with their bikes. It made us feel even better about having made it back even if we were wet and knackered.

The second day was to be a shorter ride but over the highest hills of the Pennines. I had to change the brake blocks on Anne's bike as she had completely worn out a set the day before. Then we set off in sunshine!

The sun, unused to being on show, soon hid behind the clouds and we climbed the zigzag road up Hartside in rain and fog. It was so foggy on the top that we nearly rode past the café. The staff there provided big bin liners to protect their chairs from wet bums and when I asked where we could sit to get the famous view out as far as the sea, the answer was a short, sarcastic laugh.



Then it was a day of ups and downs. We walked a few ups, especially the climb out of Garrigil and the steep drop into Nenthead was marked with a sign advising a dismount. In that little village we found a bike shop and I bought us both some new brake blocks. The guy in the shop was doing a roaring trade fixing everything from bent mechs to snapped cables as one group of cyclists after another arrived over the hill. Anne found the community shop where they provided hot coffee and cake.



The rain let up every now and then but we kept our waterproofs on as much for the cold as for keeping dry (in June!!). The roads were quiet apart from cyclists and we just plugged on over the hill to Allenheads and then one more climb over the hill into Rookhope where our B&B was booked at the Old Vicarage.



This is a large old house run as a B&B for C2C riders by Colin & Pauline. It's not your average B&B, much more like being invited into someone's home to stay the night. They were really helpful with drying stuff out and the room was large and the shower



was hot. They were not phased either by the fact that a group staying B&B, a group of campers looking for a place to stay and us two arrived all at much the same time. We stayed for an evening meal with them whilst the other guests went to the pub. It was an unusual evening meal, very Mediterranean with antipasto and a lovely cannelloni and fresh veg. Pauline and John sat and chatted with us which we did not expect but was a really pleasant way to spend the evening.

Day 3 started with a big climb straight out of the gateway of the Old Vicarage. We'd seen that one, we'd been looking at all the previous evening. It was the even huger climb out of Stanhope we'd not bargained on. It was so steep we pushed our bikes to the top.

A short ride along the moor top took us to the Waskerley Way and it was all downhill to the coast from there. Really, it was pretty much.



The Waskerley Way starts at Parkhead Station. Café. We didn't stop there as we thought we'd find plenty of cafés and coffee stops on the way to the Tyne along this old railway line. It was a bright sunny afternoon and there were loads of people out, especially as we went through Consett and Rowlands Gill.



Perhaps these northerners don't like a hot drink or an ice cream when they're out for the day. There were certainly no cafes or ice cream vans on the route. We rode right into Gateshead before finding a coffee house in the shadow of the Tyne Bridge.

The ride from the top of the Waskerley Way all the way into Gateshead is fantastic. Virtually all off road, it follows old railways and a riverside path and is well signed. Along the Tyne the C2C is also clearly marked. We had to walk a bit due to a street market but the rest was a mix of cycle paths, quiet roads and shared paths all the way to Tynemouth.

Just as we got to the very end of the journey, a big black cloud rolled in off the North Sea and soaked us in freezing rain from a thunderstorm. A fitting end to a wet weekend. Still, we got to the beach, a wheel was dipped into the sea and we had done it - coast to coast.



Pete & Anne Kelsall
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see more pics and video www.petekelsall.com