

Plank Lane swing-bridge, first meeting point for the days ride, overcast sky, fine drizzle and some quite gusty winds, perfect cycling conditions. 11:45 am yours truly first to arrive followed 10 minutes later by Harold, (on time for a change) and a further 10 minutes later by Caroline, only five minutes late, so in her eyes she was actually on time. First thing she noticed was that her dad had forgotten his helmet; he'd put a hat on instead. No time to go back, so he was banished from the group and spent the rest of the day tagging along, (he actually did, for reasons that will be revealed) Off we set, next stop Trencherfield.

We were the first to arrive, and with the drizzle getting heavier pondered as to how many would actually turn up. The weather indeed had taken its toll on the lightweights, with only a further four joining us for the days adventure. Pleasantries exchanged, off we headed via the town centre up towards Standishgate, first mechanical problem though, Harold was struggling with his rear wheel and gears, temporarily sorted we got on our way again. Up Wigan Lane; down Leyland Mill Lane, and up past the Rugby Club before joining the canal at the Lodge, punctuated by several more stops to sort out Harold's bike. Reminiscent of a ride a few weeks ago, when Ray had the problems. Ray fixed his bike by eventually kicking it; he kindly offered to do the same for Harold. Canal towpath to Red Rock, via a bit of mud just for Roy's benefit (hang on though he hadn't turned up, yet again) then route 55 to Adlington. A quick road section took us through Adlington, a footpath through someone's front garden, and a farm track led us to Horrobin Lane and a downhill coast into Rivington.

From here it was a series of roads and trails leading us up to the higher barn for our mid-ride refreshments, Harold more than anyone was glad for the rest, he was having to change gear by lifting the chain from cog to cog, meaning he was nearly always in the wrong gear for the terrain. Fair play Harold, a lesser man may have given up. Coffee's all round and a bite to eat (plain chocolate kit-kat again for me, thanks Caroline) was the order of the day as we once again set about putting the world's affairs in order. Refreshments over, and comfort breaks taken, it was time to continue with our tour of Rivington. This did bring a smile to Harold's face!

A series of trails, and a bit of road thrown in for good measure, took us on a circular journey around the lower sections of Rivington, passing by the ruins of Liverpool Castle on our way to the Lower Barn and the start of our homeward journey. Jim gathered the group together to explain that there would be a few slight climbs on the route back, together with one stonking one on Dark Lane. (Harold's face) First up was Horrobin Lane, or Horrible Lane as Ray referred to it. On we pressed, with teeth gritted and hearts pumping on the slog up to the junction with New Road. That was supposedly one of the slight climbs, what was Dark Lane going to be like we all asked ourselves? Grimeford Lane followed with another very slight climb, before we reached the junction with the A6 and the daunting Dark Lane.

Denis and myself were first to reach the foot of the hill, (no surprise there) but unknown to us, once again we had got it wrong and were at the foot of the wrong hill, (again, no surprise there) Denis set off up the hill like a rat out of a trap, myself on the other hand, took the opportunity for a breather whilst waiting for the others to catch up. On seeing them emerge onto the A6 and take a different route I was caught in two minds, shouting to Denis did no good; he was almost at the top, several minutes ahead of me. Unlikely to catch him, and knowing that Denis looks behind him once every three weeks or so, I erred on the side of caution and went to join the others (besides that I wanted to tackle Dark Lane).

Dark Lane safely negotiated, and heart rates back to normal attentions turned to the whereabouts of Denis. Jim explained that if Denis, on realising he was alone had taken a right turn, he would meet up at the same point. This was discarded as Denis only ever goes straight ahead, followed by another straight ahead etc; from this we assumed he would be in Westhoughton on the way to Manchester. Several theories emerged as to the reason for his disappearance, was it a genuine mistake; did he mistake Little Scotland for actual Scotland, or did he just not fancy climbing Dark Lane. You decide!

Excitement over and a man down we carried on with the ride, a few more of Jim's slight climbs followed as we made our way to Haigh Hall and the start of the long awaited downhill section through the plantation grounds. During this section Jim explained that he was on a 5pm curfew and seeing that home was only a short distance away it would be prudent for him to leave the ride at this point, (did a remarkable job of concealing the electronic tag!) Whelley Loop and the canal towpath back to Wigan followed, farewells to Ray and Joyce left the three amigos heading back towards Leigh. Dover Lock, and it was my turn to say goodbye to a rather tired looking Harold and Caroline. Harold said it was the toughest bike ride he had done, not the route, just that the problems with the bike had taken its toll. Many thanks to everyone for braving the weather, turning out and making it the day it was.

Since heard that Caroline walked the last couple of miles home, vowing never to get on a bike again. She soon recovered and I'm glad to report the threat didn't materialise and has been back out cycling again, cant keep a good cyclist down!