

## To Sale Or Not To Sale

Some great weather forecast for the day and a bank holiday to boot, how would we cope with the numbers? No to bad as it happed, decent turnout of seven eager bodies keen to make the most of the sunshine. Even Harold's wife Sheila turned out, albeit for the short journey from home to the bridge and back, maybe next time! No discussions needed as to the destination, just whether or not to make it a circular route. Caroline led the way; escorting her Mum back home while we made our minds up, Worsley going and Warburton coming back was the decision, so due East we headed.

Caught up with the front-runners at Butts Bridge and said goodbye to Shelia before making our way to the now familiar Marsland Green Lane and the East Lanc's. Picked up a cycle trail round about Astley area, heading initially for Mosley Common and on through to Ellenbrook where we joined NCN 55. First mishap of the day occurred as Jim H negotiated his way through the access gate on to the route, access was on a short but steep gradient and Jim was using clip in shoes, struggled to clip in, lost momentum and when he tried to put the power down his chain snapped. Still clipped in, it was hit the deck time, sideways and with some bushes to break his fall thankfully. Harold and Denis unaware of the situation, had as you may imagine scarpered, next stop Sale in all probability. Quick phone call put them in the picture whilst a suitably recovered Jim set about affecting a roadside repair. Joyce meanwhile decided to carry on and catch up to the others, returned to join the repair gang a while later having reached a crossroads and with no obvious direction to take erred on the side of caution. Repair successfully carried out and with oily hands cleaned using an abundant supply of grass we hit the trail again just as Denis and Harold came back to check on proceedings.

Got to within a few hundred yards of the Old Station Platform at Worsley when it was Harold's turn for mechanical issues, just a puncture this time though. Repair completed at the second time of asking, (don't ask) we actually rode past the platform without stopping for coffee, didn't seem right at all, got to have been a first! Followed the 55 to Monton where we picked up the Bridgewater Canal towpath, took us through Patricroft and via a short stretch of road over the Old Barton Swing Bridge before re-joining the towpath for what turned out to be a rather impromptu coffee stop.

Suitably refreshed on we pressed towards Sale passing behind the Trafford Centre, past Kellogg's and through Trafford Park into Stretford. This is where we went wrong last time, left the towpath to our right and doubled back underneath the canal to pick up the trail leading among other places to the Water Park. Got as far as the Clubhouse before stopping for a comfort break, yet another refuelling and the usual gossip. Relieved, watered and fed we continued our lap of the Lake prior to heading back to the canal towpath and the continuation of the journey, this time Warburton bound.

Towpath nearly all the way, or at least that's what we presumed, reached the centre of Sale only to find that the towpath had been closed for refurbishment. Good news and bad news in a way, good news, at least they are spending money on the canals to improve them for us, bad news, after the initial sign showing the diversion, that was it, didn't have a map to fall back on so guess it was. Headed in what we considered to be the right direction, expecting to pick up the towpath again a little further along. Rode parallel to the canal for what seemed like a mile or so without much success in finding it again, happened to meet some other cyclists perhaps they could assist!

For once we'd asked the right people, locals who knew the area. Gave us some directions to the Metrolink station in Timperley. Recognised a building near the station and remembered the canal ran at the side of it. Access to the towpath was down several flights of steps that we duly climbed down, only to find a temporary fence and towpath closed sign, now what! Closer inspection revealed someone had moved the fence, just enough to squeeze through, did we risk it, we certainly did. Technically not having moved the fence and coupled with being selectively illiterate we felt justified in doing so, certainly better than the alternative.

Next mile or so was pretty rough going; they were digging up the existing grassed surface to replace with a new compacted stone version. The machinery had made quite a mess of the path in getting to the start of the works, which as it happened was about twenty yards before we reached the end. We had cycled more than a mile or so through tyre tracks and ruts to take advantage of the tiny bit they had completed, ah well.

Back on the right track so to speak we headed along quite a picturesque section of canal past Dunham Massey and Little Bollington, leaving the canal to join Mill Lane and the way to Warburton Bridge. Crossed in the car many a time, but never cycled over it, a first for most of us I think. Brief section of busy road followed by quiet farm roads led us to Birchwood, more access and quiet roads took us to Risley and through into Croft and along Kenyon's Lane to Lane Head at Lowton. Could we ride past yet another pub, answer was no, at least for some of us. Ride had taken a bit longer than expected, greater distance travelled and a problem or two to contend with had Jim H worrying about making his intended afternoon session in the Bocket, decided to sacrifice one pint for several it seems, duly bidding us farewell and heading back to Wigan, the rest of us settled in at the Red Lion for a pint and chat in the beer garden.

Discussions turned to Jim T's Belgium trip and how they may have fared, Bruges was mentioned and Harold it seems is quite an aficionado, Himself along with Caroline and several other family members go there every year at Christmas time, for what you may ask, the beer of course as if you couldn't guess. Know all the best pubs and breweries; some of the stories were quite amusing, but that's for another day.

Back on the bikes it was Harold's turn to bid farewell as the remaining five cycled through Lowton heading back to Plank Lane, Caroline next to bail followed by Ray & Joyce at the Swing-bridge. Just left the two of us, (myself and Denis) to cycle back along the canal to Scotsman's Flash and home. Denis had told Lynn he would be home just after lunch; all depends on what time you have lunch I suppose. Don't give a time estimate anymore, doomed to failure from past experiences!

Yet another great ride, superb route but possibly bordering on the limit, without a proper lunch stop I would expect. (Covered just over 40 miles from Plank Lane & back) Thanks to everyone for coming along, hope you enjoyed it! Jim H, trust you managed to get to the Bocket on time!!! Don't want the Landlord blaming us for a shortfall in the till.

Till next time!