

Quite a dry spell leading up to day of the ride, canal towpath for the journey to Parbold should have been in pretty good condition! Not too good a forecast for the actual day however, but we were going anyway, (well some of us at least). Don't know how much rain it had put down overnight but the trails over the Three Sisters were saturated, rode them the day before and they were absolutely fine! At least the rain had cleared up though and the prospect of a decent day was the latest offering from the Met Office.

Trencherfield 09:00 am first meeting point, 5 of us having made the effort with another due to meet us at Martland Mill, the remainder at Parbold, all that was needed now was to actually get to Parbold. Had only just set off when a latecomer joined the party, it was Anthony from Active Living's Robin Park Group, coming along with us a guest for the day. Anthony always has a showroom condition bike, not sure it was going to stay that way for very long. Enid was next to join us at Martland Mill, yet another Active Living member, must be some common denominator.

Margaret and Enid led the way, at quite a lick if truth be told, rest of us were doing our best to keep up. To say the towpath was wet and muddy is just about as big an understatement as you could possibly imagine, it was horrendous, certainly must have bucketed it down during the night, even prompted Jim to say that next time we did the ride he would meet us at Parbold, (had you made of sterner stuff than that Jim). Anthony was more than impressed with the conditions, his nice shiny bike looked just like mine, (not been cleaned in months, waste of effort if you ask me).

Parbold safely negotiated we could look forward to some Tarmac for the rest of the journey, much to everyone's relief I might add, especially Anthony. Another 5 joined our ranks at Parbold making it a nice round dozen, 4 members and yet another guest, Graham this time and just to be awkward he wasn't an Active Living member. Time to get going, bit of busy road for the first half mile, busier than the canal anyway. We were heading through Newburgh to Burscough via Back Lane and eventually School Lane; this brought us out near the Railway Station at Burscough Bridge. A very short section of the A59 saw us making our way towards Tarleton, past Martin Mere bird sanctuary. Planned coffee stop was duly abandoned; it was shut believe it or not, who'd have thought it, dull Monday morning in February, what were the proprietors thinking. Rode past it a week earlier on a Sunday and there were 30 or more bikes parked up, hands up on that one, bit of bad planning! One or two of the contingent were asking if could we go to our usual café, we'd been once before as it happened, hardly our usual. Next up a puncture, got all the bikes off the road into a bit of a layby, actually the start of someone's driveway, electric gates n'all, couldn't see the house; it was that sort of driveway, they wouldn't need to use it would they! Damm right they would, Sods's law I think they call it.

Repair took quite a while; one or two more were asking about a café stop, ride was degenerating into chaos. Thought about changing the route to go to our usual, that would have meant missing the best part of the ride though. Sticking with plan A and puncture finally repaired we set off again for Mere Brow, furthest point of the ride and our turn for home, still a few miles away yet though. Mere Brow finally reached we headed across the Mosses via Green Lane (part of the NCN network), hardly saw another soul, a tractor in the field and a couple of walkers, that was it. Crossed over the A59 onto even more quiet lanes heading in the direction of Bretherton, before joining Station Road for the short journey into Croston and much to everyone's relief, lunch at the Grapes Hotel.

Got something right, the pub was a huge success, good food and some decent beer on, (so I've been told), nobody left anything so that's a good sign, probably be our usual now.

Mawdesley was our next destination along a series of quiet country roads, one or two of the group had started flagging by this time, (shouldn't have eaten so much) By-passing Mawdesley centre we wound our way past Cedar Farm to Bispham Green and then Hillgate where we bid farewell to Joyce, Ray and Eileen so they could make their way back to Parbold. Original plan was to go back with them before heading back along the canal, not a popular option as it happened. Alternative was a mile or three detour and Smithy Brow (Aka Cardiac Hill) not that bad actually. Alternative it was then, next few miles saw the group spread out considerably as fatigue crept in, had to stop at every junction to allow us to re-group. Enid wasn't for stopping though, said she wouldn't have got going again, so every time she caught up she carried on, bless her!

Cardiac Hill, one or two were looking forward to this as you might imagine, probably for the first time ever yours truly actually stayed at the back going up a hill (never been known) Nursed Enid up in doing so, all credit to her though, tired as maybe she managed it. By this stage she'd probably cycled further than ever before, to tackle and overcome that hill was all credit to her, (be no stopping her now). The top of the hill placed us almost in Wrightington, so Tunley Lane, Mossy Lea Road and Pepper Lane were next up as we made our way to Standish, then it was downhill all the way back to Wigan (well almost). Left Enid on Wigan Lane (almost home). Well-done Enid, so proud of you! Jim H and Graham had also left us by this stage, Graham although a seasoned cyclist hadn't rode in a while, no doubt he was glad to make it back to Wigan.

Central Station it was then for post-ride refreshments, Cherry Gardens, Mesnes Road, The Brockett (Jim H would be in there later I'm sure) Mesnes Park and the Town Centre passed by as the refreshment beckoned. Biggest disappointment of the day though, no Fanny's Bramble on the beer menu, been looking forward to it all week!

Another great ride, I'm sure everyone that took part would agree, probably be some sore legs the following day, best part of 40 miles is nothing to be sniffed at, not for the first ride of the year anyway. All that remained was to clean the bikes! Anthony would have been beside himself; mine got put away dirty, ready for the next outing, (did clean and oil the chain though).

Huge thank you (in no particular order) to Roy, Margaret, Phil, Jim T, Anthony, Enid, Joyce, Ray, Eileen, Jim H and Graham for making the ride a success, another one coming up shortly so hope to see you on that one. Trust our guests enjoyed the ride and look forward to them joining us as members in the not too distant future.

See you all next time!