

What a glorious day for a bike ride, stunning route and scenery, well done Geoff for leading the ride and the route advice along the way.

15 hardy souls left Ribchester with a distinct autumnal chill in the air and no doubt a degree of apprehension amongst some given the description of the route on the website, however apart from The Beast it wasn't too bad.

In total we covered 29 miles and climbed around 2100ft.

A brief stop after a few miles to view Whalley Abbey and absorb the scenery and architecture, this included the scaffolding poles evident around the site, nonetheless very picturesque, and we then continued the undulations to our planned cafe stop at Downham. Unfortunately upon reaching the lovely little hamlet we discovered that due to illness the cafe was shut!, this had us all reaching for our bottles and energy bars as we sat watching the ducks around the village green.

The undoubted highlight of the stop was in fact the gents toilet, they even had the women queuing up (well just Tracey actually), did you like what you saw? The gents was a converted pigsty and certainly a talking point.

Well done to Len who during the stop changed tubes for Enid who had picked up a thorn en route, the debate as to whether the thorn had actually penetrated the tyre and tube was quickly resolved by the familiar hissing sound as the thorn was brushed off.

We departed Downham the way we had arrived except that the downhill approach was now of course an uphill slog, clearly someone or something had enjoyed a tasty lunch as the road kill that we passed on the way out was distinctly smaller than on our way in- poor bunny.

Anticipation continued to grow as the miles ticked by- The Beast was approaching!, however before we could tackle the climb we were faced with a somewhat tricky and potentially dangerous detour, a collapsed bridge meant a crossing by foot through a raging torrent and croc infested river (think Wildebeast), a human chain was formed and the bikes handed across one by one, fortunately none were damaged which is more than can be said for those of us wearing cleats- phew we all made it but that was close.

Finally after about 20 miles we received our final briefing before turning left and facing a wall, at about 1km long and with an average gradient of 11%, though over 24% at its steepest, this was certainly a challenge- timely gear change making all the difference, from recall just 2 of the 15 managed to tame The Beast, and it must go down as one of the hardest we have ever tackled. Did you know that there is a tree about halfway up that has been nicknamed The Satan Tree by locals, I think it was the one with all the roots exposed on the edge of the tarmac, I had a close look as I walked past, well done to everyone who made it to the top.

A few more rolling miles and we finally rolled back in to the car park before some members retired to the local hostelry for a well earned glass of pop, thanks again Geoff a stunning ride that had everything.