

The Furnace Creek 508

Toby Wooldridge (Head Navigator and Executive Feeder for 'Wolfspider')

It has long been Ann's ambition to complete a classic long-distance event in the USA. Now, I am not talking about a 12 or 24 hour – she has done a number of those. Oh no, I am talking about something in the next league.

The daddy of them all is the Race Across America (the RAAM), some 3000 miles all told, from San Diego in southern California to Atlantic City in New Jersey, to be completed in no more than 12 days, with the clock not stopping at any time.

To enter this audacious event as a solo rider you have to qualify – no mean feat in the first place. Ann is the only British lady to qualify through solo qualifying events (you can do this event as a team). She crewed for Chris Hopkinson in 2005 and so saw the race at first hand. However she decided the event was not possible due to physiological problems, specifically 'hot-feet', which if you have not experienced this is difficult to understand.

So there it was: no RAAM for Ann. I have to admit I was relieved, having seen the results of 12 days of continuous riding on a number of competitors. It can't really be a good thing!

The alternative was close at hand (so to speak): the Furnace Creek 508. This event starts just north-east of Los Angeles, heads into the Californian deserts and mountains, dips into and along Death Valley (passing through Furnace Creek), out and over more mountain ranges to finish south-east of L.A.. How far? You guessed – 508 miles. Two days are allowed to complete the event: 48 hours to defy the clock, the heat and the mountains. There is 35,000 feet of climbing. Yes, you read that right!

So, in October 2006 when Ann concluded the RAAM was out, the 508 was in. Cool. Or maybe, Hot! Preparations started immediately.

The event, like all the American long-distance events, is well organized – professional, in fact. The entry fee is significant; there are no prizes, just the knowing you have overcome the obstacle. There are many rules. Failure to obey them results in disqualification (e.g. consumption of alcohol) or time penalties ('shooting a stop sign'). There are time stations to log into: miss one and you do not finish. Maybe the US is no longer the land of the free...

A crew is a necessity: we have opted for four crew members, three Brits and one 'local' (who resides in North Carolina to be exact, so not exactly close to California) have been commissioned for the outing. All expenses paid, which is only fair as we are using their time and energy.

The vehicle needs to be big (aren't they all over there?!) but not too big: no more than 78" wide. The organizer is 'green' and will not allow monster support vehicles.

Each rider has to select an animal 'totem' which links to your name: we have selected Wolfspider, and as this has not already been used it has been approved. The totem is instead of a race number: riders adorn their support vehicle with images of their totem – so we are looking for material with which to create a spider.

Offers gratefully received!

**no mean feat in the first place.
Ann is the only British lady to
qualify through solo qualifying
events**

Support vehicles are allowed to follow their rider: in fact, overnight this is compulsory and no easy task for the

drivers – traveling at around 15mph (or less if ascending a mountain) and illuminating the road for the rider without driving into them. Sounds like fun! During the day we can leap-frog, but due to the heat it is not a good idea to get too far ahead or behind.

Logistics during the event are difficult: it is basically desert out there with precious little else: occasional small towns. You must fill up with gas and ice at certain points – else you won't make it to the next shop! There is no room for error. The maxim is 'if you see it, stop and buy it!'

Training started in earnest in May after the cancelled Austrian 12 hour. This is how the intervening months have panned out.

June: Back-to-back longish hilly rides, all seated: no out of the saddle nonsense! Numerous spin classes, culminating in an 8 hour marathon spin session at a local gym.

July: rather spoilt by the unseasonably wet weather (remember?) and with the loss of water for over a week Ann became dehydrated. Weight fell dramatically: I missed the excitement as I was working in New York (plenty of water there!) and returned to find a small wife. To the point all her clothes were baggy and her Gloucester skin suit was unwearable – far too flappy! Indoor turbo sessions of 3 to 4 hours were the order of the month, it being too wet outside.

August: The WTTA 100 was the first of four consecutive days where mileage exceeded 125 miles each day, this phase being part of a 17 day mega-cycle. Then a break. Phew! This sorted out the nutrition, pedals and saddle combinations for the event. Critical stuff. Not to mention the build-up of endurance strength: the 508 is all about pedaling efficiently and the ability to refuel and recover.

September: This kicks off with the Welsh 12 hour (a great day out), (also a 25, 50 and other events). The 12 hour has to be paced such that Ann could do another 12 hours of riding the next day. The target mileage is 175 – 200 miles and incorporating a number of specified stops.

Continued Page 4

On the logistics front, air tickets were booked (American Airlines won the contract), hotels at the start and finish, car hire and so on. Attention to detail is important: useful items have been gathering in a designated corner of Wooldridge Towers for some time now: if I can't find an item, it is probably there!

On thing that is almost impossible to recreate here is the heat: this is vital as it will be around 40°C or more, a world away from UK conditions. Ann has made extensive use of the GL1 sauna (no, not with the bike!) to try and acclimatize herself to the heat.

The big adventure is nearly upon us: we fly out on

Saturday 29th September; giving us a week to prepare the vehicle (attach the spider, etc), get used to the heat (it looks like another blue-sky day here in the California desert!) and food, stock up on supplies, test the first part of the course and so on. It will be no picnic for the crew! The event starts on Saturday 6th October at 6am local time (2pm Gloucester time). We must complete the course within 48 hours. Simple.

The next Spokespiece will give a story of the event itself. Meanwhile, keep your fingers crossed and spare us a thought over that first weekend in October!

Six Decades in The Saddle and Counting

Introduction

My name is Harry McDonald, I'm 73 and I live in the small provincial *City of Shoalhaven*, 160km south of *Sydney* on the east coast of *Australia*. With my wife and two teenage children, I arrived here in 1970 when I was 37 years old. Before that, the only permanent 'home' I had was in *Dinglewell, Hucclecote, Gloucester*.

Immediately after WWII finished, and through my adolescent years between 1946 and 1951, I had a very close association with cycling in general and the GCCC in particular.

In June, two months ago, my wife and I were 'home' again on vacation, on this occasion staying with friends in *Painswick* village. This had been planned many months earlier of course'. However, some considerable time before it occurred, our hostess spoke to GCCC President Toby about it, explained to him my connection with the Club, plus the important fact that my long cycling career was still very much ongoing, and the notion that a bit of catching-up with old times might be possible.

Consequently, one fine Tuesday evening in June last, I was invited to join a group of about ten Club riders for what turned out to be a most interesting and entertaining evening ride. After a freewheeling contest at Woolridge Hill, we downed a 'half' or two at the Boat at Ashleworth before heading back to the city. As pre-arranged, I had brought a set of cycling uniform with me, Toby had lent me the bike, the weather was fine, and a most enjoyable evening ensued. Perhaps the most interesting fact is that it was the **first time I had ridden with the GCC Club for nearly 57 years**. Whilst I'm not sure if that is a record of sorts, it must be getting close to one.

At the conclusion of the ride, Toby asked me to write an article for *Spokespiece* on my ongoing cycling career, which has so far lasted well over 60 years. My hope that at least some of it will be of interest to current club members.

How it all started

My family first moved to Gloucester in 1945, and in 1946 we lived in Barnwood for a short time.

Our neighbour was a keen cyclist, and invited me to join her and her own children on a two-week bike ride to Land's End and return. Although I was only 12, my parents gave their permission and that experience set the scene for a lifetime of cycling. My memory recalls my bike being an old sit up and beg affair, weighed a ton, had rod brakes and a Sturmey Archer 3-speed hub gear, but 12 year-olds didn't bother about such things in those days, as just having a bike at all was special. That initial tour was a success, and I was hooked for life.

The first five years 1946 - 1951

The one thing we didn't have to worry much about in those days was road traffic. Petrol and food were still strictly rationed for quite a long time after WWII hostilities ceased, and the era of the ubiquitous family car had not yet dawned. During the second half of the 1940s, I rode regularly and frequently with the Club. Motorways were a thing of the future, and traffic was normally so sparse on a Sunday morning, especially on the A38, that safety really wasn't the paramount and dominant issue that it has become today. Towards the end of the 40s, I was participating in more and more tours, some solo and some with friends, as well as longer and more demanding club rides. I can recall lengthy routine local rides, particularly in the Cotswolds, the Forest of Dean, to N. Somerset (Weston S-M) and indeed, on one or two occasions, riding to and from the Brecon Beacons in a single day during mid-summer.

When I was 16, my involvement with cycling took an unexpected turn. I was offered a part-time job in T.G. Hall's bike shop in Barton Street. On weekends and school holidays, I worked both there and their other T. G.Hall cycle store in Stroud. Mostly I was employed in the Barton Street shop or the workshop, but sometimes in Stroud when

Continued Page 5

stocktaking was required. (It seems I was above-average at mental arithmetic and that was both important and helpful because electronic calculators were, like motorways, still a figment of the imagination) These arrangements lasted for over a year.

T.G. himself was still around at the time, and although I'm not sure, my recollection is that he had very little to do with the actual running of the shop. However, there's no doubt whatsoever that it was Mrs. Hall who was the matriarch! She was a rather large lady who used to occupy a tiny office within the Barton St shop, day in, day out, and she chain smoked!

The Halls had a son George, who had an interest in prospecting a gold mine somewhere in Central Wales. He also had a lorry which was ideal for carrying bikes and passengers, and I and others were sometimes invited to join him at weekends at this mine lease. We would then randomly head off on our bikes cycling in that beautiful part of Wales, whilst George continued to try to make his fortune.

The last remembered act before I left Gloucester and the Club was participating in the 1951 "Three Cities" TT, and managing to achieve a silver medal on my trusty 'Dawes', which has an all steel frame, mudguards, and still only 3 gears (derailleur by now of course)! I still have that treasured medal and it lists my time as 4h 20m 55s. If only!

The Korean War starts

In late 1951, my life as I have described it above ended abruptly. A major war was being fought on the Korean Peninsula' in far off Asia. My education at the Crypt Grammar School was completed, and I was not intending to go to University. Therefore, instead of waiting to be called up for National Service, I made a spontaneous decision to join the Royal Navy as a 'regular' serviceman, and thus started a military career which was to last for no less than forty years.

Initially, this had disastrous consequences as far as my cycling career was concerned. Although I went 'off to sea', because I was in the Fleet Air Arm, I actually I spent more time 'ashore' than I did at sea, but I didn't come ashore for good until some 40 years later in 1990.

The rest of the Military Years

As noted above, there were many periods during my military career when I was shore-based and was able to own and ride a bicycle but I was never in the same place for very long and, in the Navy, was never able to find the same satisfaction and camaraderie that I had with the GCCC, which I had valued so much. Marriage and raising a family under military conditions placed many burdens and other obstacles in the way which didn't help cycling continuity either. One positive offshoot was of being posted to various Naval Sir Stations was being able to enjoy (casual)

riding not only in Britain and North Ireland, but also in locations both in the Mediterranean and the Far East.

Circa 1969, British PM Wilson made a political decision to drastically reduce the size of the RN Fleet Air Arm. This was at the very time when I very much wanted to continue my career. The personal consequence of that disastrous political decision was that I was forced to transfer to the Royal Australian Naval Fleet Air Arm, rather than be made redundant. Initially it was for a period of six years only, but I stayed for twenty more, and am still here in Australia some 36 years later - now long-since retired from the Service and out of uniform since 1990.

Back to civilian life

As a further consequence, yet another complete turn-around in my cycling career occurred, and for the past 17 years, since I left the Navy for good, I have been totally absorbed in almost every aspect of local, recreational and touring cycling again. The passion and hunger that was generated in my youth by the GCCC never died, in fact it never even wavered!

What it's like now

The East Coast of Australia is cycling heaven. There are many thousands of kilometres of fertile and comparatively flat land in the coastal belt. There are also thousands of kilometres of high mountains and forests (The Great Dividing Range - the longest range of mountains in the world) on the western side of the coastal highways, and these extend far into the central Australian deserts. Suffice to say that such varied topography meets the needs and demands of even the most ardent MTBer! And the weather is perfect for cycling 95% of the year.

When the MTB era took off in Australia, I spent quite a few years exploring some of the local mountains and forests whilst creating new MTB rides. Eventually the role of the local Cycling Club's Rides Leader was foisted on me, and for some years MTBing became the irresistible choice of cycling. However, eventually the 70+ year-old legs became a little too slow for all concerned, and the leadership reins were passed on some time ago. Nevertheless, 10,000 km a year and one 2-week tour every year is still my norm.

Regrettably, by the time the MTBing era became established, many of the 'rides' I would like to have accomplished were well outside my physical capabilities. Circumnavigating the Continent and crossing some of the world's most **treacherous** deserts were once 'in my dreams' but commonsense kicked in and are no longer considered an option! However, some parts of the Great Dividing Range and the fringes of the 'Outback' are both challenges which **have** been tackled over the past dozen years.

Sydney to Brisbane (3 times), Sydney to Melbourne (3 times), Adelaide to Melbourne (3 times) and from the Queensland Border country to

Continued Page 6

NE Victoria are some of the major tours I have completed. Each of them tours is well over 1,000km, with the last one nearly 2,000km. And hardly a main road in sight! They have nearly all been back road tours or off-road

Through the mountains and forests.

On other multi-day tours, significant successes have included 3 x times reaching the summit of Mt. Kosciusko (the highest mountain in Australia).

A specially significant personal highlight on one remote outback ride was catching up with a drover who was looking after his livestock out on the 'long paddock', an Aussie term for the grass growing along the edges of the public roads, in order to keep them alive. This occurred during the worst drought in Australia in over 100 years. The drover said he had already been on the road for more than 2 months, living out of his 4WD, just praying for rain every day, and resigned to the fact that he could still be doing the same for many more months if the rains didn't come. For me, that was a truly moving and awesome experience.

Retirees Ongoing Ride Opportunities.

Every Wednesday and Saturday morning, all year round, a group of us leave the town at 7.00am on our road bikes for a fast ride down to the Pacific coast and return before breakfast – rides which are additional to all the Clubs' many scheduled ones. The latter are on Thursdays - for less experienced and less fit riders (well supported) - and Sundays, which is the Club's

major ride's day of course. Additionally, as if the above weren't enough, spontaneous rides are also organised on both Monday and Tuesday mornings. A normal week's aggregate ride for many of us is roughly 200km = 125 miles, and because the weather is fine more than 90% of the time we very rarely have to cancel.

Conclusion and Thanks

In conclusion, I take this opportunity, to thank Toby and Anne Woolridge for giving me the opportunity to record and pass on the story of my long association with cycling in general and the GCCC in particular. If there is any reader who may be able to identify with the subject era, and who may recall some of the circumstances I have mentioned, and who may even have a personal recollection of me, I would love to hear from you. My e-address is adslvtf6@tpg.com.au

Finally, I would like to thank the riders with whom I enjoyed that wonderful Tuesday evening ride in June. I regret that I didn't manage to remember all your names, but I'll never forget the ride, and we did get some nice photos which were taken at the start of the ride and during a 'quick half' on the way home.

Last but not least, a final thank you to my Painswick hostess Audrey, a very dear friend and near neighbour from 1940s schooldays, whose original idea was the inspiration for all that subsequently happened.

Racing Secretary's Report — Some samples from the club's press releases —

On the 25th of August Darren Jewell and Graham Denny took part in the Warwickshire road club 10 mile two up time trail held at Alcester. To ride this event requires one senior and one vet. On the day, which was very warm and humid, they finished with a time of 23 minutes and 40 seconds which gave them 16th place out of nearly 40 pairs. Graham was really pleased as this was the first he had been under 24 minutes for 10 miles. The event was won by team of Will Moore and David Barnes of Wye Forest CC with a super quick time of 20 minutes and 45 seconds.

On August Bank Holiday Monday John Murphy and Darren Jewell travelled to Peterfield to ride a 50 mile trial held between there and Liphook. The event was won by Kevin Dawson with a super quick time of 1 hour and 42 minutes and 26 seconds, averaging nearly 30 miles an hour. Conditions were not great and it was really hard in places. Darren Jewell produced what he says is his best ride to date this season, taking over three minutes off a personal best set over a year ago. His time of 2 hours and 1 minute and 17 seconds was good enough for 41st place on the day from a strong field of 120 riders. John Murphy came home

with his second fastest 50 of the year with 2 hours and nine minutes and 4 seconds with gave him 72nd place and second placed vet on standard..

On the 26th of August Gloucester City promoted their annual T.G.Hall 25 mile time trail. It was meant to be held on the Maisemore to Ledbury course but due to road works had to be moved to the A38 between Falfield and Slimbridge. The fastest rider of the day was Dave Rudland who rides for Dursley Road Club with a good time of 56 minutes and 32 seconds. Top Gloucester rider was again George Unsworth who recorded a time of 56 minutes and 50 seconds to earn 5th place and first senior. Next was the ever improving Andy Shipton with a great time of 59 minutes and 25 seconds who just missed out on a top 10 place. Guy Preece achieved 1 hour and 41 seconds, good enough for 17th and enough to win Gloucester City CC yet another team prize. Another good ride was that of Andy Palmer who improved by well over a minute from two weeks ago to record a time of 1 hour and 1 minute and 56 seconds. After another good winter's training it won't be long before he is breaking the hour again.