

The Italian Job — Continued

As in the last edition of Spokespiece this write up has been divided so that everyone each wrote a section. See if you can work out who wrote each section!

By the riders: Toby, Alister, Alastair, Richard, Dave and George

Day 5 Rest Day.

It was a bit damp and wet when the group eventually met up to walk in to Canazei for postcards. On our stroll, outside the Catholic Church we stumbled across a religious procession with local girls and boys in traditional costume. As the day warmed up the group had coffee and mused on its options. All involved a cable car and a little bit of cycling. A picnic was a must, so we purchased goodies then cycled part way up the Pordoi to a pond for a picnic. A veritable feast, which included bread, cheeses and salami, was consumed with the stunning views of mountains with their snowy peaks in the distance.

What to do next? It was an even split: Toby Bailey (renowned artistic photographer), Little Al the club run cowboy! Yeeha! (2nd rate), and Ricardo Clements decided to continue to the Pordoi to get extra miles in and then go on the cable car. Ali G, Brown Dave and George did the easier option of cycling back down the mountain through Canazei and on to Competitor to enjoy a different cable car ride. This cable car wasn't open until 2pm so we had a 30 mins. wait during which a couple, who Ali G had said "Bon Journo" to whilst cycling through Arraba, spotted us and enquired if we were really from Gloucester? It turned out that they were from Bourton on the Water, on a walking holiday and were also waiting for the cable car.

The cable car to Col de Rodella was pretty full. From the Col you could see across to the Col de Sella and the three peaks once climbed by John Flint before he joined the Club. They looked pretty impressive from our perspective. The three of us climbed to the highest point of the Rodella. George put his old Look cleats to good use, finding the terrain a little tricky ascend/descending the side of a mountain! At the top was a restaurant, unfortunately shut, that had fantastic views overlooking Canazei to the cable car the other group were to board. It looked like a very tiny little box going up a very thin wire! On our descent in the cable car, Ali G noticed a cycle track along the river, which was much more inviting than the main road, and flatter, so we dawdled back to the hotel, dumped our bikes and set off into town for an ice cream!

We met up for the evening meal to hear stories of little Al finding the cable car a little too high for his liking. (Shetland Ponies are more his height!). On returning to ground level he was seen kissing the floor and thanking the heavens that the most stressful part of his holiday had passed. Brown Dave told us all about the Lindy Hop, a new dance routine he had been learning; unfortunately we didn't get a demo!

After another good feed, the rabble hit the town to watch the Portugal v Holland match. Football doesn't normally appeal, but this one was the most entertaining of matches. It involved 4 red cards and so many yellows, that I lost count! There was even some good football, when they weren't fouling and getting sent off!

Day 6 Monday 26 June Canazei to Pocol 64.1 Km 1683m climb.

We left Hotel Crystal in good weather and rode immediately up towards the Marmalada on a very busy road. As we drew away from Canazei the traffic thinned out and left us to admire the scenery. It was a long steady climb, broken by a reservoir where we stopped for drinks and cake. We could see the Marmalada but first had to finish the climb of the Passo di Fedala at 2057m. It was then a rather scary descent into the Sottogunda Gorge. I have a feeling that we missed the pretty route by staying on the "new" road but the scenery was still magnificent and the road tree lined. Another climb beckoned and we surged upwards and onwards. As I was at the back I have no idea which athletes gained the King of the Mountains points. Lunch time called and we stopped at a very good café for spaghetti and lemon tea, a most refreshing drink.

We found our way to the top. Toby, George and Rich went off to the nearby Passo di Falzarego (2192m) Dave and I stayed in the café as we were tired but by the time they returned we were refreshed enough to climb it ourselves, leaving our luggage with George. The landscape was quite moon like there. After regrouping we enjoyed the most picturesque descent to Pocol. The scenery was wonderful, fir trees and craggy mountains with snow on the top. This was truly the Dolomites and well worth the climb. I stopped countless times to take photos as it was so spectacular. At the Hotel we were greeted by Ingrid, who was very Germanic and made us most welcome. She showed us to the terrace where we had a 180 degree view (which we drank in along with the beer) of the mountain range, including a mountain that looked straight out of Paramount Pictures. The Hotel was very comfortable and Ingrid arranged an excellent meal for us at the restaurant across from the hotel.

Day seven: Tues 27 June Pocol to Longarone 63.9 Km 1618m climb.

The experience continued with a traditional German breakfast, plenty of heavy bread and other stuff - all good nourishment if you had a few miles before a big hill but we had only a kilometre before the climbing started. It went on for another 15km or so.

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The mountain we captured, Passo di Giau (2,233m), was regarded by the locals as the most beautiful in the Dolomites. Well, it was rather jolly but in my opinion there were more scenic ones. The top opened out with splendid views that demanded a slow pace to be enjoyed (that's my excuse). The pattern of the tour was repeated: George and Alister sprinted off at the foot like mountain goats; Rich and I went steady, Alastair and Dave even steadier. Rich fell back whilst the Robot progressed onwards, reeling in and spitting out Scotty. George paced himself to the top for another maximum points haul. The top had a pleasant bar / restaurant enjoying views in most directions, so we thought it best to enjoy them too. As the remains of the group hauled themselves to the summit the early arrivals settled down to coffee and the enticing sight of "une bonne femme" cyclist going through her stretching routine. A sly photo may or may not have been taken at this point – you will have to attend the slide show to find out! She turned out to be American (as well as being well turned out and clearly fit) – just hope she did not hear the comments that some of the Gloucester folk were making!

Anyway, time for the big descent, too many hairpins to count, all very beautiful and really rather fast. Several poor souls were creeping up as we flew down. In the valley a shop was spotted just before it closed for lunch (12 'till 3 was the norm) and we procured some picnic lunch goodies. These were equitably divided amongst the crew and we set off up the final climb. On spotting picnic benches in the shade by a stream we diverted for a feed and a rest. Those that tried the water reported a rapid loss of feeling to the bodily parts immersed in the melt waters. No-one went for a full immersion! Then on with the last ascent; George romped off, followed by Toby and Richard. Surprisingly the top was gained in no time at all and the sprint between T & R was hard fought and extremely painful. Toby got it by a whisker. We fell into the hill-top bar for a beer or two (Passo Staulanza, 1,773m) then a hot and steep descent that went on for miles. A break was called for some ice cream and to allow our rims to cool, following which we had more delightful downhill all the way to our last stage town of Longarone, an odd place, built mainly of concrete

and with little style. The Hotel Post was hard to find due to road works all around it but when located proved to be a 1970's classic with original fittings and very unusual decorations. It was also very hot. But it did afford a view of the railway station and was adjacent to a supermarket – we took full advantage and purchased some beer and wine. A pizza taken in town with lots of pink wine went down a treat: the perfect way to end our final full evening.

Day 8 Longarone to Venice and Bristol

We had time to do a little souvenir shopping before boarding the train to Venice, a diesel hauled one with plenty of space for the bikes. We left bikes and luggage with in the "Left Luggage" at a cost of €8.60 each, more than the train fare of only €5.60 for 100 miles. The train fare was very good value for money.

Toby could not believe that one couldn't cycle in Venice but by the time we had done the sights, from a water bus along the canals to St Mark's Square, was convinced. We took mandatory photos and then gradually explored the city. There are no roads, only paths and alleys; everything else goes by boats on the canal. It is all very picturesque. We continued the walk back but our navigation was not so good until George took hold of the map and led us back to the station via the Bridge of Sighs and the Rialto Bridge. Venice is really a lovely city full of character and no traffic, only crowds of people.

We recovered our bikes and made it to the causeway, riding a cycle path sandwiched between lorries and buses and trains. Richard's GPS led us to where we had left the bags but we did have to rescue him from cycling on the Motorway suggested by his GPS!

We had time for supper, a final drink and to say good bye to the waitresses before going to the airport for the flight to Bristol. All in all it was a great holiday with plenty of absolutely stunning scenery and climbing and, as Toby said it is either up or down there is no flat!

Annual Dinner and Prize Presentation

Another date for your diary:-

Saturday 1st. December 2007.

The Annual Dinner and Prize Presentation is at the same venue as last year.
Make sure you make your booking early.

