

I have often flown over the Canadian Rockies, and wondered what it would be like to cycle there. As they hove into view, I was about to live that dream! Our tour was organized by a Canadian bike touring company, fully supported with bus and bike/kitchen trailer..

DAY ONE Nelson to Waterton-Glacier Park

Over breakfast, we introduced ourselves: our tour leader, who competed in this year's Trans Alp race, a double Commonwealth Games shot put champion and one-time world record holder, one women's Canadian Commonwealth Games gymnastics competitor (currently heading for BC road racing champion in age category), last year's BC Master's Road Racing champion, last year's No. 3 lady in the Melbourne Ironman, an Ontario Master's champion, etc. Having in all practical terms been out of cycling for forty years until retiring in 2003, I felt slightly in awe of the esteemed company and wondered what I had let myself in for. Would it be a race? Would I keep up? And more importantly and relevant, did the last person to the overnight accommodation stop have to pay for the beer?

These thoughts swirled around as I surreptitiously checked the lightweight machines around me. Not a mudguard or saddle bag in sight! I realized that some sort of tactic would be required. Ah yes – photos, and lots of them, preferably every mile or so. That would provide a genuine excuse, which also happened to be true. We loaded up and set off for the first stop of our tour.

DAY TWO Waterton-Glacier Park to Pincher Creek, 101kms

Our first day dawned bright and clear. After a fine breakfast, and having noted route instructions, (tip to racers – pay or you get lost!), we set off. As I took time to photograph the fine entirely wooden-built 7 storey Prince of Wales* hotel built in 1927 (and said to be the most photographed hotel in the world) I realized that I was on my own - shades of things to come. I rode the 25kms and 4800ft climb past the impressive Chief Mountain to the US border, sweeping in exhilarating fashion down to the lakeside lunch at 60kms. So far so good, but the scorching temperature in the 90's and a strong head wind made the afternoon's run through wide-open golden-yellow rolling prairie country rather tough. Plenty of photos though!

DAY THREE Pincher Creek to Highwood River Lodge 115 kms

On another fine morning our journey took us further into 'Cowboy Country' as we set off into a stiff wind, apparently an Alberta specialty (hence the prolific wind farms). Glorious prairie grassland countryside reflected the hot dry summer. Two horrendously long climbs took us to lunch at Chain Lakes. The afternoon was greener and less windy, taking in the historic Bar U Ranch on the way. A left at Longview (tip to

racers - left not right!) took us along an almost flat, traffic-free road to our night's accommodation. Frantic phoning by the leader to find the lost racers might have provoked a smile or two, had I not dehydrated and got the bonk, and arrived to collapse in a whiter shade of pale. Medical assistance from the tour doctor, and copious Gatorade and apple juice eventually brought me back to awareness and the sound of the bus going to collect the racers. Supper followed by a session recounting life's best or most-defining moments highlighted that we had some very A-plus type personalities on the tour, (including myself of course - now fully recovered).

DAY FOUR HighwoodRiver Lodge to Banff 117 kms

We left the prairies behind today, entering Kananaskis Country, with its magnificent mountain ranges including 7237 ft. Highwood Pass, Canada's highest, below which we took our picnic lunch. Fortunately the climb up had been moderate, if long, with photo-stops for wolves at the roadside, and a herd of mountain goats, but. After lunch I left early for the summit so that I was not yet again at the back of the bunch all afternoon, but the summit had in fact already been reached, and descended, by four racers who had missed the picnic lunch spot sign, and flashed down the thrilling high speed events into the wide Bow River valley. Slight smirks at the pick-up spot when I met them, hungry and thirsty! To avoid heavy traffic on the Trans Canada highway, we drove to Banff, our stay for the next two nights.

DAY FIVE rest day 33kms

We rode a loop past Banff Springs hotel* and around Lake Minnewanka*, a quite spectacular run with some great photos of Bighorn sheep, set against mountain background. Picnic lunch by the lakeside, near a memorial commemorating the completion of Captain John Palliser's* 1857 scientific expedition of Western British North America from Lake Superior to the southern passes of the Rocky Mountains for the Royal Geographic Society, gave pause for reflection on past and present means of transport.

DAY SIX Banff to Lake Louise Inn 103 exciting kms.

By devious bumpy short cuts and following tracks through the forest known only to our intrepid leader we avoided the heavily trafficked Trans Canada Highway and reached the Bow Valley Parkway. This meanders along, and has spectacular views of soaring mountains, including Castle Mountain where we took picnic lunch.

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From here the road really goes up; six of us decided to take the van to Bow Summit at 6780ft for panoramic views of Lake Peyto's* spectacular turquoise lake. Plenty of photo-op stops on the mainly downhill route to Lake Louise, Bow Lake and its several glaciers. Along the way, so just before Lake Louise I was the only one still on the road when suddenly a swirling wind storm practically blew me off my bike, with hail and leaves and branches, then heavy rain all illuminated by terrific flashes of lightning supported by a chorus of thunder. It only lasted ten minutes, but in the gathering gloom with potential for further pyrotechnics, I was very glad to finish, back of the bunch, damp but undaunted.

DAY SEVEN Lake Louise Inn to Radium Hot Springs 100kms

Lake Louise* and nearby Moraine Lake* are the jewels of the Canadian Rockies. Narrow roads and bumpy surfaces meant we took them in by bus before cycling 30kms to Vermilion Pass, me taking a lift to the top at 5380ft. Lunch at Balloon Lake should have been followed by a fast ride descent and splendid ride through the Kootenay Valley park but very strong wind meant continuous pedaling downhill, and really hard work along the flat. Here, what should have been green fir covered slopes became dead, black slopes as the after effect of the devastating 2003 forest fire remained. Another bail out at the bottom of the 5000ft Sinclair pass (by now you can tell that I have adopted a cunning mountain avoidance plan) brought us to a relaxing soak at our overnight stop.

DAY EIGHT Radium to Golden 121kms

Our run was along the Columbia River valley. The peaceful atmosphere and beautiful scenery was spoiled only by an occasional timber lorry barreling along, worse when two of them passed at the same time. Paying attention to traffic noise became a necessary road skill, and sharp critical judgment was called for on a number of occasions – i.e. jumping off the road quickly.

Plenty of stops for wildlife photos – Red Tailed hawks and Ospreys were in abundance by the riverside. Last again today when we reach the beautifully appointed Hillside Lodge cabins, nestled alongside the Blaeberry river. Our regular reward of a few beers under the trees was broken by a sudden rustling and quick movement in the bushes near us. Perhaps a Black Bear? Maybe even a Grizzly Bear? Nervous titters begin. But no – when it stamped into view it was a..... Llama! And did you know that they spit? Must be related to the camel family!

DAY NINE Golden to Nakusp 127kms, rewarding, and the longest day

The bus took us over Roger's Pass, to avoid dangerous truck traffic and snow tunnels so we began the cycling day at Revelstoke by riding some way up Revelstoke Mountain. A swift descent and careful crossing of the eight lane highway, across the Upper Arrow Lake bridge to Highway 23, led to the first of a series of long, arduous climbs to lunch by the Sutherland falls at Blanket Creek on Lower Arrow lake. The first part of the afternoon run (courtesy of another lift), led to a fairly steady descent to catch the Galena Bay ferry, the last 20kms being in pace line behind the leader, averaging 40kmph in order not to miss the 4 o'clock ferry. For once we arrived all together!

After a beautiful crossing in which the pale blue of the sky seamlessly met the lake, a brute of a climb to 2500ft led to a junction after which the minor road became totally devoid of traffic and magically serene. By now it was becoming late, but the setting sun behind the huge mountains to the west made this one of the most enjoyable days of the tour. Even the racers, by now miles in front agreed.

DAY TEN Nakusp to New Denver 50kms

The climb out of Nakusp was short and steep, leading to the Highway that continued steady upwards along the Slocan Valley. This pretty tree-sloped valley with abandoned silver mine shafts led to New Denver, our next stop, the road unfortunately being rather narrow and badly surfaced, with no shoulder. Lodging was at the unique Villa Dome Quixote*, and supper was at our leader's house, entirely built of massive pine trees, all locally cut. An easy day, but spits of rain and storm clouds on the horizon in the evening warned of what was to come.

DAY ELEVEN New Denver to Nelson Nil km. (and thankful for it!)

Our final day, and as if to make up for having a holiday with daily sunshine and virtually no rain, it was dark and raining heavily, snowing on the mountain tops. The scheduled run was 120 kms along Kootenay Lake to Nelson, with some serious climbs in between. I decided to stay warm and dry in the bus. Everyone else biked off, but as we gradually picked up stragglers, cold wet and shivering, I felt I'd made a prudent decision. We overtook the more determined riders on the way down, and they joined us at Kaslo, the half way point, soaking wet, very cold and blue. . After warming bowls of soup, we agreed to complete the journey in the bus. Whilst waiting, I took in the Moyie sternwheeler, a restored paddle steamer that transported people and goods to the interior in the 19th century.

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SUMMARY

I fulfilled a nearly 20 year old dream of cycling in the Rockies. Despite not being as fast as others, I had completed the route. Yes, I had ducked out on some of the mountain passes where practical (and possibly sensible) to do so. For example, if the mountain was first thing in the morning or immediately after lunch and the transport was handy. Otherwise, whatever came on the road (and don't think that the rest of the trip was without its challenging climbs) I had ridden. A challenge, yes, but a very rewarding personal experience, in one of the most scenic parts of the world. Great company throughout, with support and encouragement along the way from everyone, to everyone. Terrific accommodation and food, and a very professionally organized tour. One day I hope to go back and ride the spectacular 400kms Jasper to Banff route, along the Icefields Parkway. In the meantime the leader is organizing a tour of the Garden Route from Cape Town to Durban in November. Now that sounds great, and I'm back in UK for my nephew's wedding in October (and hopefully a chance for us all to see these photos, Ed.) anyway, so it could all tie in. Who knows.....

* for internet lookup

Campaign Corner**Toby Wooldridge**

There are four items to report here, some good, some maybe not so good – you decide!

1. New Gloucester City Cycle map. This is due out at the end of May, having seen a revamp with new cycle routes and other developments since the first print back in 2005. You may recall receiving a free map with your newsletter (Winter 2005 edition, I think). The County Council has stumped up the money and the local campaign group (BAGG – Bicycle Action Group for Gloucester) has done the biz once again. BAGG are looking for new members – let me know if you are interested

2. Gloucester City and County have outsourced all the highway and pavement maintenance duties to a private (that's 'for profit') company, named for this particular task 'Gloucestershire Highways'. We understand that there is a 'strict' contract to ensure performance. Well, we shall see... Meanwhile the number for reporting problems on the roads / cycle facilities is: 08000 514 514. Or you can still use the Gloucester City helpline 396 396.

3 The CTC have launched a new web site. Potholes and road defects are more than just a nuisance, they're a danger. They're responsible for 12% of compensation claims by CTC members, and local Councils have a duty to fix them.

Councils can't be everywhere, and if they don't know about a pothole, they can't fill it in. So if you want to get it repaired, report it! Fillthathole.org.uk contacts the right people to get the roads repaired quickly and easily. The best feature of the site is that it seems to work. Several reported potholes have already been repaired, and there's a map function so you can see what's been reported and what's been fixed. For the off roaders, there's a similar site called ClearThatTrail.org.uk.

4. Gloucester City Plan 2007 / 08. There is NO cycle-specific item in the plan or budget! Amazing but true. The sceptic may suggest that this means that they at least cannot install a sub-standard facility! So much for 'going green' or 'sustainability' in the planning and development process. Should we be surprised? Part of this trend is the (current) plan not to fill the vacancy for the cycling / walking officer that the County used to have as a salaried position. This occurred immediately after transfer of these duties (and the individual) to the new outsourcing company. Could this be an indication of where we are going? Only time will tell...

Secretary's Report**January**

Eddie Baud did not renew due to his moving to France. This year's Holly Run was led by John Flint. He deserves a mention for his hippy clothes as does Georges for his fairy costume. Thanks to Malcolm and Helena for hosting. Toby reported 2900 hits on the club website since April 2006.

February

Membership applications accepted from: David Read, Andrew Shipton and Mark Atkinson. Rides to Slimbridge, Trumpet, Upton, Newent and Tewkesbury were successful with four new riders showing an interest in joining. George reported that he had acquired new stopwatches. It was agreed that people

who helped out with the running of the club time trials should receive a free ride in recognition of their help. The latest cyclocross event, held at a very flooded boating lake, turned out to be the best we have yet held with 12 under 12 riders and 20+ riders. Vernon Dancey reported to have been hit from his bike and was stable in hospital. Geoff Howard has gone into a nursing home. Everyone is welcome to visit.

March

Applications accepted from Mark Roderick; Chris Udall; Ken Sheldon; Barry Daws. A donation of clothing has been received from the sponsor Yellow Ltd, amounting to £330 in value. Alan Daws is considering organising a trip to the Manchester Velodrome to one of the winter 'Revolution' series.