

GLOUCESTER CITY CYCLING CLUB



Spokespiece

Summer 2026



**The Newsletter
of the
Gloucester City
Cycling
Club**



Summer 2026

EDITORIAL

The racing season is in full swing but there is plenty of time left to join in. As our cover picture shows, our evening time trials, held every Wednesday, attract all ages, and you can be sure of a warm welcome. A report on the season will be in the next issue.

Despite all the wet weather we suffered this winter, members have not been shy about getting on their bikes so we have reports from two, arguably two and a half, tours in this issue. Some members have been putting in fantastic mileages. John 'Abu' Anthony reached his goal of 300 miles in a day, riding three circuits of the Severn Bridge and a bit more besides and we also have some regular Audax riders, notably Les Stephens, who often uses the Sunday Club ride to recover from 200 or 300 km the day before. With that in mind I've included an archive article from the early days of Audax UK that I hope will be of general interest.

Finally, an appeal. Microsoft is to cease support for its Publisher application, which I use to prepare this newsletter. Any ideas for what I should use instead would be appreciated.

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Contributions for the next issue please to Spokespiece@gmail.com by August 31st

The Flèche Vélocio, 1981

Abridged from an article by Steve Nicholas in the Audax U.K. summer newsletter of 1981

When we were gathered with our Audax Club Parisien friends, after the 1979 Paris Brest Paris, Claude Aubague asked us when AUK was going to enter the *Flèche Vélocio* and, I must admit, this was not the first time of asking!

Vélocio was the nom de plume of Paul de Vivie, who was the publisher of *Le Cycliste*, a developer, an early champion of derailleur gears, and father of French bicycle touring and randonneuring. Since 1947 the Audax Club Parisienne has held an annual ride in his honour that is called the [Flèche Vélocio](#), usually held over the Easter weekend

I cast around and recruited Les Lowe, Lawrie Harrison and Malcolm Taylor to tackle the 1981 event. We had ideas of attempting 600km in the 24 hours allowed and, lest we fell short of that target, decided on a Friday morning start so that we should arrive at Pernes les Fontaines in time for the 'Concentration', of French *cyclistes*, at 10am on the Sunday.

The four of us arranged to meet in Paris, which ruled out a start for Dijon for a route following the Saone. We decided to start at Bellegarde and to follow, in part, the route of the Paris- Briancon 1,000 km and then rivers to Orange. This would leave us some 60km before arriving at Pernes. It meant following the Loire valley to Digoin, crossing the watershed to Macon and then riding down the valleys of the Saône and Rhône.

We had never ridden as a team, previously, nor had any of us indulged in a ride of this kind before, so we felt that we should take things as they came and enjoy the experience.



Les amis at Reveil Matin

Lawry and Malcolm made arrangements to reach Paris by boat and train while I decided to go by car, picking Les up on the way. It is always nice to know that one's bikes are under one's own control. The plan was for us all to meet at the Junction of the Routes N6 and N448 at Montgeron in the south east of Paris. Les and I waited at the 'Reveil Matin' - the start-point of the first Tour de France - while the others awaited us a mile up the road! It was pure chance that we finally met up and then sped towards Bellegarde to find a hotel for the night. The latter stages of this 110km ride were assisted by a useful tail-wind. Les and Malcolm spent their time calculating our speed by timing past consecutive kilometre posts - the best time was 1:35, a mean speed of 38 km/h.

After a superb meal, for the mere sum of 30 Francs, final preparations were made for the 10 a.m. departure on the morrow. Having got our route cards signed and stamped, we left on the dot of ten, pedalling briskly in sunshine with the wind on our left shoulders. The minor roads, lined with poplar trees, were quiet and we enjoyed the views of the Loire with its multiplicity of chateaux. We averaged 27 km/h to the first control at Sancergues (113km) finding ourselves 25 minutes up on schedule, but we reduced this to five by stopping for a 'jambon sandwich et bière'. A short discussion brought us to the conclusion that, to attain 600km, we should have time only for short stops and that we should have to abandon all ideas of having a good meal before darkness set in. Since we were not in favour of abandoning the 'bon repas' the enjoyment principle was to be paramount, rather than bashing on *à la Fleche*.

We pressed on through Nevers, leaving the 1000 km route to climb through the town, and found the route very undulating as far as Decize, where we had a coffee at the control and raided a supermarket for overnight victuals. We were, at this point well up to our schedule of 24 km/h (15mph).

At Digoin we found a restaurant and settled down to a 'good meal'. Some members of ASPTT Orleans were also here and, though they were making their way to the concentration at Pernes, they were not doing the Flèche. Then

came a surprise! In came Claude Aubague to perform a secret control. After passing the time of day (or night) he wished us 'bon voyage' and left to carry on with his checking.

One and a half hours later, with the schedule up the creek, we donned our night clothing and departed on the switchback road to Mâcon. After an early introduction with a 'breton-type' road we began the long, steady ascent to the top of the first col proper, topping the summit (430m or 1407ft) just before midnight.

After a short descent we climbed the second col (400m), which snaked from side to side of the new Paris-Lyon railway line (now the TGV line) and arrived in Mâcon at 01:23. We posted our control card there and headed south through quiet streets with the hope that the remaining 273 km of our journey would all be descent!

The main road to Lyon was wide. Trains for Lyon, and points beyond, sped by every few minutes. We eventually arrived in Villefranche where, in the dark, Les rode into the kerb when the road suddenly narrowed. We inspected the wheel but could see no damage to its strong Weinmann concave rim.

I had planned to follow the west bank of the river through Lyon France's second largest city, partly to avoid getting lost therein, partly to avoid the hills to the east, and partly to avoid any possibility of ending up on the 'route du soleil'. Generally, this worked well - apart from having to ride some potholed stretches of road and coming to a no-entry sign which, at that hour of the day (night!), we ignored .

Laurie wanted a hot drink, so we stopped whilst he engaged himself in asking people - who were hurrying to work at 5 a.m. - where he might get one. His efforts were fruitless but, as soon as we crossed the river we found an open café. The City Markets were opening just down the road and we could have done some shopping there but, with two cups of hot chocolate inside each of us, we were thoroughly refreshed , and made good speed down the road.

We recrossed the river to regain the route. Dawn was fully upon us. It had never really got cold but there was a 'dawn crispness' in the air which helped us speed on our way to Givors. We met up with another *Flèche* team at the control here, noticing that they had only small handlebar bags compared with our complete touring 'set-up'. They came from Clermont-Ferand.



A few minutes ride from Givors led us to a secret control, some five hours behind plan. We now had but two hours left of our 24 and decided to speed things up and try to run out our time at Tournon. Traffic on the RN86 was building up and the road surface was fairly rough at times. We stopped to post our '23 hrs card' and pressed on, with time passing out at Arras some 13km north of Tournon.

Unlike the French teams, we each had a full touring set up

We had a well-deserved drink in the village bistro!



Malcolm



From back, Steve, Les, and Lawrie

The day's riding was far from over and we had, still, another 160km to go to reach Pernes, birthplace of the famed *Vélocio*. Suitably refreshed we set out with the sun on our faces and the air pleasantly warm. At Tournon the volume of traffic prevented us from crossing the river - we had to go to Valence before we did succeed. On the four-lane road, with rather less traffic, and with the Mistral at our backs we fairly sped along. What a delight the RN86 was after the RN8!

In Montelimar we divided into two groups as Malcolm and I wanted to look around (we got a free gift of nougat at the tourist office). Then we pushed on to Orange, in top gear and with the wind on our backs. After Orange we lost some of the favourable effect of the Mistral but we soon reached Carpentras and, eventually, Pernes.

The Mistral is a strong, cold, northwesterly wind that blows from southern France into the northern Mediterranean. It produces sustained winds averaging 50 km/h (30 mph), and can last for several days. It is most common in the winter and spring, and strongest in the transition between the two seasons, for example at Eastertime!

The next morning, Sunday, saw us at the 'gathering' (below) to hand in our brevet cards before 10 a.m.. and to hear a short speech welcoming us all to Paques en Provence - Easter in Provence - and to Pernes. Several thousand cyclists were there. We had lunch with our friends of the Audax Club Parisien. It was a very convivial affair, which lasted from midday to 5 p.m. The next step was a short ramble of 43 km over two cols at 756 and 627metres into the Marquis country, to shake down the lunch and make room for another meal at 8 p.m. which, thankfully was rather smaller!



What Steve does not mention in the article was that the meal included several speeches in French, including one by Steve himself (chapeau!). To quote from Bob Lepertel's:

"For the first time we had a complete English team from over the Channel and our member Steve Nicholas led the team. However, we must consider that the good living of the French way of life caused our friends to do their talents less than justice in the distance that they covered. At least they discovered that our wine is rather stronger than the beer they are used to.

Some details of the 1981 Fleche Velocio

186 teams entered. 162 teams arrived in Pernes with three or more. Four teams arrived with less than three riders and were disqualified.

Greatest distance covered: 690 km by Cyclolouristes Villers St. Paul. The Audax United Kingdom team was placed 35th in the classification with 479 km.

The median distance covered was 420 km.

When they arrived at Givors they had become separated and only Steve had the plan in his pocket. Our member Duval, who was out walking his dog, knew that English riders were expected and, seeing Steve, gave him a smile and used his only words of English "Speak you English?". Steve returned the smile and said "Yes", so Duval took Steve to the hotel he was looking for. The others arrived in due course. What is extraordinary is that four foreigners with only an address to go to, got there."

In the next issue we shall hear how the rest of trip unfolded...

Tourists in Yorkshire – a week on the granny ring

For a change of scene this spring six of us decided to head north to the border. The Lancashire/Yorkshire border that is, scene of the War of the Roses. Initial thoughts of travelling by train were scuppered by practical realities so we drove to Settle and met in a Georgian town house a short walk from the Market Square. Railways were not entirely off the agenda though, with Maz later making the pilgrimage to Carlisle over the Ribblehead viaduct, George and the others later riding under it.

After we had Settled in, consuming red wine and Beef Bourguignon previously prepared by Maz, in the process, our first evening was enlivened by the process of bed selection. Gordon & I won the toss but, thinking the house accommodated six in double beds and a pair of twin beds, we mistakenly chose the twin room. In fact, it had accommodation for eight, so Ian & Paul had double beds to themselves, lucky devils. Later, things got worse when a casually placed bidon leaked water onto my bedding - I've never been so grateful for a tumble drier.

To the riding then. Routes were designed around café stops, which proved harder than expected as many were still shut pending the summer season. On our first day we chanced on the excellent Ingleton Saw Mill café before heading to the highest point of the week in Bowland Forest. No longer a forest (perhaps the sawmill had seen to that), the open fells made for great scenery, and the long pull to Bowland Knots (right) proved my longest hill of the year so far. We found trees and a warm welcome in Gisburn Forest. Though the Visitor Centre's café had closed a few years before, a butty wagon had just what we needed.



How it survives is a mystery, for in the previous week it had only twenty-five customers . It is no wonder, then, that the nearby cafés in Slaidburn, Tosside, and Bolton-by-Bowland were all closed.

The day ended with 1,004 metres gained, and Paul's ebike battery warning light flashing. Time for dinner! Steak and ale pies all round in the Golden Lion, with so much gravy that we asked for spoons. That evening we had to work off our dinner with a climb up Castlebergh Crag.

Market day dawned and with it a poor forecast for the morning, so we delayed our departure. A 15% climb from the square woke up leg muscles and a cheeky footbridge crossing of the Ribble put all on alert before the long haul up to Ribblehead. For me the passage through Horton in Ribblesdale brought back memories of 1979's Three Peaks Race in which I and two fellow Reading CC members had competed. The hills along the way to Gt. Whernside felt a lot worse than I remembered, and the ascents of the Three Peaks looked more challenging. I had to remind myself that I was a lot younger then.





Ribbleshead Viaduct



Ingleborough



The eponymous café apparently closed several years ago so we sought sustenance in Ingleton instead, finding an award-winning bakery. It was the bright spot in what was an otherwise disappointing visit to the town. We rounded off the day with a puncture in Low Bentham, fixed in the very pleasant churchyard of St. John the Baptist, and a visit to High Bentham where my grandparents are buried. 933 metres of climbing proved enough to drain the battery of Paul's e-bike, but he still had enough energy of his own to cook dinner for six.

Our transfer day had the worst weather forecast of the week, so we packed up the bikes and drove to Kendal for a visit to its castle. Entertainment there was provided by a group of students filming a western within the castle walls. They certainly had an imagination! Surprisingly, the weather was holding up well so we moved on to Kirkby Lonsdale, which proved to be a very attractive small town with its own brewery (Settle has one too, but we didn't visit it). A walk alongside the Lune took us to Devil's Bridge (right) and provided inspiration for the next day's ride to Dent.



An early departure was called for as mid-afternoon rain was forecast. We crossed Devil's Bridge and headed up the valley, turning into Barbondale for another long climb: 13km. It was sufficiently gentle that even the cold headwind didn't discourage us. In contrast, the precipitous descent to Gawthorp wasted a lot of the potential energy we'd banked on the way up, but precautionary braking did mean that we arrived at Dent travelling slowly enough to appreciate its charm. The village's Heritage Centre occupied us for quite a while. As well as some great cakes it had a model railway and many exhibits celebrating local history. A cobbled centre added to its charm.

We chose not to visit the station, though it is the highest in England, since it is inconveniently 8km away from and 200m above the village. Instead, we headed down the valley to Sedbergh, which claims to be the book capital of England. Let's just say that they are lucky that Hay being in Wales makes this claim possible, though perhaps not very credible!

The journey from Sedbergh took us into viaduct country for the transport corridor used by the Old Scotch Road, the M6 motorway, and the Manchester to Carlisle railway main line crossed numerous valleys on its way up to Shap Summit. We skirted the Howgill Fells on our way to the most northerly point of the tour, the Lowgill viaduct just beyond the wonderfully named Crook of Lune bridge, where a heron patiently waited for a passing meal. Our wind assisted return took us past Killington Lake (and no, we didn't visit the motorway services) and over rolling roads to our farmhouse accommodation.



For our last day we chose to head west, into Lancashire. So far, we'd been impressed with the quality of Yorkshire roads, the lack of traffic, and the friendliness of everyone we met. Would it be the same over the border? By and large it was, though we did find the roads a bit busier and in the case of Paradise Lane (left) into Beetham almost as green as the Garden of Eden.

Today's lowlight was the worst mechanical incident of the tour, when a pinch puncture proved beyond the ability of Slime to seal. A spare tube proved to leak, and a borrowed one to have a dodgy valve. Still, with five riders even that didn't exhaust our options, and a fourth tube got us back on the road. In contrast the highlight was prompted by Maz' discovery that Carnforth station was the site of the classic film Brief Encounter. A platform on the west coast line had been dressed as Milford Junction, as it was in the film, which must cause rail passengers some confusion, and included a period furnished café and a museum. Sadly for us the café was packed ("the busiest I've ever seen it" said one

customer) and we had to wait, appropriately on the platform, for our lunch to arrive while a swing band played to those indoors. Conveniently, the station was near a bike shop and inner tube stocks were replenished for the ride back. We finally found a flat road in the B road into Kirkby Lonsdale. We positively flew (well, we used the big ring) into town, stopping at the brewery for a celebratory pint to mark the end of our tour.



The West Coast! Morecambe Bay

Malcolm Taylor

For details of the routes we rode see the Yorkshire tour in the Collections section of the Club's route library. <https://ridewithgps.com/collections/9187758>

Club Tour to Yeovil, 11 – 13 April 2026

Day 1 Keynsham to Yeovil

Opting for a totally new destination, Yeovil, meant starting away from the usual meeting point of King's Square: Keynsham was selected as a suitable venue, since it has a station. As it turned out, no-one came by train, most opting to share a car and park locally. 'Most' excluded the captain, who decided to incorporate an extra day before and after the official tour (see [separate report](#) on this adventure) and Paul W – he took the train to Kemble on the Thursday. (Keynsham, Kemble – sort of similar?)

Anyway, we met up at 9.30am (ish) at the north platform where a handy coffee car was doing good trade. We added to his coffers – and I can report it was jolly good coffee and cake: turned out to be the best of the ride!

One rider had elected to park in NE Bristol, for reasons known only to Terry! As he was seriously late, the main group of five set off for the Bristol – Bath cycle path. A little bit of busy road (and the lowest point of the ride, 34ft) soon saw us on the cycle way for a pleasant if chilly ride to Bath (below, left). We took the cycle route to the Two Tunnels – nice and quiet on a Friday morning (below, right).



Paul was ahead, having shunned meeting at the start and 'waiting' to be caught on the route. Well, that never happened such was his pace – or was that our slower pace? Anyway, the sun shone and the cold southerly wind blew – it would be a headwind all the way. The magnificent viaduct at Tucking Mill was admired by AliG and Toby – involving 90 steps down and then back up! (below) We were joined by Terry at this point. Now we are six. One still to find.



The track 'ends' at Wellow (café here, many cyclists but not Paul) so onto the lanes – a stiff climb was a shock to all. This is a super scenic section, undulating until we rejoined the old line into Radstock, an ex-mining town. Still no sign of our missing companion. Emma had identified The Miner's Arms as a coffee stop. It was bang on 12. Breakfast options stopped sharp at 12! And no cakes available, just indifferent coffee. Some went for a light snack. To say this was a disappointing stop would be kind. As we rested, Paul turned up – having been to Midsomer Norton for a better coffee stop. Now we were at full complement for the day's riding. Only 19 miles covered, best crack on.

Our leader Colin, following (mostly) Emma's route, located an excellent route out of town – via a new housing estate and onto another old, recently abandoned, rail line (to Frome) – still with the track alongside. The surface was near perfect tarmac. This is NCN Route 24 and does indeed go almost all the way to Frome. We turned off to descend to Kimersdon – said to be the home of the well-known nursery rhyme 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'. A nice stone carving reflects their misadventure (right).



Place names give away the coal mining area of Somerset, and we felt at home seeing signs for Coleford. We avoided this by taking in Holcombe instead – and temporarily lost John for a while. Once reunited we had a long steep descent, leading, of course, to a long steep ascent to the quaint village of Stoke St Michael. Onwards and upwards, passing active quarries (dusty) at Waterlip – this was the high point of the ride, 800ft. Next up (actually, down) Doulling – a ‘Road Closed’ sign was ignored by us, which allowed for a traffic free two miles or so. Tesh and Toby took advantage of a road-side cake stall: we did pay! The reason for the closure – a planned hole in the road marked by a blue cross. But no other signs of activity.

Steeply down to Evercreech where Terry recommended a good pub: we should have listened, but it was a wee bit early, so we pressed on. A busy stretch of A371 took us to Castle Cary (beautiful) and on to Galhampton for the official pub stop. Further disappointment – the first beers were off; but replacements were acceptable. Hey ho. 39 miles so far.

Rain delayed our departure – it was good timing as that would have been unpleasant. We felt obliged to sample another beer, which was no improvement on the first. Outside the cold wind was unrelenting but the rain had passed. Once back on the lanes, the undulations continued through remarkable scenery. North Cadbury, a safe crossing of the dreaded A303 to South Cadbury; Girt; Trent. All lovely little villages. At last, with 6pm approaching, we entered Yeovil: tired. The very last mile was on our fourth ex railway path – a perfect finish. The Premier Inn was located with ease.

A wholesome evening meal was consumed with relish in The Quicksilver Mail pub on the outskirts, a mile distant – a pleasant walk for some (more exercise!) and a longer taxi ride for others. Post meal, some sampled the delights of the local ‘spoons, close by around the corner: too close, really.

52 miles; 3,600ft ascent.

Day 2: Circular ride

The no-luggage day fell to the captain, thus a route with plenty of ‘surprises’ and ‘interest’ was required.

The weather had failed to improve from the Friday, but it was at least predicted to be dry. You can’t have it all! A good start at 9am after a suitable Premier Inn breakfast (for most) was achieved. We were joined for the day by Emma, who had driven down on the previous afternoon. The route was essentially into the strong southerly wind, target being Dorchester for a ‘late’ coffee. It did indeed turn out to be late!

First up, a nice little climb and interesting descent with a hidden right hander which one member overshot. Here was the first point of interest: an old archway on a track. Going by the name ‘Jack the Treacle Eater’, this is a bit of a mystery. Believed to have been built around 1780, it is a boundary marker for nearby Barwick House. Anyway, well worth viewing. Having viewed, onwards to the next point of interest, a lovely Obelisk alongside the A37 – but rather hidden by tall trees. Easily missed – I fear most did.

Next up (actually, mainly down) was Sutton Bingham reservoir – it’s always fun to cycle over dams and alongside water. This took us to Halstock – Dorset now – and the interestingly named junction of The Quiet Woman(right). She was quiet, likely silent, due to having her head in her hands and not on her shoulders: drastic! At last, our first proper climb, and a bit of sunshine too. There were complaints all round as this hill should have had at least one ‘arrow’, but the OS people had failed to allocate one.

We were on NCN route 26 for a few miles, and jolly nice it is too – and useful for navigation, just follow the signs. Undulations to Uphall and Rampisham, all glorious in the spring sunshine – it just needed the wind to be less strong and the air less cold. A rest was required here due to a sharp flint causing a deflation to our Treasurer. We admired the view south and east – and the leader eagerly pointed out the next serious climb, some three miles distant. It looked serious. In anticipation, Emergency rations were consumed. All fixed, a lovely descent to cross the



railway (the Dorchester / Yeovil line) and then up, up, up. The wind was more help than hindrance here, as we were heading east. The ascent of Charity Bottom was a breeze...and was the day's high point at 786ft.

This landed us on the rather busy A37: but the leader had a cunning plan – straight over onto a track – which proved to be an abandoned road, still with some markings. (right) Phew. This was perfect, and once rejoined with a lane, it was precipitously down – a bit sketchy with the wind – to our next 'surprise', a ford. It was in full flow, fast and reasonably deep. I regret to report that I opted for the foot bridge, as did all others except for intrepid Tesh – he carefully crossed the ford in style, and had no wet feet. Bravo.



Then we had an excellent run down the valley, right alongside a stream (Sydling Water) and on a perfectly laid road: bliss. It ended back on that wretched A37 again: this time a short 1/3rd mile, to regain the quiet lanes. The final run-in to Dorchester involved two surprisingly steep lumps, ensuring we arrived in town, eventually, at noon. An excellent café was spotted, able to accommodate all and feed them well: it was not a day to be sitting outside.

The return leg had to be easier? That strong, cold wind was now very much in our favour. North to Charminster and then a monster of a climb, a bit busy, and gaps in the hedges made it quite scary at times.

Finally, the top, for an equally scary descent past Piddle Wood and into Cerne Abbas. As the famous Giant is here, we stopped off at The Giant Inn for a welcome refreshment. Some thought the local brew was good, others not so much. Gremlins were about, with Colin's bike falling over resulting in a bent gear hanger. John to the rescue, carefully bending it back.



On exiting the village, we spied the Giant – he needs a bit of restoration (Ed. The restoration is planned for June). Suffice to say we were slightly underwhelmed. But well worth viewing all the same (left). A diversion for another point of interest, Up Cerne manor and grounds, splendid, saw mechanical difficulties for Colin, which were, once again, overcome.

A dash up a very scenic and quiet A352, to turn onto Hardy Way, a glorious lane that seemed to go gently down for ever, to Leigh and then Yetminster. We were heading more west than north for a while, the wind reminded us of its power. East Coker, another beautiful village and thatch-central, gave us hope as Yeovil now featured on signposts. Not that the leader took much notice! A final minor diversion to our last point of interest, Fish Tower

(north part of Barwick House estate); then the descent back into Yeovil to finish. 50 miles and 3660ft of climbing, according to OS maps.

Day 3 Yeovil to Keynsham 13 April 2026

Sunday was bright and breezy as seven set off for Keynsham, Emma having to return to Gloucester. The leader was somewhat apprehensive as his Garmin, which carried the route, was not functioning correctly. Fortunately, he had shared the route with the others, who were able to help.

It was a flatter start than the last two days and a following tail wind made cycling very pleasant. The group soon crossed the dreaded A303. A bridge, cycle path and a roundabout made the crossing safe. A steep descent took us onto level ground – delightful cycling with the strong tailwind. The captain spotted a coffee shop just short of Kinton Mandeville and all agreed it would have been rude not to stop. The boy at the counter was a little rude – we were obliged to use the inappropriate cycle parking handily (not) placed in the far corner of the car park. Oh well, at least the coffee was good, even if the tiny piece of cake was an outrageous price: no takers for that!

Paul quickly sorted out the leader's Garmin so now he could relax and enjoy the ride. The flat terrain soon led to the Somerset levels with views across to Glastonbury Tor. We also passed some "standing stones" with a sort of map engraved on them. (right) I think it was emulating lay lines as around this area there all sorts of legends of witchcraft and sorcery. Pennard Hill was avoided with a pleasant detour round the bottom, but there were still plenty of hills to come.

Entering Wells on the old railway (NCN Route 3) we stopped for a late coffee in the sunshine only for it to hail and then rain. We had that for much of the rest of the day. Sunny intervals permitted the steep climb of Pen Hill to be "enjoyed" in sunshine but then to be met at the summit with rain, which would accompany us for the rest of the tour. At 265m, a good height, and bearing in mind that Wells is around 50m that makes for a big climb with luggage. Then along the top of the Mendips – thankfully with that wind assistance, otherwise it would have been somewhat unpleasant.



A fast descent down to Chew Valley Lake was enjoyed, though some of the group in shorts were suffering from the cold and wet (left). Another stiff climb helped warm us up as we approached Pensford with its magnificent viaduct: 95 feet high with 16 arches (below).



The pub under the viaduct was busy and had no beer. It had just reopened after an extensive refurbishment turning it into a gastro pub, it's garden providing good views of the viaduct. The captain was dispatched to find a more appropriate hostelry.

Fortunately, the George and Dragon was just round the corner, boasted a roaring fire, to the relief of those in shorts, and plenty of ale and cider, alas not able to be enjoyed by those driving back to Gloucester (below).



It was out of the pub straight up Publow Hill which was long and steep, and we feel should have had an arrow marked on it. Climbs are rewarded with descents and the one into Keynsham was no exception with a good surface and four miles of downhill into the town to 'find' the cars which had been parked for the duration. Google maps had to help find them for us!

It was then a good drive back to Gloucester in a lovely, heated car.

46 miles and 2,756 feet of climbing.

Toby Wooldridge

Full details for the routes ridden are available in the Club's route Collection <https://ridewithgps.com/collections/9187758>

Toby's Solo Extension to the Club Tour to Yeovil

It's been a long-term desire of mine to 'do' National Cycle Route 41 from Gloucester to Bristol, where it ends (or maybe starts?). Of course, our club rides often incorporate elements of it to the south, but this was to be a full ride of the route.

With the club tour this spring going to Yeovil, and judged too far to start from King's Square, the official Friday start point was Keynsham, between Bristol and Bath. I decided this was an ideal moment to tackle 41: head out on the Thursday, stop-over in Bath, and join the gang on the Friday morning. A great plan. And then on the return, another stop-over in Bath, to cycle back home on the Monday – thus making a five day tour. Four days with luggage, one without.

So, Thursday 10th April dawned dull and chilly with a brisk SW wind. Not ideal! I set off along the canal towpath at around 7.30am, keeping to 41. Lanes to Saul, Frampton, back on the canal, Slimbridge, and Berkeley. Arriving here just after 9.30am with 20 miles covered, the Berkeley Tea Rooms had just opened for business, so in I went for a big plate of beans on toast: strongly recommended! Two coffees were required as the wind had been unrelenting, and was likely to be so to Bristol. Pleasant.

Far too cold to get down to shorts, it was leggings all the way. And wind all the way, too. The stretch from Ham to Hill and on to Oldbury offered little cover. Two touring cyclists were making good speed in the opposite direction – I envied them.

Once past Elberton, I was on far less familiar territory, covering roads previously not touched by my wheels, which is always exciting. Olveston had a tempting shop, but it was too early for a second break: onwards and over the M48, quickly followed by the M4 to Awkley. A small Ebenezer chapel (1850) on the road to Pilning station (must be one of the strangest stations in the country – there really is nothing around it) demanded a short stop. To have a break from the wind and to admire the bench (right). *"Come to me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest"*. Well, I was getting weary (of the wind) and heavy laden too!



The rest was welcome, but time was pressing: the Comptons were next, then a sheltered stretch, thankfully, to Hallen. A dead end road seemed the way – the 41 signs were lacking here – and it was: no access for vehicles, but cycles, no problem – just required care to avoid mountains of dumped rubbish. Over the M49, into the wilderness of Avonmouth and back out – a big dog-leg. At least there was no traffic to contend with. The wind turbines were majestic and doing overtime (left). Back over the M49 and immediately the M5 (motorway central, this part of the country) took me into Lawrence Weston. Not the best place to be...I encountered a group of feral youth on adapted motorbikes, practicing wheelies up and down. Some in full balaclavas – I know it was not warm, but it wasn't that cold! I elected not to stop for a map check.

Fortunately the 41 signs reappeared, so navigation out of the dodgy estate was easy – taking me directly to the Avon M5 crossing. Great views, just so noisy. Down to Pill and its nice little viaduct; through a park and around – all

well signed, which was a good thing as it was not obvious. But the route was excellent: the drop to be alongside the Avon on a hardpack track was a delight (right). This stretch was some four miles, the abandoned rail line alongside, the Avon and the cliffs to the north made for scenic riding. The Clifton suspension bridge came into view – magnificent (below). Opened in 1864 it is based on a design by Brunel, but was adapted – so strictly speaking it's not his. Towering above at 331ft, it is most impressive.



This marked the end of the off-road section: now it was a fight with Bristol traffic, keeping in an easterly direction as much as possible. I passed under the Temple Meads station on a cycle path: now this was designed by Brunel, opening in 1840 (The station, not the cycle path). Then it was duck and dive for a bit. My 41 route ended somewhere before the station – slightly anti-climatic as there seemed no formal start / end point. Maybe I missed a sign – easily done as there is so much happening at ground level.

I was seeking the Bristol – Bath cycle route, via an interesting lane at Crew's Hole (41ft) and White's Hill, followed by a stiff climb to Conham: the high point of the ride at 212ft. It felt like countryside again. But no, suburbia – and another group of youths, on souped-up electric bikes, in black with balaclavas. What's going on?

At last, the cycle path to my destination, NCN 4, was joined at Bitton station. Heading SE the wind was finally my friend. I now realised it was time for lunch – 3.30pm, a long stretch from Berkeley! A convenient seat on one of the bridges over the Avon was out of the wind ensured a good spot. Another speeding black-clad youth interrupted my thoughts.

The last few miles to Bath went quickly; then an extra mile or so wondering aimlessly around the centre trying to locate the hotel. Too many roadworks and closed roads caused much confusion! Finally I located Ann, my wife, outside the establishment after travelling by train : phew.

72 miles and 1,800 ft climbing.

The Last Day

For days two to four, see the [Club tour write-up](#).

Back in Bath at the Premier Inn, it was an early start – always best to be first down to the trough to beat the hoards!

Fully charged, I departed around 8.30am. It was a cool start. Immediately there was the hill to exit Bath, up to Lansdown and the racecourse / park and ride. First, around The Circus – a classic Bath highlight, quite beautiful. Planning regulations must be a nightmare! Then the climb – chain off was not a good start! It seemed never ending,

*"If you ever plan to cycle south by west
Travel my way, take the byway that's the best
Get your fun on route forty one"*

With apologies to anyone who motored west on route 66

crawling up in bottom gear at 3pmh. Gradually the gradient eased – it's a disgrace that the OS have not allocated at least one 'arrow' to this road! I shall be lodging a complaint.

As the road levelled off, I took a breather in a pub car park to take in the scene – low lying fog covered the Avon valley with the sun just easing it away (below). The top was 765ft – meaning that from the hotel this was a 600ft climb in under 4 miles.



Having regained my composure and breath, I continued north – it was quite busy now so not that pleasant. A fierce descent to Wick – most traffic turned off to Freezing Hill and the A420 / motorway junction. That's why it was so busy. In the valley Tracy Park looked fabulous. Turns out it's just another posh golf club and hotel.

My route continued north, through the villages of Doynton, Pucklechurch (coffee shop not open on Monday's, of course) and Wapley. The last was a navigational error, I meant to take the following turning. Nevertheless, it was a lovely tiny lane. Realising the error of my ways I went off-road – a perfectly good path – through Wapley Common, over the Paddington / Bath line and into the maze that is Yate. I hate Yate – apologies to lovers of this suburban town. It's just all the same, so confusing. Eventually I located the road to Chipping Sodbury – now, these two places are chalk and cheese. Chipping – lovely! The high street presented me with an open coffee shop: it would have been rude and indeed unwise not to stop. I stopped.

Rejuvenated, I set off across Sodbury Common – the tailwind was a great help – and then took a left to join the B4060 towards Wickwar. Seeking more lanes and roads untravelled, I took the first left to Hall End, then West End, Churchend. The last element was positively lacking in tarmac – an abandoned road in all but name. Great care was required. The route home was then fairly standard on well-used roads: back in home territory. The sun shone, the wind was helpful, and all progressed perfectly, arriving back in good old Gloucester at 3.30pm. 55 miles. 2,600ft climbing.

It's been a long time since I did a 'proper' multi-day, multi-overnight tour. And most enjoyable it was, too. Two days solo, three with company. Bring on the next tour!

Toby Wooldridge

Innovation through the years



One morning recently Jon Richardson (not pictured left), noticing the wealth of experience in the group with him, raised the question of what had been the most significant innovation in cycling technology, and thereby provoked a lively discussion. It would be hard to argue against the safety bicycle frame or the pneumatic tyre but we restricted ourselves to personal experience, though that too is a minefield – for me it would be the replacement of a chamois shorts liner with a foam pad, but I realise that for most of our members that development lies with the safety bicycle frame, in ancient history.

Nonetheless, some lively discussion was had with clipless pedals, disc brakes, indexed gearing, tubeless tyres, MTB suspension (indeed, MTB's themselves), e-bikes, electronic shifting, and aerodynamic design and position (hello Graham Obree!), each having their proponents, alongside some less obvious candidates, such as LED lights.

The conversation naturally led my mind to wander, on the ride home, as to what the worst innovations have been. It is harder to identify these, as most usually quickly disappear without trace, but bringing back solid tyres, brake lever extensions to use on the drops, fat tyre

bikes, 1x11 gearing (I thought I'd slip that on in, even if the jury is still out on the 1x craze), and hookless rims came to mind but for my money V-brakes, are strong favourites. Unfortunately, they are still with us!

For the home mechanic the priorities may be slightly different. For example I'd put Aheadsets, the original Shimano 105 (where nearly everything could be worked on with a 5mm hex key), and the freehub/cassette combination on the improvement list and it has to be said that almost any bottom bracket system is better than cotter pins.

On the other side of the scales I'd put hidden cables, press fit bottom brackets, oddball spokes, offset rear wheels (hello Cannondale), and of course anything that requires expensive bespoke tools.

To round off the topic, there is the question of what comes next? Manufacturers seem these days to be focusing on speed and data capture, but outside the world of mountain biking there is little being done to improve rider safety. Given how inevitable crashes seem to be, I would love to see the UCI mandate clothing improvements that could reduce the severity of any resulting injuries. Air bags, for example, are used by skiers, motor cyclists, and horse riders, but not cyclists. There would be objections (Weight! Drag! Heat!) but it would be good for the riders, and in due course for us too, as the benefits would trickle down to club level. It would be fantastic to have fewer club riders having to visit A&E.



I'd love to hear what you all think. Post your thoughts in the Club WhatsApp community.

Malcolm Taylor