

Hi all,

First of all, I want to thank everyone who sponsored me so generously on my 100 mile overnight bike ride from Carlisle to Edinburgh on 23rd – 24th June.

My ride raised a total of £888.00 for the *Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group* which I am absolutely delighted about. Thank you again.

What follows is a brief account of the ride.

After driving up to Carlisle with my bike in the back of the car on a warm Saturday afternoon, I met up with five of my old cycling pals from Edinburgh, at Bitts Park next to Carlisle Castle.

I was told that there were about 6-700 cyclists participating in the so-called '*Ride to the Sun*', the aim of which is to ride from Carlisle over the borders and to arrive at Cramond, Edinburgh on the shores of the Forth by sunrise the next day, i.e. by 4.30 am.

The designated starting time from Bitts Park was anywhere between 5.00pm and 9.00 pm. Concerned to arrive at our destination neither too early or too late, we duly set off at about 7.00pm.

The first 44 miles were relatively flat and easy going, our route passing through Gretna, Ecclefechan and the outskirts of Lockerbie. We took it in turns in leading our 6 person '*pelleton*' and thus kept up a good pace.

We arrived at Moffat's famous fish and chip shop about 10.00pm. The shop has catered to the *Ride to the Sun* cyclists for several years. Staying open until the wee small hours for this one night of the year, it does a roaring trade.

For those tempted by the prospect of a fish supper, the downside was having to queue for a good half an hour while, on this occasion, fending off repeated attacks from the equally hungry Moffat midges.

One good reason to give the fish and chips a miss is that the road north out of Moffat runs uphill for 7 miles, an incline not quite steep enough to warrant getting off the bike, but almost.

By this time, the traffic on the road was fairly quiet. It was now dark enough for us to switch on our front and rear lights, our main concerns being to be seen and to avoid the potholes in the road.

I found myself being 'chummed' along by my old friend, Gerry; the other four: Andrew, Patrick, Ged and Tomo, were considerably fitter than the two of us and had pressed on ahead. We wouldn't meet up with them again until next morning at the finish.

The climb seemed to go on forever. Each time I looked up I could see a long line of red tail lights ahead, always at some higher elevation. After stopping briefly to relieve aching muscles we finally approached the summit.

The physical demands of the climb were soon forgotten as we heard the drone of the Scottish pipes drifting over the darkened landscape. From a lay-by at the very top, a lone piper 'piped' us over the hill. I'm not sure what the tune was, maybe '*Ye'll tak the high road*', but it was a lovely, welcoming sound.

I remembered that on the way up Gerry had said that once we reached the top it would be downhill all the way to Edinburgh. After the long, exhilarating descent into the Tweed Valley, however, I realised that Gerry had been talking 'tosh'. Upon being challenged, he said that he had been

concerned to keep my (and no doubt his own) spirits up. While we would not have to climb quite so high again, the road ahead could only be described as 'undulating' by varying degrees.

After midnight, the temperature dropped considerably and I was glad of the long-sleeved, thermal vest my brother had lent me. The night sky was black apart from a long sliver of orange light on the northern horizon.

At about 1.30 am, as the fatigue was beginning to set in, we came around a bend to find a wayside hotel in the middle of nowhere; its huge gable end was painted white and on it was projected a psychedelic lightshow pulsing to the rhythm of loud disco music. In front of it was a large congregation of cyclists, the majority of whom, like myself, seemed happy for the excuse to dismount but not enthused enough to participate in the dancing. We were told it was a 'cyclo-rave', put on for the benefit of the riders. We were, however, just as appreciative of the free tea and bananas which would go some way to fortifying us for the 35 miles still in front of us.

By 3.00 am it was starting to get light as we passed through several small towns south of Edinburgh, the streets being completely deserted at this time of morning. Gerry and I were now stopping for a few minutes every 5 miles or so with minor cramps and major saddle sores. By now, I had given up on my dried fruit provisions and took to a bag of liquorice allsorts as pure comfort food.

By 4.00 am we were riding through the familiar but empty streets of Edinburgh's 'south side', 'jumping' the red lights whenever we could to save a few minutes. It was obvious by this time that we were not going to make our destination by 4.30 am. We cycled across Princes Street at about 4.20 am, but we still had another 4-5 miles to go before we reached Cramond.

I had always remembered that the road from central Edinburgh to Cramond was pretty much downhill. I now know that is not quite the case. As we made our final, weary descent into Cramond village, we must have encountered 7 or 8 minor inclines which seemed designed, at that moment, to finish us off – and I found myself cursing every one.

We rolled into the Community Centre at Cramond 5.00 am. Volunteers from a local Edinburgh 'homeless' charity, *Fresh Start*, had stayed up all night to provide tea, coffee and bacon rolls for a fiver a go. Gerry and I took our tea and rolls into the large hall where we were greeted by our four friends who had arrived there half an hour earlier (*see attached slightly blurred photo taken by someone who was obviously too tired to hold the camera steady*). We set ourselves down amidst some two hundred or so other cyclists, many of whom had fallen asleep!

Gerry and I joked that while we had missed seeing the sunrise at Cramond by half an hour, the sunrise from Princes Street had been just as impressive, if not more so!

Please see other attached photo taken by Andrew at Cramond at 4.30 am.

Big Jed grinned and asked me if I would be up for it again next year. "You're kidding?", I replied. Now, after a week's reflection, I'm beginning to think 'Well, maybe!'

Thanks again!

Jeff