



The Mill South Molton 15&16 April 2009

Thirty-two riders, bags packed and loaded in Ian’s Landrover gathered at Kentisbeare Village Hall for KJCC’s big ride to The Mill adventure centre at South Molton. This ride, 80 miles in total and the club’s first to cross the 1,000ft contour, would include a summit cake stop at 1,200ft in the whirling mist of Anstey Common on Exmoor.

Our first target, Uplowman Village Hall, was a quick win after we rolled easily alongside hooting lorries on the M5 and over the railway at Tiverton Parkway station. The cycle counter on this path has probably counted around 300 KJCC rider ‘hits’ to and fro in the last 12 months. Some nippy inclines to Whitnage got the blood pumping and we were all ready for home-baked treats and hot tea at the hall.

We know the Lowman valley to Huntsham well from our Big Ride to Bampton and three weeks on it was lush and greener and, by the river, scented strongly with wild garlic. Funny (peculiar) noises from Izzy’s freewheel were a signal of major mechanical failure and Ian’s sheep trailer was summoned to salvage as we rounded the summit before the long relaxed downhill to lunch.

Bampton Fish bar was warned of our imminent arrival and the fryers were steaming with delicious

fish and chips. The neat restaurant seating was supposed to hold 18 but somehow we all



managed to squeeze in. Calories were what we needed for the next stage to Dulverton, on through Morebath and Brushford and up onto Anstey Common. By mid afternoon we were sheltering, just like the ponies nearby, from the swirling mist on Exmoor

and enjoying our summit cake rest after a legendary ascent to 1,200 ft. Pausing to regroup on the descent towards North Molton we spotted a beautiful, graceful red kite floating effortlessly into the wind. Red kites are very rare on Exmoor and we felt very lucky to see one.



Red kite

The Mill at South Molton was already known to some in the group but the bunkhouse had gone unnoticed. It was just right for us – comfortable, clean and spacious and soon we were all tucking into delicious supper thanks to Elise and her kitchen team.

But pudding would have to wait until the climbing wall had been scaled. Climbing is one of those things where it really matters to listen to instructions! So we did. Harnesses in place and clips clipped and they were off.

Alpine bunks were a novelty for most of us. And jolly companionable they were too. But the bunkhouse was silent in no time as exhausted cyclists (and now climbers!) conked out for the night.

In the morning while the bacon sizzled Stuart and Corrine patrolled the ranks of bikes looking for punctures and sure enough there was one. Not bad considering 64 wheels had rolled 39 miles the previous day.

We eased our selves gently back into our saddles. For some, the promise of another 40 miles perched on this little spongy triangle was not welcome. But things quickly went numb. South Molton on market day was bustling with life and traffic but we were quickly through it and whizzing along the lovely valley of the river Mole to Alswear, the childhood home of Sue's mum as an evacuee from London.



*Willow Warbler*

And now the climbing began, up to Mariansleigh and on to Rose Ash and through the rough culm meadows full of the cheerful song of Willow Warblers newly arrived for the summer. The Stag Inn at Rackenford had laid on a wonderful spread for us and what an atmospheric pub – officially Devon's oldest and a regular haunt of Tom King the legendary highwayman. Could his elbows have worn these hollows on the bar and his horse trotted through this cobbled passage? They are bound to.



*Stag Inn Rackenford*

Restored and refreshed and with only a little more 'up' to come and the promise of some memorable 'downs' the team were newly refreshed and on their way again. And sure enough eventually the Cadeleigh 'drop' was below us and in no time we were all safely settled at Bickleigh Mill in the warm sunshine.

The run up to Butterleigh from here was a delight. Spring flowers bursting out everywhere and the sparkle of the stream by our side. Cullompton's rush hour growl of traffic was a shock after so many miles of empty peaceful lanes in the last two days. And bang on our 6 pm schedule we were back in Kentisbeare – just like that.

Stuart McFadzean