

July 29th – August 7th 2010

2010 Land's End to John o'Groats

1000 miles in 10 days



One year of planning, training and organisation culminated on July 28th when 11 riders left Wynstones to travel down to Land's End.

The Riders:

Alex Brabbins
Dominic Corbett
Joseff Fox
Sasha Herman
Kris McGowan
Matthew Mirkin
Francis Naydler
Fred van Arkel
Freek van Arkel
Tom Wycherley
Richard Brown



The Support Team

Day 0 – 3:
Margaretha Herman
Megan Lovett
Sarah Watson

Day 4-10:
Martyn and Karen Brabbins
Cathy, Richard and Maxine Noonan

Here is their story.
Words and photos by the team

Day 1 Land's End to Devon



So, bearing in mind the early start from Land's End, we had a very quick day! We set off in high spirits, brand spanking new cycling tops shining away, perfectly set off by a beautiful sunny morning. The pace was extremely fast, and by lunch time, we thought perhaps it was time to slow down a little bit!

(As one cyclist asked, "How long will it be before my whole body doesn't hurt anymore?" to the reply of, "Around day four. That's when you'll begin to think it feels normal to be in constant pain.")

As the cyclists finally rode in to the lunch stop, it was nothing but smiles at the waiting support team, arms full of delicious Philips's pasties (kindly reduced in price by the lovely shop!) stood to welcome them! Lunch was wolfed down in no time (baguettes too) before setting off for the afternoon.

At about 6 o'clock, the boys arrived at the second campsite, "Dyke's Green Farm" to a mound of bacon sarnies! After dinner, an early night was in order, with not quite as many "jokes" as the previous night!! Overall an excellent start!

Today, we cycled 101 miles over 6 hours and 10 minutes
There was a 5765 ft climb
The average speed was 16.7 MPH
We had 2 punctures, one near miss!
14 pasties
77 energy bars
17 oranges (and quite a lot of bananas too!)

We would like to thank Philp's for the pasties, the lovely Sian in Hayle for her donation of flour and tofu for the veggies! Also a very kind greengrocer in Hayle for the day's supply of veg, a kindly bike shop who donated a box of inner tubes, a wonderful butcher for bacon and cheese, and a baker in Bude for our bread and even more bacon! We couldn't be more grateful to these people for their amazingly generous donations, THANK YOU!!! :)



Day 2 Devon to Somerset

A slightly later start than anticipated today, 8.50 (a whole twenty minutes late!!!) The first twenty miles were "munched like a crunchie", so absolute heaven! We made superb time, with an average speed of 18.3 MPH, pretty good! After the morning break the pace slowed a little.....and then the twelve mile, arduous ascent began...

We sailed through Exmoor National Park to a beautiful lunch spot, right next to a babbling brook which was a perfect place to chill. Again a huge amount of food consumed, and an ancient bomb shelter was discovered by Sarah. (Very exciting!)

The cyclists beat Bleak Shannon the van for a while after lunch, before she, Sarah and Megan finally drove past a group of extremely cheerful looking boys!! We then had another, not quite so gruelling, climb to be rewarded by an insanely glorious five mile descent - a real treat! A few problems with the bikes and old tyres couldn't stop us, and we arrived nice and early at the campsite, a whole half hour before intended!!! The lovely campsite manager kindly gave us our lodgings free, along with £59 of collected charity money. The boys also managed a little "cheeky fundraising", and collected another £50!!! Thank you Somerset!! Today was more satisfying than expected, and all in all very pleasing!

We then sat listening to Dom's beautiful guitar and singing, really doing his job well!

Today we had one puncture
A top speed of 49.7 MPH (Alex)
An average speed of 16.7 MPH
We rode 90 miles
22 energy gels
A heck of a lot of bars, around 60 in total!
A maximum height of 1312 ft, but a total ascent of 5289ft!

Day 3 Somerset to Wynstones

Today was a day of many lovely things: a relatively flat day, a tail wind, not too much sun, doughnuts waiting at the end, some fabulous cycling and we nearly beat the support team to lunch (by 30 seconds...very efficient on their part). They did a brilliant job of whipping up some sausages and fried eggs – lunch of champions! Then we had 'eton tidy' – strawberries, raspberries, cream and meringue – yum yum yum yum. Then we had 22 doughnuts waiting for us courtesy of Pippins in Swindon (see them at the Stroud Farmers Market – thanks Jim!)

We rode like the wind from Bawdrip to Gloucester via Bristol covering the 77 miles in just over 5 hours. We took a leisurely one and half hour lunch and then a long afternoon break so as to arrive at Wynstones for 16.00 to be greeted by many parents and friends.

We had to sadly say goodbye to our wonderful first leg support crew – Megan, Sarah and Margaretha (oh and of course the wonderful

Shannon – thanks Sebastian). They have been absolutely wonderful and fed us really well, setting a high standard for the next team to follow. Max and Martyn, the first half of the next team were there to meet us too.

Some stats:

77 miles

16.1 mph average

1 crash caused by a low flying plane

0 other incidents in Bristol (we didn't even loose anyone)

266 miles now covered in 16 hours 21 minutes.



Unfortunately due to a crash earlier in the day, Richard Brown was not able to carry on with the ride after day 3. The repairs necessary to the bike put it beyond his ability to carry on.

Day 4 Wynstones to North Shropshire

Today started from Wynstones School with a lovely send off from friends and family. We had Joe's lovely cousin Mark joining us for the day.

After a welcome meeting, introducing the new A-TEAM support (Maxine, Richard and Cathy Noonan and Martyn and Karen Brabbins) we set off out over Maisemoor towards Ledbury. We had the honour of being filmed by Sasha's dad (Emmy award winning David Herman) which resulted in a game of catch-the-car-with-the-camera-man-sticking-out-of-the-sunroof. Having stopped just north of Ledbury for water and bananas we set out for the second quarter of the day at a slower pace than the first 25 miles, while nevertheless making great progress.



The new support team had their first test when it came to lunch which they passed with flying colours. Having completed 55 miles before lunch at an average speed of 18.2mph (very good) the next 25 miles were covered in just over 1 hour thanks to the machine of Fred that we stuck to like flies on a fly trap. We flew into Shrewsbury, slowing down for the cobbles in the town centre. A wasp flew into Kris's top, stung him twice on the neck and then three times lower down, which prompted him to jump off the bike and do an hilarious semi-naked jig whilst trying to get rid of the persistent pest.

Freek, being a little envious of Mark's shiny carbon fibre bike decided that on a roundabout he would ride into him. Freek came away with minor injuries and his dad was there to be told. Mark came away unscathed.

We arrived at the campsite at 5.20 to a hearty snack of egg butties, Corbett pizza, fizzy pop and crisps.

After cleaning bikes and mending punctures on a bike of one of the campers and doing some cheeky fundraising around the campsite we sat around waiting for Dom to start his vaudeville entertainment skills.

Today we covered 101 miles in 6 hours

We had an average of 17.6mph

No punctures

Two cassettes needed replacing

60 energy bars

15 energy gels

We would like to say thank you to Lower Lacon Caravan Park in Wem for giving us our lodgings free. Thank you.



Day 5 North Shropshire to North Lancashire

Today was the hardest day of the ride so far. The longest so far at 110 miles, and adding in to the mix a head wind and many red traffic lights, it made for a long hard day.

Also, Freek had three punctures in 2 miles, Sasha had a puncture, Alex ate a fly, and Dom destroyed the road works in Lancaster. Sasha decided to have an inappropriate rest by the roadside whilst still on the bike, Francis somehow managed to fall off his bike whilst stationary and not wanting to be outdone, Alex also fell off after pulling an endo at the traffic lights in Wigan. That'll teach him.

Kris confused David in the film vehicle by taking all the riders off on a short detour to his Gran's house in Preston. She'll be dining out on having 10 strapping, sweaty blokes in her house for years. We all had a quick drink, chat and some photos and then we set off again on the last leg of the day.



Then we got fabulously lost trying to find the campsite!

All in all a very hard, long day in the saddle with many a sore bottom!

The support crew did a fabulous job of getting us free lunch and dinner. The Gibraltar Farm campsite was wonderful. It had fabulous views over Morcambe Bay to the Lake District and to boot the owners offered it us free to help with the fundraising.

110 miles
Average speed 16.1 mph
52 red traffic lights
5 green

Kris has so far burnt 2.5kg of fat.

Everyday (a little interlude)

Everyday we wake up with legs solid and stiff, aching backs and sore bottoms.

Everyday we think, 'Can we actually go on any further?'

Everyday we are woken by Dom singing us awake, in beautiful parts of the country – this morning we look across Morcambe Bay and see the Lake District before us.

Everyday we are fed and watered by our support team, alarmed at the locust consumption.

Everyday breakfast – porridge, flapjacks, bananas, oranges, coffee.

Everyday we get our eight energy bars from Joe, our two (or more!) energy gels from Matt, our energy powders from Tom and chocolate from Freek.

Everyday Sasha makes sure our bottles are full of essential water.

Everyday Fred lubricates, tweaks, adjusts and switches over parts on our bikes.

Everyday Francis assist him

Everyday Alex's pistons keep powering away, the beard gets longer, the smile never far from his lips

Everyday we get on our bikes, wincing at the pain, crunching through the gears to find the most comfortable on for the first few miles.

Everyday we turn into cycling machines.

Everyday we move our legs in circles, waking wonderful swishing music to a backdrop of the countryside, town and cities flashing by.

Everyday we meet wonderful people who give us food and let us stay in their fields.

Everyday we arrive for lunch, dog tired and hungry. Only an unholy cross between an octopus and a locust could feed itself quicker.

Everyday we have another 50 miles to cover after lunch, how is this possible, how can we carry on?

Everyday, somehow, through the punctures, the hills, the getting lost and exhausted, we make it to the end.

And everyday we eat twice in the evening and cannot make it much past 10pm.

Everyday is the hardest day.



Day 6 North Lancashire to Scottish Border via Lake District

585 miles covered so far.

Today we were off to a very wet and hilly start. Rain accompanied us until morning break in Windermere. After that it only rained periodically as we climbed the hills of the Lake District with some of the best views in Britain (so far!). The descent from the Lakes into Keswick was splendid and a few of us did an extra three miles! (by mistake).



Then we stopped for a lunch of bacon sandwiches having reached 500 miles somewhere just outside Keswick, after which we began the big descent of the day.

Our first and only puncture of the day happened soon after lunch but was sorted out quickly. The A-Group, now behind Group 1 due to the delay of the puncture, did some incredible slip-stream

rotation along the A66 dual-carriageway achieving a 21 mph average into a headwind.

Miraculously, the A-Goup managed to arrive in Cockermouth before Group 1 by slyly taking the later exit off the A66 and entering the town from a different angle (and by dint of Group 1 waiting for 15 mins in the services for them – ed). Soon we were heading for Carlisle, speeding along the relatively flat road and meeting some fans along the way. All the children in the small towns and villages we passed held out their hand to be high-fived by us, the cool cyclists! Little did they know that we were moving at 25 mph and the high-fives can hurt. We did hear shouts as we passed; whether they were shouts of joy or pain is uncertain.

Soon we reached the busy roads of Carlisle where we had to manoeuvre our way through traffic but were relieved to find the campsite just 10 miles north of the city where we met a man going to Land's End by bike, from John o'Groats.

The support team did another great job of securing a free campsite for the night and six foot of Cumberland sausage! We had to restrain Dom from eating the lot.

Today we:
Cycled 110/113 miles (depends)
Averaged 17 mph
Maxed 47.6 mph (Matt's computer says he did 88.6 mph, this is a most false piece of data).
Had 1 puncture
Ate 87 energy bars
Ate 0 flies
Squeezed 20 energy gels
And showered in the Ladies.

Day 7 Scottish Border to Edinburgh and beyond

Day 7 was really hard. Into a head wind that sucked out our souls, uphill for a good portion of the way and very rough riding surface. Then we got to Edinburgh to find out we could not take the route planned, so rapidly had to work out how to get lost working our way around the city. And get lost we did.

Whilst following a cycle route to the west of the city, it suddenly turned into a farm track. Then we got stuck down a cul-de-sac at the bottom of a hill. Then we were back on track, but had 25 miles left to go.

Finding the campsite at the end of the day was equally hard and we had to be guided in by Richard. There was a sting in the tail too...a massively steep hill up to the gorgeous campsite.

We'd arrived at 8pm, dog tired and exhausted. We ate, showered and ate, and then went straight to bed, almost broken. Thankfully the support team had put up all our tents. We slept like fossilised logs.



Day 8 Edinburgh to Glen Coe

800 miles covered so far. 105 miles today.

We woke up, still tired from the previous day, not sure if we could carry on. We shovelled in 1000 calorie porridge, croissants and pain au chocolat and triple espressos and then set off.

Ten miles in and all the aches and pains of the previous day had flown from our muscles, our

spirits lifted by the sight of the Trossach's looming in the distance...today was the day we would end in Glen Coe.



The backdrop for today was stunning and a very fast start on the flat then led us into the hills and four major climbs for the day. The wind was once again in our faces, but this seemed to matter less today.

The climbs were exciting and the views stunning. Giddy with adrenaline and the sheer magnificence of the oldest mountain range in the world, we blasted through it ticking off peak after peak.

Then, disaster. One of the support vehicles broke down. The camper van generously loaned to Martyn and Karen by Charles Crittal had clutch problems and broke down halfway in the middle of nowhere. Martyn and Karen were standing by the side of the road with their arms out. We thought they wanted to play a game of high fives like the bored children of Carlisle. We zoomed past them down the hill to cries of 'STOOOOOOOOOP!'

Not only had the clutch gone, but there was no mobile phone signal at all. So Kris, Alex and Tom bombed down the hill to the end of nowhere, got a signal and called in reinforcements. The Noonans were at the campsite already and would have to come back to get the food and get Martyn to a garage. This spelled the end of the campervan support and Richard and Maxine took over as cooks for the rest of the ride.

Back to the ride....after a monumental 5 mile down-hill in the rain to the campsite, we had to make do with cheesy chips and hot chocolate as

our recovery meal (not too shabby) in a local hostelry, while we waited for the other half of the support team to arrive. They made a great job of cooking us a massive chilli with limited resources and David joined us to show us his draft film of the ride.

1000 calorie porridge

(we ate this most mornings and the recipe got more exotic as we progressed)

1 large bowl of porridge
1 heaped tablespoon of honey
Handful of raisins
Handful of chopped mixed nuts
45ml of olive oil
Sugar/ Jam
1 banana
Optional chocolate
Mix and eat slowly

This will keep you going for about 40 miles.

After this have two coffees and maybe a croissant and a pain au chocolat.



Day 9 Glen Coe to Evanton (north of Inverness)

Today we learned that a bacon sarnie at the morning break (thanks Richard!) can replace a few energy bars and gels. David joined us filming for the day and we played cat and mouse with him again (sorry). David spent 15 minutes setting up a perfect shot with Glen Coe in the background only for us to take a left turn and not right out of the campsite.

We went past many lochs but the big draw of the day was Loch Ness. As it was a fairly flat profile, we stayed together as one large group and achieved a phenomenal whole day average speed of 18.2 mph. We have all become rather fit as you would expect!

The engine for the day was Dom, Fred and Kris, rotating at the front, keeping the pace up. Joe, Sasha and Freck were the domestiques at the back – keeping the team together, closing the gaps and relaying messages from back to front.



The first major incident of the day was a glorious pile up at a roundabout outside Fort William. The crash saw Joe and Alex pirouetting in the air before slamming into the tarmac, providing a soft landing for the bikes on their return to the terrestrial world.

The second incident of the day saw Sasha careering off a small country lane into the verge after playing the notorious, “how far can you cycle with your eyes closed” game.

By the end of a fast and furious day, we had covered a respectable 102 miles, arriving at

Black Rock Caravan Park (north of Inverness), who kindly allowed us to stay for free!

New support team cooks lead by Maxine created a wonderful stroganoff for dinner from the steaks brought up by David.

Day 10 Evanton to John o’Groats



Judgement day had arrived; today we had to arrive at John O’Groats before night fall to achieve our target of cycling 1000 miles in 10 days, and traversing the length of the United Kingdom!

There was air of excitement and anticipation as we set off, which manifested itself in fast pace and distraction. Two accidents ensued leading to damaged limbs and bikes, with Alex coming off worse. Thankfully no medical attention was required and we soon settled into a steady and more focused tempo.

Throughout the adventure, the competition to record the fastest speed was never far from intelligent conversation. Alex had held the top speed for most of the trip with a respectable 49.7 mph, but with the journey nearing its end no one wanted to leave the competition uncontested. Turning a corner into Merrydale, a downhill of suitable gradient presented itself, the head wind abated and Joe recorded an amazing 51.0 mph tailing the film crew.

Unbeknownst to him, Kris in the chasing group recorded what he mistakenly thought would be a new top speed of 50.2 on the same hill 5

minutes later (being slipstreamed by a motorcycle). Alex attempted to join the fray, but was not able to top 47mph, for reasons that would present themselves later...

Shortly after the hill, climbing the inevitable steep gradient following, Alex sauntered up behind Kris and said... 'Kris, my wheel appears to be a bit wobbly, could you have a look at it?'

'Sure' said Kris, 'Have you got carbon forks?'

'No.'

So Kris took off the wheel and examined the hub, which indeed appeared to be a bit loose and might account for the wobble. Part way through dismantling it Alex piped up:

'Er, Kris, look at this'

There was a crack clear through the left front CARBON fork. A crack so severe that shortly afterwards, Alex snapped it clean off with minimal effort. Alex had just done 47mph down a hill with a cracked front fork. A very lucky chap indeed.

So we waited for the support vehicle, got the spare bike and made it Alex-worthy and set off again. Now nearly an hour behind the leading group, Alex, Dom and Kris agreed to work at a high but steady tempo, rotating the front man as exhaustion dictated.

However, round the first bend was another hill. This second and unexpected downhill was not quite so steep but it had potential. Kris let Alex and Dom sweep by before unleashing himself upon the hill zooming past Alex at 50.6 mph and then increasing the top speed for the ride on the flat at the bottom of the hill to 51.8mph.

So the unofficial top speed competition results were as follows:

- 1: Kris 51.8 mph
- 2: Joe 51.0 mph (steward's enquiry still pending)
- 3: Francis 50.3 mph

The inevitable uphill slog afterward put Kris in difficulties and two gels were needed to restore

balance and enable Kris to assist with the capture of the lead team.

There were still another 40 miles to go to John o'Groats at this stage and we were perilously close to not making it before dark. The trio had to do the last 40 miles non stop, caught and passed (accidentally) the lead team who were busy having a hot chocolate in Wick, 16 miles from the finish. So Alex, Dom and Kris took some photos and waited a few moments for the now not lead group to catch them up.

We all then rode together the last 16 miles to John o'Groats. We passed some of our friends from the day whilst on the way, the roads were pleasant and quiet and we had a jolly time laughing and joking. Joe and Kris attempted a near fatal high five whilst at the front of the pack as we passed the official 1000 mile mark on the bleak and empty roads on the last stretch.

A mild panic occurred 3 miles out. 'Where's the end point?' came the call from the support crew. 'Er' said Kris 'There should be some sort of sign, point, needle type thing...' We had thought it would be obvious where the end was! We had visions of cycling round all evening trying to find the end of the ride. Luckily we found it.

What a reception! Martyn and Karen had made it back just in time, the Mirkin's were there, as was Sasha's dad, David, and we had whisky and hot sausage baps waiting for us. Joe attempted to ride right down to the sea and there were hilarious scenes as half the riders nearly tried to get as far north as possible.



David and Richard took us out for a celebration meal at the Curry King in Wick afterwards. If it was mildly subdued, I think it was due to a little bit of exhaustion kicking in!

Kris handed out awards:

Services to the colour pink: Freek
Least appreciation and use of carbon: Francis
Least respect for carbon: Alex
Services to the food industry: Dom
Services to the wine and coffee industries: Fred
Best bling: Sasha (second place Dom for trying to wear some road works)
Most varied use of gels: Tom
Most confused use of statistics and mathematics: Matt
Closest relationship with tarmac: Joe (usually closely followed by Alex)

We had done it! There were incidents, exhaustion, broken bikes, rain, wind, rough roads, near misses with over laden lorries in the Lakes, beautiful scenery, fantastic campsites, fantastic food, racing against dogs and an ongoing unofficial race with the support team everyday to get to the lunch and campsite first.

Proper thanks are on another page, but thank you to all our sponsors and supporters, to all the kind people along the way.

Utmost thanks go to the support teams – to Sarah, Megan, Margaretha, Martyn, Karen, Richard, Cathy and Maxine. Without them none of this would have been possible. The food was always excellent, in good quantity, varied and nutritious. They even put up our tents when we were exhausted. They got us lots of food donated, made great films, got free inner tubes and discounted campsites. They fixed our broken bikes over lunch or sometimes even at a quick snack stop (cassettes, gears, brakes...)

The riders were phenomenal. The weather threw everything at us save for snow (but was mostly indifferent and grey). We conquered all hills (both up and down). Our average speed did not drop from Day 3 onwards and there was semi-serious talk of cycling back at the end. Riding as a team, looking after each other was a brilliant experience and we just happened to cover 1006 miles in 10 days and raised

somewhere close to £14,000 (gift aid included) for Macmillan and Wynstones New Hall.

BIG THANKS

Thanks to all our sponsors; individuals and businesses.
Thanks massively to the support teams who gave up their time, holidays and sanity to feed, fix and shelter us.
Thanks to the team at Macmillan, who could not have been more helpful.
Thanks to the parents that made us pizza, flapjacks and cake (almost endless!)
Thanks to the admin team at school for support in organising.

Thanks to those that supported the ride:
Star Anise Café
Eat Natural
Nak'd
Pippins Doughnuts
Brian's Bikes for tyres, innertubes, tyre levers, cassette, spokes, brake wire, gear wire....
Tesco Stroud
Co-operative Cashes Green
The Bike Works Nailsworth
Halfords Stroud
All the campsites that gave us free or either massively reduced camping
Choice Organics London
Suma
Great Western Sportive Organisers
Half Baked Brand for coming to our rescue with the tops
McVities
The Fabulous Bakin Boys
Sebastian for his 'van'
Charles for the camper
The Grange for the minibus

Big, big thanks to Maxine Noonan and Calum McGowan who put up with a year of training rides, fundraising days and late nights and often went without dinner and pancakes for breakfast.

'Anyone who thinks that one small individual can't have a big impact has never fallen asleep with a mosquito in the room' *anon*

If you still want to sponsor one of the riders here are their sponsorship pages:

<http://www.justgiving.com/kmcgowan>

<http://www.justgiving.com/joseffox>

<http://www.justgiving.com/matthew-mirkin0>

<http://www.justgiving.com/richardstanfordbrown>

<http://www.justgiving.com/francis-naydler>

<http://www.justgiving.com/tom-wycherley>

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