

London to Paris Bike Ride

Day 1 Blackheath to Calais – 85 miles 'ish' -

' Follow the orange arrows!'

How lucky I was to be starting the ride from Blackheath, just 3 miles away from home and where I spent my early years at school and playing rugby. I had the opportunity to meet some of the other 65 riders with whom I had connected on Facebook. We had our first briefing.

.....'We really need to get you to the ferry by 5 PM'

..... *'Follow the orange arrows'*

.....'Watch out for other arrows do **NOT** follow THEM!'

I made good progress in the morning. There was a bit of drizzle, which was OK. I was cycling by myself for a while when I nearly missed some arrows.....'Wow, that was lucky' I remember thinking..... and then I couldn't find any more arrows..... I stopped, checked the map, doubled back, 'phoned in.....It was 1 ½ hours before I got back on route. I had picked up another bike event's arrows! We were scheduled to cycle 85 miles and I had already whacked on another 10 miles.

The rest of the day was making up lost time, climbing some big hills and eventually getting to the ferry on time. We had our evening meal on the ferry.....**Chicken & Chips** and cycled 5 miles to our hotel in Calais. It was 11.30 PM before I sorted myself out. I felt a bit tired, frustrated and so stupid for getting lost. And I really did not want to cycle by myself.

Day 2 Calais to Arras 85 'ish' miles

'It is less hilly than Kent' – 'undulations'

Before we started I hooked up with some folk from Scotland cycling for other charities who were good enough to let me join them Bob, Bryan, Ann and Jackie – There was no way I was going to ride by myself on this trip again!

The day started beautifully. The weather was warm and terrain was flat, so we rode 20 miles at a good pace before our morning water break.....And then it became really tough.

The temperature climbed and climbed and the 'Undulations' got bigger. There were some challenging hills. I was having a good day, so I was riding up the hills then waiting for my team members. The waits and recovery periods, however, became longer and longer it was now 40C! This was becoming serious and it was evident that we would not make the lunch stop in time. A support vehicle came along and picked us up, curtailing 12 miles. I felt OK but there was no way I was going to ride by myself. In the van, we heard that a good number of cyclists were finding the heat really difficult.

After lunch, we set off again. It was more of the same, blazing, baking heat, rolling terrain and some challenging hills. And no one to be seen – It was as if this part of France had closed up. We rode past fields of wheat and maize, the occasional combine harvester and shuttered villages in the blazing sun. What a relief when we arrived at our afternoon water stop, just 12 miles from our evening destination!

Our final ride of the day was into Arras. Most of the hills were now past and we made good time – about 12 MPH, which was really good in this heat.

We arrived at 7.45 PM and a local pharmacy was showing the temperature at 41C! – It had taken us nearly 12 hours to cover the distance!

Whilst seriously challenging, I had really enjoyed the day as I was in good company and we were working together. And we were already more than halfway to Paris.

Day 3 Arras to Compiègne – 85 'ish' miles

'It's cycling Jim, but not as we know it!'

The early morning ride was good, the terrain was OK and it was not too warm. Our morning water break was at The War Memorial at Thiepval, a sobering moment.

We set off on our late morning ride and the heat kicked in again – this time it was even more sapping as it was 40C and humid. I was with one of our team and we were a couple of hundred yards ahead of the rest when we missed an orange arrow (Again!). Even though we realised it quickly, by the time we doubled back and picked up the route, we couldn't find the rest of the team. We guessed they had carried on and so tried to catch them up. We went too fast and I was running out of energy. I had that awful tingly sensation. We eventually rolled in for lunch and I could 'Feel' my grey pallor.

After lunch, we set off on the early afternoon leg. It was so hot and humid and we seemed to be going at a snail's pace and forever stopping to drink – and we had to – our bodies would not work properly otherwise. There was a wonderful moment when we 'phoned through to see if a support vehicle could get more water to us – They told us there was a 'Fountain' at 56 miles, which we found - a tap for a cemetery with cool water (The water in our bottles was warm!) We did a rain dance, drank, filled up our bottles and left 3 euros in Thanksgiving!

We arrived at the afternoon water break at 6.30 PM, 65 miles down and 20 miles to go. I was still really tired and thinking 'If no one else cycles in, I am not going on by myself'

'Yeah, let's go for it' said Bryan, one of our team members – and then followed the best riding of the whole trip! It was magical. We set off at 6.45 PM and quite quickly, the heat disappeared. I could feel my energy coming back. We had a couple of hills to do and then there was a gradual descent into Compiègne. It was like I knew how to cycle again and we averaged over 15MPH! We flew in together in time for dinner.....**chicken and chips!!!!**

Day 4 Compiègne to Paris 60 'ish' miles

'Let's stay together!'

Who would have believed it – today we were cycling into Paris and it was as if the weather was celebrating. The soaring temperatures had disappeared. As a team, we were determined to stay together. We aimed for 12 MPH and whenever a gap opened up or after a hill, we re-grouped.

The villages gave way to suburbs and our spirits lifted as we saw a sign for Charles de Gaulle Airport. We then cycled through Paris and arrived at Bois de Boulogne at 2.45 PM, all present and correct. Everyone had made it! High fives and hugs before our final cycle in convoy to Champs des Mars, behind Eiffel Tower, where we did a lap of honour and were met by friends and family – For me, I

was met by my wife Judy, our children, Sarah and Michael and Judy's sister Audry. That made my ride even more worthwhile!

After the photos, we cycled to our hotel for an evening of celebration. And our dinner? **chicken and chips!** Some fun awards were given out – (Written on orange arrows!) and I was chuffed to receive one, which can be best described as for 'Smiling in adversity'!

We are already back at home and the London to Paris bike ride, which took so much time in preparation and training is a memory – and a much cherished one!

Thanks to Bob, Bryan, Ann and Jackie for being such good company and showing once more the power of working together.

Thanks to the Discover Adventure Ltd. Crew, Christina (Team Leader) Christine, Helen, Caty, Seb, Ed, Billy, who looked after our well-being superbly in difficult conditions.