

'B' Club Run to Old Loom Mill, Hailsham
Sunday 22nd January 2017 by Paget Cohen

Having volunteered to deputise for Mr Gibbons last week and therefore subjected myself to several hours of getting gradually soaked to the skin it was with blessed relief that this Sunday dawned bright and sunny. Just a shame that I had again committed myself to be in service to the club (I didn't win the Merit Cup for nothing), this time in leading my second B ride. Pity too that what was wet 7 days ago was this week white with a hard frost, and not of the Richard or Mark variety. Being a relatively quiet residential street my road is never likely to see a gritting lorry so I was fully prepared to walk my bike to the main roads before mounting, but once outside it seemed just as likely I'd fall on my a**e walking so I saddled up and got on with it.

Indeed the main road was merely damp from the effects of the council's efforts and far more of an issue was the pain experienced by the one part of my anatomy I was unable to clad in Wanderers apparel – my face. As I made my way along the shiny blackness of the A272 I pondered whether there was anything one could apply to the skin to protect it in such temperatures (Deep Heat perhaps?) or whether the online shop might consider selling knitted balaclavas in club colours.

I safely arrived in Uckfield High Street several minutes before necessary and with no sign of the 'A' ride and grabbed a bite of somewhat solid cereal bar plus a photo opportunity while I waited. As 9:20 ticked by with no sign of any other cyclists I concluded I had been stood up and not for the first time, Pip Jones remaining the lone Womble brave/mad enough to yet subject herself to my brand of magical mystery tour. With 4 hours and a bike at my disposal I figured I may as well enjoy the sunshine and make my way to the tea stop just in case anyone else was foolish enough to venture out.



I'd decided the night before that my route would, hopefully, stick to A and B roads with the emphasis firmly on everyone staying upright and getting to the cafe and back with minimal drama, but I now had the added bonus of not only choosing precisely which way to go, but of riding at a pace that might keep me warm. Thus, just for a change, I headed off down Bell Lane for a brief blast down the A22. I say blast, but my legs had cooled while I had been standing and my first ascent of the hill back through Ridgewood to the Highlands was more of a grind than a spin.

Gingerly picking my way round the roundabout I turned south east once more and off through Palehouse where all was fine until I reached the entrance to Squires Farm Industrial Estate where all of a sudden a sheet of white lay across the carriageway. Thankfully I had no need to brake or corner at this point so was able to just let my trusty steed ride it out and come to a halt at the temporary red light governing the roadworks at the junction.

Not fancying Beechy Road, never mind what lay beyond, I turned right and made for The Broyle. In places there were large deposits of ice by the kerbside, but rarely extending more than a couple of feet so progress was pleasantly uneventful. As I neared Ringmer with over an hour 'til elevenses, a quick recalibration of my internal satnav plotted an impromptu loop via earwig Corner that should all be ice free.

The junction of the A26 and 10 o'clock seemed a suitable juncture to stop to grab a further bite to eat. It's one of cycling's ironies that the very conditions that make refuelling most essential are those when it is most difficult to do so. Thus a simple mouthful necessitated removal of both pairs of gloves and hoicking up my gilet in order to rummage in my back pocket, not something I could do on the move. Not something I could do standing still either it would seem as I fumbled the remains of my rations onto the tarmac just as the first fellow cyclist I'd seen all morning breezed past. Still waste not want not, and if any bacteria were out on the road that morning then good luck to them; back in my pocket for later it would go.

With the dead-turn hairpin successfully negotiated and emboldened by my bike-handling, if not food-handling skills, I took a right and a left as I returned to Ringmer hopeful that the sun plus local traffic would have seen off any danger. That they had, but I thought better of the next right down Potato Lane. Thus it was that I proceeded solo down the Laughton Road until I once again returned to the A22 for some time-trial practice to the Boship. Approaching said intersection I spotted coming the other way the increasingly familiar hues of an Endura jacket on the less familiar shoulders of Alan Lester if I wasn't very much mistaken.

Still with 20 minutes to spare I took the first exit to detour via Hellingly forgetting quite how many churchgoers might be making their pilgrimage by automobile in such conditions. There was still time to make use of my knowledge of the Hailsham suburbs in creating yet another obscure Strava segment for Mark Edwards to hunt down, and to pass by the beloved council offices before hitting the Ersham Road with 5 minutes to go.

Approaching were yet another cyclist, this time in black, and then behind the welcoming white green and gold of a fellow Wanderer, although Mickey T had called 'Hello' before I worked out who it was beneath all the clobber. At almost 11 on the dot I rolled up to the Old Loom Mill to find three bikes I immediately recognised and one I wasn't quite so sure about. Inside Wombles actually outnumbered staff, never mind other customers, as Ian and Darren Haynes were supping warming soup while Chris Hough and mystery machine pilot Tony Gale had favoured sweet over savoury. I joined them in more sense than one and conversation flowed from the high occurrence of dyslexia amongst plumbers to the unforeseen issues when installing a staircase; so fellow Wanderers you really missed out.



Mr McG reaching for his liner gloves was the unmentioned signal that we should be going and we'd not long rejoined the Queen's Highway when a quartet of Wealden Cycle Club riders breezed past. Being on the front Ian surged to grab a wheel, despite the relative lack of mudguards in their number, but, perhaps keen not to drop Chris and Tony, Darren seemed unable to respond. Eventually on the slight incline to the cemetery I could hold back no longer and span past in order to bridge the gap and hopefully drag my compadres along too, but I only killed one bird with that particular stone.

Thankfully the Wealden quartet were forked right while the Lewes quintet turned hard-a-left in order to make use of the lovely new crossing of the A22, where we met yet another throng of riders, albeit with no club colours of any sort showing. Rightly taking a turn on the front and keen to set a brisk tempo – vivace shall we say – I was surprised by how quiet my companions were. Glancing back towards Michelham I realised they weren't so much uncommunicative as distant – literally, but they were at least still following. As Darren astutely observed when they caught up with me when I waited at Bede's School the B ride had actually left the A ride behind.

Not that there was to be much more conversation as he and Chris were turning left and Tony right. Not wanting to risk Ripe, nor retrace my wheel-tracks, I hooked up with the 'A' ride leader for another dose of the A22 before my first dalliance with the lanes that morning. Sean Quinney had warned of encountering ice near Chiddingly the day before and he wasn't kidding, a big sheet of it that caused both of us to dismount and tiptoe along the verge until good old tarmacadam hove back into view. Suitably chastened I accompanied Ian more or less back to his door, before one last taste of the A22 as far as Halland.

That should have been that, but as I neared Blackboys a glance at the dashboard showed that I was temptingly close to achieving 60 miles, albeit I would have to find an extra mile or so from somewhere. Anyhow 5 small detours later as I leant my bike against the garage door I was pleased to note yet another mission accomplished.