

Club Run to Sharpthorne Organic Cafe
Sunday 19th February 2017 by Paget Cohen

After a week of mainly dry weather I had positively revelled in taking the summer bike out for a spin on the Saturday, even if some of the back lanes were still awash with detritus. Sunday dawns and Heathfield is shrouded in cloud and both my patio and the road out front are decidedly damp. Back to the winter clunker it is then. No sign of Brett or Lisa emerging from their driveway, nor Lord Geldart from Possingworth Lane, but I needn't have worried as round the next bend there was his familiar figure up ahead indicating right for Framfield. Not wishing to go anywhere near the red too soon I took my time in bridging the gap and eventually caught up with my ally on the slope up into the village.

With Notso Retro away the captain's armband had been passed to the gentleman who had suggested the day's tea stop and even from a distance it was clear Deputy Darren Brockhurst would have a job on his hands as there was a crowd outside Boots obstructing the pavement as usual. It wasn't even that the number had been swelled by early arrivals for the 'B' ride as there was just one newbie here to be led by the other Darren (Haynes), an old chap in sweatpants of all things. As well as those already mentioned there were also the regulars - Mrs Brockhurst, Brisa, Micky T, nice Martyn, Dom, plus the late arriving Big Rob 'n' Badders; the less regular - Dave Hodgson, Guy Brown, Aidan, Matt Coombs, Nick Dwyer and Little Rob, plus a rookie in the towering 6' 8" form of Jon Stuart, who we will refer to as Big Jon simply so as to avoid confusion with anyone else called Jon or Stuart.



Perhaps sensing that seventeen was enough to be going on with without any further additions Dazzler called for the off with 9 o'clock still chiming had there been a nearby campanile. Haring off up the road and ignoring our turn for Bird in Eye was Pete Morris who had pitched up with Badman and Rob(in) and stayed just long enough for a dose of some of Brett's renowned badinage before deciding he'd had enough. We'd barely entered the lanes behind Framfield when Mr B had the first job on his hands as the gap between front and rear stretched beyond earshot; he wisely delegated and sent Mr Davis up the road to ask the vanguard to ease off the throttle. He needn't have bothered as down the hill to Streele Rob Rollings shipped his chain, although Chinese whispers being what they are that had become a puncture by the time it reached the front of the pack.

A quick head count at the next junction established we were back to full complement even if not everybody was aware of it, and off we went to Buxted. For all the speed our peloton carried under the railway bridge we couldn't outrun the cars up the hill so it was probably some relief to them that we turned off for High Hurstwood. Not for us the right fork and the various hazards of Fowley Lane nor the first left branch up Rocks Lane back to the A26, but the second left handed option up Perrymans Lane where, as sure is eggs is eggs, we met horses; oh and an aircraft navigational aid in a field according to our visiting avionics experts.

For those in the know the logical compliment to Perrymans Lane is to take the almost opposite exit on the A26 and traverse Oldlands Lane. In this direction that entails a fearsomely steep tree-lined descent, the crossing of a ford and a ramp up into Fairwarp. Here Guy Brown clearly felt his sparkly new Cannondale had seen sufficient mucky lanes for the day so turned south, while the rest of us headed up onto the forest.

One problem of last minute bike switches is that I am inclined to forget something in my confusion. Not today my pump or tyre levers, but seemingly my legs as the bunch disappeared up the road with me unable to respond. Still if I was faring badly, Baddeley was faring worse; although as I later found out me had foolishly followed Messrs Pelham and Morris to Seaford and back before most of us had left home. Fortunately for both of us the climbing was over for now as we rumbled across the cattle grids to Nutley, narrowly avoiding an oncoming group of riders at the pinch point.

Decisively cutting across the traffic may have seemed a good idea at the time, but by doing so I missed the memo that dictated our ride to Chelwood Gate would be conducted in team-trial-fashion, not that I had much to offer in response when the express sped past anyway. What should have been a fast downhill to Horsted Keynes was thwarted by first a tractor and then a succession of horse riders; still it gave some of us a chance to recover.

Waterbury Hill is presumably so named for the 'water feature' near it's summit, but today the road was running with the wet stuff and so less pleasant a descent as usual, the rough-surfaced climb to the turning for Horsted Keynes Station never being pleasant. It did, however, allow some to take a pit-stop, but in doing so they missed out on witnessing some deer bound across our path as we made our way north towards the cafe. So far Darren had amply succeeded in leading us down paths not featured in my years of Club Runs and so it continued as we ignored the right fork of Chilling Street and instead plunged down Cinder Hill to begin the long grind up to Sharpthorne. Knowing salvation in the form of cafe lay waiting at the summit I attempted, and to a large part succeeded, in staying near the front all the way to the crest.

From here we could almost wake up and smell the coffee and, as I remarked to the nearby Mr Crawford, any detour would be cruel. Never let it be said that Mr Brockhurst doesn't have an edge as cruelty was on the menu in the form of a right hand turn away from our destination and into the oncoming Hell of the Ashdown Sportive. To be fair it was still barely 10:30 and we only went as far as the crossroads before swinging left to descend to Weirwood Reservoir. That of course entailed a long drag back up to the ridge in order to earn our repast, but did ensure that our bikes were left out with the trash with five minutes to spare before the 11 o'clock collection.



Like most of the group I had been past this establishment many a time, on four wheels if not two, but had yet to venture inside. I spotted no sonic-screwdrivers, but it's fair to say it's larger on the inside than it looks from the road and there was even Yannoh on the drinks menu?!? Tony Gale, Peter Price and friend had all safely negotiated the treacherous rear decking already and taken

up the largest table at the rear, while the rest of us perched where we could, making sure to leave the piano stool free for the forthcoming entertainment. The staff coped admirably with such a large influx in addition to the regulars and even the practice of getting us to pay before leaving worked far more smoothly than it does at certain other hostelrys. That said, apart from the solitary Graham Jeffs, the 'B' runners were conspicuous by their absence, even if we were back on the road at barely 11:30.



That road being Plawhatch Lane, which was still thick with both cyclists and motorists experiencing their own particular forms of Hades and Darren wisely called for single-file, even if that almost guaranteed splits in our tight formation. In the haste of leaving the cafe it seems I left the legs I picked up on Horsted Lane at my table as I had neither the power of the legs nor the will (not to mention Greyskull) to bridge any gap ahead, so I was glad that Dom was in no hurry and Mr B was more concerned with making sure his wife was okay, even if Mr D wasn't. The rest of the bunch were out of sight by Wych Cross and weren't sighted again by me until a lay-by in Nutley, by which time us stragglers had picked up Mrs D plus Lord Geldart and we had confirmation that Dave Hodgson and Matt Coombs had flown and Micky T had excused himself to LEL training.

After an all too brief breather it was off down Bell Lane by the side of the church where a first horse rider at least put a temporary brake on those keen to get on, the second, encountered on the steep uphill section out of the valley, only created a fresh rift in our pack and my efforts to grab a friendly wheel were now being compromised by my zip-tie fastened cycle computer which had chosen this juncture to work its way loose and rotate around the handle-bars. As such it wasn't until we reconvened at the Piltdown crossing of the A272 that I learned of a cleat issue for Mr McConville that had caused a major heart-rate spike amongst those riding in closer proximity to him than I.

Piltdown saw the latest, albeit mainly voluntary, schism in our church as our able deputy and his wife peeled right towards Lewes with Dom and Nick for company, while the Uckfield fast men simply rode off into the distance leaving just the TN21 posse plus nice Martyn to roll into town and then twiddle through the lanes, minus Martyn. Even at such slow speed our adventures weren't over as we had to avoid a woman simultaneously trying and failing to smoke, use her phone and command a white BMW before James, Lisa and myself left Brettski to put the kettle on and run a bath as Lisa sought to lower her heart-rate while James and I sought mileage; Mr Geldart even accompanying me to the end of my road in an effort to push his beyond the metric ton, with me falling just short.