

HARDY RIDERS : 2013

MIDLANDS | TOURS



HARDY RIDERS

Four riders, four days miles pass and the years roll back Michael Harris and John Dunkley give the low down on the Beaumanor Rally ... and how they got there ...

Since the year 2000 the CTC East Midlands Region Rally has taken place in the grounds of Beaumanor Hall, situated in the village of Woodhouse in the scenic Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire.

Beaumanor Hall was twinned with the code breaking site of Bletchley Park during the Second World War. For the last decade the Rally has been organised by Roy Clay of CTC Leicestershire & Rutland.

In the very best traditions of cycle touring, the majority of participants ride to the event carrying all their paraphernalia; a few travel by motor vehicles and campervans, but there is not dishonour in that.

Our group have been attending for some years now and we always ride the fifty-five miles from our homes in Northamptonshire.

The chosen beast of burden for tents and camping paraphernalia – not forgetting the rider – is the good old touring bike – capable of carrying everything. When fully laden you may hardly be able to lift the bike and its panniers; but the ride is always steady

and strong.

Setting off from Nether Heyford, near Northampton, means following a route largely across the grain of the land. The route to Beaumanor Hall is hilly. For those who do not know Northamptonshire and

Above:
Ready to ride
- three out of
four

Right:
Lightweight
tents, perfect
for the cycle-
tourer



Leicestershire it is worth noting that this is undulating country. Amongst these hills, the sport of steeple-chasing originated, when fox-hunting gentlemen wagered on winning a race after the hunt was done. The average view from a hilltop in this area gave them plenty of choice.

This year's ride to the event was particularly taxing due to the first twenty miles not only being very hilly, but also heading into very high winds, rain and hail. Sometimes it was all we could do to maintain eight miles per hour with the hail stinging our faces and our shoulders fighting to keep control of the heavily laden bikes as they were rocked by the gusting winds. It was like riding uphill even on the flat.

There were annoyances, too. Three times our route was blocked by fallen trees and branches, on several occasions we had to lift our bikes over debris, and, in one, instances detour around the blocked roads.

Later that day we met riders coming from the north. They spoke of being blown along at seventeen miles per hour and hardly having to make any effort.

The route takes the cyclist through the lovely countryside of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. Passing through the busy city of Leicester was pretty peaceful, too. The cycleway weaves across roads and runs down side streets. We pass through Abbey Park where Cardinal Wolsey died on his way down to London to face Henry VIII.

As a matter of tradition, we stop for refreshments at the splendid cafe in the park. The prospect of our usual refreshment stop was a beacon on that windswept ride. Imagine our dismay when, after two and a quarter hours in the saddle since lunch, we arrived to find it closed and shuttered. Apparently the weather had been so bad that they had decided to close for the day.

We rode on to Birstal, where we bought some cakes, from the local Co-op, to bolster our diminishing energy. The latter section of the route picked up NCR6, at Blaby, which took us to within three miles of our destination.

At a determined and superficially derisory nine miles per hour, we eventually arrived at Beaumanor, but there was no time to relax. It was time to put up the tents, our accommodation for the four day event, between the showers of rain. Then it was ever onward to cycle the five miles for our annual, pre-booked, sit down meal at the Rothley Chippy. This is a traditional blow out of fish, chips and mushy peas with as much tea as you can drink and unlimited seconds of chips, bread and butter, pickled onions, gherkins. Needless to say we slept well – once back at the tents.

The Rothley Chippy is just across the road from the memorial for the missing child, Madeleine McCann.

The next three days were dry and warmer, with some sun; ideal cycling



weather. So, on each day there were choices of two led rides, one of fifty plus miles and a shorter of thirty miles. After the effort of getting there, the only choice was the fifty mile rides through Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Although this area of the English Midlands has plenty of large towns and main roads, the routes used the network of almost traffic free country lanes. Charnwood Forest, the National Forest, the Vale of Belvoir; much lovely and little frequented cycling countryside.

In many ways, this is a very traditional CTC event; one of which cyclists have

enjoyed for many years. There was evening entertainment; on Saturday we had a slide show of a cycling trip to the Outer Hebrides and on Sunday several short films on different aspects of cycling. Tea, coffee, cake and biscuits abounded.

On Tuesday we packed up and rode home in the rain, which had returned with a vengeance, though the weather was neither as cold or windy as on the way up. Despite the conditions we had a very enjoyable trip and we covered 255 miles; not bad for a quartet whose cumulative ages add up to 272 years.

Top Right:
Heading into
the wind
Bottom:
Running
repairs







RAY CLAY

For the last decade the Rally has been organised by Ray Clay of CTC Leicester and Rutland.



Statue of **Cardinal Worsley** outside the **Abbey Park Café** in Leicester



Putting up tents between the showers of rain.





Rothley Chipsey



Running Repairs



50 Mile Ride



30 Mile Ride



Bradgate Park



Mayflower on the Battlefield Line.





Loughborough Station



Northamptonshire: Marston Trussell