

# GODRIC GOSSIP



Welcome fellow Godric members to our renewed attempt at a club new newsletter. I hope it will give you a view of all the activities that the club organises but also give an insight into some of the great cycling achievements and adventures of some of our members. This edition reviews our summer so far and has special features from Mark Finch and his epic climb up the Col du Tormalet, Mark Goodridge on his day out at the Tour de France and Simon Beard about his trek of Scotland. You'll also find some Top Tips from Paul Seamons on how to keep your bike at its best.



We are trying hard to increase the visibility of the club and it seems to be working with great turn outs for the social rides, often meaning we can have a fast and 'not so fast' group, all meeting at one of the Godric approved cafes! To that effect we have recently purchased an insta x5 360-degree camera to help with the raising of the club's social media profile along with several other potential uses. We also had a good Godric event as part of The Black Shuck festival which Damian Ashcroft organised and hope it will be a regular part of the festival in future, again raising our profile in our hometown.

Welcome to our new and rejoining members in the past few months. I look forward to cycling with you.

Patrick Warnes, Paul Crackett, Martin Chown, Simon Pierce, Gareth Townsend, Allan Flight & Jane Taylor.

The year seems to be racing by and with Autumn just around the corner I reflect on a couple of events from this glorious summer.

A trip to Majorca in May saw seven members enjoy a warmer climate where they took on some of the islands challenging climbs. It was enjoyed so much that plans for next year are already underway. Well done to all those who scaled the peaks last year and thank to Paul Seamons for organising. If you are interested in taking the challenge in May next year, come and join in – Paul will have the details.

Paul Seamons led the way in the Godric open 10-mile Time Trial to win the road bike handicap trophy. He was hard pushed by Stephen Cullabine who has made great strides in his cycling after joining the club last year. The event was supported by no less than eleven Godric riders, many surprising themselves on the time achieved. Well done all.

A note for your diaries – The annual Godric Hillclimb will be on Sunday 12th October. It would be great to see as many Godrics as possible take on Dove Hill – It should only take a couple of minutes of effort to conquer the hill – or just 90 seconds if you want to join the elite club.

I would like to finish off by thanking all Godric members that have volunteered their services, be it in an official post, as marshal or a social ride leader. Finally thank you to Simon Beard for pulling together this newsletter. I hope it is a success and a key part of raising our profile. Whilst we are distributing to Godric members, please feel free to pass it on to any cycling friends – with an invitation to join us!

Thank you.  
Terry D

## GODRIC CLUB RIDES – Tim O'Mullane

Always a good spectacle in and around Bungay and the surrounding villages on a Sunday, or Wednesday, is the sight of a group of Godrics riding in tandem, resplendent in their splendid green Godric kit.

The Godrics have 2 club rides every week both of which meet at the Buttercross in Bungay on Sunday (9.00 summer/9.30 winter) and Wednesdays (9.30). We are very fortunate in Bungay to have an excellent choice of routes, rides, roads and country lanes going in all 4 directions.

As numbers turning up for club rides have recently grown (we are now getting 10-12+ riders regularly) rides have been splitting into 2 groups, meeting at the same place and riding to the same destination but 1 group riding at a slightly quicker pace.



Rides always include a stop at a nice café usually about half-way. We all have our favourite stops. Wednesday ride destinations are decided on the day, and the rides tend to cover a distance of 30 miles with a midway stop at cafes such as the lovely Pennoyer centre, Aldis café, Carlton Marshes or Fressingfield Baptist church (a new favourite).

The longer Sunday ride usually involves a ride of 45-50 miles with the route sent out in advance, we cycle out to all 4 directions from Bungay ranging from Teles Patisserie, a Portuguese café in Surlingham, Marcellos in Lowestoft, Café 221b in Framlingham and Thornham walks Forge café and The Old Vineyard. The list seems to have grown as more nice cafes have opened during the last few years. Suggestions for new stops are always welcome.

The benefits of riding in a group are that the miles just seem to tick along a little bit quicker compared to riding solo. We come from all walks of life and backgrounds, some of us are quiet, some of us never shut up!! But we all have a common love of cycling and the

outdoors. Riding with others, having a chat and sharing the workload at the front into a strong headwind. Punctures, yes, all eyes are on you, and the pressure is on but ultimately help is always on hand whether it be dealing with a stubborn tyre change, the lending of an electric pump or a spare inner tube.

Comradery, sharing experiences and comical moments. Spotting a kite, marsh harrier or rare bird soaring in the sky above, narrowly avoiding lose chickens or maybe dealing with motorists with hearing impairments who mishear a perfectly reasonable warning shout of "holes" are all part and parcel of a good club ride!



## A DAY AT THE TOUR – Mark Goodridge



July 14th, Bastille Day in France, a National Holiday and Mike and I are going to watch Stage 10 of the 2025 Tour de France. Mike and I have been friends for 30+ years, met in anti-natal classes for our first borns and have hung out ever since. Both big cycling fans, raced and TT'd together and spend a week each year in France trying to see at least 1 stage of the Tour along with beating each other on the French climbs!! This year was no exception, the stage finishing at Le Mont Dore, a ski station about an hour from our house, somewhere that I have skied and both Mike and I have cycled.

Watching the Tour is a great day out, look for a spot on the route, possibly on a climb or a tight bend so that when you see the riders come through they'll have to slow down. Take some comfy chairs (it's an age thing), a picnic (compulsory) and something to read (the Tour de France Guide is a good shout).

We left about 11, hot day was forecast, up to 36deg, got to our planned destination where I thought it would be fairly quiet, I was wrong, didn't take into account the National Holiday and the French's love of the TdF!! They closed the roads earlier than planned due to the amount of people which led to me reversing down a country lane for 400 metres with a lot of raised eyebrows at the crazy Anglais !! The field where cars were parking was packed, knowing it'd be like trying to get out of Knebworth after a Robbie Williams concert, I abandoned the car in the middle of a road for a quick exit (when we returned, we found we had started a craze and all the French had joined us in our crappy parking!!).



A walk back to the course amongst the crowds, got a good spot right near a 90deg bend which would allow for some good snaps. Base camp set up, picnic out, we had about a 4.5 hour wait for the race to come through!!







This seems like a long time but the crowd, the banter, the antics always make the wait go quicker, and that's without the Caravan!! The Caravan is a parade of vehicles in all shapes and sizes, belting out Europop and throwing advertising rubbish out to the fighting crowds, stuff ranging from hats, t shirts, keyrings, haribos, drinks and washing powder if required!! It sounds strange but you can't help getting carried away and trying to catch whatever has been lobbed in your direction!! Picnic time, bread and cheese is the order of the day followed by the French patisserie, mmmm!!

Because the stage was a long one over a lot of climbs, when the peloton eventually came, they were spread out over 45 minutes which is a long time, but does give you plenty of opportunities for photos, not just of the riders but of everything going on around you.





Last year, Mrs G spotted Mike and I at the side of the road during the live coverage, so, we had our photo with Jonas and Tadej, both of us attired like nutters!!



It's also a tradition to bring back a souvenir from a day at the tour to add to my collection – It's an obsession and I've just had a new workshop installed to house them all!



**Paul's Top Tip:** Chain Wax is great, and I particularly like 'Squirt'. But only use it on your summer bike as it washes off in the wet – even if the manufacturer states 'all weather'



## BLACK SHUCK RIDE – Damian Ashcroft

On Friday 1st August Godric Cycle Club hosted 6 guest riders to the inaugural Black Shuck ride, marking the start of the weekend long, Black Shuck Festival. Using large parts of the Godric Way cycle route, riders enjoyed either a 12 mile or 22 mile ride along quiet country lanes on a very pleasant Friday evening.



We welcomed a range of riders and their bikes; from various eBikes to Paul Sinett with his hand built 'Black Shuck' racing bike. Thanks go to Margaret (for helping with the route, publicity and acting as tail rider) and to Terry/David for leading/tail riding on the longer route.

As riders reached the end of the circular route, they were met by various Black Shucks at the Butter Cross, with the more eloquent of the Black Shucks presenting medals to all riders. A thoroughly enjoyable event that will hopefully grow in the coming years.

Last words from one of our guests, Belinda.

"Just wanted to thank you for this evening's ride. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute. You all made me feel so welcome."



## TIME TRIALS – Ian Lomas

Time trials (TTs) are a great way of improving your fitness, they can become addictive and are sometimes called the 'Race of Truth' as you and your bike are on your own against the clock.

Godric CC run a series of 10-mile TTs during the summer on Tuesday evenings, at which anyone can come and have a go. It is not necessary to have a time trial bike; there is a separate category for road bikes. Godric and other local clubs also run Open TTs at 10-, 25- and 50-mile distances for club members.

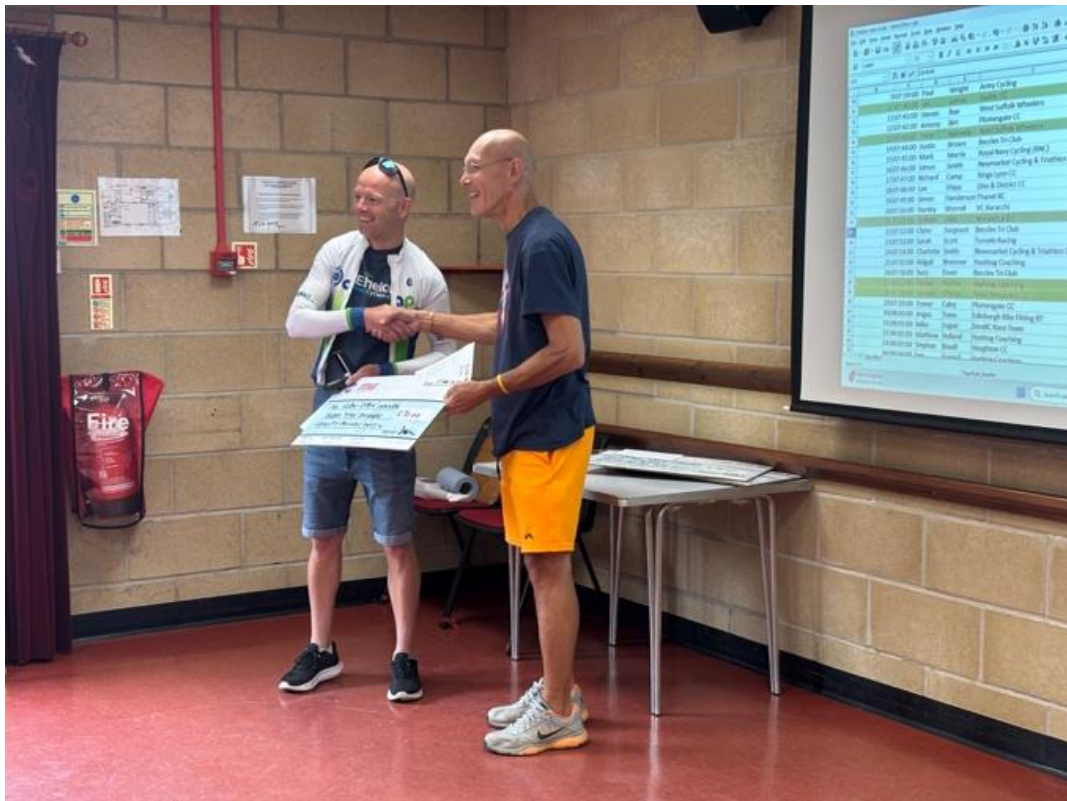


I started riding TTs many years ago on a road bike with clip-on bars and now have a lovely Argon 18 time trial bike and 'pointy' helmet. I also have a skin suit but have never worn it!

The TT crowd are a very friendly bunch and are happy to give advice to newcomers (and more regular participants) when asked for.

The club has trophies for various TT categories and started a road bike championship this year on the Godric Open 10 m TT, which was won by Paul Seamons with Steve Cullabine a very close second.

The picture to the left shows me on my Argon 18 and below is the presentation at the recent VCB Open 50-mile TT where Mark 'Tich' Richards won the VCB All-rounder competition which combined 10-, 25- and 50-mile times.



This season is now drawing to a close, but it would be great to see more Godric members take up the 'race of truth' next year and challenge themselves against the clock.



## SCOTLAND 2025 – Simon Beard

I've known Adrian over 30 years. Our eldest children were born within days of each other and grew up together. Our wives are the best of best friends. I've cycled with him on long days out in the Essex/Suffolk borders and I've drunk far too much beer with him over the years...far too much.

It was one of those rather boozy occasions in May when we somehow got onto the subject of cycling the Hebridean way – from the bottom of the western islands, about 5 hours ferry ride from Oban, up to The Butt of Lewis lighthouse. We reckoned we could do it easily in a few days – its only 184 miles. Surprisingly our wives were very supportive, perhaps both sensing the possibility of some peace and quiet for the duration. The seed was sown and we both agreed to do a bit of research with clearer heads.

After digging for a few days and trading some messages with what we had found we agreed that we were definitely going to do it. The difficulties were more about getting there and back and securing accommodation, noting the need for flexibility due to the unpredictable island weather. Do we take 1 car meaning we have to back track 184 miles and a 5-hour ferry to get 'home'? Do we take 2 cars, one at the start and one at the end? What if we book accommodation and then get rained in? We needed flexibility.

"A tent! Are you mad?" paraphrases my response to Adrian's suggestion to each take a tent on the most exposed coastline in the UK on the back of a bicycle...but I had to admit it did give us flexibility. One problem solved (with reservations), now what about travel. Train use had been discounted from the start as we assumed the cost would be prohibitive but after a chance conversation with another Godric, it seemed it may not be as expensive as first thought – especially with a senior railcard. And if we use the train we didn't have to start/finish at the same place.



To cut a long story short after looking at many options and noting the need to build in flexibility we booked trains from Bury St Edmunds to Ardrossan with bicycles for £66 each and a return back to Bury from Oban for £75 each – a bargain! It also meant we could do a couple of days on the south section of the Caledonian way as a 'warm up' before the Hebridean way with another 4 days after as a buffer for bad weather, or to do the northern section of the Caledonian way if we had time. We had a plan, but did we still have permission as the 'few days' had grown to 14!!!!

Not only had it grown to 2 weeks away I also now had a shopping list of: New lightweight tent, lightweight sleeping bag, sleeping mat, panniers, dry sack plus a few other 'odds and ends' and of course I needed a gravel bike to carry it all which needed pedals and SPD shoes. Permission was seriously put in jeopardy when I said that I reckoned that I could get the whole lot for

less than my wife's hairdressing bill over 2 years, and my kit would last a lot longer as well. It wasn't a good comparison to use.

A final check with Adrian to agree the dates, book the initial ferries and go through the logistics one last time. Food, what about food – basically there wasn't much in the way of pubs, cafes, restaurants or even shops on the remote parts of the route so we would have to take supplies and cook ourselves. Great – more stuff to carry.



## GETTING THERE.

I arranged to cycle to Bury on the afternoon of 21st July and stay in the Premier Inn hotel (about 200 yards from the station) so that I didn't have to rush around on the morning of travel. Adrian was going to cycle in on the day from Lavenham – starting at 5 am!



It absolutely chucked it down all morning on the 21st and the forecast wasn't great for the afternoon, but at 2pm there was a break in the weather, and I took the chance, riding through deep puddles on the back roads of Harleston and hoping the surrounding dark clouds weren't going to drench me on day 1. The further west I went the better it became and after 3 hours or so I arrived at the Premier Inn in sunshine. Unfortunately, they weren't expecting me! I said I was sure I had a booking and got out the confirmation e-mail. "There – see I'm booked in – Premier Inn Bury St Edmunds Town Centre". After being advised I was actually stood in Bury St Edmunds North, and I was booked into the hotel the other side of the Cathedral about a mile away I made an embarrassed retreat and got back on the bike hoping none of my other planning was such a cock up.

Once checked in I went out to buy 2 day's supply of food to take – tinned curry, tinned chilli, rice pouches, chocolate bars and an emergency ration tin of baked beans. It wasn't going to be a very healthy few weeks

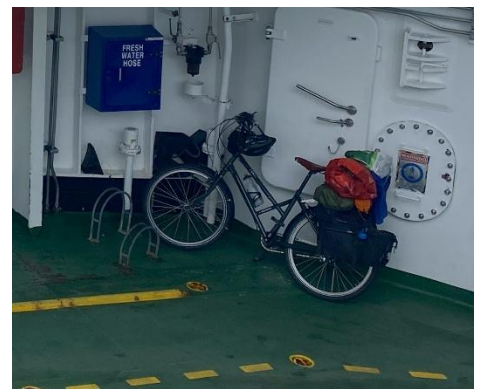
We were booked on the 6pm ferry out of Ardrossan on the 22nd and if our trains all worked out as planned, we should get to the docks at 5pm. What could possibly go wrong, we only had 4 changes to make. And amazingly nothing did go wrong, and we were sat with a coffee and half a dozen other loaded up cyclists awaiting the CalMac ferry to roll out as expected. The only 'excitement' on the journey was getting the bicycles on the LNER Intercity at Peterborough. Whoever designed the cupboard where you hang your bicycle (2 to a cupboard) has obviously never actually tried to use them. Firstly everything has to come off the bike, which is entertaining when wedged with a bicycle in the corridor by the carriage door and people trying to get past with their suitcases and baggage, Secondly the space in the cupboard is so small its nigh on impossible to get yourself in a position to be able to lift the bike in and onto the hooks and thirdly none of the luggage is allowed to be left in the cupboard so everything has to be lugged to the reserved seating 2 carriages away. It's a great way to annoy people.



own than my entire kit. It became affectionately known as 'Billy Smart's Big Top'. Fortunately, it didn't last long!

Anyway, the ferry loaded up and we had a pleasant crossing to Brodick on the Isle of Aaran, making use of the unexpected restaurant facilities on the boat so that we didn't need cook that night. Now the real cycling could begin.

Talking of luggage, I'd done quite a bit of research and in my mind we were bikepacking – travelling light over uncertain surfaces whilst still maintaining the agility and speed of your bike. Adrian obviously wasn't on the same page. He turned up in full blown touring mode including bringing a full-size pillow and a tent that would comfortably sleep 3. In fact, the tent was an old-fashioned canvas contraption which weighed more on its



## CALEDONIAN WAY (SOUTH)



Due to duration and ferry timings, we had decided to intercept the Caledonian way at Claonaig via the Isle of Aaran, and we just needed a leisurely ride of 14 miles to get close to the dock on the other side of the island ready for the early sailing the next day. It was a lovely evening with the route following a rocky coastline north around the island. With the waves lapping and birds swooping over the water it was really good to be back on the bike, and I started to relax, but then the road turned inland and suddenly we were confronted by a hill – a proper one. 643 feet of it to smash my Strava biggest

climb – not that there was much to smash from my Suffolk based cycling. It was a bit of a slog with all the gear on the bike, but I felt good and very positive about the days to come. Adrian on the other hand was starting to pay the price of dragging most of his worldly possessions and ‘the big top’ around with him, but he managed to get to the summit, and we freewheeled into our campsite in Lochranza to a welcoming reception of midges.

I’ve toured mainland Scotland on 2 wheels many times - but usually with an engine, some leathers and a helmet. I’ve been mildly annoyed by a few midges in pub gardens or at café stops and have always wondered what all the fuss was about. Now I know. Swarms of them greeted us and before we could set up camp they had already decided we were supper, well me anyway as Adrian, from his huge pile of luggage, produced what looked like a full Hazmat suit. I sprayed myself from some insect repellent aerosol my wife had given me – I hadn’t read the instructions and liberally sprayed my face as the midges seemed to have a particular liking for the ears and forehead. After a few minutes I couldn’t feel the midges – in fact I couldn’t feel my face at all as my eyes puffed up and my lips felt twice the size of normal. It did wear off after 15 minutes and then I read the label – avoid contact with face!

Tents were set up in record time and the rest of the evening was spent reflecting on how lucky we had been for everything to fall into place and to be ready to start on time the next morning.

With midges still active I decamped very swiftly the next morning and cycled a mile or so to the Lochranza ferry which fortunately had a little sandwich shop beside it doing coffee and bacon rolls. I soon learnt to take every possible opportunity to ‘fuel up’ as cafes were very few and far between. Adrian joined later as he had a full breakfast from his travelling kitchen – including coffee from ground beans. No instant for Adrian.

We had just shy of 100 miles to cover over 2 days to get the Ferry from Oban to the outer isles. With the forecast set fair it wasn’t going to be a problem, and we started out in high spirits once across the short sailing back to the mainland. There are plenty of details about the Caledonian Way route on the internet, but it is a complete mixture of grass track, logging roads, bridleways, canal tow paths and roads – some quiet lanes, some major A roads... and a distinct lack of coffee shops, or any shop at all unless you go off route!



The 1st days ride was over the Kintyre Peninsular to then follow the western coast and then back over the peninsular again to get to Lockgilphed, which we knew had a shop where we could



restock on snacks. It soon became apparent that Adrian, with wide treaded tyres, Billy Smart's big top, super low gearing for his bad back, full field kitchen and lack of miles in the legs was not going to keep up with me as I had retained 32mm slick tyres for the tarmac sections, packed light and been cycling on the Wednesday and Sunday Godric rides all year. I'd get 20 minutes up the road and then have to wait 5 for him to catch up. We'd have a chat and take a picture and then we would drift apart again. As the day went on, we got further apart and the waits got longer, especially in the hilly sections. After the morning in the hills and quite a few climbs I was starting to



feel a bit of fatigue and in need for some food. Luckily, in the distance I could see what looked like a café with tables outside – result. As I drew closer, I could see others sat outside and started dreaming of a coffee and sausage roll. Unfortunately, it was closed and the other cyclists there were just taking a rest. Not that I would have got a coffee and sausage roll there anyway as it turned out to be the Kilberry Inn -a Michelin star restaurant. I opened my emergency tin of baked beans and sat at one of their tables and devoured them. Adrian caught up and we agreed that rather than me

stop every 20 minutes or him feeling under pressure to go faster I'd do my own thing and stop at coffee shops (if there were any) and if he saw my bike outside would join for a 'catch up'

We got into camp at Lochgilphead in good time which was thankfully midge free. There were two other cyclists putting up a tent and I wandered over to have a chat with them – they were cycling to the Butt of Lewis too, but their starting point had been Toulouse in France. They had already been on the road many weeks and had come up through the west country, having docked in Plymouth, then cycling through Wales and the Lake District. And I thought Adrian and I were on an adventure!

Two Dutch brothers arrived on bicycles and both looked totally exhausted. Once they had sprawled out and recovered, they told us they had just cycled from Oban and the hills were awful and it was the worst day on a bicycle they had ever had. We were off to Oban the next day on the same route, but I was really looking forward to it. I had really enjoyed the day climbing and wanted more. In fact, that was when I was at my most enthused, engaged and alive, on my own, on the bike, climbing and looking up the road to see another climb looming and looking at the Garmin and seeing that I was on a mile of 9% gradient, and it was hurting. Tomorrow was going to be great.

And it was! Over the Peninsular again and then after following Loch Awe northwards a bit of relief heading west and then the final climb before dropping into Oban. The climbing around the Loch was brilliant with 4344 feet of elevation gain in 54 miles over the day. Halfway around there was a café in Dalavich where I had a few coffees and sausage rolls until Adrian appeared. I needed the rest to be honest, and it was also good to catch up and see how each other were doing. Adrian was looking forward to getting into Oban early if possible as he wanted to find a fishing tackle shop to buy some 'spinners'. He'd already got his telescopic rod and reel in his bag of worldly possessions of course. We did get into Oban in good time and after a midge free set up of camp we cycled into town to find the 'spinners' and stock up with more tins of curry and chilli. We passed a shop in the high street selling outdoor equipment with special offers on lightweight tents and Adrian went in to have a look as he was starting to get tired of hauling 'the big top' around. The deal was done, and the shop agreed to take Adrian's old tent and store it until he could pick it up. Load lightened by about 50% ready for the islands.

## THE HEBRIDEAN WAY.



The ferry to Castlebay on Barra was delayed by an hour or so which meant we didn't have time to go to the official start of the trail on Vatersay that evening, so we went straight to our camp site at Borge some 6 miles away. Barra looked bleak - Glaciation had scoured and scarred the landscape and it looked rough and inhospitable, but our camp site was marvellous, perched on the rocks looking out to the sunset. The next morning I cycled back to the official start where there were cows

grazing on the grass by the clear blue water and then turned north into 5 days that all seem to merge into one, catching up with Adrian in the evenings for yet another tin of curry or meeting on the ferries we needed to use to hop between the islands which were not joined by causeway. Cycle-Eat-Sleep-Repeat.

Unlike the Caledonian the Hebridean way is all road and whilst there are a few sections with a little traffic most of it is remote and quiet. As we had time in the bank, we agreed to have a rest after a couple of days so I could chill out and Adrian could go fishing. Again, there is plenty of detail about the route on the internet, but I wasn't prepared for the rugged beauty and desolate landscape which varied from



rolling hills with a few sharp climbs in the southern islands to out and out big hill after big hill in Harris before levelling out again into open plains on Lewis. The standout features though were the beaches - white sand with clear blue water and a backdrop of the mountains – In fact I spent the whole afternoon of our rest day just sat, staring out onto Luskintyre Bay in wonder with a few tins and half a kilo of cheese.

With the route being 'all road' it was easy to get in a rhythm and grind out the miles with nothing but the ribbon of tarmac, usually climbing, in front of you. Barren landscapes on one side with the odd ghostly rocky pool and fantastic beaches on the other. Lack of shops and coffee stops meant long stints in the saddle but once again I loved the isolation – me against the road and the wind which was tending WNW rather than the usual prevailing southerly.



The 1st two days just flew by doing 110 miles and about 5500 feet elevation gain. I was drinking in the experience of every hill through Barra, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist and South Harris. We pitched up in Carnish on the Saturday night and whilst I still had a couple of days of meals with me, I'd run out of energy

bars and chocolate. I'll get some tomorrow I thought.



The islands are still very religious and old traditions still hold strong, meaning everything is closed on a Sunday. There may be a petrol station in Stornoway that opens but where we were there was nothing open, not that there would have been much to open even if it wasn't a Sunday. With no snacks left, other than eating yet another tin of chilli on the road, I was going to have to tough it out until we got into camp. As the day wore on, I was getting hungrier and hungrier and seriously thinking of wolfing down a cold tin of chilli when I passed an old phone box near Lochmaddy. I'd got 20 yards past it before I registered what the sign said 'stop @ the box – Drinks and Treats'. What a lifesaver. Inside was a basket with Crisps, Haribos, Tunnocks caramel wafers and cans of drink. I put a donation in the honesty box and scoffed a few hundred (or more) unhealthy calories.



The rest day turned out to be anything but as I decided to cycle into Tarbert because it had a coffee shop (with excellent black pudding and egg baps) and a shop for supplies replenishment. I was then going to have an easy ride around to the island of Scalpay before returning to camp. It was only 36 miles in total but ended up with 3363 feet elevation gain – no wonder I just sat and chilled in the afternoon.

With the weather forecast still fair we decided that we would head back to Stornoway and the Ullapool ferry to the mainland after completion of the route. We would then try to pick up the Caledonian again from Inverness or get on the train if the weather turned – there was talk of a storm coming in. That meant 2 days to get to the lighthouse at the top of Lewis and then to cycle across the island so we could get the 7am ferry the following day. We would break the back of the journey by doing over 60 miles on the 1st leg.



Facing a long day ahead I stopped off in Tarbert for more black pudding 1st thing and then was confronted by 'The Horrors of Harris' which took us to the highest elevation so far with 2 really testing climbs over the first 20 miles. In the cloud base it was cold and wet, not from rain, just from the moisture in the air – for the 1st time I needed to put on a waterproof. It was bleak – really bleak and strength sapping. Nowhere to stop for coffee, nowhere to stop for shelter, all you could do was grind away looking at damp rock wondering if the land of Mordor from Lord of the

Rings was just around the corner...A dragon and army of Orc would have fitted in nicely it was so drab and barren. Finally, the island of Lewis came into view, it had some hills in the distance but there were flat bits, and it was green, and it looked inviting.

Mercifully that night's camp site had a camp kitchen as the midges had returned. Adrian, who came in 2 hours later, and I had yet more chilli and rice, and I'd found a community shop a few miles before camp and got some cans of beer. We were both shattered, and it was still bright sunshine as we fell into our tents,

Getting to the Butt of Lewis lighthouse was pretty easy as Lewis proved to be quite a pleasant area to cycle with a few short climbs but nothing in comparison to the previous day.

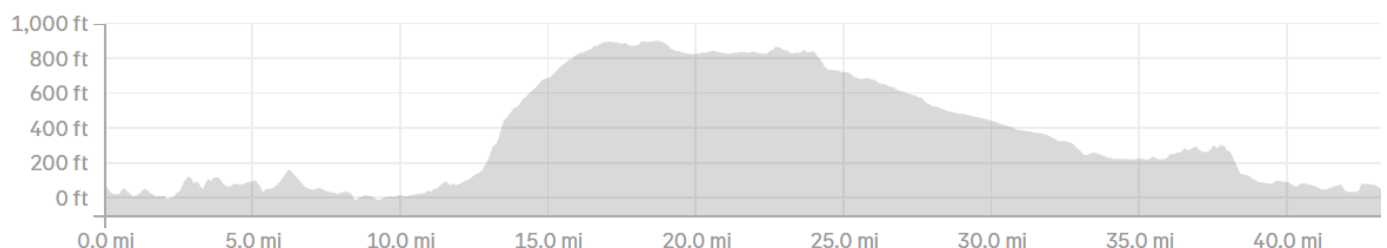
The wind had turned south too and apart from a stop for a Stornoway Muffin (Black pudding again) at a roadside cabin I didn't feel any different to a usual Godric Wednesday ride, and as it was a Wednesday I was in full Godric kit. After a few pictures at the lighthouse and a look at the bay I doubled back to retrace about 80% of the route to the main road to Stornoway, meeting Adrian on the way up and agreeing to go out for a meal and a few beers that evening rather than cook to celebrate. I felt a bit deflated. We had done what we came to do. It had been fantastic but



retracing steps, against the wind, wasn't fun and Lewis wasn't providing any challenges like Harris. I was missing the pain! "Be careful what you dream of, it may come up and surprise you" as the song goes. Unexpectedly the road across Lewis to get to Stornoway is an absolute brute. It climbs quite sharply, and you can see the summit, until you get there and then you can see the summit, until you get there and then you can see the summit. Once the 5th summit is completed you can freewheel down into Stornoway. Rather than grey rock all around it was green all round, but still as featureless. I was back enjoying myself though, even though there was quite a lot of fast traffic on the road but what a way to end the tour of the islands.

A night out in Stornoway is best forgotten – Fish and chips and a pint of Tennent's Lager is as good as it gets. It's a beer desert. It was good to get the early ferry to Ullapool the next morning and leave it behind us.

I'd done a lot of searching for a nice route to Inverness from Ullapool – there isn't one. You have to follow the main road for at least 30 miles before you can go across country heading to Muir of Ord and then following the north bank of the Beauly Firth. We'd met someone on the trip who had cycled it before, and he advised to just let all the ferry traffic get away and then slog up the hill for an hour and then enjoy the ride! We followed his advice but there was still quite a lot of fast traffic on the road which took the edge of what would have been the best day riding ever otherwise, because it was an hour of climbing and climbing and climbing which got my biggest lifetime ascent of 792 feet. And then after the climb, more or less 25 miles of freewheeling down to the estuary, what a reward.





And the scenery had everything – rough and rocky, green plains, reservoirs and waterfalls, rolling hills, big bright skies and water lapping the shore. At one point amongst rolling cornfields, I thought we'd come from Mordor to The Shire.

There was still talk of a storm coming but the next 2 days were forecast to be fine so we would do the Caledonian back down from Inverness towards Oban stopping at Fort Augustus and then Fort William.

### CALEDONIAN WAY (NORTH)

First thing next morning a slight error reading the Garmin put us on the A9 heading towards the



Kessock bridge and Inverness. After a hasty retreat and finally finding the safe route, we crossed the bridge and due to roadworks circled the Inverness Caledonian Thistle football ground to get to Inverness Castle and the North end of the Caledonian Way. After a coffee and food stock-up I was off – just follow the signs south. Adrian wanted to do some souvenir shopping, fridge magnets, amongst the items on the list.

The day was a mixture of cycle path around the main roads of Inverness and its outskirts, tracks through woodland and minor roads until joining the banks of Loch Ness at Dore. It was very pleasant and the sort of place you could cycle with the family and stop for a picnic! I was a bit stop and go with little opportunity to get into a rhythm – even worse there were people. Whilst not on the main road the route was used by many a motorcyclist and motorhome. It just didn't feel remote and challenging like the islands had been and perhaps my wife is right – I am an antisocial so and so. At Foyers the road left the Loch and turned inland to put a smile on my face again – a remote climb of 674ft to Suidhe viewpoint which I found really challenging and then a freewheel to Fort Augustus.

Adrian came in the usual couple of hours later with his souvenirs and we ate more tinned curry, before heading to the Caledonian Canal locks to admire the scenery and grab a pint (or three) in the Locks Pub. Our first proper beer of the trip; 'Nessie's Monster Mash'. We were both full of the trip comparing rides and places we had seen. Just two more days to go, Fort William tomorrow and then using the



Camusnagaul ferry the next morning to get onto the final stretch to Oban. What a great way to spend a Friday night. Friday Night, meaning we get to Fort William on Saturday meaning we plan to get the ferry on Sunday morning? Having been bitten once by 'everything is closed on a Sunday' on the islands we checked if the ferry ran on a Sunday – No it didn't!





The forecast was still good, but they were really talking up this storm coming in Sunday night/Monday morning. We decided to push on as far as we possibly could on the Saturday, making sure we got across the ferry and to then just leave a few miles into Oban for Sunday. It was another 'bitty' day as far as riding was concerned with tracks, cycle path, ferries, lots of traffic around Onich, and rough quarry roads which I was sure was going to give me at least 2 punctures, but remarkably the tyres stayed intact. But the scenery was spectacular – absolutely glorious. I tried to slow down and take it all in. Perhaps this is what

cycling is about and not just head down climbing after all? We made the small ferry and kept going until there was only 13 miles to go on the Sunday to get into Oban.



So, the final days riding arrived. A dawdle into Oban. I got about a mile into the ride and found 'The Racer' café and ordered the largest breakfast on the menu. Feeling slightly rotund the ride into Oban was uneventful although we did have to do the climb in past the golf course that we had done some 8 days previously. It showed how my climbing had improved over the trip as I did the climb in 7:38 compared with 9:30 the 1st time.

Most of Oban was open on a Sunday so we mooched around, and I had a few beers and ate seafood at the shack on the quay whilst Adrian did more shopping. The place was packed and there was a really good atmosphere as I watched the ferries come and go. A good night sleep and



we'll be home this time tomorrow I thought. I looked at my phone for the weather – Amber warning tomorrow, wind and rain. Well, it can do whatever it wants now the cycling is done.

We had booked into a hotel in Oban to make sure we were in good shape to get the 8:56 train – but only after Adrian had gone back to the outdoor shop, that opened early for him, to retrieve 'the big top'. He'd be taking back even more than he came with.

## COMING HOME

It was a wet and windy morning and sailings had stopped, more on the forecast of things to come than the actual weather at the time, which was nasty but nothing more. We got on the diesel train which was scheduled to take 3 hours to get to Glasgow, chugging slowly and stopping at every station possible on the way. All was fine until about halfway through, when we ground to a halt in the middle of nowhere. We heard a door up front slam and then the guard came down the train to inform all that the driver was just moving a tree off the line. This happened 3 times on the journey and then the train was reduced to a crawl on safety grounds. I looked at the phone and there were alerts that all trains north of Newcastle may be cancelled later. It would be touch and go if we made our 2pm Edinburgh LNER inter-city at this rate. An hour late we arrived at Glasgow to find that there was a reduced service and the next train we could get to Edinburgh was 13:48. There was no way we would make the 14:00 in Edinburgh, not that it mattered as I looked at my phone again – All LNER trains out of Edinburgh cancelled due to storm Floris!

We eventually got to Edinburgh. No one was about so we wandered to customer information to be told there were definitely no trains today, but our ticket would be valid tomorrow, and services should be running normally. "So, I just turn up tomorrow and get any train I like?" I asked. Yes, was the response, "Even with a bike?" I asked. Er No, you can go on any train, but you need a booked one for your bike. After a lot of searching on the computer we were found a bike slot out of Edinburgh – in 2 days time.



The lady helping us could tell we were not impressed and found 2 LNER cycle slots to Peterborough from Newcastle on the 10:53 the next day – we just had to get to Newcastle and there was a cross-country service at 6:06 the next morning with 2 bike slots free. Just 3 hours to wait on Newcastle station to get back on track. We had no option but to take it and stay in Edinburgh that night – which was easier said than done as the fringe festival was on and there were lots of people in the same boat (or train?) as us. We eventually found somewhere but it wasn't cheap. Beer and Pizza that night numbed the pain.

And so finally we got on a train at just past 6am to arrive at Bury St Edmunds at 4pm that afternoon – 19 hours delay and a big and unexpected hole in the pocket from the hotel bill. I really wanted to have cycled back home so the trip had been 'door to door' but the final days stress of travelling and early mornings meant I was happy to be picked up and chauffeured back home.

## REFLECTION.

It was a great trip. The weather, the scenery, the logistics (apart from the last day), and even the camping which I really enjoyed. The bike had been brilliant and all the kit I had bought worked perfectly. I don't think I have ever slept so well.

My initial thoughts on getting home were how brilliant the Hebridean Way was as a challenge of man against the road, hours pounding the tarmac, going into climb after climb, the thrill of riding fast on the descent to make up time (for no reason at all) and the bleak solitude. In contrast the Caledonian had been bitty, you could never get into a rhythm as the surface changed, or you were on shared cycleways with pedestrians or narrow tracks through forest cuttings or following the canal, having to cross locks, or open gates. There were a few challenging climbs and some fast descents but there were also real slow sections with lots of traffic. However, the more I think about it the more I've come to love and appreciate the Caledonian. It was stunningly beautiful, and I should have taken more time to enjoy that, to have stopped more often and looked around, to have reset and change mindset from the Hebridean, to have been 'more Adrian' – but I never did. It's one of the reasons I'll probably have to go back again sometime to do it justice.

And finally, would I do any other long-distance ride again. Perhaps Lands' End to John O'Groats? Coast to Coast? London to Paris? No doubt I'll find out next time I have a few too many beers with Adrian.



**Paul's Top Tip:** Squealling Disc Brakes? They may just need a good clean and re-centring. To clean the rotor and pads use isopropanol alcohol to remove contamination. Centre by loosening off the bolts that hold the calliper, apply the brakes and lightly tighten up again, spin the wheel to check the clearance and then torque up to the manufacturers spec.



## CHAINGANG REVIEW- Terry Doughty

In April, a number of members took up the challenge to ride in a chaingang. For many this was their first experience of riding closely, bunched together at 20+ mph speeds. It can be quite scary until you get comfortable with your bike control and that of others!

Initial numbers soon forced the need to ride in two groups with a 'no drop' group for the fast athletes, working together to get the absolute best time and another group for those who wanted to improve but couldn't always hold the pace, perhaps returning from injury or not having the legs for an all-out attack on the day. At some point all riders in whatever group stuck to the task of overcoming the pain barrier to hang on and not only complete but improve on their times.

The competition got very serious in the fast group which led to the art of perfecting the starting position to enable the strongest impact on the finishing time – sometimes as close as 1 second. This was something that became a hot topic of conversation during the warm down and during the social rides along with the phrase "chain-gang fever".

As summer progressed the double figure numbers have slowly declined with only a single group now regularly taking up the "who's out tonight " call on a Friday.

I think I can say that all those who rode more than once significantly improved their times and bike handling – it's an art to ride a few inches from the rider in front. I also think all enjoyed the experience and the challenge – although it might have been 24 hours after the ride before they came to that conclusion!

Well done to those who improved and thank you for those that took part. It's definitely something we will do again next year and hopefully we can get increased numbers so we can run 2, or even 3, gangs.

Still not sure how the chaingang works. Have a look at this video from British Cycling. It shows the principle on a closed road – we take a few more precautions when doing it on the public highway!

[How to ride through and off \(chaingang\) | Race Smart](#)



**Paul's Top Tip:** Predictive and preventative maintenance will keep your bike running sweet, but it's easy to forget so I use the 'ProBikeGarage' App. It links to Strava, so all you need do is enter how many miles you anticipate your bike parts will last, and the app will automatically tell you when a replacement is due.

## COL du TOURMALET: A bucket list icon – Mark Finch

The Col du Tourmalet featured in the Tour de France for the first time in 1910. Fittingly, the first man to cross the Tourmalet was a Frenchman, Octave Lapize. Since then, it has featured 91 times in the Tour, the most of any mountain climb. At 2115m, its history, stunning views and challenging climb makes it a true Tour de France icon.



The Tourmalet had been on my bucket list for a while but as I entered my seventh decade, I thought the moment had passed. However, more time in retirement and especially joining Godric CC (my first cycling club at the age of 62!), began to make me think that perhaps it was still possible.

Every year we try to see a Pyrenean stage of the Tour. This year there were three, so we were spoilt for choice but the plan this year also included me attempting to cycle up the Tourmalet around the time of the Tour! The route I would be taking from Bagneres de Bigorre is 30 km, with the first half to Sainte Marie de Campan being relatively gentle. It then kicks up to an average gradient of 7.3% for the next 17km, peaking at 11% in the brutish last 8km.

Thinking that Annis Hill might not be quite enough I had given myself three weeks to get some hill work in the legs. Preparation started off in the foothills of the Pyrenees including the Col des Palomieres, progressed to the Col d'Aspin (1489m) then the Hourquette d'Ancizan (1564m). Each time trying to give my legs time to recover but had I done enough? Stage 14 of the Tour was going over the Tourmalet on Saturday 19/7, so two days before that seemed the right time to check.

The weather was glorious, probably a bit too hot. The initial kilometres were deceptively gentle as the road meandered up the Campan valley. With 12 kms to go the gradient steepened and time to focus on my breathing and finding a rhythm. Exiting the forest, the higher peaks and the day's objective came into view. The famous kilometre markers were a motivational countdown to the summit, if not a little daunting showing the gradient for the next km!







The atmosphere around the time of the Tour is always fantastic with plenty of other cyclists for company. Cycling with a friendly Spanish rider for a couple of kms towards the end and dodging cows on the road seemed to be a pleasant distraction. Even motorists were shouting encouragement! I can only describe the last 2kms as bizarre - emotion seemed to overcome the fatigue. Having wanted to do this for so long, thinking the moment had passed but at that point knowing that I was almost there, was extraordinary. And then, there it was—the statue of Octave Lapize at the summit and a bucket list icon achieved and all on my trusty Boardman. Awesome and does it get any better.....

I'm convinced that this would not have happened if it wasn't for Godric CC. For me, the Tourmalet was my best achievement on a bike but humbly modest compared to others. The

inspiration, support and encouragement of Godric CC members is what made the difference. Thank you.

PS Bucket list item for next year - cycle up a mountain finish to see the Tour. I have never seen so many cyclists as on the day we saw the Tour, the atmosphere was fantastic.



**Paul's Top Tip:** Still using thin plastic tyre levers that are fiddly and feel like they could snap at any minute? Try the True Tension Tyre Monkey. I carry it with me on every ride. It makes tyre mounting and dismounting easy.



We would love to hear your cycling stories, top tips, comments and suggestions for the Godric Gossip. Please send any relevant material to [info@godriccycling.club](mailto:info@godriccycling.club) and put NEWSLETTER in the subject header.

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