

Where the hell is Grinton?

Stanley Feerick's 'off the back' Easter tour 2010 report.

Easter weekend tour next year will be based at Osmotherley, was the announcement at the meeting before Christmas. Our tour leader went on to say "it's a lovely place, easy riding distance from Bury, and Whitby is a good destination for a day ride". Not wishing to appear too green, I thought no problem finding Osmotherley, 40 miles radius from Whitby, easy riding distance from Bury will pin-point it nicely. True enough this cycling Mecca is easily found, however news soon came through that Osmotherley was fully booked but that we've got in at Grinton. Where the hell is Grinton?

I scoured the area around Osmotherley on the map to no avail, Jeeves wasn't too sure but Google lead me straight to 'Grinton Lodge.' North Yorkshire up on the moors, un pack the bucket and spade then, Whitby out of the question. How to get there? Grinton is a tough 70 miles from Bury with panniers, I would need to go at my own pace.

Three experienced club riders were planning to make the trip, but their pace and likely detours I thought would not be conducive to my survival. Foregoing the navigational skills of the 'tortuous trio' (Mark the distance, Mike the miles and the infamous Flashman Hood) means I have to find my own route. Auto-route has a 'draw line' tool that allows you to strike a straight line between your start and finish points. You can then zoom in and plot a route that sticks as close to the line as possible, obviously taking into account preferred roads. The route I generated undoubtedly passes the test as shortest but leaves a lot to be desired in most other ways.

The route from Rochdale was Edenfield, Rawtenstall, Burnley, Nelson, Colne then Skipton Old Rd on to Elslack. A couple of miles on the A59 then at the roundabout before Skipton over Stirton hill onto the Grassington road. North then to Rylston and on to the B6160 which takes you all the way to Newbiggings. From here the last 8 miles is up hill, past Aysgarth Falls, Bolton Castle and over the moors to Grinton. On Easter Monday Brian explained the route he would have taken, or as he put it "I normally go" Normally? What's bloody 'normal' about riding to Grinton? How do you learn these routes? The old mob seem to know the way to everywhere without trying. Anyway I made a route sheet noting the mileage at every turn. 70 arduous miles covered the mileometer says, so I must be near, I've climbed for the last 100 miles (well it felt like that) and I was on a 1:4 descent. As the last mile clocked over on my meter I slammed the brakes on unwilling to go another foot down this hill until I was sure I'd not overshot. I could to the village in the distance, I knew the hostel was before the village but no sign of the hostel. Luckily a group of ramblers appeared they soon pointed the way, which was just another few hundred yards up another 1:4.

The hostel was warm and friendly, a shower a meal and a pint, the miles were forgotten, unless I tried to move that is. Saturday's ride was a damp affair, not many miles but all up hill. It a strange feature of the Grinton area, if GPS give a distance of say 10 miles the mileometer says 12. That's 10 miles travelled along plus 2 vertical. Today we were doing 'The Stang'. I would be Stan of the Stang by sprinting over this killer to take pictures of the group as they struggle the last few yards. Didn't quite work out as I wanted as they sailed way up the Stang as I got off and pushed. Must have over done it the day before. Excuses excuses yes, but psychologically I didn't get over that the whole weekend.

Back to the Hostel and a walk down the 1:4 to the pub. This was a good session, topics ranged from City winning the Premier League to life on Mars (I can't remember which was thought most likely) By the end of the night we had put the world firmly to rights, we had worked out the best strategy for the general election, we solved the world debt crisis and discovered a cure for most social and medical ills.

Unfortunately on the following morning no one could fully remember the details, the only bits we could recall was a new law put forward by Mike, which we now realize would not meet with universal approval of dog owners, and some of the rules of a game that Nigel use to play with some SAS buddies. We avowed there and then to return to the pub that night and work things out and to keep trying until we get it right whatever it takes. Now that's dedication for you, selfless striving on your behalf, not like these bloody MPs..... no no don't get me started!

Back in the real world I decided the only way I could make the ride home was to set off first thing Sunday when the weather looked promising (Monday was forecast as a stinker). I packed my bags and cancelled breakfast, I report my plan to our leader, he immediately offered to somehow squeeze another bike into his car and give me a lift home.

Gratefully accepting his offer the Sunday ride including Tan Hill seemed a mere bagatelle. Sunday dawned overcast and damp but with great promise, Mark thought that our planned ride to Barnard Castle, Tan Hill and Mickleton was a bit short so he set off for Penrith, a mere 90 odd miles. The rest of the group set off at a leisurely pace against the brightening skies. It's strange that now that I don't have to make the ride home against the promised fierce wet head wind, suddenly I feel strong enough for anything. More about heads than legs this cycling business init.

Tan Hill is well worth the effort with its snow capped alpine views and moorlands successfully struggling to shake off this hardest of winters. The Inn at the summit boasts 'highest in Britain' and is a welcoming Mecca for riders and ramblers. The fare was very limited but the tea was warm and wet, that'll do. As we rode into the afternoon the sun finally broke through and by the time we reached the banks of the Swale all was right with the world. If you chance to view my pictures of the ride you will see a glorious valley that could be 'The Garden of Eden' or Tolkien's 'The Shire'. We stopped to view the many waterfalls that join Swale along this final road back to Reeth and onto the now much loved Grinton.

Monday was all about wishing well to the 'tortuous trio' as they headed south against the cold wet head wind. We brought the car under the shelter of the forecourt arch, packed and secured the bike to the roof rack in the constant rain. As we drove home in our warm comfortable seats we passed several braver souls, their faces grimacing against the elements, I could not escape a slight pang of shame that I had somehow dodged this 'pleasure'.

Stanley Feerick