

BURY TO SCHORNDORF CYCLE TOUR – 26 MAY TO 1 JUNE 2006

By John Butterworth

The Bury to Schorndorf Cycle Tour has been successfully completed. Wind, rain and cold sums up the general weather conditions for the five Bury cyclists, Frank Jefferson of Bury Clarion, Andrew Ascroft of Bury Tandem Club for the Visually Handicapped and Bolton Clarion and John Butterworth, Alan Webb and Duncan Limbert of Bury CTC, on our seven day ride of just over 600 miles from Bury to its twin town in Germany.

Our support vehicle, an ex Royal Mail LDV Pilot van, was driven by volunteer John Ratcliffe of Bury Metro Community Twinning Association.

Day 1 Friday 26 May - Bury to Hull (100 miles)

It was cold and raining heavily as the ride began outside Bury Town Hall at 6am. The Pennines were crossed in rain and very poor visibility down into Huddersfield. Then the climb on the Wakefield road before the descent to a welcome breakfast stop at a café at Horbury. Wet jackets were optimistically hung to dry whilst full English breakfasts were consumed.

Back on the road, the rain had eased a little. We met up with our support van for the first time in Knottingly, by which time the rain had finally ceased. A further stop was made at a transport café towards Howden. We then decided on taking the direct route into Hull using the A63. This is a busy road and riding a bike on it cannot be called a pleasant experience, but good fast progress was made. We rode under the approaches to the Humber Bridge and on arrival in Hull it was actually sunny as we crossed the town to the docks. In good time for boarding the ferry, we checked in and enjoyed a drink in the cafe.

Day 2 Saturday 27 May - Zeebrugge to Seclin (90 miles)

After a calm overnight sailing to Zeebrugge on the “Pride of Bruges” we took to the Belgian roads with relish. Facilities for cyclists are superb in this country, and it was difficult to get used to the fact that cyclists have priority at road junctions. We met up with the van for refreshments at Aatrijke. Another stop was made at a patisserie where Duncan’s knowledge of Afrikaans came in handy when speaking to the Flemish shopkeeper.

A headwind was present for most of the ride down into Ypres where we rode through the Menin Gate. Earlier we had passed Poelkapelle British Cemetery - the third largest cemetery in the 'Ypres Salient' after 'Tyne Cot' & 'Lyschenthhoek'.

After leaving Ypres we stopped at the British owned Cherry Blossom café and B&B in Brandhoek near Vlamertinge. The owners Liz and Jon Millward had been informed we were coming so they had prepared a feast for us with huge portions of

chilli con carne with rice, chips and salad preceded by homemade soup and fresh bread. Unfortunately, with the headwind and sightseeing, we arrived later than planned and although the meal was very enjoyable, we couldn't do it full justice as we still had over 30 miles to ride to our hotel in Seclin just south of Lille.

On leaving the Cherry Blossom café at 4.15pm the weather looked threatening so instead of the planned ride through Wijtschate and Ploegsteert we entered Armentieres via Kemmel and Nieukerke. It was not too difficult to find our hotel, the Hotel B&B in Seclin, after that. The hotel was located in an out-of-town complex. We enjoyed a great meal in the adjacent Hotel Campanile and had the waiter take a group photo of us all wearing our yellow Bury to Schorndorf Cycle Tour T- Shirts.

Day 3 Sunday 28 May - Seclin to Hirson (77 miles)

On our third day we enjoyed our first full day on French roads passing through quiet villages with little or no traffic on our route down to Hirson. It was mainly dry and we had a favourable wind. At one sunny point in the morning a café stop was made for lemonades. Our lunchtime rendezvous with driver John was just after Solesmes. John did a great job in buying food each morning and preparing lunch for eating at a pre-arranged point every day.

In the afternoon we rode through Landrecies and later stopped at a roadside café at la Flamengries for a 'café au lait grande'. Sitting outside we viewed the unlikely spectacle of local motor cyclists using the straight main road as a drag strip! We rejoined the lanes again and a little later on traffic suddenly appeared – we had come across a car boot sale in Mondrepuis. Once this was negotiated we were in total quiet once again before joining the main N43 for the final few miles into Hirson. The hotel in Hirson was part of the station building on the main Calais to Basel railway line, but railway noise was not a problem. Bikes were safely stored in a locked room, and once showered and changed we enjoyed a few glasses of Pelforth Blonde and a fine meal.

Day 4 Monday 29 May - Hirson to Vilosnes (80 miles)

The fourth day dawned cloudy once more, but optimism took over and shorts were worn once again even though rain was in the air. A bad decision as it turned out because the rain did hit us with a vengeance later in the day. In the morning the drizzle cleared and the sun broke through warming our backs as we rode through Poix-Terron and climbed the main hill of the day to the viewpoint at la Bascule. Soon after we met up with John near Bouvellemont for lunch. After traversing the lovely town of le Chesne the rain started to pour down. It did ease off later, but it was a wet group that arrived at the hotel in Vilosnes on the River Meuse and it took a lot of newspaper stuffed in our shoes overnight to dry them out.

Just after us, a group of bedraggled Dutch cyclists arrived and we had a general moan about the weather conditions of the day. Whilst in the hotel another cloudburst occurred, but things had calmed down by the time we had our meal seated in the restaurant overlooking the river. We enjoyed viewing the wildlife out of the window including what we thought was an otter.

Nice restaurant – shame about the portions. Portions here were not suited to the cyclists' appetite, so an extra course of steak and chips was ordered to put things right.

Day 5 Tuesday 30 May - Vilosnes to Morhange (95 miles)

At least it was not actually raining at the start of our fifth day which started with a ride up to the Verdun battlefields. Following the river for a while we then turned off left at Bras-sur-Meuse and rode through now tranquil and silent areas which at one time were the scene of much noise and horror. A steady climb took us to the huge Douaumont Ossuary – a chilling depository for the human remains recovered from the surrounding battlefields. We then descended through areas preserved since the first world war. The shell holes are now grassed over and trees grow amongst them.

Later in the day we met our support van for an al fresco lunch in a woodland clearing after a long climb out of Thiaucourt Regnieville. The lunch just completed, we had to dive for cover in the van as a tremendous hail storm hit us. We rode off over steaming roads as the sun burst through once more. We later stopped at a café just off a roundabout at Nomeny for coffee and lemonades. After which we rode in a mixture of sunshine and rain to our hotel in Morhange which was located at the far end of the town.

Day 6 Wednesday 31 May - Morhange to Seltz (83 miles)

Our sixth day was to take us to within a few miles of the German border. We made a brief halt to inspect a Maginot Line fort near Lening and we climbed our first col – the Col de Puberg. However the gradient was hardly noticeable and before we knew it we were at the summit where we had agreed to meet the van for lunch. We were now in the Northern Vosges Regional Nature Park. After lunch Alan rode off alone on a longer route to seek out more cols to climb. He found some including the Col du Pigeonnier and the Col du Pfaffenschlick.

The remainder of the day's ride was very scenic for us all and we passed through some chocolate box villages in the traditional half-timbered German style. Betschdorf was particularly charming in this respect. We met up with Alan again at our hotel in Seltz. The meal was good at this hotel and at last we got chance to have a walk after our meal. The aim was to see the Rhine, but darkness began to close in.

Day 7 Thursday 1 June - Seltz to Schorndorf (79 miles)

The final day began with a ride through Beinheim to the bridge over the Rhine and we were soon in Germany. Deserted buildings was all that remained of the former border station. The flat roads made for an easy ride through small villages and the town of Rastatt before the hillier terrain of the northern Black Forest was approached. The road out of Malsch towards Volkersbach was closed meaning we had to divert to a

road up a 15% climb between Waldprechtsweier and Freiolsheim taking us up 1000 feet in 4 kilometres.

Through Marxzell and Conweiler, and after a long steep descent into Neuenburg, we made a wrong turn onto a hill more suited to mountain bikes which involved 1.5km of walking a steep rough surfaced track after the tarmac ended. Duncan, Alan and Andy rode the whole climb which ended at Waldrennach. This was followed up by another climb and descent to Schomberg. The next exciting part of the day was the long winding descent to Bad Liebenzell which is located at the base of a deep valley.

Here we encountered another road diversion to avoid a damaged bridge. We asked a local for directions and once through this it was round a hairpin bend and onto a long steady winding climb through woodland to once again reach the high ground. Next stop Weil der Stadt where we had arranged to meet our Schorndorf cyclist friends. Heavy rain set in and on the long descent into the town Frank shot passed everyone as his brake blocks gave up the ghost. It took all his skill to come to a halt at the roundabout at the bottom. Then to the rendezvous point at the railway station where we met our hosts – Horst Reingruber, Siegbert Doring, Uli Kommerrell, Dieter Moser, Manfred Beier (and his son Martin) - who were to ride the remainder of the route into Schorndorf with us.

However, the unfortunate combination of bad weather, road diversions and the fact that we had underestimated the severity of the northern Black Forest terrain had made us late, and the fact that a reception with town officials had been planned for 7pm at Schorndorf town hall we had no option but to follow their suggestion to get on an S-Bahn train with our bikes to cut across Stuttgart to Waiblingen and ride the final 16 miles from there. This unfortunately cut about 30 miles off the planned day's ride.

So, after a coffee and a quick change of clothing, we wheeled our bikes onto the train. On recommencing cycling in Waiblingen (in heavy rain again) it wasn't long before I was the unfortunate victim of a front wheel puncture. A little later Andy came a cropper on wet railway lines across the road. He soon picked himself up, straightened his rear mudguard and we were off again. The weather started to clear and it became sunny for the final scenic miles into Schorndorf where we arrived outside the town hall at 7pm.

We were greeted by the Mayor and press photographers. Photo session completed, we then all wheeled our bikes inside the town hall and very welcome hot and cold drinks, local wine and open sandwiches were served to us. During this time the interior of the town hall was filled by a large bang as my repaired front inner tube exploded. Refreshed, and after more photographs, we loaded the bikes into the van, grabbed our bags, and we were taken individually to the homes of our hosts.

In Schorndorf

During the two day stay in Schorndorf we were taken to the brand new Mercedes Benz Museum in Stuttgart on Friday afternoon followed by a meal and beers in the Kesselhaus Gasthausbrauerei back in Schorndorf, courtesy of our hosts. On Saturday morning we obtained a copy of the local paper which included a feature on our ride

including a colour picture. Our hosts drove us into town and we were given a guided tour of Schorndorf followed by a climb to the top of the church steeple for panoramic views of the town. This was followed by some time for shopping then an al fresco pizza lunch before Frank, Alan and I were driven by Horst to the van and we departed on the first leg of our drive home.

Getting home

Frank, Alan and I returned home in the van loaded with all the bikes and luggage. We had an overnight stop in Rheinbollen. After a superb steak and salad meal washed down by glasses of Bitburger Pils we had a good night's sleep (despite a Saturday night disco outside). The next day, after a buffet breakfast, we rejoined the autobahn and drove to Zeebrugge arriving at 14.30 – in plenty of time for boarding the “Pride of Bruges” again for another calm sea crossing back to Hull.

The van did a great job throughout the tour bearing in mind the maximum speed attainable was 50mph (80kph)! 60mph downhill with a favourable wind.

Duncan and Andy spent another night in Schorndorf with their hosts and Sunday in Stuttgart before flying home to Manchester in the evening. Our driver, John Ratcliffe, stayed on in Germany for a longer holiday.

Summary

The weather could have been better but we were fortunate in that we had no mechanical problems with the bikes, and only two punctures on the whole trip. And our Royal Mail van served us well. Many thanks to Hedley Hill of Ainsworth Road Garage, Radcliffe for providing the vehicle at no cost.

Our hosts in Germany gave us a really warm welcome and treated us like VIPs. We all had the opportunity to taste local Swabian food. We all can't wait to return – next time for a cycling tour of the Rems Valley region around Schorndorf which is ideal cycling country and can be recommended.

My cycle computer readings for the ride

Friday	99.60 miles	7hrs 25mins	Average 13.4mph
Saturday	89.78 miles	7hrs 27mins	Average 12.0mph
Sunday	76.36 miles	5hrs 34mins	Average 13.7mph
Monday	79.68 miles	5hrs 38mins	Average 14.1mph
Tuesday	94.97 miles	6hrs 54mins	Average 13.8mph
Wednesday	83.00 miles	6hrs 04mins	Average 13.5mph
Thursday	63.11 miles	5hrs 56mins	Average 10.6mph (to Weil der Stadt)
	(Average down due to 1.5km walk up rough hill)		
	16 miles	Waiblingen to Schorndorf	

The above times are actual hours in the saddle. Rest stops not included.

Total mileage 602.50 miles (969.6km).

An average of 86.07 miles per day.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all our supporters who made the ride possible:

Bury Metro Community Twinning Association

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

Bury Metro - Bradley Fold Depot

Bury Sports Advisory Council

Ainsworth Road Garage, Radcliffe

Hi-Tech Diesel Ltd, Bury

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And the others who wish to remain anonymous.