

Fife Wheels

IN THIS ISSUE

On the move in Autumn.

Thro' the Land o' Loons and Quines.

Oh no! Not another 5 Ferries?

Not Slaying the Badger.

and much more



Autumn?

It looks like Autumn has finally arrived, what with the golden brown and rusty red hues of the leaves that are still on the trees (and also lying in abundance in 'the cyclists' bit' of road). The sun hangs low in the sky from mid-afternoon until dark... and just how early does it get dark these days?

But... does it really feel like Autumn to you yet?

Judging by the amount of flowers that are still blooming, the grass that still needs cutting (even the daisies have made a re-appearance) and by the abundance of insects that are still flying... it seems that the 'flora and fauna' haven't noticed Autumn's arrival.. or perhaps they've chosen to ignore it! My sure fire way of judging whether it is Autumn or not is very simple... it goes like this...

Am I still wearing shorts on the bike?

Yes I am... therefore (in my book) it's not Autumn yet... or maybe I'm just choosing to ignore it too!

Dark Nights

Are you looking for something to do on the long nights? Then look out for the CTC Fife & Kinross events that are held throughout the winter such as Darts & Dominoes evenings and 10 Pin Bowling with plans to hold other events to while away the winter months. Note too that the Annual Lunch is fast approaching and is to be held once again, by popular demand, at the Largo Hotel, Upper Largo. Please check the website regularly to see if there is anything coming soon that you fancy doing... or send us your suggestions if there is something you'd like to see included in the Social calendar.

More Dark Nights

I was trawling through the CTC Fife & Kinross archives and came across a newspaper cutting from the Fife Advertiser, Feb. 10th, 1945, opposing the use of "Rear Lights on Bicycles"

It read...

"The Fife District Association of the Cyclists Touring Club, being strongly opposed to the new Road Transport (Cycles) Lighting Bill at present under discussion in Parliament, have sent the following letter to each of the Fife Members of Parliament:-

Sir,- At a meeting of the above Association it was agreed to put before you our views on the above Bill.

The principles on which our objections to it are based, are –

1. It is the responsibility of the driver of an overtaking vehicle to look where he is going.
2. In the detailed analysis of fatal accidents it was shown that the number of cyclists killed at night while carrying a lighted rear lamp was twice as great as the number killed while carrying no rear warning of any kind
3. A cyclist is not inconspicuous at night. He already carries a reflector (and white surface). There is also the pool of light cast by his front lamp, and the light is reflected from the bright parts of the cycle.

In view of the above points, we consider that it is no safeguard to cyclists to carry a lighted rear lamp. On the contrary, we think it is a direct encouragement to unsafe road speed and carelessness in night driving.

My my, how times have changed! I wouldn't dare venture out at night without a "lighted rear lamp" and I definitely wouldn't dare to assume (as in the letter above) that all drivers and cyclists are male!

Cover photo

Until today the draft cover of the Autumn Fife Wheels looked somewhat different to the one I ended up choosing... yes the picture quality of the previous cover was much better and the scenery was absolutely stunning... but who could resist a cute robin on a bike wheel?

Dougie Latto Newsletter Editor.



(Cover photo from Maureen Latto. Taken whilst on a sponsored solo cycle round the Loch Leven Heritage Trail and the 'Sannie Road')

*“Now filtering winds thin winnow through the woods
In tremulous noise, that bids at every breath,
Some sickly cankered leaf lets go it's hold and die.
And sloes, dim covered as with dewy veils,
And rambling bramble-berries, pulp and sweet,
Arching their prickly trails half o'er the narrow lane”* ('Autumn' : John Clare)

Is there a cyclist anywhere who has never snatched a juicy mouthful from an autumn hedgerow? Now, alas, we are warned of roadside berries polluted by the lead fumes of infernal combustion engines, but as cyclists we can escape from all that, into the quieter, cleaner, secret places where bramble, hip and haw please our taste and cheer our eye. Very many of Autumn's fruits are red but some of those that look the juiciest are best left for the birds, being definitely unsuited to human digestion.

Woody Nightshade and Black Byrony ramble vinelike with glossy scarlet fruits. Nightshade belongs to the potato family (Solanum), bearing very similar purple flowers which ripen to glossy crimson droplets on thin stems. It is poisonous, though not lethal, as is Deadly Nightshade whose black berries are fortunately much rarer. Black Byrony (Tomus communis) is a lily growing from a tuber much relished by horses. It's bunches of round orangey-red berries make a brave show on yellowing papery vine in late October.

An interesting and less common plant is Butchers' Broom which also has small neat red berries cupped singly in a glossy leaf-spike. When I lived in Vale of Evesham it was custom to gather these as Christmas decorations, holly not being plentiful in that area. The name comes from the use of the stiff scratchy twigs to sweep clean the Butchers' floor when its sawdust had soaked up drips from the hanging carcasses.

Above hedge level the finches and thrushes will be swinging in branches of Sorbus – Rowan and Whitebeam – enjoying their nutritious orange umbels. The Guelder Rose, which is not a rose at all, but a Viburnum, also carries the bright red umbels of fruit. Passing cyclists in the chalk country may greet its aptly named sister, the Wayfaring Tree, whose berries begin red but gradually turn black so that you may find the red and black fruit together on a single crimson stem.

As you check the progress of those lowering rain-clouds, look out for a distant V-echelon etched against the sky. A rhythmic wing beat and deep trumpeting will tell you the Whooper Swans are arriving from Siberia, or perhaps you hear the babbling music of the Pinkfoot and Greylag geese. They chatter to keep in touch and locate position. Last year in Sutherland, when the mist was low on the hill, I stood in thick fog and heard a skein pass over me. It was eerie to hear the great birds so close and yet invisible. These are the geese that flock to our lochs and firths to avoid the rigours of winter in Iceland and Finmark. I always feel empathy for the tail-end Charlie as he struggles at the back of the line-out, lantern rouge of the bird world.

Once in Patterdale I went out into a frosty dawn to hear a familiar woom-woom-woom as a group of ten Mute Swans flew over at about a hundred feet, pink in the sunrise, necks arrowing forward as their great wings drove them on. Mute Swans migrate within Europe: Whoopers spend summer in the Arctic. Just as our warblers, wheatears and Ospreys head south to warmer lands, so many sub-Arctic species are moving in from the north. Ducks such as Teal, Shoveller and Golden-Eye will appear on local quiet ponds and canals whilst the Scandinavian thrushes, Fieldfares and Redwing, will rapidly strip the haws and elderberries in their eagerness to build strength for winter. Fieldfares are prettily coloured giving an impression of soft, mauvy grey; Redwings are speckled brown thrushes with a startlingly bright orange flash as they raise their wings to take flight.

Now that our eyes are back to hedge level perhaps you may be puzzled by a furry reddish ball on the stem of a wild rose. Aptly named The Robin's Pincushion, this is formed as a result of the action of a tiny gall-fly which eats into the sap of the rose, living as a parasitic grub for some months. Often several such galls may be found within a few yards then none for many miles. They are, like most of our fellow creatures becoming rarer. Enjoy them.

The cold headwinds of Autumn make cycling more challenging; shorts are put away and the butterflies amongst us may be tempted to fold up our winged wheels and cosset them in garage and shed-



*“.... But never heed the sinew's pain
If you may snatch before the rain
Crisp days when clods will turn up rough;
Gentleman robin brown as snuff
With Spindle legs and bright round eye
Shall be your autumn company.”*
(‘The Land’ – V.Sackville West)



Arranged for Spring but much delayed by my "post bike-crash" recovery period, I eventually managed to undertake a long-planned cycle trip with an old college pal, a journey through our combined youthful memories, as the momentous summer of 2014 began to fade. We were surveying students together, in Aberdeen, many decades ago and members of this particular band of brothers still meet up in various guises, from time to time, to stravaig the Scottish hills, tour the lanes of Surrey, etc but, somehow, always managing to involve a few alcoholic drinks! The plan on this occasion was to travel from Inverness to Fife via the old alma mater, through the rich farmland and fishertoons of the north east, cycling by way of National Route 1. Callum, or Gus to his friends, is a "born again" cyclist and busy grandparent these days so put in a request for fairly easy pacing over, say, four days to which I would then add the extra miles from his base in Forfar to my home in Kirkcaldy to make it a "proper" tour, worthy of my Fife and Kinross chums. What he didn't tell me, beforehand, was he'd recently done a couple of solo centuries as practice...

Planning all seemed straight forward, at first, but Turriff turns out to be a B&B twilight zone (nae camping for us oldies) and pre-booking bikes onto a busy Sunday train proved beyond our bargain basement advance reservations. Eventually all other potential barriers were overcome and we managed to rendezvous at the actual barrier at Inverness station, one lunchtime in early September - having travelled there independently since he got a "yes" from Scotrail and I got a "no" re bike booking.



Our first night's destination was Findhorn and the route first goes inland and uphill before dropping back to the sea at Nairn. Surprisingly steep and rough in places but nothing too strenuous plus I had heeded the experience of previous loaded tours and limited myself to two rear panniers for this one – one change of boxers would just have to do!

Route finding on a mix of minor roads and paths through the ever expanding suburban sprawl east of Inverness was manageable without maps if a bit of a chore but, surprisingly, the local duck hazard alert was at "code red"

Anyway, with the weather set fair for a few days and great sunsets to look forward to over the Moray Firth we were in a good mood as we completed our first leg with 30 odd miles already in the bag. The high spirits would need to wait for the pub.

Next morning started well with an excellent breakfast (porridge plus fry up, toast and homemade jam) and two beautiful young English ladies to share it with - lucky them to have chanced upon two such worthy specimens of Scottish manhood - oh, how the banter flowed! It was, therefore, with heavy hearts that we tore ourselves away from our (imagined) romantic tryst and hit the road, once more, in search of lost youth - to Elgin and beyond..."beyond" turned out to be an al' shakkin' briggie o'er the River Spey!



Day 2 proved pretty much “in yer face” windy but the sun was still shining and with a leisurely lunch in prospect plus time for the odd ice cream cone later on, it was going to be okay for our longest section of cycling. The countryside hereabouts is very familiar to anyone who knows Scotland's east coast from Ross-shire to Berwickshire. I suppose that might have been a “given” on planning this trip but it was only when cycling through the actual landscape that we managed to gain a sense of deja-vu with familiar lanes, familiar farmland - albeit the local farmers' favoured combine harvesters constantly changed as we rode along: here a John Deere, there a Claas, sometimes even a New Holland – not that we were short of views and interesting places to visit: Elgin cathedral, Spey Mouth Dolphin Centre, Bow Fiddle Rock, The Nicol Family Ancestry Trail in and around Portsoy (granted, mostly of interest to me!) to name but a few. As the afternoon wore on, we found ourselves rattling along cliff-top paths via Route 1 which was proving time consuming as well as uncomfortable so the main road option was chosen where the traffic was lighter (lowsin' time “rush hour” in Findochty is no joke I tell you) so we could reach our destination in Turriff with time enough to get a shower followed by a decent meal (harder than you'd think) having completed another 70-ish miles and, so far, averaging 11mph.



Next morning, our fellow bed and breakfasters (if that's a word) were a couple of Liverpoolian cone diversion technicians who lacked the obvious charms of yesterday's compatriots however, through enlightened self interest, we struck up a conversation if only to find out where they were heading, work-wise, and relieved to find that our route headed in the opposite direction – happy days! So, with the mandatory Turra Coo photae in the bag, it was onwards and upwards across Aberdeenshire and, strangely, straight into the Scottish Referendum as signs of resistance began to appear across this divided land. Given this is Alex Salmond's constituency, it was clear the (farming) natives were restless and “No Thanks” became the accompanying slogan of our third day in the saddle - it was slung across coo sheds, hoisted on tae stra' bales an' nailed tae

ony available tree – mighty me, fit a show! The poor loon in Turra main street wi' his wee bit Aye placard jist didna stan' a chance min...

A mere fifteen hard earned undulating miles later, heading east into a steady wind, saw us arrive at Maud and a connection with the Buchan Way which would, in theory, whisk us all the way into Aberdeen. Well, that was the dream but reality meant it was more hardcore pathway on a old railway track base – gradients were fine but surfacing hellish - so a Plan B was sought as we ate our last bananas, nae far fae Auchnagatt (ye ken, 'at place aff the telly) – www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8UmKcSyzg.



Being under no particular pressure at all, we now planned to set a deadline for ourselves by agreeing to meet another couple of retired college chums in a pub somewhere in Aberdeen (more a case of “Fit like an' foo's yer doos?” with some pints thrown in) before heading for Gus' daughter's place at Milltimber for food and a night's rest.

As we now raced into town, the passing scenery mostly became a blur as thoughts turned to beer and crisps but I do recall a long, fast, sweeping curve into Dyce, a very pretty tree-lined village centre at Udney Green and still more "No Thanks" banners from the farming community and oil workers of Formartine - independent of mind if not political persuasion – either way, a far cry from the multitude of "Yes" posters declaring optimistically from the lamp posts of Inverness.

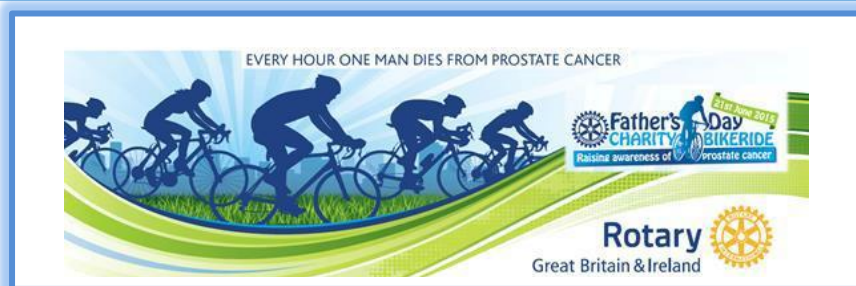
Soon, we were deposited on the uneven, cobbled streets of Old Aberdeen, awash with its new university student intake, just arrived for freshers week and ignoring mere cyclists, as they swarmed around us on the ancient College Bounds. Then, it was up and over the Spittal and on through the bustling, rush-hour traffic of the city centre before we eventually arrived at the Cults Hotel for those drinks and a well deserved rest after 60 more, often bumpy, miles in the saddle.

Our final day began brightly, once more, and though long in miles the route before us was covering fairly familiar cycling territory so the hills ahead should come as no surprise (ha-ha, as if that made them any less) and the wind gods were with us at last. With familiarity, however, comes some contempt and, though a very enjoyable leg of the journey, thoughts naturally turned to home and domestic tasks ahead so the main highlight of the day proved to be a delicious ice-cream at Auntie Betty's in Stonehaven but, inevitably, side trips to Catterline village and Dunnottar Castle were fitted in as we piled on the miles. By now, Gus and I were beginning to weary of the much busier traffic - why do articulated lorries have to pass so closely with their mini tornados of side draught? - but at least there were no more hardcore paths to endure...



From Montrose, it was a case of head down and get the miles done along the main route into Forfar (I'm sure there are finer routes through Montreatmont Forest) to complete the day and another 70 miles in the bag. As it turned out, this was the final day of cycling as the weather changed for the worse overnight and we awoke to stormy conditions and, for me, a delayed departure. Consulting the weather forecast, and not relishing the prospect of cycling under a cloud all day, a decision was quickly made to have another cuppa, and eventually, maybe catch a 50p train ride home from Leuchars?

So, 230 (or thereby) miles pootling about on bikes over a few very enjoyable and warm days in late summer, with a good old pal, through the land of the chosen few...and without over much pressure on the purse – fit mair could an al' Aiberdonian need? Ian Nicol, September 2014



Fife Rotary Clubs Charity Bike Ride Sunday 21st June 2015

You may be interested in taking part (or helping) with a series of cycle charity events that are being planned for Father's Day next June in aid of prostate cancer charity.

There are a number of Rotary clubs in Fife participating in this. In North Fife our club is planning to hold a children's and family cycle ride along the coastal path from The Tay Road bridge to Tentsmuir.

Across the UK and Ireland Rotary clubs are organising events - around the coast the plan is that each club will cycle part of the UK coastline on that day with other events inland.

The events are at a very early stage of planning and further information will be available in the spring and at www.rotarycycling4prostate.org.uk

If you could offer to help or want to contact your local Rotary Club for details about their plans a website link is <http://www.rotary-ribi.org/districts/homepage.php?DistrictNo=1010>



We had long talked of getting away on a tour in Southern France or some other exotic (and more importantly) drier and warmer climates, but what we actually ended up with was much better... depending on your point of view of course.

The 'We', mentioned above, being Richard (Maureen's brother) who some of you know from Kelso/ Barncross/ Fochabers weeks (he of the pink hat and guitar) and of course me (he of the pink face, baggy shorts and wielder of the editorial quill

Day 1, Dysart – Pitlochry Sunday 27th July

The sun could hardly be described as cracking the skies, but if you had to settle for a type of weather to start a tour in.. this would probably do. It was vaguely cool albeit with damp roads.. but no rain and hardly any wind to speak of. Unfortunately there was the small matter of getting out of Dysart and Kirkcaldy which is always a climb on any day.. loaded with panniers (even lightly as we were) made it much tougher than usual. Once we left the confines of the 'Lang Toun' though it seemed like no time at all when we were stopping for our second breakfast at Loch Leven's Larder.

We had a good old chat with a very nice couple from Cluny who were out for a cycle round the loch. As we departed the 'Larder' we were very kindly

proffered some Jelly Babies for our journey... I told them I knew exactly what hill the Jelly Babies would come in handy for helping us up.. so I pocketed them for later consumption. The weather seemed to be improving and some blue skies even started to appear. So much so, that the Factor 30 was applied. Richard enjoyed the route through Perth skirting the rivers.. first the Tay and then the Almond. I was glad he enjoyed it as it is one of my favourite 'City cycles'.

It was on the Almond that we encountered our first wildlife to talk of... and not at all what I'd expected this early in the tour.. a young otter playing merrily on the far bank of the Almond! I had to do a double take where I almost convinced myself it might be a mink... but no.. young otter it was.. how amazing! (Incidentally, how many of you were shouting "it's an otter pup" at the mention of a baby otter? You pass the Wildlife Section of the Unintentional General Knowledge Quiz.. well done)

Passing through Pitcairn Green we could resist the sannies that Maureen had made up for us no longer. We took a bench while I recounted tales of this year's 'Sma' Glen century cycle (115 actually!) where at Pitcairn Green, and this very bench, we said our goodbyes to some of the group... I also showed Richard the pub where we didn't, but should've had a pint (on that occasion as well as this!).

It was getting very warm now, so we stripped down to single layers and pushed on towards Bankfoot. There were some pretty big Cumulus (or should it be Cumuli?) growing in stature until one, then another, decided they'd had enough of this lark and proceeded to dump their entire contents upon us without as much as a warning. This unfortunately coincided with Richard's first, and only, deflation. On hindsight we should've probably pumped up the 'slow' and cycled on to a bus shelter in Bankfoot... but we weren't to know that Mr. and Mrs. Cumulus could possibly maintain that volume of precipitation for so long and that we would soon be standing in a river rather than a road!

The intended coffee break in Bankfoot never materialized due to the complete lack of a coffee shop... so we pedalled straight through. On leaving Bankfoot I advised Richard that he would soon, involuntarily, be humming or whistling an ABBA tune.. to which no more than a puzzled look was given in silent answer.. that was until we reached the village of Waterloo where the penny dropped and we had a wee singsong as we cycled along the street. Oh how the locals must've enjoyed hearing that well known ABBA tune for the first time ever!!

So onwards to Dunkeld it was for our Lunch.. we were even almost dry! We parked up at the Bike Hire/ Shop where the student manning the shop promised us he'd keep an eye on our bikes and not sell them... unless he got a good price for them of course! His recommended eatery came up trumps and filled our fuel tanks quite nicely for the final stretch of the day.

We opted to take the route through the grounds of what is now the Dunkeld Hilton before finding tarmac again on the far side of the A9 for another of my favourite stretches of road to Pitlochry via Dalguise and Logierait. It was after the rickety bridge into Logierait that I remembered that the 'Jelly Baby' hill was approaching. Sweets duly eaten, I warned Richard to be in his lowest gear as we made the turn up past the cemetery. That particular rise is short and sweet (boom-boom) but I knew that it was only a taster (boom-boom again!) for the run into Pitlochry. It was going to be decidedly 'humplly' to coin an old Audax adage.

Mr and Mrs Cumulus came along again, only with their family this time, and it absolutely hammered it down! We took shelter under trees but it became apparent that nothing was going to keep this amount of rain from getting to us and we were quickly soaked through despite our waterproofs. We could also see the hollow in the road (that we were shortly to be dropping down to) rapidly filling with water. Good job we moved on when we did as it was bottom bracket deep by the time we eventually plucked up enough courage to leave our useless shelter. It wasn't far from Pitlochry anyway.. the Youth Hostel would have a drying room... and guess what? The sun came out just as we arrived!

65 miles. 3061 feet of climbing. No ferries.

Day 2, Pitlochry – Fort William, Monday 28th July

After a great sleep (I didn't keep myself awake at all with my snoring!) the excellent Y.H. breakfast was large, as was the Y.H. packed lunch we had purchased for today's trip. We left as early as possible as we had a long day ahead of us and we didn't want to be rushing it. We left in great weather almost windless and sunny so no more to be said on that subject.. not for this day at least! Cycling along what was once the A9 it is impossible to imagine what the traffic problems would be like on this comparatively narrow and sometimes twisty road if it wasn't for the new A9. Mind you we were thankful for the new A9 as that was the reason we now had this road almost entirely to ourselves.

Killiecrankie and Blair Atholl passed in no time. We stopped only briefly at the House of Bruar for a comfort break and pushed on for Calvine where we joined the now derelict and perfectly cycleable old road until it became a cyclepath proper alongside the noisy and busy A9.

I have to confess I was worried about what condition the path through the Drumochter Pass would be in. It has been a few years since I've cycled up it and the last time there was a lot of loose stone and road debris... there wasn't quite so much this time and if anything the path was in slightly better condition, but still pretty rough and bumpy in bits... no problem for me with my many spoked, bombproof wheels and large section tyres.. maybe not quite so for Richard though who took a bit of a shuddering for the most part. Mind you I think I'd have preferred 700c's than the 26 inchers Surly forced me to fit due to my chosen frame size... I feel that bigger diameter wheels roll over potholes better.

Although it wasn't too much of a chore we were glad to leave the traffic noise of the A9 and join the road into Dalwhinnie for our first proper stop. We sat outside enjoying the sunshine while we enjoyed our 'cyclist sized' portions and surveyed from our vantage point the upcoming hill we were about to climb on our turn towards the West.

We restrained ourselves from detouring into the Dalwhinnie Distillery before leaving town and pushed on for 'that' hill. Unusually for a hill it didn't turn out to be as bad as it looked. Once up there the road rolled along the tops gently before dropping down again just outside Laggan, quite pleasant actually.

On what seemed to be a big long downhill past Loch Laggan I was telling Richard about how this is Monarch of the Glen country (as in the TV series rather than a large stag that prowls the area) and how the fictional estate was called Glenbogle when we happened across a very handily placed tearoom... aptly named Glenbogle. It claimed to be open.. but actually it wasn't! We had stopped anyway... it had outside tables so we proceeded to make use of them to polish off what was left of our Y.H. packed lunch. We reckoned without CCTV though (Big Mc.Brother is watching you!)... it wasn't long before someone drove down in a Landrover from the local stately house and opened up the Tearoom especially for us! It seemed rude not to indulge ourselves all over again.. so we did!

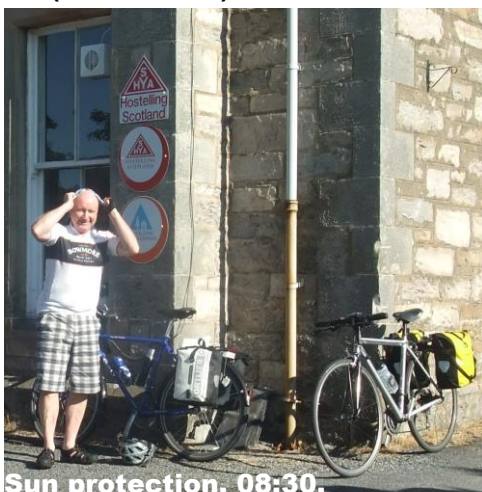
The day was wearing on and the miles building up so we reckoned we'd have one last break at Roybridge where the locals have thoughtfully laid out some very comfy benches and planted lovely borders for us to enjoy. This unfortunately attracted wasps in great numbers, maybe the locals didn't want us hanging around for too long?

Spean Bridge brought us onto the dreaded A82. At least it would be quiet at this time of evening on a Monday...wrong (actually that deserves be in capitals!) WRONG! It was absolutely horrible.. even Richard who cycles daily in London wasn't enjoying this bit. I was rueing not overshooting Spean Bridge and taking the quieter roads into Fort William adjacent to the Caledonian Canal but in reality this was already an overly long day so we disengaged our brains and plodded on. There was a bit of very nice cyclepath for the last few miles into town but it petered out unfortunately. Richard suffered a bit of a pulled Achilles tendon when he was forced to dismount quickly in Fort William when a lorry got a bit too close for his comfort... just like the London busses!

We arrived at our homely B&B which Maureen had chosen for us and she'd thoughtfully called ahead to pay our bill too. I hope that is the case.. otherwise we've done a 'Runner' At least I didn't have my CTC Fife & Kinross top on.. so maybe we got off with it! Food and drink was at trusty old Weatherspoons.. everywhere else was chock-a-block!

I'm sure we got our wine cheaper at Weatherspoons than we should've.. but again I didn't have my CTC top on... so if we did get it cheaper.. then we definitely got off with it!

78 miles (143 mls total) 2546 feet of climbing (5517 ft total) Still no Ferries!



Sun protection, 08:30.



Nifty bench!

Day 3, Fort William – Broadford, Skye, Tuesday 29th July

We had arranged for an early breakfast. The plan was to catch the Fort William to Camusnagaul foot passenger ferry to the other side of Loch Linnhe (**ferry 1**). At £1.20 for passenger and bike it was a bargain to get us onto the quiet, and level, road that would take us almost as far as the Glenfinnan Monument and the viaduct which is now of Harry Potter fame. Two Dutch girls also crossing planned to walk there for that very reason... I do hope they hadn't got their miles and kilometres mixed up.. it was almost 16 miles! It wasn't long before we had to don showerproof jackets. When we arrived at Glenfinnan the café was amazingly closed with at least 4 coachloads of foreign tourists waiting in what had now deteriorated into rain. Why in a country with such a short tourist season would they open such a popular tourist attraction so late in the day? Fortunately for us the café opened just as the 4 busses pulled out so we were served quickly. We sat waiting for the rain to pass but after our 2nd coffee it became apparent that the rain wasn't for letting up so we decided to brave it. Straight into the climbs and up into the low cloud we plodded where it abated slightly.. thank goodness.

I always marvel at how the railway takes only a slightly different route through the same gap in the mountains as the road does.. but without the seriously steep gradient! Mind you we'd have to cycle miles through tunnels to get the same gradient as the train enjoys so maybe not such a good idea... and the scenery (if only we could've seen it) is stunning!

By the time we'd descended back down to sea level at Lochoilart it had fairied up a bit. I looked for the draughty bus stop that I'd slept in on more than one occasion when passing on the Daylight 600km Audax.. it's still there.. and still draughty! Needing sustenance we detoured round by Arisaig and were rewarded by stumbling upon a Fete in the local village hall. Five different types of soup were available (really) and all sorts of fare to please a cyclist.. we were even instructed to take some cake with us for the road.. what a lovely bunch of people live in Arisaig.. I sincerely hope they raised the funds they were aiming for.

Our trip to Mallaig past the sands of Morar was very enjoyable and made more so by the sight of a Pine Marten (only the second I've seen in the wild.. the other being near Sheildaig.. Pine Martens must like place names that end in 'aig'!)

Our timing was dictated by the ferry to Skye and we knew we'd timed it to perfection with time to spare but when we arrived in Mallaig we were dismayed to see the ferry preparing for departure. Despite the ramp still being down and being in possession of tickets we were not allowed to board. Once it was explained to us that the ferry we were seeing was actually the severely delayed first ferry of the day and not the third ferry (that we were aiming for) it didn't seem so bad then. So that's why there were so many cars still sitting on the quay! At least as cyclists/foot passengers we were allowed on the next ferry, unlike some unlucky motorists who had to sail on the ferry their car was booked on.

On our crossing to Skye (**on ferry 2**) a couple of cyclists we met told us about a disused road on our route that had been abandoned in favour of the upgraded road into Broadford. I was reliably informed that it was in very good condition once you got onto it. Despite the sketchy instructions for finding the well hidden start I found it and was keen to give it a go.. Richard quite understandably (given that he'd been beaten up enough the day before in Drumochter) didn't want to risk the chance of coming upon some more roughstuff. We went our separate ways on roads that were both heading in much the same direction but sometimes weren't all that close to each other. I got the best of the deal.. what nature hadn't reclaimed was in absolutely perfect condition and quite possibly the smoothest tarmac of the whole trip. It was intact for miles, albeit narrow in places with the odd bush here and there. I rejoined the main road, and Richard, just outside Broadford.

We checked into the hostel with the intention of heading for some pub grub but it was getting dark and miserable outside and we were pretty tired so we purchased food and drink from the warden and cooked a perfectly palatable frozen meal along with the remains of our packed lunch and anything else still rattling about in our panniers. We wanted an early start next morning as we needed to be in Uig for the 3:00 ferry tomorrow so we swapped our 'paid for' breakfast for a packed lunch for the road... which the warden then neglected to leave in the fridge for us! Grrr!

62 miles (205 mls total) 3150 feet of climbing (8667 ft total) – 2 Ferries (Camusnagaul and Calmac's Mallaig to Armadale)



By Loch Laggan roadside



Sign? What sign? Waiting for ferry 2, Mallaig.

Day 4, Broadford, Skye – Leverburgh, Harris, Wednesday 30th July

I didn't enjoy going back to dormitories again after the luxury and privacy of en-suite twin rooms... I had a really poor sleep.. Richard did too, so we silently slunk out next morning into the mist. It was barely 06:00 and we had no breakfast other than a coffee. Our Broadford experience didn't get any better as the rain started before we had even left town... it had turned to heavy rain by the time we reached the low road round to Sconser, stopping only for a toilet break and the obligatory photos of the Raasay Ferry.

The last time I had used the low road to Sconser was when cycling with Maureen a few years ago.. we thoroughly enjoyed it then for its quietness and especially for avoiding the busy main road and very steep hill. Not so now.. the single track low road is still very quiet (meeting just a refuse truck) but the surface has deteriorated horribly, we were shaken to bits! The shorter, more arduous, route over the hill may soon be the preferred option if no repairs are made soon.

It was torrential rain by the time we finally reached the Sligachin Hotel where we enjoyed an excellent full cooked breakfast and it afforded us a chance to dry out slightly. The staff were very tolerant of us dripping all over the place! Fortunately it faired up during our prolonged breakfast and remained that way all day.

When we reached Portree the sun had even started to shine. It was lunch time for us so we scouted about the harbour area but we didn't get much more than a cuppa and cake. We should've looked further as there was a bustling café/restaurant doing brisk business up in the main square with a dozen or so bikes parked outside it. Bottom lips out we headed for Uig climbing into a stiff breeze all the way. After a fairly uneventful (but tough) journey we arrived at Uig with just over half an hour to spare... just time for a bite to eat in what seemed to be someone's house... service was very slow so grudgingly I had to leave some (it was macaroni so it wouldn't have travelled well in my pannier)

We caught a few zzzZZZ's on the crossing to Harris (**ferry 3**) and thought we should call ahead (while we still had reception) to let our B&B know that we were definitely on our way... only we may be some time.. we still had around 24 hard miles to go once we landed on Harris. Islanders are well used to working around ferry times but I expect it would usually only be car owners that would make the trip round to Leverburgh coming off that ferry so late in the day.

We stocked up on some bonk rations before leaving Tarbert for the last stage of a long day and we looked across the small inlet from the supermarket.. surely that stupidly steep single track road cut into (and hanging precariously from) the hill can't be our route? Oh yes it was... and it was only the start of an unexpectedly long, laborious climb! But what a view! It was worth every pedal stroke... honestly.. it was! We weren't tempted to take the shorter, and allegedly lumpier Golden Road. I had cycled it on a previous tour so (as brilliant a road as it is) we cycled past the end of it without turning. From here on till the end of this day would be the only road on our whole tour that I hadn't cycled on before.

This stretch of road has long been written in bold print on my 'To Do List'... and here I was at last, many years later.. To-doing!

Once we eventually crested the top the descent on the (very smooth) road seemed to drop us down in great freewheeling stages towards the sea.. no brakes required.. the wind was doing that for us! After dropping for what seemed to be much less than we'd climbed, we were back at sea level. And what a treat we had in store.. endless white beaches and dunes, turquoise sea and massive, foaming, white breakers with the spray drifting up into the air... you could almost taste it!

It's on paragraphs like the one above that I despair at my writing skills... I cannot even start to describe the scene adequately.. you really had to be there! Better still... go there and enjoy the experience for yourself!

So it was that the worst day of the tour was also the best... worst being the last few miles up to Sligachin.. and the best being this whole beach lined road.. apart of course for the short sting in the tail before reaching our lovely, and most welcome, guesthouse. The rise in the road would've been a mere pimple of a hill earlier in the tour, but at the end of such a long, hard day it was almost Nevis-esque!

We hadn't eaten nearly enough during the day, so without as much as a wash, the panniers were dumped mercilessly and we were quickly back on the bikes for the 2 mile ride into Leverburgh to the Anchorage restaurant. The bikes felt like svelte, lightweight racing machines without the panniers and we whizzed into town spurred on by the thought of a meal (or was it a beer?). Suitably fed and 'watered' we cycled back on the deserted road (apart from the sheep) with our bike-lights needlessly twinkling. Once back at the B&B all that remained to do was have a belated shower and an excellent night's sleep.

70 miles (275 mls total) 3300 feet of climbing (11967 ft total) – 1 ferry (Uig to Tarbert), 3 ferries total.



Day 5, Leverburgh, Harris – Daliburgh, nr. Lochboisdale, South Uist, Thursday 31st July

A fairly early rise was necessary in order to catch the Harris to Berneray ferry (4th of 5), but nothing in comparison to the previous day... and we even got a breakfast this time! What a breakfast it was.. including of course the (by now) standard Stornoway Black pudding.. Richards's favourite food of the day. It was all very relaxed, no rush at all, that was until we got outside and the midges discovered us! Then there was a rush... a big rush! In double quick time the panniers were slung on haphazardly and then a closed mouth, squinty eyed, cycle ensued to keep the midges out. Fortunately the midges weren't so abundant down at the jetty.. only 1 million midges per cubic metre as opposed to 5 million at the B&B!

It was an absolutely cracking trip over the flat calm, mirror like, Sound of Harris as the ferry wound its way through the myriad of islets and sunken rocks. The views were absolutely stunning. I was glad to get a glimpse of the Gatliff Trust Hostel as we approached Berneray.. I have great memories from the one and only night I stayed there.

Unfortunately it was starting to rain as we landed on Berneray. It was rather surreal to be cycling across the causeway onto North Uist with the ferry that had just disembarked steaming alongside us going at the same speed as we were. I tried for a photo which didn't quite do justice to what could've been a great cover shot for Fife Wheels.

After all of our climbing exploits on the previous days (averaging around 3000 feet per day) this was going to be a dawdle today. At this point you're probably expecting a big 'but it wasn't'... but it was... it really was a dawdle! We had all the time in the world to complete our shortest, flattest day. So dawdle we did!

The rain never came to much as we popped into Lochmaddy for Eleveses but it was enough to make us sit for much longer than we'd usually do. It was a great stop with more tea and coffee than we could possibly consume.. the cakes were huge! The owner must've been a cyclist who understood the needs of fellow cycle-tourists!

The rain started getting heavier as we briefly ran into heavy traffic.. it wasn't quite a funeral cortege.. but everyone from near and far must have attended the funeral and were now making their way to the local hotel for drinks.

Those same motorists presumably drove past us much later and further down the Uists.. there were no incidents to report so I expect they may have had designated drivers... at least I hope they did!

The rain continued and it just got heavier and heavier. Richard stopped at a different spot from me and was struggling to don his waterproofs in the swirling wind that had so quickly risen so missed the phenomenon that I briefly saw.. a waterspout (or something of that ilk) forming and trying to descend from the pitch black clouds that seemed so close to us offshore.. it tried gamely for about three minutes to form before it fizzled out.

Fighting the wind and rain we unexpectedly came across a roadside hotel in the middle of nowhere with a very insistent sign that read 'Come In'... so we did.. who were we to argue with that? It was more for respite from the weather than anything else as it didn't feel that long ago since we'd had our fill at Lochmaddy. We couldn't resist the huge Florentines though (Maureen's favourite) When I later went to purchase an extra one to take home to her the manager would have none of it and gave me it for free! I felt bad about the huge puddles we had left around the table we sat at.. especially now that the rain had stopped and I had chosen to put on dry clothes before leaving.. I should've probably done that when we arrived.

The only other incident of note on the trip that day (my memory forbids me to remember the exact location or even where it fits in chronologically) was when we stopped at a relatively midge free bus stop for a snack and coffee from my brand new (for that tour) steel thermos flask, and which conveniently fits a bottle cage. We were enjoying the lazy break until it seemed that every midge on the island discovered us and mobbed us all at once... in the mad panic to move on I left my flask in the bus stop. So if you're passing through the Uists and it hasn't been eaten by the midges or sheep, you'll know it's mine!

It stayed fair for the remainder of the trip all the way down to our hotel which was as good as the end of our tour for us. We had a beer to mark the occasion before showering and coming down for a hearty meal and much more beverages before retiring at early o'clock!

53 miles (328 mls total) only 1385 feet of climbing! (13352 ft total) - 1 ferry (Leverburgh to Berneray) 4 ferries total.



Leaving Leverburgh.



Day 6, Daliburgh – Lochboisdale Ferry Terminal, Harris, for Ferry to Oban. Friday 1st August

All that remained was for us to retrieve our bikes from the beer cellar that they had been secured in... then to enjoy our full cooked breakfast and our last Stornoway Black (and White) Puddings... and to trundle leisurely the last few level/downhill miles to board the Lochboisdale to Oban Ferry.. **our fifth ferry of the tour!**

It was a long voyage back to the mainland so we loafed around for most of it and only roused ourselves occasionally to see the stunning scenery of the Small Isles passing by and try to work out which one was which.. easier said than done!

Passing Ardnamurchan into the Sound of Mull was just amazing, made all the more so by trying to follow the winding Strontian road by eye, the very road where the term 'Humply' was first coined on the routesheet of the aforementioned 600km Audax.

On reaching Oban we were welcomed by 'the family' who had driven through to meet us and to give us a lift home. Our limited time had finally run out... and much as we'd have liked to have cycled back to Fife.. probably by way of Tyndrum or Crianlarrich (straight off the ferry) where we'd stay the night.. and then a final day of cycling to get us home... it was not to be. On seeing how busy the road home was from the comfort of the car it was maybe just as well. We enjoyed a celebratory drink at Comrie during our lift back to the reality of Fife and our planned visit the next day to the Edinburgh Festival... reality indeed!

Only 3 miles and 26ft of climbing on this last day!

Total of 331 miles climbing 13378 ft (2½ vertical miles!!) and of course... FIVE FERRIES.

So, would we do it differently next time? Probably not too much changes... slightly shorter mileages each day maybe? Possibly starting further away from home so we could spend more time further afield? Missing the A82 definitely! **Best ask Richard!**



CLUB KIT

AT THE REQUEST OF MEMBERS, BOTH OLD AND NEW, IT IS OUR INTENTION TO PLACE AN ORDER FOR ANOTHER BATCH OF "CTC FIFE & KINROSS" CLOTHING IN THE RED/BLUE/TARTAN COLOURS.

The clothing will again be manufactured by Endura, a Scottish company renowned worldwide for their quality bike apparel.

We have, for a very limited time only, some sizing samples on loan from Endura consisting of various garments in both men's and women's sizes. There are road jerseys of various sleeve and zip lengths, thermal grid fleeces, Roubaix jackets, gilets, lightweight packable windproof jacket and mits.

The sizing samples have been available to try at the recent AGM and a few of the Saturday meets... they will only be available to try until the end of this month.

You can try the sizing samples (in Kirkcaldy, by appointment only) until the end of November (only a week away) Call Dougie on 01592 562839 to make arrangements

The samples must be returned to Endura by 1st Dec.

If you can't manage to try on the samples you can view all of the articles that are available at Endura's website under 'Custom clothing' where you will also be able to view the prices, spec. and size charts. NOTE THAT ENDURA WILL NOT TAKE INDIVIDUAL ORDERS.. THE ORDER HAS TO BE PLACED BY THE CLUB.

We have exceeded the 15+ items required to allow the order to be processed therefore we will be placing an order very soon... possibly even mid December or early in January at the very latest.. what better gift to yourself at Christmas?

IT IS LIKELY TO BE SOME YEARS BEFORE ANOTHER ORDER WILL BE PLACED... SO GRAB THE CHANCE WHILE YOU CAN!

By way of explanation for naming this article "NOT SLAYING THE BADGER"...

"*Slaying the Badger*" is a very good book by Richard Moore about the battles and politics in the Tours of 1985 and 1986 between Hinault and Greg Lemond. I don't think he'll mind us using a reference to the title!

At the foot of the Col de Domancy in the Chamonix valley is a modern statue to Bernard Hinault. We gave him a salute as we passed on a Saturday morning run up the pass to Megeve. Back down and home to Cran, our son's village on the North side of the valley makes an enjoyable, spectacular, but sometimes painful vertical kilometre. Hinault, if you don't know him, is the one on the left at the "Tour" presentations and with his nickname of Le Blaireau is the **first reference to the badger** on this trip.



The second badger is the name of the main ski run on Le Plaine Joux, the local downhill ski area. This presents a less painful trip from the house. Seven kilometres and a climb of 400m. The name translates as playground and playground it certainly is for kids of all ages, some with bus passes, enjoying the space year round. I managed four ascents in the week and a "Lanterne Rouge" performance in the local time trial completed the cycling. A total height gain of three kilometres, no problem if you say it quickly!



The third badger in this fairly pointless coincidence is the real live badger, une blaireau, un blaireau, I'm not sure but a fairly regular night visitor to the garden and an entertaining floor show as you may imagine! See photo!

Back to Bernard Hinault, Le Blaireau, he won the World Championship road race on a course which finished with three circuits up the Col de Domancy. He destroyed the field with a badger-like attack and determination. My performance on the climb was undoubtedly more "gastropodic" earning me the French title of L'escargot!



Not Slaying the Badger

If you have the time and the inclination (about 8%) and perhaps have a family member living nearby, Don! I thoroughly recommend this area and just about anywhere else in the French Alps, or anywhere in France, or Europe!

Alec Robertson

FRANCES BROWN

(15-03-26—12-08-14)

Frances Brown died in August after a lifetime associated with the CTC.

She was born and brought up in Burntisland, and was the second eldest in a family of 7 children. The family's only means of transport was by bike and Francis would think nothing of cycling long distances.

She was life member of the CTC, due to the fact that her father, Walter Browne, was the founder of the Fife DA in 1922. It was through cycling that she met her late husband John and their children all became members at birth. John and Frances lived at 115, Dysart Road, Kirkcaldy and this remained the family home where their 5 children were brought up.

Frances was very much involved with the running of the Fife DA, serving on the committee for many years. She was treasurer for 12 years in the 70's and 80's before retiring from the committee. But this didn't stop her from being much involved with helping out at club events after that. Her home in Dysart Road was a very popular Saturday meet for many years with cyclist downstairs, upstairs and in the garden.

She was a person that was never idle, there was always something to do whether it was working in the garden, going to the Geographic Society, out to concerts, exhibitions and so on. Frances remained extremely active and independent to the end.

Words from Charlie Brown and Gordon Patterson



The 'Mughty Sunday run with George White proudly displaying his latest acquisition

They say you should never look in a lady's handbag for fear of what you might find there. Well, I've just looked into the dark abyss of my bar bag and this is what I found:

On the top there's a big bulldog clip. Ideal for holding maps. I have no idea where I got it from and although it's brown, rust-tarnished and in vivid contrast to the immaculate colour scheme of the rest of my cycling hardware it's staying there cos it's useful. It cost me nothing and it's one of the best accessories on my bike.

On the right hand side my sunglasses are held in place by a fabric loop. They'll probably stay there, untouched, until May. I suppose I really ought to put them in a case and keep them free from scratches and road dirt but since they cost me £1.99 in Aldi I can't say I'm really that bothered. I have discovered a rule in life – let's call it Sunnies Law: "the more expensive the sunglasses the sooner you sit on them or a lens falls out". Presumably, the inverse of Sunnies Law also applies and the ultimate conclusion is that a pair of sunglasses which you get for free would be immortal?

So far, so predictable. But on the left hand side of my bar bag is a cook's digital thermometer: you know the sort with the long steel probe that you'd stick into a loaf or a turkey? I have a sad obsession with the temperature and from time-to-time as we ride along I'll turn it on and have a look. In July this year down in the Cotswolds it reached 29°C on a sweltering thundery day. I just lay around in a deck chair, pouring sweat and snoozing until the thunderclaps finally woke me up. Sometimes when Nicki and I are riding along and there's nothing else to comment on we'll compete to guess the temperature. Then I'll turn it on and we'll find out the actual value: the one whose guess was least accurate has to buy the coffees at the next stop. Pathetic, isn't it? But hey, it passes the time...



Undo the zip and on the top of all the junk is a half-eaten bag of Aldi's mixed nuts and dried fruit, my staple cycling food. It's a great source of energy although there's one major flaw: if you tear the bag open too vigorously it'll split right down the side and all your precious nutrients will be scattered along the road. So I snip off the corner with the scissors on my Swiss Army pocket knife (not something you can do as you ride along) and then try to tip the contents into my gaping mouth... ..the hole is too small, nothing comes out... ..shake vigorously, bag splits, two small peanuts go halfway down my throat... ..the remainder go all over the road. I really should come up with a better scheme.

By the way, I have this little rule that my Swiss Army pocket knife is far too precious to leave in my bar bag so it always goes in the right hand pocket of my trousers. I'm a bit OCD that way.

The next thing in my bar bag is a box, opened, containing an inner tube. I have checked the tube and my bike and I can confirm that they're both 700C. My pump is best with Presta valves so it's a Presta tube. I pride myself on attending to little details like this but there's one fly in the ointment and it's a biggy: I don't know for certain whether or not the tube is punctured. I'm ninety percent sure that it's a good 'un but it might be one that was punctured on a trip long ago and I packed it away with the intention of fixing it when I got home. I'll probably find out the hard way: if it is punctured then you can be sure that I'll discover this in the driving sleet on some lonely moor as darkness approaches and there's no mobile phone signal. Of course.



This item not allowed in bar bag!

Next thing as I dig deeper is a Topeak Multitool. Best thing I never bought. It was bought for us as a wedding present and it's one of the best presents we got. Some of the things we were given are stuffed at the back of cupboards. One item was so hideous that we sold it on eBay. But the Multitool has been with us wherever we've cycled and it's worth its weight in gold. Highly recommended.

Then there's a set of plastic tyre levers. They came from a very smart puncture repair kit we bought in Belgium. It came in a bright, strong tin box. The patches have long since been used, the glue has gone hard, the wee bit of chalk has been lost and the yellow crayon is somewhere in the garage. But the tyre levers live on and they're uncommonly strong. Go to Belgium for your cycling spares I say – you won't regret it. Not least because we came across a cycle shop which was half-shop, half-brewery: Leslie bike shop take note.



We're down amongst the fluff and lint now. A few sheets of toilet paper, stolen from Café Kisa in Auchterarder (never miss it if we're in the area), a 'Clip-It' once used to hold a bag of nuts and fruit closed, two valve caps and one of those nuts which holds the valve stem onto the rim. It probably has a name and George* probably knows what it is. A ten penny piece. So we turn to the internal pocket and it's here that the controversy begins. I have one of those waterproof fabric caps which stretches over my cycling helmet to stop the rain from dribbling through the vents and onto my bald napper. It's grey with 3M reflective bits on the back. Nicki refuses to be seen with me when I wear it. She likes the rain but then she's from Glasgow. I think it's a brilliant thing. I suspect that there are other bald blokes in the club who'd be on my side in this marital rift. Eh Doogie?

**take your pick from any one of the many Georges!*



It's a very small bar bag so there are only two more things stuffed into that pocket. There's a waterproof cover for the bar bag. I just don't get that: why make a bar bag out of fabric which isn't waterproof and then sell it with a waterproof fabric cover? Why not just make it out of waterproof fabric in the first place, eh? Eh??? It's not hard – Ortlieb have been doing it for decades. Then there's a strap which converts the bar bag into a bum bag. I've had the bag for at least ten years and I have never, ever worn it as a bum bag. But I keep the strap in there because one day I think I will. I should take it out and save myself thirty grammes. Hoovering up all the lint and fluff would save another twenty. But no, it's going back in the garage: the 10p, the maybe-punctured-tube, the controversial bonnet, the half-eaten peanuts and the cook's thermometer and it'll be with me on the next Saturday run.

Come to think of it, I'd like to be buried with it. **STUART BROWN**



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WINNER AND RUNNER UP OF THE 10 PIN



RETURN TRIP FROM THE RECENT CUPAR MEET



"WATT 60?"



Qn. HOW MANY CYCLISTS DOES IT TAKE TO MEND A PUNCTURE CORRECTLY? Ans. MORE THAN THIS!



I COULDN'T RESIST SNAPPING THIS SHOP SIGN AS I ARRIVED ON SKYE..... BUT WHICH GEORGE?