

Chelsea to Everton Bike Ride 2011

Stamford Bridge, Chelsea



The 'Prologue' - 18.5.11

Distance - 25 miles

Route - Regent's Park to Stamford Bridge / Stamford Bridge to Walthamstow (via Muswell Hill!)

My journey began in an underground car park just off the Euston Road, London.

Following a meeting (for work) I completed a rather undignified strip and change hidden behind my boss's car. Having built the bike (we had to dismantle it to get it in the boot!) I emerged from the car park ready to do battle with the rush hour traffic.

No more than five minutes into my journey (dodging the buses, taxis and suicidal pedestrians as I headed west towards Chelsea) it started to pour down! Black clouds, rumbling thunder and flashes of lightening heralded the first precipitation the capitol had seen in weeks - just my luck!

I arrived some 30 rain-soaked minutes later at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea FC's ground, Christopher's team and the real start to my fund raising journey.

Wet, cold and unable to get close to the stadium (security wouldn't let me bring my bike in!) so I took a couple of photos and then set off for Walthamstow where I would be staying the night at Mark and Katie's - two good friends - who as well as being great company and providing copious amounts of food and drink - have a wealth of cycling knowledge (they cycle up mountains in the French Alps just for fun!) they couldn't wait to pass on to me.

I set off from Stamford Bridge at 6.00pm and didn't arrive at M&K's until 8.30pm (it should only have taken an hour!). To cut 'a long story short', I took a 'scenic route' via London's steepest hill (Muswell Hill)...lets just say my map reading skills needed to improve!



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Day One – 19.5.11

Distance - 88 miles

Route – Walthamstow (London) to Northampton

The next morning (and as far as I was concerned my first 'real day' in the saddle), was bright, crisp and clear – what a difference a day makes! Thanking M&K I headed north up the hill towards the M25, Waltham, and some eighty-odd miles further...Northampton.

I did say up the hill – singular. I should rephrase that as 'hills'...'plural', most definitely plural! Travelling by car or by train, you don't notice the inclines. Travelling by bike (especially with 20kgs of pannier strapped on) you very much DO notice the inclines, no matter how small or short.

And so as the day went by, I gradually got more and more tired, and my backside swiftly got more and more sore. So much so that I adopted a strange 'in saddle – out of saddle' peddling style, matched by either a sigh of relief (out of saddle) or grimace of pain (in saddle) – some light entertainment for the passing cars...

However, I did get manage to get into the 'zone', knocking out a rhythm of peddling that rose and fell in harmony with the geography of the route – the miles started to roll by. And as I passed through Waltham Abbey, Broxbourne, Hertford and Knebworth, my finish point got ever nearer.

Mile-by-mile, energy bar-by-energy bar, the distance to Northampton decreased. From 70, to 50...50 to 30, 30 to 10, never had I noted the miles so thoroughly...then Northampton – "great yippee I'm here!"

...I then got promptly and well and truly lost! Adding at least 5 miles to my journey and sweating out another couple of litres of fluid (it was hot!) before I reached my destination...Travelodge – Spinney Hill Industrial Estate!

After 9 hours in the saddle and some 88 hilly (did I mention that?) miles my scientific approach to recuperation was simple...bath, Toby Carvery (across the car park), all you can eat buffet, a pint and bed...(is that how they do it on the Tour de France?)

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The 'pink' towers of Rugeley



Day Two - 20.5.11

Distance - 77 miles

Route - Northampton to Rugeley

Have I mentioned how hilly it is around Northampton? Yes, okay...and so I set off on day two fortified by a huge bacon sandwich - cycling through some gorgeous and quintessentially English countryside. Undulating green fields splashed with yellow buttercups, ancient coppices dappled in warm sunlight, picture perfect thatched stone cottages and 'road kill' about every 50 metres!

Wildlife - well we obviously have it in abundance, but an awful lot seems to end up squashed on the roads. Forgetting my 'in saddle, out of saddle' routine (the backside was already toughening up!) I was soon counting the 'kill's' to kill the time...

Having spent the best part of a day and a half on B-roads. Just north of Rugby I got my first taste of A-road, the A5...and it wasn't half bad! The views may not have been perfect, the traffic may have been fast and noisy, but the tarmac was smooth, the hard shoulder was wide (my cycle track of choice) and the signposts were very useful (I'd missed a few turns on the smaller roads). I was able to crunch out a good forty miles in just over 2.5 hours, not bad going.

And so the towns of Hinkley, Atherstone and Tamworth were swiftly dealt with until - yep you've guessed it - more hills. The last leg of this stage proved to be quite challenging - up and down, up and down (the 'ups' taking considerably more time than the 'downs'!) until the huge pink (I swear they are!) towers of Rugeley power station came into view.

How happy I was to see the comforting sight of the Travelodge sign appear just round the corner as I cycled through the town.

Bath, take-away Chinese, a bottle of beer and bed (there's definitely a pattern appearing here).

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Saturday in Stoke



Cheshire countryside



Runcorn Bridge



Day Three - 21.5.11

Distance - 87 miles

Route - Rugeley to Liverpool (Goodison Park)

Started early (7.30am) and being Saturday the roads were quiet. The sun was once again shining, the countryside was extremely picturesque and as I peddled towards Stoke, even the hills seemed a little easier on the legs – life was good!

About three hours into the ride and fuelled by a bacon and cheese bap that was the same size as two Frisbees stuck together, I inched my way over the last summit of the morning's many climbs. Immediately after the apex the road dropped steeply and I literally flew down the hill hitting almost 50mph as I sped towards the (flat!) green pastures of Cheshire.

Crossing the M6 motorway at Sandbach (it's a village, not just a service station!) I started the last stage of my trip, the long, flat route to Liverpool...just one small challenge in my way (apart from the 50miles still to go) the formidable ring road at Runcorn and the famous (it is where I come from!) Runcorn Bridge.

Having passed first through Middlewich and then through Northwich, some ten miles up the road I arrived at the outskirts of Runcorn. Hugh refineries and vast manufacturing plants sat in leafy industrial estates aside the road. It was calm and quiet and then I joined the aptly named 'Whitehouse Expressway' – BTW - I have no idea why it was named 'Whitehouse', but every idea why its an 'Expressway'. The last time I saw cars doing speeds like this is was on the Autobahn in Germany!

The hard shoulder was a graveyard of flattened animals, discarded fast-food wrappers and broken glass. It was almost impossible to ride safely here and so I took to the inside lane (it's a dual carriageway). Hair raising - but okay - until I came to the first of many junctions where slip roads joined onto the Expressway.

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Day Three continued...

Vehicles to my right, vehicles to my left and me and my bike in the middle. It was like some mad ballet being played out. Cars were dodging me from both sides at over 70mph and I was cycling like a man possessed. Legs whirling round, maximising my speed – making sure I'd clear the slip road just as fast as possible.

This went on for some miles until I arrived at the Runcorn Bridge. I could see Liverpool "over the water" in the haze. Potholed and narrow, I crossed this last bumpy boundary to arrive on the "right side of the Mersey" – Liverpool.

Through Speke, Aigburth, Toxteth, Albert Dock I cycled and up the Derby Road past the remains of what was one of the greatest ports in the world and is now lying broken and in disrepair (the developers have not got this far yet). I turned right and fittingly up my last (and boy its a steep one!) hill – towards Everton.

Passing the 'Red-Half' of Stanley Park I arrived at 3.15pm at the place where any self-respecting 'Blue-Nose' is happiest – Goodison Park. Able to cycle directly into the small car park that is adjacent to the stadium (where the players park on match days) I was met by not just one, but two welcoming parties.

The first was my wife, little boy and parents – the second a small gang of local lads shouting "hey mister give us a go of yer bike!" and attempting to undo the buckles on my panniers...Liverpool...I'd most definitely arrived.

Arrival at Goodison Park



The 'Welcoming Committee'!



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**The 'Epilogue' – 22.5.11
Last Match of the 2011 Season
Everton 1 – 0 Chelsea**

Sorry Christopher!



Thank you:

Thank you to Malcolm, Margaret and Jon of WAVES for doing such a fantastic job of supporting children throughout the poorest areas of Nairobi and giving them chances in life that under any normal circumstance, they would never have. Thank you also for supporting me in planning and undertaking this trip.

Thank you Mirielle and Nathan for putting up with me whilst I was planning this trip and coming to meet me in Liverpool. And thanks Mum and Dad for such great support!

Thank you so much to all of you who have very kindly sponsored me and helped raise the money that will ensure Christopher (who I help support) has the opportunity of going into further education. Without your help this just could not happen.

WAVES is a small charity that has to constantly compete with larger, better known charities in order to raise funds. All monies raised go directly to helping these children. So whenever, and if you can – please give generously.