

Blackpool to Rosyth

4 to 5 August 2012

Stats:

Bike	Giant CRS 3.0 Hybrid, 35c tyres
Total Distance over 2 days	248 miles
Day 1	90 miles
Day 2	158 miles
Ave speed/Max Speed (on bike)	11mph / 39mph
Time on bike	22 hours
Elapsed Time	42 hours
Start/Finish Time	09:30 Sat / 03:00 Mon

Day 1 – 4 August, Blackpool to Keswick – 90 miles

I had decided it would be a good idea to combine Friday night poker in Blackpool with dropping the kids off at their grandparents for the week, so it seemed like a good opportunity for a cycle ride back to Rosyth.

The train on the Friday afternoon with my bike, Kieran and Connor was ok until we got to Preston. The train from Preston to Blackpool was packed and had nowhere to store the bike. I managed to squeeze it on and then had to move it around at each stop to let people on and off.

On Saturday morning the ride started a little later than anticipated because of the 1am poker finish. I managed to get away at about 9:30am after a good breakfast.

The first stretch took me along familiar roads through Blackpool and on through Poulton to Great Eccleston. I was only 5 miles in to the ride when I had to concede that my approach to navigation was going to be inadequate. I'd

printed off google maps pages instead of buying detailed maps, but they did not show enough detail for proper navigation. This meant stopping every few miles to fire up the maps app on my phone to find out my location, wasting valuable battery power. This was very frustrating and slowed me down quite a bit. I vowed to buy a bike sat nav for my next trip, which I did, and it's great!

Next was the toll bridge over the River Wyre at Great Eccleston. They charge nothing for pedestrians, £1 for cars and 20p for bicycles! No booth or barriers, just a lad with a money bag and tickets. I stopped and asked whether he was going to make me find my wallet for 20p. I turned out he was so I fumbled around in plastic bags for some change while a queue of cars built up behind me. I thought about



arguing the toss and walking across, but decided it wasn't his fault. I eventually found 20p and got a ticket in return, and then spend more time packing everything back safely in my jersey pocket before carrying on. If whoever owns the bridge is listening, it is more trouble than it's worth to charge cyclists 20p. If you make it free, you will encourage cycling and increase efficiency. If you make cyclists pay 20p, you get resentment and hassle!

Anyway, off I went along a nice straight flat stretch of road that was easy to navigate through Pilling and Cockerham. Apart from a few hills, the ride was pretty uneventful until Caton, where I restocked at the local Spar. I had difficulty finding the Way of the Roses cycle path from Caton, but managed eventually. After a mile I came to a spot I remembered from my successful completion of the Way of the Roses at a car park food kiosk near Halton Green. It was shut when we passed it last time, and although it was open this time, I was no longer hungry. Pity.

With signs pointing to cycle paths every which way and no detailed map, it was a toss up for which direction to head. As usual I got it wrong, but only figured this out after about a mile of hard slog up a hill. Turning around and cursing at the sheep, I headed back to the people still at the picnic tables at the cafe stop, trying to hide my embarrassment as I passed by again.

Confident I was now on the right path, I headed for Carnforth. I had similar navigational difficulties through Carnforth and was relieved to hit the well signposted Route 6 shortly after.



It was just before Kendal when the heavens opened and I sheltered underneath a tree to put the waterproofs on. Luckily the rain slowed to a steady shower before I set off again, so I missed the worst of it. My Navigation problems continued in Kendall when Route 6 simply stopped with no clue as to where it restarted and a one way system from hell. Round and round I went until I found the right road out to Windermere.



I remember Staveley, from the days before the Staveley bypass, as the place where traffic used to get jammed up heading into the lakes. Now I remember it much more fondly as a village with a well stocked Spar shop and a small but clean public toilet with railings outside to lock the bike to. I'd only covered about 65 miles and it was already late afternoon, so I set off again for Windermere and then Ambleside.



I stopped again at Ambleside for a quick phone home and to eat my chicken sandwich for tea. I quickly set off again to make the most of the light. I'd been dreading the pass between Grassmere and Thirlmere all trip, but when it came it was easy enough. Just a bit of a slog in the end. The road to the west of Thirlmere was a welcome relief after the busy A roads. I can't remember seeing any cars on this stretch at all and the evening view was great.



When I got back to the A591 I stopped to set up my lights and then continued down the gently slope towards Keswick, enjoying the evening but wishing I'd remembered the midge repellent as they were feasting quite happily on my legs.

I'd only gone a couple of miles when I came across a camp site at Naddle, which hadn't been on the map. It was 9pm and I made a quick decision to abandon my original plan of rough camping past Keswick. The navigation difficulties had taken their toll, so I decided enough was enough and headed in. It was cheap, basic and just what I needed after a long day. The tent was pitched with the midges biting away at my legs in the damp grass at dusk. However, it was soon up and I was done for the day.

Day 2 – 5 August, Keswick to Rosyth – 153 miles



Sunday saw me up at 6am and after a bit of faffing with a wash, tent packing and a malt loaf breakfast I was away at 7am. My legs felt fine as I peddled into the drizzle.



Keswick was another one-way nightmare. I knew where I wanted to get to on the other side but the signs weren't helping. I asked a man doing some early morning shopping and it turned out he was a cyclist also and explained the best route. I remembered most of his directions, but got lost again on the far side and ended up on a busy A road. I found my way to Bassenthwaite eventually and headed along a nice but hilly section to Carlisle, missing a turning on the way and taking a 3 mile detour to get back on track. The hills were steep and the road was exposed for large stretches, with ponies on the moors. I remember breaking out into fits of giggles after seeing a sign saying "Slow Children". Yes, I know they are, I thought. Must of been lack of oxygen to the brain.

The cycle paths coming into Carlisle were poorly marked so I just kept following the river. I found my way off the towpath and into the city, but the signs were sporadic and it took me ages again.



I shared the road out of Carlisle with a cyclist on a Sunday morning ride working up an appetite for lunch. I was working up quite an appetite myself, I thought.

I felt heartened to arrive in Scotland. As I tried to take a picture of the “Scotland welcomes you” sign, a couple came over. They were waiting for a friend to come past on his end to end and they kindly took my picture. It turned out they were from Blackpool! Small world.



I wanted something to eat in Gretna Green but didn't fancy waiting around to be served at the busy pub. I tried the petrol station instead, and they were out of sandwiches. Two shifty looking lads and a drunk were outside the nearby Costcutter, and I did not want to leave my bike unattended with them so I went on without eating. Not far to the service station at Gretna I thought.

Unfortunately I lost my way again and headed the wrong way along Route 7 (more easily done than you think!). There were a couple of end to enders trying to find the way along the poorly signed route. I turned around and took a short cut to Route 74, which follows the M74 for miles and miles. At least that was the end of my navigation problems for a while.

Now for the problem of getting something to eat. One by one the towns came and went. I couldn't find a way into the Gretna Service Station from the road I was on, Ecclefechan's supermarket had closed at 2pm and it was now 2:30pm, Lockerbie had no shops on the road I was following and I didn't fancy wasting more time trying to negotiate the town centre. I was running low on food and water and badly needed a proper meal. Then, at long last, I spotted my oasis - the Annandale Water Service Station. Gratefully, I made my way in.

I decided on a large fish, chips and beans and a cup of coffee, which was just what I needed. Who says motorway service station food is not great? After stocking up on Jaffa Cakes and Flapjacks from the shop I was suitably rested and refreshed, and on I went. 25 miles further down the road I passed the entrance to the Abbingdon Service Station, so I thought it would be rude not to go in for a banana and another cup of coffee. I didn't know whether I would find anywhere else open on a Sunday night, so I made sure I had enough food and drink to finish the journey. On went the lights, Douglas next.



Route 74 along the old main road into Scotland had a terrible surface for miles and miles. It was a real bone shaker, the worst I've encountered. So it was a relief to get back to the A Roads, which were not too busy on a Sunday night. The route was straightforward to Carstairs and from there I abandoned my intended route and simply followed signs for Linlithgow, from which I knew the way home. At one point the road went quite high into the hills and I hit a dense patch of fog. I could hardly see a thing in the foggy pitch black and had to keep braking on the downhill, which I wasn't pleased about. I did wonder if the cars passing me from behind could see me through the fog, but I survived, so I presumed they could.

On and on into the night I rode until eventually coming to the Forth Road Bridge, and then, at 3am, arrived home. I was tired but not exhausted, which was good considering I'd been up since 6am and cycled 150 miles since then. Happy to be home.



Overall

Reasonable route and quite scenic in places. Easy to get turned about in the towns, which meant navigation was difficult without a proper map or GPS and slowed me down considerably. I could have taken at least 3 hours from the total time had I not spent so much time navigating.

It was hilly but apart from the stretch from Keswick to Carlisle, not too steep. Route 74 was poorly surfaced and should be avoided if at all possible.