

# LONDON EDINBURGH LONDON

2017



Aidan Allcock

# Getting There

My departure time was 7:15am on Sunday so I decided to stay at a hotel in Illford the night before, only 8 miles from the start at Loughton. Registration was mandatory by 4pm on Saturday so I rode the 70 miles over from Buckingham rather than take the chance with a convoluted train journey. Prudential Ride London was on the same day so I guessed the trains would be packed with bikes.

Registration and bag drop went smoothly and, after a good sleep, I arrived at the start fresh and ready for the ride. Happy days.

## The Ride

### **LOUGHTON TO ST IVES (100K)**

**Set off Sun 30 July 07:15 : Arrival 10:40 : Break 12 mins**

The 75 'A' riders had set off at 5am. I was in group 'G' and there were 25 riders setting off every 15 minutes. I'd had my porridge and set off at a good pace. We were riding as a group but not changing position often and there were no hills to break the group apart. We were pushing on at a good pace when I hit a pothole and my rear light fell off. I stopped to collect it, but it was broken, and the group was gone. I pushed on alone for a while and was joined by a lady riding solo. We rode for an hour or so and then the 7:30am start 'H' riders came by at pace. I happily joined the back of the train and we caught the G riders shortly before St Ives. First stage done and feeling good.

### **ST IVES TO SPALDING (61K)**

**Set off Sun 30 July 10:52 : Arrival 12:55 : Break 26 mins**

After a short stop for some stew and a banana, I was ready for off. I left at the same time as a guy from the US whose plane had landed too late for him to deposit his bag drop. As a result, he was carrying a

satchel across his back, which he constantly had to manoeuvre into a comfortable position. We were joined by a strong solo rider from behind and took turns for a while. The pace was a bit quick for me, so I dropped off the back and let them get on with it. I carried on alone for the rest of the stage.

## **SPALDING TO LOUTH (83K)**

**Set off Sun 30 July 13:21 : Arrival 16:20 : Break 38 mins**

Flat again for the first 50km and then a couple of small hills in the last 30km. I set off alone and was soon joined by another solo rider from Seattle wearing a Cookie Monster jersey. He'd come to the UK especially to ride LEL. We were riding at roughly the same pace and so made good progress over the last of the fens. My altimeter didn't deviate from 4 to 5 meters for miles and miles. Flat as a pancake. Time to get on and pedal.

## **LOUTH TO POCKLINGTON (97K)**

**Set off Sun 30 July 16:58 : Arrival 21:06 : Break 37 mins**

The undulations started in earnest. The climbs were not very long but the short ups and down kept on coming. The highlight was crossing the Humber Bridge, which was a first for me on a bike. Like most modern bridges, the cycle path was good and segregated from the main carriageway. Unfortunately it took me ages to find the right cycle path coming off the bridge. The path was narrow and winding with debris strewn across it from the trees. I feared getting a puncture. Luckily I was soon back onto proper roads without mishap.

My first bag drop was Pocklington, but I didn't need anything so left it alone. After a quick meal of fabulous pasta with cheese sauce, a couple of yoghurts and a doughnut (couldn't resist), I was off again.

## **POCKLINGTON TO THIRST (66K)**

**Set off Sun 30 July 21:43 : Arrival 00:35 : Break 20 mins**

Beginning to get quite hilly now, and I was on my own for the entire stage, but pressing on well enough.

## **THIRSK TO BARNARD CASTLE (65K)**

**Set off Mon 31 July 00:55 : Arrival 03:52 : Break 29 mins**

This stage was relatively flat compared to the previous one. It was dark, and I began to slow. Luckily a rider came alongside who was only going as far as the next control before sleeping. We rode side by side to maximise our lights. The route diverted to avoid a road closure, and I had read that the diversion went through a ford. Fords are often greasy and difficult to judge water depth, so I usually avoid them. It's not worth taking a dunking for the extra seconds gained. Unfortunately this slipped my mind and the sliding back wheel of the other rider, as he frantically jabbed his brakes, told me we were upon it! We were lucky as it wasn't deep and we managed to cross with only a feet soaking (they were already wet anyway).

Our pace remained high and a while later we were joined by another pair of riders. Then my Garmin batteries died and I had to stop to change them in the rain. The other three pushed on and I finished the stage alone.

## **BARNARD CASTLE TO BRAMPTON (84K)**

**Set off Mon 31 July 04:21 : Arrival 08:18 : Break 51 mins**

After two big bowls of porridge I set off sluggishly up Yad Moss, alone in the dark, but it got light on the way up. It was around 550 metres of ascent to 600 metres at the high point, and the speedy 'H' riders,

now down to five, passed me on the way up. I suspect I passed them while they slept at Barnard Castle. The ride down the other side was fabulous although I could have done without the cobbled section near the bottom. It was wet and treacherous.

Brampton coincided with breakfast time. I'm not very good at regulating myself at food stops and even worse when I'm tired and hungry. On the run in to Brampton I kept telling myself porridge and egg on toast, porridge and egg on toast, over and over. However, true to form, when I got there and saw the mountain of sausage and bacon, I'd piled my plate high and eaten it before I realised what happened.

## **BRAMPTON TO MOFFAT (74K)**

**Set off Mon 31 July 09:07 : Arrival 12:23 : Break 15 mins**

I was on familiar territory for the second half of this stage as the route from Gretna to Moffat is the same as my Lands End to John O'Groates route. The road surface was terrible and mostly uphill. I briefly joined a couple of riders, but one of them was fading and the other was pressing ahead. I acted as domestique for the rider behind while the rider ahead surged on. After a while, the rider behind dropped off completely and I continued alone. He arrived at Moffat just as I was leaving.

## **MOFFAT TO EDINBURGH (80K)**

**Set off Mon 31 July 12:38 : Arrival 16:19 : Break 2 hrs 54 mins**

The final stage to Edinburgh, and another big hill. It was actually quite pleasant once you got into a rhythm and I was soon at the top and riding across the plateau. The road surface was good initially but deteriorated dramatically on the run in to Edinburgh. The route takes you along one of the worst road surfaces in the UK for 15 miles along the A701. The road constantly jarring my tired body into submission,

and I slowed to a crawl. It was raining, busy with cars and I was tired and miserable. Then on the final stretch along cycle paths through the city, I missed a turn and found myself on a muddy track. Another rider, just ahead, had done the same thing and passed me on his way back to find the right route. I turned around and found the right path. I was tired, wet and in need of a rest when I rolled into the Control mid afternoon on Monday.

With 3 hours in hand on my target time, I decided to take a couple of hours sleep. I was the only guest in a sports hall with 300 blow up beds, so easily fell into a deep sleep. I find it remarkable what the mind and body are capable of. I'd been on the road for over 30 hours, and awoke from my 2 hour sleep, 30 seconds before my scheduled wake up time! I resisted the urge to turn over and go back to sleep, and instead, rolled out of bed, still fully clothed apart from my shoes and helmet. My wake up call came through the door and I waved cheerily to the helper as I put on my shoes. I'd filled my water bottles eaten a cereal bar, had a coffee and was off in about 15 minutes. I felt refreshed and ready for the return leg. Edinburgh was a great sleep stop.

## **EDINBURGH TO INNERLEITHEN (43K)**

**Set off Mon 31 July 19:13 : Arrival 21:43 : Break 33 mins**

I lived in Scotland for 7 years and so was familiar with the hills around Innerleithen. I set off on my own and was soon joined by another group. We rode together for a while but I seemed to be going slower and slower against the wind and up some long drags, so they soon dropped me. The long downhill into Innerleithen was an absolute pleasure in the fading light. Some people were rough camping and whatever they had on the barbeque smelled great.

Innerleithen was only a short 40k hop so I got there quite quickly. I'd been having pain from saddle sores and a pulled muscle in my lower back, so I found a store in Innerleithen open late that sold ibuprofen

gel and other assorted painkillers. I stocked up for the journey to come.

One of the volunteers at the Innerleithen control recognised my Bicester jacket. Turns out he was a member of Mickey Cranks, on holiday visiting family in Scotland, and helping out on LEL at the same time. There were only a handful of riders in the control and I took the opportunity to oil my chain. After some food and far too much faffing I set off again into the dark.

## **INNERLEITHEN TO ESKDALEMUIR (49K)**

**Set off Mon 31 July 22:16 : Arrival 00:45 : Break 19 mins**

This time I was accompanied by Ian and Fraser. We'd first met around Pocklington and had seen each other on and off since. When we set off, I was the stronger up the hills, so they both lined up behind me. However, they soon got their legs back and we took turns in the dark up and down three long climbs. By the third one I was fading, so I let them go and continued to Eskdale alone.

## **ESKDALE TO BRAMPTON (59K)**

**Set off Tue 1 Aug 01:04 : Arrival 04:11 : Break 1 hr 13 mins**

The Eskdale control had pies! But I resisted and had some custard instead. I wasn't really hungry and only 50k to the next control at Brampton.

It was raining again when I set off alone in the dark, and I wasn't really paying attention to the route. I missed a turn and went on for another mile before I realised. I turned around and retraced back to the missed left turn. Back on track, I made relatively slow progress in the rain, dark and against the wind. I find it difficult to motivate myself alone in the dark.

As I was nearing Brampton, the North and South routes came together. I couldn't believe the number of riders coming the other way. I offered a cheery hello to every rider in the long steady stream, some solo, but mostly groups of three or four. This kept my spirits up and I even got a few greetings in return. I'm presuming the only cyclists out in the middle of the night were riding LEL, but of course I could be wrong!

## **BRAMPTON TO BARNARD CASTLE (83K)**

**Set off Tue 1 Aug 05:24 : Arrival 09:50 : Break 46 mins**

When I got to Brampton, the place was heaving. Hundreds of tired bodies everywhere, most of whom were on their way to Edinburgh. I had to queue for check-in, queue for the bag drop, queue for the toilets, queue for food, queue for coffee and queue to check-out again. The volunteers were all friendly and competent, but I was still there for over an hour.

I set off again as it was getting light, frustrated, but in fresh, clean, shorts and jersey. The return over Yad Moss was straightforward enough and I waved to the north bound LEL riders all the way up and down. They only started to thin as I approached Barnard Castle.

## **BARNARD CASTLE TO THIRST (64K)**

**Set off Tue 1 Aug 10:36 : Arrival 13:54 : Break 30 mins**

I made good progress along this welcome flat section, despite the head wind. The heavens opened on the run-in to Thirsk and I was absolutely soaked as I walked into the control. So much so, that I had to put my base layer back on. I was still shivering when I left and one of the volunteers gave me a survival blanket to stuff down my front until I warmed up. I gratefully accepted and was on my way.



## **THIRSK TO POCKLINGTON (67K)**

**Set off Tue 1 Aug 14:24 : Arrival 18:10 : Break 1 hr**

Unfortunately, I turned the wrong way out of the control and it took me 5 minutes to orientate myself back on to the right route. However, once I was confident I was on the right road, I felt strong again now that the rain had stopped and I was warming up.

## **POCKLINGTON TO LOUTH (97K)**

**Set off Tue 1 Aug 19:10 : Arrival 00:13 : Break 2 hrs**

Back over the Humber Bridge, finding the right route on and off was straightforward this time.

I think it was around here that I first encountered the 'A' group consisting of three Danes, and three Germans (one of them on a recumbent), and a French man. They overtook from behind and I tagged along for a little while, but their riding was erratic and I didn't feel safe, so I let them go. More about this group later.

It was dark again when I arrived at Louth, and I was tired, so I stopped for a 45 min sleep. This time I needed the wake up call but got up ok, sorted myself out and was back on the bike after an apple tart and a coffee. Again I spent too much time faffing at this control and was beginning to lose my focus. I'd given up on my completely unrealistic target of 72 hours, and didn't have a revised plan in mind. Finishing within the cut off time wasn't an issue as I had 15 hrs in hand. So I had nothing to aim for.

## **LOUTH TO SPALDING (84K)**

**Set off Wed 2 Aug 02:13 : Arrival 06:58 : Break 19 mins**

There were some hills early on that were quite steep and I had to dig deep in the dark to keep going. I was losing a lot of time against the

wind and in the hills, but it didn't seem to matter. I just kept grinding along.

Then the flats started and the sun came up and hey presto, I got my mojo back. I started pressing on again, spending a lot of time in the drops and powering on. The legs were still strong, all I needed was my mind in gear. I was now on the home straight and back in the groove.

Although I was strong on the bike, I was feeling very sleepy. When I awoke with a start from a near doze, while still riding the bike, I knew it was time to stop. It was about 7am and I saw a deserted café with outside garden seating. Perfect. I parked my bike, sat on a bench, laid my head on the table and was immediately asleep. I awoke with a start and looked at my watch. I had no idea how long I'd been asleep. I'd estimate somewhere between 5 and 30 minutes. Oh well, I felt fine, immediately got on the bike and pedalled on.

## **SPALDING TO ST IVES (61K)**

**Set off Wed 2 Aug 07:17 : Arrival 10:15 : Break 42 mins**

I rolled into Spalding and had a couple of bowls of porridge while a volunteer lubed my chain and another filled my bottle. I felt like royalty. A few more riders came in while I was eating, including the Danish/German/French group. I was quickly on the road again in front of everyone else and pressed on through the fens. There was a stiff wind against but I was keeping a steady pace.

I spied a fellow rider about 200 metres ahead, but it must have taken me 30 minutes to catch him as it was exhausting fighting against the wind. After I eventually caught him we took turns for the remaining miles to St Ives. He was Belgian and competent at riding pairs so the miles just zipped by.

## **ST IVES TO GREAT EASTON (71K)**

**Set off Wed 2 Aug 10:43 : Arrival 14:30 : Break 42 mins**

After a quick stop I was off, but I dithered at the mechanic station wondering whether to pump my tires up. In the end I decided they were fine and the extra pressure would add to my discomfort. However, by the time I set off, the Danish/German/French group were leaving as well.

I decided to ride with them for a while along the cycle path to Cambridge, but it was really slow as we were constantly maneuvering around pedestrians, other cyclists and obstacles. Group riding was far more of a hindrance than an advantage. Then we got to City Centre Cambridge, which held us up enormously with lots of stopping at traffic lights. As we emerged from the other side, I explained to the group leader, a German Policeman, that I didn't feel safe in the group on busy roads and I would be going on ahead. I said that when they caught me, to carry on past. However, it took them a while to catch me and, by the time they did, they were too tired to carry on by. So we rode the rest of the stage together anyway. The German Diagnostics Software Engineer in the group took great delight in explaining to me that humans had evolved into grouping together as packs rather than going it alone. He had several more points about society that he explained to me, but I'd already tuned out.

Then, one of the Danes got caught by a cross wind gust, bounced off the curb and was off. He was ok, but his electronic gear shifters no longer worked. We waited a while and then pressed on once we knew he was ok. His ride was over just a stage and a half from the finish. The German software engineer lamented over the folly of bringing DI2 shifters to an Audax. I agreed, but you've still got to feel for the guy.

We rolled into Great Easton, and I felt I had lost an enormous amount of time riding with the group in and around Cambridge and that, had I continued on my own, I would have been quicker.

## **GREAT EASTON TO LOUGHTON (48K)**

**Set off Wed 2 Aug 15:12 : Arrival 17:41**

The gummy sweets on the tables were a nice touch at Great Easton, but I should have bounced this one and pressed straight for the finish. Instead, I went in with the group and waited for everyone to be ready. Hoping that a group dash for the line might be quicker. I was wrong. The frustration continued.

It had been raining hard since Cambridge it continued as we set off. We made reasonable time, but none of the group had mudguards except me, so I was constantly getting mud and grit in my face. Then one of the group had to stop for a natural break, then one of the Danes got a puncture, then his partner got a puncture, and finally her newly replaced inner tube blew with a loud crack, which I feared had ripped her tire. Enough was enough. The Germans had already gone ahead so I told the two remaining Danes that had to go. The French rider and I set off together. However, I'd not seen him take a single turn on the front and he used his reserve energy to surge ahead. Great.

That left me on my own again in the rain, against the wind, having lost what seemed like hours with a group that I didn't want to ride with in the first place. Oh well, I only had myself to blame and at least I was nearly home.

I finished the ride as the sky was clearing. I got a round of applause from the volunteer at the door and a free meal voucher, which I used on a bacon roll and chips. Happy days.

# Overall

I was blown away by the professionalism of the volunteers at every control. They were happy, friendly, resilient, well briefed, experienced, and above all they made me and the other riders feel special. My thanks go to each and every one of them.

I was at the sharp end for most of the ride, and the volunteers outnumbered the riders at most controls. A few times I asked where I could fill my water, and the bottle was taken away from me, and returned a short time later, clean and full of water. At Spalding someone lubed my chain for me while I was eating. There was a range of food available, from pies, bacon and sausage, to porridge, pasta, rice and potatoes. Fruit was always around and the odd chocolate brownie was always welcome. The only exception was the Brampton control on the way back, where I coincided with the bulge on the outward leg. This wasn't a great experience as I had to queue many times and lost some ride time. However, that was just the way it was. The volunteers were keeping things moving well enough and the place was safe and dry - just busy.

The weather was a changeable throughout. Wind behind on the way out and a stiff headwind of 10 to 15mph on the way back. There were constant showers, some of them lengthy and punctuated occasionally by torrential downpours. The temperature stayed quite mild though, even at night.

The route was as expected. Some hills, some flats, some busy A roads, some nice B roads, some single track country lanes and the occasional cycle track. Mostly in good repair, except around Edinburgh where the surfaces of the A roads were very rough and wore me down.

Overall, it was a wonderful experience and I can't wait to sign up for the next one in 4 years time.

# The Stats

- 1500 started
- 900 miles
- 82 Hours
- 3 Hours Sleep
- 800 Finished

