

Sue Bannister - Cycle Ride from Inverness to Petersfield . . .

Monday 2 March, Sue Bannister started on a 11 day, 550 mile cycle from Inverness to Petersfield in aid of the Thursday Club at HISC. Inverness to Petersfield Cycle –

Day 1 Inverness to Fort William 65 miles.

At about 09.15 I started this journey in Inverness on the banks of the Caledonian Canal. After a short ride the first glimpse of Loch Ness stretching into the distance set the first challenge on this adventurous journey.

The views along Loch Ness were breathtaking despite the sometimes heavy rain and strong winds and made a welcome distraction to pedaling, pedaling.

I was pleased to get to Fort Augustus, at the Western end of Loch Ness and just over half way on today's stint, stopping for a welcome bowl of hot soup.

After lunch the ride got tougher with a force 5 headwind. There were times when I was in top gear going flat out with driving rain in my face and only going 4mph!

As dusk fell it was so nice to see Fort William after 6.5 hours on the bike. This was the longest leg of the journey. I'm looking forward to tomorrow's shorter but more mountainous leg to Glencoe. If the weather forecast is right I might need ski's.

Tuesday 3 March – Inverness to Petersfield Cycle

Day 2 Fort William to Glencoe - 29 miles.

Day 2 of my journey was a relatively short stretch of 29 miles. But with rain and snow to contend with it made for an interesting ride. The scenery from Fort William to Glencoe village was spectacular scenery. At the bottom of the Glen with snow ahead the taxi seemed the safest and easiest option. But with no taxi's in sight it had to be pedal power.

In snow fall I headed up the climb to Kings House Hotel at the top of ridge - the snow was thick and still falling. It was great to cross the bridge knowing the hotel was in view. The team at house were truly welcoming to me and my bike. I hear tomorrow is going to be a better day but it's now 20.33 and still snowing.





Inverness to Petersfield Cycle – Day 4

Alexandria to Moffat, 67 miles

Farewell to the Highlands. The word for the day is snowfall (lots of it!). The 22 mile ride into Glasgow was slow and arduous - a combination of bad weather and only 2 rear axle gears working.

By 11am and a lot of TLC at West End Bikes, I was back on the road. The train link from Glasgow to Larkhall worked well and enabled me to catch up lost time.

With over 45 miles to go this afternoon it was tough starting again from Larkhall but after an hour I got back into my stride. Here snow everywhere except on the road and excellent designated cycle paths that made the uphill climbs easier and downhill a real wheeee!

From the top of the last hill it was a 2 mile freewheel down to tonight's stop in Moffat. Out of Scotland tomorrow and a promise of improving conditions.

Day 5 Moffat to Penrith.

A wonderful day not a flake in snow in sight and knowing I was meeting Shelagh Goacher, a FF friend, who is to cycle with me this afternoon and tomorrow.

We met up just North of Carlisle. The pit stop for lunch was Eddie Stobart's cafe on the A74. Not just

truckers food - what a great lunch (stop if you are passing) and chatting to catch up on the FF Worlds.

There on I went faster down the hills (gravity) and Shelagh went faster up the hills. It was great to have a buddy. Stopping South of Penrith the George & Dragon pub was a gem. Tucked up now looking forward to the next stage.

Day 6

Penrith to Gisburn 62 miles.

Short report cream-crackered. We got off the bikes at 19.30 after a long day in the saddle, Over 5000 feet of vertical climb up hills and through fells and dales with wind and rain making it the hardest day so far. Shelagh heads off tomorrow but thank goodness for her help willing me along today.

Day 7

Gisburn to Crewe - 54 - From starting today north of Blackburn, I've almost completed today's stint - sat at Warrington station awaiting the train to Crewe (all planned!).

Windy and blown away and looking forward to a shower. Now back on my own reverting to talking to the animals in the passing fields. I would like to say thanks for everyone's support.

Had a bit of fun at Blackburn assisting an old man. Where is all this weather coming from? Sleet and rain kept just ahead of the snow.

Day 8

I slept really well only waking a few times.

Refreshed and ready for breakfast I head down to wash my bike. The hotel staff even gave me a bucket and cloth to wash the bike.

I opted for cereal with honey and yogurt and bacon, I took some fresh bananas and biscuits for later. I even eat a Danish pastry ask I skipped out the restaurant, what a treat.

I double checked my route to find out that I could connect with the right road without heading back into Crewe.

Compared to all other days this was relatively flat and fast route ahead, I stopped after going 29 miles for a nice decaff coffee and muffin a scheduled stop at Stafford.

Waterproofs back on, what a mix of day, between the sun shining and blue sky and hail/wind and rain throw itself at me, my first reaction was to look in search of the rainbow, it was funny nothing was going to dampen my spirits today! I felt really energised, the last part of the ride in the Kidderminster was busy and quiet hilly but the hotel was easy to find.

That afternoon I took a nap at the hotel, I even choose to eat early, a very satisfying day, tucked up in bed by 8.30pm.

Summary of the day 8

Crewe to Kidderminster

The day was what I visualised it to be perfect

It was a well planned out day.

Lots of energy

Focus really well all day

The Gainsborough House hotel was clean and tidy, the food was excellent – possibly ate too much Ginger sponge pudding after a tasty fillet steak.

Visual the day ahead

Tap to keep my knee going

Forgot to visual for the same the next day!

Day 9

Another fine day under my belt.

The route from Kidderminster was longer and hillier than anticipated. I can truly say the Cotswolds are deeply ingrained in brain and muscles.

The climbs were slow but I arrived at a charming village of Churchill, just west of Chipping Norton. The Forge is another find, a great place to rest my ailing body.

Day 10 - With lots of miles behind I set off on my penultimate day with a spring in my pace.

Each day I have three keywords, one is concentration which keeps me focused and on the right route ahead of my journey.

It was lovely to cycle through the Cotswolds, the quaint little buildings are pleasing to the eye.

While savouring the nice taste of a cake at Faringdon I noticed I was adrift of my master route.

To get back on track, in my wisdom, I decided to head across the A420 to rejoin the A417. However this detour was costly adding eight extra miles on the clock with a two miles up hill climb. It is great to be at my last B and B near Hungerford, 50 miles.

Sue completed her 550 mile cycle from Inverness to Petersfield on Thursday in aid of the Thursday Club at HISC. This was her final message . . .

Day 11 - the final leg Hungerford to Petersfield. With an achy body affording little sleep I woke and packed my bags for the last time.

Whilst the locals headed to Cheltenham mine was a south easterly route as I set out on the final part of my journey, working hard to get my legs working whilst the body said 'no more!'. This was the only day I was undecided about my route because of hills and busy roads.

I have to admit I was pleasantly distracted with the thought of finishing and by many calls and texts of support. After the 5th climb my mind got back to the job in hand and I got back into appreciating the outdoor sounds of the birds and the pong of the freshly sprayed fields.



Sue Bannister relaxes after completing her 550 mile cycle from Inverness to Petersfield

I arrived in Petersfield at 15.30 hrs to a small welcoming party, flowers and champagne. I am truly fortunate to achieve my quest and have thoroughly enjoyed this journey. I've achieved the target of 550 miles with an overall tally nearer 600