

Nottingham Life Cycle: A Cycle Ride of a Lifetime - 26 Aug to 8 Sept 2011
John O'Groats to Land's End (JoGLE) - 1030 miles
David Walker

Cycling from John O'Groats to Land's End is not a unique achievement. However it is a traverse of our country from North to South and as such it is a great personal privilege to have been offered the opportunity to do this. And to do it for Sue Ryder Charity fund for the University's Palliative Care Research Centre is entirely compatible with my position as a specialist in paediatric and young adult cancer medicine. This whole journey has been planned and undertaken at the instigation of David Greenaway, Vice Chancellor of Nottingham University as part of the launch of this year's University Development Campaign.

My work at the University has been greatly supported by the University's fundraising. Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre was initiated in 1997 by Jubilee Campaign and has been supported subsequently. To have been included in this second fundraising campaign is an immense asset, as it shows that we have used the funds positively over the past 14 years and that our programme is considered relevant to the University's Development strategy. Of course in reality working with the children and families who have to experience the diagnosis, treatment and consequences of brain tumour is an immense motivating factor in developing the Centre's activities and participation in this cycle ride. As part of that, the HeadSmart Campaign this year makes raising awareness of brain tumours a key focus to our work.



The full route – 1030 miles!

Preparation

<http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/lifecycle/2011/09/07/on-the-road-video-update-retford-to-sutton-bonington/>

To say this trip started on day -2 would of course be incorrect; it started when it was originally conceived by David Greenaway and the Executive Team. For me, it started when my request to join the trip was accepted and I started thinking of the ramifications for my family, my colleagues and my friends. Everyone was concerned for my well-being and offered good advice and advised caution. I thought through what might happen. I started to plan my preparation around the equipment I would need, the bike, the clothing the guidance system and the arrangements for food and drink. Food and drink are of course the fuel for the cyclist, the bike is the conveyance, handle bars, saddle and pedals are the points of contact and control. There was a need to up my fitness level in preparation, a holiday in Turkey with guided bike rides for 9 days out of 14 provided that opportunity in up 35°C heat.



A standing start!

In retrospect the most important preparation were the servicing of the bike, buying new shorts, cycling leggings and saddle cream and gratefully receiving Gilly's (my wife) handle bar bag for use. The disappointment was the SatMap GPS mapping device, which, when it worked, was fantastic, but its failure in rain whilst crossing the Cairngorms meant that it was not fit for purpose, sadly. Taking mountaineer grade waterproofs, gloves and thermal shirts was essential for the mountain sections and very wet days as the combination of wet and wind can lead to a fierce tendency to cool down. Taking a second bike was insurance for

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failure of one as well as an alternative for very hilly or off road sections.

I took it upon myself to arrange a first aid and emergency situation training session the week before we left. This proved a valuable reminder of the risk and precipitated the acquisition of some extra equipment to be included in the Vans for unexpected emergencies. In the end they were not used however it was reassuring that the equipment was there and we are grateful to the Post Graduate Centre Clinical Skills Lab for providing the training and East Midlands Ambulance Service for providing the first responder packs and the NUH NHS Trust Pharmacy for providing emergency drugs at cost price.

What do you think when you decide to go on a journey like this?

It seemed a good idea, back in the winter when the decision was made. The preparatory meetings were distant memories. We had all come a long way. Two cyclists, whom I had not previously met, Neville Wylie, a political historian and Dean from Malaysia Campus and Nick Miles, a mining engineer and Provost of Ningbo Campus from China were participating. I had, had the thought on many occasion that that the trip might not happen for me. But, in the end, I found myself standing on the start line – what was there to look forward to? Getting to know the other cyclists and participate in the journey with them all; to see the countryside in detail as you explore the route that had been set out; to test your physical capacity against this long journey, develop a discipline to get up and get going every day for 14 days, knowing that it will not end until you are at Land's End.

Fundraising

I had launched my fundraising appeal through many networks with which I work - the Medico Chirurgical Society, the Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group, The British Neuro-Oncology Society, The Nottingham Alumni Medics Rugby or The Bears, The Pickering Association, the Societe Internationale Oncologie Pediatrique in Europe, the Mid Trent Cancer Research Network, the hospital staff, the staff of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences not to mention many of my friends and family. The donations started to be registered on the giving website it was a powerful motivating force to feel that these people were

supporting me to make this journey and supporting the University's appeal in this way. A daily visit to my giving page and to see the total rising daily was a major encouragement and remained so throughout. As I write the total has exceeded £5000 but more is promised the target of the ride was £200,000 which has been reached but the nature of the work is that more money will fund more research and will assist those facing up to their deaths to do so more in control of their lives.

Day -2: 24 August 2011

It started to really strike home that we were to go, when I dropped my bicycles at the University with the support team. Gavin Scott was there monitoring loading of bikes, accepting our luggage in preparation for the drive up to Inverness where we would all meet. Gill helped me that morning, for which I was grateful.



Inverness

Day -1: 25th August 2011 - Nottingham to Inverness

Having witnessed my daughter Kate and her friends receive her GCSE results and see them celebrate their successes. I went home to finalise my arrangements, to say goodbye to Emma, my elder daughter, and then to the University to join the bus and set off on our way to Birmingham Airport and the flight to Inverness. I had been advised by Angela Horsley, Chief Nurse of Nottingham Children's Hospital, that the one piece of equipment that might be appreciated along the way by the group was some special sacral pressure dressing pads for the cyclists' saddle area. The company had kindly sent free samples, which I distributed in the coach. The look on people's faces as they opened the packs and discussed the purpose and methods for their use was a picture! Suddenly we were forced to confront the possible

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physical effects that this journey was to have upon us, individually.



The cycle team, fuelling up!

Day 1: 26 August 2011 - Inverness to John O'Groats and then to Helmsdale.

We set off in the minibus up the A9 to John O'Groats. We were able to see exactly what we would have to do on the way back, every downhill stretch was an anticipated climb and every view was there to be savoured for the first time. The weather was fantastic, dry sunny and almost clear. Arriving in John O'Groats, we were greeted with spectacular sea views and huge horizon. The sun was shining, everything was in order. The last few minutes of packing the bike for the first journey, getting the right combination of clothes. Being interviewed by the journalist on film. Time seemed to rush past.



The support team and Steve Wright

Ready for the Off

We lined our cycles up behind the official start line, all in our Team Sponsorship shirts, photos were taken, there was a decision to leave and we all moved off the line to the applause of a few onlookers led by David Greenaway. This was a unique event for us but a frequent event for those

at John O'Groats; why else would you go there? We set off as a group along the first section of the road, all wondering what will the next two weeks hold for us, as individuals, as a group and as an organization.

The first ride of 53 miles was nothing but spectacular, coastal views, brilliant sunshine a following wind and an undulating quiet road. Everyone was cheerful. The groups spread out, the faster cyclists moving ahead, the slower cyclist forming their own group. Mile after mile unfolded along the coast, the sea almost always in sight. My group stopped for tea and wonderful home-made shortbread, eaten whilst sitting in the sunshine. We felt like kings. There were two major hills we had seen on our way out, which we were ready for, they were to be, we estimated, the toughest of the journey.



Ready for the off!

However they were tackled with fresh legs. Their steepness and length were a shock but we all managed them. David Greenaway, our Vice Chancellor and leader, discovered his speed on

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hills and moved swiftly ahead. On the upper slopes we were greeted by William and Alison Parentes as well as their friend Dr Wollacott. They were offering us juice, fruit, delicious homemade macaroons and chilli chocolate. What a wonderful greeting and expression of support that was offered with such generosity. In conversation we discovered mutual colleagues and friends in the paediatric world.

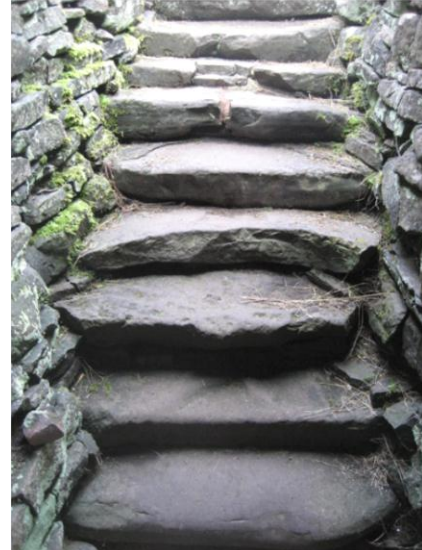
After this welcome stop it was just a few miles to Helmsdale, the majority of which were steeply downhill so we arrived at our hotel exhilarated and with time to recover and explore the beach and harbour before our first post ride meal.

Day 2: 27 August - Helmsdale to Inverness via Cromarty



Helmsdale Medical Centre at 8.30 am Saturday

Eight o'clock was the designated start time. There were a few preparations to be refined but we were ready to go after a filling breakfast. Having failed to meet local GPs to discuss HeadSmart, I pushed along the road, again enjoying the coastal views on my way to Tain. From a cyclist's view point, this was a spectacular trip with long straight downhill stretches for full speed travel. There was so much to look at – I stopped at Carn Liath, the coastal ruin of a Broch - an ancient farmhouse tower, which denoted the ancient ruling family's residence and farmyard between 1200-2000 years ago. This was a spectacular ruin that looked insignificant from the road but once inside became a fascinating space with stairs, storage areas and illustrations indicating its likely dimensions and functions.



Steps in Broch at Carn Liath – 1200-2000 years old!

Moving on to the rendezvous, and more importantly, coffee and cakes; some went to tour the Glenmorangie Distillery, whilst some set off to catch the Kilmarnock versus Inverness football match in Inverness. I decided to take the Nigg ferry across the Firth of Cromarty and cycle through Cromarty to Inverness. Visiting Nigg, an ancient settlement, centred on the 15th century church displaying the 8th Century Pictish Cross Stone depicting religious values and daily life of the times.

After eating in the churchyard I set off to the ferry hoping it would be running, otherwise I would be in for a very long ride round. I arrived to see it just leaving so I was able to enjoy a sheltered rest on the beach whilst admiring the Cromarty Firth. The Ferry was capable of carrying four cars, using a turntable to move them round to fit. Disembarking in Newtown I was reminded of a previous visit to this historic town. Leaving Newtown I was able to travel along the ridge above the Dornay Firth, passing beautiful country towns and villages and being overtaken by classic cars attending a local rally. I was able to sneak into Inverness avoiding almost entirely the A9 and found the Travelodge on the southern border of Inverness well positioned for our traverse of the Cairngorms next day.

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The Pictish Cross Slab at Nigg (8th Century)

Day 3: 28 August - Inverness to Blair Athol via Aviemore

This was the day I was particularly looking forward to as it was to take me through the area I had visited so many times on my mountaineering trips since I was a teenager. The area is full of memories for me. The day started the way it intended to continue, that is dense grey cloud cover and early rain. We had briefly talked about the need for full rain clothes but it was a surprise to everyone how cold we were to get as we cycled up into the rain. I had planned my route carefully the night before identifying the quiet roads. As we struck off up the hill, we were tempted to join the A9 thinking it would be better graded for the climb. After a few miles of road works and being passed by thundering lorries and spray, I left the main road and joined the cycle route 7 along quiet country roads. By this time my cycling clothes were wet so I stopped at a local bus shelter to change into my mountain gear and new waterproof leggings and gloves. What a difference it made to be fully protected, I sustained my climb using the cycle route that took me up to the Cairngorm plateau, wind assisted. This wind assistance was to be a feature of the day, as well as the rain.



Ruined bridge at Carrbridge

Crossing the plateau through Kingussie and Newtown and on to Dalwhinnie was great because of quiet roads but we ended up on the A9 for a spell because of a closed cycle route and the passing traffic was a problem. It was great to leave this nightmare road and join the fantastic cycle track from Dalwhinnie to Pitlochry, scooting downhill almost all the way to Blair Athol, 22 miles or so; what a luxury! To arrive in Blair Atholl as a group was a tremendous sense of achievement. The hotel was most welcome, my room in the Garrett was small but warm. My wet clothes were soon hanging around the room. The big disappointment was that my SatMap device failed in the wet and never recovered despite all the drying procedures recommended.

Day 4: 29 August - Blair Atholl to Dunfermline

The rain cleared and we set off next morning, legs a bit stiff, to travel across central Scotland. Again we were able to descend to the lowlands and then traverse the undulating countryside including some steep climbs in warm weather. The scenery was a stark contrast from the more rugged highland scenery and we successfully used cycle routes to avoid the worst of the busy roads. It reminded me of some of the descriptive passages in Kidnapped by Robert Louis Stephenson, one of my favourite books as a boy. The mixture of fast roads, undulating valleys with distant views of the retreating highland plateau, frequent sleepy villages and sparse local farm traffic reminded us that we were leaving the rugged scenery behind. We were challenged by some steep ascents before sweeping down to enter Dunfermline.

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The Professors of Theology (right) and Engineering (left) untangling a chain.

Arriving in Dunfermline it was a shock to encounter so much traffic and business after being immersed in the countryside for so long. We stayed in a great Holiday Inn and were well rested. Having travelled hard and fast with Chris Rudd and Alan Ford I had time to draw breath before dinner. By Day 4 we had all become closer and developed a better understanding of our abilities. The support team are great at their job, always ready to mend a puncture, find the part you need or make the food! The physicality of the trip was starting to tell on individuals, whether it was a bit of saddle soreness, twinging knees or ankles or just a sense of immense tiredness as each day unfolded. Tomorrow was to see us crossing Edinburgh and heading for the border at Berwick on Tweed. We would have two new visitors, David Ross, co-founder of Carphone Warehouse and Emma Pilkington his girlfriend; they would be riding for two days with us.

Day 5: 30 August - Dunfermline to Berwick on Tweed

The first task was to negotiate the traffic to the Forth Road Bridge next door to the iconic Forth Railway Bridge. We were duly impressed and were able to travel through the outskirts of Edinburgh hugging the shore line to Leith and Prestopand.



Forth Railway Bridge

We then crossed to Dunbar where we had a welcome plate of pasta with David and Emma before getting on to trace the coast line via the coastal route to Pease Bay (a very big dip in the road) and along the hilltops to Berwick on Tweed, crossing the border back into England. I rode in the morning with David and Emma. Emma was remarkable as she had done little cycling before yet covered 80 miles with us without complaint, David had done the JoGLE previously and was a fast cyclist; we enjoyed our riding together. He also was particularly interested in the possible relationship between mobile phones and brain tumours, which sparked some debate.

I reveled on the second half of the day with Steve Wright, the VC's chauffeur. He is no stranger to challenges having tackled innumerable marathons for charity. He has had a varied life, living in the US and other countries and was a tremendous companion. We celebrated crossing back into England at the border with photographs.



Crossing the border back into England

Arriving late into Berwick on Tweed, we were whisked down to the town hall for a welcoming reception by the Mayor as a result of a contact

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made by Diane Fraser, Professor of Midwifery. We were shown the remarkable Council House and Reception Room, the Mayor's parlour where his regalia were displayed for us and speeches were made and wine was drunk before we climbed the hill back to the remarkable hotel, which was a stark contrast to so many others in which we had stayed. The food was good, the sitting room comfortable and the beds soft and the essential amenities functioning, mostly.



Bamburgh Castle

Day 6: 31 August - Berwick on Tweed to Gateshead

This was always going to be a tough day as the first half was highly scenic and we had beautiful weather to enjoy. The second half was to include a traversing of Newcastle conurbation from North to South, which coincided with rush hour and a cooling breeze. I really enjoyed the morning, scooting along country lanes and glimpsing the mystical landscape of this part of the world, including Holy Island, Bamburgh Castle, Seahouses. Travelling with Neville Wylie, a Professor of History and a specialist in medieval history, was a great privilege; this was his area. The trip down to, and then across, Newcastle became something of a nightmare as we encountered the gathering storm of the conurbation's road system. Cycle paths were well marked, until we got into heavily residential areas and then tough and determined leadership by Nick Miles got us through to the banks of the Tyne where we then followed the river until we were at our Travelodge in Gateshead. A case of hypothermia and some additional injuries came to light but everyone recovered quickly and was keen to move on the next day.



Newcastle upon Tyne waterfront

Day 7: 1 September - Gateshead to Thirsk

Escaping Gateshead and finding the road to travel out through Co Durham was complex. The country travel took us through the remnants of the Durham minefield villages. The weather improved through the morning, Sedgefield being particularly attractive in sunshine – Tony Blair's old constituency. Travelling on alone brought me to a remote crossing of the Tees in a beautiful rural setting. Entering North Yorkshire and then on to Thirsk made me realize just how much progress we had all made. The days were becoming easier because the terrain was more gentle and the legs stronger. Thirsk town centre was alive with people. We stayed at the Golden Fleece in the centre. Having arrived early, it was a delight to rest and spend a little time catching up. I tried to engage the local GPs in HeadSmart but there was no time in their schedule. The receptionist, however, was a Nottingham graduate from 1972, having lived in Willoughby Hall and remembered one of my contemporaries Helen Venning, another Nottingham Paediatrician.

Day 8: 2 September - Thirsk to Retford

This was a long trip, which I made with Alan and Chris, setting off down the A19 amidst the traffic in order to cut the distance to a minimum. We made good time passing through York and then picking up the Sustrans cycle track that took us to Selby and beyond.

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The trio at York Minster

This was a great cycle route with no cars, as straight as a dye, in gentle sunshine with a following wind - what more could you ask? There were no hills to speak of and so it was simply a matter of sustaining the speed necessary. Arriving in Retford was, however, a delight; it was sunny, the hotel was comfortable and there was once again time to stop. David Greenaway's son had joined the group for this and the next day. He and his friend, big Al, seemed to blend in quickly with their young legs pushing the pace



Professor Jane Seymour from Sue Ryder Research Centre joins the ride for the Nottingham Leg

To celebrate we had a delayed start at 10.00, what a luxury. We joined the sponsored cyclists for the day at their start, so we could meet them and thank them. Our journey continued through the increasingly familiar roads of Nottinghamshire, Southwell, Burton Joyce. Entering Nottingham along such familiar roads and paths was emotional having spent so much time riding in new territory. I filtered through to Beeston to ask advice from my local cycle shop, called in at a friend's for coffee and arrived at Sutton Bonnington, passing participants of the community cycle as we neared the end of the day. We rode as a group onto the University Campus and were overwhelmed by the cheers of welcome from a sizeable crowd, music playing, barbecue cooking and a variety of stalls and games were in progress.



We were intrigued to know, as cyclists, how they would welcome the Wobbly Goolies on Saturday!

Day 9: 3 September - Retford to Sutton Bonnington
<http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/lifecycle/2011/09/07/on-the-road-video-update-retford-to-sutton-bonnington/>

This was always planned as a celebration, the Nottingham leg, the community cycle and our collective arrival at SB were all to be celebrated. Why not, we had after all cycled from John O'Groats to our home town, over 600 miles.



Caroline Anderson with me after Community Cycle, two Med Chi Presidents – well done Caroline.

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It was great to see Gill, Emma, Kate and the dog, as well as Jenny and other friends and colleagues who had joined the ride and shared the celebration.

The speeches reminded us of the purpose of the ride and there was widespread appreciation of the efforts of all involved.



Kate pedalling for a smoothie

Day 10: 5 September - Sutton Bonington to Bourton on the Water

The previous day, I had returned home for a very welcome respite. It was wonderful to see my family, hear their news and enjoy a meal with them all. A quiet evening was a pleasure and to sleep in your own bed in familiar surroundings a luxury, although there was the awareness that my legs were still in cycling mode and I had to be up and ready to leave Sutton Bonington by 8am the next morning. Gill kindly gave me a lift to the start point. I got my bike ready but missed Alan and Chris's departure so I set off with others and was immediately pulling ahead and seeking to navigate through the complex road system of middle England. The pre-selected route in pre-printed maps proved difficult on this day to follow. Also I knew this area well and was keen to follow the Fosse Way to Bourton, my planned route was not therefore on the pre-printed maps. I bought a road atlas for £1.99 and found this investment well placed over the next few days. All I needed to do was to tear the page out I needed for the day, put it in my plastic wallet and navigate my way. It rained all morning and as I picked my way through Coalville, Hinckley and on to the Fosse Way, I was

reminded of my life in Leicestershire as a junior doctor and my many friends from rugby playing days. Indeed, I was tempted to call on Nick and Julie as they live near Hinckley but was concerned I may waste time finding their rural home on country lanes.

The Fosse Way crosses Watling Street (A5), a Roman junction, which I used to good effect. I was soon powering south along this straight hilltop road. I had driven this road many times over the years to visit my family in the Cotswolds. It was a delight to revisit it on two wheels. The good aspect of this route is its direct traverse of middle England, the bad aspect is the infrequency of villages or settlements along the way. Its hilltop route provides good views but an undulating course for the cyclist. Arriving in Moreton on Marsh, the sun was out. I stopped for soup, ice cream and carrot cake, chatted with an author of children's books in the café and set off to climb to Stow, on its Wold. I struggled to adjust to cycling after soup, cake and ice cream and the warmer weather. Stripping off the layers soon put me back on the pace and, in no time at all, I was drifting down into the magical village of Bourton on the Water, the nearest thing to a Cotswold's theme park. The sun was warm, there was so much to look at. The others arrived over time reporting of their experiences of the Cotswold villages, teas, getting lost by leaving the map and losing GPS devices in pubs!



Sue Ryder shop, Moreton on Marsh

Day 11: 5 September - Bourton on the Water to Shepton Mallett

Alan, Chris and I decided to ride this together. We left at 8.00 keen to get on and after a few route finding errors found ourselves on the way to Cirencester at a reasonable pace. The weather was kind, the roads were quiet and we were able to

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use the country lanes and some of the bigger roads from time to time. There was always the question, do you drop onto to an A road for fast movement or do you choose to explore the country lanes with the navigational challenges to keep out of the motorists' sights? This day had its fair share of these decisions. We enjoyed the morning trip, although Chris took a tumble in the gutter of a ford and needed to put his bike back together.



Repairs after the tumble

Alan and I found ourselves cycling as a pair later in the day and enjoyed a brief lunch in rainstorm in a Wiltshire pub where we met the Teign Pedallers who had explored every route to Land's End from Teign for many years, such that there were no more to be explored and they had come to cycle a circular tour of the Cotswolds instead. The architecture of the Cotswolds and Wiltshire were fascinating and beautiful, Wiltshire, for me, having more impressive buildings with greater stature and assuredness, although I am sure others feel differently.

We met up with others on the way coming together in a tea shop in Bradford on Avon, a remarkable historic town in a deep ravine. Tea was served in the historic tea shop by girls in long black skirts and pinnies with white bonnets. An anachronistic event where our lycra and padded shorts clashed with such a traditional image!



Bradford on Avon

Alan and I left, and forged on exploring some of the local valleys and villages whilst seeking to get on the A road to Shepton Mallet and the Mendip Hills. We were surprised to find the Mendips a real sting in the tail of this ride. We dreamed of sweeping down into Shepton Mallett, sadly we were to be disappointed as any descent was soon matched with a comparable ascent. We stayed in a lovely small hotel, called "The Shrubbery" where the Irish landlord had created a comfortable oasis and centre of social activity. Unfortunately, we had missed the beer and cider festival the previous day! The garden was lined with barrels on racks and for £3.50 you could have a glass and sample whatever you liked – now that is what you call a good deal. We ate at a wonderful restaurant nearby where we were made most welcome in a beautiful room.

Day 12: 6 September - Shepton Mallett to Exeter

By this stage we were starting to sniff the finish line. Next stop Exeter! In the morning it was raining and it was forecasted to persist. This was a short day - only 53 miles. Should we hang on for it to clear or just get on the road? We were staying in two hotels; at the Shrubbery the mood was for moving on and by 8.00 we were on the road again, taking the road to Glastonbury, Street, Othery Taunton, Wellington and Collumpton. I stuck mainly to the main roads; Alan texted me to say he was "flying" (I thought we were meant to be cycling!); Chris and I met up along the way from time to time. He refused to stop but I liked a quick cup of tea every 2 hours or so. We arrived in Exeter within an hour of each other to discover the campus on a steep hill and the hall of residence a multi-level condominium. We were comfortable in a great setting with views over the surrounding Devon countryside looking up to Dartmoor which was to be the next day's challenge.

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The Orangery Imperial Hotel – Brunel Design

We ate that night in the Imperial Hotel - a truly fantastic building with a long and interesting past, the most notable feature being the iron orangery installed by Dr Heberden, a world famous rheumatologist – “Herberden’s Nodes” - who was, in his retirement, a very keen gardener. The orangery is reputed to be a design by Brunel and had been transferred from Streatham House. The evening meal was a mixed affair with some watching England beat Wales at football.

Day 13: 7 September - Exeter to Bodmin over Dartmoor

This day posed challenges for everyone. The problem was Dartmoor - do you go over it, or round it? If you go round it do you stick to the A30 or use quieter country roads? If you go over Dartmoor, how much distance do you save at the cost of the climbing? Chris and I decided to go over Dartmoor, because it was there and we had not done the traverse previously. In many ways it was not dissimilar to the decision to go over the Cairngorms from Inverness. The others divided themselves between the different options. Chris and I set off, escaping Exeter and immediately finding ourselves climbing up through mature forested valleys along an undulating road through Dunsford and Moretonhampstead.

There was always something to look at, the ancient buildings, traditional stone slab bridges, wild ponies. As the vegetation thinned we arrived at high level moor land, heather covered the ground and the rocky outcrops marked the Tors across the landscape.



Alms Houses Moretonhampstead 1637

We arrived at Princetown where Dartmoor Prison lay nestling ominously in a side valley. Here we stopped and were immediately frozen by the cooling wind. A retreat to the bus shelter and donning of additional clothes stabilized us both. Moving on we started to come off the moor. From a cyclist’s view point, the fierce headwind was a major feature as we were compelled to pedal downhill to maintain progress.

Watching cyclists going the other way, they looked remarkably cheerful as they were blown vigorously up the hills; their faces had a certain smugness. Who could blame them? We had had that experience in Scotland.



HeadSmart on the road

Descending to Tavistock took us off Dartmoor and into the next phase of this journey, the traversing of a series of valleys running north to south to Liskeard. These were, without doubt, the toughest part of the road trip! We plunged repeatedly into deep ravines to be faced with steep relentless ascents before being thrown headlong down again.

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Dartmoor

The climb at Gunnislake was probably the worst. By the time we made Liskeard this aspect of the scenery had retreated and we were left with a busy road but one travelling along a valley so at least it was flat and sheltered, taking us to Bodmin. The Travelodge for the night was on the far side of Bodmin and a very welcome refuge. Everyone, whatever their route, had had an epic journey; those on the A30 tackling the monotony of the fast roads and nearside verges; the country lane group, whilst enjoying peace, had had to travel further facing fierce headwinds over rolling hills and were shattered at the end.

As we ate our meal that night we were all accepting that we were about to reach our goal, and the enormity of the journey was starting to sink in. We were suitably tired but were resolved to extract whatever enjoyment and satisfaction that the next day would bring, whatever the weather, whatever the road condition.

Day 14: 8 September - Bodmin to Land's End

The last day, we set off all together and remained so for nearly the whole day, this was an almost unique feature. The early part of the day was a gratifying drift down long gentle hills on quiet country roads although there were some fiddly bits around villages. Navigation was always a remarkable experience as we had a lot of leaders who had an opinion on directions. As the days wore on the numbers of GPS devices declined for a variety of reasons. My own GPS failed due to dampness. Garmins failed similarly, some were left in pubs, i-phones were run over and crushed. Chris Jagger's Garmin, however, kept going until this final day. He was just celebrating its excellent qualities when it fell off its holder and was run over by a passing car. Chris, remember pride comes before a fall. At the end of the trip it was

the Memory Map of Karen Cox and the i-phones of Chris Rudd and Nick Miles that survived the full trip. However, only the memory map was fully functional outside of towns and monitored your ongoing progress. We passed through Truro, the low cloud and drizzle being a persistent feature. We enjoyed coffee and cakes in Starbucks and got a discount for being cyclists! We celebrated briefly the 1000 mile marker requesting a young mother to photograph us all in the rain.



Nick and Steve at the 1000 mile marker

We had lunch from the van in Penzance and tackled the last 12 miles up the hill and over the top to arrive ceremoniously at Land's End with Susan Greenaway and others welcoming us with champagne and chocolate. I was delighted to also be contacted by my nephew Charles and Beth with Izzie and Sasha who also joined us to mark the occasion, what a reception and a privilege to not only complete the journey but also have family there to witness it. My 91 yr old mother called Charles by chance and we were able to include her in the celebration, what a coincidence.



Presentations at the finish

Nottingham Life Cycle: A Cycle Ride of a Lifetime - 26 Aug to 8 Sept 2011

John O'Groats to Land's End (JoGLE) - 1030 miles

David Walker



The Ultimate Photo



HeadSmart at Land's End

My impressions at the Land's End.....

I have traversed our country from the very North to the very South, reminding myself of the regional fashions and architecture in its widely varied physical settings. There have been innumerable references to historic events stretching back over 2000 years, putting into perspective the experiences of travelers in previous eras where the horse and coach were the method of movement. It had taken us 8 days to go from the extreme north to the midlands and then a further 6 days to complete the journey to Land's End. We had stayed at wayside inns and their modern equivalents. Weather was a significant part of the journey, fortunately for us it was helpful in the majority, northerly winds and infrequent rain making it most welcome for the first half of the journey but we experienced the impact of wet weather and head winds in the last part. We were not robbed or attacked by highwaymen or charged tolls for the use of roads. But then we were not

driven, we propelled ourselves along the way, determined and swift in our journey.

Whilst travelling, I was always watching the people, buildings and features along the way, stimulating many lines of thoughts. For me, my family and their lives were a constant pre-occupation. The events and people associated with places we passed through stimulated further trains of thought. I was born in Scotland, have travelled extensively across the country in pursuit of mountain tops, I had lived in Co Durham and had family and friends in North Yorkshire, so there was much to reflect upon. My time living in the Midlands and South Yorkshire as a student and subsequently, as well as my family ties in the Cotswolds and around Bristol were all reminders as we travelled south noticing names of places along the way.

As you cycle, however, you are forever watchful of traffic and road conditions, navigating the route, assessing your comfort, am I too hot or too cold, how far have I gone, am I going well or struggling, am I drinking and eating enough? Would it be good to stop, where are your companions, when will today's ride end?

The ways the groups worked was of interest. Three groups emerged, fast, medium and slow. The fast group cycled to achieve early finish times, selecting faster more direct roads and refusing to stop for teas and lunches. I felt comfortable with that as, once at cycling speed, slowing things up to stop and eat seemed wrong for my metabolism. The slower group took their pace from the slowest rider and supported them in their quest to meet the challenge. The medium group kept a faster pace but did stop for teas and coffees along the way, extracting as much enjoyment as possible from the countryside and often meeting with others as they intermingled along the route. We were greatly helped by the support team who were always available to help provide food or advice and, most importantly, repair the numerous punctures.

We have now completed the journey, Land's End has been reached and we have continuously ridden the length of UK. Everyone succeeded, we all overcame our uncertainties. There was pain and discomfort for everyone but not so much that we could not go on. The team spirit supported us all. The planning of the route was critical to success. The shared discipline and support to get

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up and get going was essential. The personalities were entertaining and promoted interest. The qualities of good leadership was everywhere in everyone. Whenever you thought something might be better you could discuss it and there would be a response, no-one's view was excluded. The proof of the trip's success was in the sense of elation and achievement shared at the end of each day and most importantly the final leg together at Land's End.

It confirmed my previous experience that if you set out with a clear plan, organize yourselves and then launch it, you will, with luck, be successful. We did that with Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre and more recently HeadSmart. The experience of Life Cycle is that we will continue to be successful if we continue to work as a team to clear objectives and with mutual support.

The Nottingham Life Cycle was a success for each individual, for the team as a whole and for the University in their work to support research into palliative care and to launch their new Development Campaign. It showed that individuals working together can take risks that individually could be too daunting and, by so doing, prove to themselves that they could do more than they ever previously expected. Thanks for the opportunity to take part. Thanks for the support from those watching the journey.

Sponsorship for the Sue Ryder Research Centre
University of Nottingham

David A Walker



David Greenaway, the Life Cycle instigator and Vice Chancellor, at the beginning of this trip.
David, thanks for the ride.

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The Team

David Greenaway

Inspirational leader, gritty realist, acute observer of wit and purpose – the reason we did this journey, a novice cyclist made good by the experience.

Chris Rudd

Dedicated to straight line thinking and travelling, economical of effort, an outdoor thrill seeker, a quiet and sometimes absent companion

Chris Jagger

A universal planning presence, nothing was too big or too small for his comment or effort. He's happy if he is the focus of positive or negative attention. We just all hope that his next Garmin survives the journey.

Karen Cox

How did this trombone-playing nurse take this journey on and do it with such ease? Always ready to laugh, smile or swear when the occasion required it. Everyone at some time was grateful for her frequent requests for a comfort break!

Kate Robertson

A novice cyclist, experienced oarswoman at stroke, faced up to pain and discomfort with admirable resolve. Always cheerful and committed eventually to master this challenge with style.

Alan Ford

He did this to go "really fast", he celebrated his new bike with enthusiasm. Direction finding was a weakness, but overcome by zeal and willingness to cover more ground, regardless. Alan was that why you left your Garmin in a pub?

Neville Wylie

A thoughtful, stylish cyclist with serious gear. Wore his high viz jacket to breakfast; it made your nose glow yellow, Neville. He kept his whisky safe, yet shared 12 meat pies generously at a single lunchtime sitting.

Nick Miles

A lifelong Kilmarnock supporter - someone has to do it! Always ready to lead or guide. A man of contrasts, patient but urgent, calm but concerned, relaxed yet determined.

Steve Wright

A challenge campaigner of many marathons. A family man who brought his family along, a determined finisher with the thinnest phone after a double HGV crushing. A great companion, with a beautiful bike – Bianca!!!!

Andy Noyes

A master triathlete, a calm leader with an eye for the route, always encouraging. Never appeared stressed, he knew his way.

David Walker

I will leave that to others.

Support Team

Gavin Scott

A master logistician, focused, multi-tasking and forward planning

Paul

A professional driver, wise and experienced, skilled and popular, was he the Captain.

Ed

A sporting specialist, full of cycle know-how, ever ready to laugh and put things right.

Simon

Physical trainer and first aid specialist, a dry sense of humour, likes things in their place, puts ice hockey first. Watch his team.