

Czech Mates:- Prague to Vienna May 2011

The MotoNewtons
The Royals
The A team
The Vam phews!

Sunday 29th May

Text from Bushy's wind up phone tells Kings and A team they have arrived. No word from Mike's state-of-the-art phone...We begin to worry but find MotoNewtons have arrived safely but with no network until Mike jabs his fingers copiously at his i phone for hours.

Monday 30th May (Mike and Alec leading)

After Jeff's scenic tram route, 4 of us arrive at Bike shop in Prague to meet Oleh, Davida & other Czech mates. We czech the saddles, czech the racks, czech the tyres and after minor czhanges everyone has a bike. We head for the station, Bridget wearing her helmet in case of trouble at the ticket office and Ray wearing his safari hat in case of lion attacks.

Lots of shouting about the correct platform, then we are off.....off the train for the replacement bus service to Olbramovice. On the bikes at last, plastered with suntan lotion, we set off on the 'right' side of the road towards somewhere unpronouncable. A few hills, slimy ponds and quiet villages later we arrive at somewhere else unpronouncable (Sedlec Prodice) to stop and eat.

Jeff instantly forgets the word for 'hello' is 'ahoy' and after shouting 'Ole' a few times at the startled shop keeper, is offered a bottle of Olive Oil.

We start the 'Greenway' towards Tabor, looking out for the friendly bike signs, which take us along quiet, picturesque lanes. Tabor looks horrendously busy until we turn right and peddle into an enormous cobbled square like a film set from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and look around for the Child Catcher.

We find our Idyllic Pension, which is a 'Whiskey pub,' just off the square.

Half an hour later we all smell of roses and head off to a local restaurant overlooking the ornate square to pile on the calories for the next day's ride.

Tuesday 31st May (Alec's Leadership day)

After honouring our new Leader and waiting whilst Naoko bought most of the local supermarket, we set off past an ancient tower in the hot sunshine. We stopped occasionally to admire the huge fields of barley and wheat swaying in the breeze, apply more lotion and finally arrived at a castle on a lake. Fantastic picnic spot under a Linden tree, a loo nearby, scrumptious picnic of local food and then an army of kids arrive on bikes. It was like a scene from West Side Story as Gasbags squared up to face the gangly spotty contingent. (We munched our picnic and they buggered off).

Our Leader roused us into action again and we continued in the heat. As I summited a small hill in a cloud of flies, battling to cycle through the haze, I looked round to see Naoko in a halo of pure clean air. By some devious means she had managed to persuade her flies to join mine. Either that or I just smelt worse.

Suddenly the sky grew dark and sinister as we headed towards a pine wood about 10 miles from our destination. Thor sent his chariots across the sky and set his water cannon on us. Then he decided that wasn't enough and, as we set off in our puny rain gear, pelted us with marble sized hailstones.

Just as Hypothermia was setting in, Jeff found shelter and we watched the hailstones build to an icy pile as we shivered under an overhanging roof. Luckily most of the next 10 miles were in a sheltered, flat wood but it was nearly 8pm when we reached Nova Bytrice.

Bridget walked into the smartish hotel in her orange plastic bag shoes with her purple legs and announced our arrival. The rest of us joined her puddle and Jeff proceeded to add to it by wringing out his gloves.

The patrons were Czech and German speaking only but we managed to eat and drink until the nightmare storm was just a memory....till the next day.

Wednesday 1st June (Ray's day)

I awoke to the sound of someone taking a shower. Opening the curtains I discovered it was the Czech Republic and quickly closed them again.

By the time we had finished our traditional breakfast of ham, ham and ham (ideal for a vegetarian) the rain had stopped and our leader of the day led us into the sunshine until Mike's tyre got a puncture. Our bike boys laboured long and hard until Ann took pity on them and gave them a go of her super duper pump.

We stopped at the lovely scenic town of Slavonice but cycled on to a picnic spot by a river, blissfully unaware of what was to come. Across a new bridge over the 'gorge'ous river Dyje and at 5.30 on the dot, the skies darkened and rain cascaded down for the last 4 miles to Vranov.

We arrived at the 'Pension Relax' too saturated to relax until we had all had a hot shower. Our luxury apartment soon smelt of wet dog as everything dripped everywhere and the kindly host put the radiators on for us.

We managed to eat in the local (mostly empty) hostelry where a smiley little man called 'Alda' did his best to interpret what we wanted. Alec got some tasty potato cakes. Mike somehow managed to get bacon and eggs? And Naoko sorted the bill admirably!

Thursday 2nd June (Jeff's day - with Pam reading the interesting bits)

We awoke to grey skies and decided (led by Jeff) to stop for breakfast en route in a bid to arrive dry at Hevlin. First stop was Vranov Dam...amazing views and we had it to ourselves. Through a wood

with lovely little holiday homes overlooking the dam, then up to Levka for coffee (instant) and tea (raspberry) with accompanied cakes from under the counter of the adjacent shop.

We took our full tummies on to Cizov where we viewed the Austrian border from an old look out post next to a stretch of barbed wire fencing - a relict from the Iron Curtain. It seemed strange to think that Czech people had so many restrictions on their freedom for so long and went some way to explaining why they were perhaps wary of strangers.

Our information told us we must not miss 'Znojmo' even though it was a bit of a detour. We cycled into yet another large square but this one had a chip café! Wisely, the A team found a bench and had a nice picnic, whilst we waited and waited for Mrs Stresshead to deliver the chips.

We then had to navigate our way across the river and back onto the greenway. Yippee - we found the track by the river.....until Jeff nearly cycled into a hole - 2 bikes long and 1 bike deep. Surrounded by a steep bank on one side and the river on the other, we had no alternative but to carry our laden bikes across. Alec supported the bikes, handing them over to Jeff and Ray held Alec's hand.....it was very moving.

Next up, was a huge mound of earth made by a mini digger (machine, not midget). The workers barely looked up, stopped the digger but made no attempt to flatten the path for us. We heaved our bikes across and got not even a smile or acknowledgement from the workmen. Eventually, feeling reborn, we got back on the greenway and stopped at 'Slup' to view a waterwheel with 4 wheels. Then we managed to get to Hevlin DRY!

Pension Semerad was a new building with a bicycle shed and washing on the line. Unfortunately it was all locked up. There was a notice on the door in Czech with a phone number. This was going to be interesting. Ray shouted a bit of German into the phone to impress us then Jeff decided to ask at the garage (which had the same name). HURRAH - She was the owner! BOO - She spent 20 minutes filling in forms before she would let us in.

The rooms were huge and very new and clean. We found a good restaurant nearby and toasted Ray and Bridget's last day with dark beer and enormous pizzas!

Friday 3rd June (Mike leading AGAIN)

Little notes left on the landing cleared up where the A team's key disappeared to. The Vamplews left in true style and with great glee at 6am for the train back to Prague.

We went down to an enormous plate of **meat** for breakfast:- ham, salami, spam with olives in it, something else pink and fleshy - it all looked so pretty.....5 of us tucked in. The other one had to make do with the fresh rolls, cheese, jams etc and the coffee was GOOD! We heaved our bellies onto our bikes and were off, accompanied by classical music, curiously coming from tannoys on every street corner of the village. A throw back from 22 years ago during the communist era? But why keep them?

Mike led up swiftly through the next few miles, then onto a main road. "It'll be fine,,,its only for a short time" said Mike as a 20 ton truck bore down on him, driver and hooters blazing. After facing near death Mike let us go back on the Greenway and we found the wine tasting route a little further on.

Sitting in the sunshine sipping wine.....it was never going to last. Back on the Greenway through our last Czech town, (Valtice) we were swapping 'ices' for 'dorfs' as we gasped our way up the last Czech hill and across the border to Poysdorf.

Helpful Austrian people stopped to show us the way but with Mike's leadership we still managed to go up a dead end street and had to cycle sheepishy back past a group of bemused locals.

We continued along Greenway no 9, the rain began but, surprise surprise, it was just normal rain and quite refreshing. It was quite wet though and we were soaked by the time we got to Wilfersdorf (or some other dorf) and found the crappiest digs of the holiday. The 'Motel' was 2 containers next to the motorway. BUT the receptionist was really helpful and we hung our wet stuff in the laundry room with the bikes to dry.

We had the best meal of the holiday in the best surroundings: an old tithe barn and Ann found some organic apple juice for us to buy on the way - magic!

Saturday 4th June (Mike leading again - Control Freak? No!)

Left the containers at 9am for a fast ride up and down a few hills in the sunshine. Cycled past a shop in a village 3 times (as it was disguised as a tree) and stopped for lunch in a lovely park with the most amazing chocolate banana cake from the diguised shop.

After a good smear of sun tan lotion we headed towards the END of the trail....Mike hardly stopping for breath.....and got lost in Stammersdorf. Some poor Austrian took pity on us and took photos of us posing near the end of the trial and then we continued in the blistering heat to the Danube. Three of us were so fed up with Mike by this time, we threw ourselves in the river but were made to continue through excruciating Viennese traffic towards the 'Hotel in Hernel's'. Mike was so excited about getting there, he cycled along the **left** cycle path whilst we were on the right but he found us again. We were all saturated from the sweat flying off his head band by the time we reached the hotel.

As **we** were stripping the bikes down (that is Mike, Alec and Jeff. Naoko and Ann were having a shower and I was taking photos) Davida arrived to take them back to Prague:- 6 bikes in an estate car!

Here endeth our Prague to Vienna challenge. Scotland next year!

