

The Scottish Annual ride co-ordinator, Alec McPaul, called the first meeting to discuss the 2012 annual ride on 26th October. There was a good turnout with Pam McKing being one of Alec McPaul's disciples, ensuring that she was present. Pam was bursting with ideas for Scottish rides but was limited to just two ideas otherwise the meeting might have gone on all night. There were a few other presents including their partners Ann and Jeff then Mike & Naoko and Mike & Julie. Bushy and Bridget (B&B), together with John, sent their apologies but Bushy ensured he was there in spirit by sending in an idea of cycling in South Wales. Mike presented his "anything but Scotland ideas" of Norfolk and Northern Ireland. After a bit of argee-bargee the meeting came to a close with the next meeting called for the 9th November.

The second meeting had a different composition with B&B ensuring they were present, and Terry & Janet turning up and being very enthusiastic about cycling. Besides these four Alec McPaul and Pam McKing were there but some of their McBias had disappeared. Mike and Jeff filled the remainder of the chairs. After much deliberation and an absolutely fair vote Bushy's choice of the Celtic Trail came out top. He was astonished, and his hair stood on end as he had never had his idea accepted before. However the rest knew absolutely who to blame if this "out-of-the-blue" idea turned out to be wet and miserable.

The standard GASBAGS standard four couples were all keen and it looked like they would be joined by a few others including Terry & Jan and Barry & Pauline – however within a short time the group was reduced to the standard four.

The jobs of booking B&B's (not Bushy & Bridget) were allocated out, with Bushy very keen that everything should have been booked yesterday as the chosen week had 2 bank holidays due to the Queen's Jubilee. In the end Bushy was so keen to see his idea launched in the right way that he booked 3 of the 6 nights plus the B&B accommodation for themselves on a 4th night plus the transport from Newport to Fishguard. As the holiday came closer he was all for booking every evening meal but got stopped by more sensible people! If only he could have also booked sunshine, heat and no rain!

Saturday 2nd June

The day before the holiday arrived. Jeff had by now checked that the B&B bikes and their own would fit on his car without the need to tie Bushy to the roof of the car.

Mike took his rack and bikes around to Alec's to check how the bikes would fit on Alec's car. After much exertion the bikes were in place with Naoko's bike stripped down inside the car and the other three on the rack. Alec decided to leave the bikes in place and manoeuvred his car so that the rear faced the garage door. There seemed to be a banging noise coming from the car but Alec put this down to the effect of the rack.

Sunday 3rd June

M&N arrived at Alec's at 7am and stashed away the bags then collected Ann. There seemed to be a noise coming from the front of the car with Alec putting it down to the enormous weight of the bikes on the back rack. We drove to J&P's. Mike said, "We agreed to go in convoy." Ann said, "I didn't agree – drive on Alec." Fortunately Alec stopped as there was a slight sign of sweat on his brow as his concern was mounting about the "noise". Alec opened the bonnet and stared hard at the engine hoping a good stare would fix the noise. However he then pressed on each of the front wings and the noise seemed to be coming from the offside wing. Jeff, renowned for his mechanical expertise after owning many ancient cars, was fetched. He went down on his knees and put his hand inside the front spring and brought out a large section of it – there was a definite problem! There was no way Alec's car was going anywhere. Bushy now realised that his dream of GASBAGS going on a holiday selected by him was fading. He leapt into action – if that is possible for a man with a heart pacer. He took control. "Mike," he said, "We will take three cars. I have my rack. Jump in my car and we will fetch your car from Alec's." Mike, who was all set to sleep for 6 hours as he had not slept well the previous night, was not happy but responded well to Bushy's command. They shot around to Alec's and were back again very quickly. Everyone realised that time was of an essence and helped as if

we were in a war zone with Pam making cups of tea. Alec rebuilt Naoko's bike, and within no time there were 2 bikes on B&B's car and 2 on Mike's car. Now there was time to inspect Jeff's car. It was trussed up like a turkey! There did seem to be an excessive amount of rope with even one coming out of the back doors and one going right to the front. Aha! Mike realised what had happened. Jeff had got confused between a car and a sailing boat!

Finally we were off by 8:15, just over half an hour late and thus reducing the number of possible stops desired by Ann. We arranged to stop at Borobridge but Ann knew of a cheaper Morrisons garage just off the M18, so one third of the contingent failed to stop at Borobridge – Bushy gave Mike a black mark! Now Mike assumed that he would be many miles in front of Jeff as we had heard that Jeff stuck rigidly to 70 mph and not a mile more. Suddenly Jeff (or was it Pam) shot past Mike, taking him completely unawares. The race was on! First Jeff, then Mike, then Jeff led and finally we even caught up with Bushy who was snoozing by the side of the road.

We arrived in convoy after 270 miles with Jeff leading. He decided to do a tour of Newport first and after going round Newport several times we finally arrived outside the station. Now from Bushy's instructions we were all looking for a multi-storey car park. Mike, with Ann directing, zoomed up and down the main road. Then we saw Alec waving like mad and directing us to turn, which we did and drove into the NCP car park next to the station that was not multi-storey but the right one. Jeff phoned Bushy to tell him the car park had been found but Bushy refused to believe him as it was not multi-storey. Finally Bushy submitted and acknowledged that he might have been wrong (for once).



The car transporter arrived shortly afterwards with the Newport driver telling us that Newport was a dreadful place full of destitutes – would our cars be safe? We piled into the passenger transporter and within no time several were asleep but not Jeff, who was probably keen to help the driver drive out of Newport as Jeff had learnt so much about the roads on his circular tour. Nothing untoward happened on the 140 mile trip, not even a snore, and

by 5pm we arrived at the Seaview Hotel, our Fishguard accommodation.



It turned out that we weren't in Fishguard at all but a small village close by



called Goodwick. We walked as a group in the evening towards Fishguard and at last saw signs for Route 4 – our Celtic Trail route. We were about to head along route 4 but Bushy and Alec beckoned the rest of us to follow them along a coastal path. We soon had a very picturesque view of Fishguard.

We discovered that there was a beer festival on at the pub where we thought we would eat. Mike & Jeff ordered food for their respective couples and were just ordering beer when the barman said that all food was off – had the cook run off? However Jeff was not too disconcerted and still bought beer, with



Mike following him. However the other two couples were more concerned with filling their stomachs with food and went on a search of other eating establishments. They re-appeared after a time – we were booked into an Indian restaurant at 9:15. We all now set to trying as many real beers as we could in our remaining time – Naoko especially was keen to try them all!



Monday 4th June – Fishguard to Broadhaven, Dry & warm, 36 miles

There had been a debate before the ride about what time we should leave the hotel each day. The group had heard how Mike & Dave had left each day at 8am on Dave's Scottish trip but it was felt that 8am was too early. However at one debate it was felt that 8:30am would be a good time and we would have more time to look round. However as the holiday drew closer the agreed time slipped to 9am. On this first day we finally left at 9:30am

It was Mike's day to lead and he had walked about outside the hotel before breakfast to check the route 4 direction that should be followed. However he still missed the right path and it was just Alec, closely followed by Ann, that led the way on the correct path. We arrived at a lovely inlet called Abercastle after a few miles. We had been expecting rain but the day had been dry so far and the sun was trying to come out, making the inlet look very picturesque.



We cycled on to St Davids which we were expecting to be the highlight of the day and we were not disappointed. We detoured past St Davids Cathedral, dating back to the 12th century, initially (by mistake) and bought a sandwich lunch. We rested our bikes and ourselves against the tomb stones that were leaning against the cathedral wall – is this sacrilegious?



We cycled on down a steep hill to Newgate where Ann declared that she was bonking and needed a cup of tea before she could continue. The map showed what looked like an easy five mile stretch by the seaside to Broadhaven but maps can be deceptive! Instead we cycled up then down to the beach three times with the steepness of the climbs being high. Mike walked on at least one climb but some of the ladies just kept on cycling at a slow pace, and Alec, of course, cycled up the hills as if they were flat. Just before Broadhaven Bushy shouted to Bridget, who then promptly fell off her bike and touched an electric fence – a few choice words were exchanged!



At Broadhaven we divided into three groups with the Kings going off to their palatial room in a Youth Hostel, the Bushys cycling to their tiny double-bed B&B on a back street, and the other four having to make do with an enchanting Bistro Hotel (The Anchor) facing the beach. Ann was so delighted with the view that she declared, "We will eat here tonight." Mike respectfully asked, "Shouldn't we ask the others?". Ann declared, "I am not for turning" (or words to that effect). Fortunately the Kings were keen to escape from their Youth Hostel with both loving the idea of facing the sea, would any sailing boats be going by? The Bushys could not be contacted then after a long delay Bushy phoned, "We were double-booked but have been moved to a £95 a night farmhouse that is superior in every way.". The Bistro crowd thought, "Yes but does it have a seaview and a bistro – probably just cows and sheep."



Everyone except Pam had the delicacy of the Bistro – fish and chips. We all went for a cold but dry evening stroll with the closest Naoko got to tasting an ice-cream was to have a large one sticking out of her back.

Tuesday 5th June – Broadhaven to Tenby, rained all day, 32 miles



The forecast had been rain and that is what we got. Breakfast was booked for 8am so plenty of time to leave by 9am but again it was 9:30 by the time we cycled off in full rain gear, with a long climb out of Broadhaven initially.

We stopped at a boatside café near Pembroke to dry out. The photograph shows how happy we all were despite the rain. We cycled as fast as GASBAGS can cycle and arrived at the Ivy Bank Guest House in Tenby at 3:30pm.



Prior to the trip Pam had been eulogising about a wonderful Greek restaurant that they had dined in at some recent anniversary, and we had all agreed that she should get a reservation for us all. The Bushys were first out for a walk in the rain. Their departure prompted Mike & Naoko to get ready with Mike asking Pam if they were coming. "I'm not moving from this bedroom till the meal. I have had enough

of rain", she stated strongly. So Mike & Naoko walked out to look around Tenby after being told that the Greek restaurant was near to the Five Arches. They found it and thought the prices looked too high for GASBAGS. Back at the B&B it was agreed that the Kings would check out other eating establishments, and Pam moved as the rain had stopped. Within a short time they had cancelled the Greek restaurant and moved us to the Five Arches pub.



Wednesday 6th June – Tenby to Kidwelly, dry & warm, 44 miles



Mike & Naoko were down to breakfast first on the dot of 8am with Mike dreaming of leaving at 9am. After a memorable good English breakfast the time came for payment of the equally-priced rooms. However anyone over 60 had a reduction of 5% with both over 60 bringing a reduction of 10%. The Kings and Bushys were at last well-pleased about being



over 60. However poor Mike had a wife turning 60 before the end of the year but looking much younger (I had to write this!) so only had a reduction of 5%. A&A had to pay the full fee – their fault for being so young! Again it happened! It was 9:30 before we set off. It was taking time for Bushy to get changed into his gardening outfit – plastic socks and sandals – and several layers of clothes.





Bushy soon realised that he was overdressed and stopped to strip off one layer. Alec was leading and he proposed that we make a shortcut which would save 4 miles and we all rapidly agreed in case he changed his mind. We went past one small village with a very long name Croesyceiliog which actually was shown on the map as Croes-y-ceiliog – what does the “y” mean?



The team was shooting (or walking) up very steep hills and Mike was astonished how such elderly people could possibly keep on their bikes. There was the possibility to save a further 3 miles but Alec, being route leader, decided that we should keep to the route as it would be almost flat. We stopped for a short break at Ferryside – not the most beautiful scenery.



Ann (not Bushy) had booked the B&B at Kidwelly, and she should be congratulated on her choice. The owners tended our every need. They showed us around the bedrooms with Mike & Naoko somehow getting the only one with a bath. Next we were ushered back to the ground floor and served tea, coffee and cake. Finally we were asked in minute detail about our breakfast choices.



Ann had checked about eating establishment with the B&B owners and they had recommended The White Lion Inn. A tentative booking had been made though as it turned out there had been no need as we were just about the only people there.

Thursday 7th June, Kidwelly to Swansea, very wet, 30 miles Left 9:30 arrived 3:30.



Everyone was down to breakfast by 8am , very excited to see the wondrous breakfast that we had been promised and we were not disappointed. Rain was forecast and it was drizzling slightly as we loaded up our bags. We all dressed in rain gear from the outset. For some strange reason 9:30 had become the norm for leaving and it happened again, with Bushy taking time to secure his enormous bags to his rack. Naoko wore just sandals on her feet – why get socks wet?

We cycled south initially into Pembrey Forest then turned east. On a good day the scenery would have been magnificent but the rain was coming down harder and we just cycled on. After 12 miles we stopped at the Llanelli Discovery Centre (pinching its name from the Great Ayton Discovery Centre) to get out of the rain for a time and to have refreshments. After quite a time we realised that the rain was not stopping and that we would have to cycle on in the rain. Jeff, with great skill (or luck), found the way back onto route 4 after we initially cycled along a sandy path leading into the sea. Mike was near the back and just ahead of B&B when he heard Bushy shout out, “BRIDGET! We are taking the train.” Bridget’s face changed into a delighted smile, and this time she did not fall off into an electric fence.

The intrepid six cycled on – we were not for wimping out! The rain was constant and the path was firm sand so the pace was slow but mile by mile we were closing on our destination. Then with 10 miles to go Mike had a puncture. Alec came back to help whilst the rest cycled just out of sight then stopped and gradually became colder. Mike and Alec worked quickly to repair the tyre, and just when they were ready to go Alec remarked, “Mike, the tyre wall is split!”. Mike’s irregular heartbeat skipped a beat – would the tyre hold out for 10 more miles?



Mike & Alec re-joined the others and we cycled on in the rain. Mike heard his phone ring but didn't answer it as (a) it was too wet, and (b) it was likely to be Bushy being smug boasting how they had arrived in the lovely B&B and were having tea and cakes. With 5 miles to go the rain stopped and we were cycling on a tarmac cycle path directly towards the sea. We came upon a tree that had fallen right across the path. Three students were trying to move it and Alec and Jeff provided more muscle-power, whilst the ladies, Mike & Bushy stood back in admiration. Pam shouted, "Let me take a photograph." This is normally a good

excuse for not helping.

Mike's GPS guided the team straight towards the B&B when Bushy appeared to walk us the last few yards. We locked our bikes outside the B&B for all the world to steal and entered inside. Bushy threw himself on the floor, "I am so sorry for booking this dreadful accommodation," he blurted out. He looked so forlorn that we let him off especially when he told us that he had to repair a puncture for Bridget just outside the station.

The rooms turned out to be as bad as Bushy had warned us. The beds had thin mattresses and the dressing table doors would not shut. Alec and Ann had paid £86 for their room with a sea-view (£26 more than the other twin rooms) and there was no doubt that the view was good but cars were zooming past the window!

Our thoughts turned to whether we should continue as we had heard about much more rain and high winds for the next day. We congregated in the Kings' room, all except Ann, who had given Alec clear instructions to vote for going home, and Naoko, who told Mike she didn't have a view. The view of everyone except Jeff was to abandon the ride and to catch the train to Newport. Jeff was still enthusiastic to carry on – a definite masochist. After much more debate Jeff finally submitted. Mike, very mischievously, proposed that he phone Ann straight after Alec left the room to say that we had decided to continue – that would have created a few rows!

Bushy, with Mike's help, cancelled the Premier Inn that had been booked at Caerphilly. Mike phoned Ian Gofton, who had arranged to cycle with us the next day, to say that we were off home but hopefully he could join us in the pub. Fortunately the rain stopped in the evening and we walked, without getting wet, to the Wig Inn. Ian turned up just before 8pm looking very fit with the initial conversation being about hearts – Ian's heart attack; Bushy's heart pacer; Mike's irregular heartbeat. Ian then told us about the wonderful cycling in Wales, though did not mention the rain that must accompany most rides.

Friday 8th June - Train Swansea to Newport then home via Ashby



We awoke to more rain and this time Mike vowed to himself to leave by 9am to catch the 9:28 train. We were all down to breakfast just after 8am, and there was a choice of cooked or continental breakfast. Ann chose the cooked breakfast but then asked for a yogurt. "That is only with the continental breakfast," declared the owner. Ann, for once, was lost for words – she couldn't believe



she could be denied a yogurt when she had paid £86 for the room!

Mike & Naoko left at 9am on the dot with the rest leaving at 9:30 – as always. Everyone finally turned up at Newport with the cars still being there despite them being in the town of Newport. We all called in to see the Glynis and Roy, GASBAGS Midlands reps, at Ashby, and received a tremendous welcome.

We arrived back as a group outside Alec's house, with Alec, with a little prompting, asking us all in for a toast with whisky to the end of another very enjoyable but wet GASBAGS Annual Ride.

Mike Newton