

Cycling

1954

Most children at one time or another enjoy cycling and I was no exception. In fact at 66 years of age I still cycle but it must be stated, these days I am a fine weather and quiet road person. And after many years without having a car, I have recently brought one.

My wife found it difficult to believe I used to ride such distances when I related my cycling stories to my family. I was very proud of my cycle. I had started with second-hand cycles, later I had a Phillips which was also second-hand but a very good cycle, then when I could afford it graduated up to a new Dawes. To me it was the best cycle I ever had. I had saved the monies from a part time job I had as a grocer's delivery boy.

My mother had decided we would visit her mother who lived in South Cerney Gloucestershire, we were to go by train; I had other ideas, and immediately started making plans. I was a member of the Youth Hostels Association (Y.H.A.) and this was a great help in forming my plans.

First I studied the maps to decide a possible route. Next I looked in the Y.H.A. handbook to see if there were hostels near the route I intended to take, there was. My plans were going well. The first leg of the route was going to be the longest; I figured it would be some 80 miles that I would have to cover on the first day. This was from our house in Wimbourne Avenue near Redhill in Surrey to near Marlborough in Wiltshire. As I write this story I have just checked the mileage more accurately, I discover the mileage covered on the first day was just over 100.

I had sent a note to the Hostel a few days before to book a bed for the night. I set off at about 7 in the morning it was summer and fine weather. The route was as I had planned and I made good progress. The towns I passed were Reigate, Dorking, Guildford, and then north towards Reading, on to Newbury, Hungerford, and Marlborough. The hostel was about two miles further on from the centre of Marlborough and situated on the A4 towards Chippenham. The journey had taken about eleven and a half hours I had taken a short stop for sandwiches. Surprisingly I felt fine and looked forward to the next day; this would be a shorter trip.

The hostel was comfortable and I had a good nights rest, there was a first class breakfast in the morning, and I helped with the washing up afterwards. (This was one of the hostel rules in those days)

I was soon on my way, first back to Marlborough. Then turn north towards Swindon and then on to my destination near Cirencester. I arrived in South Cerney at about 1500. This had been a much shorter distance than the previous day, a distance of 25 miles. I was greeted warmly by my Mother and the Family. My journey was not over; I was less than half way through. I was in for a new experience and another great memory.

At about 1900 that evening I cycled to Ashton Keynes, where I had booked another hostel; this is a small village about 3 miles distant from South Cerney. From memory it was an old country farmhouse set in beautiful countryside. I listened to the radio with other guests and exchanged cycling stories, then went to bed in a dormitory at about 2200.

In the morning and after another good breakfast I helped with weeding the garden, there were three of us and we soon had the task finished. I then set off to return to South Cerney. My Mother and Grandmother were discussing a visit to Bristol where we had more relations. My mother would go by train from Kemel. My Mother wanted me to stay at South Cerney and return home the next day; I wanted to cycle to Bristol, eventually it was agreed. I set off before they changed their minds.

Bristol was 42 miles away and we had more relations living there by the name of Dowling; they lived in Sefton Park Road. I could afford to take my time on this ride, I was getting used to timing my distances.

I had taken to some back roads for several reasons first to avoid traffic, and it was the more direct route, although the traffic was nowhere near as bad as it is today in 2006. It was a beautiful day and I was going well. I was not far from the village of Lucklington between the towns of Malmesbury and Chipping Sodbury.



Sheep Shearing

Photograph Mick Gurr

There was a field to my left with a five bar gate and a lay by. There was some activity in the field, and two old farm wagons were parked just in the field behind the hedge. Laying my cycle to one side and taking a peek over the gate, I discovered the work was in progress, sheep sheering! Having never seen

this before or since this was exciting. I watched with great interest for about 15 minutes. The farmer looked up. "Fancy a go at this boy?" I needed no second invitation; I climbed straight over that gate. I was soon under instruction, first I had to catch the sheep, and they were all in a pen waiting their turn. Next select one, this done, take the animal to the shearing area and bring it to the ground. I must stress at this point the following account is from memory, and is not necessarily the right way to shear, or catch a sheep.

Grab the sheep's two hind legs and turn the animal on to its side, hold it down with one knee on the animal and one on the floor. Once the sheep has stopped wriggling, take the shears, and turn them on. Start at the neck working towards the back. Take care not to cut the animal by going too close to the skin. Once one side is complete roll the sheep over and do the same on the other side. Try your best to keep the entire fleece intact. It was my first and only attempt, unfortunately I did cut the sheep, but not too seriously and the fleece was in three parts.

However a great experience. I thanked the farmer. "Not bad for your first try lad" he said giving me a pat on the back. I felt good about that comment. I was soon on my way to Bristol, it was an uneventful ride.

One thing I had overlooked, and that was to book accommodation in the Bristol Hostel. "Well," said the man who answered the phone. "You should really book two days in advance for this hostel, but we have a place in the dorm, see you later." This Hostel was a tired looking place and so were the people running it, that's about all I remember. The following morning I was back in Sefton Park Road, Uncle Cecil was a nice man and a factual sort of chap. We seemed to get on well, however there were other things on my mind. It occurred to me that I did not want to be around on Sunday or else I would be trapped and be obliged to attend the Sunday meetings.

It was a Thursday. I set off and cycled the same route on my return journey, and I stayed at the same hostels. The whole trip was rather uneventful. But I had a near miss accident with a motorcycle and some pedestrians in the town of Chipping Sodbury. I arrived home on the Sunday evening; everything had worked out so well. The total miles covered were 341.