

JOES BIKE RIDE ACROSS THE PENNINES: 23RD – 24TH MAY 2013



This adventure starts in Southport and crosses to the East coast town of Hornsea 215 miles away, via Liverpool, Stockport, Penistone, Selby and Hull using the ‘Transpennine Trail’ (Tpt). The trail follows canal and river banks, country parks and disused rail tracks.

Planning for the adventure involved getting Tpt route maps and a special card obtained from the Tpt head office that required official stamps at the beginning, end and at 5 points along the journey. This provides Tpt officials with proof that the trail has been undertaken. They will then issue an official certificate of completion.

I booked 3 bed and breakfast stays. The first B&B was on the West coast, in Southport; the 2nd at Wordsey, 105 miles away. The last B&B was in Hornsea, the furthestmost point of Tpt on the East coast. At Southport the pre-booking arrangement with the B&B was that I could leave my car at the B&B until returning from Hornsea by train on the Saturday.

When I arrived at the B&B in Southport and reminded the proprietor of our agreement, he welched on the deal, saying the B&B car parking spaces were all needed for guests during my absence.

The road outside the B&B was wide and allowed unrestricted parking, so I felt the car would be safe and parked it there. I left the B&B business card on the dashboard, hoping that if anyone thought the car had been abandoned, they would connect its presence with the B&B.



At 6am on Thursday 23rd May I arrived with my bike in front of the Southport starting point and marked that moment in time with a traditional photograph. The previous day I had my record card stamped at Southport tourist office to officially register the journey.

The weather was dry and 7 degrees C. Nobody was about and conditions were ideal. Signage read that Liverpool was 25miles away. Off I started.



The trail was good and well signed. Within a couple of hours I arrived in Bootle to photograph a factory where I spent many years of boredom looking out of the window, not knowing that today I would be looking back at the factory, doing something more worthwhile and interesting.



Beyond the factory, the Tpt goes to road level where I was really pleased to discover a channel to the side of the steps, where the bike could be wheeled up or down.



The top of the steps surprisingly opened onto a road that overlooked 'Aintree' – the home of the Grand National, with a Bar named 'Red Rum' next door.

The Tpt then follows designated cycle lanes and well signed quiet roads through parkland to the picturesque village of Hale - a jewel in the crown of an otherwise urban jungle.

Onwards from Hale the Tpt goes past Halewood car factory (presently making Jaguar motor cars). The sound of aircraft could be heard in the distance. They were taxiing along the runway at Speke airport (now the John Lennon airport serving Liverpool)



The Tpt then followed the River Mersey towards and past the green bridge at Runcorn, then over the motorway leading to and from Manchester and Chester/ North Wales.

Over the years I have made countless journeys along that motorway and been stuck in traffic driving at a snail's pace over that bridge. The misery of those journeys was not any better this day, as rain clouds were rapidly approaching.

The route then followed a road passing the 'Patten Arms' in Warrington. This is where the Rt Hon John Prescott once worked as a Sous chef (a second in command position that seems to have been his role in life).

The Tpt then skirted through Altringham and was slower due to its narrowness and uneven ground.

The rain clouds had emptied out of the sky and made the water too wet for ducks.

With regret, the route I took went passed those ducks and they protested very loudly at having to get back into the water.



Arriving in Stockport the route gave a choice of cycling through or going around the outskirts of the town.

I chose the most direct route and went through the town centre, following Tpt signage until reaching the other side.

The route then went through Reddish Country Park - a hilly, muddy and bumpy track that was well signed at the beginning. Out of sight of the main road cowardly vandals spoil everything. Some Tpt signs were bent in the wrong direction; others were snapped off their posts. Stickers which arrowed the route to take where paths crossed had been scratched out. They were unreadable. When trying to get bearing from my Tpt trail map, I found that was also missing. It must have fallen from my pocket along the route. I was lost.

One of the thrills of touring by bike is getting un-lost. By listening to traffic sounds I rode in that direction to a main road and then a petrol station. Asking the way to Hadfield (where my recollection of the Tpt route continued onward to the Woodhead pass) nobody knew the way. The choice was either to abandon the ride or find a way around the dilemma.

Reaching into garage the ice cream freezer, the solution was found half way through a delectable choc ice - let the train take the strain! Off to Stockport station where a short rail trip to Penistone made up for lost time.



The Tpt route was well signed from Penistone railway station and what a grand route it is - smooth and fast. Having rested on the train, the energy boost of the choc ice powered the last 10 miles to my overnight stay in Wordsey, where a B&B had been prebooked. Arriving at my B&B at 7pm I had cycled 78miles from the 105 that would have been completed had I not got hopelessly lost.

Celebrating the ½ stage was done in great style with a gammon steak at a pub which is also a card stamping station. Afterwards I returned to the B&B, where the owner asked if I wanted to bring my bike in doors. The bike was really muddy so we agreed it was best left locked to his garden bench until the morning. I carry a gold standard 'D' lock and keep the key tied round my neck on a boot lace.

Although my mobile phone alarm was set for 5:30am I woke earlier with the sound of strong gales rattling the bedroom window and heavy rain lashing against the panes of glass. Fortunately I had a pot of powdered porridge in my pannier bag and with a drop of boiled water from the kettle, a breakfast of creamy porridge set me up for the day.

By 6am I was on the road for the last leg of this adventure. The temperature on my bike computer was reading 2.5c - fortunately overshoes, a double layer of trousers, triple top layer of clothing, sealskin gloves and a porridge breakfast kept the early chill away. Central heating for the next 10 hours was from cycling body heat.

Turning left onto the road outside the B&B the route took me to a major road, past a further route stamping station, a hotel on the outskirts of Barnsley. It was too early to call in and ask for my card to be stamped and too wet and windy to stop and take a picture of the place, but by 8am I arrived at Worsbrough Mill museum and would have loved to go inside for a warm mug of tea - no chance, they were closed!



Further cycle tracks took me alongside the river Don to Doncaster where the rain and gales were unceasing. A midday telephone call home was short - by not cycling, warmth was not being generated and coldness quickly set in. The journey of enjoyment risked being one of endurance as I continued onwards to Selby and then Hull.

The final leg of the journey is a 14mile track along a disused line that once linked Hull with Hornsea; although the rain had stopped the headwind was strong. Bearing down on the drops and in a low gear my 7mph speed resulted in a 2 hour journey. Half way along the trail I saw 2 high viz jackets cycling in the distance. After a mile or so I reached them as one of the cyclists has stopped for the call of nature. As they were ladies, I looked the other way and kept my camera in my coat pocket.



Arriving at Hornsea I photographed the end post and was approached by a chap who asked if he had seen 2 ladies on bikes travelling in this direction. I said '*yes and they would arrive shortly*'. He took me at my word, not knowing that I had chosen my words to avoid saying they were taken short!

That evening I took two baths in my B&B. The 1st bath was to get warm and the 2nd to get clean.



The next day I cycled by road back to Hull at an average speed of 18mph and arrived at the railway station within an hour.

Trains back to Southport were cyclist friendly, with 8 stacked in the cycling compartment from Manchester.

Saturday in Southport was warm and sunny where I celebrated adventures end with an ice cream on Southport promenade.

Advice to followers:

- Do it in 4 days. A 2 day trip does not allow time to enjoy the places being cycled through
- This uneven trail is not suited to road bikes. My tourer did it without damage or punctures
- Get a map holder fitted to your handlebar!