

Three Generations go to Paris

I took up cycling 12 years ago after my first heart attack to avoid a second one and joined my local Lancashire Road Club. It didn't and after a heart bypass operation 3 years ago I resumed cycling twice a week, subject to reasonable weather. My Son Andrew has always been a keen cyclist and I became quite jealous of his road trips.

One day he suggested that it would be a good idea to try London – Paris as a family together with his Sister Fiona. Dates were agreed, ferries and Accommodation were booked and we were committed. Fiona sadly had to back out with a back condition, but her eldest Son, Callum 13, offered to take her place Where upon Andrew's eldest Daughter, Rowan 12 also jumped at the chance.

Start date was Friday 31st August and we all met at Andrews in Tooting with far too much kit for the various bags we were taking. He soon sorted this out, bags were packed and we left mid morning for Newhaven. The route was not all that difficult, but the road surface over the Surrey Hills was fairly rough. Sufficient for me to lose one clip on the newly purchased Raceblades Pro mudguards as I discovered later. I must learn to check all bolts before starting out! Callum is already over six foot and frequent snack stops were needed to fuel his engine. However we got to Lewes for our last top up by 16.00hrs. A leisurely coffee then on to Newhaven for a pre ferry evening meal

Loading did not start till nearly 23.00 hrs, but for once the bikes went on first and we asleep soon after, until our alarm call at 03.30 hrs to be ready for arrival at Dieppe 05.30 hrs (French

time +1hr) Dieppe was fast asleep, the air was cold and a low mist hung over the harbour. I was quite surprised that we did not see any Avenue Vert signs until we reached the roundabout where your excellent guide notes advised us to turn right. Turning on to the old railway line the mist was much thicker and if anything it was colder. My tip is wear long sleeve tops and arm and leg warmers plus good gloves. As I was designated back marker, I found staring at 3 blinking red lights is quite wearing so switch rear lights to constant in consideration. As the sky slowly lightened we were beginning to warm up and at our first coffee stop we were able to sit in the sun. Suitably refreshed we continued and could really appreciate the French country side. When we left the Avenue Vert we could really appreciate the road surfaces and the patience and care taken by overtaking motorists, quite a change from round Manchester!

Our second night was spent at Fleury about 75 miles from Dieppe a pleasant Auberge with excellent food but all the grandchildren wanted were Pizzas.

The last stage into Paris was bathed in sunshine and really warm. A few hills were conquered and then a steep drop down to the Seine at Triel. We all flew down it but beware there is one tight right hand bend half way down and there are traffic lights at the bottom round a left bend with no warning signs. I do wonder how many French cars have been rear ended by bikes unable to stop at the bottom.

The paths through the woods were lovely and the shade was appreciated. I was riding my carbon road bike with 23mm tyres and had no problems apart from the odd tree root. Skirting Versailles we entered another forest and eventually arrived at Eiffel's aqueduct which was open after some work over the

Seine again then dropped down into the city aiming for the Eiffel Tower. On the way we enjoyed mixing it with the track cyclists round the Hippodrome Circuit Rowan got quite competitive as she practices at Herne Hill track in London. Soon we were caught up in the tourist crowds also aiming for the Tower. We made it, the last day was about 65 miles, my computer had stopped working. That evening in the Hostel Andrew and I had a few beers and the Grandchildren had celebratory Burgers.

The return on Eurostar was a first for me but all went smoothly. We cycled to the Gare du Nord after breakfast and left our bikes to go on an earlier train. We could then explore Paris but we had to remove all our bags and carry them with us so we must have looked like Economic Migrants. The bikes were collected at St Pancras and I experienced the Capital's wide cycle and bus lanes back to Tooting for a well earned rest.