

## 19<sup>th</sup> September 2022 – Day 0 (Travel – Tring to Whitehaven)

**0800** – Arrived at Martin’s and unloaded the bike, parked the car and started getting my stuff together. It was great to see Martin after so long, and also got to say hi to Rachel and met Robbie (dog) for the first time.

Martin kindly prepared some bacon butties and we filled up on tea and coffee.

**0920** – Spent a few moments fiddling about with the “Backloader” tailpack on my bike and Martin with his Panniers, making sure all was secure and off we went to Tring station to catch the 1058 to Milton Keynes on our first leg of the journey. We were somewhat in the lap of the gods as we already knew the 1141 from Milton Keynes to Crewe had been cancelled.... The biggest concern was whether we could get our bikes on a later train, as our bike bookings were held for the connecting trains we would miss.

**1000** – Arrived at Tring station and went straight to the ticket office to check on options. The lady there was helpful, saying we could use any train with our



tickets. She couldn’t help with the bike reservations though, so that was still up in the air. We went down to the platform and saw a family on the platform opposite struggling with an upside down bike that clearly had an issue. Asked if they needed help (we had time to kill after all!) and they were very appreciative. So I popped over to the other platform with my multi tool. The chain had come off and jammed in the full chainguard on the bike. Removed the chainguard and re-seated the chain. All in time for them to catch their train! Good deed for the day done!

We then settled in for a wait on the platform.

At this point, Martin revealed the massive feast he’d chucked in his panniers. We weren’t going hungry!

**1058** – Boarded the train helped by a nice bloke with a bike who told us where best to put the bikes, and which side to get off at MK. Can't beat a friendly cyclist!

**1119** – Rolled into Milton Keynes and set about checking options to get to Crewe. What this trip has taught us is that asking staff on the ground often gets a better result than phone or ticket office! We were told by a lady working at the station that there were a couple of options to Crewe – 12:13 and 12:19, but that the train at 12:19 would overtake the earlier one. No bike reservation needed. Result! She suggested asking the booking office to check for bike reservations from Crewe. So off I went to the ticket office



whilst Martin scouted out the platform. Ticket office said there was a train at 1450 from Crewe to Carlisle but with no bike availability – He was able to get us on the 1509 from Crewe though. That was a relief. Bit of a layover in Crewe but good enough. We had a coffee in Milton Keynes then got onto the 1219 and loaded the bikes into the disabled section. Bit wobbly, but good enough. Started tucking into Martin's feast – Talk about carb loading!



**1404** – Crewe! Over an hour to wait. Bar closed, weird platform layout, but grabbed a cold drink at WHSmith Kiosk. Not the greatest of stations to be stuck at. We did find the bike loading point though and briefly considered a "Platform TT" when we were bored. Martin actually bought and ate a Bounty (who even knew people eat them!).

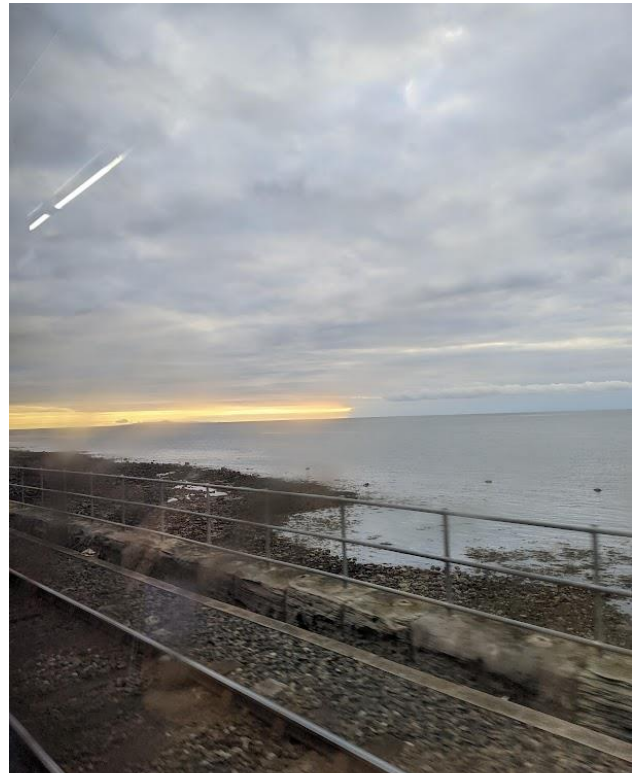
**1509** – Onto the train to Carlisle. Bikes loaded up on bike hooks and secured, then we managed to get seats in the carriage in front of the bikes. Tucked into the rest of Martin’s crazy feast, even chucking an onion Bhaji to a fellow cyclist.

The train was due into Carlisle at 1700, and there was a train scheduled for Whitehaven at 1707. So we bought online tickets and then spent the next few hours watching our train’s schedule like a hawk. Could we make the connecting train?

**1503** - We rolled into Carlisle with minutes to spare. Bikes offloaded and we sprinted to the connecting platform. The train was just about to leave but they helped us on and we managed to get the bikes onboard.

A fascinating journey ensued on a railway line running right next to the sea. A few local “yoofs” came onboard a few stops later with bikes, so we were watching carefully!

We arrived in Whitehaven at 1816 – around 9 hours after leaving Martin’s house!



*The view from the coastal train*

We offloaded our bikes and set off on



*Looking up to the Lismore*

the very short cycle to the Lismore guest house. Looked like a simple route, but for a massive hill up to the guest house (a sign of things to come). Spotted a ‘spoons nearby for later on. Got up the hill and were greeted by Brian, who stored our bikes away safely and gave us the key for the room. We



*Cheap Beer!*



quickly freshened up, then headed out to check the C2C start. After that we grabbed a pint at a slightly odd pub (great pint though), a Biryani at Akash – Then a £2.19 pint at ‘spoons (The Bransty Arch). Then back up the hill and off to bed!

## 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022 – Day 1 – Whitehaven to Alston

**0720** – A nice early start for breakfast – The hugest bowl of porridge I’ve ever had + eggs and bacon. Brilliant start to the day. Then loaded up the bikes, slapped on the chamois cream and headed for the start point!

**0822** – As tradition dictates, we dipped our rear wheels in the Irish sea and then set off with 80 miles ahead of us and copious amounts of climbing. Alston here we come! Nervous anticipation gave way to quiet cycle lanes with a gentle continuous climb – Only really busy with walkers and the school run kids and parents. The cycle path was a little tree-root rutted in places, but overall a pleasant route!

Just past Rowrah, we hit a few quiet roads on our way to Beautiful Loweswater. No major



*The start of the C2C*

climbs up until then, but we knew they were coming! Loweswater



*Stunning views of Cumbria*



*Loweswater*

gave us some stunning views, and we stopped to take a few pics and refuel at just under 18 miles.



*Whinlatter Forest*

**1010** – We left Loweswater behind us and travelled on small quiet roads until we reached the Whinlatter pass – The first real test of the day with around 750ft of climbing over 3 miles. About half of this climb was road, and some of it on a forest path, where we found the obligatory logpile! The route also took us through the Whinlatter Forest trail which gave us an exhilarating downhill on loose slate type gravel. Martin had a bit of a “brown trousers” moment on that one!

We exited Whinlatter forest at around the 28 mile mark, knowing that Keswick was not much further to go. We had a fairly flat run into Keswick from

Whinlatter and decided to grab a coffee and snack at the “chief justice of the common pleas” pub - a former magistrates’ court and police station which was built in 1901–2, remaining in use until 2000. Quite a strange building!

**1222** – After refilling our water bottles we headed out of Keswick, planning to stop for food at Penrith. We took the railway path option to Threlkeld, which reopened in December 2020 after Storm Desmond made the path unusable in 2015. There were a lot of walkers on this path so we had to go slowly and carefully, but it’s a really well maintained route and an excellent way of keeping off the roads. We then headed off up to a really beautiful cycle way to Mungrisdale. This part of the route could easily be left out, but was really well worth riding. The only annoying part was the sheer number of gates!



*Mungrisdale Cycle Path*





Lots of sheep around though, so it's understandable. Once at Mungrisdale, we turned almost 180 degrees and headed back in roughly the same direction on a minor road with stunning views. We were so lucky with the weather, and the cloud cover was really helping as it kept us from overheating on the climbs! (More about that later!).

We then joined a cycle path that ran alongside a busy road with a steady laborious climb that sapped our strength a bit, but then quickly turned us off onto a quiet road up to Greystoke. The quiet roads were pretty much a continuous feature as far as Penrith, and had a gentle downwards slope which definitely helped us to keep going, especially with a late lunch ahead of us!



We then turned off at Newton Rigg around the back of college buildings and onto a bridleway. This came out near Penrith, where we went down a quiet road before getting into town.

**1435** – Arrived in Penrith and looked around for somewhere to eat. Ended up Chapter 12 coffee rooms where we were offered Spicy Courgette soup with the biggest cheese scone I've ever seen! The staff were really filling us with



confidence telling us we had a massive climb ahead, as was the

chap sat next to us. He was bizarrely working from the café after dropping his ebike in for a service in the morning. He had no choice but to wait as he had a driving ban so it was his only form of transport.....



**1510** - So with a degree of Trepidation, we set off from Penrith, with no more stops until Alston! This was going to be a tough final 24 miles with a LOT of climbing!

We started out with a bit of a kick out of Penrith, getting the climbing legs on



immediately! Up on the pavement through temporary lights, then onto a flattish section. We crossed the River Eden at Langwathby Bridge, which had a small section for cycles and pedestrians, then went through some undulating scenery before passing through Renwick



and reaching the base of the Hartside Pass – The one we'd been warned about!

This really was a tough climb, but with spectacular scenery. We dug in and set about getting up it...

Slowly but surely. This took us just over an hour and Martin had the legs for the final push to the main road when I was flagging a bit by then! We stopped for a photo call at the summit – 1903 Feet! Not bad for a couple of old timers. Glad we got to the top for the spectacular views.



Luckily for us, it was all downhill into Alston from then, with sweeping descents on well surfaced roads giving us a well needed break from pedalling! We rolled into Alston just before 6pm – Perfect timing. Our bed for the night was at the rather odd Victoria Inn. A really weird guest house that hadn't seen a lick of paint



or a new carpet for about 40 years. Definitely needed a bit of TLC. Martin graciously took the ensuite room, leaving me with the shared bathroom and shower. Although I'm not entirely sure I had the worse deal 😊

Even on a Tuesday night in Alston you need to pre-book a table at pretty much the only eatery in town – The Cumberland Inn. We had a few decent pints, Steak & Ale pie, followed by sticky toffee pudding. Perfect set up for day 2.



Alston is a pretty town, and the highest market town in England. It's a bit of a one horse town though – Without the horse!

Stats for Day 1 – 80.24 Miles, Moving time 7h46m, Altitude gained 7487ft

21<sup>st</sup> September 2022 – Day 2 – Alston to Sunderland

**0730** – After braving the shower that needs a vice like grip to operate – We sat down to a full English which was a tad ropery – Not sure how you can completely burn a grilled tomato, but it was! Still – It did set us up for the morning but we would be carb loading a bit later.

**0815** – We loaded up the bikes and set off from Alston – Literally climbing from the second we left the guest house! Oh well – We're used to it! Quite a crisp morning with the sun out and it wasn't very long before we ditched the gilets. A beautiful day for cycling.

After a few undulations, we travelled through the pretty village of Nenthead, as shown in the guidebook. A very

pretty village, just 5 miles or so from Alston. No stops for us just yet though!

We continued on after Nenthead, up a very steep climb before turning left into even more climbing! The climb after Nenthead was so steep that you couldn't even see the tarmac behind you due to the road dropping off – Clearly demonstrated by this pic of Martin reaching the top.



*Nenthead*



The C2C passes through Cumbria, Northumberland, County Durham and Tyne & Wear.

Next we had an amazing descent into Allenheads, where we tried to get a coffee, but sadly the small farm café was closed. It was a nice short rest though after 11.5 miles.

We knew there was a short, sharp climb coming up next, but only the 2<sup>nd</sup> but last climb.

Most of the climbing on day 2 is in the first 20 miles though, so you can really attack them as you don't really need your legs too much after that. The remaining miles are either flat or downhill into Sunderland.

After Nenthead we were into Northumberland – The first county change since starting in Whitehaven!



Allenheads



**0957** - At the top of that climb, we entered County Durham, on our way to Rookhope – Where a few surprises awaited us. The scenery was changing from Cumbrian fells to grouse moors and small villages.

The sweeping descents on this road were almost spookily free of traffic, and we passed a long since abandoned lead mine (Groverake



*Groverake Mine*

mine) as we descended towards Rookhope. It was sad to see the abandoned buildings where a community had once thrived, but the scenery was strikingly beautiful.

**1022** - Our next stop took us into the small village of Rookhope, where we found a small post office and corner

shop. Martin fancied carbing up with oat cookies from the store and we munched those at the side of the road before taking our bearings and working out where to go next. We set off up the road before realising that we needed to double back and head off up a gravel track.

One slight problem- Under the C2C sign there was an old dented “CLOSED TODAY” notice.

Curious.

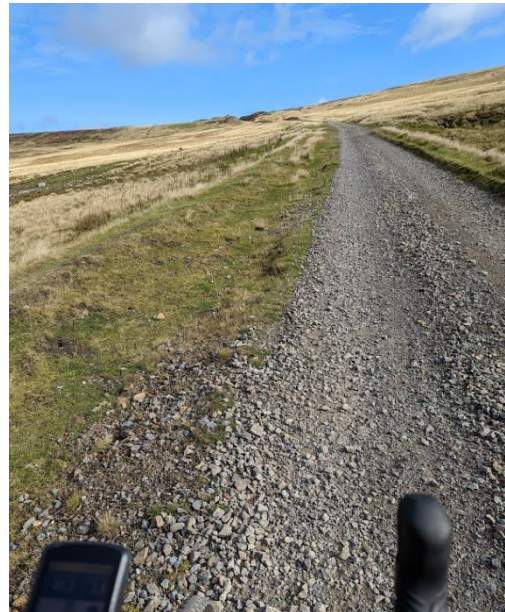
We spoke to the lady at the post office and she explained that there are often Grouse Shoots there, and they close the track as



*Rookhope Post Office & Shop*

a result. She wasn't sure if there was one on that day or if the sign had just been left there by mistake.

Since the alternative route would take us a really long way round, we decided to plead ignorance and just head on up the track. What a climb though! The loose gravel and the really steep gradient ended up with us pushing part of the way, and then we heard a lot of 4x4s roaring up the lane behind us. Yep – The shooting party! So it WAS closed after all. Hmm. Time to lay on the charm. The



*Rookhope Grouse moor*

lead Range Rover pulled up and asked us whether we had seen the closed sign or not. Martin

explained that we hadn't but also explained that we didn't wish to spoil their shoot and would be happy to wait for the all clear before passing through. The guy seemed ok with this and said we could wait at the top until the 3 hoots, after which we could pass. This seemed ok to us, so we carried on up with the drivers waving as they passed.





*Shooting party parked up near Rookhope*

Near the top a rickety old truck pulled up and again asked us whether we had seen the sign or not. We explained that the lead car said we were ok to go up, so the guy carried on and waited for us at the top.

We sat at the top whilst Grouse were flying over our heads and (sadly) into the line of fire for half an hr or so – Before the all clear came through.

**1125** - We set off again, but were stopped by a young guy dressed to the nines in a LOT of tweed. Looked like his first job fresh out of school! He didn't want to let us through until (after some

remonstrating) – It was explained to him that it was his boss who had agreed, and so he waved us on and we absolutely hammered it down an amazing flat gravel path through the Grouse moor before arriving at a really well surfaced minor road.

The view from here was amazing and the sun was shining. It was a little breezy





*The Waskerley Way*

though, with a crosswind that would soon be on our backs. What we hadn't realised is that we really should have been continuing on an old railway line. The road was really good though and provided us with a lovely view and a smooth surface for a few miles before we rejoined the original route – The

Waskerley way. A really fun gravel path with a few gates to stop for, that went on for a fair few miles before changing to a tarmac cycle way that went through Consett. Sometimes passing across roads, sometimes alongside main roads, but always on cycle paths. We saw the famous “Terris Novalis” sculptures on this section of the ride, and paused there to take a few pics before continuing on to Leadgate.



*Terris Novalis*

**1240** – In Leadgate, On one of the cycle paths round the back of a co-op – Martin's nose picked up the distinctive whiff of fish and chips so we doubled back and followed our noses to lunch, finding “Kler's Fish Bar” on Front St. Quite possibly the greasiest Fish & Chips I've ever had, but a welcome lunch nonetheless.



**1310** – We set off from Leadgate with a belly full of Fish & Chips on the final 25 miles of the trip. This took us along a brisk cycle path with a slight downhill gradient for some distance, which would have been quite a slog coming the other way against the wind! We passed Beamish & Stanley, and briefly touched the River Wear with 10 miles to go, before joining a cycle path alongside a busy main road, and then rejoining the river Wear with 7 miles remaining. We passed under the Northern Spire bridge and the Queen Alexandra Bridge before descending towards the mouth of the river and the promenade.



*Queen Alexandra Bridge*

**1515** - We'd made it! All that remained was the obligatory front wheel dip in the North Sea to complete the C2C, which we duly did.



the train station. We were quite worried as we didn't have our bikes booked on the train to Kings Cross, so there was a real danger of us not being able to get on the train. We had a short ride to the train station and a town centre that was really quite run down.

**Stats for Day 2 – 59.73 Miles, Moving time 5h24m, Altitude gained 3839ft**

Next step was to suss out how to get to



The ticket office wasn't much help as she just suggested we "Throw ourselves on the mercy of the chief guard"! Oh well – Lots of time to kill before the 1730 train so we popped into a shopping centre for coffee..... And promptly got kicked out because we had bikes propped up next to us.

Found a nice little bistro just off the high street called "The Engine Room" and managed to lock the bikes up within eyesight. Immediately got a few beers down us and had a really nice meal + freshened up and changed into normal clothes. Tried calling Grand Central (train company) but no joy there either.

**1700** – Cycled off to the train station and found the platform. There we saw a trio of Grand Central employees (1 lady, 2 guys) also waiting and asked about bikes – Martin throwing in "We were told to throw ourselves on the mercy of the chief guard". "That's me" replied the lady. Then they looked up details and said it wouldn't be a problem. She even met us at the end of the platform to help with getting the bikes on. Excellent customer service!

**1730** – Off we set to King's Cross! ETA 2107 and hoping to get the 2127 from Marylebone to Stoke Mandeville (probably a tad ambitious). Martin pulled out a



couple of (Large) Single Malt Miniatures to enjoy, and I ordered a few beers and water to be brought to us. Awesome! That's what I call a recovery drink(s).



We pulled into King's Cross a little later than hoped and quickly got the bikes off and our lights on and headed out on the road to Marylebone.

Except we didn't straight away because Knibbsy managed to stack it by not unclipping just outside the station – Cue much bemusement from pedestrians at the crossing as he went down. Thankfully uninjured.

**2110** – Finally set off on the way to Marylebone, arriving there at 2129. It was always going to be a stretch to make the 2127. So we grabbed a burger and some beers for the train and got on the 2157, arriving in Stoke Mandeville at 2249.

**2252** – We set off on the road back to Martin's, arriving at 2303 and straight off to bed! What a trip that was.

Thanks to Martin for a great few days on bikes, and thanks to both Martin & Rachel for their hospitality !

Really must do something like that again soon.

