

Caerphilly Club 2 day trail ride November 10/11th 2016.

A 6:45am meet at Crumlin Shell station was planned and the early morning rain forced us under the hand car wash shelter. It was still dark but with a flick of a switch we even had floodlights, luxury!

15 riders on the latest and greatest dirt biking exotica. More bling than you could shake a stick at. A general combination of 2 & 4 stroke ridden by either; 'Welsh Welsh', 'Welsh Italian' or 'Welsh English'.

Big Nige laid down the law on just who was gonna be opening the gates all day and threatened to name and shame any shirkers.

Vance had arranged the courier to transport the Saturday night glad rags so only a handful needed to carry rucksacks.

After the usual banter and complaining about the weather we hit the road and within 30 seconds hit our first lane which was a combination of stoney track and mud covered in wet leaves and in total darkness, was a hell of a warmup.

As we returned to Tarmac and moved up the mountain we climbed into the mist and fog which threatened to separate us it was so dense and made it all the more tricky to ride the rutted track. More Tarmac took us through upper Cwmbran before heading east in search of more mud. The going was quick considering the large amount of riders and as the daylight slowly made an impression we settled into a brisk pace whilst operating to our gating orders.

A couple of tricky technical lanes and stream crossings saw bikes being dropped and feet getting wet but thankfully no stoppers. One narrow lane forced a turnaround after a swollen crossing proved too deep.

We made good progress towards Glascoed and then turned North towards Abergavenny using a combination of tight trails, overgrown tracks and flowing lanes all linked by tarmac. A loop around Abergavenny gave us the chance to ride some great challenging lanes before heading back into town for our first fuel stop and coffee break. From here we ride north into the black mountains heading for Llandewi Skirrid and on to Llantony, close to the border of England. As we climbed higher over Hay Bluff and on through the Gospel Pass, the highest road in Wales, the weather improved and the wide ranging views of the Golden Valley, the Wye Valley and beyond into Powys and Herefordshire opened up ahead of us.

The ride down into the valley took us through some flowing leafy trails as we skirted Hay on Wye and headed for Glasbury garage for a spot of lunch. Breakfast rolls and coffee were just the ticket.

The banter was flowing and it was becoming apparent that little Nige was not at all happy with the recent money he'd spent on upgrading the brand new XTrainer suspension as recommended by the thumper forums and was busy swapping bikes with anyone who was up for it - only for each person to give it back rapid telling him how horrible it was. So with Andrew on Nigel's bike and Nigel on Andrews bike we were off again into the Begwyn mountains heading north.

The mountain range is an open moorland with great views and criss crossing roads running in all directions. By now the weather was improving and the sun was breaking through. The roads were flowing but slippery and grip was at a premium. 3 of the team were only along for the day so the time had come for them to peel off. For the rest of us lay more new trails as we explored deeper into the mountains along varying and challenging terrain. Vance took a tumble on a fast rutted track and slid his new bike along the trail for 30 feet but no harm done only broken pride and a few gouges in the mountain.

The drop off the moors took us to the bye way heading north through a series of gates for Llangfihangel and then after some road work on to the bye way at water break its neck following it north on the flowing trail before taking the road west towards Crossgates and on to Rhayader arriving at the White Lion, our digs for the night by 4:15pm in good time to shower and get to the bar before the rugby kicked off.

The log fire was ticking over nicely as we tucked into a well-earned pint while watching Wales beat Argentina. Chicken and chips in a basket at half time plus a slice of victoria sponge topped it off, all that was left, in true Caerphilly Club tradition, was to crash somebodies party. Sure enough some guy was fifty and was having a bit of a disco in a marquee at the pub down the road so after a pub crawl and a decent drink we joined in, had a bit of a dance and toasted the birthday boy whilst enjoying the banter with the pub landlady and her two lovely, lively daughters before getting off to bed by 2.00am.

A cracking Full Welsh Breakfast gave us a good start and thanks to our hosts drying room in the kitchen we were fully kitted up in dry clothes and ready for the off by 10:30 am which was about perfect since, being Remembrance Sunday, the roads were due to close in readiness for the service.

First stop was ET James for some juice then we made our way as quietly as we could around the town avoiding the Town Centre hoping to be as respectful as possible.

We headed North West to pick up the bye way which offered a fast flowing stone track with water filled ruts that shook out the hangover. We met the metalled road after a few miles and headed west towards Elan and on to Cwmystwyth before heading into the hills. This area is famed for the proliferation of windmills and better known as the windmill check on the Welsh 2 Day Enduro. Some broken Tarmac and forest roads led us further into the back of beyond and after some serious exploring Richard Smith needed some help to extract his bike from a field full of chopped sticks that was unrideable. Some interesting slab rock climbs provided enough of a test to keep things interesting, and needing several attempts, so much so that we were still in the area at 2pm when the weather began to close in and the mist descended. With just a couple of daylight hours remaining we starting to head south on the road to Pontrhyddfendigaid and the splashes and crossings of Strata Florida.

The splashes were noticably deep after the rain a day earlier and as we hit the deepest of them we drowned every one of the 2 stroke bikes in the puddle that was sixty feet long and deep enough to go over the front mudguard. 30 minutes of carb draining and tank removal ensued whilst the 4 stroke boys took a breather, took some photos or offered to help with the spanners.

We completed the river crossings and hit the road around the Irfon forest to reach Beulah petrol station for a fuel up in both senses.

We set off towards Builth 25 minutes later knowing we needed to crunch some road miles south before dark. We headed over the mountain to Garth and dropping down through Upper Chapel, Lower Chapel and on into Brecon town. We skirted the town heading south and kept to the road heading for Talybont where we skirted the lake and climbed the winding road over the mountain before dropping through the forest and around the mountain along the boggy trails in the dark to the quarry where we waited patiently for a broken down KTM 250 to be towed through the bogs. After several attempts to get the bike running we gave up and with no power or lights the bike was gonna have to be towed home. With the strap on the foot peg it was an Italian job for the brothers and they went all of five feet before dropping the bike and dragging it on the tow rope for another fifteen feet. The second attempt went smoother and we set off on tarmac south to the road. Traveling down through Tredegar town we rode four abreast behind the towed bike taking the road south towards Blackwood at 30mph at most, still four abreast barely breaking rank like some kind of slow moving funeral procession for the broken bike. The brothers peeled off at Markham and headed home as did the rest of us one by one.

Another great 2 day adventure that was memorable for all the right reasons. Thanks as usual to Big Nige for the navigation, remarkable!

An awesome couple of days riding through some of the best country that Wales has to offer. Roll on the next one!

Ride report Ian Craig.