

Destination Dolgellau, the annual pilgrimage Spring 2 day trailride 2015

After a week of warm sunshine the forecast was for heavy rain and a drop in temperature by Friday night - typical. The 6am start meant a 4.30am alarm for some, it was gonna be a long day!

A good size group of 8 four strokes comprised a few regulars plus some newbies to the 2 day ride. 499cc was the most favoured engine size – particularly if you're a wheelie merchant.

By 6.15 we were blatting up the road to Ebbw Vale. Over the mountain road to Llangynidr and onto Bwlch after a brief stop for the first breakdown of the day, a broken split link on Ian's 350exc. Bwlch to Llangorse, Talgarth and on to Glasbury garage as they opened at 7am. A fuel up and a quick coffee and we hit the first lane over the Begwns on route to Painscastle. Heading for Hundred house we were making good time through the showers despite a stop every five minutes for Jason to take his jacket liner out, then back in, then back out, then back in.....it was gonna be a long day!

By 9.30am as we rode past Llandod Golf club, the heavens opened and a fast dash to the garage was called for to prevent a soaking. Time for breakfast and a chance for the rain to blow over.

Literally fuelled up, we set off south to Dissert and out towards Newbridge on Wye and over the mountain heading for Elan village. A brief stop to chat about bikes with the local farmer on his quad took us to the Claerwen valley and the byway alongside the western side of the valley. Despite the weather the river was low and easily crossed at the ford under the farm. Up the tarmac road and into a fast blast around Claerwen Res. This stoney road is rough and was dry enough to throw up a lot of dust providing an adrenalin rush for some of the boys especially on the corners with nothing but fresh air between the road and the water 50 feet below. By half way round the 9 mile loop the race faces were definitely on, Richard Smith setting the pace and chased by several 500cc missiles. By the time we reached the wooden cattle bridge Vance had had his knee down on every corner, showing his road race roots. But there's not many wet timber bridges on a race track and maybe trying to jump it was a bit ambitious. Fair play, in true race fashion, after sending the bike sliding across the bridge and 30 yards down the gravel road, he jumped straight back on it without barely breaking stride and was full throttle into the next bend – it'll end in tears, or, it's gonna be a long day!

The ride along the winding road through the 'Desert of Wales' whilst overlooking the Teifi pools was cut short as Big Nige had a detour planned. A hidden gem, the Claerwen Bothy is a gorgeous little cottage fully equipped for visitors and enough space for a large family. We had a look around, took the photo opportunity and promised another visit but next time with sleeping bags.

Off again along the winding road, the rain clouds chased us across the mountain to Devils Bridge before dropping into Ponterwyd for petrol and a pastie. A large group of Scramblers arrived just after us and after some interrogation Nige established they too were off to Nant-y-Moch. They turned left, we turned right and headed for Nant-Yr-Arain and on to the Byway through the Red Kite centre. The lane around the forest and across the mountain took us to the river crossing at the farm – this infamous crossing is a bike trap, Barnaby likes to take a dip whenever he visits, today was Kipsy's turn. Feet up, following the Smith brothers he didn't wait for the water to clear and a little stumble turned into a full lie down for the big 500, Gareth was quick enough to hit the kill button but

the airbox was under water - as was Gareth! Five minutes of frantic air filter drying and the 500 fired into life – we were off again.

Up the road to Nant-y-Moch we took the mountain road and onward to Pen Pulumon Fawr, Plynlimon, for a photo opportunity and a brief chat about the geology of Ceredigion, breathtaking!

Running down toward Maccy the terrain was drying out and the jagged slate surface was generating a few missed heartbeats for the boys running tubes – sure enough, as we hit the road Richie felt the wobble so we stopped in someone’s driveway and hoisted the KTM up on the stand, wheel off. After checking the tyre twice, no evidence of stray nails suggested a pinch puncture so Richie whipped out the unopened, uber expensive, Austrian Adventure bike repair kit that he had paid so much for and stuck a patch on the KTM original Pirelli Tube. Big Nige was on hand to help re-insert the tube with 3 stubby little levers and Richard Smith came to the rescue with some bottled air, a pity he didn’t close the valve before breaking the seal on the bottle, oops. Luckily he had another 10 bottles in his bum bag! It soon became apparent that Big Nige’s levering might have been a bit on the rough side, the tire went flat. Off she comes again, a bit more practice. Half hour later, with a spare, old 21inch tube fitted we were off again. Richie, by now, was talking about going home but he thought better of it and stuck around, although Vance thought it may be ‘Time of the month’.

From Maccy we did some new stuff that took us over the mountain then on to some familiar trails until the customary stop above Barmouth and the picture postcard view of the estuary. Vance nearly didn’t make it that far, flat out (sat down) around a blind bend there appeared in the right hand rutt a woman on a go cart with a little kid sat on her lap, bizarre! Alongside her, in the other rutt, was her boyfriend/husband who was on a monkey bike! A family outing – why not, both are doing like 20mph and none have crash helmets – probably not something Vance was expecting, on a dirt road in the middle of bloody nowhere! Luckily for Vance, the woman must have been a Ladies British Champion or someat, she flicked the cart out of the rutt and down the middle, whizzing past Vance without a second glance, her boyfriend pissing himself laughing! We celebrated life with a winegum whist enjoying the view of Barmouth Bridge.

Down off the mountain we did a small loop above the town before heading for the bridge and posed for pictures half way across. On the other side we rode through town and took the narrow road to the mountain and on to stepping stones for a spot of pushing and shoving. The terrain here is rough, damn rough, pounding, punishing, and after 10 or so hours in the saddle the boys were starting to suffer. As we rolled down off the mountain the light was beginning to fade and the fast blast up the road to the Dolan Uchaf bunkhouse was very welcome to some of the less fit members of the ride, ahem! Over 230 miles and 14 hours in the saddle – must be a record!?! It had been a long day!

As usual, by the time we showered we hit the town by about 8.55pm – five minutes before last orders were being taken for meals, we four ordered from the menu and four Gammon steaks ordered for the boys in the second taxi, job done. By the time we sat down we fancied some garlic bread to start, so having scooped a couple of slices each, Big Nige fancied some more, plus some chips, so along with the gammon we ended up with 3 sacks of potatoes chipped and 16 baguettes soaked in Garlic butter, we made sure to inform the waitress that we didn’t order that much – so she took them off the bill, eyes bigger than your belly eh? The waitress wasn’t complaining, she had a little sideline in late night taxi driving and skinned us for two trips to the bunkhouse which, to be fair, got us to bed about 2 hours before the next Dolgellau taxi was available!

A thick frost was Sunday, beautiful blue sky over the mountains, not a cloud. No need for waterproofs. We scoffed an awesome cooked breakfast and were on the road by around 11am, a brief stop for fuel at the garage at the end of the road and a quick strip of the clutch for the Beta 450 owned by our ride leader – and we were off again, with a squealing Beta.

Up through the lanes we picked up some neat trails and tarmac to loop round to Brithdir. Some road work took us to 'Lears Lane' and a blood pumping 10 minute warm up which was noticeably clearer than previous years. Back on the road we flew down through the mountains past Cadar Idris and around the lake at Tal-y-Llyn and on to Abergynolwen towards Tywyn. From there we took the slippery track through the woods and on to the mountain road with a stunning view out over the west coast and the estuary at Aberdovey. The weather was wonderful and the riding was fast, getting faster. From the mountain we picked our way through the rocky path at Happy Valley and at the end Big Nige needed a stop for technical problems – the beta's clutch was slipping for Britain. 20 minutes of tinkering and the dreaded word was mentioned – recovery! On the road we headed for the garage at Maccy, the Beta screaming all the way. At the garage, Nige tried his breakdown 0800 number options before realising his other bike was covered but not this one! Where are your mates when you need them? Step up Jase Gurnett with Green Flag, what a man!

So off we went again, Nige on Jason's bike, West towards the coast, this time we would take in some new stuff on the loop around to Ponterwyd, fast, open mountain tracks all the way in to Nant-Yr-Arian. A brief stop at Ponterwyd and a fast blast down the road with Vance knee down around the curves at Duffryn Castell, we took the forest road to the mountain and over to Rhayader. With another detour for a stop at another bothy for a look after a fast ride through the Windmills. Some fast road work took us to the lanes outside Builth where Richie decided to practice his puncture repair skills (again), the 21inch tube in the rear had given up and so had Richie, he borrowed a tube, fixed the puncture and rode home on the road with his visor steamed up!

Down to six, we rode the lanes outside Builth and the tarmac toward Talgarth. We followed the road with a view of Llangorse lake and rode the mountain to Bwlch fast, on the pegs, with aching backs. Down the hill and over Llangynidr bridge we took the last lane of the day up through the farm to the mountain and the road to Beaufort and the split down the valley's . It was around 6pm and we'd managed over 400 miles and over 20 hours in the saddle, bloody awesome! Thanks once again to Big Nige, fat nav, amazing, and to the wheelie boys, entertainment at 60mph on the highway, but most of all to Jase who took one for the team and had a ride home in the recovery truck while we all enjoyed the rest of the day – there's a pint over for you Jay!

Check out the photos in the Gallery at CMC&LCC.

Ride report Ian Craig.