

## Swindon CTC's Brecon weekend trip

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We arrived at Brecon on the Friday from all directions; from the east, from the south and even from the north! There were eight of us; Amanda (leader), Ginny, Mike, Ben, Stuart, Robin, Kevin and Andy. The advanced stouts checked out the town for a suitable watering hole whilst the others turned up, some under the cover of darkness.

Saturday morning found the campers like a bottles of white wine; dry but slightly chilled in a campsite with lovely panoramas of the Brecon Beacons in the distance. The peace and quiet was unfortunately disturbed by a young and noisy dog barking at any bird that sang or any cow that mooed

Kickoff was 9.30am but due a technical problems departure was delayed. Finally, six of use set off along the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal toll path. We were heading for the Taff trail and an out and back trip to Merthyr Tydfil. This group remained split from the other two cyclists for over half the day, unfortunately.

As you will see from the photos the weather was excellent. The sun shone all day and the winds were light.

The toll path wound down the rather green valley to Abergavenny but we missed the Taff trail turning at Talybont and did another few miles before noticing the mistake and turning back. The first part of the trail was rather unpleasant because the surface was rocky and damp. It ascended a narrow track through woods and immersed at the dam on Talybont reservoir. Here was an excellent photo opportunity and a spot of elevenses.

We had the choice of either the road on the west of the reservoir or the more adventurous forestry commission track on the east side. We choose the later and were rewarded with un-Wiltshireque views across the valley to the hills beyond through breaks in the forest. The surface of the track was much better here and a long steady climb for half an hour or so brought us to the edge of the forest and the high point of the Taff trail. This was our lunch spot. Loads of other cyclists came and went include a large school group on a sponsored ride who we had seen back in Brecon and had obviously had got as lost as we had.

The next section was easy. We descended the south side of the col, pass two more reservoirs and then followed an old railway line down to Merthyr. There on the outskirts we had to make do with a rather basic cafe and turned around. As if by magic the Ben and Stuart turned up and we were a complete group again.

Just as we left the Merthyr's industrial landscape, along the bank of the stream we passed a Falconer. The man had an American Harris Hawk and was flying it around the trees and back to his car. After a lot of chatting he allowed Andy to take the Falconer's glove and fly the bird himself. It was unnerving having a large bird of prey flying straight for you, wings open wide and claws outstretched.

Amazingly most of us found the climb back up to the high point less arduous second time around, however, Mike had to cope with a puncture caused by a nail through his tire.

Then it was all downhill to Brecon. One group used the road a second group went back down the forestry track. Amazingly the two groups reached the end of the reservoir at almost the same time.

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The rest of the route was a joy; down narrow country lanes, back along the canal toll path and through the pleasant streets of Brecon. We had done approx 50 miles through tremendous scenery.

After our showers we completed a splendid day by drinking beer and watching the sunset from the campsite; chilly but worthwhile.

Not everybody who cycled made it to the pub that evening. Obviously, room for improvement next time!

That was not the end of the Saturday excitement either. On returning to the campsite we found a disco was in full 'swing' in the campsite bar. Only when somebody got carried away when they saw the buffet did we find out that it was a private party and we were turned away. (Oh well you cannot have everything Ben!)

Apart from the weather, Sunday was never going to match the highs of Saturday.

The ride should have started at 10 to allow tents to be packed. The plan was to cycle to Hay on Wye via national cycle route 8. The plan was good for the first mile. Then we had a puncture followed by; a bee sting, a delay to allow horses by, a retirement, a hedge cutter and finally a rather steep hill. The views had been non-existent because the aforementioned hedgerows were too high to see over. From the top of the hill, however, we had open ground and we could see the hill of the north east section of the Brecon Beacons.

On the descent we saw an unidentified bird of prey sitting on the top of a telegraph pole. Unfortunately, it flew off before we could stop and photograph it.

We reached Hay and a comfortable bench for sarnies by 1pm. We then split up and did the tourist thing for an hour or so.

On the way back the idea was to avoid the steep hill. At Talgarth, therefore, we went west not south and crossed the main A road to Bronllys. Wrong! All we achieved was to cross to the other side of the valley and up more hills. After three climbs and a few races we were back at Brecon. Only 30+ miles but it was enough.