

The Cotswold Corker: 109km Randonnée

'Is the rest of the ride going to be like this' some one said. I tried lying, both to them and to myself, for I knew deep down that this was just a foretaste of what was to come.

'This is the worst hill of the whole ride' I shouted back. I don't think they believed me - and I was not convincing myself. By now I had to get off and push, but I was not alone, at least 80% of the riders were doing likewise. We had travelled less than 3km - just 106 to go - and the route had already got the better of most riders. The hill in question went-up the scarp face of the Cotswolds, it was one in four for about a km.

The Cotswold Corker started from Bishop's Cleeve at 9 o'clock. I unexpectedly met Craig McAlpine at the start. Craig is a PBP veteran and an AAA 8.75 points man, so this ride should be like a warm-up for him.

Craig didn't say anything, but he was embarrassed by bike. I had decided, as a get fit measure, to use my small-wheeled bike. I was a bit apprehensive because I fell off of it during the last long ride - and broke my collarbone. If I could not control it on the flat what hope would I have in serious hills?

Craig and I set off in the third group and towards that dreaded hill. When we got to the steepest point there were already bodies all over the place. Near to the top the hill levelled and we could ride once again. A super fast decent then took us into Winchcombe where we turned off for the climb up to Guiting Power and the top of the Cotswold. It was a windy day, and boy was it windy on that hill! It was a south-westerly and we had just turned south. I was slow going through the lanes; on the downhills one had to brake, the flat bits were breezy and the uphill bits were - well - uphill.

Steadily we made our way south. I managed to wipe the sweat from my eyes and to raise my weary head on the odd occasion and the views to behold made the trip almost worth the considerable effort. Craig was good enough to keep waiting for me, which made me feel better - I may have taken an early short-cut back to Gloucester (I was staying) otherwise. Slowly we turned north and got some assistance from the wind. However, the terrain became hillier again. It seemed that the organiser of the Randonnée could have sent us along gently sloping valleys with burbling brooks. Instead he sent us at 90 degrees to the valleys and taking in the full glory (and effort) of the hills - what a rotter. Both Craig and I were reduced to walking our bikes at least one more time.

The final control was in a village hall at Brockhampton. Craig and I stopped for some time and feasted on tea and a seemingly infinite supply of biscuits. Back on the bikes again we headed towards the decent back into Winchcombe. There was one last sting in the tail, the route took us back over Cleeve Hill. I was dreading the 160m (600ft) climb but as it turned out the biscuits had done their job and I managed to climb steadily to the top. It was then downhill to the finish at another village hall. As I had finished much later than I had planned, I could not rest long before having to ride back to Gloucester.

It was tough at the time, but retrospectively I enjoyed the ride. I can recommend it to any one who wants a get fit quick early season ride. Oh - the small-wheeled bike - well it handled the whole ride quite well. It was surprisingly comfortable considering the reputation that small-wheeled bikes have. I was particularly pleased with the high speed handling - which was just as well because the Shimano Nexus hub brakes were not up to the job! The brakes work adequately around Cambridge, but were not up to the rigors of high-speed descents.