

**I**'d been wanting to do this ride for three years, even bought new lights especially, but other cycle-touring opportunities always got in the way. This year I was determined to make the DD my priority. As the number of participants from HC fell short of the 18-person maximum capacity of the minibus a couple of guests were invited to join us; my touring buddy Mark Worthington, and Mark Egerton from Cranleigh. The group was collected from Foundry Lane in the aforementioned minibus for riders and large van for the bikes. Mark Briffa did a sterling job of stowing all the precious bikes safely in the van, including Steph and Richard's trusty tandem, separated by blankets.

All was going well until just approaching the Blackwall Tunnel when the tunnel was suddenly closed due to a vehicle fire. The area immediately became gridlocked and, after an hour going nowhere, with even

tandem, Richard Cornell (an HC member I'd not met before), and my friend Mark Worthington who'd come down specially from Milton Keynes to join in the fun. We made our way frustratingly slowly out of London, going from one red light to the next, until we entered the Epping Forest area. Here, just as the pace picked up, the police closed a road right in front of us ... we were the first to be stopped! No advice was offered as to an alternative route, forcing us to make an ad-hoc detour, but fortunately it didn't take us too long to regain the intended route and only added a mile or two. The reason for the road closure was a rider who'd suffered a cardiac arrest which, sadly, proved fatal.

At about midnight Richard (non-tandem) had a slow puncture, which took an age to fix in the dark. Whilst several attempts were made to get the tyre to stay inflated we were entertained by the many brightly illuminated bikes that passed us by, their



the emergency services becoming stuck, it was decided that we'd unload the bikes, wherever we could find that was safe to do so, and ride to Hackney (8 miles through London's Saturday evening traffic!).

We rode west along the Thames Cycleway (NCN 1) and crossed the river via the pedestrian tunnel at Greenwich. Not able to navigate the traffic lights as a large group we inevitably ended up arriving at Hackney in dribs and drabs, in my case a couple of hours later than originally intended. A sporty group consisting of Mark B, Ian H, and Cranleigh Mark had long since set off, so that left 10 riders who tried to keep together as one group, but the traffic light fairy had other ideas. Eventually three individual groups made their way towards the Suffolk coast, I'll call them Sporting, Inter and Social as that is in effect how we progressed. I was in the Social group comprising Richard and Steph on their

riders cheerfully waving to us. We arrived at the 60-mile feeding station (Sudbury Fire Station) to find the Inter group just about to leave. At 2am I felt a bit sorry for the neighbours whose houses overlook the yard, though even at this late hour a number of families were standing out in their front gardens cheering us on and offering free water. We didn't see any other HC riders until we reached Dunwich Beach, at 6:30am, having had an excellent ride with no rain and a helpful tail-wind all the way once we were out of London.

The published ride is billed as 111 miles, though there seems to be no definitive route as such. It seems to evolve every year and is not marked or marshalled in any way. It's relatively flat with a total of around 4000ft of ascent and no particularly steep climbs, though after 110 miles anything seems steep! With the extra mileage at the beginning, and three miles to

# Into the darkness

## Dunwich Dynamo

by Malcolm Rawlins

get to the pick-up point at the end, most riders covered around 122 miles (196km). Being so close to a 200km ride, the first time for me, I persuaded Mark W to join me on a quick detour to Dunwich Forest (a pleasant flat ride btw) to make up some extra kms. I ended up recording 205km at 13.6mph. This would have been higher had I only included the actual DD part of the ride, as the initial part through London traffic was quite slow. Into The Ship for a swift celebratory pint ... no time for breakfast ... and it was back to the van, just as the weather broke, for the drive back to Horsham to the tune of much zzzzzz.

It's a truly uplifting experience to ride through the sunset and into the sunrise, hearing the birds start to wake up and gradually seeing the landscape take form. All the better for the benign weather conditions and mostly clear moonlit sky that prevailed. Riding through the East End of London on a Saturday evening was not quite such a 'spiritual' experience!

I would heartily recommend anyone to give it a go one year. The roads are 'almost' entirely pothole free, and traffic is generally very light once clear of Epping Forest. I saw no sign of any accidents along the way and there's a great air of camaraderie amongst the participants.

#### From us all:

A big thank you to Stewart Forbes for organising the event and driving the minibus, to John Chaplin for driving the bike van, both under very stressful conditions, and to Mark Briffa for doing a great job of loading/unloading and stowing all those precious bikes with such care.

#### 'Inter's' - Katie Simmons

After our 8-mile mystery tour to the start due to the Blackwall Tunnel closure, we decided all to ride together at an Inter 1 pace as the other sporting riders had already made a head start to Dunwich. After only two miles we started to get separated from the tandem and co, due to busy late night London traffic. We had decided to congregate again, but only to find we have again separated once departed. After a good time hanging back, we decided to plough on, to try and get out of the heavy masses of cyclists.

We did a quick headcount and our group of five consisted of myself, Phil, Jo, Carla and Chris. The ride was perfect; no wind, a cool temperature, no rain! Phil was the support man, Jo was the pace maker, Chris kept eyes on head count, I had the map and Carla was trying to overcome a bad stomach from a bad lunch that day.

A few hills popped up now and then, and even I couldn't resist a sprint up them! With an average speed of 15.5mph, we made it to Dunwich at around 5:30am, heading straight to the beach for a compulsory photo, and to watch to brave cyclists go into the sea (some were very brave and went in commando!) which wasn't for us. After, we headed to The Ship for a lovely breakfast, evicting the Sporting Group from their table, as the place was rammed full of tired cyclists.

Then we headed to the van and minibus, with very good timing after packing away, because the heavens opened! Great ride, fantastic atmosphere, bike light ideas were awesome. Lovely to see all the local pubs, bike shops open throughout the night, and people in their front gardens with a little tuck shop cheering us all on. Well done to all, and well done to Carla on her first 100+ miler.

#### 'Sporting group' Ian Hiscock

Like everyone else my start to the ride was different this year. Our large group broke up in the confusion of crossing the river and trying to follow a couple of helpful riders to the start. I ended up in a group of five and resorted to a hastily generated phone route to reach London Fields in Hackney - a very pleasant ride alongside the much-improved Regent's Canal and through Victoria Park to arrive around 8:30pm.

Joining me in the sporting team were Mark B and Mark E, a (very strong) guest rider from Cranleigh. Keen to push on we set off at 8:45, 1 hour later than usual. The later start meant it was busy, very busy! Our (very strong) guest soon disappeared in the start/stop traffic leaving London, leaving just me and Mark to pick our passing places amongst the long line of cyclists.

We re-joined Mark E at the first stop in Sudbury for a coffee and burger with the intention of riding the second quieter half together. Our (very strong) guest got quickly bored of our pedestrian pace leaving just me, Mark, and a growing peloton of friendly wheel suckers to make good pace to a fantastic garden stop at Brandeston in support of the local village hall.

One more coffee and we pushed on for the finish with our new friends to find Mark E at the pub in Dunwich finishing his second pint at 3:50am.

Another hugely enjoyable fast ride. Once out of the London traffic myself and Mark B averaged 19mph for the last 100 miles. Our (very strong) guest was well over 20mph!



1



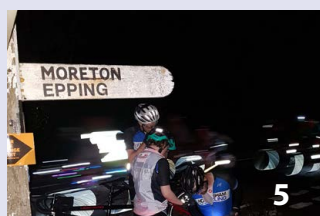
2



3



4



5



6



7

1. Loading the bikes
2. Millenium Leisure Park
3. London Fields, Hackney
4. Getting dark in Epping Forest
5. Puncture repair
6. Sudbury Fire Station, 2pm
7. Social group at Dunwich