

## RIDE FOR THE FALKLANDS

16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012 – ride report by Paul Harding; a 176 mile cycle ride round the M25 in memory of all victims of the Falklands War.

*Saturday; The Falklands Memorial, Potters Bar, Redhil; 92.43 miles*

The weather forecast for the third weekend of June sounded threatening to a cyclist, especially the Saturday; strong winds from the south west, with showers but



brightening on the Sunday. So it proved – though as our route was circular, we all secretly hoped the good would outweigh the bad. We each had a banana (courtesy of Martin, our logistics chap) then laid a wreath at 8:45 and set off, gingerly threading our way through the one way systems of the City of London; taking a detour from our planned route due to the right turn onto the A10 being prohibited. Once on Bishopsgate, it was clear we had a strong tail wind – I recall being overtaken by a crisp packet more than once! So good was our progress that, despite Richard's rear derailleur cable starting to fray (which locked up his gear changing) we were able to reach our first refreshment stop, TRBL Potters Bar, half an hour before we had planned to. Margaret, the Branch Chairman and another lady had



prepared ham baguettes for us – with salad, tomatoes and pickle on the side and we tucked in, while they put the kettle on. For myself, I hadn't realised just how hungry I was - the baguettes really hit the spot! Richard took the opportunity to take a lift with Martin and find a cycle repair shop to have his cable replaced, so we set off on schedule at 11:30 for Rickmansworth. This leg of the ride had some of the prettiest country lanes with some of the deepest pot holes; though thinking back now, these were very common.

We crossed the M25 four times before reaching TRBL Rickmansworth, 24 miles later and a little behind schedule at 12:40. Here, we were treated to a range of baguettes and some bananas provided by my wife, Suzanne (at the Branch's expense) who is also our Poppy Appeal



just as well, for the next leg was mostly into that promised head wind. We took comfort in the gradient plot at the rear of our ride guide, which showed this section to be relatively flat. Except it wasn't flat; we had misjudged where we were on the gradient plot and still had a few tough climbs ahead of us. *Message to self; mark gradient plots with rest stops!* However, from Gerrards Cross to Staines it was flat – there are the Wraysbury, Queen Mother and King George V reservoirs all round there; but it was fairly exposed – that head wind was relentless, which forced me at least to focus on good pace line discipline. Even so, by the time we reached Sainsbury's in Staines I for one was 'running on empty'; we were also half an hour late. It was here that Tania was to meet us, as she had to take a yoga class in the morning in west London. By 4:00 pm, we were getting concerned for her, but she arrived a few minutes later, relieved to off-load her rucksack (it must have weighed as much as she did), take some welcome refreshments and ride without that ballast.



Setting off to Leatherhead 45 minutes late, we passed through the old Brooklands race track on the A318 and glad were we that the route began turning us away from the wind, when it started to rain. Not heavily – and not for long, which was good. At TRBL Leatherhead we were met by a host of Legionnaires who gave us sandwiches, tea,

Organiser. Martin and Richard turned up a few moments later, bike repaired and oiled. As the bar was open, some of us took advantage of the facilities to take some of the Mark 1 muscle relaxant... which was



coffee and cakes. They were keen to show us their support, and held a whip-round of £51.21. We now had a collection!

On the last stretch of the day, we had expected to ride up the notorious 'Box Hill', now well known for its part in the coming Olympics Cycle Road Race. However, because only Richard and I had Garmins and I was shadowing him (he was struggling a bit, as was I) the rest were keen to get this hill 'under the belt', we became separated and out of radio range. When Richard and I reached Reigate, we stopped to call the others and find out where they were; the time was 7:20 – and I saw I had a message from Rob; he and the rest of the group had waited 10 minutes for us at the top of Box Hill but would press on now to Reigate and wait for us there. It was timed at 7:17 pm – we had "overtaken" them! Though we thought we must have gone up Box Hill – we even passed a cottage on one hill with a sign outside which said 'BOX COTTAGE' – it turned out that our route did not include Box Hill after all. I responded to Rob's message and we pressed on to Redhill – The Brompton Guest House, Crossland Road; Richard and I arrived at about 7:45 – only half an hour late – and the rest arrived half an hour later. Our evening meal was booked in the Toby Grill, which had a carvery with plenty of choice – and a better vegetarian restaurant than many others in Redhill (Tania had called them to check).



*Sunday; Redhill, Enfield, London; 78 miles*

We had agreed an earlier start than was usual for our host, but even so, we were 40 minutes later than we had planned when we set off in the bright June sunshine. Within a few minutes, we came across road signs warning of 'cyclists ahead'. We were to cross the route of the BHF 'London to Brighton' bike ride – and the time was only 9:00! There was fortunately well organised traffic control in place and so, after a brief stop to watch the droves of cyclists, we set off once more. The Surrey roads were much smoother than we had come across thus far and, despite a wrong turn or two, we came to our first rest stop of the day in Shoreham; 'The Crown', which was just opening as we arrived. As we were still stuffed from our feast the previous night, we couldn't manage any food – other than a random banana – so stuck to the liquid refreshment. Running a half hour behind time, we set off with hope that the Dartford crossing would not turn out badly.



But unfortunately, it did. I had contacted the Highways Authority some months in advance but had failed to remind them of our event. As we arrived, the HA car with one cyclist strapped in (and his bike strapped on) was ready to go; it had a three-bike tow hitch and space for 3 cyclists. I suggested Rob and Tania take the available seats and we loaded their bikes on the back. On his return, Richard, Darren and Paul (the other one) climbed aboard and the driver repeated his circuit. He returned once more to collect me and I took the opportunity to discuss what facilities they had, had we been a larger group. He advised they have two Navaras, having a three bike tow hitch and space on the flat bed for another three and seating for six passengers. They also have another (larger) vehicle, but it was currently out of action. We all met up again at the north control centre and took the cycle path to the Lakeside service area where Martin was waiting for (and waving at) us.

Unfortunately, this had set us back a full hour and a half, so I asked if we could bypass our next stop at Sainsbury's Brentwood, which was unanimously agreed upon. Richard decided to take a spell in the car to the next stop, suffering as he was after a hard day on a hard saddle; he really helped Martin with the navigation. We spent a little longer downing another banana and set off with grim determination; after all, Paul had a train to catch to get home to Preston at 6:30! Once again, we were blessed with a tail wind and, what with "putting the hammer down", we had regained all but 10 minutes of our lost time when we

slipped past Brentwood Sainsbury's. And that's with taking a few wrong turns, as well. As we came out of Waltham Cross, I saw my route (on my Garmin satnav) claim we had 'reached our destination' which was clearly a lie. I realised that, just like the previous evening, my device could only take so much data per route. Luckily, I knew that we needed only to continue on the A121 and we would reach the same roundabout where we were the day before. As we did so, I led the cyclists to a pedestrian area, stopped and took hold of my water bottle.



I said "We've just cycled round the M25! Let's celebrate!" and we all drank a toast. We set off on the penultimate leg of our journey, turning left into Nag's Head Lane (it was fortunate that we had stopped at the traffic lights the previous day, and Richard pointed out it was the road that TRBL Enfield was to be found, otherwise we may still be looking for it! So we arrived spot on our estimated arrival time (to the minute) 3:00 pm.



There to welcome us were Martin, Richard, Branch & Women's Section Standard bearers, the whole committee and many of the members, all cheering us in. We laid our bikes against a row of tables near the entrance and paid our respects to our hosts, and their refreshments. They also would not take payment at the bar, which was very welcome. They told us they were but a small branch, about 120 members, and that they were all volunteers there – even the bar staff. We decided to put on our 'Falklands 30' tee shirts for the last leg and, as we had two spare, handed them to their Standard Bearers, and Judith presented me with a



cheque for £50 from their Club! Soon after, a chap I was talking to dropped a fiver into our pot as well. Outside, in the bright sunshine again, I presented Judith with our certificate of thanks and we set off while the traffic was stopped for us, with the Standard Bearers parading proudly! What a spectacle we must have made, with a red London bus just there waiting for us to go on as well.



With Richard taking the navigation on, we were easily able to maintain our pace and direction. My concern only rose towards the end – I had been asked not to finish the ride at the Argentine Embassy, as

to do so could be construed as a political statement – and the Legion is not a political organisation. As it was, it mattered not what plans we had as the one-way system around Brook Street meant that we actually ended the ride on Davies Street, at the junction with Brook Street.

In our adrenalin rush, we hadn't noticed that our chief pace setter, Rob, was no longer with us. Fearing the worst, I called his number – and he picked up. He had a puncture, and was walking towards Davies Street and wasn't sure which way to turn. I advised he was a few yards of us and that if he turned north into Davies Street, then left at the lights, we were 20 yards away. He replied that all he could see were road works (Davies Street is full of them at the moment); within a few moments he was at the junction. With some help from Paul's tyre removal tool – (this was tremendous! We all want one of those!) We had Rob back in action and made another call to Martin before setting off walking to gather our belongings and head for home. Martin gave me a lift home and we agreed we should call him 'Logistics Support Director'.



The cyclists were Tania Shillam, Richard Barsley, Paul Harding, Paul Robinson, Darren Nichols & Rob Dennis; logistics by Martin Pearce. Thanks to TRBL Potters Bar, TRBL Rickmansworth, Sainsbury's Staines, TRBL Leatherhead, The Brompton Guest House and Toby Grill in Redhill, The Crown at Shoreham, the Dartford Crossing Control team & TRBL East Enfield. With the help of TRBL Leatherhead & TRBL East Enfield, I have raised £372 for The Poppy Appeal.