

First-time Gridiron



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As semi-retired, fair-weather cyclists, the prospect of doing 100 km in a day was a significant challenge. However, if we could do 30 miles on the Saturday morning Christchurch-Burley-Christchurch run, surely we could do 60 in a whole Sunday. True we have cycled serious distances in France, but usually with quite low daily mileages. Also, our days over there were broken up with stops for sightseeing and photographing, giving us a chance to massage our "derrieres".

A perusal of the route-card convinced us of the need to highlight the roads on the maps that we'd glued together. We realised that the distance was the equivalent of Bournemouth to Basingstoke (Gulp!) so our strategy was to be first away at the start and hope that we got round before all the checkpoints closed.

At the car park on the day, we were amazed to see hundreds of cars in the field before us, so hurried over to the check-in, through throngs of super-fit, slim, young people and super-expensive, super-light machines. Our cards were stamped and we quickly got on our way by ourselves, whilst the afore-mentioned types did their warming-up and chatting-up. Within 10 minutes, our peace was shattered by the first of the whirring wheelers, moving at about the speed of light!! After that, it was a bit like being in the slow lane of the motorway - an almost continuous succession of faster-moving traffic going past our right-hand sides.

Eventually, after a steep climb, respite - Checkpoint One at last! But we were behind 4 million others trying to get a cuppa! What a lot of pongy people in a small space! I hope the staff got medals for their ordeal!

We didn't realise what a lot of energy we had used up and should have eaten our lunches at that point, because 5 miles later we got the hunger knock and had to stop on a windswept plain to take in some sustenance. So, after one third of the distance, we had spent almost an hour not cycling. Hungry again near Bartley, we stopped for delicious mini-pizzas and teacakes but nearly had cardiac arrest when we learned the price. Ah well - another experience.

Except for turning right just 200 yards before Checkpoint Two and retracing our track, this stage was fairly uneventful, giving us a chance to enjoy seeing some delightful parts of the Forest we'd never visited before. No wait for our tea here, since we were well behind the fast boys and girls: in fact there was the distinct impression that we would be washing up and locking up the hall if we delayed our departure. *By now we had spent about 2 hours out of the saddle, so it was time to move on.*

Again, the last leg was across "foreign" countryside until we arrived at Beaulieu where we were heartened by the sight of familiar landmarks and actually overtook a family doing the ride. We hesitate to mention that the only reason that we were going faster was that the parents were either carrying or towing an offspring!

Back to Pilley at last! No throng surrounding the desk this time! After waking the dozing official to stamp our cards, we could now join the elite who can wear the Gridiron medal. And we were only six hours behind the fastest participant! ***Looking back, it was a fun experience: very many thanks to all those who made it possible! Can you fix one for next year please?***