

From the FPCC History.

TR (Dick) Curtis joined the club in 1927 and passed away in Cornwall a few weeks short of his 102nd birthday, after 57 years as a 'Parker'.

Dick set and held many club records and this account shows his preparation for an attempt on our 24hour record in 1938.



DICK CURTIS WINNING THE SPRINT UP LITTLE HEATH

This pic from the club 'Cavalcade of Cycling' on the A1000 in 1953 to celebrate the club's 70th anniversary. Very apt as it indicates the superiority of the 'safety' bicycle that consigned the 'high ordinary' to the bin of history.

Dick sprints on a 'cross frame safety' (1887), to leave the 'ordinary high bicycles' (early 1880's) trailing.

My 'British Empire Ride'

During the Summer of 1938 I had the idea to ride a 24 hour time trial. It seemed about time that our club record of 371 miles put up by Jimmy Fisher in 1928 was modernised, however modestly, by a Club member. I had ridden a number of 12 hour Time Trials and my general experience was to hold a steady calculated speed which would spread my effort over the time involved. Somewhere around the 9 hour mark I would crack up a bit and have to ride through my bad patch, usually chewing a slab of chocolate. Almost invariably with 1 hour to go I was back on schedule and snorting fire to finish with a sprint for the last mile. To my mind the drill seemed to need getting my legs used to lots and lots of miles so that when I had finished a 12 hour stint, I could carry on for a further 12 hours. In those 'Good Old Days' of happy

reminiscence, the workers were awarded one week paid holiday per year and, as a special concession, the extra half day of Saturday of the previous week.

In 1938 I decide 'd not to ride with a few companions on a normal scenic tour. There was a British Empire Exhibition at Glasgow and with this event as a target, I decided to do a 'British Empire Ride', up the East side of England to Edinburgh, across to Glasgow, take in the show and return down the West side. I asked Maurice Edmonds, our 1936 Club Champion, if he would be interested in doing the ride with me. We could do either bit and bit all the way or sprint for place names and milestones. However, he did not wish to miss two racing weekends and as he did not plan to ride a '24', he declined to accompany me.

I intended to tour within reason as well as piling up all the miles and so kept my luggage to a minimum. I wore ankle socks, aertex underwear, shorts, short sleeved shirt and alpaca jacket; the luggage consisted of a change of socks and underwear, a few handkerchiefs, essential toiletries, Ensign Midget camera, cape, sou'wester, minimal tools, battery lamp, CTC Handbook and a paper map of England, Scotland and Wales 20 miles to 1 inch. I rode my 'Carpenter' bicycle; 26 x 1 ¼", steel rims, high pressure tyres, Sturmey Archer close ratio 3-speed gear, mudguards and 2 brakes.

I left home at 6:30 am on Saturday and reached a cafe just beyond Alconbury for breakfast around 70 miles from home, 24 miles to Stamford for elevenses, 21 miles to Grantham for lunch; a long ride to Doncaster of 45 miles for tea and then a final stint of 35 miles to York reached at 9 pm. I spent about 13 hours riding and 1 ½, hours on meals - a steady pace around 15 mph.

The following Sunday morning, with a fellow cyclist who was staying at the same CTC house, I went for a walk around York on the city encircling wall. After visiting York Minster and lunching, I got back on the bike and rode around 100 miles to Morpeth beyond Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Monday saw me pass through Alnwick and Berwick-on-Tweed about 95 miles to Edinburgh.

On Tuesday I spent most of the day touring the city. Princes Street is rather majestic. The floral clock has a face about 8 feet square with the hours picked out with small flowers, the 'hands' are also mounted with flowers and move to 'tell the time'. Standing by the Sir Walter Scott memorial tower one can look down on Waverley Railway Station in the valley and across to Edinburgh Castle built on the rocky hillside. Some years ago, I saw the 'Royal Edinburgh Tattoo' performed on the Parade Ground of this castle; most impressive! Having spent the morning walking, I found a cafe which advertised Black Pudding hot or cold, also White Pudding, hot or cold. I forget which agonising choice I made but had a good meal, then went and collected my bike from my digs and rode West toward Glasgow.

The 50 mile ride was most unenjoyable with exhaust smog all the way from heavy lorries. My impression of Glasgow was that there seemed to be a statue at every street corner. I found some digs, had a meal and spent the evening at a picture house. Next day, I took the bike and rode out to the 'Empire Exhibition' grounds a few miles outside the town. The Exhibition was on the usual lines, craftsmen plying their skills and all manner of interesting things to see although I cannot recall seeing a black pudding machine. I took some pictures with my Ensign Midget camera; a diabolical little contraption with two speeds, fast and slow, and two apertures, large and small. There was no lock on the film travel and no lock on the exposure trigger. I managed one or two double exposures by forgetting to wind on the film after each shot. One striking effort was of the Forth Railway Bridge on top of Alnwick Castle. One thing in favour of the camera was that when closed it was no larger than a cigarette packet and weighed about 4 ounces.

On that Wednesday evening I rode 17 miles to Kilmarnock for the night only to find that the CTC appointment had lapsed and the new owners of the house did not cater for visitors. As it was so late, they took pity on me and offered to feed me and make up a bed. I think they scrutinised me and saw my latent

honesty shining through the grime. The lady of the house went off to prepare a meal and find some blankets and instructed her daughter to entertain me whilst I was waiting. I am glad I met these two ladies; they were real gentlefolk. I felt almost a gentleman as I listened to their pleasant voices. I remember reading one time that people who lived in that North-Western corner of Scotland spoke the purest English in the whole country. I hope I did not let Camden Town down too badly!

On Thursday I rode over the hills to Carlisle; about 95 miles. Friday, back to the mile-eating; elevenses at Penrith, lunch at Lancaster (around 70 miles) and tea at Preston 88 miles. At this point, I weakened and, remembering the terrible cobbles from a previous occasion, went to the Railway Station and travelled, in comfort, by rail through the Black Country to Warrington. Back on the bike for 18 more miles to Tarporley in Cheshire. 106 miles including the ride over Shap Fell and 27 miles by train. I remember the lodging at Tarporley, going upstairs to bed I passed a large glass fronted cabinet and inside was an enormous Pike about 3 feet long; a record catch from a nearby reservoir.

Saturday morning, I left Tarporley and rode to Shrewsbury where I diverted to walk up the Wrekin, a new touring 'first' for me, Bridgenorth, Kidderminster, Worcester, Evesham. and on through the glorious Cotswolds to Bourton-on-the-Water to meet my clubmates of the Finsbury Park Cycling Club who were enjoying a club week-end out from London on Saturday and returning on Sunday. This was the only booked bed night for me; all the others had been taken by chance.

I claim no records for this ride, just a rather vigorous tour with lots of fast, steady miles to 'educate my leg muscles for the Time Trial Big One'. I put 22 miles on to Jimmy Fisher's 1928 record but was disappointed not to beat 400 rides. Bill Cottenham. in 1953 put the mileage up to 419 miles where it stands today.

Dick Curtis

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