



The Club

SPRING RUN ~ Birdlip, April 21-23, 1995

Principal Organisers: Dave Martin and Norman Hyde

The days preceding our twice-yearly gatherings are always a time of eager anticipation, and in the shorter than usual week following the Easter break, just about the entire country was enjoying glorious early summer sunshine - in fact the last meaningful rain had been, for most of us, more than three weeks previously! The prospect of a really cracking run around the Cotswolds lifted spirits, and we all (well, nearly all of us) assembled in afternoon sunshine at the Royal George Hotel, Birdlip. What a splendid establishment! I must (as must many of us) have passed it dozens of times over the years but never suspected what delights lay within. Birdlip stands on the very edge of the Cotswold escarpment, and is a much quieter village since the bypass opened a few years ago.

The hotel easily accommodated our larger than usual contingent of over forty members very comfortably in single rooms, and it was a pleasure to see so many long-absent faces around the bar before dinner was served. Amongst the usual topics of conversation was of course the weather, and some optimists (pessimists?) had seen the early evening weather forecast delivered with greater than usual conviction - Saturday rain was guaranteed. Never mind - have another drink and enjoy dinner!

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After an excellent meal, organisers Dave Martin and Norman Hyde revealed what lay in store for us - a lap of 184 miles going as far west as Berkeley Castle on the edge of the Severn estuary, then eastward to the outskirts of Banbury before blasting back to base along the wonderful motorcycling roads of the northern Cotswolds. The morning route would take us south-west, where the roads are of much more "close-quartered" interest - some winding lanes between the narrower and twistier major roads which characterise this particularly hilly part of the world - and for the afternoon a change to faster and more open roads to Banbury and back.

During Friday evening dinner, it is customary for members to introduce their guests.

Tonight there were five - but for various reasons only two were on hand to stand up and be counted. At this point our President dryly observed that his guest hadn't turned up either - because he hadn't invited one! We retired to the bar for further relaxation - looking keenly forward to an enjoyable day in the

saddle.

What a change had taken place overnight! The promised rain had clearly arrived some hours before breakfast, if the size of the puddles was any guide - and there were even a few large, wet snowflakes! Well done Dave

M - remember your last effort - Diss, April 1991 - snowbound within two miles of the start? Somehow, there seemed to be no stampede for the bike park, and we duly departed Birdlip in heavy rain about 20 minutes behind schedule. All except for Paul Mercer, that is, who was very wisely still asleep, despite Keith Blair's strenuous efforts at rousing him!

The forty or so miles to Berkeley Castle are memorable only for their concentrated misery - cold and very wet and most uncomfortable on any modern race-replica around those narrow and twisting roads.

We duly arrived at the Castle, and were warmly welcomed not only by a number of well-informed guides, but a large and active radiator at the top of the stairs. Other radiators around the Great Hall were soon occupied, and suddenly the day didn't seem quite so bad!

No-one was in any hurry to regain their saddles as it was still raining outside, but after tea, coffee and biscuits there could be no further delay and we were off to lunch at the Tunnel House Inn, which lies just a couple of miles from the source of the River Thames. Perhaps the worst of the weather was over? Anyway that is how it seemed, as the roads began to open up and the pace quickened slightly, but a couple of short cuts were taken from the planned route as we had lingered at Berkeley.

One never knows quite what to expect of the various stops on our Runs, and the Tunnel House is yet another extraordinary watering hole that doesn't really fit any category. We filled the separate barn-cum-function room where a log fire awaited us (in front of which Norman Hyde stood barefoot, while his boots dried out) and an enormous dish - perhaps four feet across - of paella had been prepared by a similarly enormous cook of eastern origin. Most of this delicious fare was duly consumed, washed down with plenty of excellent ale, and we set about exploring this amazing establishment, which was originally built to cater for the navvies who were building the Thames and Severn Canal.

Close by is the entrance to Sapperton Tunnel, which takes the canal nearly 2(miles beneath the Cotswolds, and when it was dug towards the end of the 18th century it ranked as one of the world's largest civil engineering projects.

In the pub's main building is an amazing assortment of artifacts - stuffed animals and birds - an old dentist's chair - piles of magazines to suit all tastes - pots and pans -- and last but not least a good variety of soft porn materials. Along with holiday postcards

and the like, all were displayed in the best possible taste and completely without offence (at least to any Club members!).

By the time we were ready to leave our lunch

stop, the rain had all but stopped, but some of our number had enough - notably David Strathcarron, who decided to take his mobile cold eater hip-bath (aka Grinnall Scorpion) directly back to base. Whilst sympathising with these lesser mortals, they really did miss the best of the day as we headed north-east on quickening and drying roads.

The sun was shining as we passed through many pretty villages, notable amongst which is Bibury, where there is a trout farm. This is surely the business to be in - your customers pay to buy food for the fish (that you would otherwise have to feed yourself) then they hire fishing tackle and pay again for any fish they catch! Why isn't everybody doing it?

The dry roads now opened up into really good fast going, and it wasn't long before we arrived at Swalcliffe Barn for our afternoon stop. But before visiting the barn we gathered in the Stag's Head for tea and coffee. Riding apparel was removed, and we strolled through the village in the sun towards the barn.

The Barn is a splendidly restored and maintained 15th century tithe barn housing a collection of historic agricultural machinery and trade vehicles. Again we enjoyed a guided tour with a knowledgeable guide and everyone must have learned something - even Dennis Bates, who leaned on an old cart and collapsed it!

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Soon it was time to go, and we reassembled in leisurely fashion for the blast back to Birdlip and a hot bath, but not before one or two folk had asked if one day Norman Hyde might complete the Hook Norton brewery tour that was cut short in? Hook Norton is but a stone's throw from Swalcliffe.

At the Sunday meeting post mortem, it was resolved to repeat the run in the reverse direction (and in good weather?) because the weather had spoiled what had promised to be a wonderful day's riding.

Some of our route had actually been included in previous outings, but surely no-one would object to a repeat of these wonderful roads?

Our evening gathering was again the special experience that it always is - tales and drinks around the bar, followed by a particularly fine meal which left everyone in the right mood to hear about the day from our Sergeant at Arms!

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Not many escaped a mention and penalty from the Sergeant at Arms. Dave Martin (organiser) for no water in the canal... Norman Hyde for unauthorised exposure of wet and wrinkly feet at lunch, fined 20p per toe... Bob Macmillan, for taking a full-dress Gold Wing past a 3 tons Weight Restriction... and Alan Blake, who earned a 20p refund for not falling off!...

Macmillan, for taking a full dress Gold Wing past a "3 tons" weight restriction. One faller - Peter Meek, who dropped his Ducati Monster, bending the gear lever and thereby being able only to change up - and one who didn't this time, Alan Blake, who earned a 20p refund! And let's not forget Graham Goodman, who hadn't noticed that his

rear number plate had fallen off. This was retrieved by Simon Hill, who brought it unseen to the dinner table and then raised (20 by flogging it back to its owner!

We all enjoyed a ride home in unbroken sunshine (as always!) and vowed to do it all again soon. Isn't it such great fun?

