



# The Club

## CLUB RUN

LLANDRINDOD WELLS, SEPTEMBER 12TH-14TH 1997

### "DEVILS STAIRCASE TWO"

*Organisers: Tom Waterer & Nick Jeffery*

So, back to the Devils staircase, eh? Well, for some maybe but I could not make that run three years ago ( save helping Tom Waterer on one reconnoitre in a car). I remember vividly seeing nothing over the bonnet but the bomb sight on the Merc I was pedalling at the time ( had to get that in!). I heard tales of that run with people missing the turns and winding up in a bog etc. so seemed like fun. So, out came the trusty Bed Pan for a Welsh Gallop, just llike the last run from Chester.

*Yes, that was a typo but I left it in cos it llooks Welsh.*

This is being crafted (?) after the Referendum so what chance of a Welsh TT as THW was muttering about all weekend. He had a point as we were to stay at the Metropole Hotel at Llandrindod Wells which has been the HQ of many a famous motoring event. Our chairman, Mike, was regaling all with tales of Berts Perrigo, Greeves et al, staying there with the works teams for the Welsh Two Days, the RAC staging events from there and so on and so fifth (inflation). Just think, Gordon Jackson who won the Scottish Six Days only dropping one point for one careless dab all week, was at this very place. And possibly saw the same decor.

In its defence - and no offence to Tom - the Hotel was a people processor par excellence. I gleaned that on Friday night, they handled 600 people through the portals. They have 122 rooms, they have banqueting facilities, conference rooms and it was all humming along. Did you know that Nick Hopkins wanted to know how many doors were in the hotel in total. Why - why not - why did I try to find out? Nick and I should go out more. Someone unwisely enquired if Nick trailed his BSA up from the South. Nick did a passable imitation of a U-Boat commander's face while tersely replying.



One problem was how to find the car park. I failed to find the official entrance and rode down the side of the building on a service road to find a suitably vast car park virtually empty at 5.30pm save for a few cars, bikes, trailers etc. and a trailer for testing Welsh titties for shape, poise, uplift, weight, cancer or whatever. It's a tough job but someone has to do it. It was there all weekend but totally abandoned. I suppose they run Monday to Friday day shift, forgetting that people have illness or concerns about their health more in their own time so why not open when the people are leaving work rather than

when they go to work? Probably run by a bank manager as they had it perfected in the past. Open an hour after the last had gone to work, send all the staff, save the junior, to lunch from 1-2pm and close at 3.30pm. Perfect. Saves dealing with them pesky customers.

Proud of my achievement of finding the car park, I thought the Hotel entrance was round the back only to find that the back entrance was a long haul maze and carrying the panniers, brain bucket, dripping wet it were a bit of a schlep. In future, I used the short cut up the service road to the front.

Having primped and powdered, an ale was sought, as you do. I tried the recommended Welsh number as I am very thirsty for knowledge but was not impressed and it was not a patch on the lunch stop (Chester run) Welsh Ale. This passion for ale is part of the club ethos as was made evident in the meeting on Sunday morning.

Doug Mitchenall, Maurice Knight and Graham Goodman had a table near the road so we relaxed by watching bikes flying by one way, then the next, searching for the signs to the car park. I never saw a car park sign all weekend - did anyone? However two immaculate Dutch Coaches did and the guests were just finishing checking in when Simon Hill arrived at the reception in dayglo black lederhosen and claimed he was with the Dutch coach party when unwisely asked which party he was with.

A pre-prandial stroll was in order to contemplate the enormity of a remark by Doug Mitchenall. He sold his Ducati Monster for a 73-year-old. He now has a Moto Guzzi gives him more street cred? This gives him hope I can still twist a grip at 73, in the the last 6 miles to the tea stop next day, he you not.



Just opposite the Metropole was a civic park with a sculpture in the middle of the lawn in the style of Henry Moore . Sorry guys, it still misses me how that blob of a rock represents the Unknown Soldier or whatever it was titled as it looks like a block of granite that somebody has rounded. Why is there never a monument to a well-known soldier in these equal opportunity days? The park was in the tradition of the late Victorian, early Edwardian mould with civic grandeur and pride writ large. Fine, manly , stately buildings surrounding it to demonstrate substance ( now housing the banks etc.) put up without planning as we know it to demonstrate that the merchant who commissioned it could be counted. All of them used one of three master builders as far as I could tell as there were three styles from mock Grecian, through Georgian to Victorian solid. With two twists. The pitch of the roofs was in the very steep Austrian/Swiss mode which was used to clear snow. Does it snow that much in the area or was it the first Architect who designed it, set the precedent and to get in you had a " me-too" culture? The other weirdo number was octagonal towers on the corners of buildings. The sight of octagonal towers with Alpine pitched roofs was somewhat strong medicine so I thought of heading back when I saw it.

A sign proclaiming that if I followed the arrow I would find "MORE SHOPS". I definitely struck for home as I tried the growing culture of shopping once and it is not fun and no way will it catch on. I once went to one of these new ideas - a Supermarket, though where they got that prefix from beats me. There were no assistants to bring a selection to you for approval. You wheeled a trolley round, made selections, waited, unloaded them to a conveyor belt where a low level robot bar swiped them, took a credit card and you had to pack them on your own and take them to your car by yourself. Crazy idea, doomed to failure, mark my words. If they can sell that, they can sell you anything.

The Vastness of the Metropole loomed over the skyline as I came back from low town on the other side of the tracks and it was everything in the town in

one. It has castellated fringes, octagonal turrets and a po-faced Queen Victoria frontispiece. Was it a job lot that green paint? Was white for the cills not on special so these were not done at the same time? I shall write to Best Western, the owning group to enquire. Do they have a budget division called Worst Western?

By now the troops had mustered and were laying the dust. Those supping the ale noticed a passing resemblance to Sparkling Ganges 1997 so they went for bottled, factory-produced tackle Even the Pedigree Bitter was cloudy which was sad as an ale after a ride seems the right medicine.

Dinner was taken in a cosy, private room at the far corner of the establishment under the name of Wedgwood. This theme was evident by the vast, scattered display of Wedgwood style plaster embellishments from cornices to roses, to mock drapes and swirls of all kind shown off on a washed out cerise paint. I found it intrusive at first but it diminished with time. It looked as if the owners wife ( she goes to art evening classes and knows about art, tha' knows, and she is cheaper than that bloody poof who did the letterhead design) had been down to B&Q and had bought all the adhesive wall decorations in the catalogue. The moulding round the door liners was genuine but the rest on the ceilings and walls had to be recent. They only needed to be gilded and the carpet to be green, purple and gold to have created a perfect Golders Green Jewish Renaissance effect.

The table layout was in the traditional format of a horseshoe that hotels always assume for club meetings. This gives a top table from which the great and the good of the committee can command respect from the lumpen proletariat. Yes, the Club must have its organisers and they undertake heroic feats for scant reward from the floor but the success of the club is the fact the whole idea is totally and fundamentally worthless. At best, we are guilty on 10 counts of having fun. We do no good works and have no raison d'être save having a good time with like-minded mates. Hence I feel we should have table placement more on a series of round tables with no obvious "top table". However, these musings are very personal and if inappropriate for this tablet, then you will never know I wrote it as the committee will have edited it out. Maybe the job of Scribe is pure reportage but not to act as Boswell to the court. On the other hand straight reportage would cut out more than half the rubbish I write so maybe that is a good idea. Answers on a postcard, please.

The menu was headed Croeso I Westy'r Metropole which was a nice touch ( or was it? What does it mean?) and presented over a green colour-washed Welsh dragon. Every time I come to Wales I get the feeling that the whole rationale of the country is one big living part of The Disney Corporation. A theme park so well done that everybody including the staff ( the residents as they like to be known) is part of a big entertainment game. At one time I thought UK PLC was going that way until that interloper, the Blessed Margaret, came along and told us to pull our socks up.

The menu offered prawn cocktail, pate and soup followed by lamb, cod or venison but since the advent of the package holiday and the usurping of the television scene by cooking programmes, the accurate list is far, far too bland. It has to be dressed out with meaningless, redundant words and phrases such as plump, nest, lightly, creamy. They add nothing; neither does calling the prawn cocktail sauce "Marie Rose" - does that mean it is 400 years old, water logged and very salty? What about using plump as the adjective for the prawns? I hope so as scrawny does not ring my bell.

Still, it wasn't bad scoff as far as I gathered from the masses but these hotels take some time to get up to Club speed on the refuelling. The white had a certain astringent quality, like sucking on a jar of alum, while the red might

grow up one day if letlive. The Maitre d' and several of the staff were French on what I assume was a cultural/work experience part of their career.

From the hotels point, I assume they wanted the imports to lift the hotel up to international standards. Sadly I got the impressio that the Taffies had won and the Frogs were just like the Taffies but with an accent. To plagiarise an African expression "you can take the taff out of the bog but you can't take the bog out of the taff". The local cheeses were mined not matured and had a crust that Honda should have used on the first CX500 camshafts.

Chairman Mike Jackson introduced the guests. David Dew from Honda UK arrived on a RC45 and impressed all over the weekend with his smooth and very fast riding. Dave Martin fielded his older brother Howard riding a spanking new Pan European loaded with all the electronics. Howard is a Bursar in a private school and can certainly tell a tale in the true Martin tradition. From Buell came Dave Taylor on a S3T which was a first for the Club I think. As Buell is part of the H-D empire, it was nice to have another machine manufacturer represented.

Tom Waterer was eventually prised off a bubbly little French Colonial mulatto to introduce the run and a novelty. The run was not fixed!! He was sound down to the morning stop and then it was an initiative test to find the coffee stop that was along the way a bit, you can't miss it. Heading west after that, we were going to turn north, at some point to be decided on the hoof, (saddle?) on the day. Fine, we'll follow you Tom.

The raffle produced the usual quips from the Martin/Hill combo and again provided some throat oil for those with continued thirst. Has anyone arrived home with a bottle of wine from the raffle? The bench racing carried on in the bar with a selection of the 600 sharing our company. Mike Evans, ever urbane, was even more laid back as he had sold his business since the last run and, in true capitalistic, style wondered whether pushing the deal through before Gordon Brown's budget had meant he got less than he might otherwise to avoid a tax that did not happen. We will never know.

Martin Lambert had moved to KMUK and had shed two stone. These two statements are not connected. Martin described his method of weight loss and, no, there is not a book there. It was as simple as everyone knows but cannot be marketed easily. You just stop eating and drinking until you are down to the required fighting weight. No easy way to package that, methinks. Graham Goodman is looking more and more like a professor of some ancient literature subject and is full of the joys of PC life. That is microprocessor, not politically correct. Watch it Graham, nerds have electronic fun only.

Breakfast in the fresco palace was enlivened by Tom continuing to pour his charm on the dusky number who retaliated by serving him a cold kipper. Not the best thing to start a day. The staff announced that the breakfast would take at least 20 minutes to arrive so Tom announced the start would be set back by 15 minutes. The breakfasts then appeared immediately.



Mike Jackson found out how many mates he had when looking for volunteers to lift the F6C Honda from the trailer. He obviously fell in love with it on the Chester run and blagged it for the weekend. I had a go on it and it is massively impressive by being completely light and neutral when on the move and the motor is a gem. The top speed is academic as I could not bear the pressure on the chest from 90mph upwards.

Dennis Bates had trouble starting the AJS. Later Dennis dropped me a line saying he was suffering from lack of magnetism - surely some mistake. After much running, bumping and so on the AJS came to life and the look on Dennis' face when Tom announced another 6 minutes to go was worth the entry

price. Graham Goodman won the Simon Goodman Car Park Crashers award for a slow speed tumble while he was whiling time away, waiting for the off, by riding round and round in ever slower circles until the motor died. Graham jumped off and picked the bike up in one smooth movement. It was so fluent because he confessed he had done it many times before as "it passes the time". Sad lad.

Heading north from the start, we joined the A44 going east into the weak sun until turning back south towards Builth Wells along the A481. Somewhere along here we were entertained by a demonstration of cattle droving of mind-bending ineptitude. The farmer and his mate were good at controlling a huge herd of cows and keeping them in some order while we trickled through. The trouble was neither of them thought to open the gate to the field so the cows were just milling around with the farmers at the back trying to keep them together but had their hands full so they could not reach the gateway. Perhaps they are still there or perhaps it was part of the Disney Corp. standard tourist attraction and they go home at 5.30pm. The cows were efficient lubricators of the road and, from there on, everyone commented on how slippery it was.



We climbed the south east flank of Carneddau before dropping into Builth Wells and then struck out on the B4520 to go over the top of Mynydd Eppynt. As advertised, there were sheep and a Dutch Army contingent roaming around on the top. Someone informed us that in the army range on Eppynt is a fabulous road race circuit, used in the fifties, rivalling the Nurburgring for drama. Perhaps the newly "revolved" Welsh will add this to the tourist attractions by holding a Welsh GP? Would be nice

And thus to Brecon for the visit to the "South Wales Borderers and Monmouthshire Regimental Museum of the Royal Regiment of Wales". Gosh, I would hate to be manning the switchboard, saying that lot and then having to follow it with the cloying "my name is Sharon and how may I help you?" so common these days. You can help my bill and me by being crisp, that's what you can do to help. We arrived clutching a sovereign, as instructed by Tom, to find it was free so one wag reckoned he was going round twice to get max. value. I bet he runs home behind a taxi to save more money than running home behind the bus.

A hundred or so years ago, they were little chaps, weren't they. But their deeds were colossal. They walked or rode all over the globe protecting the Empire, which they did not create. It was merchants who created the Empire and the troops followed later to sort out the grievances after the locals had worked out they had been shafted. During the reign of Good Queen Vic 1 the army was reduced by two thirds but the land area called The British Empire more than doubled. Thus was created the concept of the professional Army and the museum was a testament to it and the part the Welsh played. Well worth the visit to touch the ammunition of various eras. This was freely available to pick up by opening drawers and seeing the development of cartridges into bullets over 300 years. The item that got me was an Officer's Travelling desk. He probably stomped all over the globe followed by this bleeding great big wooden box that opened out to form a writing desk so he could record events, note natural phenomena etc. They were real workers - as were the poor lads who carried the box.

Geoff Selvidge kindly informed me that the modern automatic we were looking at fired a bullet so fast it went straight through people where as the old ones stopped inside and you were dead. The rationale is that if you are dead you are not a burden to your own side but if you are wounded you give your lot more problems and the other side get advantage. I see the logic but ...really.

They had a display based on Rorkes Drift, which I could not quite follow as it recounted the heroic deeds but not much on how this lot got caught with

their pants down by a load of fuzzies. It transpires that the regiment was actually from Warwickshire and only 6 taffies were at Rorkes but they got posted to Brecon on their return and the Welsh usurped their victory. Another part of the arcane history of our confused country which has the Duke of Devonshire being seated in Derbyshire.

Mike Jackson got the F6C into a monumental Rorkes Drift on the way down to Brecon, by the way.

We then had an initiative test - find the coffee stop. Dennis' AJS finally ran out of sparks at the museum and we were treated to the sight of Nick Jeffery pushing Dennis on the dead AJS which also brightened up the local's morning. The pit crew got to work in the time-honoured way with insulating tape and WD40 and persuaded the bike to run but only at higher revs. All the road racers from the sixties and seventies took turns in showing their pedigree and bump start prowess. The coffee was taken in the restaurant alongside the brand spankers Theatre and was served by deadly eager volunteers that desperately wanted us to be happy. It was touching. The development is just opened and is very well done sitting alongside the terminus basin of the Abergavenny Canal. Outside was a lump of Welsh granite with a bronze casting atop detailing something called the Taff Trail, named after the River Taff. The Taff Trail cuts along the valleys, goes through the Rhondda and winds up in Cardiff.

Another super keen volunteer who had moved from Tyneside to run the place with lots of other hairies and luvvies showed David Strathcarron, Hugh Palin and myself around the auditorium. I am not knocking as I love enthusiasm. The whole of the central floor area is on a hydraulic system so the seats can drop down into the basement, slide under the orchestra floor and a flat floor slide forward and up to form a dance area. It was budgeted to cost 4 million but wound up at 8 million and was paid for by Lottery money in the main. They were having a male voice choir evening later so time to split before they started.

Another new excitement!! A long bash down a main road, the A40. Perhaps on one run we will go to a Shopping Mall, who knows. Actually it was rather good fun sweeping along through lots of fast curves. Just after Brecon, I spied Chris Ventress examining the back wheel of Simon Hill's on loan BMW R1200RS. It turned out that the Beemer had just jumped sideways coming out of a roundabout and Chris thought he had a puncture. Simon Hill says, apparently, they do that. Ugh?

After 20 miles we cut back north along the B4302 towards luncheon at the Bridgend Inn at Crugybar. This little loop from Llandwrda to Rhosmaen was the "not yet fixed" bit mentioned on Friday. I loved this bit of road so good on you THW. A substantial ploughman's washed down with a pint hit the spot. Tony Dawson and Doug Mitchenall refuelled Dennis' AJS, while keeping the engine running, in the garage over the road which I know was much appreciated by Dennis.

A gentle gallop north up the A482 to Lampeter then along the A485 to Tregaron to the start of the Devil's Staircase. Sorry chaps, must have had my mind in neutral because I cannot remember anything about this stretch at all apart from a few hot shots flying by and the road winding round the natural paths formed at the foothills of the Cambrians, sun on my back and life was a "big easy".

At the start of the Devil's Staircase was a stern message saying not suitable for caravans so the first thing I meet is a Volvo Estate towing a caravan. Where was he going - Birmingham? I say this because every Friday night I see all the Black Country lot setting off to Wales with their 'vans. Maybe he was getting his own back. The Staircase is really fabulous and could be a very successful cure for constipation. Just wide enough for one car, clinging on the side of various peaks in the Cambrians, it offers incredible scenery when you

have time to look around as it is constantly dropping away or climbing round hairpins. The slope in places is one in four and is covered in the obligatory gravel. Sitting on my two wheeled arm chair, I felt the effort from braking so God knows what the heroes on road race replicas were experiencing.

Dave Hill on the RF900 Suzuki came by about five miles before the end and showed me the correct line and we had a most enjoyable squirt and squeeze session to the Trout Inn at Beulah. Funny how Suzuki have produced a series of bikes in this mould - the GSX600F, GSX750F and the RF900 which sit off in the left field. They have the GSXR series, which are market leaders, but these softer sports tourers never capture the hearts of the journos so poor Suzuki has to sell on price when they are very competent machines. I love them because the exhausts rust like crazy.

The section from Beulah to Newbridge is THW's favourite bit of road and I see why. Just outside Beulah a great big whirring sound engulfed me then a sudden silence followed by a crashing and grating sound and the whirring started again but at a lower pitch. Fear not, readers of a nervous disposition, it was Dave Taylor on the Buell S3T changing up from first to second as he sped off into the distance going like the clappers. Dave Martin tells me that the crankshafts on the 1200 Harley engine weigh two and a half stone!! No wonder the gear change is slow while you wait for that lot to slow down. Great to have two new industry guests this weekend, both of whom can really ride and muck in. Hope they enjoyed and will be regulars.

At Newbridge, the run could split into a bolt for home group or go round to Builth Wells and back to Llandrindod Wells. A marshall was on the corner at the outskirts of Newbridge signing left and suddenly I was back at the Hotel. So were lots of others so I hope I did not miss anything worth reporting on that loop. Tom had blagged a go on the RC45 but I hear David Dew stuck right up his chuff piece on the ER 5, riding the wheels off it.

I spent the pre dinner drinks in the company of Martyn Roberts disclosing information about global relationships with the major automakers. He was very discreet, mind you, just mentioning the different way in which companies operate in different parts of the world. It is great that we have in Cosworth, Ricardo and Lotus and many more companies such world class centres of engineering excellence. And in Martyn, a world class engineer in our midst.

I have lost my menu so cannot be accurate about the fare but David Strathcarron was surprised that one dish claimed lobster as an ingredient. The staff were well on the bubble with the vino collapse and the food was efficiently delivered and despatched as we all eagerly awaited the entertainment. Nick Jeffery, the well-known swot, won the quiz. Tony Dawson was surprised no one really got the humour question and doubted our senses of humour. Um, who is going to tell him?



Dave Martin was in a panic just before dinner as he had not got anything on Geoff Selvidge and, as I shared a room, what could I offer? Sadly, nothing which shows how well Geoff has slipped into place as a club member. Mind you, he still got fined for being perfect. Norman Hyde, MCIA main board member, was fined for turning out on a grey import fitted with a race pipe. Should have been flogged, I say. I got fined for writing to the chairman on some matter but remarked "en passant" that I was not fined at Chester. So much for private correspondence. It really is a super feature of the evening for, when announced, the glow of expectation lights up the room and Dave Martin does it so well.

Thus to the intimacy of the bar. Well, intimate if you include a coach party of peripatetic Yanks wearing name tags and doing Europe in five days, the Welsh and Irish bowling teams and a local wedding. You could tell the bride had

class because all her tattoos were spelt correctly. I saw her at one time at the bar, fag in one hand, bottle of Bud in the other. She put the Bud and fag down, reached down, hitched her skirt up and adjusted her knickers and did not stop talking and dragging on her gasper. She was still there when I went to bed. I crashed their disco but there was not a lot of spare snicket that wanted to play so instead watched two of the chaps beat shit out of each other. I reckon that next day, they would all say what a great wedding that was.

Breakfast next morning was brought forward to 7.30 so we could nosh, meet and skiddaddle in good time. Tom carried on his pursuit of the mulatto who got her revenge by serving him a kipper on a plate that was red hot and in such a way he had to take it from her - "but I said it was 'ot, m'sieur". Mike Evans came down ready for the "off" in his obviously brand new leathers that had white sections that were still white. Maybe I am just a dirt magnetic but riding bikes and white do not go together in my world.

The club business was swiftly despatched up to the discussion on the next runs. Tony Dawson explained he had got the main frame work outlined and then the floor started making all sorts of suggestions that looked like demands. Principally about the ale, which must be real, well kept, rare, etc. Then the rest of the helpful suggestions arrived such as a quiet and exclusive coaching inn with sumptuous fittings and world class catering on a deserted winding road with achingly beautiful ... I understand this, but surely it is hard enough to organise a run without having too many restrictions. May I take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of all members, all those that have taken upon themselves the burden of organising a run or will take the burden. We cannot adequately express our heartfelt thanks for these enormous tasks.

David Dixon and I have failed to get together a run in Southern Ireland due to the logistics of getting people over the Irish Sea from North and South ports of departure so Peter Sheen has kindly offered to bring his Lake District run forward to Autumn 1998.

And thus another run came to a close and I close with thanks from all to Tom Waterer and Nick Jeffery for Devil's Staircase Two. See you in the Wolds.



Alan Baker