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# My Side of THE Mountain

Joe Thomson Age 10



## THE RIDE TO THE HIGHEST ROAD IN SCOTLAND.....

My weekend in the saddle climbing higher than I've ever been before and learning that going down is scarier than going up.

Saturday morning and at 5am my Dad woke me up for the long drive to Wanlockhead in Scotland. I was really excited and a little bit scared, I'd seen the pictures that my Dad did last year and I knew that the climbs were big and long and that Talla was called "The Wall" and at the end of the ride the road went from Wanlockhead up a very high road to the Radar station. It must be high because it's the highest road in Scotland, wow. All my kit was packed, my new Radar kit (thanks "uncle" Peter) and all my winter kit in

case the weather was rubbish which my Dad said it could be. We put everything in the car and my bike went on the back seat. It had a new chainset and block put on it the night before we went to Scotland with shorter cranks and gears for racing in under 12 races. My Dad said that he hoped the lowest gear (34x27 - Dad) would be enough to get to the top. I couldn't sleep on the drive I was excited about the ride and Dad was giving me lots of advice, which he always does. We stopped for breakfast at Stafford



Me in my great Radar kit outside the Wanlockhead village hall with the Radar station in the background, it's a lot higher than the highest village in Scotland.

services and again for a coffee break and a really tasty Beef Growler pie from the farm shop at Tebay services in the Lake District. It was hot and sunny and perfect for riding up a mountain.

The nearer we got to Wanlockhead the hillier it got and I started to get a bit worried when we came off the motorway and Dad said that it was uphill all the way to the top from here and it was more than 10 miles to the village. We drove up the red road and we could see the golf ball, it looked quite big even though it was a long way away and really quite high up to, I was more worried than excited now. My Dad called uncle Peter to see where he was and when he'd be ready for the ride. Then my Dad had no signal on his mobile and I thought that we were definitely in the middle of nowhere as my Dad's mobile always works.

We went to the pub and had a lemonade then went off to get changed. I rode around the village a few times to warm up and practice going up hill. The climb from the museum up to the start of the climb to the golf ball was about as big as the biggest climb I'd ever done before. That was in France in horrible weather on a London to Paris event last year. I was really happy with my new Specialized bike from Sigma Sport and the gears that Jim had put on

for me on the Friday night were really good.

When uncle Peter arrived we had a chat, he was really impressed with my new bike and said it would be perfect for climbing up the mountain. We decided that as I'd been warming up and the sun was shining and he still had signs to put out on the route that we'd go for it. Straight to the top from the village hall. Uphill all the way to the top.

We set off with Dad behind in the car. When we got to the barrier at the bottom of the mountain we had to stop and open the barrier with a key, it took a little while to work out which padlock we had the key for. I was thinking that this is it, the BIG climb and it must be a big one because the garage by the barrier has got a snow cat in it. Just like they use at the North Pole.

We locked the barrier again then set off, I was a bit worried about the drain that went across the road but my bike went over it OK. I started off a bit quick, I was pedalling too fast and after a few minutes I had to stop. I hadn't remembered what my Dad had said and wasn't really listening to uncle Peter. I got my breath back, calmed down and wiped away the tears, I didn't think I was going to be able to do it and I was upset. Dad and uncle Peter chatted to me and calmed me down, I had a drink from my bottle and got



ready to carry on. I was calmer now and very determined to make it to the top. I managed to settle into a nice rhythm this time and listen to Uncle Pete. We rode a lot steadier and then came a nice surprise, there was a downhill bit on the climb, I wasn't expecting that. It started to go up again pretty quick though. I could see the snow posts marking the edge of the road zig-zagging all the way and up and up. I spent a lot of time concentrating on pushing the pedals and breathing deep. I thought to myself that I'd never seen so much sheep poo in all my life as was on the road up to the sky. It's strange what pops into your mind when you are concentrating on pedalling and breathing so much.

I had to stop a couple more times to get my breath back. This was a real mountain climb, I felt like I was in Alps and riding up my own Alpe du Huez. Uncle Peter was wearing a new Sigma summer jersey and looked like he was a national champion. I kept digging in and pushing on.

Every time we went round a bend there seemed to be another one to go - would we ever get to the top? I stopped on a hairpin not far from the top and Dad wanted to take a particular picture of me, if I had enough breath I might have said a rude word to him. Uncle Peter told me it wasn't far now, one more corner, up a bit and then over the cattle grid to the golf ball. It did look a lot bigger now, so I knew we must be close.

We were close, around the corner the road got steeper and I tried to get in front of uncle Peter, I kept pushing hard and breathing harder. My Dad and uncle Peter were really encouraging me. I got across the cattle grid just before the top, that was hard and we were there.

Another stop and Dad taking pictures, we had a little rest and then did a lap of the golf ball building.

I'd made it to the top of the world - wow. I felt great. My Dad says that the pain is temporary and that the memory and the achievement are with you forever, it's true.

I put on my rain jacket for the descent back down to the village (or pub as my Dad says) It was quite scary really. I've never been up a mountain like this before and I have never been downhill like it either.

I was pretty slow to start with and had the brakes on a lot. As I got nearer the bottom I got braver and let the brakes off a bit, I went pretty fast. I forgot about the drain near the bottom and attempted to bunny hop it - ouch that hurt.

We got back into the village and I rode around for about 12 laps before my Dad called me in and I had a lemonade before my tea.

It was really really great to ride up the mountain, I couldn't have done it without my Dad shouting encouragement and giving me a couple of little pushes or my uncle Peter for being brilliant and coaching me to the top. THANKS.

Next year I want to ride the Baby Radar or maybe the Junior Radar. I'll be able to go downhill a lot faster then and think that flying down Mennock Pass will be great fun.

I am going to get my Dad to ride with me and not take pictures, that gives him a year to get fit enough. Come on Dad, you know you can do it.

He tells me he was great at going downhill as he was always rubbish at going uphill, so maybe we can help each other out.

I hope the weather is like it was for my ride up the mountain and not all wet windy and horrible like it was for everyone on the Sunday.

I think everyone who rode did brilliant and deserves a big pat on the back.

See you next year

Joe Thomson.