

RADAR RIDE

A BRILLIANT DAY OUT?

WHAT WAS IT LIKE AT THE FRONT END OF THE 2010 RADAR RIDE?

By Malcolm Dunlop

Having basked in sunshine during the inaugural Radar Ride in 2008 but missed the maelstrom of the 2009 event, I assumed it would be a lovely day and so I could post a better time than I had managed in 2008. It was not to be for either of these assumptions! Nonetheless, it was an extremely enjoyable event and extremely well organised, with the best signage of any event I have ridden.

When we set off, the clouds could be best described as 'eye-level' rather than 'hilltop level'! A quick descent of the Mennock Pass and we had a good group forming with four of the guys from our cycling group and a few others. Despite the benefit of the downhill I was happier to be in the trees around Drumlanrig as it was out of the wind! The trip through the trees along the riverside was both quick and very enjoyable as no punctures and fantastic countryside. The group was working well with more joining in and the pace was exhilarating. Out of Drumlanrig and across the A76 - with excellent marshalling - and we were soon on our way up the Dalveen Pass. I have to say that was one of the (many) high points! Wind assisted, we were going up the 5-6% climb (occasionally 7% on my Garmin) at over 23mph! Only bad bit was it was over too quickly!!! The weather had even cleared up a bit and the roads were now fairly dry.

It's fair to say that the group had thinned out a bit with the pace and we had even dropped Ed and Simon from our own group! However, we soon caught some other bunches and there was a good group of 6 or 7 forming again. We were bowling along with more wind assistance. We even managed some chatting for a bit and I met a guy

called Colin from just outside Edinburgh who was lightening quick up the hills and was taking good turns at the front along with Ian and myself. No-one needed food and so we tore through the feed station and on to the upper part of the Devil's Beeftub. This is where the pay-back came for all that chatting and wind-assisted climbing - no chatting now!! Well, nothing that I could hear past the roar of the wind round my ears and my heart pounding! Eventually we reached the crest marked 'Summit' - only to find that this is NOT the summit!! It was half a mile further on!!! Crestfallen, we battered on and finally the descent to Tweedsmuir was upon us. We climbed the mile or so up to the reservoir and the mood changed as people saw the Talla climb - no jokes now! We caught another group from Border City Wheelers and I decided the best plan was to pass them and avoid any possibility of traffic on Talla and especially on the way down (good plan as it turned out - see elsewhere!). I have climbed Talla a few times but it was the best ever in the Radar Ride 2010!! The wind assist was brilliant and I was up it in no time - not as quick as Colin (aka mountain goat) - but as good as I have ever managed. Crested the hill and Ian was behind within the small group and we horsed it down the other side in single file with good distance between - all safe thank goodness.

A wee group of 5 was all that was left after the climb and the rapid descent and we set off along St Mary's Loch. The weather by now was sunny and quite nice, but it was hard in the strong to gale force wind, but little did we know we were sheltered by the hills. Once on the straight after the café, the wind was what can only be described as BRUTAL!!! It was a steady 25-30 mph straight on the nose and was gusting to around 50 mph plus. The group worked well but it was tiring at the front and everyone was glad of some shelter, thinking only of the descent of the Grey Mare's Tail. However, the descent consisted of pedaling downhill on an 8% gradient and reaching the singularly unimpressive maximum velocity of 17mph!!! Great power training all the same!!!

Moffat and then right up the lower half of the Beeftub and by now we had picked up a few more and we had a group of 8 or so. The pace up the hill was quick enough but I decided to go for it a bit as my legs were feeling good despite the hammering they had taken. So the pace just increased steadily until there were just two of us at the top. No need for food or water and we headed back along the middle section taking it fairly steady as again wind was a major factor. We were joined by another chap from Troon who had bridged from a small group behind us. The three of us worked well together all the way back up the middle section and to Leadhills, impending thoughts of Lowther Hill began to come to the fore!!

Ian and I had a history on Lowther Hill from 2 years ago and I was dammed sure he wasn't going to thrash me up the climb again!!! So it was a pretty steady pace all the way on the climb up to Wanlockhead - both ready for the impending climbing duel and both (surprisingly) feeling we had good legs!!

Sadly our duel wasn't to be and the event finished at the bottom due to (well justified) safety reasons. However, I managed to find myself at the front of our wee group and

our day was done!!! As one might suspect, I didn't manage a better time than the balmy day of the 2008 Radar Ride but I was just as happy to post the time I did! Best thing was there was a hamper full of sandwiches and cakes along with friendly faces and chat from the helpers as we sat on the car bumper and watched the others come in.

Absolutely brilliant day out! The weather made it even more memorable and in many ways added to it. The full Radar Ride is a very challenging event amidst wonderful countryside and I would recommend it to anyone who fancies pitting themselves against both gravity and several of the forces of nature!!