

North Road at the Tour De France 2012 + photos

Contributed by Lawrence Brenchley
Sunday, 15 July 2012

North

Road at the Tour de France - Tuesday 3rd July 2012

Stage 3 of the Tour de France

was the nearest the race got to England, so along with around three hundred other cyclists who had the same idea, eleven intrepid North Roaders (myself, Glyn Dodds, Richard Somerset, John McDowall, Derek Evans, Glyn Teare, Nick Harris, Ivana Prokopova, Don Hale, Chris Ollard, Brian Goodwin and his son Nick) set off with their bikes as foot passengers on the 9.25am Ferry from Dover to Calais. The plan was to cycle the 28 miles from Calais to Boulogne, watch the race, and then cycle back.

Most discussion on the ferry was whether we could see the race in two places – a 4th Cat climb called Cote de L’Eperche 65km from the finish and then make a fast dash to Boulogne on roads avoiding the race to see the finish in Boulogne.

As we headed into a residential area of Calais heading in a different direction to all the other cyclists Richard assured us that his Garmin route was in fact correct as we would be taking the inland route on the way out and the coastal route on the way back. We made good progress on quiet B roads with some long draggy hills and after an hour we needed to decide whether to turn off to the Cote de L’Eperche or head straight to Boulogne. We chose Boulogne and this turned out to be a good decision as the town was locked down and packed. TdF lorries lined the approach roads and there were police roadblocks at the main junctions. The town was in party mood.

Glyn Dodds, his friend Sean and myself got separated from the North Road bunch comprising Richard, John, Del, Glyn, Nick, Ivana, Don, Chris, Brian and his son Nick. We ended up in the main square and had a great lunch of moule frites and beer whilst being entertained by a group of singers and a man on a chunky bike who borrowed Glyn’s glasses and my shoes to cycle around the Cathedral shouting and generally acting bonkers - not quite Emily’s at Whitwell!

We then cycled up towards the finish and by chance found a spot on a corner 250m from the uphill finish under a big TV screen showing pictures and commentary at the race approached. The crowds were a least six deep and all the good spots were bagged many hours earlier. Lots of carnival floats preceded the race caravan, as the race approached the crowd got louder and louder, especially when Sylvain Chavanel went off the front in a doomed attempt to break clear. Suddenly I saw light and dark blue shirts in the distance and realised that our main bunch was watching on the opposite side of the road. That was the last we would see of them until Calais. The race leaders sprinted through in a blur and the other riders trickled in with the team cars.

After the barriers came down and the crowd started dispersing we tried to find our way out of Boulogne. But without Mr Badger our route leader we inevitably got lost ending up on back roads and in industrial estates before I realised we could retrace our Garmin route back on the inland route we had used on the way down. After zooming out the Garmin map out to a huge scale I managed to locate the main turnoff as a tiny line and after fifteen minutes of zig-zagging trying to follow the screen arrow

until I could zoom in enough, I was eventually rewarded with the great sight of parallel lines on the screen.

We arrived back in Calais late and met up with the others. Luckily the ferry was delayed and they gave me that ‘where have you been’ look and told me how beautiful the coast route back was. We were herded onto the ferry in our usual place on the lowest deck, went upstairs for dinner, and then waited in Calais for another hour before finally arriving in Dover around 10pm. It was an exhausting but great day out. Some special mentions are needed: Ivana who was the best climber and the only person who was happy that Peter Sagan won the stage, Richard and Del for route planning (Garmin Sat Nav and printed google map respectively) , Big John for getting dropped on his cross bike, blamed on a poorly secured bungied plastic bag on his pannier plus jammed brakes. And finally to young Nick for cycling the whole way on his Dad’s old bike on NORMAL trainers with Keo pedals – you’ll pay for that one day Dad!