

Newforce e-newsletter

Issue 155 2020





Dear Newforce Members. Welcome to Newforce issue 155, or should it be e-issue 001?

What can I say about this year that hasn't been said already? It's definitely been a challenging one for many reasons. But firstly I need to apologise for the lack of spring and summer newsletters and as I'm now writing this in the middle of October probably the autumn one too. With the transition from paper print to e-copy I've been a little unsure how to present this but mainly I've been really really busy, which I'll explain more about later.

For any of you who are not aware, the change to e-copy is due to the magazine printing and mailing costs rising to the point where they were absorbing almost the whole of the club's budget for the year. Additionally, no more than half the content each of magazine was original, the remainder being information that was either repeated from issue to issue or also available on the club website. The annual calendar will remain but the intention is for the money saved on the three other issues to be fed back into club activities such as a summer barbecue, trips away or anything else the committee agrees is a good idea at the time. It's your money so if you have any ideas on how we should spend it please don't hesitate to let us know.

So how have the coronavirus restrictions affected your riding? I know people who have ridden less and also people who have taken advantage of having a time on their hands to ride a lot more. For the first few weeks when the lockdown was at it's strictest the New Forest was very quiet and a pleasant place to be. The few people I did pass seemed content to exchange a smile and a vague feeling of guilt at being out enjoying the nice weather we were having when so many others across the country were confined in their towns and cities. One particular memory I have is of the VE anniversary weekend. As I rode past the triangular traffic island by Hatchet Pond there was a circle of chairs there occupied by (presumably) local veterans with glasses in hand and bottles by their sides determined to celebrate whatever.

But the tranquility wasn't to last.

The easing of lockdown travel restrictions coincided with some particularly nice spring weather and as was well reported at the time the country went bonkers for the south coast with the New Forest becoming even more packed than usual for the time of year. Several times I passed Hatchet Pond on sunny days with cars parked a long long way down the verges and plenty of inflatables being used on the water. Good news for the ice cream van though.

So what have we got to look forward to? The current system of club rides being undertaken in smaller groups seems to be working with the social side of larger groups being the only casualty. This will presumably have to continue until we are told otherwise. So keep riding, keep fit and enjoy what we have got. Oh, and take plenty of photos for the facebook page and maybe even write something for me to put in here.

## **Newforce Committee Meeting Minutes 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

The meeting was held via a videoconference to ensure Covid safety.

**Present:** Martin Wheat, Ian Taylor, Roger Shephard, Karen Clark (p/t), Nick Clark (p/t), Sue Marsland

**Apologies:** Steve Keith, Keith Whitten, Stu Rogers, Eleanor Rutter, Allan Knight, John Hawkins, Linda Hawkins, Jack Lawry

### **2020 Club Rides**

Despite identifying leaders some rides have not been well attended or in some cases not at all. Sue has done a Facebook poll where 20 people said they were intending to ride with the club but attendance to date has fallen well short of this number.

Three people have said they would prefer a slow/medium pace ride.

There was extensive speculation and discussion about ride attendance and Covid guidance respectively which concluded:

- 1) Rides would be scheduled two rides in advance but follow the principle that the identified leader would determine starting point and pace; however where two medium leaders come forward, Ian will see if they can start from the same point so that the groups can split according to pace. Sue volunteered to lead a slow/medium ride which will be advertised as such.
- 2) As an affiliated club we will look to CyclingUK Covid guidance on group size, suitably modified based on our confidence in being able to ride safely in our specific circumstances. In other words CyclingUK guidance would provide an upper limit, however ride leaders would determine the size of the group they were comfortable with leading in a Covid secure manner, up to a maximum of 10.

### **Important post meeting note**

**On 14<sup>th</sup> September CyclingUK revised its guidelines based on changes to government legislation so that the maximum group size advised in England is now 6 which effectively leaves our current policy unchanged. This has been advised to group leaders**

### **2020 Spring Weekend**

This has now moved to June 2021. The hostel is still in business and no one has cancelled. To be kept under review – **Sue**

## **Membership Report**

It was agreed it was too early to re-start charging membership fees. Current membership is 114 but this may not be accurate as we have not been asking for fees.

## **Magazine**

Keith now less busy and will try to produce a magazine by year end. Contributions needed.

## **AOB**

Ian requested the 'newforce 2020 Committee' distribution list be used which has previously been circulated and will be used for these minutes.

Ian to check on the newforce marker address on the CyclingUK website which shows the club located in Chandlers Ford.

Roger announced Allan has resigned as Secretary effective from the next AGM. A replacement will be sought. Allan to be asked to write a job description - Roger

## **Next Meeting**

AGM 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 8:00pm. Venue/medium TBD

# Covid and the Cycle Industry

By Keith Whitten

It's unlikely to have escaped the notice of too many of you that the changes in lifestyle brought about by the Covid issue and lockdown have seen a lot more people getting out on bikes. In the following lines I'll try to convey the true scale of that surge of interest in cycling and what it's done to the cycling industry.

When lockdown was first announced in late March my first thought was to ensure I got all repair work left with me back to it's owners before I was forced to close. Then when cycle shops were listed as exempt from closure I assumed business would be reduced to a trickle and considered reducing my opening hours to suit. How wrong I was.

At first my bike repair shop showed it's normal spring increase in business but by mid April the volume of bikes coming in for repairs had ramped to double what I would consider to be a busy week any other year and stayed at that rate until the end of July. This meant that rather than reducing my working hours, I was going in a couple of hours early, staying late and working my days off to keep the turn around times reasonable and avoid the backlog becoming too huge and overwhelming my storage space. It wasn't just me, all the other shops that I spoke to locally were seeing a huge surge in sales and servicing. The sister companies Dawes and Claud Butler had sold their 2020 supply of mountain bikes by the end of April, with town bikes running out a few weeks later. Merida were in a similar situation with even their high end models being sold out by mid summer and 2021 models not due until the autumn. Word in the trade was that everyone was in the same situation and for the national importers resupply is not just a case of placing an order and waiting a few weeks for more bikes to arrive. Manufacturing slots are agreed with the factories in the far east up to a year in advance and then it takes another six weeks for a container ship to travel from there to England.

It wasn't just complete bikes that flew off the shelves. Old bikes were being pulled out of sheds and garages for the first time in years and even dragged out of hedges if the state of some of those that arrived at my shop for resurrection were any indication. Chains and cables rusted solid and needing cutting off were not unusual. Very quickly replacement 26 inch wheels and tyres became virtually unobtainable and inner tubes of all sizes became the cycling industry's equivalent of toilet rolls. Many other classes of components followed suit through the summer, not just at low and mid range levels. I recently found it impossible to obtain a ten speed road compact chainset for a customer and even USE Exposure who supply only high end lighting and componentry told me they'd been flat out. On a rare afternoon off in July I visited a

motorcycle dealership where one of the salesmen, also a keen cyclist, recounted how he'd gone to Decathlon with the intention of buying a new riding top and found the cycling aisle looking like it had been ransacked, with the only shirts left being either outrageously huge sizes or with designs that no-one in their right mind would want to be seen wearing. This phenomenon doesn't appear to have been just a British thing, I've seen several references online to the cycle industries in America and mainland Europe experiencing the same patterns. A recent letter from Merida to its dealer network notes that the current holes in the component supply chain are already expected to impact on the 2022 models due late 2021. At the time of writing (late October 2020) there are still many common components that cannot be obtained; many sizes of bottom bracket, 26 inch MTB wheels, hybrid wheels and many shifter pods being just a few examples.

With the end of summer the demand has now relented and for the past month or so I've thankfully been back to working normal hours although stock ordering is still taking far longer than it used to. I regularly have to trawl through half a dozen or more supplier's websites to find availability of what are normally quite common items and then try to group what I need into as few orders as possible to minimise carriage charges which for a business the size of mine can make a big dent in the profitability of supplying low cost items. This certainly shouldn't be seen as grumbling on my part. In a year that has seen many people's livelihoods severely dented I am very grateful that the effect of all this on my business has been positive, and now it's calmed down a bit I can start on the list of outstanding jobs at home.

# The Grand Traverse du Massif Central – Well some of it anyway....

By Will Wilkins

Our lungs felt like they were bursting out of our chests as we battled our way to the top of yet another mega climb. We unceremoniously dumped the bikes and collapsed in the shade of a tree. After a minute or two to recover and take in the view, I reflected on the trip so far. “It’s just like being on the Isle of Wight or the South Downs way, just a bit longer”. “Yeah but with less gates” said Kate, “and more croissants”.





I'd first heard of the Grand Traverse of the Massif Central from the very informative but somewhat out of date book of the same name, published by Cicerone. Looking on their website today <https://www.cicerone.co.uk/the-grand-traverse-of-the-massif-central> it seems that it's been updated but there is also the excellent official website of the ride <https://www.the-gtmc.com/> which in this modern world, combined with the maps.me app on my phone seemed to be the way to go.



If you don't know about the GTMC, the whole route is 1400km mix of dirt roads, single track and a smattering of quiet tarmac country roads that run from Avallon in central France and wiggle their way through the Massif Central and then down (well up & down – a lot) to Cap D'Agde on the sparkling Mediterranean sea.

We only wanted to ride for about a week maximum so there was no way we could take on the whole of this beast so instead bunged the bikes in the car and drove down to the Auvergne, where my mum happens to have a little holiday house. The route passes about 15km from her house so we cooked up a plan to join it and see how far we could get as we headed south through the volcanic mountain region of the Massif Central. There's a train station about 20km in the opposite direction from my mum's place so we knew we could get back. Tres bon, let's go!





Well, nothing's that simple is it? First we had to make peace with our identity crisis. You see, doing a bit of googling, it appears the route is a bit of a Bikepacking mecca <https://bikepacking.com/routes/grand-traverse-du-massif-central-gtmc/>. Now we'd just bought our new midrange Cube MTB's which would just about pass the "are you a Bikepacker?" test, but we'd made the huge faux pas of fitting totally non fashionable (but hugely practical) rear racks in order to fit our panniers to. "What no frame bag or seat pack?" I hear you cry? "Mon dieu, Monsieur, vous etes so stuck in the 90's!" We even got stick from some of our fellow brethren who reside amongst this very club for bolting such crude and out of date carrying devices to the rear of our steeds (thank you Richard!). Yeah, well, d'you know, those rack and our trusty Ortlieb panniers that attached to them were bloody great for lugging the tent, cooking gear, sleeping kit and a few pairs of socks n jocks. I don't care what the fashion is, on a bike, practicality rules in my book. We did however concede somewhat by buying a handlebar bag each, to kinda 'get kool wiv da kidz' and more importantly balance the weight out a bit.



With that off my chest I'll get on and tell you a bit about the ride because that's surely what it's all about? Each of the sections on the GTMC website are broken down into doable distances and are graded. All of ours were listed as 'hard'. God only knows what the 'very hard' sections further south as you approach Millau are like. Some of the climbs we endured were as steep as we encountered on the all-day Isle of Wight ride the club did back in the summer. But with the extra



weight on the bikes, they felt way tougher. There wasn't really much payback on the descents either. Our little brake pads were cooking as they held back the weight of the bikes. We had to keep the speed down in most places, especially on the single track or sections of loose rocks & stones. There were even some somewhat technical sections, especially through the forests where the tree roots criss-crossed the track. Chuck in a few sections where the single track looked more like dry stream bed and parts of the ride started to get pretty good fun.



Another thing that put a smile on our faces was the excellent signposting/way finding. The website says that most of the route is signposted and I had visions of us arguing, back tracking and generally getting frustrated as we floundered in the woods. I'd spent quite a bit of time researching various GPSs to download the GPX files but couldn't stomach splashing the cash for a 'just in case' moment. I did manage to download the files to my phone as backup but never actually used



them. The French (gawd bless 'em) had done a really good job of it. They use street furniture (think trees and fence posts rather than dumped sofas!) to fix the directional signs to, but nature being what it is, often the trees were in the 'wrong' place. So their system includes positive direction signs and negative ones. By this I mean the route marker with a big X through it. Using a process of elimination you might see several X's telling you to not take that path, therefore meaning stay on the path you're on. In lots of places the route was joined by various other bike or walking trails, each with the own sign. It was so simple to follow that I think in 4 days and hundreds of junctions, we only went wrong about 3 times and due to the frequency of the signs, soon knew we'd messed up. We also felt confident enough to actually divert off the track here and there, especially when it went off on huge loops that joined back up just a few Km down a 'normal' road.





In the end we actually only rode for 4 days. The summer heat was in full swing. I knew from visits over the years to my mum's place that the weather in the region can be very changeable. The worst I've seen over the years is blistering 35 degree sunshine one day, followed by 15 degree drizzle the next. For this trip though we had a consistent 31 degree hot sun pumping down on us all day, every day. The clear skies remained at night so combined with the 1000m approx. altitude it got a tad parky in our little sleeping bags at night. To be honest, it was all getting to be a bit hard work. We started to research the trains for getting back and discovered that the dreaded engineering works meant replacement buses which we knew (from previous bitter experience) meant no bikes allowed. That kind of sealed the deal. There was a train running part of the way but if we rode any further south, we'd then need to turn around to ride back to get it. It all seems a bit 'soft' and maybe with a bigger group or some macho bravado we'd have ridden on some more. But a husband and wife team with nothing to prove and the free use of a comfortable French farm house sitting empty, we decided to call it a day.





We turned east at the ski resort of Besse and headed to Issoire down a glorious 35km tarmac descent, barely pedaling all the way. The previous days we'd done 55km with 760m climbing, 40km with 930m and 42km with 1120m of up, up and away. Sitting here in December with the 5 degree rain beating on the window I feel like a bit of a softie writing this – I mean isn't it all about sweat, hard trails and pushing yourself? Yes and no. But to appease our guilt, once we were safely back at the house and had rested for a few days, we did go out for several blistering day rides that reminded us of our mortality!



One thing the websites don't really help with is finding campsites along the way. Before we left the UK I spent hours zooming in on Maps.me and managed to find lots of potential campgrounds on the route. We were happy to dive in the bushes if he had to but for about 15 Euro between us for flat soft grass and a hot shower why would we? France is great for being able to make it up as you go along. From previous trips we had a pretty good idea we'd find camp spots each night but



it's always nicer to know that there'd be one waiting for you. In fact we'd go as far to say that finding a campsite in France is actually sometimes easier than getting a coffee. Ask for *Café au lait* and you'll be corrected that they only serve *Grand Crème*, ask for a *Grand Crème* in the next place and, you've guess it.... And woe betide you to go to a restaurant after say 11am when they've already laid the tables for lunch and ask for a coffee. Jeez, face of death! "OK, we'll have lunch as well please". "Lunch? Now? It's not past noon yet, are you mad"



Anyway, enough waffling. If you're interested in doing this section of the ride I'm afraid I can't offer you the keys to my mums place but I can tell you that if you drive to a lovely little French town called Ebreuil, you'll find a decent campsite and a little GTMC sign pointing you on your way south. From there you won't go far wrong if you pedal your way to a night's rest in the town of Volvic. Then on to a tiny village of Orcival with a lovely little campground and café/bar. Next day

is a fantastic ride through to the medieval village of Besse and then an easy roll down to Issoire where the train will whisk you north back to Clermont Ferrand. From there, change to another train, heading towards Montlucon but get off at Saint Bonnet de Rochefort which is less than an hour's ride back to your car. And in that paragraph, ladies and gentlemen is more than enough information to get you out into the beautiful, empty, fresh and lovely French countryside for a ride you won't forget in a long time.

A bientot!

