

Point to Point

A cycle ride from Britain's most easterly point to the most westerly point in Scotland



John Hopkins and Gordon Leadbeater





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A Cycle Ride from Ness Point, Lowestoft, Britain's most easterly point to the tip of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, its most westerly point.



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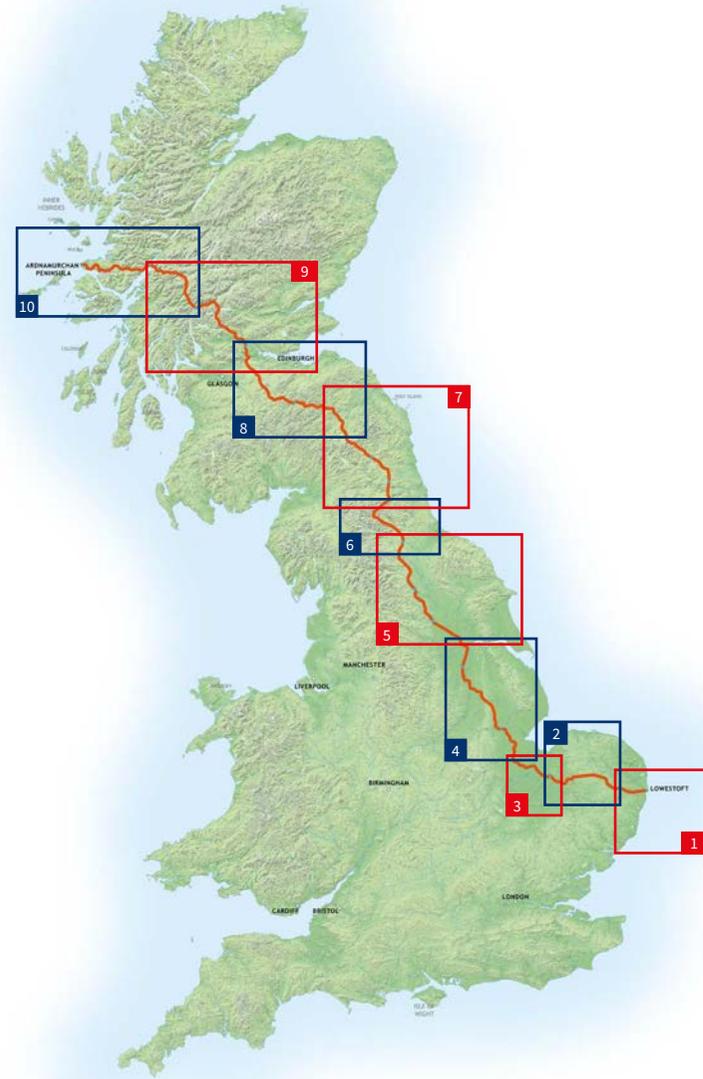
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Period houses at Wisbech

Foreword



Market Square, Downham Market

In 2004 John cycled from Land's End to John o'Groats (The End to End as it is affectionately known) and immediately became a member of the Land's End John o'Groats Association. A few months later he wrote a book about his journey entitled "Follow the Yellow Gorse Road".

In early 2005 John and I met for the first time at the Association's annual prize giving event. Over a drink that evening I mentioned to him that, whilst I had enjoyed my two End to End rides in 1986 and 1996, I had also completed the East/West ride in 1997 which, as a pure cycle ride, had appealed to me even more. I explained that this ride was from Ness Point, Lowestoft, the most eastern point in the landmass of mainland England, Wales and Scotland to the most western point, the tip of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula on the west coast of Scotland which abuts

onto the Atlantic Ocean just north of Oban. This conversation obviously sowed a seed in John's mind for in 2008, having planned his route, he set out with Rachel accompanying him in the car.

I'm not sure whether John considered it a punishment or a reward for my innocuous comments, but he asked me to write the Foreword for this book; I hope I am correct in assuming it was the latter. I accepted with pleasure, considering it to be an honour and privilege, even though I had no previous Foreword practice whatsoever.

It was inevitable that I should take particular note of John's chosen route. There is no set one for the iconic End to End but, generally speaking, there is a fairly broad corridor through which most journeys are made. With the East to West there is no limit. It



A rare Edward VII wall letter box

is a theme with more variations than even Beethoven could manage. Of necessity we both started in the same place and finished in the same place (though regrettably there was no Schubert Piano string quartet to listen to in the hotel in Salen that day) and pedalled on the same roads for the first and last few miles. This was as far as Watton in mid Norfolk at the start and from Corran, the short ferry crossing

which leads on to the 50 mile long Ardnamurchan Peninsula at the end. During the course of our respective journeys our routes diverged but came together again in both Lincoln and Goole. We didn't even share Rannoch Moor, John's choice, as I went via Appin House on the A828. John took a more direct route of 650 miles whereas I went the pretty way, 43 miles further. One item on our bikes we had in common was a "granny" gear, though I often wished mine was from the previous generation, a "great granny gear".

What John did, and I didn't, was to explore in detail the local history or families of many of the places he passed through. A good example of this happened on the very first day. I rode through Barsham, a small place west of Beccles on the Bungay road which the OS Landranger map deemed worthy of only its smallest font. I didn't give it a second thought and quickly forgot all about it. John didn't. As you will see, he devoted two pages to its historic significance

and the notable Suckling family who lived there and indeed the mother of Lord Nelson, of Trafalgar Square fame, was actually born there.

Other instances of his research, especially into churches including those with Saxon and Norman round towers in Suffolk and Norfolk, and curiosity of the places and areas covered by his journey are very much part of the charm of this book. It contains much history, of both the natural and historic varieties plus, for those of a sporting inclination, passages on the Melrose Sevens and cricket in County Durham. There are even a few words on the backbone of Scottish football. And if you wish to know more about the enterprising Peckovers of Wisbech or Boston Spa or Spalding – it's all here together with so many interesting diversions – on one of which I must challenge him. He makes the assertion and does not say it is his own or somebody else's, or even a committee's, that the number of acres in Yorkshire broadly approximate to the number of words in the Bible, Old and/or New Testaments? On what basis is this assertion



Beautiful scenery in Co Durham

made? Has somebody counted or used a calculator and set square or what? I should like to know.

Most of us can recognise a Munro when we see one, or can we? How many can give a precise definition and know the name and definition of the next one down and the one below that and the one below that? If you can't, look at the relevant section and you will find out.

I had previously mentioned Goole as one of the few places where our routes converged. John writes an interesting paragraph about it and if I had known

then what I now know, I might have taken a bit more interest and tried to imagine its importance nearly 200 years ago.

John certainly cycled through more towns than I did; maybe that's the reason for his route being shorter. There is no point in listing them here – they are all in the book but one which did elude him is Spennymoor. It is not a place inundated with B & B's. For some reason, Anne and I found ourselves there late one afternoon and after she had looked in vain for accommodation a local newsagent came to the rescue and pointed us towards a beautiful old

house with high ceilings run by a redundant steel worker from Consett. We didn't worry it was all a bit morbid with a cemetery on the other side of the road, an ambulance station on the other side of the back garden fence, adjacent to an isolation hospital, adjacent to a mortuary. The Victorians might have been romantic; they were certainly pragmatic but we did have an excellent breakfast. What would John have made of that?

The photographs, by Gordon Leadbeater, plus the map extracts, certainly enhance the excellent and informative text and the horizontal format makes the book easy and pleasant to handle. I could go on for a while mentioning more but it is time for me to stop this adulation and let you get on and read the book.

You will enjoy it.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gregory Smith'.



Samuel Smith horse and dray

for Diana and Gordon



John met Gordon, and his wife Diana, through his wife Rachel. Rachel first met Gordon and Diana when she was a teenager on holiday in Wales. They have all been close friends ever since.

The road trip to produce this book was Gordon and Diana's last such adventure as sadly they both died early in 2017. They shared many laughs with John and Rachel on their travels and happy memories of their time together.





Heckington's rare 8 sail windmill

Introduction

In 2004 I rode a bike from Land's End to John o'Groats (LeJoG) and enjoyed the experience immensely. Some six months after finishing the ride I decided to write a book. "Follow the Yellow Gorse Road" was not just about completing the journey, but incorporated many items of interest which I encountered both on the route and more or less adjacent to it.

Having completed the ride, I duly became a member of the Land's End/John o'Groats Association. To be a member of this club one has to have made the journey, no matter how. During my 11 year membership the usual methods adopted in travelling from one end of the British mainland to the other have been cycling, walking, driving a car or riding a motorbike. More eccentric ones have included pushing a scooter, driving a tractor and, in the case of a one legged man, flying an

aeroplane. Needless to say the club consists of some colourful and doughty characters, many of whom it has been my privilege to meet and come to know.

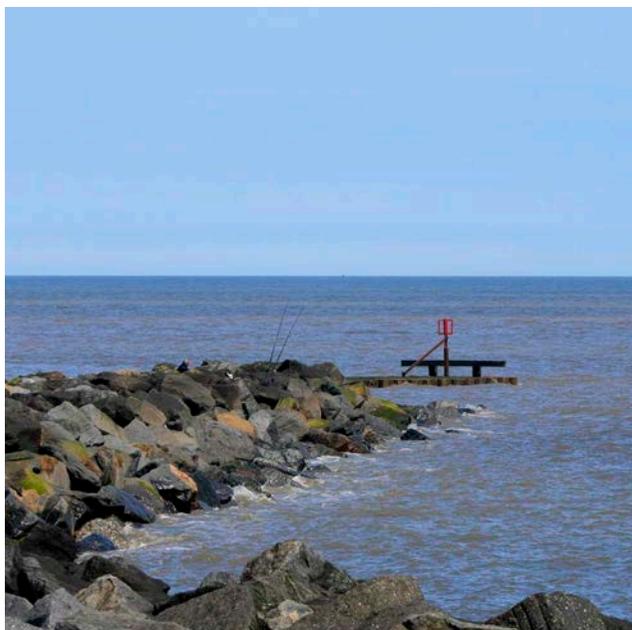
One such member, Geoffrey De'Ath, a retired solicitor and a club stalwart produced, until just recently, the LeJoG quarterly newsletter, Quo Vadis, and very readable it is too. A year after completing my ride Geoffrey made me aware of the East/West ride which he had completed some years previously. This is from the most easterly point of the British mainland, Ness Point, Lowestoft in Suffolk, to the most westerly, the tip of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula which juts out in to the Atlantic Ocean just north of Oban on the west coast of Scotland. I remember him saying that he had enjoyed that ride even more than LeJoG. My appetite was duly whetted.



Suffolk door

I was fortunate to complete the ride during the first half of May 2008 in near perfect weather. I could understand Geoffrey's point and would go as far to say that each ride had its plus points and very few minus ones. There were contrasts in the scenery which underlines the varied nature of what the UK has to offer. This is what I find so appealing and interesting. I enjoyed every minute of it.

A ride such as this, however, could not be undertaken without having a reliable bike, in my case a Falcon Cotswold which I had purchased some 20 years previously for the princely sum of £240. In today's money, if the same model were still being made, it would cost at least £1,500. A month or so before the ride I paid a visit to my reliable bike shop Langsett Cycles in Sheffield for a new rear tyre. Four years previously, prior to my LeJoG ride, the Langsett proprietor had recommended that my tyres be filled with 'slime'. This is a thickish green substance which prevents punctures for if a sharp item, such



as a hawthorn needle or a nail, penetrates a tyre the slime automatically seals the hole from within. My other requirement was a new Granny gear in my rear wheel cluster for I knew that some significantly steep hills lay ahead once I reached North Yorkshire and beyond.

This book is in much the same format as 'Follow the Yellow Gorse Road'. Thanks to very generous sponsorship prior to the ride, from friends, family

and business contacts, I was able to raise £9,500 which was split more or less equally between two charities of my choice; Water Aid and the Sheffield Family Holiday Fund (SFHF). As many readers will know, the first aims to provide safe uncontaminated water for the poorer African and Indian sub continent countries. Contaminated water accounts for more deaths in the World than any other form of illness. The SFHF, of which I am Chairman of Trustees, currently gives some 2,000 Sheffield Area adults and children a holiday experience each year. The terrible statistic in this city is that one in three families has never had a proper holiday. It is a proven fact that holidays broaden peoples horizons thereby enabling them to perform better in exams, leading in due course to better job prospects.

With these two rides under my belt I have quartered mainland Britain and in the process have discovered many new places which are interesting in their own right and are often off the beaten track. An added

bonus this time was that I planned my own route without the aid of any previously written book on the subject. I wanted to go through Lincoln and Stirling with their majestic cathedral and castle respectively. For the rest I kept to as many B roads as possible but, after Stirling, there are no real options other than the A84, A85 and A82. These duly led to Corran and the short ferry journey across Loch Linnhe to the final 50 mile ride along the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, a wonderful experience in itself.

Inevitably there are places and items of interest to see off the main route. Whilst I did not deviate from my chosen path during the ride it was a different matter when, in 2009 and 2012, Gordon Leadbeater and I were lining up pictures to include in the book. I discovered many places and objects of interest which, in most cases, were new to me. A new hobby was sparked in looking for and visiting Round Tower churches in East Anglia and pictures and references to three such churches feature in the text.

There is a Round Tower Church Society and their informative pamphlet which I picked up in Bedingham Church near Bungay, states that 180 of these churches still survive, the majority being in Norfolk where 124 exist and evidence of about 30 more are visible or recorded. I read that Norfolk was one of the first parts of Britain to hear the Gospel which inevitably led to the building of many churches. Many of these early ones may have been of wood but builders also used the local pebbles, flint and carrstone. This is how one of the great Norfolk hallmarks, the round tower, came about for they required no stone quoins. About a quarter of the Norfolk churches are Saxon with the remainder being of Norman origin.

A few thanks are now due. The first is to Geoffrey De'Ath, who not only sowed the seed for my doing the ride, but for also kindly agreeing to write the foreword. As with my previous ride, Rachel drove the backup vehicle accompanying me the whole



Barsham church

way and amongst other things finding suitable B&Bs or similar accommodation each night, an essential prerequisite for a 68 year old cyclist.

As with “Follow the Yellow Gorse Road” my special thanks go again to Gordon Leadbeater for his excellent and meticulous work in taking almost all of the photographs that appear in the book. Whereas I had been fortunate to have almost perfect weather during the whole of the ride we were not so lucky the following year when Gordon, in his usual professional way, was attempting to take the photographs. It was very much a case of waiting for breaks in the weather, one day being good the next bad. Separate journeys were in fact made to complete the task. On these trips we were always accompanied by Diana, Gordon’s wife. She was not just a passenger in the car but her wise words, Lancastrian sense of humour and downright common sense contributed greatly to our photographic journeys. It is to both Diana and Gordon that I dedicate this book.

Thanks are also due to my brother Roger, our daughter Penelope and Miles Stevenson for their diligent proof reading of the initial and final drafts. Their constructive comments resulted in certain factual inaccuracies being corrected.

For some time I struggled to find an appropriate title for the book wanting words which were both short, punchy and informative. I’m often taken to task, and quite rightly so, by friends and family for wandering off at tangents when recounting a tale. When we were talking about the book over a pub lunch one day my good friend, Andrew Stones, said “to the point, John”. Our daughter, Rebecca, was present at the time and a week later phoned me and came up with “Point to Point”. This struck me as the

perfect title to take readers into the journey.

A brief word on the chapter titles. The first seven chapters cover the English counties through which I rode. Following the county boundary changes in 1974, the English, Welsh and Scottish boundaries were, in many cases, redrawn to include Administrative areas. This was particularly noticeable in Scotland where a few new large regions were created. Three of



John riding out of Crianlarich with a backdrop of Ben More and Stob Binnein



Ballachulish Bridge

these through which the majority of my route passed are the names of the Scottish chapters, The Border Region, The Stirling Administrative Area and the Highland Region. From just west of Peebles to the City of Stirling I rode through parts of both South and North Lanarkshire. The description of this is included in the Stirling chapter. Likewise the seven or so miles from Tyndrum to just north of Bridge of Orchy is in

Argyll and Bute and I have included this in the text on the Highland Region.

I feel very fortunate to have been born in the UK and have come to know it pretty well during my lifetime. It has so much varied scenery in its comparatively small land area. This journey I hope demonstrates how by taking a theme, in this case riding from one

side of England to the other side of Scotland, can provide so much variety both from an historical and a geographical point of view. Some readers may even be tempted to ride or drive the route themselves.



Suffolk



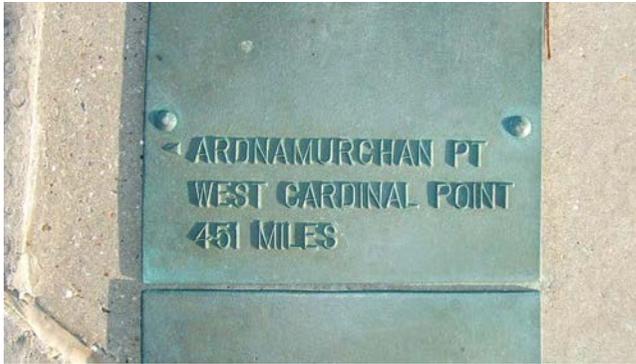
Suffolk and Norfolk (East Anglia) which are respectively the eighth and fourth largest counties in England, form a prominent bulge half way down its east coast. Norfolk and Suffolk are collectively known as East Anglia and they have the proud distinction among our counties of being named after the race that gave our country its name. When the

German tribes from the mouth of the river Elbe, the Jutes, Angles and Saxons crossed the North Sea the Angles came to this part of Britain. It subsequently became known as East Anglia before the rest of the country was called England.

The two counties have played a major role in the development of our Island Nation, both from a geographical location stance and also by being the birthplace of many great men and women who have made their mark at significant times in our historical development. They are by and large flat, but don't be deceived that this means it is easy cycling terrain, for it is not. Very rarely is it totally calm - there is usually a wind and in my experience it is against you. This trip was no exception.

Ness Point, the most eastern location of the British mainland is marked by a large metallic disc set into the seafront at Lowestoft showing direction points and distances to notable land marks such as Dunkirk, Land's End and John o'Groats. The most significant marker for me was Ardnamurchan Point shown as being 451 miles away as the crow flies. I am no crow, however, and my journey would prove to be 650 miles.





I duly left Ness Point and cycled down the sea front in Lowestoft on 1st May 2008 at about 4.30pm in the afternoon. On my left was the sea and one of the finest beaches, not only in Suffolk, but in the whole of England. After a couple of miles I was turning inland and, having passed through Carlton Colville, I encountered the East Anglia Transport Museum, the first of many places of interest on the ride.

In 1962 four local tramway enthusiasts rescued the body of an old Lowestoft tramcar (No.14) which had been converted into a summerhouse. From this the idea evolved in 1965 to form the East Anglian Transport Museum.

It is designed to show the development of mechanical transport during the last 90 years. Its essence is movement, where vehicles of yesteryear can be seen in action, where half forgotten sounds of the past are brought back to life and where visitors can journey back in time by travelling on a few of the exhibits along the Museum's streets. This Museum is well worth a visit. Leaving Carlton Colville I headed west toward the two B's, Beccles and Bungay. However, after skirting Beccles there was another B, Barsham.

Round Tower Churches

Some years before doing the ride my wife, Rachel, and I spent a few days in North Norfolk near to Holt. It was then that we noticed and visited for the first time round tower churches, a feature of the East Anglian landscape. The names of two in particular, Little Snoring and Stody, stuck in our minds for each had both a story to tell and a memorable name.

Here confronting me now was yet another, Barsham. This little Norman church situated above the



East Anglian Transport Museum, Carlton Colville