



BORDERS GROUP (Lothian D.A.)

Newsletter 1993

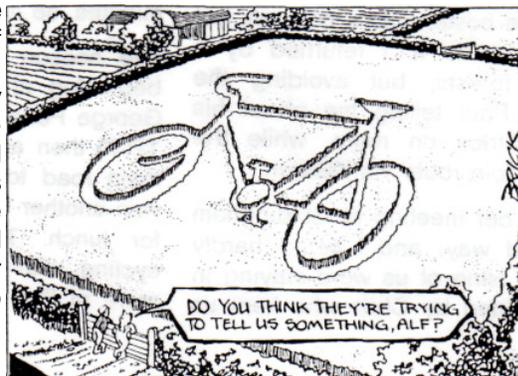
The general idea of this letter is to let new members, and others, know what we have been doing as a Group, and what is happening in the Borders Region for cyclists in general. Also what we have planned for 1994, and possibly stimulate a little interest in the non-participating members in the area. It's that time of year again when I start to feel guilty for not writing this Newsletter sooner, but I expect for most of us the winter is a time to put cycling on a back burner, long nights, cold, wet and windy is not the most conducive for cycling. I hope some of you at least have had the wheels turning, and the fresh air in your lungs?

1993

I am pleased to report that the reduction of attendances shown in 1992 has not continued, and we are up to an average of 10.5 for the Saturday night gathering, which is an increase of 3 on the same period last season. The thing that pleases me most is that 2 of the increase are actually from the Borders area. Attendances (incl. evening visitors, Borders folk plus friends from elsewhere) at the various meetings have ranged from 6 to 15. We started off the- season at Melrose Youth Hostel at the end of March. Seven folk came down on Friday and stayed overnight so we could go for a run on Saturday. I joined the group and another couple came over from Gala. We headed off in the general direction of Kelso, via Leaderfoot, Clintmains and then Maxton. Our luck was definitely in, there was a coffee morning in the village hall, the minister was pleased and surprised to see us. 50p got us two cups of tea and biscuits (we missed the cakes, unfortunately), and we didn't win the raffle either! After refreshments we had a leisurely run to Nisbet, Roxburgh and into

Kelso where we had lunch beside the Tweed at Mayfield, watching the salmon leaping. The group then returned to Melrose via Makerston and Dryburgh, and more tea and cakes at my house. In the evening we were joined by one or two others for a chat. The next meeting was at Abbey St Bathans Youth Hostel in April, when we had a lovely sunny day to get to the Hostel. I cycled down in time to go for a short run up passed the off-road driving centre at Whiteburn. We filled the hostel again with twelve of us staying, plus we had several evening visitors which made the small hostel very lively. Two people slept on the common room floor, but I don't think anybody minded. One notable absentee was Margaret who, I was informed straight faced, was away "bungie jumping" with her keep fit class! We were all up sharp on Sunday for the run home. I cheated by getting a lift to Greenlaw and cycling from there, but wished I hadn't as the heavens opened and was very wet by the time I got back, as was everybody else. In May our meeting was at Snoot Youth Hostel, and I arrived by car from a weeks holiday in the Lake District, to a pleasant sunny afternoon. Alice and I went for a short run up the valley to Craik into a slight headwind and was looking forward to a run back down the gentle slope. We

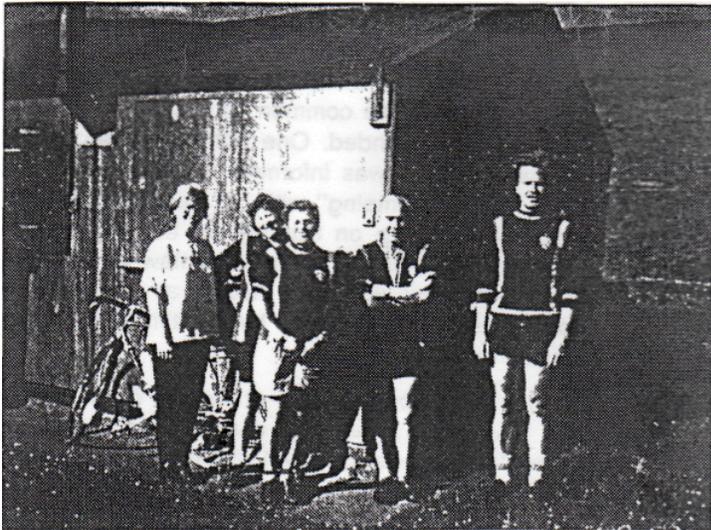
met Peter, who had already cycled from Edinburgh, and after much deliberation decided to try a circular route through the forest to Robertson. The route was very pleasant, but a bit ambitious for that time of day, and by the time we emerged on the



tarmac west of Ale Moor Loch, it was getting cold and starting to rain. So we arrived at the hostel cold, wet and hungry. Still, with a warm hostel, and a good turnout of eleven including two new Borders faces, the evening went well.

At the beginning of June we had our meeting at Bellingham Youth Hostel, which as usual is our farthest away. I made it all the more epic by picking an off road route over the Cheviots. I went up the Kale Valley to Under Hindhope then up the track to the Pennine Way with the brilliant sunshine helping to sap my already flagging energy. Dropped down a fairly boggy path to Chew Green Roman Fort where I did my good deed for the day by helping an old couple find the fort. Things were not looking good for my route though. I was intending to go through the military area to Byrness, but the gates were closed and the red flag flying. After a cup of tea from the flask, a 'top brass' type of guy in a volvo came along and opened the gate for himself and I pounced. Ok to go through as long as I kept out of today's firing zone - you bet! Was I glad, it's a long way round.

After reaching the A68, I crossed over and into the start of the forest drive, then took the direct forest



road towards Bellingham. Very peaceful, good views but a bit hilly. The hostel was a bit busy but only six of our group made it. I returned by a similar route through forests, but avoiding the military this time, with Paul telling me about his new job teaching in Africa on route, while the others took a more sensible route via Kielder.

By the end of June for our meeting at Coldingham my back was in a bad way, and I could hardly walk, never mind cycle. Nine of us were staying in the Hostel, and were joined by Chris who kept us

enthralled with his tales from the mammoth 1300k London - Edinburgh - London cycle ride which took him about 90 hours. It would have taken me about 90 days, if not 90 weeks.

July is our traditional time for the pilgrimage to Polmood Hut at Tweedsmuir. This year there were nine of us. Again my cycling was scuppered by my bad back, but the rest of the company had been out and about. Sunday morning was the sunniest at the Hut anyone could remember for years! and had cyclists up early to make the most of it.

Next was Wooler Youth Hostel in August, which is always a popular spot, this year the hostel was full, so two of the group had to go to Kirk Yetholm Youth Hostel for a bed, but we still had nine overnight at Wooler. It had been a nice day for cycling, quite warm - unlike the forecast. On Sunday most were following a treasure hunt trail to Etal that the warden had persuaded them to try. I was sidelined again.

September saw us return to Kirk Yetholm Youth Hostel, well six of the Group at least, because I was - no not injured - on holiday in France, and I had my bike with me.

The last hostel weekend was our AGM weekend at Melrose in October. We had intended having a club run on Saturday morning, but not for the first time the weather was diabolically wet and after much deliberation only one or two brave souls went to Kelso. Our AGM was attended by a very healthy figure of nine people from the Borders Region plus five friends from the Lothians. It's definitely not a formal AGM, more a chat over the events of the season and planning next years runs. An entertaining slide show was given by Robert Melrose, which showed Austria as well as the Borders, and a few nostalgic ones for the more mature members of the audience. The evening was rounded off by tea and a good selection of cakes etc. One date and

walnut loaf lasted less than two minutes, so it must have been good?

The season culminated in Sunday lunch at the beginning of November. We arranged to meet at George Fennel's cycling super-store at Peebles for 12:30 then a mass group of sixteen cycled up the main road to the Scots Pine at Eddleston. There was another 5 or 6 at Georges who did not join us for lunch. The main road was unpleasant for cycling, with at least 2 drivers giving us abuse, but more of that later. After a pleasant snack lunch a

few of us cycled back over the Meldons to Peebles. Not a bad turn out for such a grey day

1994

Our programme for 1994 is very similar to the above, and is as follows :-

26th March - Melrose YH

16th April - Abbey St Bathans YH

14th May - Snoot YH

4th June - Bellingham YH

25th June - Coldingham YH

16th July - Polmood Hut

20th August - Wooler YH

10th September - Broadmeadows YH

8th October - Melrose YH + AGM + Slides etc.

6th November - Sunday Lunch - Kelso

National events which are held not too far away are KM154 in Dumfriesshire, the 50th York Rally, and the Birthday Rides at Darlington. Details in Cycle Touring. A Scottish Inter DA meeting has been arranged for 8th May at the Crook of Devon and deserves our support and is a good chance to meet like minded cyclists from all over Scotland. Details from me nearer the date.

RIGHTS

As a follow up to my article last year on the new version of the Highway Code, I arranged a meeting with the local Police. It was also prompted by the amazingly stupid behaviour of several motorists on the A703 between Peebles and Eddleston as I mentioned earlier, when the Group went for Sunday lunch. We were riding two abreast, well strung out on the fairly wide road. Despite this we were shouted at, and told to ride in single file, and horns blasted by several motorists at least one of whom was coming in the opposite direction and was not inconvenienced in any way.

I met Sgt Morrison, who is a duty sergeant in the Traffic Section at Divisional Headquarters at Hawick. We discussed a range of cycling related topics which included the above problem. He indicated the police were quite happy for cyclists to ride two abreast in such circumstances, and would only expect single file at oends or on narrow roads. The problem of the abusive motorist was not an easy problem to identify, or solve, but if the driver had deliberately caused alarm or danger to us he (or she) could be reported to the Police and they, given sufficient evidence may be able to charge the driver with an offence.

The danger caused by speeding cars was one being tackled as a general policy by the police. A general statement set out in the Road Safety Plan for the Borders is that "It is widely recognised that excessive speed remains a major contributory factor in road accidents. This is particularly true in open road situations, and it is in these areas that speed enforcement will be carried out most vigorously by the Police."

In addition speed cameras are currently being used on the A1, and seems to have reduced average speeds by 5-6mph. A small step in the right direction, and these may well be used in other places with known problems.

Another topic discussed was the use of pavements and/or paths by cyclists. The Police would discourage anyone other than very small children cycling on the pavement, but outwith built up areas it would be OK. In fact the Scottish Office have asked Councils to look at the shared use of all paths adjacent to trunk roads outwith 30mph zones. The shared use of properly signposted paths such as the Gala walkway did not seem to cause any problem at all, despite it not meeting the normal criteria on width.

I asked about the use of non-BS lighting (ie. LED's including the flashing type), and Sgt Morrison's own opinion was that he was more concerned about cyclists being seen, whether it was the use of decent lights or reflective clothing, and would not be too fussy about it being strictly legal.

We also chatted over various aspects such as helmets and hedge clippings, more just highlighting our own personal opinions and feelings. However the meeting was very useful in establishing our relative positions on road safety in general, and the needs of cyclists in this area.

The Borders Regional Council managed to get the Tweed Cycle Way officially launched in 1993. The idea was a good enough one, but the general feeling seems to be that it was not all that well executed. The route has some bad sections, such as the final leg into Berwick, and I have had various comments about the signing, especially that it is only in the West to East direction. A circular route would have been much better. The initial publication that went with the launch was badly flawed, in that the distances were a very long way out, the actual distance I thought was about 88 miles, and the publicity said 62, that's 26 miles (42%) extra! There are various ideas being floated to improve on the route etc.

The Council are taking a slightly more positive approach to cycling, and the 1993/94 Transport Policy & Programme (TPP) includes a short section

on Cycling in the Borders. The specific schemes it mentions are :-

- The Galashiels Walkway/Cycleway which still has some work to complete the links between the separate lengths of the walkway in Ladhope Vale and Tweedbank.
- The Tweed Cycleway, see above.
- Cycle Parking. One rack has been installed in Kelso, tucked away next to the car park behind Menzies, and not signed. More racks they say will be provided at "locations when there is sufficient demand". So start demanding!
- Cycling Officer. The Council's Road Safety Officer now has the additional role of Cycling Officer. His time is obviously in short supply, as are the financial resources to carry out any existing or future scheme. But hopefully they will consider us in designs for new road schemes, as they are with the cycling lane that is to be provided on the A7 improvements south of Hawick. Let's hope we don't have to fight so hard when it comes to things like the last bit of the Melrose Bypass.

One very good thing that has happened recently is a getting together of representatives of Pedal Power, BRC Roads and Planning, CTC and Scottish Tourist Board, to form a sort of Borders Cycling Liaison Group. We had our first meeting last month so that the various interested parties could meet each other, The Tweed Cycleway and other cycling facilities could be discussed, and cycling proposals for the new TPP could be considered. Various ideas were floated, including the development of a network of roads or paths suitable for safe cycling between major centres, and possibly short circular routes based on various towns, which could all be signposted, and promoted by the Tourist Board.

It was agreed that a policy along the following lines be submitted for inclusion in the next TPP :-

- "The Department of Roads and Transportation, in conjunction with the Department of Planning and Development, the Scottish Tourist Board and cycling groups will work to develop a network of routes suitable for cyclists, and promote cycling for travel as well as leisure, with routes outside towns and special facilities in towns."

Hopefully, with a new Assistant Director at Roads, and an improved organisation at Pedal Power the Borders can only benefit.

PERSONAL

On a personal level as I mentioned earlier, I have not done a lot of touring recently, but I did get to KM153 at Drumlanrig, which I enjoyed despite a bit of rain. I also took the bike to the Lake District and France, where Alice and I did a bit of cycling, but not a lot. The most memorable bit of the year was undoubtedly my few days at Loch Ard in October. I expected to have the place to myself, but to my surprise a small group from Edinburgh and Glasgow, most of whom I know, were also staying at the Hostel for one of the nights, including Richard and Margaret.

My first day was a lone trip up through the Forest Park on the cycle track to Callender, then back to Aberfoyle on the main road, before a loop through the trees again south of Loch Ard. A bit muddy, but the colours were very spectacular. The second day was even better, ten of us (so much for being alone!) went for a glorious run in bright sunshine clockwise round Loch Katrine. The lighting and colours are hard to describe, breathtaking. We all parted company after a drum-up at Achray, and I returned via the Dukes Pass. I am glad I had a camera with me, but it never seems to look the same on film, but if you want to check, you will just have to come to Melrose in October and find out. I also managed a third day's run by myself again, but it was not so sunny, but still very pleasant. Three quite hard day's after not much cycling for a while, but very memorable, and well worth the effort.

Lets hope 1994 will continue as 1993 left off, and that I see you out on the open road, preferably in glorious sunshine, and with a tail wind!

All the best .

Ian Oliver 17/2/94

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