

London to Brighton Bike Ride



Photo by Ray Allen

I have been doing this ride on and off for twenty years and it doesn't get any easier! However as I get older I prepare more. This year I have been practising regularly, both on the bike and in the gym, since March.

27,000 riders took part – it is an amazing spectacle - and the British Heart Foundation expects to raise almost £4 million.

On the morning I was a bit late and we did not reach the start line at Clapham Common until about 8.45 instead of the planned 7.30.

Also in the slight panic to get there I forgot my helmet and had to buy one on the route. When I first did the ride in the 1980's helmets were quite unusual, now nearly everyone wears one and I would not think of doing the ride without.

The late start meant quite a few hold ups on the way. The bike rules the roads of South London on this event and I felt sorry for the motorists and bus drivers who got stuck in the traffic, surrounded by bikes on all sides.

After London we skirt Croydon and head into Sussex. On passing a sign for Purley I heard a rider explain to his friend, 'that is where the famous "Purley Gates" are.' Perhaps this would be an interesting destination for a future Holy Cross visit?

There are a huge variety of ages and fitness levels on the ride with a great spirit of friendship and support. Even though I was riding on my own this year it certainly didn't feel like it – there were plenty of people to chat to and share the pain!

The last and biggest challenge of the ride is Ditchling Beacon, which rises steeply to over 800 metres above sea level. As the hill started to loom in front of us, with its top seeming to merge with the clouds, the chatter subsided and a silence descended on the riders.

Most people dismount and walk up, while a few super-fit ones ride up passing us on the right hand side. I have to admit I was one of the walkers again this year. I could have ridden it, but I didn't want to delay the faster riders as there wasn't much room for them to pass – well that's my story and I'm sticking to it!

As I reached the top of the hill I experienced a great feeling of elation, the tiredness (and soreness in unmentionable places) melted away. From there it is a five-mile downhill ride into Brighton and after a few traffic hold ups through the town I crossed the finish line to share in a fantastic welcome from the crowds lining the seafront.

A big thank you for the support and interest from so many members of Holy Cross Church. This year I have raised almost £600 for the British Heart Foundation and a big chunk of that has come from Holy Cross members. The charity means a lot to us; both Margaret and I have lost parents to heart disease. I would also like to thank Peter Fuller and The Bike Shop Greenford for their help in preparing my bike and Ray, Margaret and James who acted as my support team on the day.



Andrew Vigor