

The C2C – an Expected Journey



This 2013 epic journey directed by Karen Waple is a three part journey of 15 little and not so little people led by Anne Kelsall. The story is set in the North of England and took place from 3 rd - 5 th May 2013 on a bicycle ride from the west to east coasts, from Whitehaven in Cumbria to Tynemouth in Tyne and Wear, a journey long known as the C2C (Sea-to-Sea so why not S2S you may ask?) and is narrated here by Paul Butler.

This is the true story of an incredible group of hard drinking soft training individuals who conquered their fears and the hills or should I say mountains of the Lake District and the Northern Pennines. This is the story of 15 people, 2 camper vans, 150 miles, 3 days, a total 3900m of climbing (just for comparison Ben Nevis is 1300m and Everest is 8900m!), two birthdays and no punctures J

Starring Cast

Dave 'Silver Fox' Buckerfield

Jo 'card sharp' Butler

Paul 'the goat' Butler

Allan 'the Chef' Hodson

Lizzie 'toilet finder' Holt

Simon 'the Rock' Hudson

Helen 'Wiggo' Hurst

Anne 'the map' Kelsall

Jason 'Sonny' Lee

Jane 'Sherpa' Quinn

John 'wise words' Quinn

Ron 'Rocket' Reynolds

Wendy 'pedals' Sargeant

Karen 'the organiser' Waple

Chris 'birthday boy' Waple

Prologue The arrival

Thursday 2nd May the party gradually arrives at Mains Farm Kirkoswold in a variety of transport including two camper vans belonging to 'Rocket' Ron Reynolds and 'Silver Fox' Dave Buckerfield. Mains Farm was to be base camp for the expedition and hosts Julie and Robert welcomed us to the start and briefed us on the itinerary and what to expect over the next three days. Robert gave us his first tip for the trip which he was to repeat at breakfast the following morning and that was to lower the bikes into the sea holding the bike at the handlebars and pushing the back wheel into the water to avoid slipping and an early bath and a very cold next 7 hours! Words of wisdom indeed.

Tables had been pre-booked at the Fetherstone Arms and it was a gentle 1 mile stroll into the village and our luck was in as it was pie night, well everyone's luck was in except Allan as they had run out of his chosen fish pie!

We sat down (eventually after waiting about an hour for the tables to clear), but it was worth the wait, I have never seen so much meat in a pie but perhaps they knew something that we didn't about the torture, I mean obstacles we would face on the following day, day 1 of the journey from Whitehaven back to Kirkoswold.

A fun evening was had by all and we all returned very full to our bunk rooms and camper vans nice and early to prepare for the journey ahead. Breakfast was set for 7:15 and so we all said our good nights and retired to our beds.

Day 1 of the ride Whitehaven to Kirkoswold 63 Miles

The alarms go off around 6:15 and it's out of bed to discover that the fine weather of our arrival had disappeared and grey clouds and cold wind of the north had started to blow and you could sense the trepidation building amongst the merry band. We all collected in the farm kitchen for a hearty breakfast of bacon butties and toast washed down with orange juice and lots of tea and coffee and it was time to load the bikes onto the trailer to head to Whitehaven, a journey of about 1hr 30 minutes and the start of the journey. We said our goodbyes to Julie and Robert, climbed into the mini bus and we were off. You could have cut the air with a knife, never before not even at the start of a marathon have I seen such fear in the eyes of highly toned athletes (I have of course in ARC members but not in highly toned athletes!)

We arrive at Whitehaven and after circling the town a couple of times we eventually pull into the car park at the water's edge and after disembarking slowly from the bus we remove our bikes from the trailer and drag the bikes down to the water's edge. We all assemble by the C2C sign with our back wheels in the water, have our group and individuals photos taken (not all of the group were present for the photo as Allan and Dave were doing their Pilates stretches in the car park) and then we are off.....well sort of, the ladies all needed to find a toilet and after much scratching of heads the café on the harbour is spotted by Lizzie (the first of many toilet discoveries) and off we set on the first leg, 150 m, and time for our first break.

Everyone is suddenly feeling more relaxed now that they can uncross their legs and get back onto the bikes, well except that the first mechanical problem of the trip, on Wendy's bike something to do with pAnneiers, and Dave being nice and relaxed after the Pilates offers support and within two minutes problem solved and the peloton pulls away from the harbour. A nice and gentle ride through Whitehaven giving us no inkling of the hills to come, even though we had been warned by Anne, we all thought she had been exaggerating. How wrong we were!

The start of the ride was nice and easy the only obstacles being the broken glass and dog poo, an avoidance skill we would once again use as we approached Tynemouth!

Gradually the route became more rural and we joined a railway path with its gradual inclines a little taste of the larger climbs to come. After leaving the railway we joined a very quiet lane and started to enjoy the fields and the early views of the fells. Anne had warned us of the climbs ahead including the long one up to Whinlatter, climbs which were to be the start of the first dismounts and walk stints that the group would get to appreciate (I think that was the general feeling!) over the course of the trip.

One or two hardy souls decided to attack the hills, including Paul 'the goat' and Chris, and at least make it part way, others bailed out early on reasoning that reserving energy outweighed the embarrassment initially felt at jumping off and pushing. One thing that was noticeable early on that some people were more adept at climbing, the aforementioned plus Helen 'Wiggo' Hirst and Jane 'Sherpa' Quinn and others at descending, Allan 'Chef' Hodson, Jason 'Sonny' Lee and 'Rocket' Ron Reynolds, but the end result was that the group was never badly splintered and waiting was kept to a minimum. As the climbs steepened my own decision not to use the grAnney gears too early in the trip was reversed and I was spinning my legs like a whirling dervish and only just climbing faster than the walkers!

At the top of one particularly steep and very long gradient it was decided that it was a good time to stop for lunch and let the peloton regroup. The packed lunches were unpacked, everyone tucked in having worked up quite an appetite and after the gents toilets had been found just behind the lunch spot over a wall surprisingly (the ladies was eventually discovered by Lizzie over the other side of a farmers hedge, it always seemed to be Lizzie somehow who was the ladies toilets spotter!). After lunch and a brief rest the group set off again toward Whinlatter and eventually the climb up to Whinlatter Visitors' Centre which was the chosen café stop and the designated first café and cake stop (Allan was already getting withdrawal symptoms at the time, from caffeine that is, it was me that had other withdrawal problems later in the trip.....oh and to qualify the problem was cash withdrawals just in case anyone was getting the wrong idea!) It was another good chance to regroup and coffee, tea and cakes were ordered by all and a welcome rest and chance to catch up on how everyone was feeling before heading off again.

The rest of the first day passed by without incident, up and down hills, occasional photo opportunities/rest stops and toilet stops, and on one such stop John 'wise words' Quinn shared three pearls of wisdom (the first of many) with me for us men as we get older:

- Never pass up on a toilet opportunity

- Never pass wind and assume that this is all you will pass!
- This has been censored.....what happens on tour stays on tour! But if anyone would like to ask John personally I am sure he will furnish you with this important pearl of wisdom!

After approximately 7 hours in and out of the saddle the group still full of energy but looking forward to an evening in the pub eventually wound its way through Kirkoswold and back into mains Farm just in time for a quick shower, change of clothes and the short 1 mile walk to the dinner again at the Fetherstone Arms. It was then back to the Farm and everyone tucked into bed nice and early ahead of the more challenging hills to come on day 2. Goodnight Jimbob, goodnight Grandpa.....

Day 2 – Kirkoswold to Rookhope 40 Miles

We awoke at around 6am to the sound of heavy rain and water gushing through the drains, not what we had hoped for or expected from the weather apps on our smart phones! Not to worry it was Ron's birthday and nothing was going to spoil that. We all went into the farm kitchen for another hearty breakfast and to our delight the rain had stopped by the time we had finished and we were in for another relatively dry day in the saddle.

By 0830 we were all assembled in the court yard for the start of day 2. We were battle hardened and ready for the shorter in distance but much hillier day to come, another 7 hours in and out of the saddle, slow climbs/walks and some very fast (dangerously so in some cases!) descents. We were almost immediately into a steep climb within minutes of leaving the farm and I asked Jo how she felt.....'Leave me alone this is all your fault!!' was her reply and I decided it would be best if I go and check on the rest of the peloton!

Rolling hills soon became mountainous ascents and everyone became less chatty and concentrated effort was put into the climb up onto the Pennines. The first main target was a Café almost at the highest point of the climb at a point called Hartside Summit at 1903 feet. Eventually at the summit, lots of smiling faces and photos at the sign, and Jo was talking to me again J More coffee, tea and cakes followed before a group photo was taken at the summit sign, and everyone was laughing, another one of John's pearls of wisdom I expect or perhaps someone breaking wind, who knows?

Off once again with some nice descents but never far from another climb, and It was at this point Chris pointed out that a fall on day 1, had caused some damage to his gears and he was unable to get into his lowest gears, a bit of a problem on these climbs. We knew however that we were going to be passing through a village with a bike shop and hopefully a chance for a repair or two as Wendy was also having one or two problems (one being she later found out that one of her pedals was about to fall off!) and Jason needed to get his disk brakes checked. We soon rolled into the village located the bike shop and the Community Village shop and stopped for lunch and repair. The weather was cold and windy but spirits were still very high amongst the group particularly when Chris emerged bike repaired, a full set of gears, and only £5 lighter! Wendy had one or two adjustments, a new set of pedals and all for £25 and Jason was assured that his brakes were fine and what did he expect when descending at 45 mph!

We were off again and shortly entering into Northumberland and more rolling hills, steep climbs and fast descents and soon entered the village of Allanheads, a perfect opportunity to have a picture of Allan and his head next to the sign...geddit? He had to borrow my ARC running vest for the photo as Ron insisted this was a good 'best of the vest' opportunity, Allan reckoned my large vest must have shrunk in the wash lol!

Before long we were leaving the beautiful rolling hills of Northumberland and entering the equally beautiful rolling hills of County Durham and on our way to Rookhope and the Bunkhouse where we would be entering the 'Big Brother House' conveniently positioned next to the Rookhope Inn and its welcoming landlord and landlady...not!! Four unlucky members of the group (Chris, Karen, Lizzie and Wendy) however had to miss out on BBH and were booked into a strange and haunted B&B at the other end of the village. Note: Chris would be forced on the next morning to take one for the team and have a full cooked English breakfast while those at the BBH had to settle for cereal, porridge and toast (well it was afterall his birthday J).

The BBH is a lovely old school house with a largish lounge with sofas in the centre surrounded by bunk beds fitted end to end around the four walls, a small kitchen, toilet, shower and a wet room (It was to be a very cosy night later on with us all top and tailed and having to get used to the various 'night noises' that can emanate from sleepers, sounds from both ends of the anatomy!)

After a quick shower and change we all headed to the pub for 6pm as we had been informed that tables for dinner could not be booked and it would be first come first served. We got the

feeling that the landlady and landlord didn't really like people in general and certainly not a large group of 'bike tourists' just wanting to part with their hard earned cash.

After food and couple of bevvies we all retired to BBH at around 8:30pm and found a couple of the group already getting ready for bed (they were to be kept up for another 60 minutes or so), then after tea and coffees expertly made by Allan demonstrating his kitchen skills for the first time, the haunted B&B crew trudged back to their lodgings. At this point the BBH group fractured with the men all going to bed at 9:30pm and the ladies deciding to play cards, the games gradually getting more competitive as the evening went on.....Jo!)

The men were all fast asleep and not a sound could be heard from any of them....well except for snoring and the occasional breaking of wind (that was just the men at this stage, and I guess one of John's pearls of wisdom was to be fully tested here J) Just as we had settled into deep sleep we thought the house was falling down as Val, the host at the bunkhouse decided to come in at 1015 and clean out the fire, making an incredible amount of noise that could even be heard above the snoring and wind breaking! This scraping and bucket filling/emptying of coal seemed to go on forever but eventually the noise subsided and the men fell once again into deep sleep and the ladies retired to bed.....here started even more snoring and wind breaking, not sure who was responsible but those who had never heard of quadraphonic sound were getting a good demonstration now! (e.g. the only youngster Jason who Julie from C2C thought was the son of someone in the group!) In the opinion of some the noises certainly became louder after the ladies went to bed but that could have been a coincidence!

The night was a relatively peaceful one, the snoring did continue unabated though, but we were all rudely awaked by a pair of competing cockerels and I don't mean Ron and Allan! At that point I would have happily chosen chicken for lunch and would personally have gone hunting for said food, and practiced some neck wringing!.

Day 3 Rookhope to Tynemouth 53 Miles

Today was the second birthday of the trip with Chris celebrating the passing of another year (as opposed to wind although in all likelihood the same happed in the B&B as in the BBH) and he was to celebrate this in style later on by again falling off his bike on a particularly steep right hand bend when he stopped and forgot that his feet were still clipped into the pedals!

The journey out of the village led immediately onto the first of a series of very steep climbs that were to test our new biking fitness and the walking/bike-pushing skills of some of the group. Today was to be the first and only time of the trip that part of the group went the wrong way (all but Anne and Helen, as Anne had her trusty Garmin and were slightly behind the group when we headed wrongly through the village). The main group was searching for a toilet (real one not a hedge) and missed the all-important C2C sign. After the toilet stop I was given the honour of leading out the peloton and advised to turn left (it appeared later this should have been my other left!). We found ourselves on a main road with very fast traffic and after a couple of miles someone in the group decided an error had been made and as we were a team no blame was apportioned... 'Paul this is all of your fault!'

We turned around headed back into the Village and soon found the sign and made the turn onto what was to be the last serious climb of the day and of the trip. I decided to charge up the hill with Chris and we stayed together until his earlier mentioned fall, and I continued to grind the gears up the hill that seemed to go on forever (this climbing ability led to my moniker of the goat, no other reason!). At one stage I did see Anne and Helen in the distance but they soon disappeared over the first brow. I along with John and Jane 'Sherpa' Quinn managed to bike all of the way to the top of this first section, there may have been others but I only witnessed with my own eyes this lead group, and we set off to the next agreed rendezvous point at the Parkhead Station Café, a very welcome and warm watering hole. More coffee. Tea and cakes were swallowed!

The route from here was for the next part via the Derwent Walk a largely downhill off road section formerly the track-bed of the old Derwent Valley Railway that makes its way through the country side. The path of loose grit and was fast but had to be ridden along fairly gently although certain members of the party, Rocket Ron and Allan included didn't seem to be very much affected!

The path wound its way into Consett, Anne's Garmin came into its own here as we weaved our way around and through the town and back onto the cycle path and a chance to stop for lunch. Spirits were very high now as we knew that we were into the last part of the journey, next stop Newcastle. The weather cleared up and the sun shone and it suddenly became tee-shirt weather for the first time during the three days (obviously for the locals from the Northeast it had been tee-shirt weather throughout the three days!)

The sun shone brightly as we entered a very busy Newcastle and cycled then walked along the river through the market. We took a few group photos and then had to make the decision to get a move on as we still had 10 miles to go to reach Tynemouth and it was already 3:15pm and the mini bus was collecting us at 4pm.

The remainder of the journey was not the prettiest of the three days and seemed to take longer than any of the previous sections but we knew with every turn of the pedals that we were nearer to the finish of our target of putting our front wheels into the sea at Tynemouth. Once again as at the very start we had to dodge, glass, dog poo, and with the addition this end of the occasional drunk and some very dubious looking dogs/owners!

Eventually we wound our way into Tynemouth and with an initial false dawn of the wrong beach we were soon assembled at the right point and duly pushed our wheels into the sea to finish our journey and to take our finishing photographs! Hooray!!!!!!!



There was just time for an ice-cream cone before putting the bikes onto the waiting trailer and into the bus for the 2.5 hour trip back to Mains Farm.

It was around 7pm when we arrived back, weary but very contented with our efforts and looking forward to the BBQ and a few drinks on our last evening before the journey home. Allan 'Chef' Hodson performed the cooking honours and we all pulled together to get everything else in place, tables & chairs into the barn, salad and the rest of the food preparation (thank you ladies!), baked potatoes and garlic bread and beer and wine into the fridge. Julie and Robert joined us for a drink and a bite to eat and it was a very pleasant last evening spent with great friends. The evening was not complete without the birthday cake for Chris and this was a perfect end to a perfect trip. It was then off to bed and an early rise for our last bacon butty and then to pack up and head off on the final part of the journey, home.

What a journey it had been, and how happy we were to have all made it, together throughout the three days (well except when we got lost earlier on!). It had been a wonderful trip and a great achievement by all. It was the culmination of an idea of Karen's with her great

organisation, some training, and a heap of determination to push through the occasional pain. We were throughout a very close group and I am sure we became closer friends as the miles passed but what did you expect of a group from Aldridge Running Club? Anne summed it up later that evening 'I am so pleased to be a member of Aldridge Running Club!', a sentiment echoed by everyone else in the group J Nuff said!