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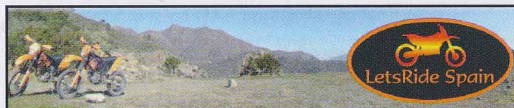
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TRAIL



The magazine of the TRF, the National Club for all who wish to ride Legal Motorcycles on Legal Carriageways

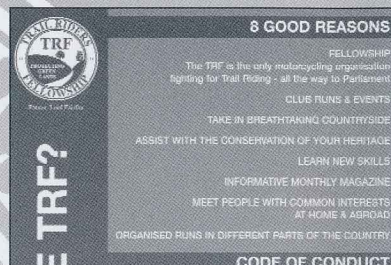
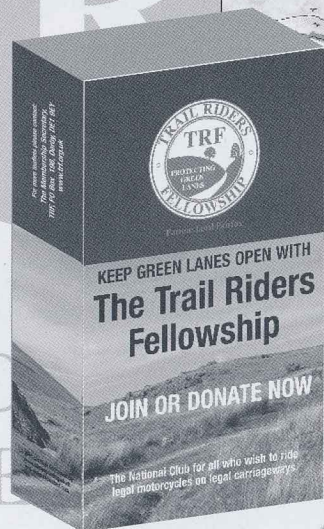
AUGUST 2011 No. 396 EDITOR: FRED ELLISON



Patron: Lord Fairfax

TRF LEAFLETS & DISPENSERS

available from
Debbie Hutchinson,
Membership Secretary



Letterheads and Compliment Slips for all external correspondence available to all Group Officers from Fred Ellison, Editor, 01254 823893, editor@trf.org.uk
 (Membership number required)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 20th November 2011

The Heritage Motor Centre, Banbury Road, Gaydon, Warwickshire CV35 0BJ. (Venue to be confirmed).

Any agenda items must be notified to The Secretary, Polly Cody, 52 Conway Drive, Flitwick, Bedfordshire MK45 1ST, secretary@trf.org.uk

PLEASE NOTE

Any proposals for change to the Constitution must be notified to the Secretary, Polly Cody, in writing, by the 31st August 2011 (a proposer and seconder are required).

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WANTED:

**RUN REPORTS
 RIGHTS OF WAY • NOTICES
 BIKE & RIDING GEAR REVIEWS
 COVER PHOTOS
 YOUR VIEWS ON TRAIL RIDING RELATED TOPICS**
or anything you feel would be interesting

COVER PHOTO:

From Sean Comber. Enjoying the View. St Harmon, North of Rhayader.

**COPY DEADLINE:
 1st Tuesday of the Month**

**All contributions to THE EDITOR
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BMF Discount Code: TRF11C774

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STATIONERY & LEAFLETS

Keepers of Stationery:	Debbie Hutchinson	Leaflets & Membership Forms
	Fred Ellison	Letterheads & Compliments Slips
Display Equipment:	Leo Crone	01325 463815 (7a.m. - 5p.m.) Display boards held at Ut 10, Red Barnes Way, McMullen Road, Darlington DL1 2RR

REGIONAL RoW ADVISORS

Wales & West Midlands	Tim Stevens	01547 529946 <i>Offa's Road, Knighton LD7 1ES</i>
South & South West	Dave Tilbury	<i>See above for contact details</i>
Eastern	Richard Sugden	01354 651390 home@rlsugden.fsnet.co.uk 122 Station Road, March, Cambridgeshire PE15 8NH
East Midlands	Robin Hickin	<i>See above for contact details</i>

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Members Classifieds: FREE OF CHARGE Enclose membership number.

ALL Commercial Advertising to be paid for - £1 per line, £5 minimum.

Please send all classifieds with payment if applicable to THE EDITOR.

RoW UPDATE

EAST LANE TRO HERTS

As an update to the introduction of this TRO in Hertfordshire the TRF initiated a legal challenge in the high court in May this year and on the 28th June we were informed that Herts County Council were not going to contest our challenge and the TRO will be quashed.

LOS REQUEST

A number of Local Groups have responded to this request and I would like to thank you. I am still awaiting replies from some groups so please can you inform of whether you have a copy of the List of Streets for your local authority.

TRF ROW TRAINING DAY

23 OCTOBER 2011

A date has now been set for the next Training day within the TRF. The day will cover three main topics during the day. These will be:

1. Preventing prosecution of TRF Members
 2. TRO's
 - How to prevent their introduction
 - How to make a legal challenge
 3. The future route of ROW within the TRF
- Email row@trf.org.uk to book a place on this event

UCR'S IN POWYS AND BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK

As a lot of members use the routes in Mid Wales and the pending season for use of the Gap Road is approaching, it is

incumbent on me to provide whatever advice I can to members regarding legal use of the Dual Status routes in this area.

I can not prevent you as individuals from using routes such as Sarn Helen and the Gap whilst the TRO allows but I must point out the following advice from PCC in respect to the Dual Status routes, now technically Restricted Byways.

"Any rights that existed for Mechanically Propelled Vehicles (MPV's) may have been removed under section 67 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC)"

"The Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Guidance on NERC indicates that it is for the individual to satisfy themselves that a right of use for MPV's exists."

However in a letter dated 22 November 2010, Alastair Knox, Network Manager Powys Highways, to Julian Atkins, Head of Countryside and Land Management for BBNPA, Alastair writes:

"In the meantime we must continue to lobby CPS to proceed with the Sarn Helen prosecutions in a robust manner as these could set a very useful precedent that will help users draw appropriate conclusions about their lawful right to use such routes thus removing any confusion that may exist."

As a possible user I ask you to "draw appropriate conclusions" now that CPS have dropped this case.

If you are stopped by Park Rangers or the Police contact row@trf.org.uk for further advice.

Robin Hickin

TRF PROSECUTION OF MEMBERS PROTOCOL

1. Since its beginning over thirty years ago, one of the purposes of the Trail Riders Fellowship has been to give support and legal assistance to Members wrongly accused of driving on a public right of way without lawful authority.

2. Since the commencement and effects of s.67 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERCA) there are and will be fewer routes being used that are not recorded as byways open to all traffic (BOAT) or unsealed unclassified road (UCR), but Members are still at risk of being wrongly prosecuted under s.34 of the Road Traffic Act 1984, cautioned under s.59 of the Police Reform Act 2002, or threatened with prosecution for breach of a traffic regulation order.

3. All TRF Members are expected to have satisfied themselves to a reasonable level that the routes they use carry a public right of way for mechanically propelled vehicles. All BOATs have conclusive MPV rights. The TRF takes the view that all unclassified roads are part of the ordinary road network except those that are visibly not vehicular, such as paths through churchyards and flights of steps in cities.

4. There are some roads that are not recorded as BOATs or unclassified roads where the public MPV rights have not been extinguished by NERCA, but it is essential that TRF Members are confident about the reasons for the survival of these rights before they use the routes. All such routes should have been subjected to the TRF 'Claims Audit' at some point since the commencement of NERCA in May 2006.

5. Basic advice is available on request from

the TRF's honorary officers, who will seek more specialist help if required. Assistance with the cost of fighting a threatened or actual prosecution is at the discretion of the TRF Executive, but will normally be given provided that the Member or Members involved have been driving in accordance with TRF rules and advice.

Prosecution under s.34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 (e.g. 'driving on a bridleway without lawful authority').

6. If a TRF Member is interviewed by the police with a view to prosecution under s.34 RTA 1988 he or she should:

- Refuse a 'caution instead of prosecution' if satisfied that he or she is in the right and has not committed an offence.
- Get copies of any witness statement given.
- Write down whilst fresh in mind the full details of the trip, who was there, times, locations, registration numbers, etc. This report must include the names and addresses of all the motorcyclists in the group whose right to be on the route is being challenged.

• If a member of a local group, contact the Group Representative, who will in turn contact the National Rights of Way Officer, adding his or her own comments to the report.

• If not a member of a local group, contact the National Rights of Way Officer directly.

7. The National Rights of Way Officer will review the case and engage internal assistance as appropriate. The TRF may assist the Member by writing on his or her behalf to the Police or Crown Prosecution Service.

8. If the case proceeds to a summons and prosecution, the TRF Executive will further review the case and may offer to assist the Member with the cost of fighting the prosecution in court. The TRF Member (and any other persons present and being prosecuted) must have been a paid-up TRF Member at the date of the alleged offence.

Where a Member being prosecuted was in a group including non-members of the TRF, the TRF Executive may, depending on the circumstances, amend the level of support offered.

9. If the TRF Executive authorises financial support, the Member(s) being prosecuted must find a good local solicitor used to dealing with motoring offences and retain their services. In retaining the solicitor's services, the Member must show to the solicitor this protocol and gain the solicitor's agreement that he or she will deal directly with the TRF's case officer, who has many years of experience in highway law matters. The TRF's case officer and other legal experts will work with the Member's solicitor, feeding in evidence about the status of the route where the alleged offence took place, and specialist materials on rights of way law. Below is a simple diagram of how the working relationship will operate:

10. These TRF experts will not usurp, or interfere with, the solicitor-client relationship. The solicitor will also be asked to engage with the TRF experts' input in a form where the cost

of their work might reasonably be reclaimed by a costs award in the event of a successful outcome. If the case proceeds and is so complex that counsel are required, the solicitor will be asked to engage for preference counsel with a good track record in this sort of case, known to and trusted by the TRF.

Prosecution for alleged breach of a traffic regulation order.

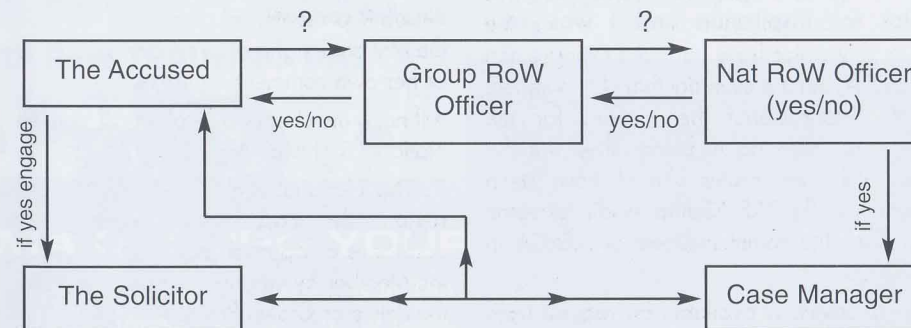
11. This is a rare situation, but if a TRF Member is interviewed in connection with the alleged breach of a TRO, he or she must:

12. Revisit the site and photograph all road signs and statutory notices (A4 pages of official text), taking particular note of signs that are covered up, e.g. with black plastic or hessian sacks. Note down the locality of signs on a map.

13. As soon as possible write down what you (and any others in the group) remember about the presence of signs and notices on the day. Remember that as soon as the highway authority hears that there is a possible prosecution they might go out to ensure that all signs and notices are in place in accordance with statute.

14. Get a copy of the actual traffic regulation order from the highway authority.

15. Then follow the process for a s.34 alleged offence (as above).



Caution under s.59 of the Police Reform Act 2002.

16. S.59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 was introduced specifically to tackle the blight caused by 'boy racers' using the likes of supermarket car parks for impromptu drag races. The provisions overlap quite well to cover 'cowboy' motorcycling, and have been used by some police forces as a very effective tool against 'scramblers in country parks' and the like. There is some risk that a TRF Member driving lawfully could fall foul of s.59.

17. To be served a notice (caution) under s.59 by a uniformed police officer the alleged offender must be, or reasonably believed recently to have been, driving in contravention of s.34 RTA 1988 (e.g. driving on a footpath, or open land), or s.3 RTA 1988 (careless driving, e.g. doing wheelies or burnouts), and be causing alarm, distress or annoyance to persons in or near the place as a consequence.

18. If a police officer 'threatens' a s.59 caution (and this can be done after the alleged incident, e.g. at the Member's home under interview) explain the status of the road being used at the time, and query any accusation of careless driving. Also ask for the details of the person alleged to have been distressed by the driving. It is not an offence simply to drive along a BOAT, no matter how much some people would like it to be.

19. If a police officer issues a s.59 caution then this cannot simply be refused, and neither is there any statutory appeal process. Follow the process for a s.34 alleged offence (as above).

20. In all cases, at all times, be polite to the police officers involved and make notes as early as possible because even after a couple of days you forget important matters, and events get jumbled in time and location.

DEVON TRF

After Brian Sussex, our esteemed (ex) Rights of Way Officer decided to retire from said post I arranged with a friend of mine (Chaz Connal, who has a penchant for drawing) to come up with a personal gift to give to Brian to show our, as a group, appreciation of the thousands of hours he has given to DTRFG over the years. I gave Chaz a couple of photos for inspiration and I was very

happy with the result.

I framed it and was delighted to present it to Brian on behalf of Devon Group at the July meeting at The Dolphin Hotel.

Steve Marcus, Devon TRF

Ed: The last time I saw Brian and his Yamaha TTR they did not look nearly as wild as the excellent cartoon!



NOTICE BOARD

EAST YORKS GROUP CHANGE OF VENUE

2nd Tuesday, 8.00 p.m. at Londesborough Arms,
Market Weighton, York.

Contact: Simon Garthwaite 07980 680026

MATCHED FUNDING FOR ROW ETC

Need money for anything of national interest/importance?
Matched funding is available.

For further information contact

Andy Gerrard, 01525 717634/07803 600571, chairman@trf.org.uk
Robin Hickin, 01926 817060/07890 550847, row@trf.org.uk

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

TRF AGM Sunday November 20th 2011 provisionally

TRF RoW TRAINING DAY October 23rd 2011

Email row@trf.org.uk to book at place on this event.

MAKE SURE YOUR EVENT IS LISTED

Send any details to The Editor editor@trf.org.uk,
Sheepcote Farm, Moor Lane, Wiswell, Clitheroe, BB7 9DG.



RIEJU IN RHAYADER

Fashion, peer pressure, call it what you like, influences most of us more than we probably care to admit. Most of us take the route of least ridicule and, if we can afford it, plump for the latest high tech enduro bike, and if we can't; the latest enduro bike but one with a few miles on the clock. Racing has created a breed of bikes that are immensely capable in all conditions but is that what we need for trail riding? I bang on to anyone who will listen that we all seek out the most difficult or technical trails and maybe the more competent that the suspension, tyres, engine, the whole package is; the more we dilute some of the pleasure of trail riding.

It was along these lines that I was talking to Jamie Masterman, Rieju (who?) Importer at the BMF show back in May and he offered to lend me one of his little MRT200 bikes to try which TMX news (according to a press release that he handed out) described as a

'proper little trail bike'. A few emails later and it was delivered to my house in time for our (East Midlands group) weekend in Rhayader.

There are two models which look pretty much the same apart from the paint job. The one I had was the more expensive at £3999 inc. VAT & OTR and had adjustable rear suspension. The engine; a water cooled 183cc 4 valve, 6 speed is supplied by Yamaha. The rest of the spec looked pretty good; Marzocchi shocks, O ring chain, braided steel hoses front & rear, wavy discs and a cast alloy swinging arm. Some of the plastics looked a bit sharp edged and didn't seem to have the flexibility of the obvious alternatives but scuffs to both the front and rear mudguards when it was delivered showed that it had been dropped before and hadn't done more than superficial damage. Rieju offer a complete set of unpainted body

panels for £60 so they won't break the bank even if they do get damaged. The black anodised rims and green and white plastics made it stand out from the crowd.

It also comes with keyed ignition which, whilst giving a degree of security whilst parked outside the pub, did prove to be a bit of a hassle on the trail particularly when it is hidden under a map case.

Before loading it in the van I took it for a quick run up the lane and a couple of times round a nearby field (friendly farmer!). Initial thoughts: started easily enough with just a whiff of choke (lever handily placed on the handlebars), very quiet, linear power delivery (but not a lot of it). It felt nice and nimble and most importantly sitting astride it with my 29" inside leg, I could place both feet flat on the ground. The brakes didn't feel especially powerful but that didn't prove to be a problem in reality over the weekend.

Anyway, I wasn't sure how it would cope with Rhayader so, to be on the safe side, I loaded my faithful XR400 into the van ready for an early start in the morning.

We were expecting quite a few East Midlands members down for the weekend. A hard core had travelled down on the Thursday night to get 3 days riding in. Most were arriving Friday evening and a few masochists would be travelling down and back on Sunday. I couldn't get away on Thursday but wanted maximum trail time so left Oakham just after 5.00 and with a couple of brief stops for coffee and a call of nature (can't do much more than about 2 hours between oil changes these days), I arrived in good time to join the gang, who were just finishing breakfast, for a cup of tea. The Rieju attracted loads of attention and it has to be said, a certain amount of well, not derision as such, but certainly a bit of a condescending attitude. I must admit to feeling a bit nervous when it was parked alongside the other bikes; a trio of KTM's - Neil's 400, Brian's 450 and Cliff's 530, a couple of CRF250s belonging to Barry and

James and Bob's WRF250 - it looked quite diminutive and certainly much less focused. Partly it was because it is just that bit smaller (the impression heightened by a side stand that parked it at a seemingly perilous horizontal attitude which gave me the jitters all weekend) but also because the tyres; Michelin T63s 80/90/21 on the front and only 110/80/18 on the back looked like BMX tyres in comparison to the Mitas Stone Kings knobblies that everyone else was wearing.

Once on the trails, there is no doubt that it was slower than the others but I probably would have been whatever I was riding. The thing that struck me the most though was how easy it was to pick your line up rocky bouldery climbs. The XR just bangs its way up while I just try to hang on. The Rieju felt almost trials like and the nice grunty engine and the lack of outright power (or a power band) meant that the back wheel was never in danger of spinning out. Similarly, when things got a bit boggy, the smooth power and the ability to float over potential bike stoppers meant that the Michelines were not quite as disadvantaged as they might have been.

The biggest problem were rutted lanes for two reasons - the front end didn't feel very secure (tyres again) which made travelling down any narrow muddy rut a buttock clenching experience but also the low peg height meant that you were continually being thrown off-line by them digging into the side of the deeper ruts. The lack of front end grip on wet grass meant that it went down fairly hard at one point. It didn't seem to be damaged when I picked it up but felt odd. Initially I thought that the front wheel had twisted in the yokes but I realised that I had reshaped the handlebars slightly (sorry Jamie).

The weekend was wet, wet, wet and each group experienced a number of drowned bikes. Happily, the Rieju sailed through everything including one river crossing at which the rest of the group, having watched

me fight my way over with water up to my knees, all decided to take the easy route over the bridge. Undoubtedly the main reason for the relative success was the low seat height which meant that I could get my feet planted when things got a bit slippery so it never actually got dropped under but even so it did seem to love water.

Strata Florida, which had been perfectly passable on Friday, had risen enough by mid afternoon on Sunday to be a threatening flood in places. Unfortunately, after spending some time drying out Simon's BMW 450 after the first big crossing, time was getting on and with every possibility that there would be further stoppages later on the trail, we had to take the decision to turn back and head back the long way round (make a good title for a book that would) on the roads to the vans.

This highlighted the compromise that had been made to the gearing to give a reasonable off road performance. You could wind it up to an indicated 59mph but you wouldn't want to hold it there for any length of time if you had any mechanical sympathy - it was happier between 45 and 50. Economy suffered too. With a mix of riding, it was exemplary and I only normally only needed to put in about 5 to 6 litres in to everyone else's 6 to 7 but, after an afternoon of largely high speed road work, it went on reserve pretty quickly. A very firm, narrow saddle (by XR standards) also made the road miles relatively painful. On the plus side, those tyres instilled great confidence on the road and were quiet and minimally vibratory!

If I was buying the bike there are definitely some changes I would make: the bars would have to go and be replaced with something stronger, bigger foot pegs would make standing up more comfortable and, surprised though I was with how well the tyres coped, they would be overwhelmed by the claggy clay that we get around our local Leicestershire lanes.

During the Friday afternoon when I wasn't

leading a group and things were a bit more relaxed; as others wanted to have a go, I got to try all of the bikes except the 450KTM. Neil's 400 ran beautifully and, being closest perhaps to my own bike, felt most instantly right to me, the 250s were, to my mind, a bit zippy and the 530 was positively intimidating. Anyone could get on the MRT and, whilst it might not be to everyone's liking, I am fairly sure that all would feel instantly at home and at ease with it.

At around 2/3rds the price of a modern enduro bike it seems to represent reasonable value. Sure, Spain is not up there with Germany or Japan as a manufacturing nation so depreciation is likely to be steep, and, as I said before, some of the equipment will need upgrading but in 3 fairly hard days, apart from one of the two allen screws that fasten a little bit of shiny trim to the exhaust, nothing fell off and the XR stayed in the van. Rieju will undoubtedly have an uphill task persuading large numbers to abandon their KTMs etc but if you aren't too chunky or are new to biking or finances limit your choice to one bike which has to double as a shortish range commuter and occasional trail bike, don't dismiss it - you might be pleasantly surprised.

Jack Knight

OTHER SNIPPETS:

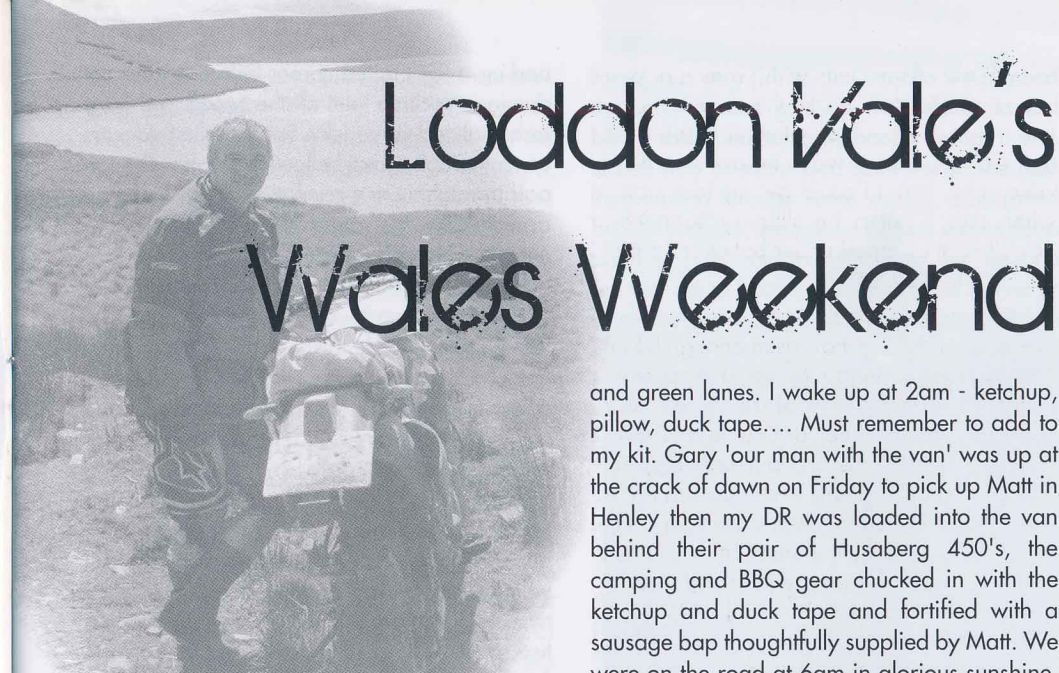
Why can't we get Monk's Trod open?

Look out for the Rhayader carnival next year - drunken madness!

Thanks to the Royal Oak Inn in Rhandirmwyn for allowing us in for a proper sit down meal in their carpeted dining area despite being fairly wet and unsavoury.

Watch out for the byway going west out of Llanoley (starting at 082603 on Map 1047) - despite the homemade sign it is TROed and the farmer is not very welcoming!

A purple all in one waterproof that might have been fashionable in the early 80's is not a good look in the 21st century.



Loddon Vale's Wales Weekend

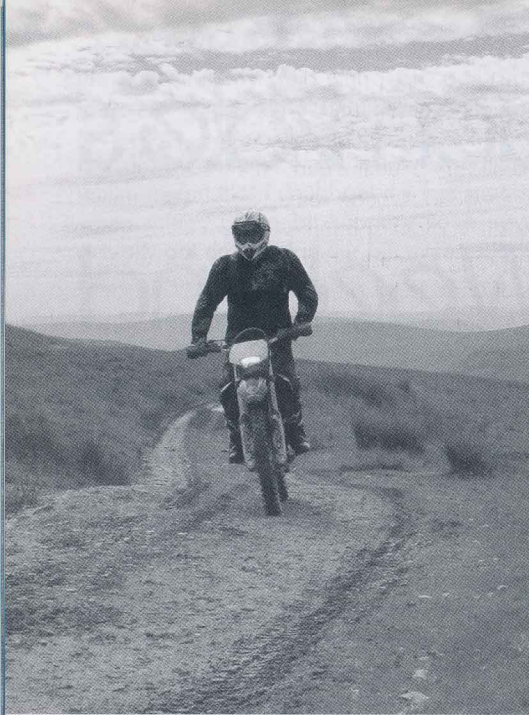
FRIDAY

Wales, land of my mother, of high mountains and low cloud. Stuff of trail riding legend, miles of tracks including, Strata Florida, Sarn Helen, The Gap, Wayfarer, Happy Valley all green lanes we've read about in magazines and heard stories passed down through the generations. My father rode those lanes in the early 80's on his Honda XR200 and I used to watch the grainy 8mm cine film and imagine riding those technical climbs, across moors, over the mountains and far away.

So here we are in 2011 and I am about to lose my Welsh trail riding virginity. Armed with a new bike, a Suzuki DR350, electric start 1998 model, beautifully looked after and with only 10K on the clock, dropped in the forks and slackened on the rear shock pre-load to swing my short little legs over. Richard goes up to Wales this week every year to ride and watch the Welsh 2 day enduro and offered to show us around the lanes of mid Wales for the weekend.

Thursday night, alarm set to stupid o'clock and I doze off dreaming of mountains, dragons

and green lanes. I wake up at 2am - ketchup, pillow, duck tape.... Must remember to add to my kit. Gary 'our man with the van' was up at the crack of dawn on Friday to pick up Matt in Henley then my DR was loaded into the van behind their pair of Husaberg 450's, the camping and BBQ gear chucked in with the ketchup and duck tape and fortified with a sausage bap thoughtfully supplied by Matt. We were on the road at 6am in glorious sunshine. Swindon, Gloucester, Bother, forgot pillow.....Ross on Wye, Hereford, Kington and finally Rhayader. A quick poke around the motorbike shop and onto the Wyaside camp site. Tents erected in the sunshine, with pegs simply pushed into the soft ground right beside the river suggesting maybe they experience some rain in this part of Wales....I rustled up some bacon baps just in time for Richard and his son George to come back from watching a section of the Welsh 2 day enduro. We decided to ride a local lane and then watch a special stage for the rest of the afternoon. The lane outside Rhayader ticked all of the boxes for what I expected of Wales, classic mountain scenery, boggy peaty stretches, rocky steps, water splashes... again certain evidence of inclement conditions which belayed the blue sky overhead. Mind you there were a few more clouds now than there were earlier....., but still plenty of opportunity to soak up the views. Given it was the first time I'd ridden the DR in anger I was very pleased with the way I was settling in. It is a bit high geared, marginally heavier than my Serow but went where I pointed it, did not feel skittish and has plenty of



low down grunt from the air cooled engine. We all cleared the lane without too many issues, but the rocky going certainly jarred our arms and ensured we worked up a sweat. Richard dropped his XR400 and spent 10 minutes kicking the guts out of it before it started - a bit of a theme for the weekend really!

At the end of the lane we rode over to Off Road Only to get a new air cleaner for George's WR200 Yamaha which was experiencing starting issues mostly to do with a very dirty air cleaner. By now the blue sky had mysteriously disappeared and was replaced by white cloud enveloping the hills as we rode a couple of miles to a field full of cars and bikers eagerly anticipating the arrival of 500 strong Welsh 2 day competitors. We parked up and had a chat with a chap from Somerset who weirdly also had an imported Yamaha WR200 like George's, very unusual. We made our way down through the woods and picked out a place to watch between a very boggy area, which leads into a drop down into a stream

and up a tight rutted corner before a tree root dominated climb out of the wood. All very technical and very tricky. Soon the first sidecars came through, great bellowing singles. The last pair through were a revelation, a guy with one arm taking his outfit through the mud - unbelievable and a testament to what you can achieve with a bit of ingenuity and an awful lot of determination. It was at that time I noticed a few drops of drizzle falling through the gnarled oak, the exposed roots of which I was using as a handy seat. The Sportsman class was big, around 250 strong and provided plenty of entertainment with falls in the mud, getting bogged down in the rutted corner and slipping around on the roots. The rain now became persistent and ever more wetting. The Clubmen were generally a notch up in standard and the twinshock riders good value with their howling two stroke Maicos, RMs, KTMs and Huskys. The test was very taxing and seeing some who came to grief in the mud you could see they were out on their feet, poor saps, still they signed up for it! The Experts and then the Championships boys - wow they can shift, wheeling through the mud and the corner with contempt getting maximum use out of the laws of physics, gyroscopic stabilisation and good old fashioned luck to make it all look easy, up until one had a massive 'off', but even then, those guys must be made of titanium as he bounced up like Ironman was on the bike and away before we had time to say 'that's an ambulance job'. The course cleared, a few stragglers limped through, bedraggled, bent but not broken, a tribute to the might of the human spirit.

Back out on the hill where we had left the bikes it was now very damp and riding the 10 miles back to camp on a slippery road wearing knobbles was no one's idea of fun. The site was now quite squelchy underfoot, with the reason for the ease of pegging the tent out now clear... The river was rising and taking on a brown colour as we abandoned the idea of a BBQ, showered and headed for the pub! A few pints of the local ale to wash down an excellent

steak and we eagerly anticipated tomorrow's long day of riding the best mid Wales could offer. We were in for a treat! Matt checked the forecast on his iPhone, light rain till midnight, heavy rain 'til 3am, thereafter light rain 'til 11am with the promise of a dry afternoon.... Hmmmm quite a lot of rain then..... hope the tent stays dry, as it is the kids' one and has never been tested in anger. Thankfully getting back to the tent it is still dry inside, but with the field being very squelchy, the trick was not bringing the water in with you. Also it was at this time I realised that I had not packed enough clothes, no coat - just riding jacket - now soaked, one pair of trousers - now damp, but at least I had a towel which Matt had forgotten and had borrowed the micro-fibre one I had spare. Having failed to negotiate a pillow from Gary (had 2) or Richard (had at least 6) I curled up on my airbed in my sleeping bag using a fleece as an improvised pillow. I slept through to 7am where, woken by Gary rising from his plump pillowed bed in his van and slamming his door, I was up and out of the tent thinking the rain had stopped, but to my disappointment 'light rain' does not make a noise on the tent.... So into Gary's van with the cooker and set up to sort out a fry up to fortify us for the long day ahead. Bacon, eggs, sausages in the frying pan, beans and a bun - yummy.

SATURDAY

The heavy rain had turned the Wye into a very angry looking torrent, brick red, and thundering through the valley. Given river crossings were to be a theme for the day I was beginning to get a bit nervous at the thought of rivers, wet rock, steep hills, mud.... Still at least I have two arms and so no excuses! 9 am and we are ready for the off - except George's bike won't start. A fiddle with the air filter, clean out of the filter box and it reluctantly fires up and away we go. The rain is now effectively low cloud, which gives the first lane a real ethereal feel, steamy cloud clinging to the coniferous

forest in a very primordial way as we climbed through bracken and up the hillside to just below the cloud base. Although damp, it was still all very beautiful and quite warm. The next lane wound through some woods, a bit rutted but still verdant, sphagnum mosses inches deep providing a cushioned landing for anyone unfortunate to fall off. Every lane had a river or stream flowing through it. Moving on we reached the first water crossing of note. It was fast flowing and about 20 metres wide. No way of riding across. Richard walked the XR across as I videoed in excited anticipation of a "You've Been Framed" moment. Leaning into the current I could see that Richard had done this before. George followed, stalled the Yamaha but man handled it to the other side with some help, I would have loved to have pitched in but being the official cameraman meant I was forced to stay dry on the sidelines..hmmm... Gary and Matt muscled their Hussies across without incident, bother - my turn... Frankly I was worried. Being the most diminutive, on the heaviest bike and the fact that every one else had made it through, seemed to stack the odds against me. I fired up





disappointed. We are rewarded with a beautiful ride up through the woods climbing along grassy tracks with glimpses down through the valley.

Next up was a climb through a forest with Richard stopping and telling us that we were to expect a 'technical' climb, switch backs, wash outs, adverse camber rock... hmmm Richard does have the knack of causing me anguish! It was indeed a technical climb, but the DR handled it well, finding grip, maintaining momentum and plodding its way up the hillside, we all made it to the top safely and pleased with ourselves. Each lane generally involved riding along a newly created stream with water running off hillsides and using lanes as the shortest route towards the ocean. The other feature of these Welsh lanes were gates - we must have opened and closed hundreds over the weekend, eventually getting quite adept at coordinating an efficient opening and closing routine with a bike falling over only once whilst its rider fiddled with some binder cord or closing mechanism.

A quick splash of fuel at Beulah and a Lion Bar to sustain me and we were off down a lovely byway near Garth with a ford at the end, but impossible to cross even walking the bikes so we used the bridge instead and travelled south. Not far from Tirabad Gary realised he had a front puncture so we pulled over to change the tube and lost Richard into the distance. Matt chasing him saw two bikes in the distance and set off in pursuit. Several miles later he caught up with 2 guys on Harleys - doh! Retracing his path he came back and eventually Richard arrived just as the front wheel was going on and we were once more on our way.

By now the 2 stroke Yam was regularly cutting out and requiring plenty of kicking to re-ignite it. The final straw was riding through seat deep 'whoops' full of water through the Crychan Forest on an UCL where it stubbornly failed to start. Cajoling it to the end of the lane Gorge stripped down the air box, bugged up drain holes and reattached it. I finally cracked and

emptied my boots of water and was alarmed at the hideously wrinkled skin resembling early onset trench foot. We headed west and started a series of forest gravel tracks swinging north towards Strata Florida. At the first river crossing we realised that we stood no chance of riding the whole route as the chance of nursing the water-averse WR200 through a dozen or so fords were zero. We ducked around along some more forest roads to Tregaron for much needed fuel, the Yam coughing and banging on air and one Hussie on reserve. The fuel station closes Saturday afternoons...argh! Asking the locals and taking the opportunity to eat yet more Fruit and Nut from the local Spar (my staple diet when away from home) and after conversing with a local we deduced fuel to be 3 miles away at Stags Head. We arrived there on a wing and prayer and filled the thirsty bikes. The DR still having more than half a tank left, suggesting a range in excess of 130 miles, which is impressive. We doubled back up over the Teifi Pools and the Yam finally expired and required towing back around Claerwen reservoir and home. The excellent byway around the reservoir offering the opportunity to open the throttle a little bit with plenty of visibility ahead.

Back at the site it was dry and clearing and I had a reviving shower, checking all over for signs of 'trench', thankfully getting the all clear. I dressed for dinner in my last dry clothes and off we went to the pub in time to get fed.

SUNDAY

Sunday dawned clear, warm and sunny, Wales and its crazy weather. George had his carb apart by the time I was out of my tent at 7ish and soon diagnosed a disconnected fuel shut off valve as the culprit and by 8am the site was treated to the dulcet tones of a two stroke bursting into life! Richard had tweaked his knee on Saturday so it was down to me to lead with his maps and we rode out of Rhayader and up over a byway just north and west, we were treated to stunning views south towards

the Brecon Beacons. The climb involved rock steps in many places and was great fun, the usual small stream running down the track from the rain the day before. Being able to see more than 100 yards in front of us was very refreshing. I failed to find a marked byway at Ochr cefn which was a bit symptomatic of Welsh lanes, starting in farm yards and not clearly marked, local knowledge is really useful before setting off into a sheep field along an ill-defined track. For fear of upsetting a farmer we re-traced our steps and rode up the dams road for another ride along the Claerwen byway for George's benefit on a now fully functioning Yamaha. I managed to clout a rock and get a pinch puncture on the back wheel and limped back to the dam to change the tube. Given I've only seen 1 puncture in 2 years' riding around the south east, it showed the havoc that rocks can cause with three punctures in all over the course of the weekend. Back in the saddle we rode the lovely byway from the dam down stream which, again, was wet with standing water from 4x4 gouging and technical in places with rocky steps. Lovely views though. Bypassing a particularly gouged bit of trail George had the only really spectacular dismount of the weekend going over the handlebars hitting a boggy area. Looping back through Rhayader and saying goodbye to George, Matt, Gary and I grabbed a sarnie in the bike garage and rode a couple of lovely lanes around St Harmon in blazing sunshine, one UCL up through the woods and over a hilltop and then a byway across open land yet another type of terrain and views of rolling verdant hills away into the distance. We arrived back at the site at 2.30pm in sweltering conditions to pack up the bikes and make for home.

What a weekend, looking at the map it has just whetted my appetite for more, particularly more north and west where there are miles of open trails. Great company (thanks Richard for leading us round), great views (eventually), great lanes. Wales, the stuff of legends.

Sean Comber

the DR, stuck it in first, saw Richard aim his video camera at me giving the thumbs up and grinning as I entered the raging river. Wow, the current was strong, I leaned into the flow and kept the engine revving and the water rose to seat level, my 'classic' Roger De Coster Alpinestars circa 1980 last used in Wales by Dad all those years ago rapidly filled with cold tea coloured water, weighing me down as I struggled for grip, the bike bouncing off hidden subsurface granite boulders. I stall the engine - argh - have I drowned it? Bracing myself I pull in the clutch and push the starter. After a couple of seconds she fires up - relief, I move forward another few metres and the water shallows a few more steps and I'm back on terra firma - looking slightly ashened. Richard stops videoing, looking slightly

SOUTH HAMS

weekender '11

The plan for the weekend was for a group of the WMTRF (and some dodgy non-members) to head to South Hams for two days of trail riding. We only had one run leader, so I made an inquiry on the Devon TRF forum to see if someone would be willing to help out. Sure enough, Dave Mullar and Steve Taylor jumped up to offer their experienced services for Saturday, so we could then put together a run between us on the Sunday too. As I'd heard so many good things about South Hams I couldn't wait to get there and find out from the locals.

Arriving at the California Cross campsite, I was directed to the lower end of the site, where some of the group had arrived and pitched up already; Jon & Mike Stone, Chris Shawcross, Pat Nesbitt and Jane Holdsworth. I parked up and was met by Jon Stone delivering a four pack of Guinness to say thanks for organising the event, top man! I quickly set up camp and tucked into the beers, while the Stones and Jane went to the nearby pub for food, and Martin soon arrived having left long before me, but got truly stuck in the traffic and was very hacked off with the journey too. Hope the lanes would be worth it! I gave Steve a quick call to check all was okay for the following day and arranged to meet him here by 9am. The evening was spent with a few tinnies, huddling around Jon's open

BBQ thing, into which he'd placed an alleged quick burning log thing (it wasn't), trying to keep warm, before we gave up and got some shut eye by midnight. The quick burning logs started to get going at this stage.

SATURDAY

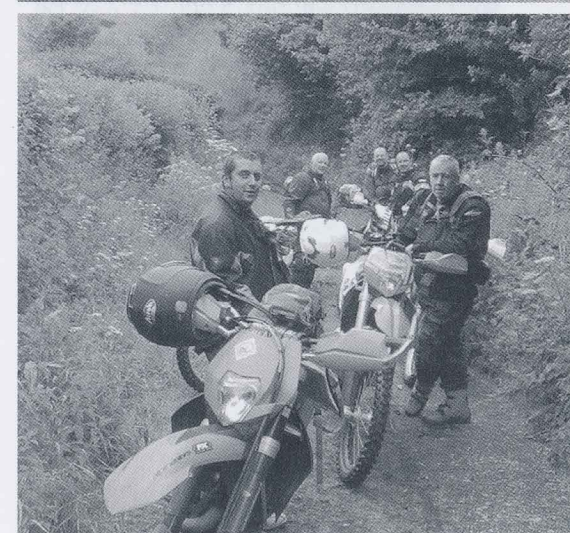
Waking to a gloriously sunny Saturday morning we had breakfast, then Steve and Dave turned up in their vans and we were soon ready for the off. It could have looked to an outsider as a Yamaha owners' club meeting, with 4 x TTR250s, my WR250F, a KDX125 and one of those orange things (sorry Martin ;)

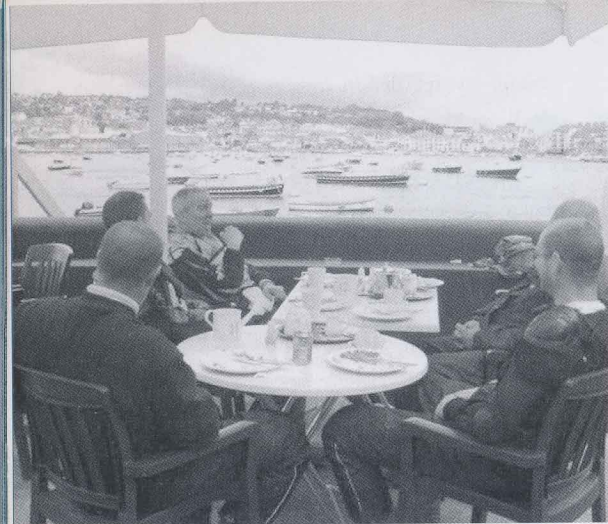
However we were still down three members of the group who had yet to turn up, Dick, Bozz and Graham (not a sixties pop band!) As Dick was one of the run leaders we decided that the Stone brothers, Martin and I would head off with Steve and Dave, while the others would wait for the imminent arrival of Dick and Bozz and we had no idea where Graham had got to.

We set off along the road and soon hit the first trail inside 5 minutes. It's at this point my memory has gone a bit hazy as we were set to cover so many trails during the day and I'm beginning to lose my faculties, sometimes repeating myself when I forget and sometimes repeating myself when I...!

Relentless is not an overstatement here. We started gently in the Halwell, Harbertonford area to reach a nice ford at Ashprington. Dave went across, had a couple of moments, and made it to the other side, where he waited for us with his camera. I was next across this simple little watery moment, which hid green slime covered boulders hoping to catch us out. Fortunately our skills and style had us gliding across with ease. (This might be disputed by watching the short demonstration video; <http://youtube /Uxat2mS8SrE>)

On past Cornworthy via a few more tidy lanes towards the Dart ferry crossing, where on approaching Jon was nearly taken out by a manic youth on a trials bicycle having a race with us down the road! After the ferry crossing we headed north towards Totnes via Fleet Mill, and out of town through Bourton and Littlehempston. The lanes were getting progressively challenging and amusing, when reaching the end of an adventurous climb, I was met by Dave waiting for the return leg back downhill again, top fun. Dave kept lead, then it tended to be me, followed by Martin, then Jon & Mike, then Steve doing tail gunner to pick up the pieces. We had a brief pit stop at the end of a particularly dusty lane, to discuss the pros and cons of riding in such dry weather; either fighting spindle deep ruts hidden by long grass, or





paddling/sweating your way along deep slurry-like mud lanes. Personally, give me dry any day but some would prefer the more forgiving mud.

ROCOMBE ROCKS

Onwards we headed to the holy grail of South Hams and Rocombe rocks...which it does. Endless trails climbing high, brief visit to tarmac then steep step descents down another lane...up and down we went for what felt like ever...sheer trail riding heaven. I wish I could recount every lane, its name and what happened, but there were just too many, too much fun, too many 'moments' and it all became a blur. One section of trail will stick in my mind though as it became clear Jon had a fondness for flora and fauna it transpired. We had negotiated a particularly rocky, boulder strewn descent dropping down onto a lane, when Jon in front of me decided to throw his bike to the ground and run across the lane to give the hedge a hug! Gobsmacked to know such an unassuming chap had this strange fetish. He came to his senses quickly though, as he caught on there were riders behind him who had noticed this strange

behaviour, so he hastily came back and picked up his stricken machine, remounted and rode off at a gallop. The lane dropped down into a farmyard, took a right turn, where we saw the others setting off up a grassy lane one at a time. I waited for Jon to set off, and then followed close behind...only to watch him repeat his floral obsession on a left hander, where he couldn't wait to get off the bike resulting in him dropping to his left and lying in the grassy bank smelling the cowslip, bike on top of him! Again he was quickly to his senses and he picked himself up and rode off, trying to regain what little dignity he still had. (VERY fortunately for him, my headcam battery had run out and I missed this series of events, gutted...but very amused.)

LUNCH AT SHALDON

We eventually stopped for some food up at Shaldon by the waterfront, in a basic café and tucked into a cracking fish and chips feast.

We discussed how fortunate they were to have so many trails nearby despite it being a tourist region, I raised my concern with Jon about his floral obsession to some mild amusement, then Martin and Steve enjoyed talking of bygone days on the trail and Welsh Rally's in the 1920's, then we all put the world to right on countless subject matters. The trip was made good by the trails and great by the company we kept.

Next, with our stomachs full, we filled our steeds with fuel and we set off for some more action filled adventures. Our guides set us off along some of the lanes we had arrived via, but now ridden in the opposite direction, some of which were used in local

LDT's. Heading west we covered more than enough lanes to keep us happy for our day's adventuring. At the start of good lane, Dave had us stop and wait for a couple of minutes before heading along, without realising it was for a photo opportunity along a good rocky lane, with a lovely little climb forcing the bike from bank to bank to find a decent route up, again used as part of the LDT's but more bizarrely also used by cars for their rallies, That, I would like to see!

The theme continued for some more hours, before we headed back to camp after possibly the best trail riding day I've ever had. Challenging trails without being nasty enough to need to get off and manhandle the bikes up, long enough in the saddle 9.30 - 6pm, covering over 100 miles and what felt like 100 lanes, all at a good pace, with no major incidents, one broken number plate (go flexy-plate Mike!) and grins as big as a Cheshire Cat's. We parked up and debriefed over a brew for some and beer for us campers, having arrived back before the other group returned. Steve even offered to return the following day and guide us along some more lanes! Many thanks for all you did for us, the pair of you, we were very grateful. I'd hate to think what the day would have been like if we had to stop every lane or so, to check maps etc. Dave was using his Road Angle satnav, (which uses Memory Maps plotted and uploaded from your computer) which displays the route as an OS map, very useful.

Shortly after Dave and Steve departed, Bozz (another TTR250) appeared with Jane. They had returned after Jane had struggled with her asthma on some of the harder trails, so Bozz offered to escort her back to camp. Jane had a heroic day, as this was only her 3rd venture out on her wee bike and a trail riding novice, determined to give everything a go, which she did. They had made it to

camp eventually in the morning, and after setting up camp, their group set off by 11am! They still managed to get in nearly as many miles as we did. Chris and Pat soon appeared on their TTR's, while Dick had gone seeking fish and chips. The evening was spent feeling quite chuffed with ourselves around the campfire talking of glorious trails, bikes, beer, whiskey/whisky, and non-appearing members...Graham, what happened?!

SUNDAY

After heading to bed, I was awoken in the early hours by that very unwelcome sound of lashing rain. The downpour didn't stop until I heard a bike start up, so I looked out to see Jane riding her bike into the back of her horsebox (clever thing that box, with self-contained flat at the front, with bunks, tv, Jacuzzi, kitchen...perhaps. Comfy looking nonetheless and dry! Looking around I was glad to see others packing up their kit, having the same idea I had. Saturday had been such a good day out I didn't see much point in throwing either my bike, myself or both down some of those rocky trails, so all but Dick and Bozz were packing up for the long journey home. Once I had thrown all my sodden kit in the car and started up, I noticed it was only 8am...brownie points lay ahead for me by returning home early to spend time with the good lady.

Here's to a repeat journey in 2012, which will hopefully be attended by more members!?! Thanks to all for a memorable weekend.

Simon Reid
West Mids TRF

VOLUNTARY RESTRAINT – IT REALLY WORKS!

Late last year, as a result of discussions with all interested parties regarding so-called "sensitive routes", the Peak District National Park Authority submitted a formal request for voluntary restraint to the GLASS Peak Park local rep, Richard Entwistle.

The request concerned Minninglow Lane & Gallowgate Lane, a non-classified highway from grid ref SK197 576 to SK222 565. The lane is a natural surfaced enclosure which has relatively low vehicle use (around 60 per month).

The lane has become rutted over recent years and the local landowner had recently repaired the lane. PDNPA requested that the lane should be subject to a voluntary restraint for the period 1 November 2010 to 1 May 2011 to ensure that the lane was not damaged over the winter, and to maximise the growth of vegetation during the Spring of 2011, which would hopefully bind the surface and establish a good base for continued use.

The situation would then be assessed with members of PDVUG (GLASS & TRF) in early May 2011 to ascertain the success of the winter restraint and a review of the situation would then be carried out.

PDNPA staff would erect and maintain signs at the ends of the lane on the same

substantial wooden posts they are deploying elsewhere in the Peak District with the "multi-user" route information signs, and written authority to do so was obtained from the Highway Authority.

The restraint was duly agreed by motoring groups and LARA, vehicle counters were installed on the lane, and a press release was issued to publicise the VR and to demonstrate the collaboration between the PDNP and users.

In March 2011, a PDNPA newsletter said:

"We would like to thank users for the restraint shown from using this route while repairs are given the winter to bed in, only two users drove vehicles on this route during the last counted month and these may have been farming vehicles. The restraint shown here and at other sites is a clear indication that voluntary restraint is a feasible option at some locations."

Subsequently in June 2011, the same PDNPA Newsletter stated:

"This voluntary restraint has now ended. Thank you to all users who refrained from using this route over the winter and spring. Vehicle use fell by almost 70% during the period and as a consequence the route has improved."

"Signs about the restraint have now been removed from the site. Thanks to members of the Peak and Derbyshire Vehicle User Group for their help in advertising this restraint and to local farmers Mr Edge and Mr Cooper for their help with the improvement works and during the closure itself."

So for those who don't think VR works, I would point you to the PDNPA message of thanks received on 17th June, which said:

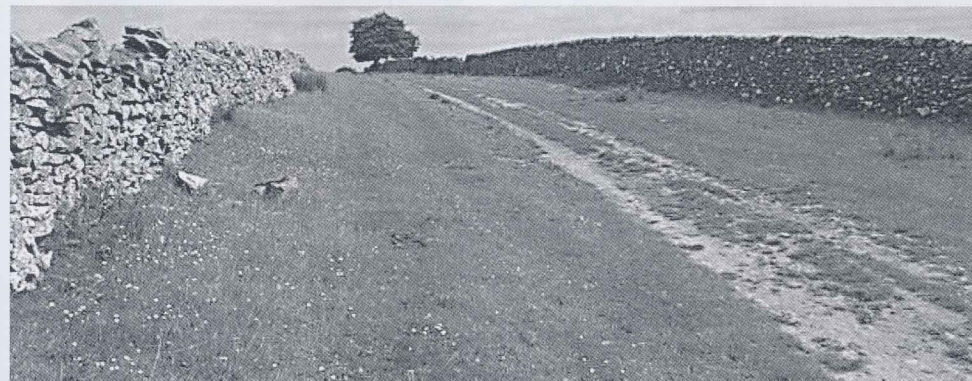
"In relation to Minninglow Lane, can I first thank you for helping organise that, and can you also pass on my thanks to PDVUG Members for their support. The lane's use fell by 66% over the winter and it does show on the ground, I think Mike Rhodes was saying that there was some concern amongst members that it could not be enforced but this

gives us a useful idea of the success rate of this approach."

Postscript

The use of voluntary restraint as a method of protecting sensitive routes is a far better and fairer method of managing vehicle use than the "all or nothing" TRO which local authorities and anti-motorist pressure groups tend to prefer. The Peak Park ROW people are to be congratulated for their consideration of the use of this method. As we have seen with Chapel Gate, which has a proposed TRO banning all motor vehicles for 18 months, it isn't the only tactic in their toolbox, so we need to be careful not just to constantly oppose, but to suggest VR where it might help.

Chris Mitchell, GLASS Derbyshire Rep.



The photos show how the lane looks now.



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Sinking the Titanic

Rich "XR" Bond Heads East

The hotel 100 dollars and I just got asked my
room number by the piano player, not for
me. Also unfortunately not a good place for
bike maintenance.

People here are much calmer than in Russia
There's a Buddhist influence, which I like.

SATURDAY 25

A late start and an early camp today. Late to
start because of a lot of faffing with luggage,
repacking the bike from a hotel stay, and re-
airing up the rear shock, both my pumps are
inadequate and garage compressors only
seem to manage 110 psi.

No doubt my most tranquil campsite but not
secluded. All the little lanes round here go
somewhere and all have a degree of traffic,
I was passed by a posh 4x4 and a van
earlier. I'm by a little lake, reasonably big but
very shallow. I fully expect to wake up to
camels drinking from it in the morning.

A car passed me earlier and the passenger
made a sign as if to shoot me, its the only
unpleasantness of the trip so far. I guess the
British aren't popular around the world, if I
speak to anyone I'm sure to tell them I'm
Scottish, which in the past has always helped
with international relations.

On that note, the winds here would do
Scotland proud. Good sideways 40mph
winds, be sure to hold on tight when an arc
goes by in the opposite direction at 80mph.
I had hoped to be on desert tracks by now
but this is probably the best road so far.

The land is totally flat and the sky massive. At
any one time you can see 3 or 4 black
thunderstorms ahead, maybe 10 miles in
diameter. I try to dodge them by speeding up
or stopping for coffee. The road is more or
less straight so I try and ride in the gaps
between them depending on the wind
direction, so far so good but it makes slow
progress. At home I don't mind the rain but I
haven't been able to find any waterproofs
and I'm tired of getting soaked. If you get
caught in one of these storms it is torrential.
The road floods instantly with rain the size of
conkers. That said it also dries pretty quick in
the wind.

The sunsets here have all been spectacular,
it's nice to stop early and drink tea at the
campsite. The wind has dropped and in the
distance thunderclouds are lighting up with
the lightning. There's a good chance one of
the storms will pass over me tonight. The bike
is a few inches taller than my tent and the
only object for miles, wonder what will

happen if it's struck.

I like to eat dried fish. They sell it here in the garages instead of crisps, you can have anatural, hot 'n' spicy, sweet and sour or candy coated. Its my staple to eat whilst riding. Not easy to get in my gob with a full face helmet on. Hoping for an early start tomorrow and some off road riding.

Sunday, a bath in half a litre of carbonated water.

I wasn't woken up by camels but by frogs, dozens of them all hopping around as if they've just grown legs. And just as I write this, one has hopped over the laptop and into my helmet I think.

Today's a day of meeting people. 1st 3 guys and a girl on 3 1930s Chinese Urals outfits, riding from Shanghai to Paris. 2 of them have a sidecar hire tour company in China. They're sponsored and are aiming for the longest sidecar ride. I think Andy Landistow might have some comment on that. It wasn't going too well for them as their GPS hadn't stored the track log so there might have problems with evidence. Also they could only ride one hour at a time. One hour's riding and 10 minutes bike cool down time. They had worked out that this rhythm was preferable to pushing the bikes and then spending all night fixing them. I caught them up on the road and we all stopped to chat at the roadside. A train that I had passed 10 mins earlier caught us up and stopped to wave at us, blowing its whistle.

I'm at the Uzbekistan Border and there are 2 British overland 4x4 trucks, only met one set of occupants, a retired couple who at one time or another had pretty much been around the world. Do it now whilst the diesel's affordable.

Bone shaking roads today, also shake the bike to hell, so chose to ride the desert at the side of the road. 100km off road the start of

things to come.

Couldn't get into Uzbekistan! My visa is dated for this time next month and I didn't notice until now. I don't know if this is my mistake, the visa companies or the embassies but there is nothing I can do about it now. The Uzbek border guards couldn't be nicer, apologising for not letting me pass. The butch tattooed lorry driver looking me up and down as if for dinner didn't look so friendly, hope I don't meet him in a dark alley. I try to buy a transit visa but this has no hope. I wish I had asked to call the Uzbek embassy but I don't think anything was going to work. I was really looking forward to the Ariel Sea, the company of other travellers and a day or two in a hotel. I ride the 100km off road as fast as I can now as I have to get my Kazakhstan visa validated somehow before 5pm today as I will have been in the country now for 5 days.

On the ride back I notice that my chain has jumped a cog on the rough ride, (could I have been so unobservant as to fit it incorrectly at Volgograd). The answer to this thankfully is no as it jumped a cog again the next day. This has never happened to me or anyone I know. Could it be that the bike doesn't like the oversized rear sprocket? I have the chain adjusted uncomfortably tight with the bike at rest, I guess the full travel of the suspension is enough to slacken the chain and jump the cogs. I'm careful now not to give the bike any gas when the suspension is compressed, which in most riding conditions is counter intuitive. If it happens again I will have to change back to a standard rear sprocket and one tooth off the front. Not ideal but the tight chain must be stressing the engine internals.

3 hours of chasing my tail in the heat of the day and my Kazak visa is sorted. The immigration police are not the most friendly. I ask the police to look at a map of

Kazakhstan; they didn't like showing it to me.

Dinner in a café with a couple of off duty coppers is calm and relaxing, even though we have no shared language the company is pleasant and welcome. Seems like everyone here is a copper of one sort or another, is there anything else to do here?

I'm resigned to driving back the way I came to regroup my thoughts. There is a road parallel to the one back north that goes all the way south again alongside the Uzbek border. This road is about 500km to my right across the steep (desert). A more seasoned overlander might be tempted to try and traverse the steep by compass here. I'm not confident in the bike, don't have the fuel range. I know there is at least one railway to cross and finally I can see in the distance a long large cliff front. I figure the road I want is either on top of it or on the other side of it so there is no way I will attempt the traverse.

100km along the road a UK overland Landrover passes going to the Uzbek border. We don't stop to talk and I feel very much like I've been ejected from the party.

Even though it's 200ish km I decide to ride back to the frog campsite, as there is nothing else around. I think how nice it would be to get drenched by one of those thunderstorms but the sky is blue and bright. I stop for a swim at a river crossing and am given a beer by some youths doing the same. Finally at the campsite for sundown, 9pm, I give myself a wash down with bottled water. There are mosquitoes here but they didn't bother me much last time I was here 2 nights ago, their buzz is worse than their bite. **** no, they must have come of age in the last two days and my feet get ravaged. Swollen and sore in the morning I shake all the frogs out of my kit, wrap my feet up in my bike boots and start riding north.

9TH JUNE

North then turn right for 300km ish then south again. The road deteriorates until it is unrideable. Riding the sand alongside the road is the only option. I have my 1st tumble, not bad and didn't do any damage. The dark wet sand is like quicksand and you instantly sink, there is also drifting sand which is very hard to ride but I'm enjoying the riding. I stop for fuel and as the garage staff are very friendly I decide this is a good time to try air up the rear shock. I don't attempt this unless there are friendly people around to help out if it goes pear shaped. Again, just as well as the shock does its trick of dumping all its air. Again local compressors will only manage 100ish psi. The solution at last is a lorry compressor that does the job with ease. The lorry owner insists that I wheelie up and down the street with him on the back as a thank you, I do my best.

Hot from all the effort I get a shower from the garage staff, the normal wooden shack with water tank on top. There are no showers in Kazakhstan in the winter; its well below freezing so no outside water.

As evening falls I cross another river and have to stop for a swim. There is a family on the other side doing the same. I know the riverside will be swimming with mossies come sunset so I ask the family if there is a hotel around. I'm sure there isn't but I've heard a lot about Muslim hospitality and am testing the theory a bit. With no hesitation the family insist that I stay with them. I have to say that they are the nicest people I could hope to meet. He is 26 with 2 young children and lives with his father, mother and two young brothers. Their house is simple, no shower or toilet but very clean and bigger than expected, with 6 large rooms and several outbuildings. They have camels and horses, all free wandering out on the steep until they come home to be eaten in the winter. Well,

the camels get eaten and the horses milked. I'm fed well and over dinner asked if I know about the wolves that live out on the steep. A little more conversation and it seems that the wolves feed on camels and me if I happen to be around. Camping tonight and ignorance would be bliss. I'm treated to a sauna and a Turkish style bath in the morning. It's the bath for the village rather than belonging to the house. My host asks me if I had seen Borat, this is not Kazakhstan he says. He says the name Osama Binladen, this is not Islam he says. Funny that its all in the same sentence. The children are very well behaved and there is no demanding to sit on the bike, as has been the norm. Over lunch (chap-chap) the mother translates for some route advice. It seems my new detour will take me through a military live fire area; she circles this area on my free map from the friendly fuel station. She also tells me that this region will be unfriendly cynical in her words, to westerners, that I must not camp here, that I should drive through and not stop. As I leave she hands me a piece of paper, which says:

- 1) Take care of a - double faced person, but not of a knife with two blades.
- 2) Meek and mild, meek as a lamb.

I take the knife with two blades to mean not to fight back.

As we say our good byes and shake hands someone says come back soon, not in a million years is written all over my face, I hope they don't notice before I have time to change my expression.

Midday and I'm on the road again. I say road but mean the sand track that runs along side. As far as I can tell the road is only there to reassure you that you're going in the right direction. Having said that I have to alternate and ride it occasionally. The sand can be very bright and a snow blindness means I have to suffer the black stuff to rest my eyes

and refresh my concentration. A new American artic going in the opposite direction flags me down, I thing of the butch truck driver at the Uzbek border but all is calm. The driver just wants to know if I know where I'm going, we have a cigarette and consult the map. I never say where I'm really going just give my immediate route; it's always good to confirm I haven't missed a turning whist riding the sand lanes. On several occasions locals have flagged me down to make sure I'm on the right road or to guide me out of towns were the route is not obvious.

There is distant rain in two large clouds and I wish it would fall on me and cool me down. It is incredibly slow going. I'm camped now and still haven't covered the 300km before the turning south. At this rate this detour will take me a week, but what else is there to do.

30TH JUNE

Starting to see eagles at the side of the road. I wonder if a big eagle could take a wolf in an alien v predator kind of way.

I've made some progress, I'm now directly opposite where I started this little detour 4 days ago, I've done 3 sides of a square and am just north of the Arial Sea again.

The road climbed to around 400 meters, most of Kazak I've been riding through has been around 10 meters below sea level. I guess I must have been riding on top of the mountain ridge I saw from the border road 4 days ago.

The landscape changed for about 100 km earlier today and I figured I must be in the live fire zone. It was an area of lots of small hills, ideal I thought for playing soldiers. There were suddenly dozens of pylons and telegraph poles and high fences for no good reason and the area was very busy with trucks, some military and some civilian. I

didn't want any bike problems here and rode steady with mechanical empathy foremost in mind. Not for the 1st time on this trip I thought of the simplicity of a XR650R. There were lots of barracks dotted around and I stuck to the road, no matter how bad it got when the lanes through the hills looked very inviting.

100km later as the landscape returned to normal steep I began to relax thinking the stressful bit was all behind me. People today had not seemed so friendly, not checking that I hadn't broken down as I stopped for a rest at the roadside, which had been the norm. However all my fears and the advice from the Kazakh family were nonsense. Just goes to show that on a trip like this you have to have a positive mindset or you can end up worrying about everyone you meet and everywhere you happen to be. How do I know.

In the distance there was a lone figure pulling what looked to be a wheelbarrow, I got closer and saw that he was western. Ole from Berlin, was walking from Berlin to Shanghai in China. Not all in one go but in three years and in three stages. Last year he had to end his challenge early as he broke his neck diving into a river in Kazakhstan, the doctors here didn't diagnose it and he struggled on for 7 days before giving in and returning home where he was immediately taken to hospital. Ole was covering around 40 km a day and had camped in the hilly area last night. The barracks I saw were for workers, the area was industrial, extracting ore from the rocks. Oli had stopped in the workers' canteen the day before. We made a B line for some rare shade and combined our supplies to make lunch and drink coffee. I drove around the town I had been warned against, not intentionally, I just couldn't find my way out of it, what a dump. But then again all of Kazakhstan so far has been. As my host from a few days earlier said

Kazakhstan is not for looking, by which he meant, this is not an attractive place. It is a dump, with litter, broken glass etc lying everywhere.

I'm a short distance, once I find the right road, from the Arial Sea and a swim is very much called for, but I have no expectations of it being a nice place, just a necessary cool down.

1ST JULY

I've been in Kazakhstan far too long, 10 days. Its like being on the moon, there's a light side, a dark side, some litter left by the Americans and you can get in your moon bug and drive around a bit. Here all there is, are craters, rocks, sand and dust, litter everywhere and nothing to do but drive from north to south. If you have to come through this way, pack your sandwiches and don't stop.

Couldn't go south, I couldn't find the road. Even if there was one. 200km north to turn south again. Arrive at the Arial sea just as the mosquitoes start to swarm so drive on by. Can't wait to get out of Kazakhstan but there's still 1000km of desert to ride through.

3RD JULY

Driving south, there's a 40 to 50 mph wind mostly catching me to my left but as the road turns left I get it head on or even to my right hand side. Aah variety, the spice of life.

Hotel and bike service time 6000ish miles covered. The suspension is set up better now and doing a reasonable job. The bike is sluggish down to around half power, hopefully an air filter cleaning will solve that. I'll change the oil at a friendly garage tomorrow.

To be continued...

THE FORUM

RE RICH "XR" BOND'S ARTICLE ON LONG DISTANCE RIDING:-

Helpful advice to counter sore bums on the saddle, (1) make sure your underpants don't have seams across the buttocks. They can give you the motorcyclists equivalent of bed sores as I found out on an extended trip in New Zealand - Rohan do a wonderfully seamless pair, just about affordable in their Sales. (2) Cyclists' padded shorts. They may make you look a bit like you've had an accident, but they do the job. (3) Maybe not

for trail riding, but the Airhawk inflatable saddle pad is like having a mini load-spreading air pocket mattress just where you need it. Reading Stephen Nash's HUMM Along, the Airhawk is definitely better than a gel pad - I've used one of those as well. Don't know about sheepskin - there's plenty of that about up here in the Lakes, but what water and mud would do to it I don't know, though it seems okay on its original owners.

Steve Pighills,
Cumbria TRF

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