Upavon and some. Friday 27th August 2021.

I left Bradford-on-Avon before dawn on the trusty Bafang powered 1991 Raleigh Amazon. I chose the old 'boneshaker' over the Orange Gyro as it has a sturdy build suited to a longer and more adventurous trail ride. Plus, it carries a bigger capacity battery!

Wanting to avoid riding on main roads in the dark I planned a route that got me near to Devizes via the canal towpath. The ride along the Kennet and Avon Canal to the ‘Three Magpies’ at Seend was a bit scary at times, due to the mist rising from the warm water being brightly illuminated by the LED cycle lights, leading to a couple of near misses with the deep water! ………..Autumn is coming!!

The first lane of the route was supposed to be a Bridleway called 'Somerham Lane' that runs from Martinslade to Poulshot. Sadly, the old road was obstructed with dense vegetation which wound itself round the wheel spindles, packed into the derailleur mechanism and jammed on the brakes. Reluctantly I had to admit defeat and turn round after a couple of hundred yards of intense battle!

Instead, I took my life in my hands and headed towards Devizes along the A361 for half a mile, and turned right onto another Bridleway that goes to Poulshot called 'Hooks Lane', which is part of the 'White Horse Trail'. Luckily, no incidents to report!

At Poulshot I took another old road, now a Bridleway to Potterne. 'Hay Lane', part of the 'Five Lanes' complex, was hideously muddy in places and I had to push the bike through the worst of it, the mud was almost to my knees at one point. This time mud and cow poop packed into all the moving parts and stopped the chain and wheels from rotating.... After poking out all the mud with a stick, I contemplated going straight home and back to bed, but I don't like quitting that easily!

After cleaning my legs and bike off in a deep puddle, I then rode from the East side of Potterne along the stunning ‘Coxhill Lane’. This track was dark, sandy and dry, deeply sunken from use over the centuries. Gnarled, elongated tree roots climbing down the banks into the lane made the place look like something out of a 'Harry Potter' film! This is definitely an area to revisit in the future, and film on the GoPro.

Confidence and interest restored, I headed on towards Urchfont via a most excellent Bridleway, I crossed the railway and passed 'The Three Graves' (worth Googling) and onto a Byway that meets with the B3098.

Next, I pedalled along a Bridleway that runs parallel with B3098 which was the course of the original road to Chirton, and moved on via Bridleway to Wilsford, Charlton St Peter, Rushall, Woodbridge before heading South down a long, partly interesting and varied Bridleway to Upavon.

From Upavon, a short stretch of grim A road (A345) took me to West Chisenbury from which I headed uphill via mainly gravel Byway towards the impact area on Salisbury Plain. This marked my furthest point from home.

Heading West along the Salisbury Plain perimeter track Byway, I deviated from the planned route and tried out several of the Bridleways and Byways that go up and down the escarpment to the A342 and B3098. This area needs revisiting for a more in-depth adventure as some of the old lanes are very steep, sunken and interesting! A quick, nutritious and delicious lunch break of squashed cheese sandwiches, a bruised apple and left-over Birthday chocolate was had at Redhorn Vedette. No coffee as the forgotten flask was cheerfully sitting in the kitchen at home!

Feeling like I was in ‘home territory’ I picked up the pace a little, and rode the long Bridleway from Market Lavington to the A360 at Gore Cross, which is both spectacular and uninspiring in places.

From the A360 I made my way along the mainly gravelled Imber Range Perimeter Path/Wessex Ridgeway for a few miles towards Coulston Hill, my progress slowed by a chap in a BMW 4x4 who kept getting in my way! Saying goodbye to Salisbury Plain I zoomed down the fantastic ‘Old Slow Coach Road’ Byway, using up most of my brake blocks before getting to Edington…….. Must fit disc brakes soon!

Just North of Edington, I attempted to ride the Bridleway, ‘Cowleaze Lane’ that heads towards Keevil, but for the second year in a row the old road was blocked by crops which resulted in a big detour on tarmac roads via Steeple Ashton to get me back on route.

The next lane on the route is a classic Wiltshire old road which is now sadly only a Restricted Byway. 'Mudmead Lane' which thankfully isn’t muddy anymore, is one of my favourite Wiltshire lanes. It’s tree lined, wide and these days has a good unmade surface. A second food cramming session ensued, under the canopy of the ancient trees! At the end of Mudmead Lane I turned right onto a rather bland Bridleway that goes past Stourton Water fishing lake to the A350.

Once again, taking my life in my hands I turned right onto the A350 and rode about a mile to ‘Hag Hill’. I attempted to use the Bridleway called ‘Corestreet Lane’ at Hag Hill that heads towards the A361, but like last year it was obstructed by long vegetation.

The penultimate lanes of the day were the Byways that go from Semington towards Hilperton, again old favourites that thankfully are frequently used and in good condition these days.

By this time, I’d pretty much had enough of cycling, so was pleased to ride the last track of the day which was the old Whaddon to Staverton Road, now a Bridleway that runs alongside the River Avon. I had plenty of battery left, so treated myself to using the throttle alone, not my legs for a change!

By the time I got home with my feet still soaking wet and legs glowing from the nettle stings, I found that I had covered over 66 miles, mostly off-tarmac. This was a tough ride on a cold, late Summers day but the old bike performed flawlessly and it remains a tribute to past British manufacturing!

Captioned photos here:

My YouTube Channel here: