

Dear New Forest Cyclist

Thanks for entering the September 'Cycling New Forest' events - whether you started, finished or not.

Well I suppose it had to happen one day – and Sunday 4th September was the day.

Until this Autumn we had run 16 previous editions of New Forest Cycling Events with a mixture of weather ranging from very hot (described by a well known AUK from Oz as “almost Australian”), to dull with sporadic showers for those unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong moment, but in the round we have always had pretty good weather days.

On the morning of Sunday 4th, there were no right places to be.

The weather forecast on Saturday was for a mixture of heavy rain and hail in the morning, clearing for a fine afternoon. We reckoned there would not be many on-the-day entries and a few DNSs.

In fact when we pitched up at the ferry terminal at 6:30am to get ready it was dull and dampish but not raining and Paul W was first to check-in (as usual) having cycled over from Portsmouth without getting wet. Being cautious souls, Sheila and I set up our table in the café rather than outside as usual.

We successfully saw 68 cyclists (out of the 79 who had entered) onto the boat, despite a bit of last minute panic from those who can't quite grasp that “the ferry leaves at 7:45am” means just that and not that 7:45am is a good time to drink up your coffee and start to wander towards the boarding ramp. One late arrival boarded the 8:05 ferry with a promise that the Needles Checkpoint would stay open for him.

From here things started to deteriorate. We phoned our Needles Controller, Bryan Wilson - who leaves each year on the 6:45am ferry to cycle up to the Needles - and his assistant Nik. Bryan informed me that it was thick fog and he could not even see Nik who he assumed was still standing next to him, but he had put his reflective coat on an AUK sign to try to direct cyclists to the checkpoint before they continued blindly on to the cliff edge above the Needles rocks.

We headed back into town and after re-stocking with bananas and brevet cards set up the Start Control for the 100km and 50km events. By now it was raining, but not too heavily. Despite the weather, 50 of the 62 entrants turned up and 6 brave individuals arrived to sign in on-the-day. A seventh arrived well-soaked after cycling from Southampton and decided that he would not ride the event after all, but generously gave us an entry fee donation before setting off back to Southampton. As his journey home overlapped the event route the short distance to the first junction I suppose technically he achieved a DNF after cycling 50m (is this a record?). A tandem couple decided to downgrade from 100km to 50km, not in the hope of getting less wet, but of being wet for less time.

With a minimum event speed of 10km for these BP events we tried to persuade some entrants that they had all day to finish and with an improving weather forecast it would be a good idea to go for a coffee (or two) and set off later. Only two were persuaded of this approach and the rest set off at 10:00am into the rain.

After this, in Lymington it looked to be improving nicely as the rain eased to a drizzle or nothing much at all. But... John had to go back to the ferry terminal at about the same time as the 200km and Century riders were between Chale Green and Bembridge; and the 100km riders were heading out of Boldrewood....and the heavens opened. The car wipers couldn't cope and Undershore Road rapidly flooded between the causeway and ferry terminal. And as those of you who were cycling know it was much the same in the New Forest and on the Island.

To quote a few of you:

- I think I've been wetter but I was in the bath at the time.
- Rained so hard that I stopped caring and had to laugh.
- Bembridge Cafe suffered a power outage due to water coming through the ceiling.
- Probably the most miserable of my 4 times on this event but still very enjoyable.
- The weather conspired to spoil the best bit which is the Needles section.....Simply comical on the river of leaves and squashed beer cans coming back down before Bembridge.
- It was REALLY wet on the Isle of Wight.
- The last few miles to Bembridge were in a deluge.
- The road through the town had water coming up out of the manhole covers and rivers running down it.
- I assume The Needles are still there but impossible to see at the time.
- Was this your revenge for being drowned on the Dorset Coast a few years ago?

It did indeed improve to give us a mostly dry, if windier, afternoon, but for some this did not come soon enough. Nine 200km riders and Five Century riders scored a DNF. For most of these the temptation of a figure of eight route allowing you to step off at 100km and head back to the warmth and hot food on offer in the Finish Control was too much. One small 200km group carried on to complete a truncated version of the route before turning back in the Avon Valley.

On the 100km event, 48 out of 54 riders were officially signed in as finishers. A few more who were just out of the ride finished but did not bother to complete brevet cards.

Five of the seven 50km entrants who set off completed their event successfully.

Despite the wet weather and inevitable punctures we are only aware of one mechanical DNF and one mechanical almost DNF. Dave M shredded his supply of 406 inner tubes and had to resort to a taxi-assist to Yarmouth. We tried not to be hurt when he confessed that annoying as this was, completing the New Forest O&O was not the apex of his season's targets and he was pleased not to have suffered a similar fate on his recent double-PBP. Wendy B suffered a self-inflicted near DNF by losing her bike lock key at Cranborne. But, helpful garden centre staff assisted and finally her bicycle was set free.

Despite the bad weather conditions there were a number of firsts. Dave P from Tuesday CC and John W completed their first 200km randonnée, Janet and Steven B from Wessex Tandem Club completed their first 100km event, as did Wendy B. Trevor W completed his first Audax event. There may be others we did not record.

The Organisers' event merit award was easily won by Peter Bezant completing his first 100km event (in less than ideal conditions) aged 10, making him the youngest ever solo cyclist to complete a New Forest Audax UK event.

No prizes are given for guessing who kept up his unbroken achievement as New Forest events Lanterne Rouge. The 200km event closed at 9:55pm and Mark B was stamped in at the Control front door at 9:54pm.

Judy (what rain?) U and Stephen L managed the only dry ride of the day by wisely deferring their 100km start until late morning.

The usual variety of Bicycles (but no tricycles this year) took part, from lightweight mudguard-free models to chunkier steeds. Fixed wheel and tandems were well represented, including Janet and John T out on their newly acquired Hasse recumbent / upright tandem combination. One recumbent solo took part and Dave and Judith flew the flag for small wheels on their Moultons.

The bare statistics:

130 started and 105 finished (20% DNF).

The highest DNF rate for a New Forest event series by a long way, reflecting the poor weather.

200km: 47 started - 38 finished

150km: 22 started - 14 finished

100km: 54 started - 48 finished

50km: 7 started - 5 finished

But thanks to Sheila the food was as good as usual and well received, especially hot soup, beans or pasta for those feeling wet and chilled.

Thanks to our helpers:

Bryan and his assistant Nik in the cloud at the Needles checkpoint

Mary at the Finish Control

Emma assisting Sheila with food at the finish

Bembridge and Cranborne cafés; and the Sheaf of Arrows pub acting as Controls

John and Sheila

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If you want to come back and enjoy the Isle of Wight or New Forest on a fine weather day of your own choosing, all of our May and September events are available to enter as "Permanent Events". Some are listed on our website, others can be made available if you contact us.

As soon as they are ready details of 2012 events will be on our website at

www.cyclingnewforest.weebly.com

Think of bicycles as rideable art that can just about save the world