

Wessex report - Watership Down: January 2013

The Watership Down 100km Audax brevet populaire on 13th January was the first ride listed in the Wessex Tandem Club calendar for 2013. In the event a degree of sanity prevailed amongst most members who opted out of a 100km early January hilly ride in possibly bad weather, so WTC was represented by just one tandem - John and Sheila on their Greenspeed recumbent tandem trike (which was perhaps not the best choice of vehicle; see their report below).

Quite a bit of early morning dithering on the potential ice factor above the "snow line" on the Berkshire Downs, so we set off with the proviso that if it looked bad we would dip out and head back to Kingsworthy.

Good start once we arrived in that the trike couplings went together first time and we were all set up in warm togs, hat (Sheila sporting her arctic hat with built in ear flaps) and gloves in plenty of time for a pre-depart mug of tea.

Set off with the sun shining and cold, but not biting cold, weather. Sheila declared within first 5km that she was having a bad legs day. Not good as we had only climbed one hill at this point. Being unsure of the early morning ice possibilities we opted to take the slightly more main road version of the route to the first control, thereby gaining the pleasure of climbing a bonus 8% hill. OK until we hit the outskirts of Andover and got lost, ending up going around every town centre roundabout and leaving on the wrong road. After consulting the map we retraced around several roundabouts and tried another road only to find ourselves on wrong side of the railway line. Second retrace, more town centre roundabouts and success, back on route.

Coffee at the first control and then off for the serious stuff. Lots of stunning views across the Hampshire and Berkshire Downs gained, of course, by climbing lots and lots of steep hills. Some ice in puddles beside the road at the top of Conholt Hill, but no real problem aside from cautious down-hilling.

The real killer of the day was lots of lanes with gravel, grass and mud in the centre making riding a tricycle a near impossibility. At times our little 406 wheels disappeared in the mud making steering impossible. Needless to say trike absolutely plastered in mud. Inevitably dozens of potholes. Also meant going down hill was at times no quicker than going up.

Picnic lunch on a bench beside road. Glad of thermos flask with hot drinks.

Great success!! We climbed Watership Down, having never managed to tandem up it before. No real choice with the impossible to push trike. We deployed the secret weapon of the low hub gear option, only ever used twice before. But had to pedal very smoothly to avoid spinning the rear wheel on the very steep top section.

Had lights with us but with 10km to go it looked like a daylight finish, when we picked up a giant thorn. Tyre did not deflate immediately so we pressed on but it had gone soggy in 2km. Put lights on and did roadside inner tube change. Nearly home and rapid deflation of tyre, with a second puncture. We had managed to find a second thorn somewhere. It refused to come out of the tyre, requiring scissors and a roadside surgical operation to remove it.

Finished - 108km in 7hrs 40minutes. Our worst time for a 100km event ever :(bit ashamed to publish it here.

PS saw snowdrops

PPS had a glass of Crabbies ginger wine when we got home - great restorative, feeling quite "good" now
PPPS no photos as we did not have an "under-mud" camera with us.