

Captain Cook Medium Ride 20/8/14

A woefully late ride description was posted on Tuesday evening and caused several members some consternation which they rightly vented on the leader. Nevertheless 7 intrepid Loiterers gathered at Uxbridge in the sun and after admiring the miniscule weight of John Watson's new Trek and Carol's photo of a white pigeon just about to be run over(?), we set out down the well known route leading under the M40. The gardens and fountains in the Buckinghamshire Golf Club looked particularly splendid as did the straight line of trees leading to the church. Denham village is so lovely and quintessentially English that we were surprised when Phil stopped to talk to a lovely Lithuanian lass (a friend of his daughter, so he said!) The Pytle was as bumpy as ever and we spun right after the railway bridge to the entrance of Savay Farm, once home to Sir Oswald Mosley; John Woodford described Mosley's wife's mausoleum (desecrated by locals) and the OS map shows a mound by the river? No refreshments were offered chez Woodfords so we pushed on following the yacht club path and pausing to view the gravel extracting and sorting process (plus wooden bear!) A short stretch on the toll path, left at the Fisheries, right at The Oaks and soon we were at the greasy spoon, Maple Cross and slapping Brian and Terry on the back in greeting.

A hard climb up and over the M25 (traffic at a stand-still), past the Dumbbell, the tiny lane blocked with dumped debris ! Left on the Chalfont Road and across the A4442 into the Vache grounds – a manor house, but much changed, dating to 1411 from the Norman De La Vache family – some missed the narrow, rough path, flanked with barbed wire, leading behind the new houses, up and up braving the brambles until the moat, mound and tower came into view – well worth the effort. A Royal Navy bosun's whistle piped us across the drawbridge plank and the white ensign was laid on the steep steps as some "pusser's rum" was sprinkled in tribute to the great Captain Cook. John Male's dissertation on triangulation was rather lost in the rousing chorus of "Hearts of Oak are our ships" and we all examined the globe and inscriptions and some climbed to the tower roof. Built in 1777 by Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser, Cook's commanding officer in Vancouver prior to his three voyages to the Antipodes. Palliser retired to the Vache and recognising the navigational genius in Cook, caused the monument to be erected. It is largely unknown mainly due to the efforts of the Vache estate to restrict access!

On to Little Chalfont and a bumpy pavement ride to Amersham – followed by awful roads and a huge swooping run down to Old Amersham and the welcoming Saracen's Head – excellent food and drink in the sunny garden with a boule/petonque pitch for good measure. Here Francis left us before we pushed south past the old flint, towered workhouse (now luxury flats!) and a small cycle path leading to the steep climb into Coleshill – the effort was worth while however as we then glided down past the lovely houses, the Red Lion and Grove's windmill to the Harte and Magpie – across the busy road and up, climbing into sunlit woods again. We soon arrived at the White Horse where Brian mis-directed Angela right towards Seer Green !! Zooming down Narcot's Lane we discussed the Indian Head in the hedge – no solutions are yet forthcoming must try harder. Riders peeling off independently now, such that only three made it to the new coffee shop in Chalfont St Peter, next to the bike shop; good cakes but a tad expensive. A pleasant discussion on holidays and times past before taking on the steep climb up to Rectory Lane – super downward run for miles past the only golf rail stop I know - as we were discussing Phil's expertise on building racing car spoked wheels he overtook us in his car and joined the conversation last pint at the Falcon and the last climb up through Uxbridge golf course – path improved.

An excellent day – the Cook monument is hugely impressive (as it should be to reflect the man's worth) and worth the struggle to see. On a different note after 4 weeks of cycling in France on near faultless smooth paths I was much struck today at how bad our roads and paths are; constantly watching ahead and altering route to avoid the worst potholes; even the green painted, designated cycle lanes were very bad – we must all campaign harder.....