

## **THE WILMSLOW WELLS CHALLENGE – DAY BY DAY!**

The idea of doing this challenge to mark the WWfA 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary arose from a conversation with three friends with whom I play tennis (rather badly). Mervyn, had done a little cycling before and was immediately enthusiastic so went off to work out routes and make other preparations. Martin was a little apprehensive but seemed to be up for it even though (like me) he hadn't cycled for 25+ years. Viren, was unusually quiet – perhaps knowing what was in store having seen his son do Land's End to John O'Groats a few years' earlier!

Mervyn's wife, Julia, decided to join us on her e-bike and was fantastic at keeping our spirits up as we went along and also at photography. Finally, my brother Andy relishes doing things like this and joined the team.

Training started on New Year's Eve and I felt so rough on New Year's Day I thought I'd made a big mistake! However, we all gradually improved and began to enjoy our training runs. There were a few health issues but we overcame them, encouraging each other through our WhatsApp group and by April, cycling had become mildly addictive! However, most of us did hardly any distances above 45 miles and seldom got out on consecutive days. We knew that the challenge itself would take each of us into unknown territory.

As soon as the idea of the Challenge was announced, Ian Porter came forward saying that he wanted to have a go but was unable to cycle. He had the great idea of using his bus-pass for the entire journey and set about working out a route but had to start the day after us as buses don't run on Sundays.

**David Cash (Chair WWfA)**

### **DAY 1 – SUNDAY**

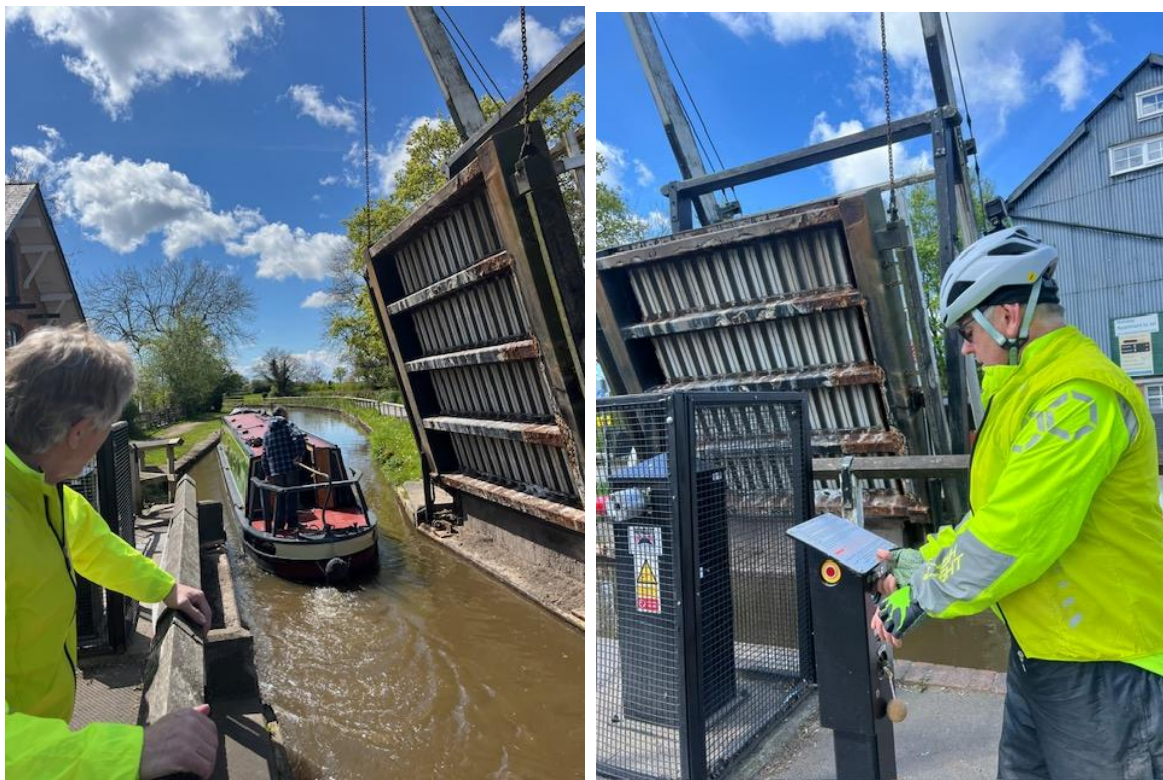
It was raining in Wilmslow when we arrived at St Bartholomew's, our set-off point. We were first greeted by Bishop Sam of Stockport and Eddie Roberts, Rector, who had to get away to preach before we left.

The large group of supporters who turned up to see us off was really encouraging and at 9.30, the local MP, Esther McVey counted us down!





The first leg was across familiar territory to Bostock Green where we had coffee and then on to the Dusty Miller at Wrenbury for lunch by which time the sun was out. We stopped the traffic (2 cars) and operated the device to open the drawbridge for a barge on the canal next to the pub - an interesting diversion!



The afternoon was spent pedalling across the flattish Cheshire countryside through pretty villages in the sunshine until we crossed into Shropshire and got to Wem. This was the first overnight stop and we'd completed the first 55 miles of our journey!





## **DAY 2 – MONDAY**

Day 2 was harder than Day 1. Although only slightly longer at 57 miles, it took us an extra hour and a half. There were more hills and from midday we seemed to be continuously into a headwind which meant even the flattest sections felt like steep hills! Shropshire is lovely with long views over rural landscapes and we passed through lots of picturesque villages like Clive and Upton Magna but the terrain is undulating. We tried taking the advice of an experienced friend by getting into a tight line and taking turns in front but it wasn't easy to achieve when the lanes were uneven and loose-surfaced or the main roads had potholes to negotiate whilst the traffic passed us.

One of the team decided to cycle through a ford and narrowly avoided getting soaked so the rest of us used the adjacent footbridge! We also had several encounters with colossal Clarksonsque tractors!

Our yellow WWfA gilets are great as people realise what we're doing and give us a cheer or clap us on our way, sometimes even when we have held them up! We've already been given donations at two of the four mid-day stops. We knew our lunch cafe at Ludlow would stop serving at 3.00 and just made it with ten minutes to spare but fortunately Carys (support vehicle - not needed!) had tracked us and warned them! Finally made it to Shobdon for a bath!

On the buses, Ian left Wilmslow a day after us as they don't run on Sundays and caught the 10.38 to Macclesfield. After four journeys, he made it to Stafford for his first overnight stay and seemed in good spirits. Only one of the four buses he took was late and fortunately that was the last one! I understand he has six rides today so fingers crossed! Meanwhile Day 3 is supposed to be the toughest for us...





### **DAY 3 - TUESDAY**

Day 3 was tough but thankfully not as hard as I feared it would be - mainly because the wind dropped a little and it didn't rain much! We covered 55.5 miles and climbed 3,151 feet during the day.

We knew the small hotel didn't do breakfast and had found a lovely tea shop/ general store/ post office 3 miles down some lanes in Kingsland (the sort of place Mr Bates has fought so hard for) and they really looked after us. We set off for Hereford happily in the drizzle for an uneventful ride except when Andy had a few polite words with a mobile-home driver who drove too close to Martin when we caught him up at the red light!

Coffee in the Cider Museum Cafe and on to the excellent cycle paths through Hereford (crossed the Severn on an old railway bridge) and headed towards Monmouth. We did a fair amount of climbing and then met this hill that seemed to go on forever - at every bend, up it went and seemed steeper! You just have to dig in and focus on the ground in front of you but one by one we gave up, dismounted and pushed our bikes (sorry!). I'm sure cycling fanatics love these but it was just too much for us!

After lunch in Monmouth we set off down the Wye Valley. This is one of my favourite places and it was looking beautiful with lush meadows alongside the river and the woods in new leaf with carpets of bluebells. Only problem was that we sailed along so happily I never thought to take a photo! We crisscrossed between England Wales until we got to Tintern and eventually the amazing ruined abbey. However, when we left Tintern, along came another everlasting hill but at least it wasn't quite as steep as the previous big one and we all made it to the top! We'd split into three groups of two and were able to keep each other going. Then passed the racecourse and into Chepstow for our overnight stop.

Then I heard from Ian that his first bus (9.30 out of Stafford) had never arrived!



Fortunately, the 10.30 did and he managed to recalculate his schedule and got to Stourbridge, Kidderminster, Worcester and Evesham where he was last night. Hope things go more smoothly for him today!



## **DAY 4 - WEDNESDAY**

We were joined by Martin's brother, Peter, for the final day of our journey and set off from Chepstow on the cycle way over the 'old' Severn Bridge crossing first the Wye then the swirling waters of the Severn. Using the cycle paths around the back of Avonmouth, two young riders came alongside us and were interested to



know what we were doing. They'd ridden from Bristol to its twin city, Bordeaux, last summer (500 miles in 4 days) which made our efforts seem rather pathetic! However, they must have been impressed because I noticed later that they'd kindly taken the trouble to find our website and donate!

We went into Bristol along the Portway passing under Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge and got to the Create Centre in the old Bonded Tobacco Warehouse for coffee. We had all got ready to set off when Andy discovered his rear tyre was punctured. Mervyn led the repair and we finally got into the penultimate leg of the journey.

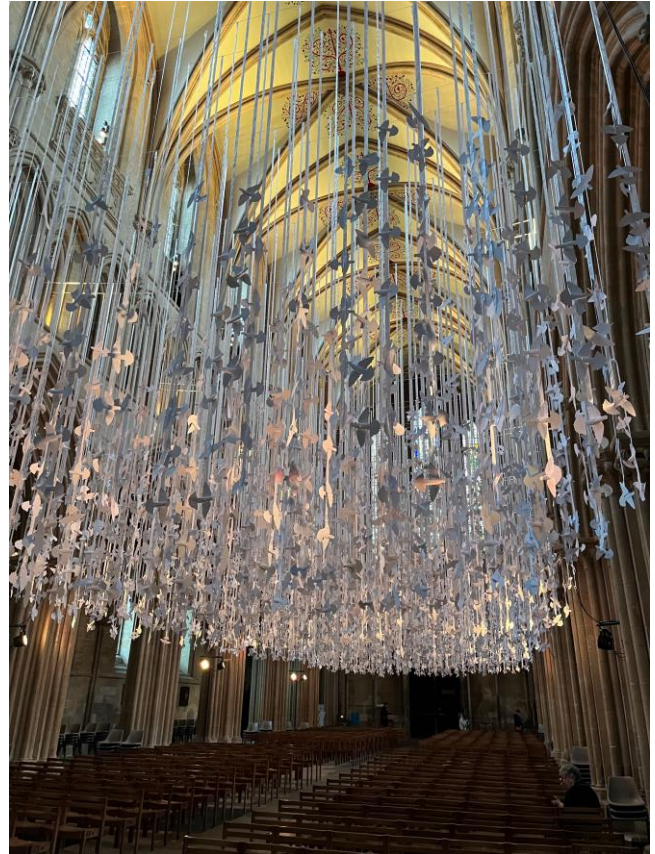
This contained Dundry Hill, the part I was fearing most of the whole journey because it's so steep! Julia and Peter made it to the top but one had a little e-power and the other hadn't been in the saddle for 4 days! The rest of us were soon walking but at least although Carys was hovering nearby, we didn't need to trouble her for a lift! Then it was down through the pretty village of Chew Magna and on to Chew Valley Lake for a late lunch in the cafe there.

On the final leg, there was just one thing left between us and Wells - the Mendips! We could barely face any more hills but we got up them and over the top to see a lovely view over the Somerset Levels with Glastonbury Tor rising out of the mist. Then down into Wells where a reception comprising the support team (wives) awaited.

The Verger invited us into the cathedral and it was all rather magical! They were halfway through Choral Evensong and we were greeted by beautiful haunting music as well as an amazing art installation above the nave. Beautifully lit, it comprised thousands of peace doves made from folded paper, each one of which contained a prayer - they'd been collecting these for some time! We were invited into the service and sat in the chancel. I was told that our journey had already been mentioned but when it came to the closing prayers, the Dean gave thanks for our safe journey, prayed for Ian arriving by bus the following day and then for the people in Africa and in particular that the money we had generated would be spent wisely. It was a real surprise and a fantastic way to end the ride. When it finished we were able to chat with the clergy and three members of the congregation produced donations!







## **DAY 5 – THURSDAY**

After a leisurely breakfast, some of the group had to quickly head north but five of us were able to take a look around the beautiful old city and then meet Ian who had been in Bristol the previous night. He arrived at lunchtime on the bus from Bath, looking a little tired after such a marathon journey but in great spirits!





