

WILMSLOW WELLS CHALLENGE

BUS VERSION

DAY 1

Bus 1 Wilmslow to Macclesfield. D&G Buses

A very familiar journey, which arrives in Macclesfield just 5 minutes after the next bus has left, resulting in a 55-minute wait. Time for a coffee.

Bus 2 Macclesfield to Crewe. D&G Buses

To Crewe via Congleton. Crewe is still in the process of developing its bus station and it looks very unfinished. The toilet facilities are provided by Asda, which led to a little concern - would I get back in time for the next bus? I did, and continued on the next leg.

Bus 3 Crewe to Hanley. First Potteries Buses.

Leaving Crewe by the same road I entered, but soon moved off onto a different route via Alsager and Kidsgrove into the 'six towns', which form the city of Stoke on Trent. The first was Tunstall followed by slow progress through Burslem, which I found very depressing. Hanley is pleasanter and has a well-organised bus station.

Bus 4 Hanley to Stafford. First Potteries Buses

More slow progress through Newcastle, followed by more rural progress through Stone and on to Stafford, Stafford did not seem to have a bus station, and my bus terminus was next to the railway station. I eventually found my way to my first overnight stop, then went out for a pub meal. TV did not work very well, but I was ready for bed.

DAY 2

Bus 5 Stafford to Wolverhampton. Select bus services.

The bus was scheduled to arrive at 9.30, but after 25 minutes another Select bus stopped near and the driver informed us(2 waiting) that he was the next bus and due to leave at 10.30. As I had arrived in good time, this meant I had been at the stop for an hour and 15 minutes. The route was very winding and few other passengers were picked up. The rather circuitous route took us through Penkridge, Brewood and Coven before depositing us at a street stop near, but not at, the bus station. I encountered a West Midlands Metro tram which was just leaving the vicinity of the bus station as I arrived. Wolverhampton bus station is very well planned and buses are not required to reverse out of pick-up points, but instead move in a continuous loop.

Bus 6 Wolverhampton to Stourbridge. West Midlands Buses

My earlier research suggested that I would have two buses between Wolverhampton and Stourbridge, but I was delighted to find that I didn't have to change in Dudley, compensating to an extent for the non-arrival of the first bus. Dudley was interesting, giving a glimpse of the Castle and a hilly loop around the academic zone. Merry Hill shopping area belies its name, being rather run-down. Stourbridge bus station is rather like a small version of the Wolverhampton one.

Bus 7 Stourbridge to Kidderminster. Diamond buses

Mostly downhill, it seemed to me. Is Kidderminster in a hole? Even further downhill is the bus station, which was quite warm and windswept when I was there, with very little shade. It seemed to be a long way from the town centre and a poor use of the available space. A circle of bus stops around a large open area.

Bus 8 Kidderminster to Worcester. Diamond buses

This was a very pleasant mostly rural drive to the fine city of Worcester. The bus dropped me in a street adjacent to the bus station, which is a line of bus stops down a single hill under a railway bridge. Was this Shrub Hill station? Worcester,

like most other places I've visited on this trip, has an outbreak of road-works. I had quite a long wait for the next bus so I used it for coffee, I had a long conversation at the bus stop with a very nice lady who was interested in my project and applauded our charity, but regretted that she was unable to support any more charities than she already did and I was minded to believe her!

Bus 9 Worcester to Evesham.

Even more rural drive via Pershore to Evesham. This is all fruit-growing country, but I was too late for blossom, although I looked very hard for it. This part of the journey moved from the Severn valley and Worcester to the Avon valley and Evesham. Much evidence of fairly recent flooding. The bus went past my hotel, so I stopped it before it reached the terminus. I found a very pleasant Turkish restaurant for my main meal, but to my surprise, it started to rain while I was eating, so I got rather wet on my return to the hotel. The bus station in Evesham consists of three bus stops and shelters on the High Street.

DAY 3

Bus 10 Evesham to Tewkesbury. Astons Coaches.

After a pleasant breakfast at the hotel, I experienced what was probably the nicest bus trip of the whole adventure. The route winds its way around Bredon Hill (*A E Houseman*), a Cotswold outlier, full of beautiful traditional stone houses, and pleasant undulating farmland. Tewkesbury is a splendid town with a fine abbey church, My driver dropped me at the wrong place, but very kindly took me back to the right place to catch my next bus.

Bus 11 Tewkesbury to Gloucester. Stagecoach West

A complete contrast. Most of this leg consisted of moving at maximum speed along the A38, apart from two diversions around modern (and uninteresting) housing estates. Gloucester itself caused slow traffic through the depressing and industrial areas of the city. I had a brief glimpse of the glorious pinnacles on the tower of Gloucester's magnificent cathedral, but no opportunity for exploration. The bus station is well organised, although buses did not always start from the advertised bays.

Bus 12 Gloucester to Nailsworth. Stagecoach West

This trip was enhanced by sunshine and I was forced to divest myself of my jacket. A hilly route through villages and small towns finishing in Nailsworth- another small town with some rural industry. Nailsworth's bus station is essentially a wide lay-by with three bus shelters and, happily, a public toilet. I was able to sit in the sun and explain my journey to an elderly lady, who was also sitting in the sun but waiting for a bus back to Gloucester.

Bus 13 Nailsworth to Wotton-under-Edge. Cotswold Green

The road between Nailsworth and Wotton is very undulating and very attractive. Cotswold Green buses are small and if the one I was anything to go by, travel very fast. That might have just been an illusion, but this was the most exciting ride I had, with, as I recall. Only one stop to deposit a passenger. The bus deposited me, as the timetable said, by the War Memorial, in Wotton (pronounced WOOton) under Edge. There were bus stops on both sides of the road, but neither of them, as far as I could see, showed my next bus.

Bus 14 Wotton-under-Edge to Yate. Stagecoach

I think I may have watched the bus I needed go past me, but it seemed to be going in the wrong direction. After 20 minutes had passed, I enquired at the pub, and the girls in there assured me that the next bus would be there in half an hour. They were using live bus information, so I supposed they must be correct. I was joined at the bus stop by a lady who confirmed that the bus would arrive soon and she was taking it as far as Chipping Sodbury, just before Yate. We had the longest conversation of any of the whole trip and she was very interested in the Challenge.

Bus 15 Yate to Bristol First buses

Yate proved to be a much less attractive place than Chipping Sodbury, but we left it quite quickly. The drive to Bristol passed through increasing urbanisation, and dropped all the passengers in the middle of the city. Found my way to my

overnight stay, but the onset of thunder, lightning and heavy rain forced me to take advantage of the inadequate food offered at the Travelodge.

DAY4

Bus 16 Bristol to Bath. First Bus

Rain had stopped so a dry 20-minute walk to the bus station. Bristol Bus and Coach Station is well hidden but seems to work quite well when you have found it. It has a small café supplying adequate coffee.

Bus 17 Bath to Wells. First Bus

The bus from Bristol made its way directly to the bus station giving glimpses of some of the fine architecture. The bus from Bath to Wells passed through pleasant countryside only to be held up in Wells for at least ten minutes by the rubbish lorry travelling very slowly along a very narrow street. Slightly ignominious end to my expedition: but reversed by the warmth of the welcome given by the small welcoming party.

Curious readers may have come to the conclusion that I have become a connoisseur of Bus and Coach stations. I suspect that this is correct but only because I have seen so many and they vary so much. I am too old to take up a new career but I can appreciate the difference between a badly designed and a well designed bus station.

I had visualised striking up conversations with members of the travelling public. What I found was that either: people boarded the bus with friends, already in conversation. or: people boarded the bus already deeply involved with their mobile phones and unwilling to engage with me, or anyone else.