

DARTMOOR CLASSIC SPORTIVE – 2010

The sun shone from the moment the first of the Mid-Devon Cycling Club's team arrived on site at 08.00 on Friday morning till the last one left a Noon on Monday. It shone most of all on the Sunday and beamed down on the 1,800 plus starters.

Friday was a day spent receiving the marquees, toilets, barriers and skips, seeing the cycle racks were erected where needed, storing the bananas and other consumables, putting up the smaller marquees and the 2 mobile stages ready for the weekend's performers and a myriad of other tasks. Some 20 miles away, as the crow flies, there were similar activities at the Princetown control. By 6 p.m. all seemed ready and an eerie silence fell over the site.

Saturday morning was spent putting the finishing touches to the Dartmoor Event Village. Electrical supplies were run out to the key points. Computers tested. The parking areas made ready and an early lunch taken.

Soon afterwards the first of the keen and eager entrants arrived bursting to register and spend time relaxing in the village. There was much to do. There was the jazz band alternating with the folk group to listen to while eating a true Devonshire Farmhouse ice Cream. There were stands selling cycling kit, nutritional advice was available from the SiS stand. A Giant bike could be won in the RNLI raffle. Falcons could be handled. Bikes from bygone eras could be examined. Children could have their face painted and then tackle the inflatable assault course. Riders could have a pre-event massage. When all of this had been enjoyed you could sit back and enjoy a hot meal prepared by Lin and her team. As the afternoon wore on the site got busier and busier and it all had the feel of a village fete in full swing.

By 6 p.m. almost two thirds of the entrants had registered and an hour later most all the team had gone home and silence fell on the stalwarts who readied themselves for a short night's sleep.

It was short as the first movement on site began soon after 4 a.m. A snatched breakfast was grabbed and the first of the Sunday registrations were done. Within minutes the site was a hive of nervous activity as more and more people arrived. The Sunday registrations swelled by those who had 'done the deed' on Saturday.

In the last hour the timing mat was put in place and checked to be working 100%. The departure arch was inflated – well after the off switch was toned to 'on' and the starting pens were made ready.

Fifteen minutes to go and the first three pens were filled with about 100 riders in each but "which one would be opened first"? That was the question that was in the mind of those always ready to blast it from the gun. In the end it was the middle pen and a groan was heard from those with twitchy legs and even more twitchy brains left in pens one and three. By 08.30 all entrants were away save for a few who found the bed too comfortable or who had a last minute mechanical disaster.

Out on the road the groups merged and split as faster riders swept by and slower riders just enjoyed the day at a more tranquil pace. The first real test to the legs came on the climb out of Bovey Tracey, a short descent and then a 1 in 10 hit up to the open moor. The long climb over and around Trendlebeare Down was a continuous line of colour as the 'ants' made their way upwards to the proverbial spoonful of sugar at the top.

Doubling back just after Manaton and there was another climb to pass Jay's Grave and then Hound Tor – scene of several Doctor Who episodes where it was a distant planet. It was then around the Southern flank of Dartmoor past Hemsworthy Gate and Cold East Cross where those with time on their hands could look out into Lyme Bay. Those with ambitions on gold medals were able to power along.

A long and bumpy descent dropped the riders down to the banks of the River Dart. One unfortunate had failed to check his rims for wear and the pressure of block and rim on the 2 mile drop had resulted in a huge explosion as the inner tube came through. A call back to HQ got him to a place of

rescue but while he waited a passing local cyclist saw his plight and gave him his wheel and walked home with the scrap wheel – so maybe he was the fortunate rider.

The climb of Holne Chase and then up to the moor beyond was the most severe to date and a number of riders found that walking was the best option. Once on top the views down to the Dart Valley were a real compensation for the pain suffered.

The drop into Hexworthy was a test of cornering skills with its treble hairpin. This was followed by an almost mundane ride over the open moor to Two Bridges and the control at Princetown where there was copious sustenance available – the ubiquitous bananas, gels and energy bars supported by, locally made flapjacks, quiches and leek and feta pie.

The 100 milers soon left the moorland town and dropped swiftly down to Walkhampton and Horrbridge. A sharp climb followed to Plaister Down with a swift descent to the stannary town of Tavistock. Here some riders had to compete for road space with a religious procession. Perhaps some prayed for an end to the hills. If they did then their prayers were unanswered.

There was the long hill away from Tavistock, a drop into Chillaton and then up the valley to Lydford. For those with time there was the chance to view High Willhays and Yes Tor, the highest points of Dartmoor and standing proud on the western flank of the moor. For those pushing on it was just an exercise in covering as many miles as possible while the going was slightly easier.

By now the temperature was beginning to rise and the heat was having a telling effect. The new control at Brentor Village Hall was an opportunity to top up with water as in the next 10 miles lay the hardest part of the ride.

Once over the River Tavy at Harford Bridge it was up Batteridge Hill to Moorshop, left and it was up again over Pork Hill and after a short descent it was up Merrivale to Rendlestone. From close to sea level you were now at 1,500 feet and soon back at the Princetown control – more of ubiquitous bananas, gels and energy bars supported by locally made flapjacks, quiches and leek and feta pie!

66 miles done only 40 to do – the back has been broken of this ride or has it? Temperatures on the moor were at the rarely seen 30 deg C. Water was being ferried out in all manner of ways to the riders. Three of the inns on the route had agreed to provide water at outside taps to reduce the delay for those needing a top up.

There remained two last hurdles to conquer. One was from Postbridgeto the Warren House Inn – a particularly hard climb as the top can be seen from the base and then the twisting climb out of Moretonhampstead and over the 1,000 foot contour for the final time.

Once past Cossick Cross it was three glorious downhill miles to the Teign Valley and then ten more of running ground back to the finish.

Here, having racked their bikes, all were welcomed back, received their medals, souvenirs and goody bags and had time to repeat the Saturday afternoon exercise in the Dartmoor Event Village while waiting for their friends and team mates to come in and recount their tale of the day. Many took advantage and had a post ride massage under the capable hands of Anna-Marie and her team.

One by one or in small groups they drifted away till there were only the site crew left – all they had to do was clean up and wait for the last quartet still out there. When all hope had almost gone they arrived.

They had started late. Got to the control after the 100 mile route had closed. Were diverted to the 100km route but after 5 miles realised it and decided to map read back to the 100 mile route. By this time there was no one in Princetown to turn them back and with the indomitable spirit of the Cornish they carried on to the end – Oh how we blessed them.

What will 2011 bring? After the rain storms of year 1, the heat waves of years 2 and 4 and the showers of year 3 who knows but you will find out if you enter now and ride the event on the weekend of June 25th and 26th.