

The Clun Run (Drovers Roads) – 11th September

In advance of the run, organiser Brian Jones sent us this note with some history, and advice about the kind of roads we would encounter:

“Some of these roads are narrow and in poor condition with mud, loose surfaces and potholes. You will meet livestock on some lanes and other obstacles. It is recommended that you ride it on an easy to handle bike of a not too precious type. There are no green lanes and the high roads give magnificent views.

For centuries Welsh farmers sent their livestock to market in the large cities to the east in England. Some of the tracks that the herds followed have become the roads and lanes of today. This ride reveals some of the old drovers roads that criss cross the hills of this part of Shropshire.

A lane originating as a drovers road is identified by the wide distance between the hedges compared to the narrow lane between, and when it meets an incline the deep narrow earth sides of the lane. Features caused by the wide spreading of the herd on easy going, and the bunching as they climb in a line, the hooves cutting a groove in the land. Other features are the preference for following high ridges to avoid toll roads. These high roads gave access to the hill farms, the cattle being collected at Scotch pine copse which can still be seen on route. Also to note are remote inns (The Dog and Duck, now upper Castlewright cottage) and the smithy at Cefn Einion where cattle were re-shod for their long walk east.

After selling the cattle the drover would be responsible for bringing back cash, a great temptation for highwaymen and footpads. So they devised an early form of cheque issued in the east and paid at home. The sign of this service was the black horse favoured by the drovers, a sign we still see today as the logo of Lloyds bank. Another Drover legacy is the heel nipping Corgi dog.”

The run started from Tony's Diner, but took the B4368 along Corvedale directly to Craven Arms, so riders could either sign on with Stuart Munroe at Tony's, which most did, or with

Brian at Craven Arms. We then went up the A49 a short way before turning left along the A489 for about 7 miles to the stop at The Heath Tea Rooms (left), a few miles short of Bishops Castle. The route proper would start here after coffee.





The coffee stop was interesting. We were invited to sit around a table in the garden, on which there were already a great many saucers, a few cups and two whole cakes under covers. On enquiring whether we should order we were assured by the lady in charge and her young man assistant that more was coming. After a while two plates full of tomato sandwiches arrived, which no one had ordered, but we were told that the poly tunnel was



full and they needed eating. Next we had teapots and milk, then mugs of coffee for those who wanted that and finally more teacups. We were in business! Dave Chapman took charge of slicing the cakes, I can't remember who was 'mother' with the tea, but it was all good. Afterwards we were invited to look round the sheds, which among other things contained a gypsy horse drawn caravan under restoration and two kit cars on VW beetle chassis but in the form of Bugattis. A memorable stop indeed.

After coffee we continued up the lane to Lea, then skirted Bishops Castle and out towards Church Stoke before turning off onto a lane again at Snead. That lane took us up around Aston Hill to Bishops Moat and on between Reilth Top and Colebatch Hill to Cefn Einon. Some of the views along this stretch were terrific. We then criss-crossed Offas Dyke as we made our way south to Newcastle. After there we turned north-west again, following the Folly Brook valley to Brook House, where a splendid sculpture of a deer stopped some of us in our tracks for a photo opportunity. From there we went up to Two Crosses and along Edenhope Hill, more great views before dropping down and crossing the River Unk and going back up again and turning left along the ridge towards Sarn where we joined the A489.



A few miles further on we turned right into Mellington Hall Country House Hotel, a very posh establishment approached over what seemed like a mile of private driveway. Certainly not a greasy spoon café, are they really expecting us? We lined the bikes up on a gravelled area next to the Hall and made our way round across the terrace and inside the second door along (the first door contained a 50th Birthday party in progress and they *definitely* weren't expecting us!)

The welcome was warm, surroundings very pleasant and the food excellent, a very good lunch stop. All in all, a splendid day out, many thanks to Brian for the route and his route checking sidekick Stuart Munroe. Here's the two of them photographed on route and at lunch.



David Spencer

