

Day 5 Part 2

It was raining hard by now, but the wind was largely behind my back. I was making good time despite the late start, getting lost, and slowing down to cycle with my recumbent friend. I was looking forward to Cirencester, which was a Roman town with some apparently good sights to see. Although the merino wool appeared to be doing its thing, I was really looking forward to a piping hot pub meal somewhere overlooking the Roman theatre, perhaps. Things would not be quite so straightforward, however.

The first setback was a closed road near Cotswold Water Park. The signs pointing to Cirencester were accompanied by temporary road markings indicating a road closure ahead. I looked around. It was pouring and there didn't seem to be anyone in site, as far as I could see down the long, flat road. Curiosity got the better of me. Sometimes it was possible to skirt around road construction, perhaps walking around a barrier or two or hopping over a worker or two. It annoyed the hell out of my motoring companions, but I didn't care a jot. It was a pedalling perk. I looked at the 'road closed' sign. I looked far into the distance, seeing no road crews, and nothing but open road. I decided to take a chance.

A mile later, I had seen quite a few more signs, but no no sign of diggers or workers. I had made the right decision. Another mile passed. Definitely, the right decision. Probably saved myself a few miles, too. Then I turned around a corner and the road disappeared into a cacophony of fluorescent-vested workers and noisy machinery. I would've needed a jet pack or some spelunking gear to get past it. There was nothing to do but turn around and add some more miles to my futility odometer.

I headed back with a heavy and increasingly soggy heart, but soon had a bit of luck. One of the side roads that I had failed to notice sported a National Cycle Path sign, and indicated that it headed to Cirencester. It was perfect. I turned right and dutifully followed the blue signs in the direction of Cirencester town centre. Passing over the A-road that led to town, I checked the map and realised that my detour had costed me at least 4 miles and that there was another 3 to go. I was starving, but the merino wool was working and I felt better than I had on Day 2; a hot lunch would put matters right. I reached the outskirts of town and headed towards 'Town Centre'. Rather than taking me to an array of cosy pubs, the path took me under a major road and then led to a series of council flats. The only pubs here appeared to be for sale. Then the National Cycle Path signs disappeared. I turned around, looked around, but saw nothing. I went back to the last one I'd seen. Yup, 'Town Centre' straight ahead. I continued in the general direction, but saw nothing but flats and failed

businesses. Then, I spotted a blue sign far off in the distance. Good, here we go. 'Cycle route out of town'. Huh? I hadn't *been* to town yet! I was really in need of seafood pie or bangers and mash. What the hell was going on? Surely it couldn't be that difficult to find my way into the centre of a small town!

I then decided that the National Cycle Path signs must simply be wrong. All the time. It reminded me of the time Michelle and I ended up walking across the entire Dingle peninsula looking for Gallatus Oratory. I decided to trust my empty gut. I looked at the map, I figured that I should turn right. After more council flats, I reached a major roundabout, decidedly heading out of town. Hmm. I went back in another direction. This time I found myself in an industrial park, as far away from the Roman amphitheatre I had planned to eat my lunch in front of as you could probably get. Cold, hungry, and feeling a bit weak, I stopped at a petrol station for something to eat. A bun-warmer cabinet contained some of the least appealing pasties I'd ever seen. I glumly extracted a curry chicken parcel and went to the cashier. I took off my gloves to fetch the £1.39 from my wallet and the cashier gasped. My hands were stained black from my slimy wet gloves and looked as though I had been spending the last few hours massaging an engine block. "Uh, it's the gloves," I said, avoiding eye contact, and headed back out into the rain.

I ate the dismal, but warm, pasty under the awning with my stained hands, as motorists stared in either horror or amused fascination at my predicament. I could have asked one of them, I supposed, how the heck to get to the city centre, but I was far beyond caring. The hell with bloody Cirencester, I thought, let's just get to Cheltenham! I continued through the industrial park, retracing my tracks through a few dead ends, and after a couple of minutes, found myself feeling a creepy *deja vous* sensation. I had been here before... And sure enough, I had. I was back to the A-road I had passed on my way in to Cirencester. I had completely circumnavigated Cirencester. Sputtering fire and brimstone at the Roman ruins, the useless signage, the rain, my pasty, and the world in general, I rolled back into town. This time, trying just to get through the damn place, I managed to go right through the heart of the town centre, cursing the lovely pubs I saw, and finally managed to find the correct road to Cheltenham.