

Day 2 Part 3

After the heavenly pasties - steak for me, veggie for Mark - we got back on our bikes and headed up the steep, verdant valley that led out of Looe. By now the rain was really coming down, and, as we climbed and climbed, silvery wreaths of fog could be seen caressing the trunks of trees. The vistas Mark promised along the south coast were beginning to look rather doubtful. By the time we reached the summit, visibility was next to nothing, yet it was still pouring, now lashing in at angle from the south. I didn't think it was possible for thick fog and violent rain to co-exist, yet this was the case. I asked Mark if we were in the midst of a meteorological rarity, and he replied with a bemused grunt. It was astonishingly dreadful weather. The pasties now digested and, blood retreating from our muscles and into our stomachs, we both felt sluggish in the hilly terrain and more than a wee bit chilled. There was nothing to do but keep going.

Mark was right, the road out to Tor Point should have boasted spectacular views of the dramatic south Cornwall coastline, but all we could see was water in the form of vapour and fast-moving droplets. The fog did dissipate temporarily when we dropped down to sea level, only to build up again when we climbed up again. I thought that the only thing that could make it worse was if I was wearing foggy glasses - I had had the foresight to insert my contact lenses - but then on the other hand, my eyes were beginning to sting nastily from the rain blowing off the sea. It was frustrating as well as sozzling.

Finally, we made it to the Tor Point Ferry, the third, and last, ferry of the trip. Shivering and wondering if any of the motorists would mind us curling up with them in the back seat for the 10 minute ferry, we wrung out gloves and shook off our jackets as we headed into Plymouth - and Devon - the second county of the journey. Our first stop in Plymouth would be a bike shop that Mark recommended. He had wisely made a list of bike shops along the way, something I started considering myself. While Mark bought a couple tubes, and some decent, rain-proof gloves, I ate the last of the chocolate beet cake in the subterranean arcade that fronted the shop. In a rather stupid burst of inspiration, I decided to take off my rain jacket to see if could dry off my sodden poly-phew top in the breezy underpass. At first I thought I had made a good decision; the wind buffeted my green shirt quite boisterously. However, after five minutes, I wasn't much dryer, but an awful lot colder. After another five minutes, I started to do jumping jacks just to keep my blood in liquid form and a few Plymouthian ne'er-do-wells, who had also been sheltering from the storm and looking curiously in my direction, raised their eyebrows and took off. Just then Mark re-emerged with enough tubes and hand protection for an entire LEJoG, let alone the final 35 miles, and we took off as well.

Mark knew the stretch from Plymouth to Torquay very well and took the lead once again. He'd speed off on the flats and I'd catch up on the flats, which was just the thing for putting some heat back into my torso and staving off the hypothermia. Unfortunately, however, my shoes were completely saturated and my feet, swimming in the briny puddle that had gathered around my toes, were starting to go numb. Each time we got off for a water break, which had been a redundant ritual pretty much all day, my feet felt like they were encased in ice. It was patently ridiculous; here we were at the height of summer, in the southernmost corner of Britain, and my tootsies felt like they were back in an Edmonton winter. Despite riding through blizzards where the temperature plummeted below minus 25 in a dozen Canadian winters, I couldn't remember feeling so cold. Mark just kept shaking his head in dismay, muttering that the weather was never this bad when he was a kid. Adding to the surrealism, we kept seeing a white Ferrari with Italian plates which kept zipping up and down the B-road we were travelling along. I suggested to Mark that maybe he was a new signing for his beloved Plymouth Argyle Football Club, who had just been purchased by a Japanese investor and he cheered up considerably.

We finally reached the last 4 or 5 miles of day 2, creeping down some muddy lanes on the outskirts of Torquay. Mark warned me to be wary of the cars and SUVs that would whip around the sharp corners as if they were at Silverstone, but I felt more comfortable hidden away in the narrow, sunken tracks, relying on my Spidey sense to detect approaching vehicles, than on A-roads and B-roads, which exposed me to Italian Ferraris driven by hopped-up footballers and super-sized lorries. At any rate, I was just profoundly grateful that the end was in sight. I was absolutely, completely, and nearly unbearably spent. I felt like the solitary gigolo at a mid-sized nymphomaniac convention. There was no juice in my legs and, not knowing the way to Mark's place from this end of Torquay, I got caught behind at some of the lights when he sped ahead with the energy of someone who knows that a hot bath and a steaming plate of pasta beckons. Soaked, cold, sapped of my strength, and only on Day 2, I wondered what I had got myself into.

Finally I recognised the street that Mark and his wife Claire lived on and wearily carried my bike down the stairs to the landing. Mark, who in his t-shirt, was even colder than I was, jumped immediately in the shower, while I phoned Michelle to tell her that I was, literally, if not figuratively, in one piece. After I spent a good fifteen to twenty minutes in the shower, dinner was served. I have never been so sorry that Mark and Claire were veggies. I could have murdered a steak, killed a roast, and sent many a pork chop and chicken joint to its maker, but it was tomato pasta, olives, and crisps instead. But I ate gratefully and, I hope, graciously if not gracefully, and after many a glass of red wine, had to admit that I was sated. After dinner, Mark and I guffawed our way through *Anchorman* and *Mock the Week*. Stuffed like a Christmas turkey, finally warm, and chortling like a schoolboy, life was good again, and sleep came fast and deep.