

LEJoG de Matt

Day 3 - 25.57 miles (177 miles)

I awoke to, wonder of wonders - sun! Mark and Claire's flat looked over Torbay and nothing quite matched the view from their balcony on a cheery morning. Sailboats dotted the bay, the sun glittered merrily on the water, and you couldn't quite make out that the people strolling up the quay were actually the refugees from a stag party, smelling of stale smoke and beer and speckled with the sick of an overindulgent evening. Maybe things weren't so bad after all. After a quick breakfast, I put on my now merely damp shirt and shorts and headed out to follow Mark to the road to Teignmouth. Normally Mark cycled to his summer job as an ESL instructor, but his aching hindquarters convinced him to fire up his Vespa. It was a little hilly, and my legs felt a bit rubbery, but the sun did a number on my spirits and I could tell that, sore ass notwithstanding, Mark was sorry not to be joining me. "Oh well," I said, hoping that it would be true, "there's always next time."

Coming down the steep hill into Teignmouth, I realised that, barring a couple of snaps from the Fowey ferry, I hadn't taken a single picture of Day 2. Although photogenicity had not characterised our trip from Cornwall to Torquay, I felt a bit regretful and decided to make amends on the bridge that connects Shaldon(?) and Teignmouth. The first couple of times I encountered this bridge, I had found it more than a trifle annoying. When you're walking along the southwest coast path between, say, Torquay and Teignmouth, it is patently obvious clear that channel through which the River Teign enters the English Channel at Shaldon is narrow. It's wafer thin. With the wind blowing in the right direction, a decent long jumper could probably clear it. Canal boats would do well to get out without scraping both sides of their hull on the shore. But the bridge over the Teign isn't here, across the narrow part, but about a half a mile further inland, where the estuary spreads out like a rugby prop gone to seed. The bridge has got to be an additional half mile in length, and then it has to be nearly a mile more of walking to get to the Teignmouth seafront, from where the coastal path resumes. The last time I had crossed this bridge, it had been smack-dab in the middle of a 50 kilometre charity walk from Torquay to Exeter, and it's safe to say that I didn't have many nice thoughts for the civil engineers who had added 2 km to my journey.

Today, cycling quite a few fewer miles than I had trudged on that walk, I wasn't bothered. The light pouring onto the town and sailboats on one side of the bridge, and the rolling hills on the other, nearly made up for the unremitting rain the day before. Devon was spectacular when the sun shone, there was no doubt about it. I took an appropriate number of pictures and then headed towards Dawlish and the familiar cycle path that led me back to Exeter.

It felt good to arrive home even though I had only been away for a weekend. It was great to see Michelle and Alice the Cat, and to wash up myself and my duds. Watching my polypropylene tops slosh around in the washer, I realised that I had a sartorial decision to make. The night before Claire had mentioned how warm merino wool could be, even when wet. It dried quickly, was light, and, astonishingly, didn't stink. This mithral-like material seemed too good to be true, but I did remember another friend, a rock-climber back home in Alberta also praising its virtues. If it was good enough for a wiry climber clinging to a rock face somewhere a mile high in the Rockies, it had to be good enough for a leisurely cyclist with a spare tire around his waist. One thing was for certain. I didn't want to endure another hypothermic session like yesterday. I, like most Canadians, did not merely dislike the cold, I hated it. Well that wasn't completely true. I didn't mind *the* cold. I was perfectly happy to head out into a blizzard providing I had the right clothes on. What I hated was *being* cold. I not only despised it, I feared it, largely because I knew what it could do to exposed flesh and insufficiently covered appendages. I'd see fans of Newcastle United chant and cheer their way through January games at St. James Park bare-chested and marvel at how they could do it. Sure some of them wore enough cellulite to insulate a small town, but they would still

feel the cold, wouldn't they? I managed to feel chilly at October games at the St. James Park in balmy Exeter, even when I was sporting 6 or 7 layers of clothing. No, if there was some miracle substance that could ward off the cold, I was going to invest in it.

So, with Michelle's blessing, and with her good self, I headed off to my local bike shop, the Bike Shed, to find some merino wool shirts. Although the shop boasted biking jerseys in a rainbow's array of colours, the only thing made of merino wool was in the women's clothing department. Recalling that my advice was coming from two women, I began wondering if being warm meant being a transvestite. I made a rather hesitant mental note and exited for an outfitters down the street. I was in luck. The next place had a whole range of merino jumpers in varying degrees of thickness. I tried one on and it felt embarrassingly tight. I showed Michele and she stifled a chuckle. "Maybe you should try an XL," she said, encouragingly. I asked a young sales guy if they shrunk in the wash and he said, "Yeah, about 7%, but they're supposed to be tight." Surely not that tight, I thought, and opted for the XL. Michelle happily okayed me to buy a light one for on the bike and a thicker one for staying warm in the evenings, perhaps at the football. The trip was already getting expensive.

Back home, Michelle made some stupendous home-made pizzas, and I made some changes to my kit-list. I realised that weight was really not a worry; it was better to be comfortable and prepared and not worry about a few extra pounds. This didn't jive with some of the advice I had heard, but so far, I had done okay on all the hills and Devon and Cornwall were almost universally acknowledged as the most challenging counties to cycle through in England, even rivalling some of the roads in the Highlands which, rather more sensibly, tended to wind up river valleys, rather than take the quickest way to the top. I packed some extra clothes and, recalling my dad's advice about body heat escaping mostly through the head and neck, included a toque and neck-warmer, just in case. I also added shoes, to spare the cleats on my bike shoes, and brought spare gloves, which I stuffed in the shoes. Annoyed, in the way only a former boy scout could be, that I hadn't had enough to eat the previous day, I headed up to the Exwick Bakery before it closed for the day and cleared them out of caramel flapjacks and sandwiches. Into my panniers went all of my ordnance maps, even ones that I would only need for a few miles, which made me feel more confident for some reason. Finally, I decided to pack my nearly-full bottle of contact lens solution, despite the fact that I would only require a couple of tablespoons of the stuff for the entire journey. In for a penny...