MICKEY CRANKS

# NEWSLETTER

## SEPTEMBER 2022

# WELCOME

What a fantastic summer of cycling we have enjoyed! Members of the club have been riding their bikes far and wide.

In this edition of the newletter, we finally catch up on Jerry Williams' Scottish adventure that he undertook last year, Michael Oliver gives us a brief insight into his experience of riding following a kidney transplant, we have a round-up of the successes of the MCCC Race Team who have been busy this season and David Campbell has been out café hunting!

Thanks to all those who have contributed; there are plenty of adventures and activities that have not been featured and we would love to hear about them!

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## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Once again thanks go to all those that contributed to this packed and varied newsletter. As we transverse into Autumn, cycling adventures continue unabated. Cranks have recently visited the Pyrenees and Alps not to mention this years Chase the Sun epics and Le Jog's. Please keep the articles flowing to Jules our dedicated editor.

As October approaches, look out for the notification of several evening club nights throughout the winter period. It would be good to see some more faces at these social events that normally include food and drink. Finally our Christmas party looms which hopefully will not be disrupted by Covid again. We intend to once again award the 'Ride Leader of the Year' shield and maybe a few more notable awards. Look out for more info on this which is booked for early in December this time to avoid the office parties.

Enough of my ramblings, enjoy the newsletter and most importantly have fun on your bike.

DR
Chairman MCCC WG

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NC500 Jerry Williams 170

# The North Coast 500

Jerry Williams tells us about his epic adventure that he undertook this time last year

**What event/challenge did you do?**

NC 500 – Circular 500 mile route around the North Coast of Scotland, it starts and finishes in Inverness. It can be done clockwise or anti-clockwise. We did it clockwise.

**What was the attraction of this event/challenge?**

Those of you who know me will know that I like to have a bit of an adventure at least once a year. In the past this has included trips such as Vietnam/Laos, Morocco, Mongolia, Spain, Greenland, various tours in Iceland, Norway, Portugal, LEJOG in 2019 and in 2020 I did 12 peaks across the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District.

The idea of doing the North Coast 500 came to me as I have relatives in Scotland and was hoping to visit them with my wife in 2021, so I could kill two birds with one stone. So, the whole plan was there. I just needed to check if it could be pulled together.

**Did you do the event/challenge alone?**

I prefer cycling with at least one other as you keep each other going and it is always a bonus to share the experience with a like minded person at a later date. The person who came straight to mind was a fellow tours rider from the Peak Hill Fellwalkers, Lee, who did LEJOG in 2019. I then got to know him better in 2020 when he was in the area for the 12 peaks challenge.

We both strongly agreed that camping was out of the question. We would tour as light as we could and book overnight stays. We agreed doing the 500 miles in 8 days, i.e., averaging 62 miles a day from Saturday to Saturday would be the aim. Easy peasy! We had all kinds of fun and an alternate inland route to bypass down the East coast on the A9. The thought of riding on this busy A road was not appealing.

**Did you do any specific training for the event/challenge?**

I did not do anything special, in January 2021 my riding was mostly FTP (Front Room to Porch). As the Covid restrictions were reduced i did extended rides to and from work, regularly did 100 miles in a week and I also did a couple of rides to the Peak hilly club rides along with a couple of 100 mile plus Sportive events.

**How did the event go?**

**Day 1: Inverness to Lochcarron**
64.07 miles, 2,104 ft. ascent, 3h 55m ride time, 16.3 mph average

The last time I had ridden was the previous Sunday. I foolishly decided to go and ride with the MCDC Fast group- I managed the ride, but my legs were not right all week after. So, I started the ride a little apprehensive, but legs and lungs were comfortable and but felt he was itching to get going. That was soon proven as Lee shot off like a rat and was gone within a couple of minutes, with panniers. My legs were soon screaming from the extra 2.5kg weight that was to remember the luggage I was carrying and whether I could ditch anything. It happened that I would need to ditch a couple of items of spare in just over a week's time so I could collect my discarded kit then.

By 3.10pm we were at our B&B for the night, I had two thoughts. What a wonderful view over Lochcarron and there is no way I can keep up on average of 62mph for the rest of the route. Little did I realise that the terrain and weather would ensure this average speed was never seen again on this trip.

Our landlady was very happy for me to offload some kit. Nigel and I estimated that it was at least 1.5kg. Surely this will help tomorrow's ride. When I was back home, I weighed the package of items I left at Lochcarron; It was only 0.8kg. However, it gave me a psychological advantage.

**Day 2: Lochcarron to Gairloch**
81.02 miles, 5,636 ft ascent, 6h 44m ride time, 12.3 mph average

In the morning, our landlady's cat had the NC500 travellers' woes. Evidently, it was suffering big mountains. The cat started well in that the weather looked good and my legs were feeling good I guessed due to the loss of baggage weight. However, it soon became an epic ride. As you leave Lochcarron the road rises steadily for 6 miles, and it is like villages you see in TV and you see the mountain you are going to go over. Today it was covered in cloud. I later worked out that the Bealach na Ba was 2,054 feet so miles with only a few respites. It was not long before we started to experience very impatient motorhome drivers as they came up and down the pass. The views from here were great. However, other drivers were not and we had one or two "exchanges".

We eventually got to the top of the climb in the pouring rain and descended to the bottom, shivering and hungry. The only place open was the Applecross Inn, where we had a very good meal, but only after the landlady had covered the seats with a towel as we had absent them from our wet clothes.

We set off again in full waterproofs. The route now followed the very scenic coastal road to Shieldaig. We bought sandwiches in the Spa there and ate them in the bus shelter. This became a frequent occurrence during this ride and we were very thankful that bus shelters are protected from the elements on all four sides from ground to ceiling. This one even had a bench to sit on.

We finally reached our hostel along the north side of Loch Gairloch. At 7pm. Bliss, they had a drying room where we could dry our kit. I even washed my shorts and tee!



**Day 3: Gairloch to Ullapool**
58.37 miles, 4,721 ft ascent, 4h 12m ride time, 13.9 mph average

We set off fully rested just before 10am. A more straight forward ride today and the manager at the hostel assured us it was an easier ride. He said "it just rolls a bit". I shouldn't have believed him. It was not long before I started to suffer. I had to dig into the Gel supply. I realised after a while, that the problem was that I had not had enough calories over the last few days. This therefore needed to be remedied tonight.

We followed the A835 to the Falls of Measach. Then tuned left onto the A832 and this is where it got too busy for Oxfordshire standards. The scenery changed from sea lochs back to highlands with a few lochs again, always stunning.

We reached Ullapool at around 4pm and promptly headed for the Tesco store to stock up on food supplies and ate Haddock and chips in the car park due to the ferry terminal was massive and delicious. After checking into hostel, we tucked into our takeout dinner (the food bought at Tesco). After this we concluded that we probably had enough calories on board for the next day's ride.

**Day 4: Ullapool to Lochinver**
66.14 miles, 2,988 ft ascent, 4h 44m ride time, 11.2 mph average

We left Ullapool on the A835 riding 10 miles to Drumrunie where we turned left onto a minor road that took us to the Inverkirkaig falls and the Fish Smokery on amazing views. This was our shortest day and we arrived at Lochinver at 12pm. With time to kill, we went to the Lochinver Larder, Deli shop, the Lochinver Larder, but only drank coffee as we all had our Tesco supplies. Lochinver Larder didn't disappoint as on pies as we discovered that our accommodation for the night did not include any breakfast.



**Day 5: Lochinver to Durness**
60.04 miles, 5,650 ft ascent, 5h 02m ride time, 12.0 mph average

Today, finding food was going to be our biggest challenge. Before we left our accommodation we ate our remaining provisions, i.e., dried fruit, nuts and bananas. It was 34 miles before we found any civilisation (the next very windy again so had to shelter in yet another bus shelter to eat our lunch).

The 9 miles of minor road from Drumbeg to Newton was stunning a the final 16 miles to Durness was mostly downhill.

We arrived at around 3pm. The only place to eat was the Smoo Cave Hotel which was a mile further up the road. We went there straight away. What a great find. Great food and soft drinks. After having our fill, we rode back to Durness to book into our B&B. Our Landlady, Mrs Taylor had controls to ride to and receive our COVID-19 dry run test. In the event that when we went down for our breakfast in the morning, we had to make tasks to collect our full English and other goodies that were in disposable boxes. We then had a picnic back in our room. The food was great.



**Day 6: Durness to Melvich**
55.4 miles, 4,840 ft ascent, 4h 28m ride time, 12.4 mph average

Another windy day, a North Westerly gusting between 40 & 50 mph. People on the Durness campsite had to take their tents down in the night.

The first part of the ride was around Loch Eriboll which was amazing. Fantastic views and the road albeit an A road was single track, this helped control the traffic flow. But there were still some hairy moments.

The road along the North coast rolled up and down. We had some more assistance on uphills. It was not until we reached Bettyhill that we got close to the coast again. Bettyhill and Melvich are small villages with a few memories. This is where I started the last day of my LEJOG journey back in 2019. That was a very wet and windy day.

Staying in Melvich proved to be another food challenge. There were two restaurants in Melvich. One was closed and the other was fully booked. The local shop was also the petrol station and store was 10 minutes from closing and buy whatever we could.



**Day 7: Melvich to Lairg**
79.43 miles, 3,013 ft ascent, 5h 39m ride time, 12.5 mph average

Two miles after setting off from Melvich we turned off the official NC500 road as we wanted to avoid the extremely busy A9 road. The route was undulating, and we had straight in a very strong South Westerly wind. It turned out to be a very tough ride with a lot of climbing and I felt as if I do not have much to say about today's ride. It was a matter of trying to ignore the pain in the arse and saddle (for the last couple of days I have been taking paracetamol and ibuprofen tablets to dull the discomfort) and the strong wind. Nigel and I did not speak much today. We were just focused. But we did ride past supposedly the most isolated hotel in Scotland, a construction site for rocket launching and the famous Crask Inn that sells very expensive whisky and holds charity events.

We knew we had to head for Lairg as we were staying in Luxury Pods at Loch Shin and did not have any food. We arrived at Lairg at around 4pm. The only place to eat was the Spar shop and we might be able to get hot food was a fish and chip shop. Before I embark, I will have to retrace our ride for the few miles back up the road to get to our Pod. The Pod was great though and we had amazing views.

The original route I had agreed with Nigel included a diversion to Dunnet Head, but I had now changed my mind as I no longer wanted to do this. But in a roundabout way we both agreed that we wanted to ride the most direct route to Inverness in the morning to finish our ride.

**Day 8: Lairg to Inverness**
79.71 miles, 2,282 ft ascent, 3h 46m ride time, 13.5 mph average

The wind was a bit gentler today but still from the South West. We rode the first 6 miles from Lairg to Invran on the A836 and then the A9. The A9 is wide and we had left the main NC500 route yesterday, have been lovely and quiet. We then rode through the lovely little town of Golspie where we had buy All to ride three miles or so to cross the Cromarty Firth on the Kessock Bridge. To make it easier for our other hauls to pick us up we had arranged for them to meet us at Tesco supermarket in Inverness, instead of the official start and end, as the store was easier to get to.

**What were the highlights?**

The scenery, riding up Bealach na Ba, getting a hot meal in the Applecross Inn, the west coast roads from Applecross to Shieldaig and from Gairloch to Lochcarron, meeting the locals, getting back to Inverness.

**What didn't you like/low points?**

Saddle discomfort, crazy angry mobile home and car drivers, strong winds, struggled to find sufficient and suitable food on route.

**Looking back was there anything you might have done differently?**

With lockdown now over it is probably possible to find more accommodation and cut a day or two out of the route. On the Bealach na Ba, I tried to get to the Applecross Inn. There is a bunkhouse/private hostel there, a pub and a restaurant that I had heard about. I would have been a tough ride from Lee's day though as you would need to ride up to the Bealach na Ba.

Should have carried dehydrated food rations in case food on the road was not available.

**Would you recommend the event?**

Yes, it is definitely a ride to put on your bucket list.

**Anything else you'd like to pass on about the event/challenge?**

Make sure you have got good waterproofs, a comfortable saddle you can ride on over several days and make sure you have food rations in case you cannot get any.

Use SYHA hostels where you can. Having a access to a drying room really helps.

**What are you planning next?**

The Raid Pyrenean in June 2022 and a 10 day version of the LEJOG in June 2023 with fellow MCCC clubmates.

Jerry Williams

Photo credit: Phil Horan

# Racing After A Transplant

Michael Oliver recently competed in the European Transplant Games held at Blenheim Palace. Below, he tells us of his experience of cycling and racing after a kidney transplant.

A keen cyclist in my teens and twenties, by my early 40s I'd become more sedentary and piled on the weight. A rather unflattering holiday snap plus watching the Giro d'Italia on TV persuaded me to retrieve my bike from the back of the garage and get out there again.

But the real catalyst for 'doing something' came around the same time, when my GP confirmed I had something called polycystic kidney disease (PKD). PKD is a late-onset condition, the first symptoms only starting to emerge in your forties. Cysts develop on the kidney which cause a reduction in kidney function, eventually causing total organ failure. Fortunately, this wasn't as great a shock as it might have been, because my father had the same condition. As he had gone on to have a kidney transplant, I didn't have to be a genius to work out what was coming down the tracks!

I continued to cycle regularly but as my kidney function reduced, it got harder and eventually things like walking up stairs or hills made me very breathless. In January 2014 I started dialysis, and in March 2015 I received a kidney transplant from an unknown deceased donor. The fact that someone had to lose their life in order to save mine was not lost on me at the time (and still isn't) and I was determined to honour my donor by not wasting this opportunity I'd been given.

It was former professional Steve Joughin, who now runs the Pro Vision clothing company, who suggested that after I had my transplant, I should consider taking part in the British Transplant Games. The Games are like a mini-Olympics for people who've had transplants, including heart, liver, kidney and bone marrow and include sports like athletics, cycling, tennis, badminton, table tennis and golf, with competitors split into age groups. They also aim to promote the fact that, after a transplant, it is possible to live a normal happy, healthy and active life and to encourage organ donation.

Having raced quite seriously in my youth, cycling was an obvious choice and so, from the day of my transplant, taking part in the 2016 British Transplant Games became my goal. I joined Mickey Cranks in January 2016 and did plenty of endurance miles in the early part of the year. In June I did my first race in nearly 20 years at Castle Combe and in late July I was on the starting line at the British Games in Liverpool. To my great surprise and delight I won a bronze medal in my age group in the time trial and a silver in the road race.

The following year I was selected to ride for Great Britain at the World Transplant Games in Malaga, where I placed fourth in both events. The road race was particularly painful, as I was part of a four-man breakaway but I lost out in the sprint, so no medal! However, I made up for it by winning the road race outright at that year's British Transplant Games in Glasgow and taking silver in the time trial.

Unfortunately, urinary tract infections (UTIs) are a fairly common issue for transplant recipients and really started to affect my health in 2018. I didn't train or race as much as I would have liked but despite this, I did manage to defend my time trial and road race titles. The 2019 World games were in the UK, in Newcastle but I had to withdraw due to needing an operation. Then the pandemic struck and transplant sport globally was suspended due to the fact that all transplantees are classified as clinically extremely vulnerable due to being immuno-suppressed. I did very little riding in 2020 and 2021 and if I did go out, it was usually on my own, so they were a very solitary few years, although I did do a lot of walking with my wife, Gill.

This year, I decided to get back into training. The combination of inactivity and lockdown comfort eating meant that my weight had crept up to 90.5kg, more than 10kg above my racing weight! I began in February and was just starting to feel an improvement when I caught COVID. I was quite unwell and didn't want to push a return to the bike too soon, so it was early May before I started riding in earnest again. Then in late May Gill and I decided to do a European 'workation' trip for five weeks and it wasn't practical to take my bike, so that was another interruption to my riding. I had pretty much decided by that point not to compete this year but a chat with a fellow transplant cyclist who'd had far more setbacks than me and was still planning to race led to a change of heart.

When we returned from our trip, I had four weeks until the British Transplant Games in Leeds. After so long away from competition you don't really know what to expect so I was thrilled to win silver in the time trial and gold in the road race, although I had to resort to being a 'sit-in sprinter' in order to do this! I then had another four weeks until the European Transplant and Dialysis Games, which were taking place on my home patch, Oxford, with the cycling events being held at Blenheim Palace.

Photo credit: Gill Oliver

The proud owner of two shiny medals

From walking around the grounds, I knew there was a lot of elevation change there, so all my training focused on hills, which those who know me is something I usually avoid having to do unless absolutely necessary! I'd also managed to get my weight down to 79.7kg, always helpful when going uphill... In the time trial, I felt terrible but still managed a bronze, so everyone else must have felt worse than I did. In the road race, I came away with a second bronze. In the circumstances, I was really happy with my results which hopefully should mean I will be going to the World Transplant Games in Perth, Australia next April. I'm planning on joining some Mickey Cranks group rides during the winter, so I hope to see some of you 'down the road'...

**Michael Oliver**

Photo credit: Robert Hall

Photo credit: Mike Wise

# 2022 Oxford Road Race League

The MCCC Race Team have been busy this season. James Engledow outlines the achievements by the team.

The Oxfordshire Road Race League (ORRL) returned for 2022, the first time since MCCC won in 2019. This years league consisted of one criterium race, four road races (unfortunately the 5th road race was cancelled due to last minute roadworks on the course), one individual 10mile TT and one 25mile Team TT. We had MCCC representation in two of the women's races where Steph Foster and Hannah Makins both finished 5th and Steph rode as part of the men's Team TT. We had MCCC representation in all of the Men's races where we had top 10 results in all rounds, with Alex Royal taking the win in the men's individual competition and Matt Herman finishing 9th. Cowley Road Condors were dominant in both the men's and women's team competitions and the MCCC Men finished 2nd and the ladies 4th.

Photo credit: Mike Wise

Alex Royal

The ORRL is a team event so thank you to everyone who raced (James Engledow, Steph Foster, Jamie Garrett, Scott Garrett, Oli Gummery, Matt Hermon, Rad Hart-George, Nick James, Neil Johnson, Hannah Makins, Alex Royal and Mike Wise) and supported the races (especially Pete McGrane who organised the MCCC race). If you would like to race in 2023 please make yourself known to the race team and we will do our best to support you.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Round 1 | ART- Dalton Crit | Steph Foster 5th<br>Matt Hermon 3rd |
| Round 2 | HWCC - Horton | Alex Royal 1st<br>Rad Hart-George 9th |
| Round 3 | MCCC - Bampton | Matt Hermon 10th |
| Round 4 | CRCC - Woodstock | Alex Royal 2nd |
| Round 5 | VCRT - Little Milton | Alex Royal 2nd<br>Oliver Gummery 7th |
| Round 6 | DPCC - Southmoor<br>10 mile TT | Hannah Makins 5th<br>Alex Royal 2nd<br>Matt Hermon 3rd |
| Round 7 | ART - Dalton 25 mile TT | MCCC Men 3rd |

Tony Turner and Nick James have also been regularly competing in time trials, both achieving great results at the RTTC National 10 mile Time Trial event in August .

**James Engledow**

Photo credit: Mike Wise

# Rise and Flour
# Martha's Coffee House

David Campbell has been out and about, and reports back on some café stops that he has enjoyed recently.

As cyclists, the coffee stop is an essential part of our rides. For many, it's the absolute highlight of the ride!! Choosing the right coffee stop, bearing in mind the size of the group, the length of the ride, the weather conditions etc. requires military planning!!

Whether you just want a coffee and cake or something more substantial, the one thing we all want is a warm welcome for cyclists.

During a week in August, I visited two cafes that were new to me. In both cases I felt very welcome as a cyclist, the cafes were excellent and I would recommend them to anyone in the Cranks.

The first café was a newly opened café called Rise and Flour in Milton Under Wychwood. They describe themselves as an "Artisan Bakery in The Cotswolds". As we arrived and were pondering where to leave our bikes, a lovely lady came out and said "don't worry just lean them up against the café wall". There was plenty of space to leave bikes lying around, but she was very keen to help us out. She also said she wants to encourage the cycling customer base and would be investing in a bike rack. What a refreshing attitude to cyclists!!

They have their own bakery kitchen to prepare all their own food. On this occasion we just stopped for a coffee and pastry, but they prepare an excellent range of hot food, pastries and sweet treats.

I had a lovely chat with the same lady when we were finished, and I left feeling this is a café that sees cyclists as an essential part of their future customer base. There is plenty of space outside for bikes and people, so a decent size group can be accommodated.

**Rise and Flour Opening Hours:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sunday: | 9am-3.30pm |
| Monday: | CLOSED |
| Tuesday: | 8.30am-3.30pm |
| Wednesday: | 8.30am-3.30pm |
| Thursday: | 8.30am-3.30pm |
| Friday: | 8.30am-3.30pm |
| Saturday: | 9am-3.30pm |

01993 831856

Click here for the website: Rise and Flour

The second café was Martha's Coffee House in Moreton-in-Marsh. I had never been here before, always frequenting other cafés in Moreton. Going forward, I would certainly visit this café again as my first choice in Moreton. It was the very friendly welcome that we received on arrival that made the experience for me. They were happy for us to lean the bikes against the wall and told us to sit down and they would come over and serve us.

It was a gorgeous day and we were able to sit outside. The menu was extensive and I plumped for the Bacon, Brie and Chili Jam toastie.....OMG it was to die for!!

They have tables out the front and a courtyard garden at the back. I think this café is better for small groups as there is not a lot of space for bikes. As there were only two of us, we had no problem.

So, if you have not been to either of these cafés and you are looking for a new café to try, then I highly recommend both of these for a great cyclist experience.

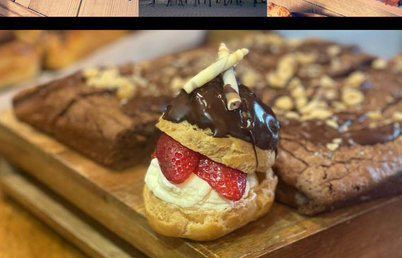
**Martha's Coffee House Opening Hours:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sunday: | 9am-4pm |
| Monday: | 9am-4pm |
| Tuesday: | 9am-4pm |
| Wednesday: | CLOSED |
| Thursday: | 9am-4pm |
| Friday: | 9am-4pm |
| Saturday: | 9am-4pm |

01608 651999

Click here to see more about Martha's Coffee House

**David Campbell**



**We want to hear your news and share what club members have been up to!**

We'd love to hear about your achievements, no matter how great or small or any cycling trips that you have been on.

Do you have a favourite piece of kit or item that you can't be without?

Cranks are renown for their ability to sniff out the best cake stops so tell us about any new cafés that you've been to.

Any potential article writers, do get in touch. It can be short, long, funny, sad, it all counts!

Please send your contributions to:
**joolesbirch@gmail.com**

Thanks!