



Cycling in Hitch Wood (Photo: Graham Trent)

Peaceful pedalling in the northeast Chilterns

By Dennis Keeling

The Society's Cycle Group ride in different locations every Thursday throughout the year. One of our members from the NE Chilterns devised a splendid route for us along some very quiet roads, and passing through beautiful villages. This was a complete change from our normal rides - we didn't see a car for the first hour! The circular route from Gustard Wood, north of Wheathampstead, was 19.7 miles long and had a total ascent/descent of 1,130 feet. The route lies between Welwyn, Stevenage, Hitchin, Luton and Harpenden, without getting near any of them.

Future Thursday Group Rides

If you'd like to join one of our popular cycle rides, come along to one of those listed below. We usually start at a pub and return there for lunch.

We meet at 10am to place food orders, for a 10.30 start. If numbers are large, some riders will often leave at 10.15, with the main group following at 10.30.

1 June

Meet at The John Bunyan, Coleman Green Lane, St Albans (Grid ref: TL 188 126, postcode AL4 8ES). The large car park is available for use by those who will be using the pub, and other cars should be parked in the road nearby. The ride will be on lanes and roads around Wheathampstead, Peters Green, Whitwell and Codicote. It's

c20 miles long but a shorter alternative is available.

Ride leader: Roger Bangs 01923 720143.

6 July

Meet at The Plough, Belsize, near Chipperfield (Grid ref: TL 034 009, postcode

WD3 4NS). The ride will be c20 miles with typical Chiltern undulations. It goes north through Bovington and Whelpley Hill to the outskirts of Berkhamsted, and returns through Ashley Green, Ley Hill and Flaunden. It's mainly on quiet lanes and suitable for all types of bike. There are opportunities to short circuit the route if need be.

Ride leader: Andrew Bailey 01923 282605 and 07561 364253.

3 August

Meet at The Cross Keys, Ballslough Hill, Gustard Wood, near Wheathampstead (Grid

We started from The Cross Keys pub at Gustard Wood and followed the route in an anticlockwise direction. We passed through Ayot St Lawrence, where George Bernard Shaw lived for 44 years, then went downhill into the River Mimram valley, upstream for a mile and left up the hill to Couch Green. We then cycled through very peaceful countryside to St Pauls Walden and across to Hitch Wood. We were too early for the bluebells, which are quite spectacular here.

We cycled across to Preston and stopped for a break on the green, where The Red Lion pub is still community managed. On the other side of this beautiful green is an old well built by the owner of Temple Dinsley in 1872 during a very long hot spell. Two people were needed to operate the well and it took five minutes to get the water to the top. Preston pre-dates 1,000AD and the Knights Templar came to the area in the middle of the 12th century.

Duly refreshed we headed out towards the side of Luton Airport. The westerly wind meant that planes landing at Luton were directly above our route - a bit noisy at times and frightening how low they get on their approach! The route to the airport perimeter took us down a very long hill, so of course we had an equally high hill to climb towards the airport. On reaching the airport perimeter we took a left turn towards Harpenden. At the top of the hill the views are spectacular. We turned left before Harpenden, staying on top of the plateau, and returned to Gustard Wood.

Graham Trent, who designed the route, is leading a first of the month ride along it on 3 August. Why not come along and enjoy this great ride with us?

ref: TL 174 164, postcode AL4 8LA). The ride is in the northern Chilterns on quiet lanes between Luton and Stevenage, and is just over 20 miles long. We start by riding through Ayot St Lawrence, before heading to Preston and returning through Peters Green.

Ride leader: Graham Trent 01727 833771 and 07806 667915.*

Rides are open to Society members and non-members. All ride at their own risk and should be 14 years or older unless accompanied by an adult. Bring a drink for roadside stops. It is strongly recommended that riders wear a helmet for all rides and carry their own first aid kit.