

## Aviemore to John O'Groats

Our summer cycle this year only included Katharine and myself (Evelyn). Having cycled from Aviemore to Dunkeld last year we thought we would join up the dots and cycle from Aviemore to John O'Groats.

So this July we arrived at Birnam/Dunkeld station at 08.30 to travel to Aviemore, having booked what seemed months ago.



DAY 1. Having arrived at Aviemore station we headed out following route 7 (on road) north. The weather was overcast and chilly. Having just got into a good rhythm Katharine decided it was coffee time, so this set the pattern of the journey, so coffee at Boat of Garten. Onward to the Slochd, our first challenge, stopping at Carrbridge for photos. We arrived at the Slochd, without too much of a challenge and dined sitting on kerb. Continuing on route 7, which was in good condition to Inverness. Taking the local route to avoid Culloden. Tea and cake at a café/bike repair shop, through Inverness following yellow bike signs, and over the Kessock Bridge and more photos. Signage not good but finally found the route, so up hill and on to Fortrose. A good B&B and watching dolphins made the day. 54 miles.

DAY 2. With the sun shining we headed up hill out of Fortrose taking the main road, traffic minimal, to Cromarty, Nigg Ferry. While Katharine caught up with an old friend, I dolphin watched. Off the ferry and up the hill, following the Pictish Trail. Slipping off the route to view a Pictish stone and another one down a big hill at Shandwick Bay, tea and cake overlooking the beach. Up the hill and on to Tain. Lunching on the beach overlooking Dornoch Firth. Out of Tain and cycling a short very busy section of the A9, turning off to Bonar Bridge. Visiting another Pictish stone on the way. Katharine is starting to suffer from saddle sores, unable to adjust saddle because of worn screw, we were rescued by a small bike repair shop at Ardgay. More tea again. Replacing supplies at Bonar Bridge we continued cycling on the main road to Inverness, to avoid climbing over the bridge. No comment on the accommodation. A good walk in the evening to view the old Carbisdale Castle hostel. 44 miles.



DAY 3. The sun is shining again and another hill to start the day. Through Lairg and on to the junction for the flow lands. A long slow gentle climb on a single track with very little traffic, outstanding views. Our morning coffee now late, we cycled on wishing the Crask Inn would come soon. It did in the middle of nowhere. A good cup of tea and friendly people. Continuing the climb we reach the top overlooking the valley to Loch Loyal, lunch time. A naturalist paradise, a golden eagle soars in the distance, a large green dragonfly flying up and down a small stream, and sun dew. A good run down to Altnaharra and long hard climb out and long run down to Loch Loyal. A lovely calming ride along the loch with a hard climb out and a long run down to Tongue. Accommodation at the hostel was good and friendly, sited next to the Kyle of Tongue. 46 miles.

Day 4. Today was going to be hard with numerous steep climbs and descents. Having cycled thus far side by side, Katharine decided we should do the ascents at our own pace. The route was the main road which was fairly busy. It was another hot sunny day. Having climbed every hill to Bettyhill, it was coffee time. The pattern of hills continued until Melvich. Lunch on the beach down in the bay, golden sands, lapping waves, blue skies and sunshine, heaven. Staying on the main road we passed Dounreay and continued on to Thurso, not taking route 7. No comment on the accommodation. We dined that night on Chinese take away by the river. 45 miles.



Day 5. Still sunny, rain forecast and Katharine still suffering from saddle sores, I said I would cycle to John O' Groats by myself. However, with Katharine wearing three pairs of trousers we headed to John O' Groats, following route 7. A pleasant route not too hilly, lots of birds and wild flowers to see. Arrived at John O' Groats, not a very exciting place. Photos taken and tea drunk we headed back to Thurso via the main road. Lunching on the beach at Dunnet Bay in the rain. We returned to Inverness by train. It was a long journey but interesting to see places one could never cycle to. From there we travelled to Birnam/Dunkeld arriving at 22.30. 40 miles.

