

## **Mawdesley U3A Annual Cycle Tour**

We cast off our cars in the pretty village of Awre (the local pronunciation we were told is Arghhh) for our epic tour of the Forest of Dean.

Setting off in a cool breeze, we tackled some steep hills heading for Speech House in the middle of the forest where we were to stay the night. We were warned that we may encounter wild boar and other creatures roaming free. This did make us extra observant when hurtling down some of the spectacular descents! Along the way there was the opportunity to view some of the sculptures on display in the forest, including this beautiful stained glass window.



Speech House was lovely, a foresters' courthouse in days gone by and clearly a local legend that lived up to its reputation.

Next day we left Speech House for a trip through the forest to Symonds Yat, our first coffee stop of the day. It is an amazing village, split in two by the River Wye. Travel across the river is possible using a man powered, wire guided ferry. It looked fun, but we needed to press on to Monmouth via the Peregrine Path, an old railway line.

Lunch and a quick puncture repair in Monmouth then off to view the magnificent Tintern Abbey before another stretch of disused railway track, The Wye Valley Greenway, with its 1km Tidenham Tunnel. We emerged a short distance from Chepstow, our next overnight venue.

Leaving Chepstow behind we crossed the M48 Severn Road Bridge (on a dedicated cycle path!) and off to Gloucester which was a great route enabling us to enter the city on traffic free tracks and canal tow paths down to the docks and straight into the town centre.



Our accommodation was in a fourteenth century Inn in the town centre. Not sure the rooms had been decorated since then. A very nice Italian meal on the docks in the evening our second Italian of the trip.

We departed Gloucester via the wetlands nature reserve and the old Telford Bridge to head for Highnam. We had bumped into a man cycling round Britain in the hotel in Gloucester. He is writing a book about his trip and when we bumped into him again at our first coffee break we told him about our 88 year old's cycling exploits and soon our hero and his wife were required to pose for a photo shoot for his next book!

Onward through some lovely villages with names such as Tibberton, Birdwood and Upper Hey and into the Old Dairy Tearoom in Mitcheldean. (Very highly recommended).

As we approached the end of the ride fairly pooped, a couple of buzzards circled above us, which we thought was a bad sign. After a hard day's ride it was nice to return to that haven, Speech House, where we sat in the sun enjoying some well-earned drinks.

Just a half days ride to finish, but a tough half-day, as we returned to Awre to pick up the cars. West to Broadwell and through to Parkend, then up, up, up to a narrow track in Furnace Valley where we met a local character with an old goat called Dave, popular name that! Back in Awre by lunchtime ready to start the long slog back home. Unanimously proclaimed a great success by the nine of us lucky enough to ride.



A total of around 136 miles with a significant ascent made all the more of a challenge with some hefty panniers.

