

# THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

Jeff Stevenson

This is going to be my year, no doubt about it, this is the year I qualify for Super Randonneur. What better way to start than to fulfil a long-standing ambition and ride the North West Passage for the first time this winter. I wasn't working seven days a week, no restaurant to organise whilst away. Yes, this is definitely going to be my year.

So, right from the start in January I began to get the miles in. Nothing energetic, just good solid steady riding with trips into the Yorkshire Dales and the Trough of Bowland. Then it came, the current copy of Arrivee which included the dream page, or to be more correct, the Events Calendar.

Yes, there it was, the magic event on February 14th, the North West Passage. All other things paled to insignificance as I took in this wondrous news. A quick note and a stamped self-addressed was rapidly despatched. Then the wait for the reply. It arrived promptly, out with the maps and as the snow came down the central heating went up and the dreams began. Ho! What wondrous names to conjure with, Littleboro, Todmorden, Settle, Kirkby Lonsdale, Ribchester, Wilpshire and Haslingden. What joy, the joy of anticipation. So off went the entry form with the necessary entry fee.

Now to the planning. First a phone call to friends in Rochdale to arrange for a large evening meal and a good nights rest - and an even larger breakfast at the early hour of 6.00am. Yes, they would be delighted to see their eccentric friend with his bike.

So bring out the faithful Dawes Double Blue and all the pieces carefully put away in the attic, assemble and await the great day.

Now the weekend has arrived, bike stowed in the car, all the food for the ride prepared, clothes washed and ready, and that great tingle of excitement one gets at the start of a great adventure. A fond farewell to my long-suffering wife and off we go.

Driving down the M6, all snarled up with traffic near Preston, a great idea takes shape - I can branch off the next turning and recce the bits of the route I don't know into Rochdale. In the darkness of Haslingden Moor I pass three cyclists, no doubt they are carrying out their own recce, but doing it the hard way. Further on I pass more, all making their way to the start for tomorrow.

The following morning was cold, and frosty but with the promise of a super day to come. On with the thermals and sundry layers of clothing. A quick farewell to my friend and a short drive to the start. The time 7.30am. Good time to sign in, check everything and away at 8.00am. I carefully follow the one-way system I had checked the night before and, yes, there is the lane to Castleton Cricket Club. Here we go now, but where is everybody?

The place is deserted. I check the instructions and suddenly a number stands out - February 14th and today is Sunday 15th. I was a day late.