

U3A Bikers To Hyde Park and Regents Park

Tuesday 21st June 2022

It was the Summer solstice and the sun was shining as the group assembled at Brockwell Lido. A passing member of the public kindly responded to my request to take the group photo, and here we are.



It had been a plan for some time to take the group to the open spaces of Regent's Park and thanks to Mary and Andrew a safe, quiet route had been developed.

From our meeting point we took the familiar route on Cycle Route 25 over Clapham Common to Battersea Park in two groups, led by Mary and John.



With National Rail and the Underground both on strike the roads were expected to be a bit busier than usual and so it proved down Cedars Road. The second group avoided the traffic jam by a detour around Queenstown Road beyond Lavender Hill.

There was some discussion about a coffee stop at the Putt in the Park but it was agreed to continue on, circling Battersea Park, on to Chelsea Bridge Road and crossing the bridge.

There was a modest amount of traffic as we cycled past the elegant mansions of Belgravia, partly on local roads and partly on a cycle route, to the Albert Gate entrance to Hyde Park.



From here we headed up the gentle incline of the cycle path which runs between the Serpentine and the original site of the Crystal Palace on our left.

The two groups met up as planned at the Italian Gardens for the coffee stop. Seated at the café there was a splendid view of the Italian Garden, looking at its best in the summer sunshine.



From here the route was the exit through the Victoria Gate and across the Bayswater Road, to make our way through the streets of the Hyde Park Estate and Tyburnia, with only light traffic.

These brought us on to Marylebone Road, just opposite the York Gate entrance to Regent's Park.

Once into the park and across the Outer Circle we found the large area adjacent to the Inner Circle that Mary had previously found where we parked and securely locked the bikes before proceeding to the café to eat packed lunches.



One finished, the destination was the Queen Mary's Rose Garden with its profusion of blooms just about in peak condition. Some had a beautiful fragrance.



Once mounted, the group rode to the Broad Walk and headed up towards the Zoo to get on to the Regent's Canal Path towards Little Venice.

The canal path here is very good, and not at all busy as we passed the aviary, designed by Lord Snowden.

We paused along the way to read about **the blow-up bridge** which was destroyed in an explosion and examined the marks on the cast-iron pillars made by the tow-ropes at a time when barges were pulled by horses. There were marks on both sides of the pillars, and the information board explains why this is.



A narrow boat, *Chiswold*, was making its way along the canal, heading towards Camden Locks.

Before the canal reaches Little Venice it goes through two short tunnels, Maida Hill Tunnel and the very short Eyre's Tunnel, and detours on to local roads were needed.

We paused to look at the tranquil scene at Little Venice before setting off on the return journey down Westbourne Terrace and back into Hyde Park.



Circling the Park we arrived at Hyde Park Corner, then picked up the cycle route down Constitution Hill and the Mall before departing for home, either across Westminster or Vauxhall Bridge.

Everyone enjoyed this new ride and it is one that we plan to repeat. Late June is a good time, to enjoy the rose garden.

Distance: 20 miles

Riders: Chris, David & Irene, Felicity, Gisella, Jan, Joe & Jane, John & Denise, John, Mary, Niesje..

Notes

The blow-up bridge: *This is Macclesfield Bridge, on the Regent's Canal. It was here that a horrific incident once occurred. In the early hours of 2 October 1874, The Tilbury — a barge containing a mixed cargo of coffee and nuts — exploded right under the bridge. Both boat and structure were immediately destroyed. The Spectator would later report that there was also "the perilous combination of two or three barrels of petroleum and about five tons of gunpowder." The three men aboard the Tilbury — one of whom, it's presumed, lit a match that ignited the blast — were killed. Windows shattered a mile from the explosion. Residents sat bolt upright in bed, fearing an earthquake. The animals in the nearby zoo caused a hullabaloo. 'Dead fish rained from the sky in the West End'.*

A plaque by the bridge now marks the tragedy, and explains what happened after:

Though Macclesfield Bridge was reduced to rubble, its cast iron columns were relatively undamaged, and were reused when the bridge was put back together. The name of the forge, Coalbrookdale, which also built the world's first iron bridge, can still be clearly seen at the top the pillars:

There was one minor adjustment; the pillars were turned round the other way, which is why you can now see rope grooves from boats on both sides.

A year later Parliament passed The Explosives Act to regulate "the manufacturing, keeping, selling, carrying, and importing of Nitro-glycerine, Gunpowder and other Explosive Substances".



Ride leader: Mary Burke

Report by John Clements, 23rd June 2022