

## Re: Llanfair PG 400 - 25/05/13 - part 2

Joining the old coast road just after leaving Connah's Quay was a time to get on with the job: it's a fast link road between the A494 expressway and the old coast road through Prestatyn and just after we joined it squeezes from dual to single-carriageway, and this is the traditional place for white-van-man to take the outside lane for one more overtake before Flint, leaving us cyclists rather exposed. Fortunately nothing bad came of it, but the traffic was stacked up right through Flint, meaning we were bouncing along the chevrons in the middle of the road to make progress.

Flint's not a nice place at the best of times (this is just my opinion, corroborated by many), and luckily today seemed alright, but it was still nice to begin the big climb of the day, which starts in the middle of Flint and heads about 260m up in the space of 4km onto Halkyn Mountain. [Edit: I forgot to mention that Flint has a castle, a real one, but you can't see it from the road.] The initial part of the climb is steep (an attempt at preventing Flinters from leaving?), levels off for a bit of respite, and then gets really steep and shitty: it was wet and dirty, but even on the dry tarmac, the roadstone had been worn smooth causing back-wheel slippage. A real soft-peddalling technique required here. I rode the bottom half with mds101, who rode off the front, and I was passed by srsteve, who was trying to catch up with mds101.



About halfway up, the road becomes much better and then it's just a long drag to the top. My legs felt still intact at this point, although I could feel last weekend's ride in them still. At the top a quick call to my parents to meet me at the Black Lion with some lunch – ah, the benefits of passing one's door (although I haven't actually lived there for well over a decade) on the ride 😊👍 But they got the timing wrong, so what should have been a quick pitstop and chat that would have saved time stopping at a café later turned into a 15-minute wait for them to arrive; and they live only one mile from there 🤦 Still, it's only a ride and I still had plenty of time in hand and plenty of riders behind me who I could join up with later.

After this it was quite a lonely ride as far Rhôs-on-sea. I decided to take the non-footbridge diversion down the old main road through Rhualt: it's possible to run most of the hill in one go without stopping for the steps. This used to be the main A55, which replaced the original coast road through Connah's Quay/Flint/Prestatyn and it's hard to believe that we used to build such traffic bottlenecks – it's very steep and winding and barely wide enough for two buses and was the *new* main road along the coast. I swooped down the road, hand-signalling

the van behind to stay exactly where he was, which he did – I was touching the speed limit through Rhualt anyway.

A quick pit-stop in Co-op in St Asaph to grab more sweeties and then out to Bodelwyddan. I have done the cyclepath along the A55 twice and seen Bodelwyddan's fake castle (it's technically a manor house, although its history extends further back than its recently rebuilt exterior visage suggests) and the far-too-new Marble Church (although this is older than it looks and than I thought) from that side and wondered whether it would be quicker/easier to ride around the other side of the castle. This turned out to be a bit of a mistake, because it has nearly an extra 100m of climbing – I really was questioning how long my legs would last now! And the climb impacted my average speed somewhat. Perhaps I should just ride up Sychnant Pass a second time on the way back like Bikey Mikey did 🤪 (Note: these pics taken in March.)



After Bodelwyddan, the route drops back down onto the coastal plain, which is dull but over very quickly, before heading into Abergele. This is once again the old coast road and when the A55 expressway is busy then many drivers take to this road, and it was indeed busy, with Abergele being backed up through the lights in the centre. Riding past the queue caused some ire in drivers and one truck driver honked and later cut me up on the other side of town, bastard. I gave him a solid blast of my horn (that comes out wrong, I know) and a

friendly wave, and the cars following took note and passed at a distance 🙄

Abergele's Gwrych Castle also isn't quite what it seems: it's really a country house. Romantic, but useless as a defensive structure.

The coastal path from Abergele to Rhôs-on-Sea is a gem: it's a bit rough-surfaced in places, but it's mostly flat right along the edge of the coast below the A55 expressway and the coastal railway line, except that in several places it suddenly bounces 10-20m into the air over a drainage channel – it's proper Nobby's Nuts territory if you're in the wrong gear (although not quite the steepest road we encountered 🙄)

Rather than stop for hours in a caff in Rhôs, it was time for a Spar stop and a quick fettle and then away. It was getting bitterly cold in the on-shore breeze at this point, so I put my windproof jacket on, only to stop a few miles later to take it off 🙄 There's a nice short-shocker of a climb across the Orme promontory followed by a fast descent down to the Conwy estuary before riding over the new bridge into Conwy itself. On the left is Thomas Telford's original suspension bridge over the River Conwy: a suspension bridge that makes the old road appear as if it enters the bowels of the castle, but actually it turns sharp right at the foot of the castle and joined up with the current main road. The railway bridge next to it, designed by Robert Stephenson *does* enter the bowels of the castle and, although they believed they had done enough, is now causing the east tower to fall away from the main structure. It's all still an amazing sight, though – a classic defensive castle and very original



(apart from the bits that were rebuilt over the years, some of which were cosmetic for tourists in the mid-20th century IIRC). What's almost more amazing is that before they built the tunnel under the Conwy Estuary, this road was the main coast road: all traffic had to negotiate the narrow streets and pass through the small gates through the town walls on the eastern side!!! The queues were legendary!

A hard left-turn after the town square (which is tiny: blink and you've missed it) and it's the official start of the second and last notable climb of the day: Sychnant Pass. It's a short



climb out of Conwy itself and past a housing estate at the top of town and then straight out into farmland topped with moorland, signifying Wales proper. It's a lovely climb this: there's a couple of moments of respite, but it's basically keeping the pedals rotating and waiting for the top to appear. Oddly, the summit is in a tunnel

of trees with high walls either side, but this just frames the view down the other side, which is the Sychnant Valley itself (meaning "dry river", I think). Here's one I took earlier this year:

I dropped a couple of riders on the way up from Conwy and due to familiarity with the descent on the other side widened the gap: again I signalled to the car behind to stay where they were as I used the full width of the lane, but through the blind left-hander I was way quicker than them anyway and they were a long way behind by the time I had to brake to be legal into the 30 at the bottom 😊. A quick picture of the headland – unfortunately requires filters and a decent lens, which I didn't have – and it was a quick roll down to the bridleway around the headland above the Pen-y-Clip road tunnels. The headland here drops near-vertically from the top to the sea and it has always been a challenge to route any sorts of roads around here. Thomas Telford managed to get a road up over the headland and in 2008 bridges were built to enable peds/cyclists/horsie-types to gain access to the old road safely from Penmaenmawr to Llanfairfechan. It's a really nice stretch over this old road, and I think it's brilliant re-use of old rights of way, as opposed to the narrow pavement alongside the A55.

The next stretch of windy lanes from Abergwyngregyn to Crymlyn is a nice respite from some of the bigger roads we've seen so far and I like the gentle roll and general peace and



tranquility. The climbs are challenging without being brutal or long. The views on the left are straight up to moor-topped Welsh hills, to the right is the Irish Sea towards Anglesey – you can see Beaumaris Castle, a proper castle, if you know where to look. Lots of fencing made from slate wired together – very Welsh. Lambs everywhere, makes me hungry. As I was entering the lanes, I chatted with JayP for a short while: he asked me about LEL on the bike I was riding, I responded; "masochist" was his only comment 🤔 JayP is another one of

those riders who is very consistent and if you're on the same bit of road as him at some point along the ride, the chances are you'll keep seeing him, as he passes you again, and again, and again. Disconcerting!

A quick snap of Penrhyn Castle, which is a Victorian country home built in the style of a Norman castle, i.e. a fake. Although I'd climbed through the lanes quicker than JayP, he passed me in the moments it took, and I didn't repass him until we got to Penrhyn gatehouse.





A swift drop down into Bangor and steady climb back along the Menai-view road, then drop to the original Menai Bridge crossing, another of Telford's suspension bridges, before a steep climb up to the run down to the main A55 Menai crossing at Pont Britannia/Britannia Bridge, which is a rebuild of Robert Stephenson's originally innovative box-section rail bridge. The old bridge supports tower above the road here like some sort of misplaced Space Invaders attempting to dominate the Earth:



Back in March when I rode this as a perm, I managed to get into the outside lane overtaking slow-moving cars right onto the bridge, which makes for interesting photos, but this time the traffic was moving freely, so it was lefthand-side only.

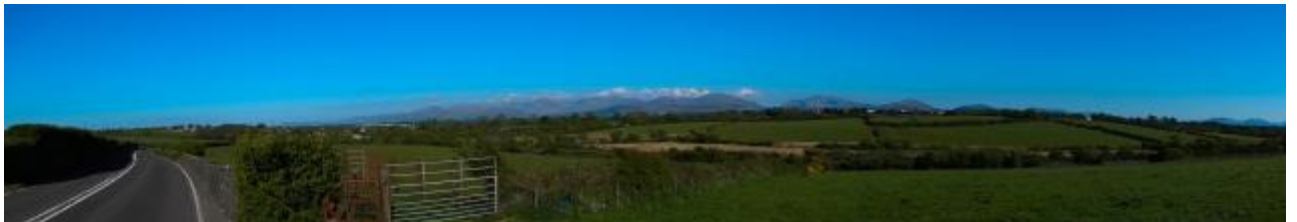
Once on Anglesey, it's a quick spin down the road to the ride's namesake. Written down it's easy to cut'n'paste, but can you say it? Properly? For my sins I learnt it from a guidebook on a train back from Betws-y-Coed when I was about 10 and it's one of those things you don't forget (if you do then you begin to worry how long you've got left)

Bizarrely, I turned into the garage in Llanfair PG with none other than JayP, who I thought I'd left behind before Bangor!! 😬 It turns out he's an old hand at the Larrington Manoeuvre and had crossed the suspension bridge, because it's shorter (I also suspect he rode through Bangor rather than the scenic route around the headland, but I didn't think to ask at the time). A quick sandwich and head down to the visitor centre for the obligatory photograph: this is one name that *won't* fit on Pppete's LEL nameplates:

The previous two times I've ridden the perm from Prestatyn, I've lost the will to live just beyond Llanfairpwllgwyngyll: not bonked per se, just got bored with it all. The A5 westwards across Anglesey is one of the dullest roads I know of (I am yet to experience the B1040 to Whittlesey – I am saving that for LEL), as it doesn't really do anything interesting and the

villages it passes through are all nondescript.

However, turn and look over your shoulder and on any clear day there's a truly inspiring view of the whole of Snowdonia, absolutely beautiful and impossible to capture fully on a pocket camera:



This time, though, instead of having just 80km in my legs, I tackled the A5 with 180km in the legs and although it didn't fly by, I made much better progress than previous times



without the lethargy, so maybe it was down to winter fitness, or overheating in cold-weather gear, or something.

A quick wave to some riders at the chippie in Valley and cross the causeway to the coastal park where Mike had said he'd be providing validation services with rice pudding. JayP leaving as I'm arriving.



To be continued