

Disasters and how not to deal with them..

So now it's October, I should be sitting on top of a finished LEL 2025 and having conquered Lands' End to John O Groats, but that's not where I ended up, two big mechanical failures and a bail. LEL was stopped as storm Floris made the northern section of the route impassable, apart from one rider out of 2,500 who made it all the way. Suffering the loss of expectation, being denied my ambition, feeling crushing failure, (even if the context was rather minor), I was at a low ebb even though I'd had some great rides over the year.

I did this ride back at the end of September, and didn't get to write it up until later in October. I've been raising money for my Dad and a family friend, but this month, (October), while I was away a fellow club member passed away on a club ride, so this is dedicated to Graham Aedy. Died too early but doing something he loved.

So where do I start this? Well I'll start on the Thursday after I bailed out of LEJOG with a bent chain, seeing the Facebook posts of my mate Martin Greig making it to the John O' Groats sign. Feeling crushed, knowing it's what I wanted, feeling loss, extreme anger with myself and nowhere to redirect it, losing faith that I could do a big ride without being stranded in the middle of nowhere. Yes I was a complete PITA for at least 48 hours, my family say it was longer. Time for redemption.

On the day I was about to start LEJOG, audax mate Jason King, who I first met on Tom Deakins Flatland Friends at Goole in 2022, he remembered me, not I him contacted me. We had teamed up on route checking on LEL and rode much of the Brian Chapman Memorial together in June. He floated an invite to do the top part of LEL starting from Tebay near Kendal, with 3 other riders. Not thinking I'd be ready after LEJOG, I replied, that I'd get back to him, not knowing how fate was to unfold two days later.

The chance of some decent distance, climbing and keeping my RRtY, (Randonneur Round the Year), going for the year seemed like a good prospect, to rescue the season which I'd been doing to raise money for my late father and a family friend:

<https://www.givewheel.com/fundraising/7569/doing-mad-things-for-dads/>

The weather forecast had been a moving feast for much of September, moving from benign to horrid by the time the I travelled north. One thing for sure the back end of day 1 would be tough and day 2 be unrelenting!

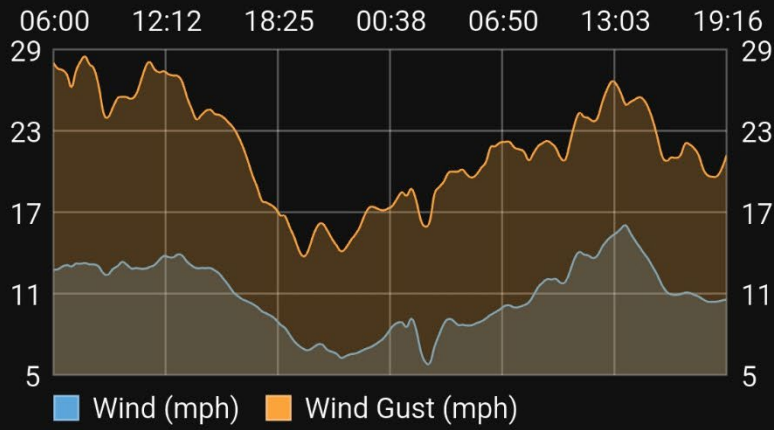
10:25 @ ...

Bluetooth, Signal, Wi-Fi, 96% battery

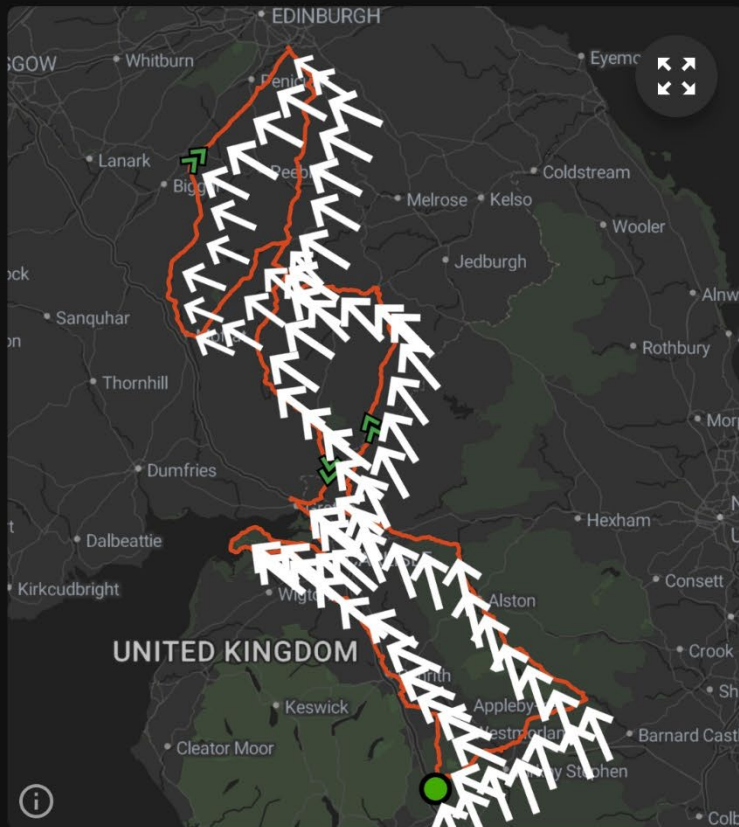
Epic Ride Weather

30 Sept 2025 at 06:00

Wind



Wind Direction



Elevation

06:00 12:14 18:25 00:39 06:51 13:05 19:17

We had originally planned to meet in Tebay just off the M6. I'd planned to meet Jason in Kendal Travelodge having taken the train to Oxenholme. One rider dropped out and the rest of us, including James Rees were all planning to be at Kendal on the night 29th. So it made sense to change the route to start/finish in Kendal, nice idea shame about the extra 400m of climbing, but we may get some AAA point out of that!



The adventure begins

Monday morning as I was all toggged up, lightly loaded, (for me!), and on the train from Paddington, then made my way across to Euston, (always fun in London), caught an earlier train to Glasgow, my first experience of that route by train with a bike. It was packed and spent the journey on the floor in the train bike compartment, with the dread that we could be forgotten and let out in Glasgow! But all went well and found myself sailing, metaphorically, into Kendal

Travelodge at around 3.00 to get some poorly managed rest. Met Jason in the bar at around 7ish for supper, (Travelodge finest!), before hitting the sack.

Come 6.00 in the morning, Kendal was very dark and damp. I was down in reception in trepidation to meet the others of which there was no sign as they were trying to figure how to get out of the car park. So I made my way to the local MacDonalds to be caught up by Jason and James. James had bivvy'd the night and was looking much leaner on the bike than either Jason or I, I mean one small saddle pack and no mudguards to slow him down, sacrilege. 30 minutes, later breakfast consumed we were on our way past the start (the Travelodge) in the dark to start the ride over the hills to Tebay. On the way I heard an odd squeak from my freehub on coasting and a bit of BB creak, thinking it was my gremlins again. Jason soon found that he could not get into his small chain ring without dropping his chain, so out of 3 riders, James was apparently the only one with a fully functioning bike. I'm happy to say that was the least of our problems and seemed to disappear on day 2, or I became deaf with the wind roar on Wednesday morning.

The forecast was for a mild, but wet and windy wet, especially towards the end of day 1 and all of day 2 would be a wet fierce headwind, which unfortunately it was. Visions of a duck in a wind tunnel and being shot at with a water cannon sprung to mind.

Daylight broke and we arrived at our first brief stop in Middleton in Teasdale having covered just under 50km, where we joined part of the LEL route, a vaguely familiar scene from 2022, it was bright and mild all good for our first feed. All good, rolling and lumpy all the way and more lumpiness as we progressed and a gentle gradient. More déjà vu hit when we passed the right turn to St Johns Chappel, where the 2022 route went.

So I knew we were on the way to Yad Moss, the scene of a rather windswept Danial Webb came back from August where the windspeeds were 80 mph plus! Well Yad Moss came and went with little evidence of said 80 mile per hour winds. It didn't really feel like anything much as a climb and after the last cattle grid we had a lovely fast and sweeping descent into Alton, my freehub screaming as I hit 60km/h and on past the big Spar where I had my feed in 2022 before heading over the other way, a few miles on we got to the Nook café for a proper slap up feed at 87km.



Jason and James on Yad Moss

Energized, my head was thinking Brampton-Moffat, but this is where the route was different this year and we made our way through Brampton and at 113 km we went then right after a while to

take us to the next LEL control location at Newcastleton at 150km avoiding many sheep and goats, (I think ?!). The wind and rain had started to pick up and the light dimmed. We stopped at the yet another Spar for a quick feed. When I say stop, it takes me a little time to actually eat, however I could not keep up with Jason, who seemed to be able to funnel all volumes of food down his throat without stopping for breath! Apparently it's a technique he learned as a child to avoid starvation at the hands of his older siblings. I, as the eldest of 2 never developed that skill.



A fine feed at the nook near Alton



Desolation of Yad Moss

Onwards and into the darkness and at some point we would pass the border, but not yet. Another short stop at Hawick at 186km, (pronounced Hoik by Scottish folk), and onwards in the darkness and the rain. All I remember in this section was rolling, quite fast, but dark and wet, but my Wahoo was stating to pay games with me on account of what I now realise was the result of having a screen protector plays havoc with a touch screen in the rain.

It would later leave me flying blind after Moffat. We stopped at Crosscleuch, next to the reservoir for a very good and open public toilet at 230km. Not much of a stop as we knew we needed to be at off at before well before 10, as Jason offered the mouthwatering prospect of kebab shop or Pizza in Moffat.

Well the weather had other ideas and it was battle every single km plus a plague of frogs, which Jason and James called out, but I have to say I just wanted that next stop as tiredness was taking its toll along with a toll of small green squealing amphibian death under my wheels. We got to Moffat as bang on 10.00 to find it in darkness, not promising, apart for a garage in the middle of town, who told us there was a power cut but he could give us 5 minutes to sit eat and then he was shutting up.

I really needed longer to eat as I couldn't emulate Jason's gannet like food consumption capabilities. So with all lights blazing and leg warmers and wet weather gear donned we headed up a very damp Devils Beef Tub. Apparently we had a tailwind at this point, but I can't say I noticed.

By this time my Wahoo had frozen up completely and I was flying blind and rather terrified as James and Jason's lights disappeared over the hill. They stopped just after the apex and we stayed together for this last section from Moffat. It was the thought of a bed and a shower that made me finish the day, knowing it would be 350km and over 13,000ft of climbing by the time we rolled in to the Dalkeith Premier Inn, (PI). The final part of the stage involved navigating roads that felt like the surface of the moon.

By 2 in the morning we got to what we thought was the PI, looking very shut – only to realize it was the Chef and Brewer, with the PI close by, a very short moment of terror flashed by. We were to be met by a rather unwelcoming young night receptionist. Fortunately we made past reception in our bedraggled state and into our rooms. The thought of having to rough it on the porch did fleetingly pass.

Next is the long distance cyclists routine of doing 51+ things quickly, not necessarily in the right order to get to bed and be horizontal as quickly as possible. Get showered, get kit off, charge stuff, sort Wahoo out, hang up stuff get into bed and try to shut down then have a coffee get up put wet kit on, pack up bike. Unfortunately the shutting down didn't work too well for me, but I think I got 2 hours of uninterrupted horizontal time, even if my Garmin watch was telling me that I had a high heart rate and should stop what I was doing. 6.30 came all too quickly and my alarm went off and soon met the others in reception at 7.00, not very awake, then again I'm not sure anyone was.

A second McD's breakfast and tried their porridge, what a treat it's like rocket fuel. We edged our way into Dalkeith dual carriage way rush hour traffic on a dull miserable morning. Quite soon at around 20km we started to get back onto smaller roads and on the Scottish Borders. Much familiar territory from 2022 was covered in the wind and rain and lots of mist, it was going to be like this for the day, oh deep, deep joy. We battled onto Innerleithen just shy of 400km, soggy and ready for a feed in the café.



The Rapha Twins

Not much rest but we were in the really pretty part of the route going over rolling country side which despite the headwind was a great sight take in, unfortunately, I had no massive desire to

stop and take pictures, but it was nice rolling into Eskdalemuir at 440km. Having battled a headwind all the way from Dalkeith, we'd travelled 50 odd miles in 6 hours and that was not for the lack of trying.

At least it was going to be straight South again with a headwind all the way. We stopped at the community shop what was the control in both LEL 2022 and 2025 for a really nice lunch stop, macaroni cheese and chips never tasted so good.



A rather large Arse!

Rolling roads, (bit of a theme here), from here on and pleased to say all the fresh gravel for 2022 had dissipated, which you would have really hoped had happen! Onwards and Southwards to Longtown and a detour at Gretna Green for that obligatory 'Scotland Welcomes You' Photo. We detoured to the services, a necessary extension to make it up to 600km and to refuel. Rolled

past some rather aggressive driving in the road works before the feed at the services. Never has a KFC mini fillet meal tasted so good, but no rest as Jason in Gannet turbo mode had devoured his bucket in seconds, and off we went.



The smiles are genuine, not forced, well may be a bit!

Now we were in England having to cope with rush hour traffic through Carlisle with just over 90km to go, all rolling, quite fast but now dark and I was getting very tired, keeping up with James and Jason was becoming harder. They liked me at the back on account of a very bright, non-flashing, rear light, so we were safe from rabid London Wales London badgers, zombies and hopefully cars! More straight roads and then dropping into more civilization at Penrith and yet another petrol station stop, that was, as you guessed it, just closing!



A real Ass not wearing Rapha kit

Now the going was rolling along quiet roads as darkness fully descended before getting to a right turn at Appleby in Westmoreland at around 570km. James mentioned it was only 10 miles or so

to Tebay, he neglected to mention that the right turn preceded Orton Hill, a continuous 300m climb that became increasingly exposed and windy at the top. Towards the top, James asked if I was OK and I was sadly rather rude, 'no I'm not and sod this never ending bloody hill!!!', it just never seemed to end, but it did and then there were long sweeping and fast descent into Orton and then Tebay. We pulled into the 24 hour services which felt like an oasis. It was now officially Thursday and I was needing a rest. So we settled, perhaps a bit too long, but at least it was indoors, warm and comfortable, but as we knew, time marches on and the end was getting no nearer, so back our steeds we soon mounted, suitably relieved.

I knew there would be two largish climbs making something like 200m in total, and as Jason and James slipped away I plodded on the unrelenting and what felt steep climbs. They passed and then I was on fast sweeping roads punctuated by signs showing the approach to Kendal was increasingly imminent. Rolled back into civilization and stopped to see Jason and James and fist bump at the finish. They were tired, I was shattered, but there was the satisfaction of the ride was done, ow to find a bed.

I'd booked a hotel in Kendal plus also Shrewsbury as well as a return to London. Why, you may ask, well I had plan A: go home on Thursday and there was plan B: cycle to Shrewsbury and then home. The thought of two more days riding in headwinds and rain did not appeal. Fortunately the hotel had got my messages that it would be the early hours by the time I arrived and I was greeted by the night porter. Straight to my room, collapsed somehow into bed not sure what I'd be doing later that morning or even if I'd managed to get undressed.

Daylight came, showered, breakfasted and it became very obvious I'd stick with plan A. I'd done the 600km, there were no disasters, I'd vanquished my jinx, it's enough. I can't remember what time it was but I ambled back up the hill to Oxenholme in my rather smelly gear and onto a train an hour or so later. By 5 in the evening I was home, not really knowing what day it was, but happy it had been done.

It was a great challenging ride, with some great guys and if we didn't get our points, so what, as well that felt very secondary. That's how it should be

So what's next, not sure, finish my RRtY, and then Moonrakers and Sunseeker on a Friday night in Bristol next month and maybe even the Full Fat Festive 500 at the year end. Then there's lots of great rides next year coming up on AUK.