

# The Lost Boys

by Chris C

Leaving home at an ungodly 5.50am, I did a record-breaking 90 miles before 9.00am. It's amazing how you can eat the miles in a car. This, however, was no ordinary vehicle: I was travelling in the customised luxury of the PerrinMobile. Indeed, a finer charabanc for setting out for a weekend's cycling it would be hard to find. Chauffeured by legendary Super Randonneur John Perrin, and with Lord Mion of Capesthorne riding shotgun, I stretched out in the back and slept like a man who had left home in the middle of the night.

The call had come early. A posting by Ant Lear and Karl Grant on the Wheelers' famous Forum had invited participation in a September Lake District cycling extravaganza. A rigorous mechanical and physical regime meant that by late summer my bike and bod were tuned and toned. This, I was sure, would be The Big One, against which the pimples of the Peak District would be a stroll in the park.

Ant n Karl had assembled a crack team of Wheelers hard men: John P, Toni M, John Baguley, Moray Macnee, Graham Travis, Paul Dean and, er, me. By 9.50 we were ready Eddie and eager for the off. I seized my bike, knocked Toni's to the ground, gushed apologies, congratulated myself for not picking Paul's million dollar, new dream machine and set out.

Crikey, who chose this route? Did someone think we'd need a freshener, or what? We were climbing within seconds, straight up the killer Kirkstone Pass. After gasping the rarefied summit air, we relished the extended descent into Ambleside where we enjoyed one of the sights that the Lake District is famous for, a big traffic jam.

After Coniston and Dunnerdale, I picked up a rumour that the team might field an attack on the infamous Hardknott Pass. I took one look at the 30% road sign at the bottom of the Matterhorn-like profile of the craggy beast before me (the hill that is, not Karl), decided I knew my place and watched in awe as Paul, Toni and Moray tackled this fiendish climb. The residual mere mortals continued along the valley up the tough, and peculiarly titled, Rhinos Pass (more accurately known, I later discovered, as Wrynose Pass) followed by the glories of Little and Great Langdale.

Karl had warned us that we might not stop for lunch until about 1.30pm. The combination of breakfast at long ago 5.15am, greedily gobbling my entire supply of bonk food in the car park before we left and 50 miles hard cycling meant that I was fading well before we actually stopped at 2.30pm. As we cunningly hid our bikes behind the café, which itself was camouflaged above a shop, the Three Hardknott Hard Nuts missed us and lunch altogether. There was much shaking of heads and muttering about lack of signals as an impressive array of telecommunications equipment failed to locate Three Lads Lost in the Lakes. We eventually welcomed them back in Grasmere amid the hordes of lost souls wandering gormlessly from shop to shop in search of the latest Peter Rabbit must-have accessory.

We sped into Keswick around 5pm and despatched John P into half a dozen teashops to ask if they were still open. Readers will be as perplexed as we were to know that each establishment mysteriously decided that they had actually closed seconds before this innocent enquiry by such a fine example of British manhood, whose physique and cutting-edge fashion sense would surely grace any teashop window. Deciding to forgo a 'Brysons Afternoon Tea, two small fruit scones and tea for one person, £6.25', we continued, like the ploughman, to plod homeward our weary way through Dockray and Ullswater.

Wheelers who love wildlife will be delighted to learn that, as the light started to fade, a red squirrel crossing the road was lucky enough to spot a fine, large, mature specimen of the hitherto rare John Baguley descending at speed in full late summer plumage. Until recently, it had been thought that the species had suffered the same fate as the Roaches wallabies but twitchers have reported several sightings in 2007 so it is clearly enjoying a resurgence and becoming quite common.

By the time we returned to base camp, I'd clocked 85 miles at an average of a blistering 12.2 mph. Our Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse had added a heroic further 12 miles (on no lunch). Before surrendering to the charms of the bunkhouse, I spent a confused evening in the bar chatting to two locals, who bore a bizarre resemblance to Roger Wrenn and his protégé Simon Ward. Ant n Karl had offered an optional Sunday easy ride, but after breakfast I glanced at the 45 degree rain and opted for the easiest ride of the lot, home in the PerrinMobile.