

Solitary biker **Dan Campbell** continues his 2019 diary of DIY trials, heading north, south, east and west from his home base in Staffordshire. This is how he and his bike spent the rainy summer months...

# Bulls, blustery breezes and blessed bus shelters

### DAN'S VITAL STATS

**Location:** Stoke on Trent  
**Bike:** 2011 9-speed aluminium tank  
**Age:** 44  
**Weight:** Wheel breaking (110kg)  
**Fitness:** broken and rebuilt  
**Resting Heart Rate:** 65  
**BMI:** Obese

**WHR (waist/hip ratio):** High

**Favourite food:** See food!

**All Dan's ride reports are here:**

<https://dancampbell.co.uk/audax-ride-list/>



### THE BOSTON TEA PARTY OF 1773 (DIY, 400KM)

Although I've cycled through the Fens before, I've never ridden from home to the east coast, so I was excited to explore this side of the country. I started the ride at 7pm in the evening as this would mean I'd be home for the following evening, allowing me to have a full night's sleep on Saturday. This was the first time I'd documented a ride on Twitter and it was full of funny moments.

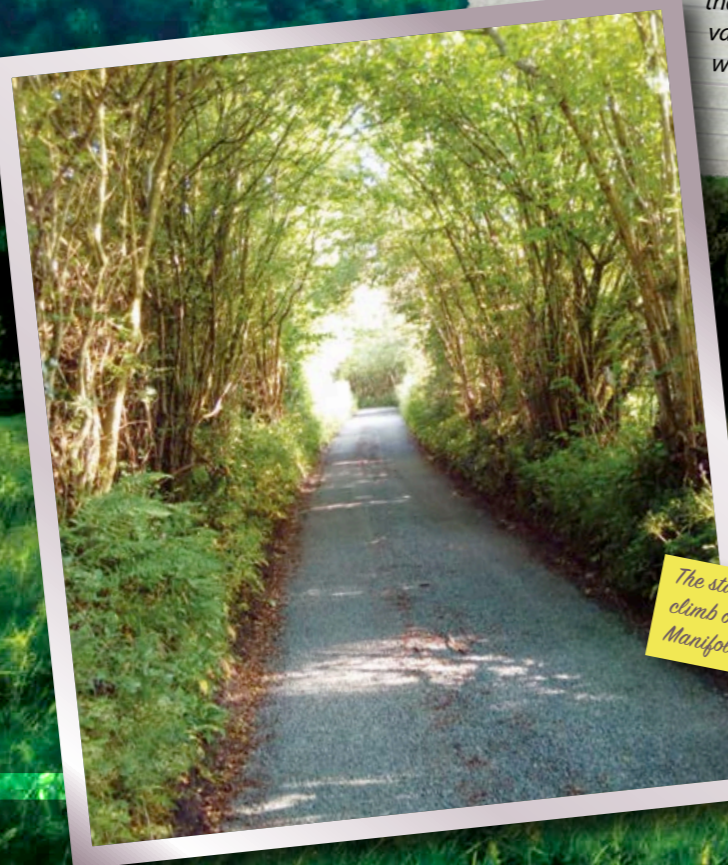
For example, at one service station stop I met two rather inebriated ladies who used my bike's flashing lights as an impromptu disco. One asked me where I was heading and I replied "Boston". They thought I was cycling to the USA. I found a bus shelter which provided a comfy seat and the daily papers on the bench for passers-by to stop and read. Very civilised.

**WHAT A SUMMER!** Toss a coin for rain or sun...it's usually been rain. But I've enjoyed spending the summer absorbed in all things cycling, and sharing my love of bike-riding with the students I teach, in the hope it will inspire some of them to ride their bikes.

You may recall that my primary target for 2019 was to complete the Super Randonneur with AAA points, due mainly to my love of hill-climbing, and the need to lose some weight. My continued exploration of the world of DIY Audaxing involved some old favourites and some challenging new routes...

### ASHBOURNE & THE MERMAID INN (DIY, 100KM, 2AAA)

The weather forecast suggested some skin-burning temperatures so I made an early start, hoping to be home for a late breakfast. The course is a variation of my other Ashbourne route but this one provides vistas over the Roaches towards Manchester, which are amazing. The biggest achievement of the ride was making it up the cat-3 climb through the Elkstone valley without getting off and walking.



Looking back to Ilam from the top of the climb

The start of the climb out of the Manifold Valley



Up-market bus shelter in Boston with all the comforts of home, including the daily papers

**A PAIR OF KIRTONS (PERM, 600KM)**

A 4am start at Hilderstone (Staffordshire) led to a lovely leg into Cheshire, before turning for Stockport and over the Pennines... which resulted in mild heatstroke. I could not keep cool. I have this problem a lot due to my belly fat! I spent the night feeding on energy gels, water and full-fat milk. In hindsight, I should have stopped to take on more water and had a couple of hours of sleep. I finally went to bed in a bus shelter about 5am and had 30 minutes of rest.

It was not until I reached the American-style diner at Colsterworth (497km) that I finally took on solid food (beans and eggs). The road which traverses from east to west (B676, A6006) is actually very quick and I made up time here, but it's a very busy route in the daytime. Finally the 10 miles from Uttoxeter to home was the second hardest section of the ride. It felt like I cycled uphill all the way in those last 10 miles.



AI Stadium Diner at Colsterworth on the A151

**THE MOUNTAIN PASSES OF SNOWDONIA (AUDAX, DIY, 200KM, 3.5AAA)**

I'd intended to do some star-gazing at Llyn Stwian (near Ffestiniog) but when I arrived at the start (Bala) it was raining. I considered having a couple of hours sleep before setting off, but I knew that I would sleep right though so I just headed off into the rain.

By Penygroes it had stopped raining and the clouds were slowly lifting, making it a little more pleasant. I chatted to a couple of commuters who overtook me as I climbed over Nantlle Pass, which was nice. There was very little traffic, making the climb to the top of Pen-y-Pass enjoyable. I think most holidaymakers decided to have a late breakfast due to the rain. I stopped at Pete's Eats in Llanberis for beans on toast and a cup of tea. The roadside carpark was full but there were very few people about.

The climb over to Bethesda was nice as the clouds had lifted and I could see most of the mountains reaching into the sea. The traffic was still light so the climb over Ogwen pass to Capel Curig was pleasant. I stopped at the petrol station on the way out of Betws-y-Coed and discovered where all the holidaymakers were! The next 15 miles were generally uphill, and very steep in places. By the time I reached the Ffestiniog to Bala road via the Tryweryn road, I'd started to wish for a flat route... or a gun! I felt a wave of relief as I reached the top!

This was a great ride and if I do it again, I'll take a quality camera as there are some amazing photo opportunities all the way around.



Pen-y-Bwlch looking towards Bethesda

**ROCESTER & THE MERMAID INN (AUDAX, DIY, 2.5AAA)**

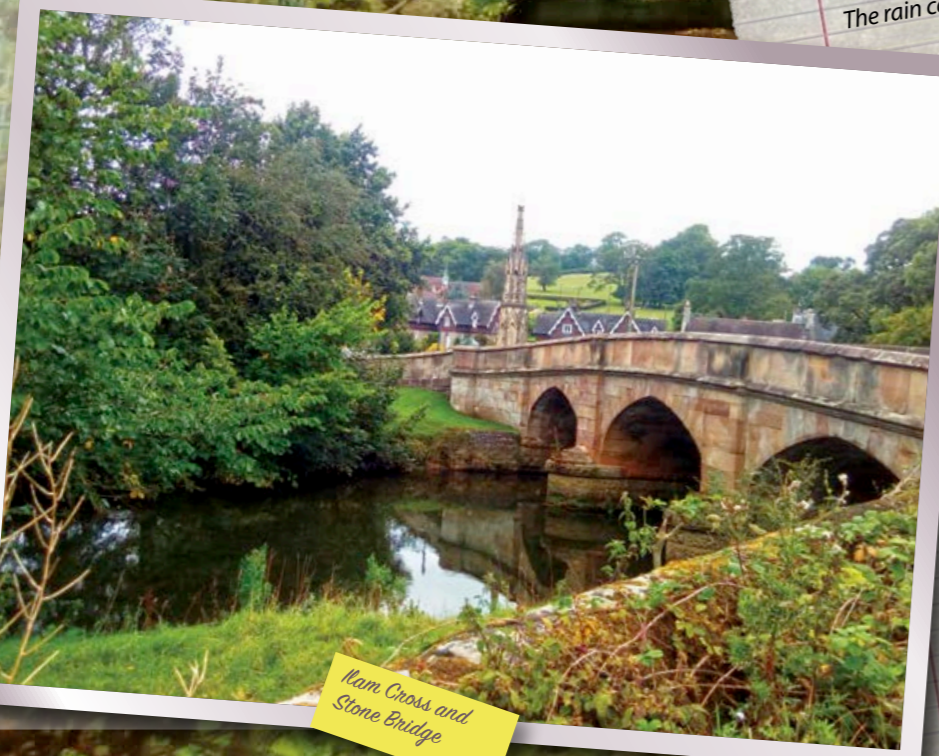
This route is another variation of the Ashbourne loop and takes in the Elkstone valley climb twice. I had to be back home for dinner time, so I left at 3am to ensure that I had plenty of time. The forecast was for low winds with rain starting about 11am. I made 25km in an hour before experiencing the first of many monsoon rainstorms.

The rain caused numerous flash floods, with debris being washed into the road. The climb from Blore to the A52 along Marten Lane provided an excellent view of the Ilam Valley and Derbyshire plains. The excessive number of signs indicating that there were bulls in the adjacent fields began to worry me. I imagined being chased down the road if any escaped. As I passed the bull, he just looked at me with those eyes, and seemed to simply say: "Idiot."

The wind grew in strength, but the rain had stopped. By the time I was climbing out the Manifold Valley, the rain had returned and on the open roads the wind was whipping the surface water up and driving it directly into my face. Yes, I was having fun - I think.

The second half of the ride was more about dealing with the wind and rain than it was about cycling. Along the top (Blakelow Road) the wind was gusting and pushing me across the road into the other lane. Anyway, I made it home for 11:45am.

Stockport hydro project



Ham Cross and Stone Bridge



Tunstall Road at The Cloud looking towards Macclesfield

**WHITE PEAKS, CHESHIRE AND STOKE (AUDAX, DIY, 200KM, 3AAA)**

Inspired by my 200km (3.5AAA) Mountain Passes of Snowdonia, I created a 200km (3AAA) from home. In effect, I merged several rides into one and in hindsight, I should have given this more thought.

The wind and rain were kind to me as I by-passed Elkstone. The leg to Ashbourne was lovely as the sun had risen to warm me. I arrived too early at Ashbourne and all the shops were still closed, so I pushed on to Longnor and the Cobbles Cafe on the high street for beans on toast. On the way I saw a cow giving birth as I was climbing a hill. By the time I was close enough to take a picture the calf had been born. I took the first turning on leaving Longnor to avoid the 20% tarmac wall at Hollinsclough but the views were not as spectacular.

I'd forgotten why I normally turn off the A54 at Allgreave on to Rabbit Bank but was soon reminded. The roads are pothole-ridden, narrow with blind corners; several cars came a little close, even for me. I'll remove this section next time. The views from Mow Cop were as spectacular as always, and on a clear day you have a 360-degree vista: worth a detour if you are ever this way.

The last section to home was mostly flat but there were very few places to grab any water or food so I'll divert this route into Haslington next time. I was surprised to achieve a Strava PR on Keele bank (at 115 miles) by knocking off nearly three minutes. This may have been due to my wife messaging me to say that she had a bag of cheesy puffs (my favourites) waiting for me!