

The further adventures of an irrigating colostomate...

MARBLE ARCH TO LANDS END BIKE RIDE

Departure - 06.00 a.m. 15th May 2011

Arrival - 09.45 a.m. 18th May 2011

Tim and Richard Allardyce

After being diagnosed with rectal cancer in October 2007, undergoing radiotherapy and chemotherapy that year, then surgery in February 2008 and a further 6 months of chemotherapy in 2008, I had to accept a major change in my life style.

The first year was understanding the change that had occurred, and the new equipment available to me, but also the extent of support that was around, which was something I never realised.

Then my stoma nurses, Jan Beard and Anna Wallace, talked about irrigation. What was this I asked – showing my ignorance! After some careful explanations, I agreed this was worth trying. Up until then I was changing bags 3-4 times a day with the resultant restrictions on my lifestyle, not to mention the other unpleasant consequences that were endured.

After 3 days of “training” I went out into the wide world duly released from the drudgery of bag changing, and having to carry spare equipment wherever I went.

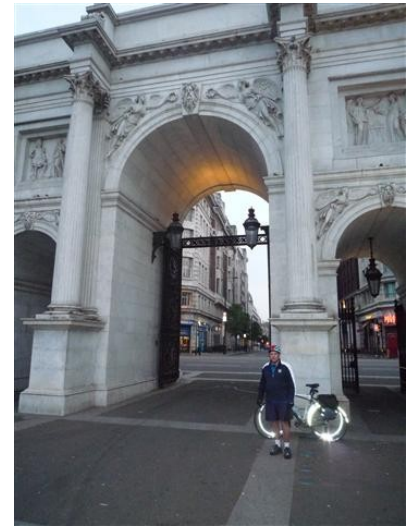
This was a revelation. Freedom at last and (almost) back to normal.

2010 saw the real change in being an irrigator. My son and daughter decided that the London Marathon was a suitable challenge. This went well, and I got round, with a lot of help, in under 6 hours, and absolutely no trouble with the bag.

The next trial was for Tim and I (with my daughter’s dog, Branston) to walk the 84 miles of Hadrian’s Wall in August 2010. I irrigated in the evening so we could get an early start, and we completed this challenge in 5 days, sometimes doing 20 miles in a day.

Then, in January, Tim suggested a new challenge – cycle to Cornwall.

Every year, my old rugby club, the Old Dunstonians, make an annual pilgrimage to Penryn and Falmouth, and have done so for the last 77 years. The concept was to go on rugby tour by bike. After much thought we both decided that it was better to do the job properly, so we made the decision to start from Marble Arch and go the whole way to Lands End.



The first problem was equipment. We chose the lightest bikes we could find that would take the load we needed. Then the saddle. I tried 5 and all were very uncomfortable after the surgery I had undergone. Eventually I found a strange saddle with no “nose” but this suited me well.

So, we were ready, and then the training started. This required many early starts to get the miles in, and as neither of us were bike riders this proved very tiring.

Eventually we were ready, and decided that early starts were imperative to get as many miles done before the traffic got too heavy. Therefore, evening irrigation was the only way I could accomplish this.

DAY 1

We started on the 15th May from Marble Arch at 0.600 am (having spent the night at the RAF Club in London). Our target was 60 miles a day if we were to get to Cornwall before Easter.

The roads were remarkably clear and thankfully flat for the first section.

Having changed my routine from irrigation in the mornings to the evenings I was unsure how bike riding was going to work. Thankfully all went well on the first day, and we ended up near Amesbury – nearly 81 miles into our trip. We were elated as this was considerably further than we have anticipated.

DAY 2

Again another very early start at 06.00. As we on the A303, the roads were busier with more commercial traffic, but this never caused any problem. We pushed on hard, and after breakfast and lunch breaks, we finished in Honiton after 84 miles. We had reached Devon in 2 days.



DAY 3

Here we had breakfast in Exeter, and then a major decision – the A30 or to cross Dartmoor. I chose the “scenic” route and we went for the Moor! WOW! Was that a task I had not envisaged? The hills were extensive and long. The scenery was magnificent, and riding a bike, we had sounds and smells that we never experience in a car. Due to the hilly route, we only achieved 55 miles that day finally crossing into Cornwall at Gunnislake, where we stayed.



DAY 4

A difficult start as the first 2 miles were up a very steep hill, but after the previous day, this soon got a bit easier, and passed some lovely villages and towns. We then had the pleasure of meeting our support team for the first time, as my wife Rosamond and daughter, Nikki, passed us on the A30, and we then met at a local pub for a well earned lunch stop. The girls then went ahead after relieving us of some of our kit, which made things a bit easier, eventually finding accommodation in Camborne.

DAY 5

This final push to the end. Only 25 miles to go and the finish was in sight. We had breakfast in Penzance Harbour and then the last few miles passed very quickly. The roads got flatter, the scenery was clear and then Lands End appeared on the horizon. We had made it and without any major mishaps, apart from Tim, whilst taking a video along the last mile, crashed onto the road. Luckily he was only slightly grazed.

SUMMARY

We had completed 311 miles in 4½ days. We were extremely lucky, that we had the most marvellous sunny weather, and thankfully, a slight tail wind which was most unexpected and appreciated.

I carried the minimum of irrigation kit needed to survive a daily routine and this worked so well that during the whole ride, not once did I ever have any problem – clean bags every time I next irrigated.

What a magnificent system. I do appreciate that not all colostomates can irrigate, but I do wish more was done to promote what is an exceptional system.

Richard Allardyce

15th May 2011

