Croeso i sir benfro (Welcome to Pembrokeshire)

When you go through the front gate of the welsh cottage you are staying in for a weekend and your Garmin shows 18% you know you are in for a gut wrenching climb just to start your welsh ride.

After an invite from my sister to visit their newly refurbished Welsh holiday cottage in Capel Iwan, near Newcastle Emlyn. The opportunity to experience the Pembrokeshire countryside was too good to miss.

It just so happened that the March 2014 edition of Cycling Plus feature ride covered the Pembrokeshire coast, 'Celtic Coaster' (www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/big-ride-pembrokeshire). Using this ride as the main focus looked a good idea and all it needed was a route from the cottage.

Start of the ride and the Sunday morning. It became apparent that to get going I was going to have to go down to go up. So having jumped on the bike and freewheeled down to the little bridge at the start of the only flat piece of road I turned, selected a low gear, took a deep breath and started the charge up the hill.

Just after passing the house and I'm out the saddle. It's at this point I started to wish that I'd changed the rear cassette from11/25 to12/27 as I was soon running out of gears. Heart rate at 160+bpm glancing down to the Garmin I see figures of 30% or more and at one point saw 43%, which was dismissed as either due to being in a valley or the dense tree coverage, although it was starting to feel like 40%.

Final push to the top and on to level ground and I can start to recover. Despite following the bread crumb on the Garmin I still managed to miss a left turn which turned out to be a narrow lane nestled between houses; found on the return journey.

Despite this and with the bread crumb trail still visible continued to ride close to it with the comfort that sooner or later the two of us would meet.   Heading towards Boncath I pass a local farmer and we exchange pleasantries. Stopping at a crossroads to check the map, brought a long for as back-up. At this point the farmer catches up and asks if I'm lost. Not lost just checking where I am. I show him the map and where I want to get to but it's no good without his glasses. It then becomes a scene from 'The Vicar of Dibley' and "yes no yes" to response to any questions. Slightly assured I'm heading in the right direction off I go looking to pick up the route again

Riding on and looking down at the Garmin I see that I am fast approaching the planned route. Suddenly I'm on top of a crossroad and the Garmin blips and the course found.

At which point out from the side come two snarling, bike chasing dogs pursuing me down the lane. Suddenly the Garmin blips again and tells me I'm now off course.

No time to stop and check the route, just shout at the dogs to clear off and carry on. I'm now descending down a steep hill and thinking if I'm going the wrong way then tough cause if I'm climbing back up this hill just to be chased by those dogs again then think again I'll just ride a few more miles instead.

Having bottomed out the decent, stopping at the next junction, checking the map a short detour gets me back on track and I meet the planned route at Abercych.

At Abercych the front mech decides starts to play up and shifting down becomes a lottery which doesn't help as to get out of Abercych there is a 10% climb. Eventually the front mech changes down and the climb becomes easier and after a couple of miles I meet the published route from cycling plus at the A487 in Eglwyswrw.

Turning left and following the route clockwise I continue for a mile or so where the route turns off on to the B4329 towards Brynberian.

Over a cattle grid and a steady long climb through the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, whilst relentless is rewarding with some terrific views and once conquered a fast descent. Being mindful of the other cattle grid towards the bottom at New Inn I turn right with a three mile descent down to Pontfaen, which is fast but technical due to the condition of the road. Whilst descending with a glance at the time, brings thoughts of a coffee stop, perhaps at Pontfaen.

Despite being shown on the map in bold letters I passed the village church and out the other side within 30 seconds, so no coffee! Instead and immediately after leaving Pontfaen and a left turn I hit another steep climb, which tops out at 20% in places.

Cresting the climb and riding through open grazing land with sheep I head towards Newport with stunning views of Dinas Head with another fast descent. Entering Newport it looks like I'm on the high road through the town and with f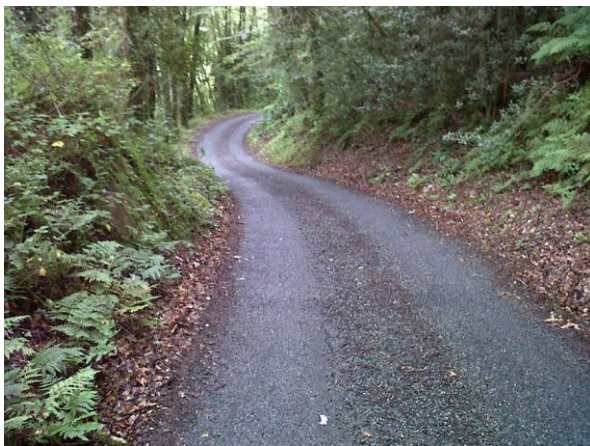ew shops around it looks like if I want coffee I'm going to have to either drop down to the harbour or carry on. I decide to cycle on after seeing a sign for the Pavillion Cafe near Moylgrove.

Eventually reaching the Pavillion Cafe I stop off for coffee and a tuna Panini. Stopping allows me to send a text to family to tell them where I am but surprise surprise no signal. So send a text and hope that when I pick up a signal it will go.

Back on the road and heading towards Poppit Sands. The route takes me down to sea level which only means another climb up and out to St Dogmaels. Arriving at St Dogmaels it appears more like Devon than Wales. Through the village and picking up NCN 82 the road ambles along through a wooded tunnel until it reaches the A487. Turning right on to the main road there is a slight descent which allows the pace to increase at a fair lick back to Eglwyswrw.

Reaching Eglwyswrw turning left towards Newcastle Emlyn I retrace my steps with the thoughts of having to face those snarling dogs again. Fortunately as I creep past the farm there is no sight of them and a big relief.

Riding through Capel Iwan descending down the hill to the cottage the Garmin once again

shows 40% but this time with a minus sign. With brakes full on and the fear of running out of control on the rough gravel road, by the time I reach the cottage my forearms are aching but back home at the cottage safe and sound. Total distance covered 63 miles with 6,539ft of climbing. Welcome to Wales.