

Despite the punishing mountain ascents, merciless winds and reckless pedestrians, **Dan Campbell's** 200km circuit of the beautiful Lleyn peninsula in north-west Wales, rewarded him with the spectacular vistas he was seeking



# Looking for a change

If you time it right, you can catch the sunrise across the sea from the Lleyn peninsula. That was the primary motive when I decided to set off in the dark from a deserted car park in Bala, North Wales. It also occurred to me that, besides the reward of the sunrise across the mountains and sea from the peninsula, I would avoid the heat of the day by undertaking much of the ride overnight.

An internet search identified suitable controls during the night stage to ensure I had access to water. I parked in Bala town on the long stay car park (£7.50 for 24hrs). My car would be safer, and it was next to the Co-op for when I returned. The car park is long stay and short stay, so make sure you park in the right area. There are also public toilets on the corner of the car park.

The first climb quickly arrives and is a wake-up call. It ramps up into the hills, reminding me of mountaineering at night. It felt like I was climbing to the top of the mountain. It was dark but there must have been excellent views across the mountain range.

After crossing the main road at Tan-Y-Bwlch (32km) you would be

treated to views of the coast. The descent into to Garreg signalled the flat lands which take you through Tremadog and on to Llanbedrog and my first control. I was a little surprised by a very steep hill, which narrowed and had a lot of bus caution signs near Tremadog but other than that, this section was fast. Arriving at Llanbedrog 24hr Service Station and off-licence (70km) I was not surprised to find it closed. I took five minutes to rest and pushed on for Aberdaron at the end of the peninsula. On the last climb before Aberdaron, (Rhiw Hill) I came to a complete stop (Cat 3, 26.9%). I'm blaming my supersize belly! I took a minute to watch the sunrise across the mountains which was reflecting off the sea. This was one of my ride objectives.

Arriving in the daytime, Aberdaron would be a great place to take in the views with a light lunch but when I arrived it felt devoid of life, so I kept moving towards my next control at Clynnog Fawr (127km). The coastal views were pleasant but the climb out of Nefyn was not. However, the increasing wind speed may have tinted my perception.

# of scenery

“ Mothers with prams were lined up along the pavement, ready to strike without warning ”

Racing a local bus down the A449 was equally entertaining, for the bus driver as it was for me. We exchanged smiles and a wave when he finally overtook me on my approach to the Clynnog Fawr turn off. Arriving at Clynnog Fawr Service Station, Shop and Cafe represented a milestone in my journey as I was over halfway and, more importantly, I could get some water. It also denoted the transition from the coastal to the mountain stage.

Pulling on to the forecourt was promising as there were people milling around, setting up for the day. In my best Welsh accent, I gave the greeting: “Bore da”. The chap looked at me, so I asked: “Are you open?” He replied: “We are closed until 8am, but we are open.” I was feeling good so I had a small bottle of milk and a can of fizzy pop with my last sandwich before pushing on.

The climb out of Clynnog Fawr is a little steeper and longer than I expected, but the views were excellent. Arriving at the Co-op in Penygroes (136km) represented the start of the mountain stage and I was still meeting my time schedule. The first of the three mountain passes is the Drws-Y-Coed pass, which

took me to the foot of Snowdonia (Rhyd Ddu). This was more of a long run in, a climb in middle and a roll off the top. Even though the pass tops out at 20% (Cat 4) it was a nice climb and the views were superb.

The descent into Beddgelert was a welcome opportunity to sit back and relax, watching the mountain scenery pass by. The wind which had been terrorising me had finally relented and the fresh morning breeze felt welcoming. Arriving at Beddgelert, I decided not to stop and pushed on to Moel Siabod Cafe as I was feeling strong. Cycling past Watkins Path and car park reminded me of the mountaineering days of my youth. The long approach to the actual Nant Gwynant climb (Cat4) took me past the two lakes and a memory of seal-launching my kayak off one of the rocky outcrops into the lake below- it was a long way down.

Reaching Pen Y Gwryd Hotel at the top of the Nant Gwynant climb, (the junction of Llanberis Pass) I stopped and took a minute to watch the many tourists trying to park or decide what to do next. Back on the bike and pushing for Moel Siabod Cafe, I knew that it was

all downhill from here – well mostly. The cafe was full and there was a line of customers waiting to place their orders. I decided if I pushed on to Betws-y-Coed I would encounter a similar situation, so I took my place in the line to order a fried egg sandwich and a cup of tea. Sitting out of the sun in the gated area on the side of the building was pleasant and I had the space to myself. The sandwich was just right but a little expensive for my liking.

Leaving Moel Siabod behind and following the river Llugwy, I had to stop to look at Pont Cyfyng Falls, which were my first major waterfall during my kayaking years. Cycling through Betws-y-Coed was like playing leapfrog as I tried to avoid the cars, tourists and potholes. After the peace and relative quietness of roads, this was a slap in the face. The one thing which struck me was the number of parents who pushed their prams into the road, forcing the traffic to stop. They were lined up along the pavement ready to strike without warning. I didn't stop at Pont-y-Pair Bridge, but I smiled as remembered being launched (thrown) off the bridge in my kayak by two friends.