

WORDS AND PICTURES
DAN CAMPBELL



A recent convert to Audaxing, Stoke-on-Trent-based **Dan Campbell** is well-placed to enjoy the testing routes of England's picturesque Peak District – but because he prefers to ride at night, he doesn't get to enjoy the spectacular views. Here he describes the pleasures and the pitfalls of being a night rider...

Peak blinder

Tales from the dark side
of the Midlands' Moors

I ride at night. It fits with my lifestyle – my family and my work commitments. And there are plenty of benefits. At night the roads are generally traffic-free. You see much more wildlife. And because I get home quite early, I have more time with my family. There are very few downsides, though. I do miss the daylight vistas.

This year I've taken up Audaxing. I was rather bored with the same old rides. One of my targets is to complete the Brevet 500. The ride I describe here is this is fourth of the five 100km rides. I don't have a problem staying awake overnight, especially if I've had an easy day at work. Sometimes I'll have a couple of hours sleep between finishing work and starting the ride. On my first couple of John Hamilton rides my body was clearly not used to overnight cycling, and I'll admit to taking the occasional nap in a bus shelter – or a handy McDonalds.

My home base is Stoke-on-Trent, which is excellent for Audaxing. I've got good access to Wales, the Peak District and the Cheshire plains. My plan for the future is to find Audax routes in different parts of the country which I've not visited. This year I've ventured up to Hull (Moor and Wolds 400) and down to the Chilterns (London-Wales-London). I've also, taken in some of the mountain passes of North Wales (Snowdon, Lleyn & Lakes and the Barmouth Boulevard).

One outcome of riding these Peak Audax 100km AAA rides is that it has built my endurance capacity which has inspired me to undertake 200km AAA rides. I'm considering targeting the Super Randonneur AAA next year too.

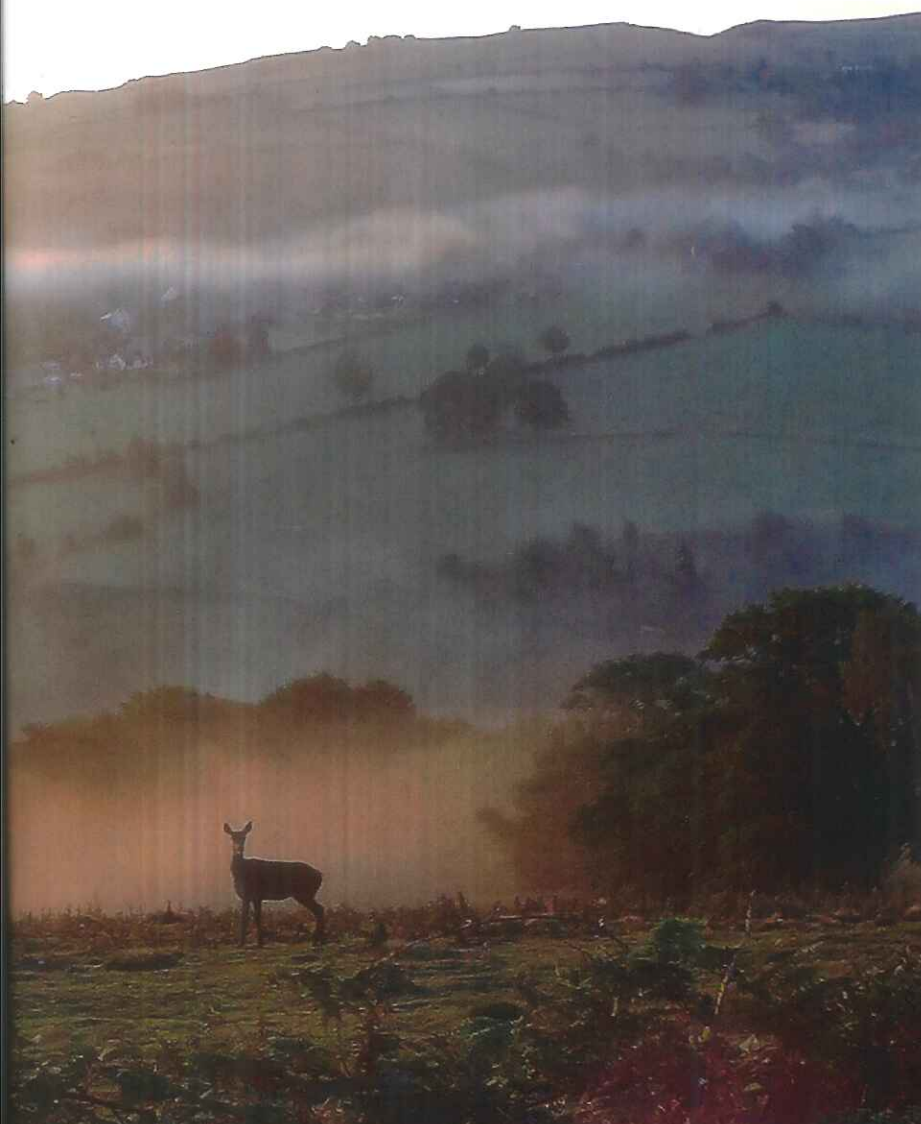
This ride was part of a sequence of 100km AAA rides offered by Peak Audax, which I used to achieve the Brevet 100 and to gain AAA points towards the AAA

award. I've now achieved both.

I began this ride across the Peak District at 2.30am – I love this time of night because I can complete most of the ride before the roads start to become busy and before the heat of the day starts to kick in. I started near Tittesworth Reservoir, parking in the lay-by on the A53 Leek to Buxton road by the Three Horseshoes Inn.

The downside of this approach is that I start on a climb. This morning it was the Thorncliffe climb to the Mermaid Pub. The climb was not as harsh as I thought it was going to be because there are two very steep sections which are connected by shallow ramps. It was looking like it was going to be an excellent night already. I'd already seen two or three stags on the road to Warslow. In all my time riding in daylight in the Peak District I never saw a deer – except on the warning signs.

The climb out of Longnor is a long one,



A night rider's essential kit:

Dan uses the Wahoo Elemnt Bolt GPS cycling computer which, he says, is excellent at navigating at night. "It flashes to tell me to turn," he says. "But I also carry a paper copy of the route on the assumption that something will go wrong!"

The Wahoo computer provides a range of useable information, good navigational capability and has a relatively long battery life. The device was developed as part of an integrated system designed to reduce drag. The unit fits neatly on to the frame, and the makers claim that, in tests, the Elemnt Bolt system reduced air resistance by over 50 per cent.

The device can communicate via ANT+, Bluetooth Smart and Wi-Fi and is compatible with both iPhone and Android. It also contains maps for a range of different countries, and new maps can be easily added.

As for lights, Dan uses two Cateye Volt 400 XC front lights (total cost £39.98), for maximum illumination. "I use one light as a 100 lumens running light and the second as a main beam (400 lumens) when I am going downhill," he says. "I toyed with purchasing a dynamo and light set but realized that a recharge light can last me all weekend."

but it's gradual at least, and leads to the Flash Inn on the A53. After that, a shortcut over to the Cat and Fiddle Inn. The sun had started to cast its initial rays across the moors illuminating the mist in the valley. It felt like I was on an island surrounded by a sea of mist. I did take some photos but they were blurry due to the low light.

The descent into Buxton was fast – 38mph. If the traffic lights are on green the momentum will carry you into the town centre – and coffee. Unfortunately in the early hours of a summer Sunday morning, everything was closed. However, there's a 24 hour service station on the way into Buxton, so if you're doing this route overnight from Marple, this is a good stop for food and water.

The climb out of Buxton was much easier compared to the last time I did it in March during the Monyash Peak Audax

(100km). And because it was so early, only three cars overtook me. I had to stop on the descent down into the Goyt Valley to take more photos of the mist and sunrise. This time there was enough light for the camera to work reasonably well.

The climb out of the Goyt Valley was also much easier this time around. The extra two teeth on the cassette top cog made a massive difference (from 28 to 30). I was able to maintain a reasonable cadence without feeling like I was grinding my way up. Climbing out of Kettlehume (Higher Lane) to Marple I came across a herd of deer crossing the road, and because of the growing light I managed to get a decent photo.

Arriving at Marple, I found that the Costa coffee shop wasn't open – not part of my plan. I'm not sure why I was moving so quickly. Maybe it was because I was riding an old aluminium 8-speed bike

(11-30 cassette)? Or it could have been that my main bike has an 11-28 cassette.

Having ridden a few of these Peak Audax 100km rides, I now recognise many of the roads, so I know when the hills are coming. This actually helps as you can take on energy during the downhill and flatter sections. However, I hadn't cycled this way through Macclesfield Forest (Macclesfield to Danebridge) and I now know why Strava told me that the last section of the climb is 28.5%!

The section along Wildboarclough Valley was excellent. And the final section back to Tittesworth reservoir was quicker than I expected, even though it included Gunn Hill from Danebridge. Almost finished, Tittesworth Reservoir was the last landmark of my ride. The reservoir was almost empty at the time, the heatwave being in full swing – and if it had still been dark, I'd have missed it!