

THE PENGUIN PELOTON – GUYS TO GUYS VIA BRITTANY AND NORMANDY – TOWER TO TOWER CHARITY CYCLE RIDE

Day 1 – 23rd May 2025 - 141 km distance 1140 m ascent

On 23rd May 2025, The Penguin Peloton, a motley mix of 42 students, young healthcare professionals and fossils, ranging in age from 18 to 68, coalesced. The party, including 5 x father + son and 1 x father + daughter combos, assembled at Guys Hospital Memorial Arch near London Bridge. *(The arch was designed by William Walford and unveiled by the Duke of York in July 1921. It commemorates staff and students of Guy's Hospital who died during World War One).*



Penguins Assemble – The Penguin Peloton at the Guys Memorial Arch under Elysian skies

We were there to undertake the Guys to Guys (G2G) challenge, via Brittany and Normandy, to raise money for Penguins Against Cancer (www.penguinsagainstcancer.org.uk), (PAC), a UK registered charity. Also present were the perennial and incredible Rat Pack Support Group of Black Rats: Sasha and Tony Smith and White Rats: Paul Gillam (artist, musician, photographer and polymath) and Jok Dunbar.



Penguins come in all shapes and sizes



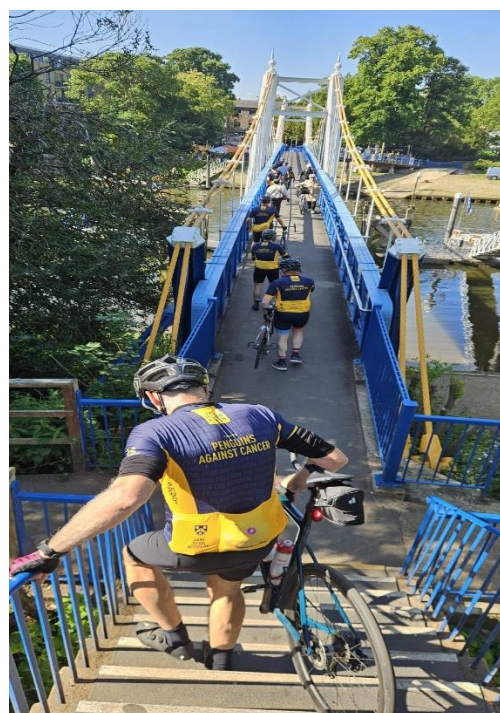
Underneath Guys Tower waiting for the off

Following the customary photo and pre-ride banter we got going. Team Jackass, with plenty of mass, lumbered across the start line, followed by Rowan White's Chinstraps, Tom Downie's Snares and Team Fairy led by King of the Fairies, Lutz Hostert.

The now familiar route, exquisitely planned by Trevor Kelly, as ever, took us over Westminster Bridge, past Parliament and Pimlico (*possibly named after the master of a house once famous for ale of a particular description*) along the Chelsea Embankment and across Putney (*birthplace of Thomas Cromwell and Clement Attlee*) bridge. A fantastic transit through Richmond Park saw deer, kites and parakeets in abundance. We crossed the Thames again at Teddington. Bushey Park was also entertaining, and shortly thereafter we reached the first refreshment stop at Esher RFC (the oldest rugby club in Hersham). The contrast with last year could not have been more marked. We were made very welcome, the coffee and bacon rolls were timely, plentiful and hot.



The 3 Degrees posing at Esher



Unopposed river crossing at Teddington

We were soon away again through Cobham (*Covenham in the Domesday Book*) and then experienced the joy of the Surrey Hills with plenty of up and down before arriving at the very well-appointed White Hart pub in Witley (*Witlei in the Domesday book, whose assets were held by Gislebert, son of Richere de L'Aigle*), where we had a very well organised and fulsome lunch, and some excellent real ale.



Ready for some refreshment



Excellent real ale

We continued via Haslemere, Milland, Rogate and Nyewood until we gained South Harting, where the painter Theodore Garman lived and worked. Following best practice, we settled at a pub called the White Hart (*personal badge of Richard II, possibly derived from the arms of his mother, Joan 'the fair maid of Kent'*) for refreshment.



'He fixed on me his stony eye'



Googling 'Fair Maid of Kent'

The final stage was a fantastic ride through the South Downs National Park via Finchdean, Rowlands Castle (*which has a lung shaped village green*), West Leigh and Bedhampton before taking dinner at the Ship and Castle pub in Portsmouth ferry terminal - Another very well organised, prompt and hearty meal supported by real ale. We were also joined by the Macaroni Trio with a combined age of 200 years, before boarding the ferry for St Malo. Unfortunately, we lost a Penguin who had forgotten to bring his passport. As Windsor Davies would have said 'Oh Dear, How Sad, Never Mind'.



End of Day 1 2025 (141 km no rain)



End of Day 1 2024 (161 km constant rain)

Once aboard and showered, changed and with refreshment in hand, it was time for the Penguin Peloton AGM - held against a background accompaniment of the ship's quiz night. Business was conducted efficiently, and Becky Callard, Niki Davis, Bianca Banciu and Trine Lowie (the Brown Rats) were elected as Honorary Peloton Members, entitling them to buy drinks for the rest of the Peloton for the remainder of the evening. Eventually everyone went to their cosy cabins for some rest.



Now where can we hold a meeting?



Carbloafing after the AGM

Day 2 – 24th May 2025 - 109 km 530 m ascent

Unsurprisingly, Day 2 dawned far too soon. We disembarked and headed for an early breakfast of Galettes in St Meloir des Ondes. Cycling in France is generally more relaxed than in the UK. Motorists appear to be more considerate, potholes almost unknown, tarmac smoother, cycle paths more frequent and weather warmer. Abundant wildlife was encountered; pheasants, a red squirrel, deer, hares and foxes alongside our domesticated Rats of various colours.



About to set off on Day 2 all full of the joys of spring

We reached Mont St Michael after nearly 50 km cycling and took in its majestic situation, magnificent asymmetry and overall architectural splendour. The monastery of Mont Saint Michel gave its support to William the Conqueror's claim to the English throne. He rewarded this act in 1067 with gifts including a small island off the southwestern Cornish coast which was modelled after Mont Saint Michel and became St Michael's Mount. The Bayeux tapestry shows Harold Godwinson rescued 2 Norman knights from the Mont St Michel quicksands during the Breton-Norman war (1064-1066), before he became King of England. William the Conqueror rewarded this act by killing Harold at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066



A quartet of Chinstraps power along the Mont St Michel causeway

After suitable study of the magnificent abbey we continued on our way via Pontaubault, Ceaux and Huisnes sur Mer before reaching Avranches for lunch. Then a quick 36 km saw the Peloton reach Granville just in time to watch the European Cup rugby final where Northampton lost to Bordeaux in a frenetic game. We were joined by the Sherry Squad of Mick, Charlotte and Dai, before enjoying a superb dinner at Le Vauban restaurant, fantastically arranged by Matt 'Motocross' Rose and faultlessly delivered by the vivacious Vanessa. The meal was followed by a musical extravaganza from the most excellent Jammin' Good (Paul the Maestro Gillam [lead guitar and backing vocals], Pat Davis [rhythm guitar], Dai Evans [electric ukelele] and Will 'The Voice' Taylor [lead vocals]). The usual eclectic mix of numbers including West Country Roads, Delilah and Sweet Caroline was sung with gusto, and rounded off with the traditional Amarillo conga. Sam Bryan (*never ask him to look after your chair whilst you are dealing with important matters*) then took to the stage and performed a magnificent unplugged version of Don't Look Back in Anger. Eventually people went to bed.



Singalong at Le Vauban



Jammin Good members getting Aperol friendly

Day 3 – 25th May 2025 – 161 km distance 940 m elevation

As predicted, Day 3 also arrived far too early. Not everybody was ready at the appointed hour. It was a demanding route of over 100 miles and a number of people struggled. Luckily, we had a helpful tailwind for much of the way. Crossing the Sienne we skirted Coutances to a scheduled stop at Mesnilbus. The weather was kind and progress good. Thereafter a short leg to Carentan les Marais where at La P'tite Escale we eventually enjoyed a health-conscious sized portion of lasagne with some very refreshing lager. The tailwind really kicked in thereafter to get us along Omaha beach and very close to Point du Hoc (*watch The Longest Day if this means nothing to you*). La Rotonde in Port-en-Bessin produced a wonderful array of crepes with homemade chocolate sauce and jam, before the final leg of the day.



(Slow) Starting Day 3 – only 100 miles to go

Cider with Rosé

Thereafter a fascinating journey which included seeing the remains of the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches (Gold beach), and the British Memorial at Ver sur Mer overlooking Gold and Juno beaches. We completed the leg by cycling along Juno beach (*originally to be called Jelly beach which Churchill considered inappropriate considering many lives were likely to be lost so it was renamed after Wing Commander Dawney's wife*) via Courseulles and then along Sword beach via Lion sur Mer to end up at L'Accostage restaurant in Ouistreham. A fine meal with good wine eased the long day and we meandered slowly the last couple of kilometres to the ferry to embark for UK.



The D Day invasion beaches



Arromanches - Mulberry harbour remains



Quiet Contemplation at Ver sur Mer

Day 4 – 26th May 2025 – 134 km distance 850 m elevation

Dawn saw The Peloton disembark and head for breakfast at the Cowplain Café near Waterlooville (the ever-restless Erect Crested team elected not to stop here and thus were the first group to eventually reach Guys Hospital). Thereafter we enjoyed a fantastic journey through the South Downs National Park via Petersfield and Bordon before stopping for coffee in Elstead. Rural delight then gave way to suburbia, skirting Guildford and Woking, passing through Weybridge and gaining the excellent Royal George pub in Walton. A superbly organised lunch - a smorgasbord of humous, pitta bread, pizza, sausage rolls, quiche, spicy chicken and a variety of outstanding sandwiches, ensured all had enough fuel for the final push.



Full English at the Cowplain Café



Coffee and cake in Elstead

The last leg was roughly the reverse of the first leg taken 3 days earlier. All navigated the delights of Bushey and Richmond Parks and then enjoyed the dust and grime of Central London before arriving at the Mother Ship. Showers, a change of clothes and an excellent meal in the Market Porter concluded a highly enjoyable 4 days.



The Penguin Peloton plus the Black Rats and White Rat Jok (as Penguin) at Guys Memorial Arch – 548 km (341 miles) distance and 3460 m of ascent in 4 days (The Erect Crested team covered 771 km (482 miles) and approximately 5000 m of ascent over 6 days)

All the riders worked hard. The Road Captain (Trevor Kelly) Rider of Tour (ROT) awards are:

Silver ROT: Will Taylor, for Perseverance. The heaviest rider yet to cycle with the Penguin Peloton who completed a number of very demanding steep hills without pause. He also does a great Tom Jones.

Gold ROT: Pete Davis is the second heaviest rider yet to cycle with the Penguin peloton, and led the Erect Crested team to cycle longer and harder than any other team, despite them having an average age of over 50 years. He was also incredibly generous, not only financing the Market Porter dinner, but also footing the drinks bill in L'Accostage.

I would like to pay tribute to all of the more than 500 extremely generous individuals, and organisations, whose unstinting altruism has enabled us to exceed our fundraising target, significantly, once again. I would also like to thank the Penguin Peloton, Rat Pack Support Group (Black, White and Brown) and Sherry Squad for their camaraderie, humour, tolerance and perseverance. Tony and Sasha Smith were outstanding as always. Special thanks also to: Trevor Kelly (Road Captain and route planning), Lutz Hostert (safety and shirts), Graham Bevan (hotel, ferries and finance), George Tsolakides (fundraising), Matt 'Motocross' Rose (Vauban dinner), Pete Davis (Market Porter dinner), Rowan White (all other meals), Tom Downie/Aarash Jayazeri (Bike lock up and showers at Guys), Paul Gillam and the rest of Jammin' Good (music), Paul Gillam (video and photos), Jok Dunbar (drinking water and photos). Apologies if I have missed anyone out. A fantastic 4 days.

The Penguin Peloton:

Team Jackass: Charlie, Trevor, Julian, George, Alan, Duncan, Simon, Aarash, Will M

Team Chinstrap: Rowan, Jessie, Harry, Guy, Graham, Matt R, Miles, Will M, Theo

Team Snares: Tom, Nick, Chris, Noah, Georgia, Kat, Archie, Peter, Sam

Team Fairy: Lutz, Andy, John, Dave, Paul O, Seb, Finn, Ben

Team Macaroni: Pat, Mike, Mark

Team Erect Crested: Pete, Richard, Matt M, Rob

The Rat Pack Support Group:

The Black Rats: Tony, Sasha

The White Rats: Gilly, Jok

The Brown Rats: Niki, Becky, Bianca, Trine

The Sherry Squad: Mick, Dai, Charlotte



Becky the first Brown Rat back to Guys



Mick the Sherrymeister reclining

The G2G ride has so far raised over £82 000 for Penguins Against Cancer.



Charlie Beardmore
President
The Penguin Peloton
6 Jun 2025