

Southport Cycling Club

Hannah Bussey meets a seaside club with a proud heritage

The most important thing,” grins Ken Beck, secretary of Southport CC, “is to do your turn on the front on the way out.” I know exactly what he’s alluding to; we’ve been riding an effortless 17mph along Southport seafront, and the way back will almost certainly be into a rather strong sea breeze. But for now we have our backs to the coast, zigzagging our way through salad fields awash with different colours and greenhouses full of ripening tomatoes, on one of Ken’s magical mystery tours, as the other club members describe it.

We’re a mixed age group of 14 today. The youngest is 13-year-old Issy McKinnon, who is accompanied by her 15-year-old brother Connor,

mum Claire and dad Andy. “Cycling has totally changed our way of life,” mum Claire says. “We all come on the youth ride every Sunday, it’s about 30 to 40 miles. Both the kids race for the club; in fact, this morning they presented Issy with a carbon bike after being named as the club’s most improved rider after just her first year of racing. It’s such a lovely and supportive club to be part of.”

The ride so far has been mostly flat, so when we do gain elevation, it’s a bit of a shock to the system. We regroup at the top of the climb, and while most of us catch our breath, one rider, Ian Bailey, is still chatting away. “I do ride every day,” he laughs when I tell him he’s not panting enough. “There’s

just so much to get involved in with the club, there’s pretty much a group ride every day of the week, and I time trial too, so stay pretty fit.” With the promise of a cafe stop not too far away, we swiftly get riding again; thankfully downhill most of the way.

Stars in the making

We’re not the only Southport CC lot on the road today; a second group, of about 20, left the impressive club house in Victoria Park at the same time, but is taking a slightly shorter route, as many of the riders are the club’s juvenile riders from its youth section.

“We’ve worked with the kids for years,” president Colin Baldwin explains. “Our juvenile race series held in Victoria Park is a bit of a rite of passage, many of the British Cycling stars have raced here. Cav used to come over from the Isle of Man, and this year Sir Bradley Wiggins turned up to support his two kids’ races.

“It takes a lot to organise, as there’s three races in the series, each with up to 190 starters. Thankfully we have a lot of local support and great prizes. Dolan Bikes awards framesets

Club facts

Based: Southport
Members: 197
Formed: 1932
Meets: Club nights are every Monday at 7.30pm. Club runs meet at 9.30am on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Sunday has two runs, long and short, as well as a youth ride (various locations, check website).
www.southportcyclingclub.co.uk

to each category series winner — that’s 10 in total.”

Seanor service

It’s not all about the kids though, as Terry Seanor, who at 83 is the club’s oldest active member, explains: “I didn’t start riding until I was 63. I joined the club after seeing an advert in the paper. After about eight months, they invited me to join them on a 400km Audax, which I did and got hooked. Every year I have a birthday ride, we ride the exact miles for my years, and everyone had a great ride this year — although some of the younger ones were puffing a bit at the end,” he laughs. ▶

History

It’s believed that the first incarnation of Southport Cycling Club formed around the mid 1870s, with records of the club holding races in 1879 at the Southport Winter Gardens Track. The club in its present form was founded in 1932, holding its first event, a 25-mile time trial from Kew Bridge to Aintree and back, the same year. In 1936 membership peaked at 64, before declining as men were called up for active service.

Post-war saw the Southport CC rapidly increase in membership, and by the 1950s the club had 70 members and became a force to reckon with. In the mid 1960s the club promoted the Gala Criteriums,

which imported top Belgium and Dutch amateurs. It became the top criterium in the country with crowds of 15,000 coming to watch.

In the mid 1970s the club started promoting schoolboy races, the catalyst for many of the club’s successful riders, with youth races still promoted by the club to this day. The club bought the defunct tennis club for £100 in 1984, before completely rebuilding and officially opening in 1989.

Achievements

■ Bill Bradley is the most famous rider to have hailed from Southport CC, winning both the Milk Race and National Amateur Road Race champs

twice, along with many other significant results from across the globe.

■ Other well-known Southport CC riders are: Bob Bird and Broo Rimmer, whose Southport-Blackpool-Southport tandem record of 2.26.49 still stands to this day; John Parker, national hill-climb champion; Jim Henderson, five time national hill-climb champion (and who was never out of the top four for 15 years); Kevin Reilly, who went on to ride for legendary Parisian club ACCB; and Dave Williams, former national criterium champion.

■ Southport CC has been successfully organising a juvenile



with four annual road races, one sportive, and also runs 20 weekly time trials in the summer. In 2006 the club hosted the British National TT Champs. The club has 20 loan bikes for children to use, funded by CTC, MBNA Bank and the Ben Gautrey Foundation.



Southport CC club run

Ride highlights

47 MILES

1 Marine Drive

An off-road cycle path along the seafront all the way from the pier to the RSPB Reserve, affording riders serene views out to sea.

2 Southport Salad Fields

On a sunny day the colourful harvest will make you think of southern Spain. On a rainy one, the narrow flat lanes, flanked by drainage ditches will transport your mind to northern Belgium.

3 Lord Street

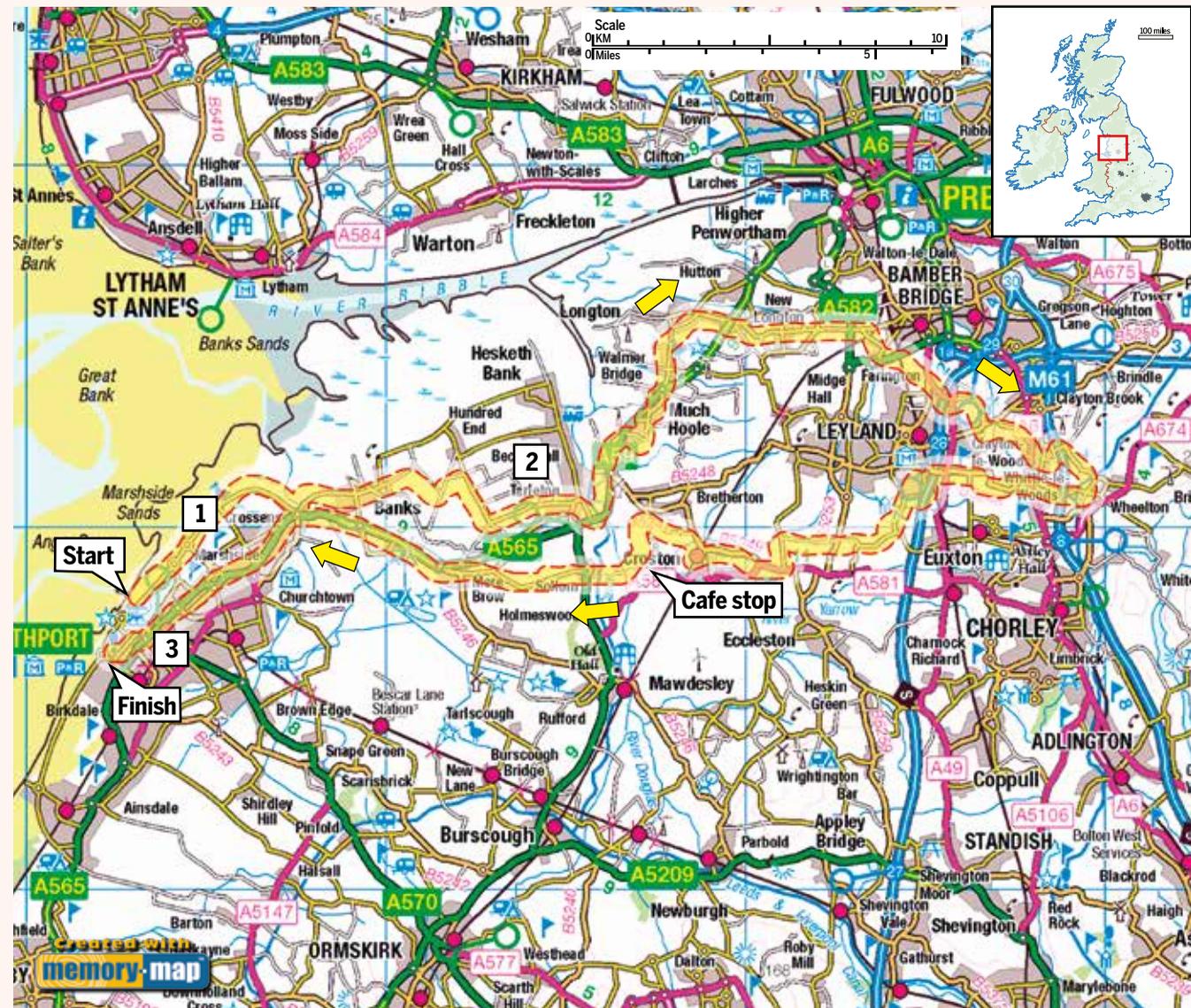
A beautiful Victorian canopied boulevard edged with scenic gardens. It can be busy with traffic and pedestrian lights, but having to stop gives you more time to take it all in.

Favourite cafe

Twin Lakes Velo Cafe

Run by two cyclists and overlooking the picturesque lake, this licensed cafe/ bistro is open every day from 10am until 3pm and late nights Friday and Saturday, often for cycling-themed evenings. Cycling is shown on big screens in the cafe, which also provides several cycling magazines to read, while you feast on the variety of food and drink on offer. The coffee is fantastic and the huge slabs of cake out of this world.

Bretherton Road, Croston, PR26 9RF
www.twinlakesvelocafe.co.uk



Placing an industrial coffee and cake order at the Velo Cafe



Fresh-faced and ready to roll



Plotting a game plan for the ride's remainder

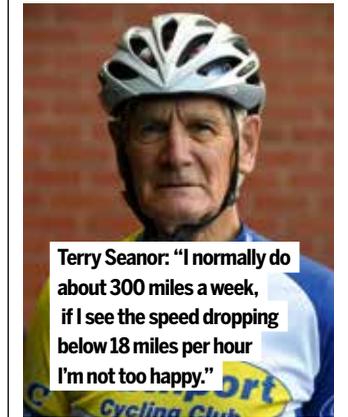
After a few more miles of singletrack lanes and cycle-path riding, we reconvene and rendezvous at the cafe, where both groups merge and chat about all things cycling. After recharging with bacon barmes and cake, riders set off in smaller groups to head home.

I'm chaperoned back to the clubhouse, via yet more quiet lanes. Once inside I'm given a tour of the wall of fame. "One of the most important things are the photos of the clubhouse renovations," Ken points out. "From a neglected shed, to our home, all from

volunteers and donations, it's one of our biggest achievements." It's a fitting tribute to a club that works hard, with such determined and enthusiastic members — and it really is like home to such a big and diverse cycling family. ■

Contact: www.southportcyclingclub.co.uk | facebook.com/SouthportCyclingClub

Meet the club



Terry Seanor: "I normally do about 300 miles a week, if I see the speed dropping below 18 miles per hour I'm not too happy."



Colin Baldwin: "I first joined the club when I was a junior in the Sixties. I've been chairman, race secretary and now I'm the president."



James Holloway: "A friend from swimming used to come out on these rides, so I decided to come along and have just loved it since."



Claire McKinnon: "The club is so friendly and sociable. Both my children are on loaned club bikes as they've grown so quickly."