



South Cheshire Advanced Motorcyclists Newsletter

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In this month's edition:

- Chair's message
- President's message
- NC500. Dave Creedy gives a fascinating account of his recent classic tour
- Tuesday rideouts - Howard Payne's invitation to an occasional midweek meet-up
- Six of the best - concluding instalment from Chris Steel

Chairman's message

Some bad news to start this month with the loss of long time member of the group, Chris Prior. The group will be sending flowers and a condolence card to his wife. I believe his funeral will be on 15th October but has yet to be confirmed, I'm sure Geoff will let everyone know in due course.

Also, very best wishes to Don Wood who is having a tough time of things. Get well soon, Don.

Better news is the completion of the Summer course and already several tests passed. Well done, Rob, Che and Pete with Pete receiving a F1rst, thanks again to all the Observers.

So, we move onto the Autumn course, time to dig out the thermals and put the liners back in, Summer has definitely ended. As I write this we've just had the induction meeting via Zoom, hopefully the next time we will be face to face again. Unfortunately, there are only three associates but I'm sure what we lack in numbers we make up for in quality, welcome to the group, Nick Stockley, Colin Riddell and Phil Kearns.

Looking ahead we're hoping to arrange a presentation evening/get together at the Hawk in Haslington and a Christmas meal. Once details have been finalised we'll let you know.

Dave

President's Message

Well here we are in October already, the Autumn is upon us, the night's drawing in, the temperature dropping and the rain more regular, before we know it, it will be Christmas. I was saddened to hear of the death of Chris Prior, those of you who knew and met him will remember his happy disposition and hearing of his many motorcycle journeys around the world, some of which he shared with the group by giving a presentation, when I toured the World War 1 battlefields, I remember seeing an inscription on one of the headstones it read, "To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die" this is true of Chris. To his wife Beryl and family, I offer my sincerest condolences, I know the group will be paying it's respects with a card and flowers.

I have submitted the last instalment of the Norway trip, I know that the ferry from Newcastle does not run anymore, and the logistics of getting there is a bit more complex, but I recommend you put Norway on your list of places to ride round; you will have some fabulous memories. That is all from me for this month, so to you and your families stay safe, until next month, take care.

Chris Steel

President

The North Coast 500 (NC500) concept was created under the North Highland Initiative and launched in 2015. It has been phenomenally successful in stimulating the economy of the Scottish Highland. The scenery ranges from spectacular to awesome. The route has its challenges - a full Scottish breakfast with haggis and black pudding every morning being the most notable. I'd been dreaming of riding the NC500 since its inception and it was the reason that I had bought a tourer. Lockdowns provided the opportunity for planning and I chose the departure date of 10 August 2021 based purely on speculative extrapolation of release from Covid bonds. What I had not considered were school holidays and 'staycationers'.

I studied maps, trawled the internet, spoke to others, prepared an itinerary of daily visits and booked hotels and B&Bs with a cancellation option - just in case the iron hand of the First Minister descended. My initial itinerary was too ambitious. What I actually achieved is summarised in **the Table (at the end of this piece)** together with the measured distances travelled which include the various offshoots from the route. My schedule was out of phase with weekend-to-weekend travellers as was that of many others. Check in times were around 15:30 -16:00 allowing plenty of time to faff, charge all electronic devices, take a walk before dinner, shower and then eat around 18:30.

J&S benefitted from my expedition as well as the economy of Scotland. I bought a Cardo communication system to assist the lady hiding in my GPS plus an alarmed disc lock which I never used. A proprietary waterproof bag protected my clothes, although my panniers showed no proclivity to leak. I packed, unpacked and repacked thrice leaving space to stow my helmet in the top box when exploring on foot. I carried, but did not need, sunglasses, sunscreen, summer biking gloves and midge repellent.

My adventure started with the M6 slingshot to the north, diverting slightly to Rheged near Penrith for a break. The old road through the Southern Uplands made for a more interesting ride than the highway, becoming even more interesting when a sign for Leadhills and the mining museum at Wanlockhead lured me into the wilderness. A few hours were spent gazing at exhibits, wandering around local mining legacies and indulging in afternoon tea. The roads through the wild and woolly hills were fun, largely unfenced and generously sprinkled with sheep. Back on the motorway, I stopped at Hamilton services for a flask break before heading to Dunblane near Stirling for an overnight stop. Ahead, squalls were patrolling the edge of the Grampian mountains.

Old Churches House Hotel and its attached restaurant, the annoyingly spelt Mason Belles, were welcoming. After a substantial dinner I walked around the exterior of the cathedral, through the old town and along a delightful riverside path. I returned to my lodgings to discover a fatal packing error – the wrong charging cable for my mobile. My phone consumed its last few milliwatts to confirm that PC World could solve the problem.

It took nearly as long to get served at PC World in Perth as it did to ride there from Dunblane. While

sheltering in Costa to plan my onward route I was trained by the staff how to log into the NHS incompatible Scottish track and trace. Back on the road, the A9 with lots of overtakes kept the juices flowing. Every camper-van in the UK seemed to be heading north. I was thankful of the heavy BMW



metal as each squall brought exceptionally strong gusts as well as a downpour and a drop in temperature. On came the heated grips. Despite the best misleading efforts of my Garmin GPS, I managed to find the historic Ruthven Barracks, near Kingussie, the best preserved of four robust barracks built in the year 1719 after the Jacobite rebellion of 1715. The spectacular setting on an old castle mound was unspoiled by cafes and pay booths.

I wound along narrow lanes to the junction with the highway to the ski station at Cairngorm Mountain. Five minutes of wind and rain was enough to survey the scene before dropping down to Loch Morlich for a picnic. My chosen B&B in Inverness had not fully recovered from stringent Covid precautions. I was confronted with a reasonable sized room and a small table already set for an unappetising continental breakfast. Dinner beckoned. Full waterproofs were donned for the short walk to 'Fairways' golf club, discovered in a quick internet search. The modestly priced restaurant provided sustaining meals and excellent service to a very casually dressed clientele.

Having started the NC500 proper, I almost immediately departed from the official route. A blue-sky morning took me over the verdant pastures of the Black Isle to the Georgian splendour of Cromarty. Parked and dying offshore oil platforms dominated the view across the Firth. I sat outside a coffee shop watching the minuscule Cromarty-Nigg car ferry discharge and load two cars. There was quite a queue developing and after some reflection I joined it. Prompted by a local driver, I marched down the causeway and asked the ferry boat captain if he could squeeze my bike on. "No problem", said the captain, waving the cars back. I rode majestically to the front of the queue, boarded and parked at the side of the small deck. I would be disembarking forward while the cars had to reverse off. I'd watched a landscape painting competition from Cromarty on Sky Arts featuring the parked rigs. A fellow traveller on the ferry had watched the same programme and a debate on the finalists followed.



Regaining the official route, I rode to Dunrobin castle, once the seat of the Dukes of Sutherland now full of seats for tourists. Access to the café was not permitted without buying a ticket for the house

and grounds. A quick tour of the grandiose pile, a peek at the gardens and a late lunch satisfied my tourist urges. I could have stayed longer but didn't. Wick was calling. The dated blockhouse design of the Norseman hotel was unappealing but deceptive. The external visual shortcomings were more than satisfactorily compensated for by the choice of dishes and excellent service. I walked around the town and completed a river bank tour before retiring for the night.

Morning brought a grey sky and a breakfast buffet including the Scottish staples of black pudding, haggis



and Tunnocks bars. The first stop of the day was Duncansby Head, the true north eastern end of the mainland, for a walk to view the guano spattered cliffs and spectacular sea stacks. Despite the warnings, I had to visit John O'Groats. Hordes of visitors, a parking fee of £2 and 40p for the WC deterred stopping other than to snap the cheesy signpost. I rode the lanes to the next major promontory, Dunnet Head, the northernmost point of mainland Britain. A short climb accessed a 360-degree panoramic viewpoint from where I admired Orkney basking in

sunlight. The Old Man peeked above the cliffs of Hoy. To the south-east of the lighthouse, scattered brick buildings and concrete bases mark the location of a former WW2 Chain Home Low radar station.

In Thurso, I spotted a community cafe in a run-down fishing dock area. On entering I was immediately drawn into the banter of the animated volunteers and ordered lunch from a menu with no prices. You just paid what you thought the meal was worth and if you were hard-up no donation was expected. It was a wonderful experience renewing my faith in human nature until I caught up with the next convoy of hired camper vans reluctant to pull over. However, in general, on single track roads most vehicles travelling in the same direction pulled in to let me pass. Approaching cars could be comfortably passed in many instances without resorting to passing places.

For no particular reason other than shafts of sunlight and a promise of leafy lanes, I turned off the main route to follow a sign to St Mary's chapel. The road terminated in a farm yard. A footpath along a lane continued through meadows and crossed a river to approach the sea. The tiny chapel was perched near the cliff edge, its origins lost in time. I chatted to a Scots family on the way back - they made various recommendations on places to visit but I had difficulty understanding their rich brogue.

The sky was darkening as I rode across the bleak moors towards Bettyhill. I parked my bike in the lee of a high wall at the Bettyhill hotel. After a warm welcome I was led to a newly refurbished room with a massive TV with Netflix that worked, USB ports in all the right places and a walk-in shower. A few miles of evening walking prepared me for dinner in the lively bar. While faffing with my bike in the car park I chatted to a guy touring on a Kawasaki, his nearside pannier was bound up with duct tape following a sheep strike near Aviemore. Learning from his misfortune, every time I spotted sheep munching the verges of an unfenced road, I slowed to a crawl.

I knew that it had rained in the night as my bike cover was wet, so was the ground. I set off soon after 9am for Durness. Blue sky and dark clouds were replaced by squalls. For the first time, I encountered escorted groups of motorcycles. The weather improved by the time I parked for the magnificent Smoo cave. I walked straight down the path to sea level and booked in for a tour which involved descending a short ladder and climbing into a rubber boat. The guide used a single oar to navigate across a pool fed by a waterfall spraying down a spectacular shaft from the surface. The boat collected waiting tourists and my group entered a short length of passage to hear a long story about a supposed large chamber which lies beyond. A



dig has been started in the main chamber heading for the lost chamber. Easy riding led through cloud capped mountains until I turned onto the narrow, winding coastal route to Clachtoll. I had camped there many years ago and wanted to see if it had changed. It had. I shouldn't have been surprised to find the magic gone. Car and van traffic seemed less considerate than on previous days. Each blind corner and summit had to be approached with caution as there was a good chance that oncoming traffic would not do so. Maybe it was because it was Saturday and a changeover day for many. I was also getting hassled when adhering to speed limits. In places, the narrow road had been resurfaced with new blacktop leaving a vertical drop of about 15cm each side so passing oncoming cars required precision and a prayer. Where possible I used passing places. The sun was shining on Ullapool as the bike turned onto the promenade facing Loch Broom. The Arch Inn provided me with a single room, compact but comfortable, modern and clean. The noise from the bar was lulling me to sleep when the stomping of excited children in the room above brought me back to life. Daylight was peeping through the curtains when I awoke and the thought of another Scottish breakfast had me washed and dressed in double quick time. A hot breakfast, made to order, was the perfect start for the day.



I cruised out of Ullapool, with rain and mist blessing the hills. After a short ride, I parked at Corrieshalloch gorge and followed a pleasant circular walk. At no time was the bottom of the gorge, nor the falls purported to lie within it, visible due to the dense vegetation. The one viewpoint that might have yielded a view, a Victorian bridge, was closed for safety reasons. Suffering from disappointment and a need for a coffee fix, I pulled into a deserted lay-by and scrambled down to a stream. I sat by the water's edge, drinking coffee from my flask and listening to the soulful sound of rushing water. My itinerary included a stop at the Russian Arctic Convoy Project. It was closed as was much of northern Scotland on a Sunday. Loch Ewe was an important assembly area for convoys bound for Iceland and Russia in WW2 and there are various relics and monuments that are fascinating to visit. It is difficult to imagine the hive of activity in what is now a very quiet and secluded

backwater. An 8-mile ride took me to the headland at the mouth of the Loch to inspect the remains of the artillery defences. A sculpted memorial celebrates the guardians who accepted discomfort and isolation to guard the gathering ships. Finally, I headed for Gairloch and then Loch Maree.

The Loch Maree hotel is a lovely old building but the reception was not overwhelming. I was so busy studying the bar and imaging my first beer that I didn't pay much attention to the briefing other than to note that the key was in the door. I wandered upstairs and found a single room with a delightful Loch view and occupied it instead of the no-view room intended for me. Having been informed of the error I made a grovelling apology and was excused as the late arrival who had to take my original room was quite happy. I had no need for TV, I just lay on my bed gazing at the serene surroundings. Intermittent rain and mist periodically obscured the loch and the mountain backdrop. The hotel had some unusual practices and characteristics. Dinner and breakfast had to be preordered. The Wi-Fi was weak to non-existent and water pressure in the shower low to zero. The infrastructure problems were explained but I couldn't understand why no attempt had been made to engineer solutions. On reflection, I would describe the hotel as quirky. Table service was excellent, the food was beautifully cooked and the heating was switched on in the dining room, maybe unusual for August but most welcome in the circumstances.

The drizzle ceased and the first midges of the trip launched an offensive as I left Loch Maree. I topped up my fuel tank before turning onto the coastal route around the Applecross peninsula. The peaks were cloaked in cloud. By mid-morning I was sat atop a rock sipping coffee from my flask, gazing across a tranquil Loch Torridon. Most traffic was going the same way as me and I was allowed to pass freely. Others were on a quest and would not yield. While many sections had enough room for oncoming bikes and cars to pass safely that didn't apply to camper vans and commercial traffic. On one occasion, a Range Rover refused to share the road and forced me onto the grass verge. Thus, I learned the limited off-road capability of my tourer.

Cafes are closed on Sundays and Mondays in Applecross. There was a hot dog kiosk but I didn't fancy that. After a stroll on the beach and a detour to Toscaig quay I headed for the famous Bealach Na Ba pass and the most challenging ride of the journey. The protracted climb to the misty summit was spectacular. I took the descending hairpins very gently, acutely aware of the precipitous drop beyond the Armco. There were quite a few bikers around, all very polite and careful. In contrast, some cars were driven by lunatics who didn't slow on blind bends and executed an emergency stop on meeting an oncoming vehicle. At one place I rounded a corner to find a car reversing towards me. All exciting stuff but I learned a lot from it and I felt very pleased with myself once over the pass and sitting in the Bealach café that was enterprisingly open. The onward route took me across country back to Inverness to complete the NC500 circuit having covered 552 miles.

I was booked into Culliss House, a lovely B&B with safe off-road parking, superb hosts and an exceptionally comfortable bed. A short walk took me into the centre of Inverness. Before viewing the sights, I enjoyed a wholesome meal at No 27 Bar and Kitchen - an independent venue with good quality food, a varied menu and excellent service. It is amazing how fresh air and biking can create an appetite.

Satiated by an excellent cooked breakfast, I left Inverness. General Wade's military road, the B862 from Inverness to Fort Augustus, provided an exhilarating ride with superb views. My track continued down the Great Glen on the very busy A82, which I followed for the rest of the day. I refuelled the bike at Fort



William and myself at a nearby Costa. The route followed Loch Linnhe to North Ballachulish bridge before turning inland for Glencoe and its spectacular pass. The magnificent mountain scenery never fails to impress but the masses of parked cars damaged my feeling so I did not stop. Beyond the pass, the long straights over the expansive moorland are built for speed. I pulled into the car park for the Falls of Falloch, south west of Crianlarich, only to find a tangle of cars trying to get in and out. I abandoned the venue and continued along the A82 until a Scottish National Trust centre

café hove into view. Refreshed with tea and cake, I enjoyed the bendy road alongside Loch Lomond. I had booked into a B&B at Shieldaig Farm on the outskirts of Balloch, near the southern end of the Loch. The access road deteriorated into a rough undulating track along which I lurched and bumped. The bike didn't really enjoy it. I parked in a sunny, gravelly yard and was welcomed by the lady host who brought out a piece of timber for my side stand. My dwelling looked like a cowshed from the outside but was very well-appointed inside. The views from the adjoining field were magnificent. I decided to walk down the hill to Balloch and discovered a footbridge that crossed the busy A82. A footpath led into Balloch where the Princess Rose, a Cantonese restaurant, was my choice for sustenance.

My last full Scottish breakfast of the mission prepared me for the long drag home. Strong winds tried to tip me off the motorway bridge into the Clyde. As I progressed southwards the wind eased, replaced by low cloud and drizzle. Nevertheless, the ride was still exhilarating, punctuated by coffee, comfort and fuel stops. The bike seemed to enjoy its unfettered freedom after the winding, uneven, single-track roads of northern Scotland. I arrived home having added 1,415 miles to my riding experience.

Dave Creedy

Table of detail

NC500 Expedition, 10-18 August 2021									
Day No.	From	To	Miles	Accommodation	Itinerary				
1	Crewe	Dunblane	277	Old Churches House	Rheged near Penrith, Mining museum at Wanlockhead, Dunblane				
2	Dunblane	Inverness	162	Loch Earn B&B	Ruthven Barracks at Kingussie, Aviemore, Cairngorm mountain				
3	Inverness	Wick	106	Norseman hotel	Cromarty, Nigg ferry, Dunrobin Castle, Wick river walk				
4	Wick	Bettyhill	82	Bettyhill hotel	Duncansby Head, John O'Groats, Dunnet Head, Thurso, St Mary's Chapel, Bettyhill				
5	Bettyhill	Ullapool	137	The Arch Inn	Smoo cave near Durness, Clachtoll, Ullapool				
6	Ullapool	Loch Maree	85	Loch Maree hotel	Corrieshalloch Gorge, Loch Ewe WW2 convoy defences and monument, Gairloch				
7	Loch Maree	Inverness	142	Culliss House B&B	Loch Torridon, Fearnmore and Applecross peninsula, Inverness				
8	Inverness	Balloch	148	Sheildaig Farm	Military road to Fort Augustus, Fort William, Glencoe, Falls of Falloch, Loch Lomond				
9	Balloch	Crewe	276	Home					
		Total	1415						

Meet up and ride out - Tuesday mornings. Howard Payne has started to organise the occasional mid week outing...

Being retired and a full member who finds it nearly impossible to make Sunday ride outs, I should very much like to start an occasional Tuesday morning meeting. I suggest a 9.30am meet to enjoy a coffee and then 10.00am have a rideout with like minded members, who have nothing better to do on Tuesday whether they are retired, shift workers, unemployed or any other reason.

This will give us the chance of meeting our fellow members make new friends in a totally relaxed atmosphere just to enjoy ourselves and have a ride, some lunch and possibly ride again in the afternoon.

The new Costa, which is at the Crewe Commercial Park, Jack Mills Way, Shavington CW2 5AB, is a good place to meet. The venue has plenty of parking where we can get together and enjoy a chat over a coffee.

IAM and SCAM rules re ride outs will apply, i.e. leader and back marker must be full members.

The idea is purely social for all levels of members. Sorry no none members will be able to join club social rides for insurance reasons. Associates are very welcome.

A message will go up on FaceBook ahead of any Tuesday the rideout is to be organised.

See you there...

Howard Payne.

PS, we have already had a couple of successful Tuesday outings - hope to see more there when we organise the next. Keep an eye on FaceBook.



Six of the best.

Chris Steel's gives us the final instalment of his epic Nordic adventure.

The final section was only 109 miles, about two hours even taking it leisurely, so we were in no rush to pack up and get going, seeing check in time at the ferry terminal was 18.15.

We had a relaxing breakfast and packed up one more time, we left the hotel and set off for Bergen, once again we had to catch a ferry to cross another fiord, having only been riding for twenty minutes, we were dismounted waiting for the ferry, the beauty of this format is that you don't have to wait long, fifteen minutes later and we are boarding, forty minutes later having had a coffee we were on our way again, the sun was yet again shining on us, every day had been bright sunshine, the scenery again did not disappoint, despite taking the ride leisurely, and having negotiated a section of road which to say the least was a single track with two way traffic it was only just after twelve when we arrived at the ferry terminal in Bergen, we decided that we would leave the bikes at the ferry terminal and explore Bergen.



Bergen during the war was where the Germans had a large U boat base, although I have been informed it has not been turned into a tourist attraction, although a large part of it still exists, the town has many of its original wooden buildings along the waterfront in various colours, very picturesque, and there was a market going on with sailors entertaining the crowd singing old sea chanteys, well I think that's what they were, we noted that there was a mountain railway to top of the mountain or very large hill overlooking Bergen and decided to go and have an aerial view of Bergen, having eventually got up to the top the view was impressive, we chilled out with a drink and

admired the view and took advantage of the bright sunshine, knowing that we were not going to experience it again for a long time.

Having come down from the mountain without any tablets, John (my throat has been cut) Brady suggested lunch, as it was a busy market day most of the café's and restaurants were busy, but John having a built in radar for food found a hotel which had obviously had it's rush over and we had a nice slow lunch with no deadline, John having sold his business and contemplating retirement decided to take photo's of the restaurant, when asked why, he said you never know I may decide to open another restaurant and it is always nice to have some idea's, I could not see Bev jumping at the thought of starting again, but you never know.

The time had just flown by and it was time to make our way to the ferry, as usual it took time to jostle our way onto the ferry, but eventually we made it and lashed the bikes down for the twenty four hour trip, yet again Dave and John Bailey had the presidential suite, whilst the rest of us had the cattle truck, no time to waste we changed and went on deck for our last view of Norway, with precise efficiency at 18.15 the ferry slipped it's mooring and set sail, we watched Bergen disappear into the distance and turned our thoughts to the trip home, being our last night together we thought we should end the holiday as we began it with a last supper in the steak restaurant, Don obliged and booked a table and was given the pager that would inform us when the table was ready,



we as usual visited the duty free shop, which as usual had not much choice but we purchased something for our better halves, and went to the bar to enjoy a relaxing drink or two or three.

Dons pager started ringing and off to the restaurant we went, we settled down, and a bit like the last night of term decided to have a blow out, the prawn cocktail was delicious, most of us opted for steak as a main course, Dave ordered a well done one when it arrived it would have been more done if I put it on my cylinder head for ten minutes, a good vet would have revived it, obviously it was sent back to the kitchen, the replacement was even more rare then the first, Dave did not want to cause a disturbance, and said he would just eat the chips, whilst we were contemplating our next move a lady came over and enquired if our meal was ok, as her's had been awful, undercooked and cold, having thought about her comments for a minute or two, launch big mouth steely, I went and spoke to the head restaurant officer and showed him our various steaks which were bleeding all over place, it was like the somme 1916, he explained that the chef was of the highest calibre, I suggested that he was an expert at rare, did they have a chef who was good at medium and well done, he pondered a moment and said that he would bring chef out, I had visions of a large man complete with meat cleaver appearing at the table, as it turned out he was somewhat sheepish, I explained that our steaks were not up to standard, and asked the others if their meal was ok, John (turn coat)Brady just said, "you know me, I will eat anything" despite the offer of another meal the whole atmosphere was destroyed, we had the various steaks deducted from the bill, and were given a voucher to spend at the bar as a form of apology, so our final meal turned into a damp squib, we went to the bar and made full use of the drink voucher.

There was a group on, in the lounge bar which was good entertainment, we had a few drinks and retired to bed.

Sunday 10th, as we were on the boat till 19.30 there was little point getting up to early, Don got up and



made it to breakfast, John Ian and myself couldn't be bothered and we stayed in bed till about ten, then we got up and had coffee and toast in the coffee lounge, this was the only time that time seemed to drag, at about midday we had to vacate our rooms as they had to be prepared for the return trip, we duly arrived at Newcastle at 19.30 and in no time at all we were all assembled on the quay side ready for the journey home, no point hanging around straight down the A1 and turn right, the trip back was progressive and one by one we separated to make our various routes home.

Having arrived home and sat down, I started to smile at the memories of a great holiday, Norway is spectacular, ok so it is expensive, but you have to go there, it has to be seen to be believed, the company was great, the two Johns, Don, Ian and Dave I could not have had better company, the memories will remain with me till alzymers gets me, would I go back, tomorrow no question, but in true scam tradition we try to vary the trips, for 2008 it looks like Spain and Portugal, dates to be announced.

I hope you found the article interesting, who knows it could be you on the next trip.

01/10/2021

I think the Submarine base can be visited, check on the internet for details.

Chris Steel