

## **PETER HOWARD-DOBSON'S STORY OFF HIS TIME ON SHETLAND**

I arrived in Shetland on Monday afternoon and soon had a call from Michael to say that they'd just had the worst cycling day of their trip so far, battling up through north winds and rain from Montrose to Aberdeen. They were now on the ferry to Lerwick, but had decided that - given the forecast for Tuesday was even stronger winds from the north - to reverse the direction of their final run, and therefore to start at the top of Unst, and cycle down to Lerwick. Bill would drive them up to Unst on landing. This meant that my 10 mile stint would be at the start of their Shetland ride rather than the end, but no matter.



After some difficulty achieving further communications next morning (Shetlands mobile coverage is a bit variable, and the only way I could get a signal near my hotel on Unst was to go and park near a quarry at the top of a hill looking down over Haroldswick), we got ourselves together and I rendezvoused with them at Norwick on the north east coast. Norwick beach is a very picturesque spot and much represented on calendars of Shetlands. The sun was out as they got ready for the run down to Belmont, and it didn't actually rain on the guys until they got onto the Shetland Mainland.

Having watched them set up, I headed back a couple of miles to Baltasound garage where my bike had now arrived - the garage having taken it to Belmont in anticipation that that was where it would be needed! The guys were hot on my heels - my goodness they were quick - and this did not bode well for me. The first stage of my ride was downhill, but we soon began to tack across the 25mph wind and then started our first climb. This was horribly hard work for me, but eventually my muscles began to remember what it was all about. In the end I didn't totally disgrace myself, and had a great time following on their heels - this is a great way to see the countryside. The last hill before the run down to the Belmont ferry defeated me, and I had to walk up the last hundred yards or so, but apart from that I managed it all.

My respect for Michael and John knows no bounds. My paltry 10 miles amply demonstrated the immense effort that their 900 miles entailed. Not only that, but John gave a talk to a Rotary group every day, often breaking off the ride at lunchtime to do so. I was jolly glad to hand my bike back to the garage folk after a mere 45 minutes, and to enjoy the lift back to Baltasound.

I then set off by car to catch them up, and did so only about 6 miles north of Lerwick, where I found them climbing a steepish hill in pouring rain. Of course I just went swooshing past and gave them a holler of support (something encouraging like, "get out of the bleeding way, you're holding up the traffic"!).

We all met in Lerwick in the evening.

The three chaps were interviewed by Radio Shetland earlier that evening, in the course of which it transpired that John had worked at the Lerwick Hospital on occasions in his youth - soon after graduating from Glasgow University, he was on the medical team at Aberdeen and he and a consultant used to do monthly visits - so here was just one more bit of logic to their route.