

East London Cyclist

www.wheelers.org.uk

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2008

THE NEWSLETTER FOR TOWER HAMLETS WHEELERS • LONDON CYCLING CAMPAIGN

LCC 30 years on...

In September, the LCC will have been around for 30 years, (and Wheelers for about the same time!) Over the years, Wheelers and the London Cycling Campaign have been working hard to improve conditions for cycling both London-wide and locally in Tower Hamlets.

We've had many successful campaigns and initiatives, and have become increasingly recognised by local authorities, planners, government, police, and organisations such as TfL, and have considerable input both locally and nationally into improving standards and promoting cycling as a sustainable, affordable, healthy, green, practical, and convenient way of getting around. (It can be fun too!)

Cycling has undoubtedly moved up the political agenda and is seen as an essential part of transport, environmental, and even health policies, with commitments being made for continued investment in cycle lanes, cycle training, bike parking, and changing behaviour, such as the congestion charge.

Things that would have seemed sheer fantasy 30 years ago are becoming a reality. London has witnessed a 43% rise in cycling since the introduction of the congestion charge, and an 83% increase overall since 2000.

We have come a long way, but we mustn't stop now. Wheelers will continue to do all that we can to campaign for safe and usable cycle facilities, secure places to lock bikes, cycle friendly developments and workplaces, training initiatives and promoting cycling at events, as well as our usual rides!

Entirely volunteer run, Wheelers need your help to do all this. Keep telling us what we can do for you, and get involved – we are always on the lookout for volunteers, especially to help distribute newsletters, help out at the maintenance workshops, help promote cycling at events, and come up with new ideas, and maybe even suggest and lead rides!

As well as continuing our ongoing work, we have some great ideas for 2008, and some exciting projects in development. So, now is the time to get involved and help us to make these ideas a reality. ■

Robert Lister

Lift lobby

The lift service at the Greenwich to Island Gardens foot tunnel has become unreliable recently, despite a major overhaul a couple of years ago. This is due both to mechanical problems with the lifts and to a shortage of operators. The tunnel is a vital route for cyclists, with large numbers using it day to get to work at Canary Wharf. When the lifts are out of action, there are 8 flights of stairs at each end – a major disincentive to using a bike, especially as the DLR cannot be used as an alternative. The lifts are managed by Greenwich council, but jointly funded by Greenwich and Tower Hamlets. We have raised the problem with both councils and urged them to improve the situation. ■

Dave Allison

Green machines

Wheelers led a ride to the Day of Action Against Climate Change march on 8th December, which included a bike ride around town. The ride stopped to hear speeches from various people, including Koy Thomson, CEO of the London Cycling Campaign. Some quotes from his speech:

- “Cycling is a public transport pressure valve, guarding against an explosion of commuter misery, dissatisfaction and anger. Bang for buck it is a damn cheap one. Promoting mass cycling across thousands of kilometres of London streets will cost the equivalent of a few kilometres of CrossRail”
- “The mass solution [to the health crisis] as we know is not a £400/year gym membership, but to build everyday, regular, habitual activity such as cycling or walking into your daily lifestyle. Bike to work, to shops, to school, to friends, to leisure!”
- “It is easy and affordable and individuals gain by cycling, they don't have to give up things or forgo pleasure as with many green actions.”
- “We need to see cycling fully credited with the health, human and environmental benefits it brings. For every turn of the pedal, a cyclist generates health benefits, public purse savings, and planetary benefits. *We should be paid to cycle!*”

For the full speech see

<http://www.lcc.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1049>

Caroline Fenton

Memorable cycling moments 2007...

We asked various members and volunteers to recall their best (and worst) memorable cycling moments of 2007. We hope you can join us in 2008 to add some of your own!

- **Kielder Forest Drive** on the tour. A rough bone-shaking 12 mile stretch of what could only loosely be called "road", consisting mostly of stones. "*It will be character building*", said Caroline. After a few miles, Rob announced he had a puncture. The foolhardy group stopped. **Then the midges attacked.** - Rob
- **Dave's puncture guilt.** Marathon Plus man was left deflated, heading to work down the A2. Some yooof leaned out of a car window and yelled "Oi, You've got a flat tyre mate." Having virtually indestructible Marathon Plus tyres, he didn't believe it, and hurled some abuse back. The car disappeared off, only for Dave to discover that he did indeed have a puncture – a big nail! - **Dave**
- **Rob's Bonkers Barrier ride.** Much maligned, but a great spectacle. Even if it did involve getting up at 5am. As a bonus, the café was open, the weather good, and we even got chatting to one of the barrier technicians after seeing the barrier close.
- "I managed **Dunwich Dynamo** for the first time. Plodding along in the dark at steady pace. Rain for 60 miles. Finally got to the beach. Felt great to get there, and then on to the Wheelers minibus for the trip back. The look on Brenda's face was priceless when Simon's Bus – our extra special bus firm, whose bread and butter business is taking punters out on stag and hen nights - equipped with full disco lights, video and sound system, played cheesy pop all the way back. Kylie, Jacko, Steps, Alcazar, Scissor Sisters, Celine, Tina, Whitney and Shirley accompanied us the entire 120 miles. Many fell asleep. Determined to get my money's worth, **I bopped in my seat the whole way back**, Brenda was not so taken by the disco vibe! The most painful bit (apart from my singing along) had to be the 3-mile trip back from Mile End, by which time my knees had well and truly seized up!" – Rob
- Gary and Aileen's **anniversary tour split.** Husband and wife Wheelers tour duo Gary and Aileen had a trial separation to mark their wedding anniversary on the Wheelers Borders Tour. Gary lost Aileen, so she disappeared off with the sandwiches to Buttermere for the day. Both found each other by the end of the day...eventually, and renewed their courses.
- The Wheelers supported two of the biggest cycling events of 2007, the **Tour de France** and **Hovis Freewheel.** ↗

... For the Tour we led 50 cyclists, including children, into Central London. A fantastic, sunny day was had by all in the area reserved for LCC members. We then brought everyone back and were very touched by their warm thanks.

At Hovis Freewheel someone shouted 'Is there a Dr Bike in the park?' and the Wheelers stepped forward, little knowing how many bikes needed attention. Loads of people rode away safely and were able to enjoy the day. Oh, and we had a good day as well and handed out 500 newsletters. ■

Wheely good awards

Many workplaces and other organisations support cyclists and cycling. It used to be only couriers using a bike during their working day. Now police, paramedics, business people and many others cycle to carry out their duties, often very well supported by their employers.

If a local organisation or business is positive towards cycling and cyclists they deserve to be recognised and the Wheelers are now looking for nominations from you for our new award, 'The Wheelys!'

They might do or provide:

- Cycle parking (particularly indoors)
- Bike to work scheme
- Showers and/or lockers
- Mileage allowance
- Information about cycling
- Improve/encourage cycling?
- Any other things you think are relevant.

You don't have to work for an organisation to nominate them, if you see or hear they're doing the right thing we'll do the rest and find out more.

You may want to nominate a library, community centre, local shop, supermarket, bike shop, or hospital. If they look as though they've got it right, chances are they're doing more beneath the surface and that's what we want to find out and congratulate. Maybe they've gone that extra mile to help you, storing your bike when you visited or looked after you or your bike when you had a difficulty.

There'll be a nomination form on our website in March and a reminder in the next East London Cyclist so put your judges' hats on now... ■

David Tuckwell

Muffin Man or Beigel Boy?

In the spirit of new-year's resolutions, Wheelers have decided to introduce a "muffin" (or maybe beigel?) rating to all future rides. This is an indicator of how many muffins you can eat, guilt-free, having completed the ride, since you will have expended the equivalent amount of energy by doing it. For more details, and to read 'The Science Bit' see our web-site www.wheelers.org.uk. ■

Dave Allison

Vélo à Paris

Being lucky enough (?) to work for a French company, I get to make fairly frequent visits to Paris by Eurostar. The idea of taking my Brompton occurred to me and I chatted to people I saw on the train with bikes who all assured me it was no problem (as long as you don't leave your cover at home in error.)

So why for over a year did I still not do it? Mainly laziness as it would involve getting out of bed 15mins earlier (and these things matter at 5am) and also a slight fear of the "wrong side of the road". Anyway, finally the combination of an afternoon rather than early morning trip over plus the super abundance of hire bikes on the streets persuaded me to do it. And of course they were all right, it's just fine. It's slightly irritating to have to manoeuvre the bike in its bag through the check in gates, put it through the X-ray machine and then trundle it through the lounge, but it's easy enough to stow it on the train, as luggage provision on Eurostar is much better than on most UK trains.

Cycling in Paris is I guess like cycling in London, good in parts and bad in others. There are some cycle tracks that put you right next to the inboard side of parked cars (and their opening doors) and the Place de la Concorde appeared to be a traffic junction at least 11 lanes wide, but with an almost complete absence of road markings which was rather scary.

On the plus side there are some good tracks down the central strip of the wide boulevards, and there is a lot less dog-poo than a few years ago! At one point I ended up on a closed road (part of the Paris beach summer season), which was great for cycling but not so good when I got to a barrier at the end. However the cyclist in front of me very charmingly lifted my bike over for me and even managed a Gallic smile when the Brompton did its usual self-folding impression.

If you don't have a folding bike, or can't wait until Eurostar make it easier to take a conventional bike with you, then do try the Velib. A lot has been written about these – and they really are good. It's quite easy to purchase a €1 day pass and then hire a bike. I did this when I was over there with my sister and her two children. Our main challenge was in fact to find a hire point with four bikes available – they are so popular that often as soon as they are returned they are immediately re-hired. ■

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Caroline Fenton

Ride for Hire

Want to come on one of our easy rides but you are "between bikes"? Have friends who would like to join but they don't have a bike with them? Then either hire an OYBike here in Tower Hamlets (<http://www.oybike.com/>) or ask Wheelers as we often have basic bikes that we could lend you for one of our rides. ■

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Who do you think our newsletter should be sent to?

Currently, we send this newsletter to all LCC members in Tower Hamlets and councillors. We also leave 150 in local bike shops. You may also have seen Wheelers handing them out every couple of months, particularly at Cable Street and Shoreditch.

As a campaigning group the Wheelers want to reach people who can change or influence things. We are reviewing our mailing list to make sure we reach these people. Can you suggest people who could make changes or have an influence in Tower Hamlets?

We would welcome any ideas from you. Someone you work with? Your boss, a colleague, another cyclist using the same parking?

Any well known people living or using the borough?
Suggest the obvious to us, we may have missed the obvious.
If you have any ideas, please send them to:
wheelers@towerhamletswheelers.org.uk ■

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Get off and walk...

Get ready for the 2008 Big Spring Walk! Take a sponsored stroll this spring with your friends, family and colleagues and raise money for disadvantaged older people. Call 0870 770 3288 or visit <http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/walk>

Last cyclist ever

The East London Line closed without ceremony on Saturday 22nd December to become part of the extended London Overground system which when it opens in 2010 will connect West Croydon to Highbury & Islington. So, for the time being we cyclists have lost a river crossing. Now, the only safe river crossing is the Greenwich Foot Tunnel. That night I had been out with friends in Deptford and by sheer coincidence I found myself taking the last train from New Cross to Whitechapel with my bike in tow. The train was packed with trainspotters (ok, enthusiasts), transport police and London Underground managers and had a party atmosphere to it.

This was quite an emotional journey for me especially passing Wapping because I moved to there at the age of five and was always fascinated by the line's trains, small stations and history. The tunnel that connects Wapping to Rotherhithe was the first tunnel to be constructed underwater in the world, the famous Victorians Marc, followed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel were the engineers. On arrival at Whitechapel the party continued on the platform and the last train south to the depot had more people on it. As I bided farewell to the train I then realised that I had been the last cyclist ever to travel on the ELL so with some satisfaction I cycled home. ■

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'The Black Knight'

Rides and events

Check our web site for the latest information....

January

Saturday, 26th January

BICYCLE MAINTENANCE WORKSHOP

Monthly Workshop – 11am-3.00pm at Limehouse Town Hall, 646 Commercial Road. Bike Security Event. Come along and get your bike security marked.

February

Sunday, 3rd February

LEE VALLEY LOOP

Easy/Medium ride: Lee Valley, Epping Forest, Essex Weald nearly circular ride (40 miles, 2.5 muffins estimated!) Upminster finish, train back. First section up Lea Valley off road and easy, then on road with some hills. For a lower muffin rating come with us as far as Enfield Lock, then return by the same route. Morning cafe stop at Springfield Marina, lunch Epping Forest (pub or take away cafe or bring picnic if weather is good), afternoon tea at Weald Country Park. Meet at 9.30am on top of the Green Bridge at Mile End Park. Contact: **Caroline** 07967 139491

Wednesday, 13th February

MONTHLY WHEELERS MEETING

Meet at St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road 7.30-9.00pm - everyone welcome. Followed by a visit to a local pub from 9.15pm. Contact: **Owen**

Thursday, 14th February

CYCLE FASHION SHOW

As part of London Fashion Week come along to Columbia Road from 4.30pm (time tbc) where current innovative cycling design by local, independent designers will be showcased to attract more people to cycling. Hackney and Tower Hamlets councils are running the event and we'll be joining in, in some shape or form.

Saturday, 23rd February

BICYCLE MAINTENANCE WORKSHOP

Monthly Workshop – 11am-3.00pm at Limehouse Town Hall, 646 Commercial Road

Sunday, 24th February

CHILTERN'S RIDE

Off to the Chilterns for 45 miles of hilly riding. Meet on top of the Green Bridge at Mile End Park. (time tbc) Don't forget your lights. Contact: **Steve**

March

Sunday, 9th March

CHILTERN'S RIDE

Another 45 mile ride in the glorious Chiltern Hills. Meet on top of the Green Bridge at Mile End Park (time tbc) Don't forget your lights. Contact: **Steve**

Wednesday, 12th March

WHEELERS AGM & SOCIAL

To be held at St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road. All of our committee posts are up for re-election. Contact **Owen** for more info.

Saturday, 29th March

BICYCLE MAINTENANCE WORKSHOP

Monthly Workshop – 11am-3.00pm at Limehouse Town Hall, 646 Commercial Road.

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