

Mike Graven is an Exmoor Beast



The 2008 Exmoor Beast (Sunday 2nd November)

0400	<p>Alarm goes off interrupting a dodgy dream involving a couple of women I work with and Bournemouth's 1984 FA Cup win over Man U. Milton Graham / Ian Thomson – you beauties!!!</p> <p>Inevitable thoughts of 'just go back to sleep' and 'why bother' go through my mind but that old sense of shame kicks in (i.e. too many people know that I'm planning to do this and it'll be embarrassing if I don't) and I force myself out of bed.</p>
0420	<p>With bloodshot eyes and a couple of slices of toast on my lap I start the long drive to Exmoor. Temptation to do the sane thing and go back to bed is still enormous.</p>
0520	<p>Eating for England in the car even though I'm not hungry but I know I'll need it later. Jam sarnies, bananas and rice crispy bars is the order of the</p>

	day along with a litre of blackcurrant.
0525	Deposit litre of the aforementioned blackcurrant on the roadside near Yeovil. Feel better now.
0530	Bored and tired now and it's still dark. I know! ACDC live from Donnington should wake me up. Sure enough 'A whole lotta Rosie' has me moshing away behind the steering wheel and I feel born again. There should be a whole section of the benefits of ACDC to staying awake while driving in the Highway Code.
0630	Arrive at a field somewhere in Exmoor. Shrewdly the organisers have arranged parking for 1000+ cars in a muddy field in early November. I couldn't possibly foresee any potential problem there.
0650	I eventually get parked after skidding and sliding across the field. Already anticipating a nightmare getting out.
0700	Erm.....it's dark, it's cold, it's windy – why am I here?
0710	Join queue to the toilets.
0720	Give up on queue and acquaint myself with a local bush.
0735	4 layers of clothes on and I set off. Only 100 miles to go (or so I thought.....!)
0750	I feel rough – I ate way too much on the way down and feel like I've got a basketball in my stomach.
0800	Start slowly overtaking riders on the rolling roads. Tag onto the back of one group for a while but even though I'm enjoying the tow there's some motormouth know-it-all in the group doing my head in so I decide to go up the road before I go insane, or kill him, or both.
0800 – 0900	It's all a blur. I'm somewhere in Exmoor.
0900	About 25 miles in near Wheddon Cross (I think) there's a really nasty climb. Lots of people are off walking and I'm in my smallest gear (39-25).

	<p>Oh God, I should have put a 27 on!! Cattle grid half way up the climb and some nob's got his wheel stuck in it. How did he do that? Was he bunny hopping sideways up the hill? Brilliant, everyone has to get off to go round him. Getting going again on a wet 15% gradient is a bit of an epic and I have to zig zag across the road like I've just downed an 8 pack of Diamond White to build up some momentum.</p>
0915	<p>Start of first really major climb up to Dunkery Beacon. It's about 7km long and rises up to about 500 metres above sea level. The basketball in my stomach has now reduced to the size of a grapefruit, so feeling better I go ok up the hill overtaking loads of the early starters. Typical bleak moor scenery at the top but it proves you don't need to go to the Alps to find some big hills.</p>
0945	<p>The top of the moor is windswept and cold, with constant undulations that are starting to wear me down. The roads are really greasy too after the previous day's torrential rain making descents pretty dodgy.</p>
1000	<p>Aaaaarrrrggghh!!!! The descent into Lynmouth on the North Devon coast is outrageous. Spectacular, but scary! Right alongside the sea and the road plunges from about 400m down to sea level in little over 3km. The air is full of the squeaking of brakes and bumholes alike.</p>
1010	<p>Straight back into another 8/9 km climb from Lynmouth to some other hill on the Moor. Fairly steady at first and spectacular with river gorge on one side and rock face on the other, but pretty steep for a few kilometres in the middle before the inevitable windswept top in the middle of the Moor.</p>
1050	<p>Over the top and eventually at the first feedstation about 50 miles in. (Halfway.....or so I thought). Bacon roll and a flapjack grabbed and I'm on my way. At this point the 100m and 100km route split.</p>
1055	<p>On my own on yet another energy sapping climb but meet up with a bloke called Guy from Camel Valley CC and we team up as we're going about the same sort of pace.</p>
1100-1200	<p>I'm struggling to remember where I was or what I was doing – but I do recall there were lots of hills. Oh yeah, next to no cars – all day – fantastic!</p>
1210	<p>Feedstation 2 (approx 70 miles). I don't bother stopping as I've got a full water bottle, power bar and a carbo gel and there's only just over 30 miles to go – isn't there?</p>

1230	Stop for a pee. Bright orange is a great colour isn't it.
1300	Feeling reasonably ok, especially on the hills where Guy is struggling a bit, but then he's strong on the flat and I can sit-in.
1330	"94 miles in" says Guy. That's great as I'm running on empty now, so only 6 miles to go.
1335	Oh no, big hill ahead!! Smallest gear all the way now and virtually no energy to turn the pedals.
1345	"99 miles" – we're nearly there!!!!
1348	"100 miles" – where's the finish? I've done enough now.....
1400	Another endless climb. I'm exhausted and am pedalling in squares. Guy has more energy left than me and goes up the road in virtual slow motion.
1405	106 miles. I can see the finish ahead but am struggling to control the bike. I've totally blown.
1409	Thank God. 107 miles, over 3000 metres of climbing, 6hours 34 minutes and I'm finished.....in every sense.
1415	I'm freezing now. The combo of rubbish weather and my body being totally spent has kicked in big style. But fear not – a ½ pint of complimentary Exmoor Beast Bitter will see me right – err no!
1445	2 roast pork rolls, a packet of crisps, 4 pastrami sandwiches, a banana, a Yorkie, a cup of tea and car heating on full blast and I'm starting to feel better.
1500	Manage to skid my way out of field without the need to be towed by the emergency tractor and look forward to drive home.
1545	Still stuck in site trying to get out.

1600	Get on my way at last.
1830	Home. Bike looks like I've just done a cyclo cross but I couldn't care less. I'll wash it soon (well, 7 days later is soon isn't it?)