

OLLIE AND ELGON'S 'PROBLEM-FREE' CYCLE FROM LONDON TO PARIS TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE MS SOCIETY

Day 1

How better to start your weekend than waking up at 4:45am with the prospect of three days of cycling to go – well that's what we did. Jumped on the 5:20 train to St Pancras which was surprisingly busy (who actually gets up at that time on a weekend?!), and chugged into London. And so the customary start photos...



Yes we both look surprisingly happy considering it was 6am in the morning and the start of day 1 – don't worry, that happiness soon faded!

We then began the escape from Central London and pretty much motored our way out of the capital. Cycling through SE London at 6:30am while people were still falling out of clubs and venturing home was definitely a surprise to see! Powered through Greenwich Park and then started ticking off the towns until we reached Ebbsfleet -->>

The temptation of jumping on the Eurostar at Ebbsfleet was pretty strong, but we persisted (at least for about 2 more miles, until a puncture arrived for Elgon!). Fortunately we had a supply of inner tubes and after about 25 minutes mucking around fixing it, we were back on our way.

After 35 miles we made our first scheduled stop of the day: bacon sandwiches at Ollie's house. Pretty sure that nutritionists wouldn't recommend fried bacon on white bread to complement your exercise routine, but they definitely went down well. Although they would probably prefer bacon sarnies to Elgon's meal on Day 2 (see later on in the story).



Having left Ollie's house (with Ollie's mum declaring that "it would be amazing if Elgon finished, and a complete miracle if Ollie finished") we carried on, with the sun beating down on us, past Rochester Castle -->>

And so we began down the A2, and despite an old woman at Gillingham who decided she wanted to randomly jump up from her seat at the bus stop and run into our path (despite there being no bus coming) and a brief exchange of pleasantries between Ollie and a chav motorist in Sittingbourne at a roundabout, we arrived in Faversham.



Walking through Faversham was an unpleasant experience as there was a hop festival going on that weekend, so every man and his dog (except us) was walking around with a pint of beer. Very, very tempting (although given Ollie's fitness levels, beer would probably not have been the best idea!).

Then we moved through the countryside and into Canterbury, then back into the countryside and on our way to Dover. A 'small' issue with one of Elgon's pedals was the only thing that held us up for 5 minutes on the way, but we didn't know at that point how big that issue would become!

A quick photo-stop at Dover Castle, and a photo looking back at the White Cliffs of Dover were our last clips of England before we shifted shores to France. *(82 miles done)*



Having scoffed some sausage and chips on the ferry, which was evidently trying to outdo Wembley Stadium in its exorbitant prices for crap food (£9 for a small plate) we departed the ferry.

And then the lightning came. And the thunder. And the torrential rain. And no streetlights. You can probably guess this didn't lead to a very enjoyable three hour journey to Saint Omer, and by the time we arrived everything in our bags had become wet (so much so Ollie's phone just broke and wouldn't turn on again). Just what you need cycling in a foreign country: no phone!

(110 miles done)

Day 2

If we were to summarise day 2, it would go along the lines of: complete bloody nightmare. Having had a relative lie-in (getting up at 8), we set off towards Amiens. Well when I say set off, we had a little stop at the Notre Dame de Saint Omer for Elgon to have another 'small' tweak on his problematic pedal -->

In hindsight, having known the day was going to turn out as it did, we probably should have given up on the cycling and gone to do some Arjo work instead:



And so about 6 miles into Day 2, we reached our first major stumbling block: Calamity Corner's pedal gave up completely and he was down to one pedal. Naturally this didn't bode well for a day's cycling through the countryside, so it was down to walking those 6 miles back to Saint Omer to find some way of fixing it.

Given this is France, nobody works on Sundays (seemingly nobody works any days but that is a different matter!), but we struck lucky at a street market where one man was probably completely stunned to see an Englishman on a bike turn up and be absolutely ecstatic to find that he was selling two long metal bolts. A whopping €1 later and we had our makeshift pedal.

With the prospect of another pedal problem occurring in the 70 miles of countryside between Saint Omer and Amiens, with no way of fixing it, we had no choice but to change our route and follow a train line through some towns. Unfortunately the route to Amiens was subject to France's favourite activity (being on strike), so at 1 o'clock the executive decision was made to cycle the day's miles (well about 10 short if we're being completely honest) in completely the wrong direction and to then get a train to the hotel in Amiens so we were back on route. Danny "The Adjudicator" Rohrbasser confirmed this was acceptable, so we were all good!

Having arrived in Amiens, Elgon took it upon himself to treat us to some nutritional goodness in preparation for the next day, aka McDonalds. Even though we hadn't eaten much all day, Elgon's calorie intake that night (see right) was something to behold. Danny later claimed on our arrival back in England that he was more impressed that Elgon had eaten 4 burgers at once than he was that we cycled to Paris. If only we'd known that at the start...

(170 miles done)

	Energy
Fanta Orange Large	210kcal
% GDA	11%
French Fries Large	460kcal
% GDA	23%
Hamburger	250kcal
% GDA	13%
Hamburger	250kcal
% GDA	13%
Hamburger	250kcal
% GDA	13%
Quarter Pounder with Cheese	490kcal
% GDA	25%
Totals	1910kcal

Day 3

So after the crap day yesterday, it was pretty fair to say that Ollie had pretty much written off any chance of getting to Paris that day, let alone by 10pm to register our bikes as luggage for the train home the next day. Although at that point, Ollie was quite happy to never see his bike again, so probably not a huge issue!

Having put contingency plans in place for Elgon to ditch his unfit partner along the route (his quote after day 2 being: "if I had known Ollie was this unfit, I would never have done it"), and having written a list of all the stations on the route in case Ollie needed to bail, we headed from the hotel bright and early at 7am.

After a few miles, we passed a cemetery and Ollie commented that he was more likely to be spending Monday night there than he was in the hotel in Paris!



To both our surprise, the morning's miles actually flew past. Despite aching legs from the off, sheer determination to wipe the smug grin off Danny's face was enough to make us conquer the first 45 miles of the day in a pretty rapid time. The negativity at breakfast that morning had completely disappeared, and the prospect of completing the challenge was actually looking like a possibility. Cue the thumbs up eh Ollie.

Mind you, it was probably something to do with the sweets we bought that morning that were providing about 90 grams of sugar per 100 grams – now that is pure energy in a packet! Either that or they were laced with speed.

Given we were now back on track, an afternoon at the races was definitely on the cards. And where better to do that than at the 'home of horse racing in France' – Chantilly.



But the happiness soon managed to dissipate after Calamity managed to break his other pedal about 10 miles later. Fortunately as we'd managed to get two bolts from the man in Saint Omer, it was a quick fix and Elgon progressed onwards with no pedals (and two incredibly sore feet). The fact that Elgon was still by far the quickest even with no pedals says something about Ollie's fitness levels! Ollie promises that he did not sabotage Elgon's bike in an attempt to make himself look better.



Problems didn't last for long though, and we were soon into Paris. After about a million stops to check the map, we finally managed to locate the Arc de Triomphe. A trip around Etoile roundabout was decided against on the grounds we would definitely have wound up dead, given cars aren't even insured going around it, so a bit of walking was in order. And within a couple of miles we were safely at the Eiffel Tower, absolutely shattered but all within plenty of time to still get the bikes on the train. In your face Daniel Rohrbasser!!!



(260 miles done)