

Water – lots of it – was the main feature of (almost) solo-rider **Dan Campbell's** quest to complete a DIY Super Randonneur with AAA points. In the latest extract of his diary of road trips, the Stoke-on-Trent-based Audaxer describes his encounters with waterfalls, potholes, sludge, mud and mire, plus an amorous bull, a team of Morris dancers, and a worse-for-wear hen party...

# Why does it always rain on me?

## DAN'S VITAL STATS

**Location:** Stoke on Trent  
**Bike:** 2011 9-speed aluminium tank  
**Age:** 44  
**Weight:** Wheel breaking (110kg)  
**Fitness:** broken and rebuilt  
**Resting Heart Rate:** 65  
**BMI:** Obese

**WHR (waist/hip ratio):** High

**Favourite food:** See food!

**All Dan's ride reports are here:**

<https://dancampbell.co.uk/audax-ride-list/>



*It was a rare occasion as I was riding with another Audaxer*

### ROCESTER AND THE MERMAID INN (AUDAX DIY, 100KM, 2.5 AAA)

For the second time in the year I tackled this Peak District route, and happily the rain held off until the last six miles from home. I took shelter, not for the first time this summer, in a shop doorway as the monsoon flooded by. I'd left home a little later than normal (4.30am) but was still able to watch the sunrise over the White Peaks - lovely. Although the rain had been kind to me, this time the wind was just as strong.

I stopped at Milldale, and as there was no-one about, I listened to the water slowly cascading over the rocks, which was very peaceful. I was hoping that I'd be able to grab a brew at Wetton Tea Room, but it was still closed when I went through.

As I left Wetton I stopped to watch a big brown bull pushing the farmer's land cruiser sideways along the field while trying to reach the lady cows who were heading off for milking. This was amusing, but also a little scary. In the end the farmer got out of his land cruiser and admonished the bull while rubbing the creature's head. This worked a treat. I spent a pleasant 15 minutes chatting with the farmer about life in general before moving on.

I was feeling tired, but was making good time compared to my previous attempt at this route. Not having the rain helped a lot, and the roads in the Peaks were still very quiet. A car did try to overtake me on the steep and fast descent, but, at 42mph, the driver couldn't keep up. I was up the next hill and turned off for Elkstone Valley before the car caught up. I was able to ride up this valley climb both times without stopping which was an excellent result.

As I approached Ipstones I had to slow down as there were cars abandoned everywhere – the Ipstones Fete! I stopped at the corner shop as normal and had a small bottle of blue milk – yummy. As I stood there, a group of Morris dancers playing instruments led the parade across the main road and out of sight.



*A sticky encounter with a group of Morris Dancers at the Ipstone Fete*

### PISTYLL RHAADR, BALA AND VYRNWY (AUDAX DIY, 100KM, 2.5 AAA)

I've only ever seen the waterfalls at Pistyll Rhaeadr from above, during a walking expedition across the Berwyn range when I was a teenager. I thought it about time that I saw the falls from the bottom. This is one of those rare occasions that I rode with another Audaxer. We also took the opportunity to undertake the two mountain roads (Llangynog Climb and Bwlch Long) to and from Bala at the same time.

It was a typical Welsh misty morning when we started from Guilsfield near Welshpool and to be honest, we never really lost the mist as every time we climbed it was into the cloud. We had a pleasant ride to Pistyll Rhaeadr with a few sharp climbs along the way, but we were looking forward to a brew at the tea shop. The waterfall can make for a spectacular photograph if you can airbrush out all the other tourists trying to get a picture. The wet rocks can be slippery in your cycling shoes, so take care.

Leaving Pistyll Rhaeadr it didn't take long to reach the first mountain road over to Bala (B4391) but thankfully it was a long gradual Cat 2 climb with a wide and fast descent off the top (watch out for the Red Kites). It does get a little twisty towards the bottom, but you pop out at

Bala Lake and it's a fast sprint to the café on the high street. We saw four Red Kites along this section and two were very close to the road.

After lunch we traced our route back to Bala Lake and traversed its length before starting to climb back over the mountain road (Bwlch Long) to Lake Vyrnwy. This road felt much steeper and it definitely becomes steeper as you near the top. I would say that we had amazing views, but we only had a few feet of visibility and misted-up glasses.

The descent to Vyrnwy is fast, and there's plenty of loose gravel and potholes, so take care. As you reach Lake Vyrnwy there's a wonderful stone arch bridge, almost hidden by the trees, but you'll ride over it at the T-junction. The road along the lake is fast and in places some of the trees which line the road would make a spectacular photo, but the weather was not on our side for photos.

The final push back to Guilsfield provides some of the steepest climbing of the day and apart from one vista towards Llanerfyl and the coast there was not much to see, except the buzzards sitting on the telegraph poles. If I do this route again, I think I'll take a flatter and more direct route back to Guilsfield.

*Background is the waterfall at Pistyll Rhaeadr*



**FOUR COUNTIES AND TWO COUNTRIES (CHESTER VIA DINKYS DINAHS – AUDAX DIY, 200KM).**

It was monsoon season as I opened the front door. Serious thought was given to closing the door and climbing back into bed. I knew it was going to be one of those rides. By the time I made it to the top of the hill, about 2km, I could feel the rain running down my skin on the way to my already cold feet. I realised that I'd left my heart rate monitor at home, but knew that if I went back to get it, I'd call it a day.

Just started, and I was not a happy bunny. By the time I reached Stone (5km), I was also very cold – so much for my winter kit keeping me warm and dry. At this point I would have settled for warm and wet. I still had hope, as I could see a break in the clouds where the first light of the sun was breaking through, so I told myself to keep going.

Pushing on in my misery, I realised that only a few years ago I'd have enjoyed the challenge of the rain. Now I'm just a feeble rider, a wannabe Audaxer. Approaching Hodnet (40km) the rain started to break, and the morning sun began to warm me; the world was a much nicer place. Although the rain had stopped, the roads were badly flooded. To be honest I never really warmed up all day, but my speed did increase mid-morning just in time for another monsoon downpour. I made it to Ford

(72kms) and sat eating my breakfast (fried egg sandwiches and a cup of tea) in my personalised and private puddle of water.

The next 70km to Chester were considerably more pleasant – it didn't rain. However, my route planning sent me down a tarmac track, which gave way to a gravel section, which turned into a wheel-gripping mud section, and finally into a swamp-like path which eventually arrived at the tarmac road. I realised I'd just needed to cycle along the road another half a kilometre and I would have avoided knee-deep mud and swamps. However, this was on me and my route planning.

It was a welcome relief to arrive at Chester where I was greeted by the mandatory hen party. I couldn't work out if they'd been at it all night or if it was just an early start. If so, they were already looking out of sorts!

I pushed on to Bunbury, and to my horror realised the cafe was closing when I arrived. But the ladies were kind, and served me a slice of cake and a warming cup of tea. I'm always impressed with the service at Tilly's Café where the staff always seem happy for a wet and muddy cyclist to sit inside to get warm. The final 40km back to Stoke on Trent passed fairly quickly but the sun was leaving me now. I just wanted to get home for a hot bath.

Once a road... the not so Merry Lane in Clive



Your room is like a pigsty... some locals near Hampton Wood, Ellesmere

**My Audax UK – a new mobile App for Audax rides**

It's almost Spring and many of us are planning which Audax rides they want to sign up for. This could be just a modest few choice events or something more complex like RRtY. But for me, this season is more focused than my usual scattering of rides as I'm aiming for my first Super Randonneur award. Pulling this together was the motivation for me to write a simple mobile app – **My Audax UK**

My plan was to design something simple to use and dedicated to helping with just the selection of events. It needed to have an easy, one-finger interface and to be very accessible. As well as that it had to be a mobile App, not an internet resource, as I didn't want to make a version for the website.

So, I produced a prototype and tentatively asked for some feedback from the community of Audax riders on Facebook. I was worried that this would be less than complementary! But it was all positive and well beyond what I expected. Members seemed to like the overall idea and lots of thoughts and ideas on how to improve the design and function of the App were suggested.

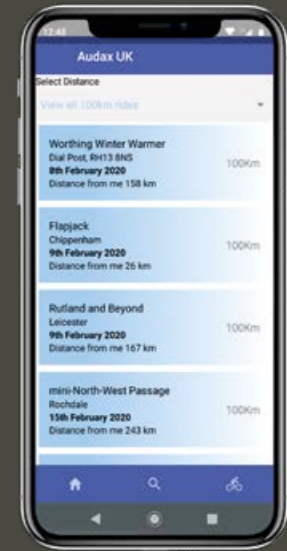
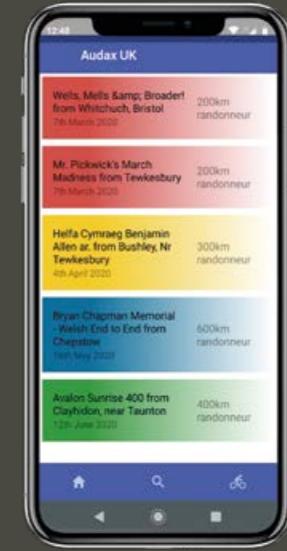
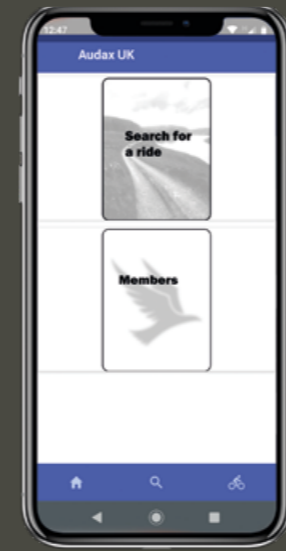
The finished App was released soon after and is now available. Since October 2019, there's been a steady stream of downloads with more than 100 members already using it.

There are two main screens: **Search for rides** and **View rides you have entered**.

The screen I use most is the search facility. You simply select the distance and a list showing rides in date order is displayed. Thanks to a suggestion from the Facebook group I've also added a **distance from your current position** to the start of the ride. Clicking on the ride links you straight to the

AUK website where you can then see more information or enter the ride. You can view the Audax rides you have entered by clicking the bicycle icon. This will display the rides you have entered in date order.

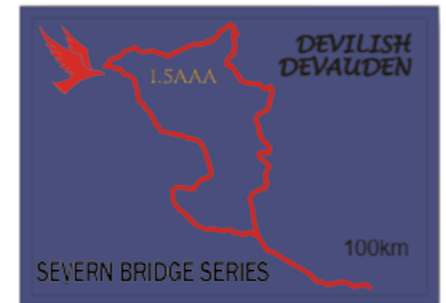
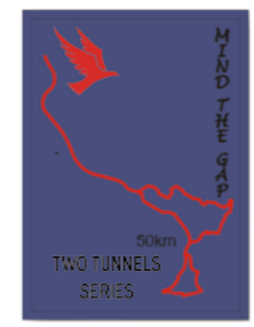
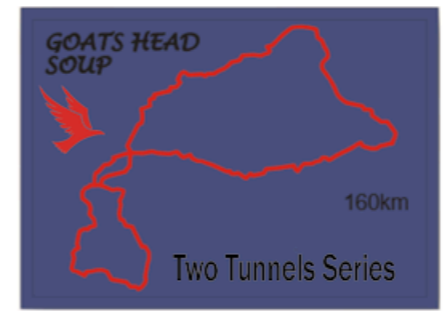
The App is currently only available for Android mobiles. It doesn't store any information, has no adverts and is free to download! Find it on the Google Play store and type "my audax UK".



**PLEASE NOTE:** This app has been developed independently by **Andy Rich** – AudaxUK, therefore, takes no responsibility for its data security, which is as yet unverified.



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