

Towards a revised and agreed Code for cycling and cycling events

Background

Nearly 30 people representing most New Forest groups, and the power bases of organised cycling met (18/7/13) to try to thrash out two things. First, a Code for Cycling Conduct, and second a Code for the organisers of Cycling Events. Clearly, some representatives did not understand the concept of a code. For clarity, the easy example is the Highway Code. There are no automatic sanctions for breach, but conduct in breach may be evidence of careless driving etc. The Government seem to favour Codes instead of new byelaws - not surprising in the light of byelaws which recently failed the judicial "certainty" test and are thus useless. Also, Codes can be drawn up with expert advice and lead to goodwill and general acceptance. Certainly the exchanges at the meeting were generally good natured, and local cyclists appreciated the comment that frequent, and sometimes extreme attacks in the local press on cyclists "by no means" fairly reflected Verderers opinions.

Re-inventing the Wheel ?

Much of this exercise will cover well trod ground. We already have the Forestry Commission Code, National Trust Code, District Council Code, National Park Code, plus those of various Forest participants. Some are specialised, some general - but all recognise the Forest as a shared facility. The 3 meetings organised will try to find agreed forms of words that reflect the expertise and good intentions of Forest user groups. That is new. The existing codes (presumably) will remain. Brief summaries could be on the cards. Literally maybe!

Words

To distill new and viable codes will not be easy. In this first meeting nuances became significant. "...words themselves may be inadequate to express the meaning which you wish to convey. They may lack the necessary precision." (Denning M.R.) See "events" below. A group of getting on for 30 is not ideal for detailed drafting, and it is hoped to keep to one representative of each group in future. Nigel Matthews (NPA/Convenor) has the onerous job of reconciling the ideas and language. This meeting looked at a general cycling code. The next will look at an Organisers Code.

Cycling Events Organisers Code

Note the term "events". Multiple meanings, some specific. For decades there have been "club" and "open" timetrials in the Forest. More recently, triathlons have become popular. There are a few road races. There are Charity Rides and Reliability Trials. In Autumn, the "Grid Iron" is a popular event. All are "events." But many of these rides are quite small. It is the rise of the Sportif or Challenge Ride which has brought in significant numbers. The new Code here will promote links between organisers and communities - to include notification etc. Also there will be an economic aspiration - an attempt to ensure local sourcing of consumables, encourage overnight stays and so on. Some good work has already been done here and the main local sportif organisers are on board.

Facing the facts

There will still be those who wish to evict cyclists from the locality, if not directly, then by rules which make cycling impractical. The Appeal Ct threw out attempts by the Met. to intimidate cyclists who were organising "Critical Mass" rides in London. These spontaneous get togethers were legitimate and notice of route could not be insisted upon. HMG want less government and were looking at relaxing some constraints on cycling events. The various sporting organisations have detailed rules of conduct, and timetrials in particular are legally approved. No Code can undermine existing law or detailed rules of promoting bodies. But, it can lead to more goodwill, more awareness by cycling visitors, and hopefully, more local spending. Cycling locally, until now, has been fragmented. The current proposals will undoubtedly bring closer links between cyclists of all disciplines.

I will be happy to explain/enlarge on any of these issues.

PdW

A Note to Members of the New Forest Access Forum

from Peter Walsh

Topic: Cycling events in the New Forest.

A few years ago, I did a short note for Forum members of some of the basic cycling issues, and to answer uninformed comments. I thought it was time to update earlier remarks, and hopefully inform newer members of the Forum of some basic issues.

As a club rider from 1960 the sport was my life. Now, on the fringe of cycling culture, I do my own thing. I rode over 1000 time trials since 1961 specialising in hill climbs. Had a 15 year break from 1975. At 64 I had my first indoor track session at Calshot, and in 2012 gained formal Accreditation at the new Bournemouth velodrome where I enjoy training. I never wanted to ride a sportif, and do not enjoy local roads, preferring Cranborne Chase. My wife and I are regular light offroaders - Tarka Trail, canal towpaths and gravel tracks. New Forest CC 1991-2012. CTC since 1996.

The following are some general points to clarify organised events, on road, in the Forest area.

There are 3 main types of events that occur on the road, time trials, sportifs (challenge rides) and road races.

Time trials are the most common - I estimate 2000 plus rider starts over a season in up to 50 events. Riders are at one minute intervals, timed on courses which usually involve left hand circuits. The vast majority are over 10m fixed distance. Police consent not required - merely notice, but if there are concerns over a course the organising club can usually re-arrange. All courses have safety audits and warning signs are used. New Forest CC give their event dates to the Verderers and will avoid any clashes with drifts. Time Trials are authorised by Statutory Instrument and the national body (CTT) arranges insurances and every rider, even in local evening events is paying £2 on top of the club entry fee which maybe another £2.

Timetrials are the main cycle racing activity in this country. It has become the focus of much veteran activity, where riders beat veteran "standard times". You may not be "fast" per se, but you may be fast for your age. Riders not only race others, but are testing themselves. **Team Timetrials** are against the clock, but with 2,3 or 4 riders working together to share the pace. Locally we have a couple of mixed sex team time trials.

Traditionally speed is sought on dual carriageways. In 1970's I rode on the Essex A12 in Friday evening events, surrounded by caravans!. Also on the Southend Arterial road. Locally, the Upton Bypass is a focus. But too many riders have died crossing "spearpoint junctions" and roundabouts. CTT requires safety traffic counts. For example, CTT stopped events between Cadnam and West Moors on the A31 some years ago. Veteran involvement is significant, but fewer riders are coming in as juniors. Parental written consent is needed.

Sportifs: Field of up to 2000, sometimes more. These are challenge rides, not races. Riders cover a fixed course and are released in groups. Riders choose their own target and are grouped accordingly. Technically these are touring events, but the riders have electronic chips for their finish timing. A finishing list is published (in alphabetical order). But, the quickest finishers do get bragging rights, and the national magazine, "Cycling Weekly" sometimes covers sportifs better than major races. (3 pp on a Brockenhurst based event.)

Compared with (e.g. The Dartmoor sportif and the Exmoor Beast) the New Forest is kindly. There are no serious climbs, the Frogham 1 in 4 is exceptional. Forest routes are more likely to lead to "bunching" as weaker riders can hang on to an overtaking group for a while. In the two more westerly National Parks, the climbs can really spread the field out. .

Sportifs/Challenge rides are used by charities to raise funds. Not all sportifs are charitable, though a lot of the shorter rides are. The 60m plus Isle of Wight Circuit is a popular fund raiser. Air Ambulance and Parkinsons are two beneficiaries. Both entry fees and sponsorship of participants can contribute.

These rides DO NOT need police consent. In London, regular mass rides "Critical Mass" led to the MET threatening to arrest the co-ordinators, demanding route details etc. Cyclists resent bullying, and the case went right up to appeal judges, who ruled that they were not required to disclose routes or get permission. There is a right to pass and repass. That said, it makes much sense to have local consultation, and the Hampshire Police have shown an intelligent appreciation of the issue, despite some shrill interventions by those who want the New Forest to be available only on their terms.

However, the cycling fraternity includes some people who are thoughtless and/or aggressive. The majority, now aware of local problems will, I suspect, behave themselves and be a credit to their sport. With prominent numbers, riders spotted acting improperly will be disqualified. The talk of "Licensing" sportifs is just that. It will not happen. HMG want deregulation. (Red Tape Initiative)

Road races: Bunched racing, first across the line wins. You start together, sometimes with a neutralised area, perhaps to clear a Town Centre. A bunch will usually be faster than solo time trialists, and these require much more policing - either static or mobile - the real issue being road junctions and keeping the bunch on the left, unless the roads are closed. There have been some road races on Beaulieu Heath and near Moreton in Dorset. The size of the fields are obviously restricted. Barnesfield Heath (ideal off road circuit) has been used in the past. We would like to see renewed access there, and an experimental 4 lap time trial went down well with those of us who competed. There is much more control over road racing, with some Forces charging for Policing or training mobile "approved" marshals. The Government Red Tape initiative is believed to be looking at some simplification in this sector. A couple of years ago, the Tour of Britain used the Forest, and the publicity with such an event is valuable to the local economy. British Cycling regulate this aspect of competition.

n.b. Triathlons The cycling component after the swimming is not "massed start" but is not spread out like a timetrial. Some triathletes lack the sheer experience of dedicated cyclists. The swim requirement locally tends to focus on Ringwood or other local leisure centre with a pool

A threat to animals? New Forest CC draw attention to the animal inhabitants in both general cycling and race promotional information. Ponies are not usually a problem to cyclists, but donkeys can annoy the humourless in Burley. Neither species seem to ever have been hurt through cycle activity. On Exmoor/Dartmoor the sheep (like horses) seem to like the grass verges.

In an autumn event near Matley, a group of piglets joined me on the road. It was suggested that a Fircroft Hotels jersey (bacon breakfasts?) worn by another rider may have upset them. My own view is that deer are the most likely cause of an accident. Several times on routine training sessions, deer have leaped fences and dashed across the road. Near misses and locational experience help. Elsewhere, a cyclist was badly injured when a deer landed on him, and they have been known to land on car bonnets too. Whole groups of deer can dash across near Huckles Brook at Ogdens.

I hope this clarifies and gives some insight into cycle sport. Of course, there are hundreds of cyclists in the area who have no interest in racing but enjoy clubruns, touring and commuting, a heritage going back to the Victorian era.