

Halfway & turn around point

CAERNARFON

BRYNCIR

GELLILYDAN

COED-Y-BRENIN

MACHYNLETH

TOP OF THE CHUTE

NANT-YR-ARIAN

THE ARCH

BWLCH ESGAIR GELLI

SOAR-Y-MYNDD

LLYN BRIANNE

LLANWRTYD WELLS

TIRABAD

BRECON

TAF FECHAN

QUAKERS YARD

CARDIFF

Start & Finish



Dave's quest took in two full - and very tough - nights of night riding



Quick rest and a cuppa in the van out of the elements before hitting the trail again

CHALLENGE

The Hobbit's Tale: a full-on route that saw Dave ride 448 miles

THE LONGEST RIDE

CHALLENGE

Dave Buchanan went for a ride and came back as the first man to ride the length of Wales and back non-stop

Words: Matt Skinner Photos: Matt Cope, Tom Simpson

I just felt dark, my vision went and everything was out of focus. I couldn't talk or walk straight - I just felt out of control," recalls Dave Buchanan of the lowest low of his longest ride - all 59 hours, 448 miles (721km) and 73,162ft (22,300m) of climbing of it. "I could feel it [a major bonk] coming and I said to [support rider] Scott Hodgkins, 'I'm in trouble, something's going wrong.' I tried to walk with the bike but I couldn't, then I started to lose consciousness. It was a strange feeling as I had no sensation of cold or warm - nothing at all." Taking him from the Celtic Ring in Cardiff to Caernafon and back

off-road along some of the toughest trails in Wales, The Hobbit's Tale ride - so-called because of its 'There and Back Again' nature - was coined in 2009 after Dave had pioneered the Welsh north to south coast to coast, riding it non-stop in a total time of 22 hours, 24 minutes and 49 seconds. "I finished it high on caffeine and said, 'Oh, that'll go as a double.'" He may have been wired, but the seed was sown. Over the intervening two years the zygote grew from a half-flippant comment to a Guinness World Record for the greatest distance ridden on a mountain bike in 48 hours. "I couldn't walk, couldn't stand, couldn't talk," Dave



3 hours in
"The zygote grew from a half-flippant comment to a Guinness World Record for the greatest distance on an MTB in 48 hours"



The riding was a mix of fire road, rocky descents, flowing and fast singletrack, and techy climbs that all kept Dave on his toes



remembers of his major bonk on the Hobbit's Tale ride. "I just collapsed in a heap about 46 hours in so I had a lie down while Scott went for help just in case. By the time Scott came back I'd had about 10 minutes shut eye. It was like I had rebooted. I could stand up, then just about walk; then balance and then just about pedal. Eventually I got down to Llyn Brianne near Llandoverly, where I got in the van and said, 'Get me up in two hours, I'm going riding.' I had those looks [from the support crew] that said, 'Oh god, I'm not sure if he is going to.' But there was no doubt in my mind: I was getting up and I was riding as I had to get home."

The start...

Dave left Cardiff's Celtic Ring at 10am on Friday 13 May and headed northwards on the Taff Trail before taking in the famous Gap descent in the Brecon Beacons, the trails around Llanwrtyd Wells and picturesque Llyn Brianne, through The Arch near Devil's Bridge, along Nant-yr-Arian's singletrack, down the steep and loose flint descent of The Chute into Machynlleth, along the rocky wonderment of Coed-y-Brenin, through Bryncir, and on to Caernafon. He arrived at Caernafon to complete the first leg of the ride some 23 hours later at 9.35am on Saturday morning, within 10 minutes of his predicted ride time.

"I felt awesome," he says of the halfway point. "Even with that head wind, even with the frost and the



Above: Cardiff's Celtic Ring was the scene for the start and end point of Dave's awesome ride

rain I got there bang on time. I sat in the car, had a chat and some food with Mark Huskisson (of Reset Films, making the sequel to *Find*, due this autumn) who was taking video.

"Jo [Joanne Evans, his partner] said, 'You look great!' 'Do I?' 'Yeah, you look really fresh.' 'Oh, great!' 'What are you going to do now?' 'I'm going to ride back.' 'You're not going to wait for a bit?' 'No, no, I'm going to ride back.' So I just got up, picked up another rider - Mike Hall - and rode back to Coed-y-Brenin."

"He arrived at Caernafon to complete the first leg of the ride 23 hours later at 9.35am on Saturday morning"

At Coed-y-Brenin Dave ate and got changed into dry clothes before continuing. Then, he recalls frankly, as he rode out the far side of Britain's first ever trail centre, "the rain dropped its guts." It rained its heart out and continued to do so all the way to Devil's Bridge in mid-Wales as he was pursued by a weather system dubbed 'Dave's Cloud' by his support crew.

As the Scotsman and Mike Hall summited the Mach 3 climb out of Machynlleth the rain went sideways, and thunder and lightning came in, the cloud cover came even lower to render an already barren landscape into a lonesome, soul sapping one.

"Mike dropped his head and said, 'If this doesn't break you, nothing will,'" Dave recalls. "I was like, 'What do you mean? I'm alright.' I was focused. It just didn't register."

Sharp focus

This focus and Dave's resolve is fundamental to who he is and what he achieves. But it wasn't something he was born with, it emerged from the darkest period of his entire life.

Dave was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 1993 while working as an aeronautical engineer for the RAF. It was a year of extreme highs and lows in which he was gravely ill, undergoing both surgery and chemotherapy, but it was also a pivotal period in his life that laid the foundations for his achievements.

"That was where I saw the first elements of what you might term



36 hours in
"Dave had no doubts whatsoever that he would complete the ride, and under his own steam"

mental fortitude because I was going down for the surgery and not knowing what was coming - because they couldn't tell me what was going to happen. My mum was in pieces as it's harder for people around you. I just wanted to get it over with, get home and get fit. I was like that all the way through and I've been like that ever since. So that was like the flicking of a switch," he remembers.

Despite the crushing low of the Llyn Brianne bonk, Dave had no doubts whatsoever that he would complete the ride, come what may, and under his own steam.

"Joanne had said, 'If you pull out of this I'm going to kill you,'" he explains of Jo's half-joking, half-serious assertion prior to the ride. "I could see it in everyone else's faces too as they'd put so much time and effort into it there was no way I could let them down. I didn't even consider it - even when I hit rock bottom... I was finishing it no matter what."

With the help of some rest and recuperation, Dave was back on the bike and on the home stretch back to Cardiff. His previous suffering was little more than a painful memory as he not only rode his way

home but as near as damn it raced - sprinting past his support riders on the steep climb to Castell Coch.

"I pumped past them and they were like, 'What the effing and jeffing are you doing?' 'I don't know I just feel good and I'm having a cycle.' It was probably faster than I've ever ridden before up a hill. I don't know what it was but it was awesome. It may never happen again but it was magic."

At 9.36pm on Sunday 15 May, some 59 hours and 36



Below: Dave rendezvoused regularly with his support team along the ride

ENDURANCE TIPS

Dave offers up his top tips to help you enjoy rather than endure an enduro

Pacing

"Go a bit slower than you think you can go. Research published recently says that you're better off going as fast as you can for the first couple of hours because every body after six hours tends to tire at the same rate. Unless you're a professional you're going to die before you get to that point! So you're better off going slower and keeping a steady pace throughout."

Drinking and moving

"When you take a drink stand up and pedal. It takes some getting used to but it stretches out your hip flexors more - especially if you practice getting a good straight leg pedal when you stand. It gets the circulation moving and stops you cramping. It gets your circulation into your Pudendal nerve - your plums area - and your feet."

Leading foot

"A lot of people tend to stand up with the same lead foot all the time. That places one side of your body under stress every time you stand. It feels awkward at first but swapping your lead leg now and again means the other half of the body shares the stress."

Break it down

"Split it down into little bits otherwise it can be overwhelming. During a race I break it down a lap at a time or a climb or section at a time. Always look at the positive side of what's coming up."

Nutrition

"I use a purely liquid diet from Infnit Nutrtn as it's so much easier for you to maintain hydration, maintain your salt status, your electrolyte status, and also to get the right amount of carbs into you - anywhere from 70-100g of carbs an hour. I drink every 15 minutes and take two or three mouthfuls - a fifth of a bottle."

Saddle sores

"I can beat saddle sores with my Christmas Pudding Chamois method. Hang your shorts inside out and rub a big daub of chamois cream on the chamois, leave it overnight and it soaks in. The next day you do more, then it soaks in; the next day it soaks in even more. You end up with a very elastic chamois, so it almost acts like a fluid cushion-like cartilage."

Aches and pains

"You can stretch while riding: stand up with your legs straight, drop your heels to get a good calf stretch and push your hips forward for a good extension stretch of the hip flexors. You can extend that to do your lumbar spine as long as you're stable. Your chest muscles can stretch as you're on the bars. If you go into the cat stretch and get right back - pull your weight away from the bike - that makes a big difference."



8 hours in
"If it wasn't fun and I didn't have fun riding I couldn't have done it"

minutes after leaving, Dave brought The Hobbit's Tale full circle as he and his growing entourage of supporters and well-wishers rode in a spearhead formation to journey's end at the Celtic Ring. Dave had lost two stones in body weight during the ride, burned 40,000 calories, climbed two and a half times the height of Everest, suffered two major bonks, beaten the weather, and ridden the length of Wales twice to secure the 48 hours World Record: all 357.9 miles (576km) and 72,178ft (20,000m) of climbing of it.

As you may expect, nothing is ever half assed with Dave. Whether that's getting carried away with his culinary creations for his support crew's thank you barbecue or for helping people in need. Typically, the official guidelines for the 'greatest distance covered on a mountain bike in 48 hours' are based on flat distance and ignores height gain. It's also suggested that it be done on an athletics track rather than across some of the most challenging terrain going.

When asked why he chose to tackle the record the hard way rather than the way Guinness recommends, Dave enthuses: "Because we're mountain bikers". A simple refrain – and one he repeats throughout our time together – but it's one that is central to who Dave is. "If it wasn't fun and I didn't have fun riding I couldn't have done it," he continues. "Even when knackered I was enjoying the descents."



Natural high

This need for a buzz for enjoyment's sake – rather than masochism's – has always been with Dave. From climbing to a very high level, motocross, through competitive boxing, paragliding, and now mountain biking it's his love of the physical outdoors and, perhaps, of physicality itself, which has delivered the excitement he needs.

Although this litany of extreme and adventure sports could propel Dave to be the archetypal extreme sports poster boy – something that he would assuredly wince at – he asserts that his sporting ability hasn't come easily. He is an everyman who has to put the work in. Although his body has been through countless broken bones; two

dislocations; the invasion of cancer and the attrition of chemo; bowel, shoulder and knee ops; a stomach ulcer – which he unknowingly raced to second in a solo 24-hour with – not to mention the stage three arthritis in his knee and shoulders. "People need to realise I'm just a normal person and I'm doing the stuff that I do because I think it's possible."

It's his glass half full, can-do attitude that's seen him rise above the wreck of his body. When asked how he would describe himself he replies simply but emphatically: "Headstrong." But such extraordinary drive does not come without a suitably incendiary fuel.

Underneath the genuine philanthropy, resilience, self-belief, and focus that Dave exudes is a man who has been battling with himself. Fighting every day against the "shit" that he admits he was at some points in the past; against the

Above: The face of a tired and fatigued man, yet also an extremely focused and determined one



Spare bikes, a support car, a mechanic's van and a small army of supporters made Dave's ride possible

CHALLENGE



Dave may not be the fastest rider out of the blocks, but he can ride, and ride, and ride



Support crew were on hand to keep Dave's calorie count up

29 hours in "Dave refuses to dwell on the negative or be defined by an illness"

RAISING AWARENESS

Dave used The Hobbit's Tale to raise money and awareness for children's cancer charity, CLIC Sargent (www.clicsargent.org.uk). At the time of going to press he had raised almost £3000 with donations still rolling in. To donate visit <http://bit.ly/cun7dk>.

Dave would like to thank his support crew and sponsors without whose belief and support The Hobbit's Tale wouldn't have been possible.

metaphorical chip on his shoulder left by the bowel cancer; against – even – his own body. Battling somehow for atonement and peace to repay a debt that you get the sense that he may never allow himself to pay off.

"I was a bit of a shit at times," he admits honestly. "For a while, and I can still be guilty of it now, I can be a bit self-centred, and..." he trails off leaving the sentence unfinished but for the silence of introspection. Then with the renewed vigour of confession he continues: "I was a shit one day in Tremadog: I was climbing and a lady came up to me and said, 'Hey can you give money for charity – it's for cancer?' My reply was, 'No thanks, I've got no money right now and anyway I

should be having that [money] – I've got cancer.' I thought that was funny to say at the time but it wasn't, the lass didn't know what to say or do. I've always regretted saying that, but that's been an indication of the chip on my shoulder. If ever I was ill or I had something wrong then [adopts melodramatic voice] 'It must've been the cancer back.' It ruined my life from that point of view for five, six or 10 years after."

Stay positive

Today, that chip has shrivelled in size and Dave refuses to dwell on the negative or be defined by an illness. Instead, he is infectiously positive and pragmatic, seeing not only ways around obstacles rather

than a dead end but also a whole new playing field. Indeed, he now views his cancer as a rebirth.

"I'll get slated depending on how I put this: [cancer] was almost, from certain viewpoints, a good thing for me. I met Jo first and foremost. I changed my job because she wanted to upgrade me, so I went to uni and got a degree and got the job I have now [as an orthotist and prosthetist]; and now I work with people who need help as I needed help myself in the past," he explains.

His positivity outstrips even that of six-time 24-Hour Solo World Champion and Dave's coach, Chris Eatough. Dave explains: "I don't think Chris thought [the Hobbit's Tale] could be done, but he also thought that if anybody could do it,



Santa Cruz Carbon Blur XC coped well with the extreme enduro punishment



SatMap Active 10 recorded all the vital data to validate the record attempt



Spare tube, mech hanger, Exposure Flare light, and gaffer taped CO₂ canister



KNCN and Shimano transmission complete with a Scottolier

THE BIKE & KIT

The bike
Santa Cruz Carbon Blur XC with Hope brakes and wheels, a KNCN/Shimano transmission, Syncros finishing kit, and Fox suspension. The shocks were tuned by Loco suspension (www.locotuning.co.uk) by improving the negative spring of the fork to ensure increased

suppleness and reduced stiction for a plusher and more compliant fork in the early stages of its travel. Dave ran a Scottolier to lube the chain and transmission without having to bend down or stop. Ergon grips boosted comfort.

GPS and lights
Dave used the SatMap Active 10 GPS and Exposure's Six Pack, Spark and Diablo lights. The GPS had to record the entire

Guinness World Record attempt non-stop and was powered by an Exposure Lights Piggy Back battery strapped under the stem thanks to a new USB cable that Exposure Lights had developed. The cable allows any USB device to be charged and/or run off the Piggy Back battery. During the ride, the one Piggy Back battery powered the SatMap GPS for 59 hours of GPS logging.

Clothing and kit
Dave used a full suite of The North Face's technical mountain biking clothing, Rehband compression tights and his own personally designed cycling-specific orthotic insoles for his shoes to relieve ischaemic numbness due to the constant pressure of pedalling. He used 661's Raji and Evo D30 gloves, and a Polar heart rate monitor.

it could be me – maybe because I can switch off, I'm a bit thick, I don't know – because I'm no fast rider but I can just ride and ride. I've learnt a lot of what's possible about myself through bloody mindedness and hard work. People now realise that we can go that bit further, and even further and faster than I've done."

For Dave, that pioneering spirit of pushing boundaries – that belief that we can go longer, further, faster than we think is possible whether relative to us as individuals or absolutely – is the means to the end. Asked what he'd like written on his tombstone when he pops his SPD clogs he replies with a grin: "I'd like to say Spike Milligan's, 'I told you I was ill cos that's just stuck in my mind.'" With a few moments more thought he comes back simply with: "'He did it, he did.'" He certainly did. But he's not done yet...

To read the full interview, log onto www.whatmtb.com. **WMB**



Dave proves that dedication is definitely what you need as he celebrates becoming a record breaker

Photos: Simon Smith