Report on Wiggle 8th and 9th April

On Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th April, I drove in the opposite direction to the cyclists from a point close to Beaulieu where the standard and epic routes diverged, back to the starting point at Somerley estate. Up until the Avon Causeway all the cyclists I encountered were on the Standard and Epic routes. Past that point, they included cyclists taking the short route. As such, the total numbers I counted would have been smaller than the total number of entrants.

The totals were:

- **Saturday**: 2,320
- **Sunday**: 1,938
- **Grand Total**: 4,258

It’s probably safe to say that the actual total would have been in excess of 4,500.

This report highlights a number of problems which fall into the following categories:

- Very poor initial Safety Advisory Group briefing
- Insufficient and inadequate marshalling
- Inappropriate signage for the conditions of the New Forest
- Poor behaviour of participants and motorists
- Poor decision making by organisers both in advance and on the day

At the end of this report I have made a few suggestions as to future events. While I realise these are unlikely to be considered, I hope we will not have to wait until there are serious accidents or even fatalities before some action is taken to improve the conditions of these mass cycling events.

**Woefully inaccurate safety brief**

In the safety brief provided by UKCE for the Safety Advisory Group, estimated numbers for this event were stated as:

- Epic Route – 350
- Standard – 300
- Short - 200

So the total for each day should not have exceeded 850.

On Saturday, I drove just over 30 miles of the route from when the first cyclist appeared near to Beaulieu back to the start at Somerley. For the majority of this route until I turned onto the Avon Causeway, the only cyclists I would have seen were following the Epic and Standard routes, so I should have seen at most 650 cyclists. My total count up to that point was 1,305. After that back to the start point, I would have seen a mix of all 3 routes but since this was now around 10:20 and the last cyclists should have started around 10am, this should not have been a large number. However it turned out to be over 1,000 giving a grand total of 2,320. Since I had no doubt missed a number of earlier cyclists who were following the short route, I think it is fairly safe to say there were in the region of 2,500 cyclists. The last ones left Somerley estate at around 10:45 – well after the advertised time.

On Sunday, by the time I reached Avon Causeway, the total was higher than Saturday at 1,313. Beyond that however I counted an extra 625 to give a grand total of 1,938. Again I would have missed a number of earlier cyclists who took the short route, so the total would have been well over 2,000. The last cyclist left Somerley estate at around 10:30 – again well after the advertised time.
Marshalling:
On Saturday I counted 8 or maybe 9 marshals. 4 or 5 in the first 10 miles to where the routes diverged at the end of Avon Causeway, and the other 4 in the remaining 20 miles to just before Beaulieu. On Sunday there was an additional marshal at Hatchet Pond giving a total of 9 or 10 marshals.

This is totally inadequate. More are needed at each junction to give positive direction to the cyclists and encourage them to slow down, and at pinch points along such roads as Thorney Hill to Burley so as to slow the cyclists down and encourage them to give way when appropriate.

The reason for the uncertainty in numbers of marshals is that the person standing at the junction of Matchams Lane and Avon Causeway appeared to be a marshal but was not standing in a particularly sensible location or doing any active marshalling.

Other marshalling problems included:

Approaching along C10 towards junction with B3055 at Marlpit Oak. Events marshal had parked his car on verge contrary to New Forest bylaws and obscuring road signage including their own one advising extreme caution!
On Sunday the marshal for this junction was in a much more suitable position on the B3055 opposite the junction indicating to cyclists when it was safe to cross.

At the B3347 Junction with Avon Causeway, the marshal was illegally stopping traffic on the B3347 instead of using her STOP sign to warn cyclists coming up Avon Causeway to the junction. Official traffic control needs to be implemented.

Sunday - correct marshalling though his STOP sign was round the wrong way!

Can you spot the marshal here near this A31 junction? Look beyond the cyclist on the right.

Or was the marshal here? If so, they were not being particularly obvious or helpful.
Signage problems
Like last year, almost certainly unauthorised 40 mph signage was in use - this time on the road that goes past Somerley estate. While I believe all roads where the cycle route crosses should be subject to lower speed limits, this must be done properly by temporary traffic orders. Any other signage could cause considerable difficulties when apportioning blame in the event of accidents.

Signs driven into verges
As in previous years, dangerous metal stakes were used to hold signs on the verges such as this one on the C10 between Longslade View and the B3055. This presents a significant danger to the forest animals.
Staples were used to fix signs to some wooden structures which when removed after the event, left sharp spikes sticking out where forest animals could be injured. This example is at the cattle grid on Pitmore Lane next to Shirley Holmes.

Far greater care needs to be taken to consider the safety of the free roaming New Forest animals with all the activities relating to these events.
Bad behaviour

There appeared to be far more aggressive cyclists this year than last year. It’s as if all the improvements observed last autumn have been totally forgotten. A few examples from Saturday:

1. on road from Burley to Thorney Hill. Cyclist tried squeezing past me on one of the pinch points instead of slowing to give way to me:

Generally it appears that cyclists en-masse believe that they should not have to slow down for such hazards and hence should always be given right of way. This does not encourage best behaviour from either cyclists or motorists.
2. Dangerous overtaking of wobbly cyclist on cattle grid at Thorney Hill.

This was much more dangerous than it looks in these photos owing to the camera’s very wide angle lens. These cyclists almost ended up in a heap in front of me which explains why I had to brake to a standstill. The one on the outside should not have been overtaking with me coming towards them – let alone with the cyclist wobbling around across the cattle grid.
3. This cyclist along Station Road between Burley and Wootton did not want to be delayed along with everybody else. Traffic had slowed due to cyclists in front and the traffic coming in opposite direction. This cyclist seemed determined to overtake me on either one side or the other despite the congestion, making it extremely dangerous for himself and others by adding an extra hazard into the mix. Again the camera has a wide angle lens making him appear further away than he actually was. Much of the time he was inches away from the rear of my car or coming up along the inside.
4. Cyclist cutting corner going into Hundred Lane Pilley. Fortunately I was driving very slowly at this point and was able to avoid him.

5. Five cyclists passing this dog walker on a very narrow stretch of Boldre-Pilley road with me coming in opposite direction. Clearly no thought of waiting until it was safe.

6. Shirley Holmes – had to brake hard for this cyclist way over on my side of road.

7. Followed almost immediately by another who was too busy overtaking to notice any vehicle coming in the opposite direction.

8. Burley end of Road from Thorny hill to Burley. Group of five cyclists speeding through pinch point inches away from these 4 ponies 2 of which were actually in the road. The cyclists made no attempt to take a wide berth or to slow down. Another 3 followed them in their haste to get through the pinch point before me.
9. Further down this road towards Thorney Hill, cyclists had absolutely no intention of slowing down for any of the pinch points meaning the motorist was always forced to give way. This is unacceptable. We must share the roads equitably.

10. On several occasions, I had to brake to a standstill because a motorist was on the wrong side of the road attempting to overtake a large group of cyclists. The problem generally is that the cyclists do not maintain sensible gaps between groups and the groups are too large. I counted several groups of more than 10 cyclists, a few around 20 and the largest was 29. This is wholly inconsiderate of the other road users. The motorists will always be blamed for dangerous overtaking, but the cyclists must show more consideration to enable the motorist to drive safely.

This example below was on Sunday alongside the A31 about a mile from the main road junction near Somerley. Here the person clearly at fault was the motorist.

From my observations I would consider a group of 6 cyclists riding 2 abreast is the maximum safe number. Each group needs to leave a large gap in front for vehicles to overtake into.
And finally, how could the organisers ever have allowed this pair to take part without insisting on the adult wearing a high-viz jacket? The child looked to be around 5 or 6 years old. This particular road has a 60 mph speed limit!

And how could the organisers have decided it was a good idea to route this event through Burley at the same time as the Palm Sunday parade?
My suggestions to address all these problems include

First and foremost, organisers of any event need to be required by law to abide by such bylaws and codes of practice as are in place. This includes New Forest bylaws such as those regarding erection of signage and removal after the event etc. along with the New Forest Cycle Events Charter. It should be possible to ban any organisers from holding any event that does not comply.

1 – If we are going to have such large events, then either some of the roads should be closed to all other traffic, or they should be temporarily made one-way to prevent conflict between cyclists and other road users. Traffic controls should be in place at dangerous intersections.

2 – Temporary speed limits need to be in place restricting all motor vehicles to maximum 30 mph for the duration of the event.

3 – Marshals must be positioned at every junction where the cyclists exit and enter, and if two-way traffic is present, at every identifiable pinch point. They need to be trained in what to do at that location, and instructed to note and pass on the number of any cyclists who fail to adhere to the highway code and the New Forest Cycling code or who are seen to be riding in an aggressive or inconsiderate way. Such cyclists should then be banned from future events.

4. The New Forest Cycling Code needs to be tightened to include such things as ride in groups of 6 max leaving gaps for passing cars to move into, be prepared to give way to other road users where appropriate, etc.

All costs of any such measures must be borne by the event organisers.

Much more also needs to be done to educate both cyclists and motorists on the correct way to share the roads. This is a general observation, not just one relating to such mass cycling events as this.

The organisers must also engage with the local communities. For example, it was ridiculous to have organised such an event to coincide with the Palm Sunday parade in Burley. Contrast this event with the way the New Forest Marathon is organised – where local residents are encouraged to volunteer to be marshals, and the organisers consult with the parishes from planning through to the actual event. Only by talking with the communities can the organisers ever understand how our environment differs from other locations where their events are held.

Hugh Marchant
Sway Parish Councillor

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