

PEDDLERS IN THE MIST

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
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I'm always seeking new ways to push my limits and step out of the comfort zone. Give me a challenge and I will embrace it with open arms. You would think the harder the challenge, the less appealing, but for some bizarre reason it attracts my attention more. I knew that being located in the up and down (mainly up) dale of Rochdale that I wouldn't expect anything less than a leg burning ride.

Pulling up to the event, I expected to see a bustling headquarters filled with a mass of eager lycra clad cyclists busying around having a laugh with their riding buddies. Instead the

weather matched the serious atmosphere that I was now a part of. The heated indoor area for signing on was where everybody was, cyclists all huddled close, mentally preparing to face the cold conditions. Trying to stay upbeat and positive I dressed up in my winter riding kit. Bib fleece leggings, overshoes and layers that even an onion would be proud of.

I came into this sportive very naïve. What was awaiting me was going to be a shock to my out of tuned sportive mind and body. The briefing at the start was a relief as I was raring to go but with no clue of the important intricate details

Totally absorbed in the moment, suddenly I saw writing on the road emerging from the fog. Cav and Froome and a mass of other names penetrated the tarmac that oozed memories of the world's greatest cyclists that graced the roads during stage 2 of the 2014 Tour De France. I was aware that somewhere en route I would be faced with this little 5 mile encounter, but I didn't expect to enjoy it as much as I did. You would think the markers counting me down kilometre by kilometre would deflate me. Quite the opposite, it made me push harder. Reaching the top, it felt a

descending I found myself smiling at the long flowing traffic free road awaiting me. I noticed this is where I gained on the riders who had effortlessly gobbled me up on the climbs. Picking off cyclists one by one, I started to wonder if there was something I should know as they made their way down cautiously. I vaguely overheard a chap shout to his buddy about many falling off last year due to the icy conditions. With a moment contemplating slowing down, I thought it would be a waste of a good reward. Coming from the extreme sport of downhill of the off-road variety, I would say I'm pretty confident handling my two wheeled machines. The ice and pot holes were my equivalent to boulders and drop-offs that I used to attack with passion.

Every now and then a solo rider would slowly crawl past, muttering a quick hello through gritted teeth. The majority of the way round there was an eerie silence and I missed the usual camaraderie I tend to get during a sportive as this can take your mind off plodding up a hill, and always helps when you can give encouragement to each other.

All in all the Evans RideIt staff were very helpful and organised. The signage was excellent for newbies to the area. With my mood being a mixture of grumpiness, exhaustion and happiness; I rolled into the finish pit. It made my day to have the staff welcoming me with an enormous very well done. The locals were saying at the finish 'anyone who didn't know the route would think those climbs were never going to end' and indeed it is a ride that will stay in my catalogue of memories for many years to come.

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such as what signs to look out for and where the feedstations were.

I have done some hilly rides in my time taking in severely graded climbs but this one was relentless with what felt like never ending climbs and never clearing fog. The harsh haze limited my vision leaving me oblivious to the surprises the route had to offer. For a moment the fog shifted and I was stunned by the outstanding scenery. It was as if I had rolled out of the wardrobe into a winter wonderland, surrounded by rippling hills sprinkled with snow.

very desolate place. I was only a little disappointed there was a lack of cheerleaders or even a fanfare with a gathering of spectators to welcome me over the crest. Conquering England's longest continuous hill-climb known as Alp d'Cragg is one I can now tick off the bucket list.

Climbing hills can be very satisfying and one good aspect is that at some point it's inevitable that you will have the pleasure of going down the other side. These slopes certainly reflected the hills in terms of severity. Being a fan of

