



Staying local

THE SHERIFF'S Ride 1-8 August 2020 was a great success on many levels. First and foremost it raised comfortably over £3,000 – a significantly larger sum than the £2,000 that we targeted – for the first-class Staffordshire Community Foundation which has done so much to help out the people of Staffordshire through the COVID-19 crisis.

Second, it covered over 300 miles and visited 30 tourist attractions and other points of interest throughout the county. Third, we met numerous charming, interesting people committed to making a great contribution to our communities in Staffordshire. It was also a lot of fun, not only for all of us who participated, but for our hosts who enjoyed the publicity and buzz of promoting the amazing landscapes and places of Staffordshire.



Above: Flash, the most northern and highest point – the summit of our ride and a little way past the halfway point of our 300 mile journey

Below: The finish at Blithfield Hall – Charlie Gillow was substituted by Revd Simon Davis for the last two days Photo credit: John Hyde
Below right: At Wightwick Manor where the T-shirts came into their own



The cycling posse taking an ice cream break at Moseley Old Hall (National Trust). Left to right: Swampy, Charlie (the High Sheriff, Charles Bagot Jewitt), Rupert, Toby and Charlie Gillow, wearing the T-Shirts printed for photo shoots at each venue

Would we all do it again?
Unequivocally yes; we had a great group with a fifty-year age range from youngest to oldest, who completely 'gelled' as a team. We also visited a huge number of fascinating places, learning a lot as we went. Staffordshire is too easily forgotten by people as they thunder through on the M6 but as we proved, it is a fascinating and hospitable county with the most incredibly varied rural and industrial landscape. We only scratched the surface but our conclusion was the same as that of the opening line of Phil Drabble's excellent book, *The County Books: Staffordshire*, written over 60 years ago on the character of Staffordshire:

'I believe that nowhere in England is anything to be found which can approach the variety of Staffordshire.'

It is hard to express the pleasure of cycling and camping as a 'holiday' but there is something special in setting out from home and being self-contained and

without the need for trains or boats or planes or expensive accommodation. The bonus of having a group of people to do it with makes it even more special. I was very impressed by the two 16-year-olds who had no real idea of where we were going or how long it would take each day, but they approached each ride like young puppies – flying ahead of us and veering off to do tricks and jumps on any wide verge or open space with the enthusiasm of youth and always laughing and joking with each other. I was also quietly pleased that as the oldest member of the group by far I was able to keep up and tackle some of the punishing climbs and descents found between Leek and Flash, the highest village in Britain.

For a whole week we were able almost to put behind us the events of 2020 and to witness the efforts of people around the county who are all trying to re-shape their lives and livelihoods to accommodate the increasing demand for local days out and 'staycations' in Staffordshire. If we can all re-learn how to live and shop locally and to appreciate the remarkable places on our doorsteps rather than travelling further and further to satisfy our holiday demands then I for one would be delighted.

◆ Howard Price

Member of the High Sheriff of Staffordshire's cycling posse; landscape gardener

