

charity



TPPL bike ride raises £19K for Cancer Research UK

TPPL MD James Brennan and his brother Simon marked the tenth anniversary of the death of their brother Tony from cancer with a 410-mile charity bike ride in September to raise vital funds for all those impacted by cancer.

Tony Brennan died in 2014 at the age of just 36 from pancreatic cancer. His father, Jim, known to many in the industry, sadly passed away aged 69 following a brave battle with oesophageal cancer in January 2023. In their memory, and for all those other relatives and friends impacted by or lost to cancer over the years, the brothers conceived the idea of the charity bike ride.

Along with some close friends and relatives, James and his two brothers had taken part in two previous charity bike rides with specialist

organisations, cycling 300 miles over three days from London to Paris in 2015 and 380 miles across four days from Paris to Geneva in 2019. The latter included a former Tour De France category two climb through the Jura Mountains. Between them, they raised more than £30,000.

As 2024 is also the 20th anniversary of TPPL, which was founded by Jim Brennan, Stephen Hall, and James Russell, it was decided that this latest charity bike ride would start from TPPL headquarters in Cambridgeshire and finish on the North

Berwick coast at Archerfield Golf Club, East Lothian, the location for the 20-year celebration TPPL golf event.

While discussing their plans, Pete Vickers, TPPL's Business Development Manager for Southeast England, expressed an interest in joining the ride. Pete himself had been personally impacted by cancer as both his parents were diagnosed with cancer in the last five years, his mum with endometrial cancer and his dad with cancer of the nose, both still fighting. Pete is also no stranger to charity events of this nature, having previously tackled



Above:

The TPPL team completed the 410 miles over four days from 6-9 September, roughly broken down into 100 miles a day for the first three days and 110 miles on the final day, with several minor deviations every day.

THE ROUTE

Day 1

TPPL Head office, Oakington, Cambs to Sutton in Trent, Lincs

Day 2

Sutton in Trent to Bishops Monkston (near Ripon), North Yorkshire

Day 3

Bishops Monkston to Carlisle

Day 4

Carlisle to Archerfield (North Berwick)

challenging fundraising events, including the Northampton Half Marathon in aid of Brain Research UK in September 2022.

The route from Cambridgeshire to North Berwick was calculated at 410 miles using 'claimed' cycling-friendly paths and roads. The plan was to perform the trip self-funded and self-supported, meaning that not only would every penny donated go directly to the chosen charity Cancer Research UK, but that all expenses for bikes, equipment, food and drink, travel, accommodation, and the support vehicle would be covered in full and independently by the riders, alongside some helpful contributors.

Initially, all three Brennan brothers were planning to take part. However, as the event drew closer, one had to pull out because of work commitments in Canada, leaving James, Simon, and Pete to ride from Cambridge to Scotland, along with Mick Martin, the Operations Director at TPPL. Mick was the trio's one-man support crew, or, in other words, the designated driver, head of logistics, barista, chef, motivator, mechanic and general locator of essential and depleted items.

The plan was to complete the 410 miles over four days from 6-9 September, roughly broken down into 100 miles a day for the first three days and 110 miles on the final day, with accommodation planned and booked in advance.

Day one: TPPL Head office, Oakington, Cambs to Sutton in Trent, Lincs

James Brennan said about the ride: 'We were hopeful for fair weather, light winds, and a dose of luck with kind cycling surfaces and road conditions, as we relied heavily on a cycle-mapping website to determine the route. With great excitement and a hefty dose of trepidation, our cohort was waved off by staff at TPPL headquarters, with breakfast rolls and coffee to fuel the first leg of our journey.'

'The weather on day one was pleasant, with clear sunny skies, a light northerly breeze, and temperatures forecast into the late 20s as the day progressed. We set off across the best surface of our trip, a guided busway with a cycle path alongside it.'

'A fairly flat 35 miles in the morning sun to Oundle led us to our first stop in good spirits. This was a false dawn as the next hilly section brought us back to earth with a bang. There were numerous short but steep climbs (up to 14% gradients) over a distance of 30-odd miles around Oakham and out past Rutland Water. This coincided with the temperature peaking at 28 degrees, and a few initial knee pains for Pete and bike issues for Simon.'

'Thankfully, at our brief refuel stop at 70 miles, we were furnished with lots of liquids and Mick's award-winning ham and cheese

toasties cooked in an enclosed skillet pan over a camping stove. This proved to be the first of many essential contributions from our team's engine room.'

'As the temperature dropped and the terrain levelled, we cycled into a glorious sunset and a much more pleasant run for the final section of day one, where we arrived at our first night's accommodation for a meal and a few pints. We had ridden 103.9 miles – thanks to a few short accidental diversions.'

Day two: Sutton in Trent to Bishops Monkston (nr Ripon), North Yorkshire

'We set off on day two in near-perfect cycling conditions after some morning drizzle. The day was uneventful in many respects. It was very flat, with many roads and paths running through or alongside farms for the first 80 miles, with a north-easterly wind blowing in our faces. The biggest challenge was the tedious terrain, which didn't distract our attention from the aches and pains of too many hours on not exceptionally comfortable saddles.'

'Once we hit civilisation in Selby, we were treated to around 10 miles of cycle path all the way to York and our first real bouts of rain. Following a much-needed fuel break of caffeine, porridge and sugary treats in a rainy leisure centre carpark in York, we set out on

charity



Above: James, Peter and Simon raised more than £19,000 plus gift aid. They are incredibly thankful to everybody who pledged to their cause.

the last 35-mile section of day two through the North Yorkshire countryside to the pub where we would stay for the night. Again, we went a slightly longer route than planned at 103.5 miles.'

Day three: Bishops Monkston to Carlisle

'Even before the trip, we expected day three to be the toughest, as we would be going across the Pennines, past England's highest pub, and in total climbing over 7,100 feet in elevation, reaching not far short of 2,000 feet at the highest point.

'From the get-go on the initial climb through Ripon to Masham, the weather was horrendous, and we cycled the best part of 80 miles through torrential rain, which added to the challenge of the ascents. These reached 16% at times, so it was tough going, and because of the rain, we couldn't even enjoy the stunning scenery.

'The weather even deprived us of the joy we had hoped for during this day, the descents down the Pennines. It was so slippery that the downhill were worryingly unsafe at times. Thankfully, our trusty support, Mick, was invaluable, offering coffee and toasties to help warm our stomachs and spirits.

'We eventually made it to Carlisle soaked through, bodies tired and aching but without major incident, and our spirits buoyed by what we'd achieved in such awful conditions and the continued support and sponsorship we were receiving, which was why we were doing it. We

arrived safely after riding 99.7 miles in total.

'As any good athlete will attest, a day of extreme exertion must be celebrated, and for us that was a slap-up meal of Domino's pizza, washed down with a few tins of lager in a most welcome dry apartment. Then we set about cleaning, drying and preparing equipment for the final and longest day of our trip.'

Day four: Carlisle to Archerfield (North Berwick)

'Despite always knowing day three had the most climbing and was likely to be the toughest day, we realised that we'd probably put day four out of our minds as it seemed so far away at the start. Yet day four not only had a significant number of hills between leaving Carlisle and our final destination on the North Berwick coast, it was the longest day in terms of distance

'There were five separate occasions where we cycled above 1,100 feet, of which three took us to almost 1,250 feet, meaning we were up and down for most of the day. Luckily, while the hills were often much longer than the Pennines, they were not nearly as steep (usually 5-7% gradient, with only very occasional steeper sections).

'Fortunately, we were blessed with pleasant if rather cold weather, which stayed with us for the whole day, and allowed us to admire the scenery of the Scottish borders. However, we also experienced the major route malfunction of our trip (through no fault of our own), which meant we had to carry our bikes for

½ mile through the dense undergrowth of brambles and stinging nettles, culminating in a clamber over a fence into an understandably irritated farmer's residence. However, he soon understood once we explained how and why we had ended up outside his house.

'Day 4 overall did bring out many of the niggles accumulated over the trip as our bodies were starting to rebel. Pete even took a nasty fall, which broke his helmet and gave him several bruises but which could have been much worse.

'Eventually, through fading light, we were greeted by our trusty support Mick and our welcoming party as we reached the Archerfield estate. We were handed a nice cold can of lager each and glided our way through the estate, exhausted but grateful, and rode the last mile to our accommodation having completed 110.5 miles on the day and 417 in total.

'With hindsight, spending two days golfing after such an exhausting journey wasn't the best idea, but it was great to spend valuable time with colleagues, suppliers, partners and customers, who participated in a number of charity competitions during the two-day TPPL event.

'And between the three of us, we raised more than £19,000 plus gift aid, which we are incredibly proud of. We are so thankful to everybody who pledged so generously to our cause. Anything that can go towards helping fight this awful disease through funding further research makes every ache, pain, and blemish more than worthwhile.