

The Michael Ride

Nearly all the ride is covered by OS Explorer Maps 200 (*Llandrindod Wells & Elan Valley*) and 201 (*Knighton & Presteigne*) apart from a brief road stretch around Bryngwyn.

Total distance: 57.7 miles. There are no major climbs, but unfortunately rather a lot of minor ones. There are four off-road sections of two miles or longer. The Start and Finish happen to be where I was based, so could be altered to suit your convenience. On my ride I dealt with two punctures, a creaking headset and a loose spoke, so be prepared. The ride took me 10 hours in unseasonably hot, dusty conditions in April. It would be a considerably muddier, and greater, challenge to attempt it in daylight on the feast of St. Michael on 29th September.

As well as the 7 Michael churches the ride also passes close to places of worship at Yardo, Gladestry, Huntingdon, Newchurch, Llandegley, Bleddfa and Kinnernton. Much more information about the places visited on the ride can be found in the excellent *Radnorshire: A Historical Guide* by Donald Gregory ([Gwasg Carreg Gwalch](#), 1994).

An important issue to bear in mind is that the ride covers very remote territory with almost no opportunity for buying refreshment. I wished I'd carried more food with me. There is the [Red Lion Inn](#) at Llanfihangel-Nant-Melan (which hadn't opened by the time I reached it). Unfortunately when I did the ride both pub and tea-room at Bleddfa had closed, but I understand both are reopening in June 2011. It is also possible to alter this route slightly to enable a stop at Penybont.

Stage 1 (~12 miles)

START: From [Highbrook Farm Cottages](#) (229624) at foot of Bache Hill on S edge of Radnor Forest, L along B4372 to Crossfield Lane (234627, marked as bridleway), R at T junction to Bronze Age [Four Stones](#) (246608); take the byway to the R immediately before the field with the stones (it can be muddy, and there is a ford over Summergil Brook just before the end), all the way to junction with A44 next to a cottage (237602). R on A44, then next L (235602), up hill to a small white chapel at Yardo (222588), turning L and then almost immediately R, following road up to a T junction (222580). Straight ahead (SA) following a signed bridleway; keep to the L of the house and follow the track down and through a farmyard (strictly this is a footpath, but the bridleway to the R of the house has been out of use) before emerging on a straight farm track which meets the road at 230573. Turn R then L through a gate (225572) to descend a muddy, stony path to ford Gilwern Brook (224566). The climb up the rocky path beyond the ford is steep and technical (I still haven't managed it) - emerge at a junction of three lanes, SA and enjoy a fast road descent into Gladestry (231551).

Turn L and then R (233552 sign Huntingdon) along flank of Hergest Ridge, then R at 243548 and climb to Huntingdon, where you start a brief, unmarked foray into England. SA at 250538, continue along lane with swooping descents, over River Arrow and back into Wales (252514). Turn R up a byway at 251511 and climb a muddy track/streambed to emerge at 248506, where you find the first church, [Michaelchurch-on-Arrow](#), immediately to the R.

Stage 2 (~5 miles)

Turn R out of church and follow lane along the Arrow valley to Newchurch (216507). Turn L onto B4594, off the edge of OS201. Turn R onto lane (196492 sign Bryngwyn Church) and climb to the second church at [Bryngwyn](#) (187496).

Stage 3 (~7 miles)

Follow lane N out of Bryngwyn (sign Glascwm), across common, then descend to a T junction (190517) - by now you are on OS200. L to rejoin Arrow valley, to a crossroads (185529), then SA to New Cwmceste Farm, where the metalled road becomes first a lane, then eventually at 177548 a deeply-rutted byway as the ride's first major off-road section begins. Continue along the obvious track through this beautiful valley, passing to the R of a small plantation as you ford Gilwern Brook for the second time (181562) and then climbing to the crest of the hill, where you see Radnor Forest for the first time since the start. Pass to the R of Llanwentre Pool and bear L away from the track through the next gate, descending across a grassy field to a junction of paths (188576). Take the signed bridleway down the slope - it's a great moment when you spot church #3 nestled in the valley below and to your L. Turn L at the next junction and take a fast descent down a stony track all the way down to join the A44 through a farmyard (182582). The third church at [Llanfihangel-Nant-Melan](#) is just 100m to the L.

Stage 4 (~9 miles)

Continue W along A44 then take a marked bridleway to the R (177583). The well-marked track takes you through a farmyard and past a bungalow, but most importantly keeps you off the busy, dangerous A44. Eventually there is no option but to climb back to rejoin at 164592. Turn R, and take care as the road crests the hill and twists in and out of the western folds of Radnor Forest. You pass [Castell Crugerydd](#) (158593), where Giraldus Cambrensis is supposed to have spent his first night on his Journey through Wales in 1188, on a hillock to the L. Eventually, just before a phone box, turn L onto a track marked Public Footpath (148606), descend a stretch of metalled road just over the crest, and bear R through a gate to begin the second big off-road section. A well-marked byway, which for the most part is a rutted track, takes you westwards, climbing gently. There's a short section of metalled road beginning at 114597, at the end of which there is a stiff climb across a grassy field. Reward comes at 100595 when the staged descent - one of the highlights of the ride - begins. Pass the SW edge of a pool, and continue down at ever-increasing speed, taking care to pull up sharply after a tight RH turn for a gate (082603). At the bottom of the slope take the marked footpath to the R through a field with horses - strictly you should walk the bike, but in any case make sure you treat walkers and other animal life with courtesy and consideration. At 083604 the track becomes a superb fast grassy descent, which emerges through some woodland at Shaky Bridge (084613). From here a short push up a footpath brings you to the fourth church at [Cefnlllys](#).

Stage 5 (~9 miles)

From the church climb the grassy hill to join a broad track (still technically a footpath) running NE. Pass through the gated field to the L of the house at the summit to rejoin metalled road at 090617. At next junction keep SA and then R at T junction (107628). Swing to L after bridge crossing River Ithon, and then SA ignoring 2 roads to R, heading

towards Llandegley Rocks. Climb to 120613, then turn sharp L through one gate, then a second, turning R at Bailey-Shon-Llwyd (117621), then L at T junction (123624) and finally to junction with A44 (132631). Turn R and then next L (138630 sign The Pales), and climb lane to T junction (140643). To the L just up the hill is [The Pales](#) - a famous Quaker burial ground (since 1673) and Meeting House (built 1717) - but Michael says go R. Follow main road sharp L at 148647, and continue along the flanks of Radnor Forest, catching glimpses of church #5 in the valley below. Descend to join A488 at a milestone (146664), and turn R to find the fifth church at [Llanfihangel Rhydithon](#) 300m further along.

Stage 6 (~8 miles)

Take lane to immediate W of church and climb steeply uphill to junction with byway (154662), turning L to begin the third off-road section along the NW flank of Radnor Forest. The byway is well-marked and easy to ride, though occasionally rutted. Ignore the obvious track to the L at 173673, instead choosing the grassy track SA. Eventually you rejoin the A488 (184680), and enjoy a fast road descent into Bleddfa in the Lugg valley (or an optional byway climbing to L from 194683 if you still have the legs - I didn't). Through Bleddfa (with an optional visit to the [Bleddfa Centre](#)), after switching back to OS201, turn R onto minor road (209682), climbing initially gently above the valley. Go through the farmyard at 222675 and bear R up a rough track through a gate to begin the final off-road section, eventually entering woodland, at which point the path becomes very steep. By some means or other get to the next junction, with a broad forest track at 228674, and follow it L down the slope. Eventually the track swings to point SE, and there are fine views across the Lugg valley to [Pilleth](#), site of the victory of Owain Glyndŵr over Edmund Mortimer in 1402, now marked by a clump of redwood trees. At 244674 the main track swings sharply round to the L - instead follow a smaller trail SA up a short steep climb to a col, to be rewarded with an exhilarating descent down a stony track, rejoining metalled road at 242665. Follow the lane 300m to the R to find the sixth church at [Cascob](#) at the top of a short rise.

Stage 7 (~4 miles)

Retrace your pedalling and follow the lane down the valley to the junction with the B4357 (267652). SA, crossing [Offa's Dyke](#) eastwards at Yew Tree Farm (272651), then turn R (277649) up the hill, following signs to find the seventh church at [Discoed](#).

Stage 8 (~3 miles)

The final climb up the lane S from Discoed is brutal (you may prefer to swallow your pride and return to the B4357, offering an easier climb to Beggar's Bush - I wish I had). Turn R at top (277640), back over Offa's Dyke, and passing the entrance to the Iron Age hill fort at [Castle Ring](#), descend to the Beggar's Bush crossroads (262642 - so named by Charles I in 1645, disappointed with the hospitality offered at the nearby farm). SA and enjoy fine views to the L over the Vale of Radnor on the final swoop down the B4372 bringing you back to the Start.