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# FINISHING GB DURO 2023 | STEVEN WHITE

By Steven White



Mike Hall once said, "Nothing worthwhile comes easy." The hardest part is often just getting to the starting line. The anticipation, fear of failure, final preparations, and last-minute surprises can make it feel like everything is telling you to stay home. The question is, do you listen to those doubts, or do you keep pushing through the obstacles?

I faced a major hurdle when I discovered that my Son Dynamo, which charges my lights and other electronics, was damaged just days before the race. Working with Root Cycles in Stirlingshire, I tried to resolve the issue using a spare from a different wheel. Unfortunately, a spoke count mismatch prevented it from fitting my preferred HUNT wheel setup. Additionally, the Cycling World Championships had closed all roads around the delivery of a new wheel. The shop managed to match a £22 Bontrager wheel, and with a fresh build and the installation of the Son Hub, it became my only option. However, the wheel felt strong but sluggish.

Rule No.1 of GBDURO: No flights allowed. This means no air travel; participants must rely on land transport or self-powered means to reach the starting point at Land's End. This rule reduces the carbon footprint and ensures that trails are not overcrowded. I embarked on a 13-hour train ride from Scotland to Penzance, during which I had further concerns about my front wheel.

Fortunately, my race was saved when Neil Phillips, an ultra-cyclist, connected me with Luke Humphreys, the owner and CEO of Pacenti Wheels, who offered me a carbon wheel with a Son Dynamo setup for the race. I couldn't believe my luck until I saw the wheel at Luke's doorstep. With my front wheel switched, I shifted into race mode, eliminating excuses and doubts, and focusing on the mission ahead.

After hopping back on the train to Penzance, I did my final food shopping and enjoyed some hearty meals at Wetherspoons before cycling the 15 miles to Land's End campsite. In keeping with tradition, I met up with 31 other cyclists at Sennen Cove beach for beers. We were a mix of nerves and excitement, ready to embark on the 1,168-mile journey of the GBDURO.

## Stage 1 - 400 miles: Land's End to Daf's Farm (Ysbyty Cyfyn, mid Wales)

The first stage of GBDURO began with an 8 am start from Land's End. I felt great as I rode into the first leg of the race, making my first stop for supplies at Great Torrington, 123 miles in. There, I caught up with the frontrunners: Donnie Campbell, Cristian Batista, and Alex Boswell, who were also stocking up at the gas station.

Continuing through the night and riding over Exmoor National Park at 11 pm, I had a collision with a roe deer. Despite the impact, the bike seemed fine except for a split top tube bag strap, which I quickly fixed with a cable tie. After spotting a pub, I stopped for a water refill and kindly announced that venison was back on the menu. Donnie, who was also in the pub garden dealing with a tire issue, seemed to be having a tough first night.

Pushed on through early morning mud baths and climbs before reaching Bristol, where I had my first goal in sight: the Severn Bridge and entry into Wales for breakfast. Snappy steep climbs greeted me in Wales, and I spent the day leapfrogging with the front two riders. Rain set in as I rode into the final night of stage 1, and I managed to take the lead on the last 40 miles of thick forested track climbs.

However, a mishap with my Wahoo GPS cost me a few miles, and I arrived at the checkpoint behind Donnie, whom I thought I had surpassed. Nevertheless, I had completed stage 1 in 38 hours, ensuring two nights of rest and refueling before stage 2.

My strategy was to reach the checkpoint as quickly as possible, as the clock stops ticking at that point. The person with the lowest aggregate time over the four stages wins. This approach meant little to no sleep between stages or perhaps just a quick power nap.

Arriving in good time allowed me a full day off the bike, during which I searched for my lost head torch, eventually ordering a makeshift replacement en route to stage 2.

## Stage 2 - 288 miles: Daf's Farm (Ysbyty Cyfyn, mid Wales) to Garrigill, North Pennines

Riders were still arriving as stage 2 began. The first 100 miles were fantastic, with challenging gravel climbs and breathtaking scenery in Wales. However, my front derailleur malfunctioned while climbing a valley called the World's End, leaving me stuck in the smaller chain ring. I pressed on, heading toward Chester and Manchester.

Alan joined me, offering some much-needed company. Navigating cities was mentally taxing, and the challenges of the Pennine Way were on my mind as I transitioned from Welsh wilderness to city lights.

As I maneuvered through tight bollards in Manchester, I clipped my pedal, causing a fall. Luckily, my iPhone took the brunt of the impact. A broken phone was a small price to pay compared to a broken hip.

Morning arrived, and Alan left me, followed by John. The Pennine Way remained challenging, with countless gates to navigate. Lunchtime came in a small Yorkshire village, where Cristian and Alan's bikes were parked outside a tearoom. We were all exhausted, but Alan was in better shape. I struggled on, managing my wet feet, which were a source of pain.

### Stage 3 - 319 miles: Garrigill to Fort Augustus

Stage 3 began with riders still arriving, including Kirsty Gunstone, one of only two female participants. Crossing into Scotland, I was in second place, with my bike repaired, feet managed, and my iPhone partially working. Will Robinson passed me, and I assumed he would tire eventually, but I was wrong.

I was motivated by familiar territory as I re-entered Scotland and ventured back onto local trails in The Trossachs. I rode through the night, taking a short 20-minute nap by the roadside. Dawn brought renewed energy, but I took a longer nap under a tree, hoping Cristian would wake me when he passed.

I continued through remote Scottish landscapes, descending into Glen Lyon. Fatigue hit hard, and I slept for 20 minutes again before tackling the Corrieyairack pass. Finally, I reached Fort Augustus in fourth place.

The Corrieyairack pass, the highest point of the route, marked the last brutal climb of this stage. Finally, I arrived in Fort Augustus, securing fourth place. Alan, unfortunately, broke his collarbone during this stage but received help from other riders and mountain rescue

### Stage 4 - 235 miles: Fort Augustus to John O' Groats

The final stage was about nursing my aching Achilles and finishing the race. I faced steep gravel climbs right from the start, aggravating my Achilles. With only one village shop for resupply within the first 50 miles, it was a remote and challenging stretch.

I had a second puncture early in the day due to the dynaplug coming loose from the first puncture. I rode all day to catch up with the front pack but lacked the energy to press on. I rode alongside Adrian Reynolds for most of the day.

During the wet night I had to take several 20-minute bog naps. On my third nap I heard a cyclist passing and gave chase as dawn broke. It



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