

A Virtual interview with a veteran extramiler – John Howell:

What was your most memorable moment – for good or bad reasons? I was one of four Bedford Park Rotary members that undertook the first ever challenge with Challenge Adventure Charities back in 1999 or thereabouts and found myself driving the Gibbs and Dandy box van on a foul wet early morning down a steep hill. I made the mistake of overtaking our cyclist, who must remain anonymous, but we shall call him “Ray” for convenience. I had to make a quick stop at some traffic lights which turned red. Ray took evasive action and skidded to a halt on the nearside pavement opposite the driver’s door and uttered the immortal words “F.....g hell John, you nearly killed me”! I was contrite with apologies whilst my two erstwhile colleagues, William and Martin, were choking themselves trying to suppress their laughter! In Caen on the first morning and in the dark and straight off the overnight boat we crossed Pegasus Bridge and within a mile took a wrong turning up a dead end road....ah wellthings could only get better....or could they?

What was your most challenge event? This was the 2011 Black Forrest where we had torrential rain all day and were absolutely soaking wet, frozen stiff and miserable and lost all sense of humour. Water was constantly sloshing around in our shoes and whilst recovering in the back seat we had the dreadful prospect that we had to do it all again.....and again.....!

Which was your favourite Gala Dinner? Definitely in 2012 on the Haute Savoie Challenge which was celebrated on a boat on Lake Annecy. The lake has fond memories for me because it’s on the route to Val d’Isere my favourite ski resort. The evening on aboard was special and the lights onshore created a very atmospheric sight from the boat. However, there are “no free lunches” and I happened to be President of Bedford Park Rotary that year. A certain unnamed member of the Challenge organising committee gave me half an hour’s notice that I was expected to make a speech!



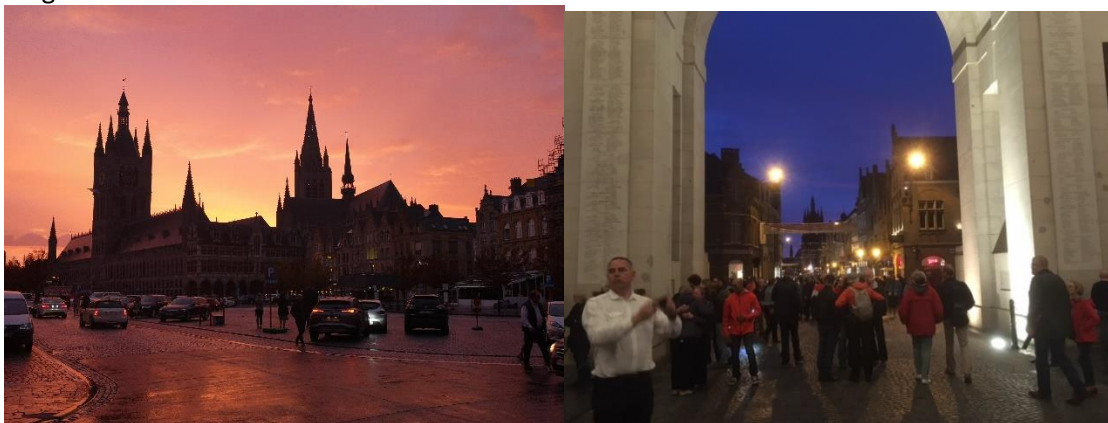
Which was your best hill climb? The best climbing for me were all the combined hills on the first day of last year’s Flanders event. Whilst it was somewhat daunting, and 20 years on from the event which really gave birth to the idea of “Extra-Mile”, we conquered them all and proved we had still got “it” whatever “it” is. The satisfaction of beating the challenge and the hills was, as always, on later reflection well worth the effort and sweat and putting up with the constant Eales’ chatter.

Which was your favourite day’s cycling? For me the best day’s magic discovery was the last day on the 2017 Brittany Challenge when we cycled for the final run-in along the Normandy coast. For the first time for some of us we saw the various memorials, museums and remnants of the Allied invasion of 1944 and the famous beaches of Omaha, Gold and Juno. I found this very evocative thought provoking and humbling to think of the heroic events of all those years ago. Sadly I had

planned to drive down the coast again this year and make a four day tour of the entire Normandy landings area but needless to say the present events have put paid to this plan for some time.



Do you have a favourite hotel? The best hotel was again last year on the final night in Ypres. The excellent location of the hotel within close walking proximity of the town centre was a bonus after the last day's cycling. A good number of us watched the very moving "Last Post" ceremony at the Menin Gate before the excellent dinner at the Town Hall. The square lit up at night was truly magnificent.



What motivates you to keep taking part? Extra-Mile Challenges have provided us all with many wonderful experiences over the years. They have enabled many to "push the boundaries" of personal comfort zones in both the physical and mental sense, whilst at the same time providing a great holiday in excellent company (most of the time!). The camaraderie amongst the teams and people who started out as strangers has always been superb, and the dry wit and humour in the car usually funny! On top of this is the prime reason for supporting the event; the funds raised for the many deserving local causes coupled with the immense personal satisfaction in having contributed and taken part.