
Strauss Annual Report & Travelogue 2021

vol 3, no 23



One very unusual year seems to have followed another, and as a result, this letter will be uncharacteristically brief! For us, though, we are happy to say that 2021 was a good one.

Picking up from when we wrote last year's letter, the main success story was Pat's getting back on her feet then back on her bike. One evening in mid-December she took her first unassisted steps in the kitchen and cooked her first meal. The building's communal disabled scooter then got trialed for delivering local Christmas cards and for doing a little shopping, even motivating the staff at our local Spar to bring out what she wanted to her, rather than her having to hobble in. That new-found mobility boosted her morale sky high!! Our social life was otherwise pretty limited, but some lateral thinking allowed us to visit friends through an open window, in true social-distancing spirit. As January progressed,



her crutches got used less and less around the house, and by the end of the month she ventured outdoors, using them sparingly for a half-mile walk, finally parting with them altogether at the end of February. Her sessions on an exercise bike we had bought at Christmas grew from five minutes to five miles, gradually strengthening her muscles. By the end of March, determined to know whether she could ride her proper bike, she ventured off into the lanes, clocking up eight miles on her first ride, then started going out nearly every Thursday morning to meet our local cycling group in a churchyard somewhere. Having converted her touring bike to electric assist last summer gave her the confidence to do all this. By early May she bravely embarked



on what was perhaps her most ambitious challenge – a 5-mile walk, up into our nearby bluebell woods, down through a field full of curious sheep, then home via part of the local Geo Park way, taking in the beauty of our local apple orchards and lush green rolling hills on a glorious day. In the six months since her fall she went through an amazing transformation back to nearly normal.



With travel still off the agenda, April to July passed relatively uneventfully, though tech upgrading work at the theatre enticed Pat out of the house, and we got out on a few pleasant bike rides. The UK tandem rally, however, didn't get cancelled, so at the end of July we loaded up our bikes with all our camping gear and cycled over three days up to the event in Nottingham. Aside from the middle day, when it rained and rained and rained some more, it felt wonderful

to be out and about again, actually going somewhere, and once at the campsite we thoroughly enjoyed the company of so many friends!!



During the 2020 lockdown, Pat's family history work had revealed that one branch of her family, going back to the early 17thC, had come from the village of Claypole in Lincolnshire. As the rally was being held quite near there, she contacted the local history group in the area to ask if



we might learn anything by visiting the village. The church warden's reply, inviting us to meet up with him, couldn't be refused, so we devoted one day during the week go to Claypole. We were treated to a wonderful afternoon that included a personal tour around the church and afternoon tea at the church warden's house while looking at numerous photos his wife had collected of life there over 100 years ago. Though we didn't have any luck communing with Pat's actual forefathers while exploring the churchyard, we did find four gravestones with the relevant surname on them and a lot of 18thC graffiti on a wall outside the church. It was an amazing experience, establishing such a link with her past!



This euphoria continued into September, starting with a long weekend at the annual gathering of Flying Gate owners (Mike's make of bicycle). Although it was based in Hereford, quite near us, it felt like being 'away', and the rides took us to many places we had never been to. It also reminded us what a beautiful, hilly and interesting county we live in!! Again, meeting up with a group of cyclists, most of whom we see only on this occasion each year, added so much to the enjoyment.

Four days later we were back in Hereford for the start of a cycling tour across Wales and back, one that Pat had organised when it became clear that overseas travel was unlikely to happen this year. Nineteen of us pedalled northwest past some of the iconic black and white villages of Herefordshire then into the Welsh hills and on to Machynlleth, south along the west coast nearly to Aberystwyth, east via Devil's Bridge to Llandrindod Wells, then via Hay-on-Wye back to Hereford. More stunning scenery throughout and more challenging hills!! But most importantly a great bunch of people to spend 10 days with!!! We had done this tour in 2007, but it was a real pleasure to ride once again past so many verdant green fields sprinkled with loads of sheep and along the rather special Elan Valley with its remote reservoirs, oft-photographed dams and slightly rough-looking landscape. Wales is green because it gets lots of rain, but on this week we got none!! Enjoying the natural beauty of the area was the primary focus of the tour, but we also took in interesting visits to the Centre for Alternative Technology near Machynlleth and the National Cycle Museum in Llandrindod Wells. Sadly this was the last CTC Tour we would lead, as their Holidays & Tours programme has now been terminated.



Back at base, we were blessed with a mild autumn that seemed to linger longer than usual. The theatre got going again with both local am-dram and professional productions. The Big Apple Weekend, an annual event celebrating the local cider-making industry, was back on the calendar. U3A meetings resumed in person, with Pat taking on the editorship of its local newsletter and the deputy leadership of its new photography group. We have outlined plans for a tour in France next year and hope to be able to attend the Tandem Club's Easter weekend event and its International rally in Germany in August. Only time will tell how much of that will actually come to pass, as we seem to be living in a time of such uncertainty, though perhaps we should heed the advice given in the musical *Damn Yankees* ...

*"You gotta have hope. Mustn't sit around and mope.
Nothin's half as bad as it may appear, wait till next year and hope."*

Wishing everyone a healthy and happier 2022!!

Pat & Mike

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