

The "Camden Cyclist"

August/Sept '05 Newsletter of Camden Cycling Campaign

Camden
Cycling
Campaign

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Dates for your Diary

Members meetings: August 8 & September 12

In the Castlehaven Community Centre, 33 Hawley Road, NW1 at 7.30 pm on the second Monday of each month. Bring your bike inside for security.

August 8 Rachel Kirk of Groundwork will present a project to improve cycle & pedestrian access on the Camden section of the Regent's Canal at 7.45pm

September 12 CTUK's Staff will hold a workshop during our Members' Meeting, from 7.45-9pm.

Regent's Park BikeFest

The Green Fair and Bikefest were held in Regent's Park for the first time, on June 5. Part of Chester Road was closed to motor traffic so people could enjoy different cycles without fear. This location was hugely more successful than Cardington Street. We had almost continuous stream of callers to our stall. Our volunteer mechanics were kept very busy and Bikefix had unusual cycles for people to try. Many thanks to all who made this event such a success.



Bike Week

CCC members were kept active promoting cycling.

The week started with Dr Bike at West Hampstead on the Saturday. This was followed by the TfL BikeFest on Sunday. CCC held two rides which led to Trafalgar Square, where the atmosphere was somewhat muted compared to the previous year's BikeFest.

Our Members' meeting on the Monday featured John Adams' presentation (see below)

Wednesday was wet, wet, wet! The gazebo in Ossulston Street attracted many cyclists, who received sustenance and shelter.



Barnet Cyclists breakfast with Camden

Parks & Open Spaces

We collected a large petition in favour of cycling in parks at the Regent's Park BikeFest and campaigning to improve cyclists' access to open spaces was prioritised at our May Members' Meeting.

The attitudes of some organisations involved in parks management has been rather hostile.

The Heath Constabulary will happily drive motor vehicles on the Heath to pursue pedal cyclists!

At present, cycling is allowed on two routes across Hampstead Heath and prohibited in just about all other parks and open spaces in Camden.

Bob Speller, keeper at Hampstead Parochial School has been encouraging children there to write to the local Press, after leading rides across the Heath with them.

The replies from Heath Management to the children have been incomprehensible.

Bob attended our July Members' Meeting, where we discussed ways to devise enjoyable 'protest' rides. We hope to have a family cycle and football funday in the new school term.

Lionel Shapiro



John Adams speaks to CCC

John Adams was Guest Speaker at our June meeting. He is Professor of Geography at UCL and author of several books about risk.



The *risk compensation* hypothesis states that people modify their behaviour according to changes in their environment. A child learning to walk is an excellent example of risk management. It illustrates a balancing act where the pleasure of getting it right is contrasted with the pain of being wrong. It is instinctive, intuitive, it consults experience and is modified by culture.

We all have some propensity to take risks (our risk thermostat) and the resulting risk taking behaviour results in accidents. These accidents feed into our perception of risks and then to our balancing behaviour. But the latter can also give rewards again affecting our propensity to take risks.

After the death of the racing driver Ayrton Senna racing cars were modified (to make brakes less efficient and tyres have less grip) so that drivers would go more slowly - and crashes would be less dangerous.

In Ontario showed that the fewest fatalities occurred in February when road conditions were icy and the most when the weather was clear and dry. A Swedish study showed that there were very low death figures just after driving was changed from the left to the right of the road, which was expected to be very dangerous - but drivers over-compensated for the change.

A study by Bike Magazine had riders in a variety of different states of dress - from full leathers, normal clothes to just underwear. Those with less clothes on drove more slowly.

Defensive highway engineering results in railings, footbridges and even underpasses in town centres. John's amusing video clip showed pedestrians climbing the railings, avoiding the underpasses and even successfully crossing a busy two by two lane road without collisions.

But John also showed us views of Seven Dials where pedestrians, cycles and vehicles were successfully intermingling, referring to the ideas of Hans Monderman from the Netherlands who promotes the idea of *naked streets* in which people negotiate by means of eye contact instead of obeying signs. John stated that at Seven Dials there had been only one minor pedestrian accident in five years.

He went on to discuss the radical improvements made in Kensington High Street under the guidance of Daniel Moylan. These changes were originally resisted by council officers, but were eventually accepted and implemented. John then pointed out that pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles

are mingling safely with less regulations than usual and that cycle lanes are not necessary in suitable conditions. Since the upgrades, accidents have decreased at 10 out of 11 sites studied.

John referred to the book *One False Move*, that he and Mayer Hillman had written on children's independent mobility (in 1990). This showed that in 1970, 80% children went to school on their own, but only 9% in 1990. This resulted from a fear of traffic and of stranger-danger. In 1922 the number of children killed on the road was more than 3 times the number in 1990. Figures have subsequently decreased because children are not allowed out.

John mentioned the issue of segregated versus shared cycle ways, comparing the Bloomsbury (SSL) cycle route with an area in Melbourne with shared use involving pedestrians, skateboarders and cyclists, which is not seen to be controversial.

John showed us figures to support the idea of "safety in numbers" for cyclists - countries with large numbers of cyclists have a lower per km cycled accident rate. He then returned to the "balancing behaviour" diagram and talked of interactions between road users, in particular between cyclists and lorry drivers. The other user affects our behaviour and we affect theirs. But unfortunately lawyers and insurers get involved and the fear of litigation is stifling - risks that we might have been willing to take in the past may not be so acceptable in the future.

John told us of an interesting article in New Scientist (Jan 2005) that describes a study in Israel which shows that in an area populated with religious types, who rely on god to protect them, rather than stop, look and listen, when crossing the road. There were fewer accidents than elsewhere. Drivers are wary. John introduced a variant of risk compensation called "risk homeostasis" where it is claimed that as so-called safety features are installed in vehicles and roads, drivers feel better protected and tend to be at greater risk. The proponent Wilde suggests it should affect strategies for road safety whereas the critics claim it is an excuse for doing nothing.

Finally, John reverted to the subject of the helmet debate between him and Mayer and Thompson, Thompson and Rivara. His article *Public safety legislation and the risk compensation hypothesis: the example of motorcycle helmet legislation* was submitted to the American Journal of Public Health in 1981. The journal editor demanded that he drop the references to risk compensation.

The talk was very well received and was followed by many questions, quite a few of them on the issue of segregated cycle lanes. We were interested in John's telling us that Bloomsbury is to become a Business Improvement District and that it is his ambition to civilise it to a level where segregation will no longer be needed. When we said goodbye to John, Stefano Casalotti and Jean Dollimore said that CCC would like to be involved in any such improvements.

Jean Dollimore