Cycling Cliffs of the Chiltern 100

The roads that make the event

By Simon Warren
Welcome to your exclusive guide to the climbs that make the Chiltern 100 the great event it is. With three routes to cater for all abilities there’s something for everyone, but if you crave hills and you’re in good shape then you know there’s only one option for you, the 161 kilometer Grand Fondo.

You may imagine the Chilterns as just an innocuous set of undulations, hilly, but not mountainous, and yes, while they aren’t the North York Moors, you’ll be surprised at how tough this ride is. With very little in the way of flat, you’re constantly being tested, your legs repeatedly pummeled by the perpetual barrage of accents which start after 10 kilometres with Frith Hill.

As climbs go it’s of little significance but it’s perfect to kick start the system and set you up for the rest of the day. Following this, in the middle of Chesham is the wonderful Eskdale Hill. Having previously never ridden it before I took part in the Chiltern 100 I didn’t know what lay ahead so I just hit it hard at the base expecting it to be over in a flash. It’s not, it hits you in three waves so if like me you go too hard on the first you’ll suffer like a dog on the next two. There’s plenty of time to recover before the third featured climb of Wigginton Hill, an ascent that has an abrupt start on a bridge crossing the A41 then weaves up through a tunnel of trees, steep in places, before relaxing as it enters the village.

Up next is a real beauty, a little jewel in the Chiltern Hills, hidden, and illusive, The Crong. Whenever I find a fantastic climb I’ve never ridden before I’m consumed by a mixture of the excitement to ride it and anger that it had passed under my radar. Rising from the gully you will right away clock the menacing corner ahead and if there are any of riders in front of you they’ll no doubt be weaving all over the road trying to maintain momentum. Keep your eyes peeled, pick what looks like a good line, commit to make your effort, but also be prepared to suddenly change direction if a rider decides to dismount or randomly change path in search of a kinder gradient. It’s over all too soon and you’re legs will be hating you but if you made it round without putting a foot down you’ll feel great and be itching for the next challenge.

And it is a challenge, as after the feedstop comes the mighty Whiteleaf, a hill that for generations has been punishing riders from weekend warriors all the way to the countries best professionals. Everyone wants a good time up Whiteleaf and everyone usually starts their ascent too hard. Be warned, it’s a long climb so keep a lid on things early on, I don’t mean potter along, just control your breathing, stay seated, then as you see the nasty right hand bend approach, then put some more power down. From here on it will be all hurt as up ahead you can focus on a brow, a potential summit. I say potential because this brow brings false hope, the slope merely relaxes for a few meters then
kicks up once more, tricking you into thinking it’s all over. This last stretch is what separates the weak from the not so weak and everyone suffers here, so if your legs feel like they are ready to buckle, fear not, you will not be alone.

Next up you hurtle down Kop Hill, turn left at the base, continue to shed yet more of the hard earned elevation and arrive to tackle Wardrobes. Split into roughly two halves the first hard, the second after the vicious left hand bend, harder. Once Wardrobes is dealt with you come to the point where the Medio Fondo and Grand Fondo routes split. Those riding the Medio head left, those riding the Grand head right and have the pleasure of three extra climbs. Once you’ve dropped off the ridge via Chinnor Hill you have the task of tackling Kingston Hill, a tough climb in anyone’s book, followed by the picturesque rise up to Bledlow Ridge then almost immediately after the climb into Walter’s Ash. With now 970 metres more altitude gain in the legs than the Medio participants, you rejoin with their route to take on Speen Hill, weaving through the high hedges up into the village. There are still a few lumps between you and the finish, but only one more challenge and that is the timed climb. Rumor has it some riders soft pedal the whole route to arrive fresh to get a good time in the KOM competition, this is scandalous behavior in my book. You should give your all, all the way round and then summon what ever strength you have left to smash out one more effort to the line. Have a great ride.

The climbs are all given a rating out of ten, ten being the toughest and you may notice the scores of some have changed from their appearance in my previous books. This is because I’m rating them in the context of the event, so naturally Whiteleaf now gets a 10, instead of a six as it had previously held. The rating is an amalgamation of gradient, length, the likely hostility of the riding conditions, and the condition of the surface.

LEGEND
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTFILE AND RATINGS

LOCATIONS

On each Factfile you will see a small colour coded graphic of the three Chiltern 100 routes. On that graphic, highlighted in white you will also see the location of each particular climb. You can use this to see which climb appears on which route and whereabouts on that route it appears. Only one route features all ten climbs but all three contain two of them.

TOP TIP

Each Factfile includes a brief tip to help you get to the top of it in the best shape, together with the climb’s key statistics and of course the map to show where the climb starts and finishes. Also is the approximate time needed to ride each hill, timed over the distance marked, this time will be slow for some but fast for others, so see how you fair.

FACTFILE

TOP TIP
Don’t go too hard early on, stay in your comfort zone until you reach the bends then give it some stick to the top.

LENGTH 640m
HEIGHT GAIN 54m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 8.4%
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 16.5%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 2.5mins

INCLUDED ON
CORTO FONDO
MEDIO FONDO
GRAN FONDO

RATINGS

The climbs are all given a rating out of ten, ten being the toughest and you may notice the scores of some have changed from their appearance in my previous books. This is because I’m rating them in the context of the event, so naturally Whiteleaf now gets a 10, instead of a six as it had previously held. The rating is an amalgamation of gradient, length, the likely hostility of the riding conditions, and the condition of the surface.

MAP KEY

Ride Route
A Road
B Road
Minor Road
Rail line
Hill route
Town
Scale
With the legs nicely warmed up you’ll be begging for a hill by the time you reach Great Missenden and here it is, Frith Hill. It’s no monster but just right to start the day’s climbing, a nice wide road set on a reasonably challenging gradient, perfect to get the blood pumping through every vessel in the legs. Heading east from the roundabout the slope picks up gently around the right hand corner then begins to rise steeper as it climbs under the trees above. As it gently bends left there are a couple of side roads that caught my eye as they look much steeper, and therefore great fun, but ignore them and concentrate on the brow ahead. Dig in to push yourself to the end of the steepest section then change up onto the big ring for the rest of the climb. It may look flat but you’ve a couple of hundred meters of very shallow incline to cover before the true summit, so if you want to record a good time on social media then keep pedaling hard.

FACTFILE

TOP TIP Change down before you reach the roundabout so you’re in the right gear before you hit the steep start to the climb.

LENGTH 1080m
HEIGHT GAIN 58m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 5.4% 
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 13.5%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 3mins

INCLUDED ON CORTO FONDO MEDIO FONDO GRAN FONDO
Here’s the first real challenge of the day, don’t be fooled or put off by the urban setting, it’s a wonderful and punishing climb. The first time I rode it I was excited by the sight of the initial steep slope and set off like a greyhound released from a trap, expecting the summit to be the bend I could see on the horizon. I gave it full gas only to find out that this wasn’t actually the top, and although it does ease here it then picks up again, this time steeper. Now the legs were hurting. This second of three distinct ramps that combine to make the climb is the toughest so make sure you keep something back for this stretch. What follows is another slight ebb as the road twists left then right, not as pronounced as the first though, then a long slog up the arrow straight slope to the final brow. Eventually the climb starts to fade, allowing you to click up the gears and build some speed to finish on the flat a few metres shy of the mini roundabout at the junction.

**FACTFILE**

**TOP TIP** Don’t go too hard early on, stay in your comfort zone until you reach the first bends then give it some stick to the top.

- **LENGTH** 640m
- **HEIGHT GAIN** 54m
- **AVERAGE GRADIENT** 8.4%
- **MAXIMUM GRADIENT** 16.5%
- **APPROX CLIMB TIME** 2.5mins

**INCLUDED ON**

- **CORTO FONDO**
- **MEDIO FONDO**
- **GRAN FONDO**
If you’re riding the Grand Fondo you’ll hit this hill with 62 kilometres in the legs and the adrenaline that got you over the first climbs will be a long gone. Soon after pausing to cross the A4251 you head straight on Hemp Lane, as the road rears up to cross the A41. A bridge rather than a hill, this nonetheless is the start to proceedings, as the climb then enters a tunnel of trees, sandwiched between tall banks, straight at first before starting to bend a little. This long tough stretch will hurt the legs and then when you reach the first kink in direction they will hurt some more, as here’s where the gradient peaks, at close to 12%. Bending slightly right, then left, you’re still only half way and there’s an equally tough stretch up to the village sign. From here though the slope fades, but not totally, just enough to relieve the pressure on the legs on the way to the summit at the junction with Chesham Road.

**FACTFILE**

**TOP TIP** Pace your effort across the climb, push a bit harder through the woods then change up a few gears when you reach the village sign.

- **LENGTH**: 1.440m
- **HEIGHT GAIN**: 83m
- **AVERAGE GRADIENT**: 5.8%
- **MAXIMUM GRADIENT**: 12%
- **APPROX CLIMB TIME**: 4.5mins

INCLUDED ON: CORSO FONDO, MEDIO FONDO, GRAN FONDO
This is my favourite climb on the route and one that had me cursing the fact that I’d never ridden it before when I arrived at its base. It lies well off the beaten track, it’s narrow, the surface is rough, and it has one of, if not the best corner in the Chilterns. The first time I caught sight of it the excitement began to build right away, it looked viciously steep and ahead riders were struggling to force their gears over as it veered up and out of sight. Rising from what looks like an old mill at the bottom it’s not long before said corner appears, so stick it in bottom gear and prepare to suffer. Bending sharp left, try and ride in the middle of the road to minimise the slope and drag your bike over the near 25% gradient. Unfortunately this terrific bend doesn’t last long but the slope does continue to bite for a good 100 metres before settling down to a more sedate pitch then continuing on to the summit where the trees recede to reveal a radio transmitter.

**FACTFILE**

**TOP TIP** It’s all about that wicked left hand bend, pick up speed on the approach and attack it full gas then ride wide to minimise the impact of the gradient.

**LENGTH** 520m  
**HEIGHT GAIN** 53m  
**AVERAGE GRADIENT** 10.2%  
**MAXIMUM GRADIENT** 25%  
**APPROX CLIMB TIME** 2.5mins  

**INCLUDED ON**  
- Corto Fondo  
- Medio Fondo  
- Gran Fondo
This is the signature climb of the event and rightly so as it’s the toughest challenge you will face on any of the routes. It’s a brute of a road with waves of steep gradient that hit you one after another until they break you. Start the ascent by turning off the A4010 from Monks Risborough and climb hard right away. Smooth and straight, the gradient increases gradually up to a left-hand kink where it slackens, just a touch. The road twists a little, passing houses as it makes its way towards where the serious business really begins. Banking right, the climb soon hits its 1-in-7 rating and the surface gets rougher as the road passes through dense tree cover. It continues steeply until what looks like the top, a left-hand bend alongside a small shelf of chalk. It’s not the top though, you’ve one final leg breaking kick before the gradient finally subsides and you reach the peak at the junction at the summit of Kop Hill.

**FACTFILE**

**TOP TIP** This is the toughest climb of the day so deserves your best effort. Start gently, then when you round the right hand bend go all out to the top.

- **Length**: 1420m
- **Height Gain**: 127m
- **Average Gradient**: 8.9%
- **Maximum Gradient**: 16%
- **Approx Climb Time**: 7 mins

**included on**: corto fondo, medio fondo, gran fondo
With no chance for the legs to recover from the punishment of Whiteleaf the climb of Wardrobes can almost feel as hard as it’s famous predecessor. With little over two kilometres between them, this is where you will see how well you’ve prepared for the event, how well you can recover from one climb before heading back into the ‘pain cave’. Rising gradually at first from the valley floor the road then begins to rear up significantly, forcing many a gear change. Ahead you see a brow at the intersection with Wardrobes Lane and this acts as a good carrot to drag you though this first section. Take care at the junction and turn harsh left through the 20% corner and directly into more climbing. In the gloom of the forest the slope increases further, the toughest part saved until the last which may have you weaving a little to preserve that forward momentum. Alas it’s not too long and thankfully the end appears at the next junction with Pink Road.
If you’ve opted for the full monty, the 161 kilometre Grand Fondo then the reward for your bravery is more climbs, lots more climbs, including one pretty stiff one, Kingston Hill. Of course it’s no killer, there are no patches of 33% gradient but it is one of the toughest in the Chilterns and must be treated with some respect. Heading south out of Kingston Blunt the gradient begins to bite as you enter the woods and then, as the shadows from the branches overhead replace the daylight, things get gradually tougher. It’s a relatively short climb set on an all but uniform gradient, so pick a suitable gear, keep the legs spinning and your effort high as you power all the way through. Meandering left then right then left, the higher slopes are worn and pitted making your task harder, but try and maintain your momentum, to finish just shy of the right-turn sign next to a private footpath on the left.

**FACTFILE**

**TOP TIP** This is a very straightforward climb so just find a comfortable gear and grind it out.

**LENGTH** 1165m
**HEIGHT GAIN** 110m
**AVERAGE GRADIENT** 9.4%
**MAXIMUM GRADIENT** 17%
**APPROX CLIMB TIME** 5mins

Included on: Corto Fondo, Medio Fondo, Gran Fondo
Of the three extra climbs featured on the Grand Fondo loop I had to choose just two, and of those this was my favourite. After dropping down from the top of Kingston Hill you ride into West Wycombe, turn left, and line up to face the mound ahead. Rising between high hedgerows you’re under no illusion of the task that awaits as you can see the climb rise up the steep bank and vanish into the woods. Very slight at first, then, as it kinks left things get serious as the slope approaches 15%, only briefly, but long enough to make you hurt. This passage up through the trees, after 130 kilometres of riding will without doubt sting the legs and you’ll be more than thankful when it eases and you can relax somewhat. The climb’s far from over though as it continues to rise for close to a whole kilometre, all be it on a very mild pitch, until it levels and you reach the village of Bledlow Ridge before dropping down to very soon climb again.

**FACTFILE**

- **TOP TIP** Build momentum in the valley and see how long you can hold it as the steep gradient bites.
- **LENGTH** 2520m
- **HEIGHT GAIN** 95m
- **AVERAGE GRADIENT** 3.8%
- **MAXIMUM GRADIENT** 15%
- **APPROX CLIMB TIME** 6mins

INCLUDED ON: **CORTO FONDO  MEDIO FONDO  GRAN FONDO**
The last big obstacle before the finish, Speen Hill should, if you have gauged your effort right, just about finish you off. No point arriving at this point feeling fresh and ready to attack it, if you do it means you’ve taken it too easy for the previous however many hours. Pacing, like climbing is an art though so if you are still quite fresh then you have no excuse to ride hard. Turning left onto Speen Road you can hardly tell you’re climbing at first as ever so slightly the slope picks up, then at the point where it bends right and you pass the single track road sign, it begins to sting. Rising between tall hedgerows and past numerous houses the hill gets steeper and steeper, weaving left and right as it climbs. As the hedgerows recede the road widens and the gradient fades for a while, only to return for the final push into Speen. After a long slog you pass the village sign as the road arcs left to the finish at the junction where you head right.

FACTFILE

TOP TIP Be ready when the road bends right to change down a few gears, then keep pushing, you are almost home.

LENGTH 1860m
HEIGHT GAIN 78m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 4.2%
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 11%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 6mins

INCLUDED ON CORTO FONDO MEDIO FONDO GRAN FONDO
You’ve made it, I hope, to the final climb of the day, the all important timed ascent to the finish. You ‘should’ be tired, you ‘should’ be dreaming of a huge recovery meal and an ice cold beer, but before you get there you’ve once last effort to make. If you’re going to do this properly you need to be ready in a suitable gear when you hit the base and be prepared to ride as hard as you possibly can until you cross that line. If you have any liquid left in your bottles, dump it, the weight will slow you down, (no dumping gels or bars though, that’s litter!) The slope’s never steep, it twists and turns and there are many changes in pitch that require quick thinking to change gear and keep your speed high. The road is closed to cars so you can use the whole width but watch out for other riders and don’t go causing a crash in your effort to beat your mates, or just your previous best time to the top and the end of an amazing day in the Chiltern Hills.

FACTFILE

TOP TIP It’s all or nothing here, leave it all on the road, ALL OF IT, squeeze out every last drop of energy until you fall across the line!

LENGTH 1150m
HEIGTH GAIN 49m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 4.3%
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 10%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 3.5mins

INCLUDED ON  CORDO FONDO  MEDIO FONDO  GRAN FONDO
Ride them all.