

The Knowledge walk

Manor House Station, N4, to Gibson Square, N1 (3.5 miles)

BIG SMOKE HAILS A RIDE!
London cabbie Richard Cudlip is this week's guest editor



Before they're let loose on the capital's streets, all London cabbies have to undergo rigorous training, learning each of London's streets one by one. Cab driver **Richard Cudlip** shares his memories of his first step on the road to the Knowledge.

Born in Pimlico, raised all over south-west London and now firmly established in SW17 – my life has been a physical and metaphorical trip around the city, leading to my current vocation: licensed cab driver. Come across me at various points in the past and you would have found a probation assistant, IT consultancy business manager, NHS waiting list administrator or full-time dad, to name just a few. Only the last one gave me any job satisfaction and that couldn't last for practical reasons and so, in autumn 2003, I took the plunge and started the Knowledge.

There are moments that you know are life-changing, like getting married, having children or being there when John Terry missed *that* penalty. Others you don't see the significance of until much later. Like the time I had a hat party (don't ask) with some flatmates and a certain friend of a friend turned up and made such an impression on me that she is now my wife.

Sitting outside **(1) Manor House station** on my Honda Lead scooter in September 2003 was most certainly one of the former. From here on in, life was never going to be the same again. It's all there in front you, the whole of London, broken down into road-sized pieces.

And off you go. On the left is **Green Lanes**, with The Manor club round the corner on **Seven Sisters Road**, but now isn't the



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7

time to worry about places: it's all about the roads. Over the junction you pass the **(2)**

RAD Centre for Deaf People, about to be brought back to life through a £400k refit. On your right is Wolfson House and Posnasky Court – two names, one block of flats. Whizzing past the **(3)** Castle Climbing Centre, you can miss the old entrance to **(4)** Lordship Park,

marked by a griffin and lion.

Right at **Highbury New Park** takes you past the **(5)** White House but you can't stop yet, you've only had to learn two roads. You've missed the boarded-up house on Highbury New Park and more lions in someone's garden, but you've got three years to fill in the gaps. Left **Highbury Grove**, right **St Paul's Road** and there's **Highbury Corner** looming ahead. Be safe and don't

get run over on your first day. Leave Highbury Corner by **(6)** **Upper Street**. You notice the Union Chapel but don't take it in; should you stop to see if you can remember the route you've just taken? Nah, it's only six roads. If you can't remember those, you aren't going to

be much of a cabbie, right? Past the Town Hall on your left, Sutton Dwellings on your right and a right into **Barnsbury Street**. Who lives

in all these Georgian houses?

But then you're almost done, left into **Milner Square**, forward Milner Place, forward into **(7)** **Gibson Square**. Really, who does live in all these amazing houses?

Come on then, can you remember the route? I did, just about – piecing it

back together, literally learning the capital road by individual road. I went on to learn three more runs that day: Thornhill Square to Queen Square; Chancery Lane Station to Rolls Road; and Page's Walk to St Martin's Theatre. And then I got my first Knowledge-related headache: information overload really does make your head hurt.

Over the next 32 months I learned 316 more 'Blue Book' runs, over 300 assorted runs to fill in the gaps, 8,000 points of interest and 120-plus suburban routes for good measure. And, on the whole, I enjoyed it. Not the mind-numbing boredom of calling over (revising your routes) but being out there on my bike finding places I had no idea existed. I have great memories, rose-tinted no doubt, of my time on the K but, to quote Jarvis Cocker, I'll always remember that first time – Manor House Station to Gibson Square, *the first Blue Book run.*

OVERHEARD UNDERGROUND

'I always end up in the seat where you can't see your reflection. I get paranoid about my hair.'