

While there has always been a tradition of cycling in Kilmacud Crokes, particularly to raise funds for Coiste, the genesis of the KC Wheelers Cycling Club can be traced back to 2007 where a number of club mates came together to support a friend. 2007 saw the sad and premature death of Marie Gallagher, wife of Paul "Gazza" Gallagher, who died at the early age of 44 from breast cancer, leaving Paul to look after their three young daughters.

After Marie passed away Paul and a number of his friends, came together to explore what they could do to commemorate Marie's passing. At that time they identified an event organised in Wales, by a charity called Regain which raised funds for athletes who had suffered quadriplegia as a result of sporting injuries. The event was known as the Snowdonia Challenge and comprised completing, on a competitive team basis, a 64kM cycle, a 14kM trek to the top of Snowdonia and a 5kM paddle across a lake. Each team would consist of four members. This was to be the start of cycling fundraising activity in the club which would eventually grow into a series of major Malin to Mizen cycles raising funds for Kilmacud Crokes and Breast Cancer Ireland and the formation of the KCWheelers Cycling club as it is today.

In late 2007 Paul and his friends decided that they were going to compete in the Snowdonia Challenge which was to take place in June 2008 and raise funds for Quadriplegia victims. They approached John Shovlin and Gerry Greene to set out a training programme to prepare for the event. Kevin Mulligan was another mentor and contributor on the training front as he was the only one within the club who had previously completed serious distance cycling on a number of occasions with the Guide Dogs when they organised Mizen to Malin or Malin to Mizen events.

During the early months of that year a small group of people from the club and outsiders used meet every weekend to train for the event. On occasional weekends hill walking would be organised to prepare for the Snowdonia ascent. By the end of May the athletes were prepared for the Snowdonia challenge and they ventured forth to Llanberris at the foot of Snowdonia. The chief protagonists from Kilmacud Crokes in this adventure were John Shovlin, Gerry Greene, Richie Stakelum, Billy Ryan, Paul Gallagher, Kevin Mulligan, Brian Greene and Paul Huban,

Following their exploits in Snowdonia the group became increasingly brave and they along with others, including Pat Halpin, Kevin Coakley and Donie Dowling participated in the Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford in August 2008.

Because of the success of the 2008 Snowdonia adventure it was agreed to return in 2009 with the objective of winning the competition outright. Numbers of participants from the Kilmacud Crokes increased as Gerry Greene got to work on persuading additional club members to participate. Training sessions were organised, throughout the autumn of 2008 which generally comprised cycles to Enniskerry. In early 2009 routes were extended to Delgany and Greystones and eventually Rathnew. The trip to Rathnew was in preparation for a cycle to Mullingar where Kilmacud Crokes were playing in the All Ireland Football Club semi-final against Corofin. The event was a major success both on the road and on the field. 25 cyclists travelled from the club to Mullingar and the football team progressed to the All-Ireland Final. Snowdonia training continued up to the beginning

of June on more local Wicklow routes. Included in the training programme were trips to conquer Lug Na Coille and commando courses in Crone Wood.

The Kilmacud Crokes group participating in Snowdonia 2009 were organised into seven teams of four people. The top Kilmacud Crokes team that included John Shovlin, Richie Stakelum, Peter Ward and John Ferrick came second in the overall event but the club had a notable success when the team including Frank Rutledge and Gerry O'Loughlin won the over 40's event. Following Snowdonia 2009 a pioneering group of six cyclists from the club, including Gerry Greene, Mick Garry, Kevin Foley, Frank Rutledge, Kevin Mulligan and Gerry O'Loughlin, participated in the Ring of Kerry and a much larger group of participants completed the Peter McVerry Trust cycle from Belfield to Wexford. The Ring of Kerry also became a staple part of the cycling calendar for club members over the following 6 or 7 years.

In 2010 a new cycling challenge was presented to the members of Kilmacud Crokes when an annual St Paddy's Day Cycle was inaugurated which consisted of a 100km cycle from Glenalbyn to Rathdrum and back. The route included the famous Calary Climb, the rolling and poorly surfaced road between Laragh and Rathdrum, the lumpy return to Roundwood via Moneystown, the climb up Djouce and the dramatic descent down the Old Long Hill before finally taking on the short sharp bite of Lover's Leap into Enniskerry and heading back to Glenalbyn. A contribution was collected from the participants and donated to the Club's Benevolent Fund. Weekly cycling sessions continued throughout the year and destinations became more varied as time went on.

The cyclists of Kilmacud Crokes were not content to limit their horizons to the home front for their cycling exploits. 2010 saw their first incursion onto the European mainland when a group that included Gerry Greene, John Shovlin, Pat Conlon, Kevin Foley, Frank Rutledge, Tommy Whelan and Fionnán Daly made a trip to the South of France for a five day cycling trip.

2010 also saw the first participation by club members as a group in the Wicklow 200 and Wicklow 100. The programme for 2011 included a spin to Navan to support Kilmacud Crokes in the All Ireland Club Football semi-final against Crossmaglen but unfortunately the match outcome wasn't as successful as 2009. A Tour of the Three Provinces was also organised and consisted of cycling from Cavan to Leitrim onto Longford, where the highest hill in the county was conquered, and back to Cavan.

By the end of 2011 the Kilmacud Crokes cycling fraternity were seeking fresh challenges and the concept of a cycle from Mizen to Mallin was proposed as a means of raising funds for both Breast Cancer Ireland and the club. This required a major effort of logistics and co-ordination from the organising team. A steering group consisting of Gerry Greene, Frank Rutledge, Hugh Campbell, Paul Gallagher, Tommy Mannion, Dave Byrne and Paddy Walsh who acted as a non-cycling Chairman was established. Routes had to be selected, locations for overnights stops identified and hotels booked, fundraising and supporting events, such as static cycling, managed, sponsorship organised and back-up teams recruited while at the same time training had to be undertaken and scheduled. Trojan work was undertaken in the first half of 2012 in preparation for the first M2M which was to take place from 30th May to the 3rd June.

On the 29th May a group of intrepid cyclists assembled in Heuston Station to head to Barleycove to commence the following day the M2M adventure from Mizen Head to Malin Head. The cycle would take place over five stages:-

- Mizen to Tralee, 153kM
- Tralee to Oranmore, 168kM
- Oranmore to Sligo 133kM
- Sligo to Letterkenny 110kM
- Letterkenny to Malin 81kM

18 cyclists departed from Mizen on May 31st and 21 cyclists arrived in Malin on 3rd June. A number of cyclists dropped out and others joined along the way. 15 cyclists had completed the entire trip. Among the arrivals in Malin was Pat Rowley who was the only female cyclist in the first M2M. Pat would become a stalwart of the Kilmacud Crokes cycling community and a role model for all female cyclists within the club.

The event was a very successful event with numerous beneficial spin offs for Kilmacud Crokes including community, and financial benefits. €40,000 was raised which was shared between Breast Cancer Ireland and Kilmacud Crokes. The funds raised for the club were assigned to the club's capital account. The event also brought together different strands of the club who wouldn't necessarily come into regular contact with one another. It also attracted and encouraged more members of the club to take up cycling.

Because of the success the 2012 M2M event it was agreed that M2M would become a bi-annual event.

During 2013 the Kilmacud Crokes' association with Cycling Safaris commenced when four members, Gerry Greene, Pat Conlon, Tommy Mannion and Dave Byrne signed up for the Geneva to Niece Alpine Sportif. In preparation for this challenge cycling horizons were extended with regular forays further into Wicklow being organised and the first club event to conquer both the Wicklow Gap and Sally Gap in the one outing was completed. Other challenges were identified and completed including the Ratoath GAA Club Sportif, Mayo Pink Ribbon, Glenealy Challenge, South East Cycling Club's Three Pins Sportif and the Wicklow 200. The Alpine Challenge was duly completed with a number of significant Tour De France Cols/Peaks being conquered

Throughout the first half of 2014 a number of discussions took place on the formation of cycling club within Kilmacud Crokes and by spring 2014 it was agreed that a cycling club be formed. There were a number of suggestions made as to what the club be called including : Crokes Wheelers, Kilmacud Wheelers , Kilmacud Crokes Wheelers but after a substantial consultation process KC Wheelers was finally selected as the name for the club and was registered with Cycling Ireland.

In 2014 Liam O'Carroll assumed the role of Chairman of the M2M steering committee and set about preparing for that year's M2M which in contrast to the first event would be from North to South, Malin to Mizen. Major work was again undertaken on the route selection, sponsorship, fund raising/static cycling events, and logistics fronts. Training was undertaken on the usual routes but an innovation was introduced for the route of the Paddy's Day cycle which went out to Blessington and turned east towards Sally Gap and on to Roundwood, down Slaughter Hill and home via Newtownmountkennedy and Kilcoole which was a much lumpier cycle than previous years. The Good Friday cycle was also more challenging and involved 120kM cycle across the Wicklow Gap onto Blessington and home by Sally Gap. A cycle was also undertaken to Tullamore to support the victorious Dublin U-21 football team in the All Ireland Final against Roscommon. A number of the

participants had sons on the Dublin panel including Paul Mannion, David Campbell and Shane Cunningham.

In 2014 the number cyclists increased significantly to 32. Again it took five days for the cycle, from 28th May to 1st June but unlike 2012 it was decided to travel from Dublin to the Malin starting point on the first day of the cycle. The stages for that year were:

Malin to Letterkenny	81kM
Letterkenny to Claremorris	190kM
Claremorris to Lahinch	122kM
Lahinch to Kenmare	160kM
Kenmare to Mizen	87kM

M2M 2014 was also very successful with all of the benefits associated with the first cycle being accrued. Close on €64,000 was raised which was split 50/50 between Breast Cancer Ireland and Kilmacud Crokes. The funds raised for the club were again assigned to the club's capital account.

Cycling continued throughout 2015 but the major event of that year was the participation of a group KC Wheelers members in a Cycling Safaris cycle between San Sebastian and Barcelona. The Group consisted of Pat Conlon, Gerry Greene, Frank Rutledge, Kevin Coakley, Pat Halpin, Tommy Mannion, Mícheál Mullin Michael McNicholas and Dave Byrne. The trip proved to be very enjoyable both from a cycling and social perspective.

For the remainder of 2015 and into 2016, weekend cycles mostly on Sunday continued. In 2016, the Mizen to Malin challenge was undertaken again. A new committee was formed and new members added including Pat Rowley, Ronnie Murray, Richie Stakelum and Mícheál Mullin. In preparation for the M2M trip, a new route for the Paddy's Day Cycle to Wicklow was undertaken as part of the training schedule for that year.

The Jersey Sponsorship increased such that jersey space for logos was exhausted. Numbers increased to over 50 from the 2014 event. The weather on the trip was magnificent, with melted tar on the road on some days. The route took a circuitous path through the main towns of Mayo that included Shrule, Castlebar and Ballina, the highlight being the munificent and hospitable reception in Castlebar. The 2016 trip also saw an increase in the number of women who took part. 6 Female club members took part – Pat Rowley, Joan Kehoe, Frances Mullin, Ann Campbell, Linda Tormey and Wendy O'Hora. €108,000 was raised which was split between the club and BCI.

Another feature of M2M 2016 was the courage and tenacity displayed by one of the participants, Barry O'Gorman. Barry had to pull up on the last stage of the cycle on the fourth day, between Bundoran and Ballybofey, because of mechanical problems with his bike and took the van into Ballybofey. On arrival in Ballybofey he had his bike repaired and returned, unbeknownst to the majority of the group, to the place where he had been forced to retire to resume his cycle. While Barry was grinding out the kms on his bike the remainder of the party were pre-occupied with seeking out hostelrys in Ballybofey to watch Dublin's progress against Laois the quarter-final of the Leinster Championship. It was only after the evening meal had been completed, after 10 o'clock, that Barry arrived back in Ballybofey to the admiration and awe of all.

Within two weeks of completing the 2016 M2M Mick Culligan, along with 56 other cyclists began an epic odyssey around the west coast of Ireland when he joined the Wild Atlantic Way Audax that required cyclists to pedal 2,100km over 7 days and 7 hours - in other words, they had 175 hours to get from one end of the Wild Atlantic Way to the other. By 2016 Mick, along with Fionnán Daly, had

begun to acquire a growing reputation as very serious cyclists. They both completed a number of the Five Monuments of One Day Classics in European cycling including Milan - San Remo, and Liege - Bastogne - Liege. In addition Mick has conquered many of the famous Tour de France peaks and completed numerous other challenging audax events.

However his exploits on the Wild Atlantic Way captured the imagination of Kilmacud Crokes and during the event and club members were constantly on their phones and lap tops following Mick's progress along the west coast as he cycled out and back along its many peninsulas through day and night. Mick was one of the 35 participants to complete the course but despite his great achievements on the bike Mick's most treasured moment still, is winning a County Clare minor football championship medal with Kilrush Shamrocks in 1983

Cycling in the club continued to progress during 2017 and another Cycling Safaris trip was undertaken to Croatia Slovenia and Italy in 2017 which again was very enjoyable the highlight being, the conquering of the "Ucka" which is 13.9km long with an average of 7.9% and topping out at 1372m.

As well as the M2M trips and the Cycling Safari holidays, a number of weekends away in Ireland have also become a regular part of the cycling holiday. To mention a couple, a trip to Carrick On Shannon/Enniskillen was a great weekend and also a trip for 2 days cycling based in Cavan town will live in the memory of those who took part. The cycling fraternity in Crokes, also built a link with popular KickStart Crokes program which over the last few years has run each January where more experienced cyclists took folks out each weekend who wanted to get into cycling. In fact a number of these folks, have since completed one of the M2M trips.

M2M 2018 saw a further increase in cyclists up to 75 with just over €153K raised which once again was split between BCI and the club. In 2018 it was decided that the Laura Lynn Foundation would become the beneficiary of the Paddy's Day cycle which has become an enjoyable fixture in the club cycling calendar.

Through 2019, weekend cycles have continued. A group also took a week long trip, cycling in the Sierra Nevada, in Spain. This adventure included the Pico da Valeta climb that comprised a 2870M climb over 41km, a gradient of 7%.

Towards the end of 2019, planning was commenced for M2M 2020. It was shaping up to be one of our biggest events yet with over 80 cyclists signed up to take part. But as we know, Covid-19 had other plans and the event had to be deferred. Since March of 2020, cycling has continued inline with Covid-19 protocols. There are circa 90 active cyclists in the club all of who are members of cycling Ireland. The club itself is affiliated to Cycling Ireland. Through the efforts of Liam O' Carroll, Dave Byrne and Paul Gallagher the club members now proudly wear KCWheelers cycling jerseys and winter jackets in the Kilmacud Crokes colours.

For more information on KCWheelers, check out the Kilmacud Crokes website for more details.