



republished from the early(ish) march 2010 archives

## it's hell out there



we are, if nothing else, a contradictory bunch of folks; obsessed with bicycles and riding them too, softer on the planet than our motorised counterparts, yet without a scooby when it comes to understanding adjectives. there have been a number of television programmes broadcast in the uk with titles similar to *the neighbours from hell* and *holidays from hell*, both intent on describing either the folks next door who make life a misery, or those package holidays that didn't quite work out as expected. the general point of both those listed, and others of similar ilk, is one of despondency, irritation, financial dismay and a warning not to go there. since many box office movies with the word *hell* in the title are often adjoined by a censor's certificate restricting viewing to those who ought to know better, but are likely to get a scare anyway (i don't remember any disney movies with 'hell' in the title), along with fire and brimstone from the pulpit each sunday, hell does not sound like the sort of place that most of the sane population would be interested in visiting.

cyclists, ever the naive bunch of pedallists, would appear to look upon anything regarding hades as an entreaty to fill in an entry form or settle down in front of the telly with frites and mayo readily to hand. *the hell of the north*, *a sunday in hell* and numerous other descriptive euphemisms are directed at paris roubaix; those of us unable to travel or ride such an ungainly pile of bricks have thus built our own edifices. *the hell of the ashdown* has not long passed, rapha are intent on celebrating paris roubaix sunday on 11th april with their very own *hell of the north* ride through the wilds, lanes, bridleways and dirt roads of hertfordshire, and now the virus has spread across the atlantic. the latest to suffer from this hellish affliction is the hell of hunterdon (april 3rd), featuring a challenging course with 18 sections of pave (ok, so it's dirt and gravel, but who's quibbling?) through the nether regions of hunterdon county new jersey.



and as if the word 'hell' were not dissuasion enough, later that very same month (april 25th) comes bucks county, philadelphia's paeon to the ronde van vlaanderen, entitled the *fools' classic*. i can think of few other activities where participants would clamour to sign on for an event which, by definition, classifies them as lacking the very sense with which they were born. this too will eschew as much of the metalled highway as is seemly in civilised society, and is described as '*a 72 mile belgian themed ride over roads less traveled*'; a beautiful way to describe purgatory, as indeed is the word '*hardscrabble*'.

the hell of hunterdon entry closes on the 28th march, while all fools should have their registration in by april 18th. of course, i cannot exclude myself from such misanthropy, as i fully intend to partake in rapha's '*hell of the north ride*' come april 11th. there are easily enough crap road surfaces around here to enable at least tentative exploration of hell, but any and all words of encouragement from other intending participants would be most welcome while riding through the devil's back garden.

*the prudent man looketh well to his going; the fool believeth everything.*

[\*hell of hunterdon\*](#) / [\*fools classic\*](#) / [\*the hell of the north\*](#)



*posted saturday 6 march 2010*