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British Columbia

Randonneur

Marathon Cycling

Editorial

Lyle Beaulac

Yup, that's right. Our long-time newsletter editor Susan Allen has finally managed to divest herself of the manifold pleasures of this task. Having done a marvelous job of putting the BC Randonneur newsletter together for more years than I can recall, Susan has decided that it's time for someone else to taste the joys of editorship.

This year's club president, Michel Richard, had volunteered to do the job, but he hasn't acquired a computer yet, so I thought I'd take it on just this once. I'd like to thank Susan for her dedication in putting out a consistently high-quality publication year after year (and for the MS Word templates which will give Michel and I a leg up on putting out something readable).

So, gentle randonneur, I crave your indulgence whilst I attempt to catch a draft in Susan's editorial slipstream. Your contributions of ride reports, cycling news tidbits, or even random musings would aid tremendously.

In this issue we have PBP reports from Wim Kok, Sarah Gallazin and Stella Meades, an inspirational story from Kevin Bruce on his 10,000.1 km year, the year in review by our Web guy, Eric, new clothing announcements, and much more.

But now, the real purpose of this newsletter edition: **the EGM!**

Spring Social and Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)

19:00 March 13, Moose's Down Under

The annual Social event will serve a dual purpose this year. An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) will be held concurrently with the Social event (contingent on meeting a quorum of membership), for the purpose of voting on increasing the club membership fee from \$10 to \$20. This vote will be conducted as the first order

of business at the Social. Membership renewals will not be conducted at the Social event until after the vote has been taken.

Due primarily to rising insurance costs, your club executive has taken the painful decision to propose this increase in membership fees. Although we have not received final word on what the actual insurance costs will be, the current estimate is \$23.50 per member. At our current membership fee of \$10, the club is in danger of not being able to meet its financial obligations. An increase of membership fees to \$20 per member is expected to ameliorate that danger. Note that, even at \$20, the club is still subsidizing the per-member insurance cost to the tune of \$3.50 through its other fund-raising endeavours. The club's financial status will likely need to be reviewed again before the AGM in September in order to determine if another adjustment in membership fees will be warranted.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the Social. Again, it starts at 19:00 (7 PM) on March 13, 2004 at Moose's Down Under: in the basement of 830 West Pender St., Vancouver BC. (604) 683-3300. The EGM will officially start at 19:30, as a quorum (10%) of the club membership must be present within ½ hour of the meeting start.

And don't forget to bring your cheque book to

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refurbish your cycling wardrobe. The new Rando BC socks are looking to be a hot seller. Danelle will be there with all the clothing. If you can't make the social and want some duds, call her at 604 421-1717.

Call for Volunteers

Have you looked at this year's ride schedule? This is one busy club, no? Now, if you take a closer look at the schedule, you will notice that there are a few vacancies open for ride organizers. The LM 200 and LM 600 Summer brevets have not been spoken for yet

Also, ride organizers need help. Each brevet can keep a half-dozen people busy (ok, maybe not busy; occupied) manning controls, helping at sign-in, taking candid photos of suffering rando's. It can really be a lot of fun. If you're worried about missing a ride, consider that the ride organizer usually conducts a "pre-ride" of the route a week prior to the actual event date, and that the event volunteers are permitted to join the pre-ride. This way, you get to learn about new routes before your friends do, so you can tell them how nice and flat it was (heh heh).

Volunteers will not be left to their own devices if they choose to take on a position. The club has numerous experienced members who will gladly help guide newcomers along. You don't have to come out with a route of your own, either. The club has a large library of tried and tested routes available. If you do decide to craft your own route, several members have tools that will aid in that endeavor.

Volunteers are also needed to help out with the Rocky Mountain 1200, July 21-25. Bodies are needed to staff the controls and the start/finish in Kamloops, as well as man (person?) the lead and follow vehicles. Contact Susan or Doug (604-734-2504) if you can lend a hand.

British Columbia Randonneur Marathon Cycling is the hardcopy newsletter of the BC Randonneurs Cycling Club. The BC Randonneurs are a founding member of the Randonneurs Mondiaux (1983). The club is affiliated with Cycling BC and the Canadian Cycling Association.

The opinions expressed in the newsletter are those of the article authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, club executive, Cycling BC, the CCA, or Randonneurs Mondiaux.

The newsletter is published in hardcopy form approximately every three months. Articles and notices are posted to the club webletter at www.randonneurs.bc.ca as received (or a little later if work or riding get in the way) and subsequently edited and formatted into this newsletter. If you are happy with the html or pdf version on the web and do not wish to receive further paper newsletters please contact the database manager. The data reports are emailed as pdf.

Editor: Lyle Beaulac

Submissions: Please send articles to me. My preference is plain text files or MS Word and digital photos in JPEG format. Send to Lyle_Beaulac@telus.net. Or mail (diskette or CDR) to Lyle Beaulac, 830 13th. St. New Westminster, B.C. V3M 4M9

Next publication deadline is TBD

Lastly, but certainly not leastly, the position of LM route coordinator is up for grabs, as Mr. Harold Bridge will be far too busy cycling across the country to continue with the job this year. He officially resigned from the position as of Dec 31, and he's been pressing us since the AGM to get our ducks in a row and round up a new vict., er, volunteer. He's also expended a great deal of energy into making sure that the upcoming season is well laid out for his successor. If you feel that this is something you could take on, please let Harold and/or the executive know as soon as possible, so that a smooth transfer of responsibility can take place before Harold cinches up his toe-straps and starts pedalling his way to St. Johns.

Wool Club Jersey Proposed

Eric Fergusson

Jaye Haworth has designed a BC Randonneur wool jersey - cream and burgundy, short or long sleeve. If there are 40 orders by the Spring Social (March 13) the order's a go! Order through Danelle. (604) 421-1717 Check www.randonneurs.bc.ca for details and full colour images of both jerseys.



Short Rides and 500, 1000 km. Awards Eliminated

Another topic which this year's executive agonized over was the decision to eliminate most of the "short rides" which have been offered alongside the regular 200 km. brevets for the past few years. The original intent of these short rides was to give prospective Randonneurs a "ladder" of incrementally more challenging rides as a (more or less) gentle introduction to the sport, with the expectation that they would "move up" to the official length brevets.

Unfortunately, it didn't quite turn out as planned. Examination of the ridership patterns for the past few years has shown that there is little evidence that people who initially take on the short rides, with the exception of the Populaires, move on to the more

challenging distances. By the same token, riders who do start doing brevets typically jump right into them, perhaps after completing a Populaire event just to get their feet wet.

So with the elimination of the short rides, it naturally followed that the 500 km. achievement award had to go as well, since the 500 km. was to have been made up out of a mini-series of short rides. And then did it make sense to have a 1000 km. award?

A not insignificant factor in the decision to eliminate the 500 and 1000 awards was the toll taken on our club volunteer resources (particularly our long-suffering database lady, Cheryl) in organizing and supporting the short rides, keeping track of the rides completed and managing the medals to be awarded for them. The 500 and 1000 awards had turned into ends in themselves, rather than a means to an end.

The executive apologises for any hard feelings this decision may engender in the members who were looking forward to earning a 500 or 1000 km. achievement medal, but we feel that the short-ride experiment has not borne sufficient fruit to continue with it. Short rides may still be offered at the discretion of individual event organizers; however, they will not count towards any sort of award offered by the club.

Also please note that Populaire events are not affected by this decision. All the populaires, New Year's Day, Nanaimo, Victoria, Canada Day and Pacific continue as before and finishers pins are available.

Bike Trailer is Missing

Gord Cook

Our club bike trailer has gone missing from the Bose farm in Surrey and no one knows its whereabouts. If anyone knows where it is please notify Gord Cook at (604 594 4644).



Up, Up & Away

2003 Season Review

by Eric Fergusson

Maybe it wasn't such a surprise that 2003 was a big year. All the indications were pointing to another jump in ridership, though maybe not such a big one. Club distance total cracked the 200,000 km mark for the first time (222,606 km). We had an astonishing 51 Super Randonneurs which easily exceeds the 1991 record of 43. And a lot of the action happened away from home... 39 BC Randonneurs went to PBP - by far our biggest contingent ever.

Paris Brest Paris

And 'big' wasn't just happening in BC in 2003. It was the biggest PBP ever with over 4000 entries, including 84 from Canada. The extended heat wave that had plagued France earlier in August was gone by PBP week, leaving behind perfect riding conditions - warm and generally sunny days, cool but pleasant nights, almost no winds, and dry roads all the way around the course. The event organization was as tight as usual and bursting with hundreds of helpful volunteers, to say nothing of many road-side supporters.

A few people have been around the course a few times now. Among this year's BC finishers were Ken Bonner, Keith Fraser, and Manfred Kuchenmuller who have now completed four PBPs each, and Deirdre Arscott who can now carve a fifth notch into her saddle. (The only other Canadian to have done five PBPs is Brian Leier from Manitoba.) At the other end of this continuum, over half of the BC finishers were PBP first timers - 16 of 31.

There were many remarkable stories this time, and as always, a few disappointments. One PBP disappointment that didn't happen was Jason Abrams's. Jason's Achilles failed around the 750 km mark - too far out to finish, right? Wrong. He rode the remainder of PBP (450 km), in pain, with the bad hoof out of the pedal. Thing is... he forgot the whole slow-down-and-take-it-easy part of being in rando survival mode. The clock stopped at an impressive 67:20 - the 3rd fastest BC time, and 7th for a Canadian. Bon courage mon ami, tres bon courage.

And Keith... Keith Fraser had a fast 2003 here in BC including a 41:25 Island 1000, and the quickest ever BC 600 (22:19) on the challenging Cache Creek route (breaking his

Coming Events

Spring Social – March 13

Extraordinary General Meeting

Moose's Down Under
Michel Richard 739-6798

Seattle Populaire – Mar 6

See SIR web site

Seattle 200 – Mar 20

Kent WA

See SIR web site

Island Populaire – Mar 28

Southgate Tim Hortons,
Nanaimo
Stephen Hinde 250-245-4751

Pacific Populaire – Apr 4

9 am: Riley Park
Danelle Laidlaw

Island 200 – Apr 10

50, 100, 150 also available
Stephen Hinde 250-245-4751

Peace Populaires I – Apr 4

50 km: Fort St. John
Wim Kok 250-785-4589

Seattle 300 – Apr 10

Tahuya Hills
Peter Beeson

Peace Populaires II – Apr 10

100 km: Fort St. John
Wim Kok 250-785-4589

L. Mainland 200 – Apr 17

Manfred
Kuchenmuller 604-448-8892

Fleche Northwest -Apr 23-25

Finish @ Semiahmoo
Peter McKay

Kamloops 200 – Apr 24

Kamloops
Bob Boonstra 250-828-2869

Island 300 – Apr 24

Duncan or Victoria
Stephen Hinde 250-245-4751

own record of 22:59). So maybe expectations were a little high for PBP. Harold and Dan had signed on as his PBP support team... On night one of PBP Keith didn't link up with Harold and Dan at the Mortagne control. The three of them spent hours trying to reconnect while Keith's chances of an elite finish evaporated. Many would have abandoned. But despite the calamity, Keith did eventually get back on track and then rode straight through. He ended up finishing in 59:41 and skunking us all – he was the first BC rider back and the third Canadian. His time is well off his '95 Canadian record time of 50:09, but after PBP '03, the '95 record still stands.

Rookie(s) of the Year

[i.e. the biggest distance total for a first time Super Randonneur]

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Sarah	200	200	200	200	4700
John:	200	200	500	200	4700

Not the typical five year patterns for people easing their way into randonneur cycling. Someone forgot to pass along 'The New Rando's Handbook' (with that chapter on sensible annual distance increases) to Sarah Gallazin and John Little, a couple on loan to us from the ultra marathon running world. But maybe they were just casing the joint all this time... toying with us for four years, then pouncing.

Before 2003 Sigi Palme had no brevet distance to his credit whatsoever. On any other year his impressive total of 4300 km would be the chart topper, but this year he'll have to settle for an honourable mention, and banana raspberry power gel.

The other first time Super Randonneurs are Jason Abrams, Randy Benz, Jacques Bilinski, Andreas Brade, Kevin Bruce, David Gillanders, Bob Goodison, Tina Hoeben, David Kirsop, Paul Lahti, Paul Lee, Alard Malek, Stella Meades, , Derek Shackleford, Sarah Tennant, Brian Westerberg, Val White, and last but not least, our 2003 club president Frances Caton. Yeah Frances!, and congratulations to all 19 of you.

Brevet De Randonneur 5000s

With PBP comes a new batch of Randonneur 5000 pins. And the winners (so far) are: Susan Allen, Deirdre Arscott, John Bates, Ken Bonner, Eric Fergusson, Keith Fraser, Manfred Kuchenmuller, Danelle Laidlaw, Mike Poplawski, Réal Préfontaine, Michel Richard, and Karen Smith.

Four riders - Ken, Michel, Eric, and Real - earned their 5000 pins all in one year. But it's Real's number that really jumps out at you. He rode a 400 km Fleche, added the other compulsory ingredients (200, 300, 400, 600, 1000 + PBP[1200]), and then added a spicy three brevet (900 km) topping... just enough with not a smidgeon of excess. Yes, his total in 2003 was a perfect 5000 km.

Au revoir Réal

It was quite a season for Réal, and not just as a rando rider. It was his final year as Randonneur Mondiaux President (the world-wide association promoting randonneur cycling); he organized much of

the PBP information dissemination, including the workshop in February for first-time PBPer; he masterminded the always delicate process of arranging our PBP accommodation at the Le Pavillon des Gatines in France; and in addition to his rando riding he won the BC seniors games road race and the time trial, and he 'silvered' in the hill climb (age category:70-74). Many will be saddened to learn that Réal is moving away (to near Ottawa), to be closer to family. Thanks Réal, for your many efforts over many years.

Intruder Alert...

Wil Roberts (who is a grad student from England studying in Seattle) rode only two brevets in BC in '03, but they're arguably our two toughest. In June he rode the Crowsnest 1000 (Vancouver to the Alberta border on highway 3)(and by the way he rode back to Seattle afterwards), and then in August he tested himself again with the Switchback 1000 in early August. Nice guy, strong rider, excellent climber.

I should mention that in both cases Wil was joined by Michel Richard... Michel had attempted the Switchback in 2002, but failed due to a mechanical problem. Despite the BC interior heat the route was no probs this time for either Michel or Wil.

Disappointment

Another person who had no trouble with the August Switchback 1000 was Henry Berkenbos. But tragedy was stalking Henry this year. On the Flèche Pacifique, Henry, the most cautious rider among us, had been surprised by the new rumble strips on Highway 1 west of Hope, and crashed badly. But Henry, who has never in his life been east of the Rockies, was determined to go to PBP. He was well enough to gingerly ride the Kamloops 600 in early June and earn a last minute PBP qualification. But the real tragedy happened after Henry was fully recovered. On the eve of his flight to Paris (connecting in Toronto) much of Ontario and the North Eastern US was hit by the biggest electrical blackout in history. Most BC riders were already in France; some of us were en route; Henry never made it out of the Vancouver airport. C'est pas juste.

Iron Butt

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Ken:	5054	5839	6700	12,594	12,229

Above - not the typical five year pattern for... well, anyone. Several years ago it seemed incredible that Ken Bonner had tallied a life-time event total of 50,000 km, but suddenly 100,000 km doesn't seem so far away. It was no surprise that Ken has won the John Hathaway trophy (a.k.a. the Iron-but trophy) for the most event distance ridden by a BC randonneur in 2003 - nobody else was in the same ballpark. Mike Poplawski has pointed out that the distance totals of the next two people on the list still fall short of Ken's incredible 12,229 km total. And oh ya... Ken ran 9 marathons last year, bringing his total to 146!

There is an important footnote to this file in 2003. Michel *always-a-bridesmaid-never-a-bride* Richard rode several events in France after PBP which are not included in his '03 event distance totals:

Raid Pyrénéen (800 km), the Diagonale: Hendaye-Menton (1000 km), and Randonnée Alpine (740 km). These events, though not recognized by ACP or Randonneur Mondiaux, are in character a lot like our randonneur events: they're long distance cycling events usually with time limits that recognize a successful completion with a medallion or other distinction. So just for fun, let's add Michel's event total of 6429 to his 3 other French events (2540) to get the impressive (but strictly unofficial) total of 8969 km. For those interested in this sort of cycling, I have put together an Info Page on the BC Randonneur Web site: www.randonneurs.bc.ca.

The iron butt list itself grew considerably in 2003. The riders who registered 1500 km or more increased from 43 riders in 2002 to 51, and it included 19 new names.

Bon Voyage & Merci Rando 500 / 1000

2003 marks the end of 'short rides' series and the accompanying Randonneur 500 and 1000 awards. It was an initiative of Dan McGuire's back in 1997 inspired by a suggestion from fellow BC Randonneur founding member John Hathaway, and modeled on a similar formula used by Audax UK. It was a series enjoyed by many riders, some of whom have gone on to ride the longer brevet distances.

Roger

The thing I haven't mentioned is the sad start we had to the season. Roger Street died of a heart attack while riding his bike near 16th and Blanca in Vancouver. He was 55 and in good shape at the time. He was a tough rider, a wise club treasurer & advisor, and a great friend to many of us, and we will remember him with great fondness.

While acknowledging the gravity of tragedy there was something a few people were saying at the time that sticks in my head – what a beautiful way for him to have gone (i.e. out riding his bike). What a great way for any of us to go... it was however, for Roger, 30 years too soon. A bien tôt mon ami.

2004 - Ready or Not Here We Come

So what about the coming season? 2004 is a 'PBP hangover' year, and no doubt there will be a little more elbow room at the start of many of our brevets. [One of the more revealing record pages for tracking the four year pattern that seems to be so much a part of randonneur cycling, is our Super Randonneur archive page - have a look [HERE](#). See what I mean?]

But let's not forget that there is one particularly big item on the menu for next year. In 2004 all eyes turn east (except yours Wim → look south) as we prepare for the 6th running of the Rocky Mountain 1200. If you plan to ride be sure to submit your entry on time (March 18) - there will be a lottery if the 100 entry limit is exceeded - or if you're not riding, consider contacting Doug, Susan, or Sharon if you think you can offer a helping hand.

One final note... are you still looking east? Now look a little south. Tina Hoeben is organizing a 200 in Penticton in September 2004. Good luck Tina, on rando cycling's newest frontier.

Better Get a Mud Flap!

Fender and light rules tightened up for 2004

Just a brief reminder of the club rules about bike lighting and fenders needed for participation in BC Randonneurs brevets. The minimum requirements have been tightened up a bit for the 2004 season. The club rules are viewable on the club Web site at: <http://www.randonneurs.bc.ca/introduction/rules.html>

Rule #4:

"Bicycles must be in safe working order. A bright front light (which clearly illuminates the road at least 5 meters in front of the bike) and a red rear light are mandatory, and both must be attached to the bike - no lights means no ride. Riders should have backup lighting systems and should carry spare batteries. Bikes must also have front and rear fenders. Mud flaps extending down from the rear fender are mandatory, and must fully protect a following rider from wheel spray. After June 30th fenders are not required. It is nevertheless strongly recommended, as a courtesy, to use fenders when paceline riding in wet conditions. There may be inspections before any event to ensure that the minimum equipment requirements are met. Organizers may refuse rider participation because of equipment violations. For a fender rule violation, riders will receive a 30 minute penalty. This penalty will take the form of a late start, 30 minutes after the official start. You are not required to have lights or fenders on the rides shorter than 200 km."

Paris Brest - The Last Ditch Effort

Sarah Gallazin

We were lying in a ditch in rural France. Our bikes stood guard, upright, beside us. Our excess clothes, gloves, helmets, and the contents of our pockets were strewn on the grass, John was asleep. Hoards of bikers seemed to whiz by us on the road, in the direction of Paris. With 220 kilometers to go, we had given up.

The heat of the day and the 1,005 kilometers we had already biked had won. We kept falling asleep on our bikes, and it seemed PBP had claimed another 2 victims.

My husband and I were in France to ride the PBP. Everyone who makes it to the start line has endured challenges beyond imagining, in qualifying for this event. They are all winners. Especially those riding qualifying rides on the "Wet" coast. It is a crime when a rider does not finish this ride. So much time, effort, and money are expended.

A voice in my head told me I was not well enough to start the ride. Seven days before leaving for France, I came down with a sore throat and a bad cough. The cough did not go away. I felt we had invested so much emotional, physical, and financial energy, that I was compelled to ride.

The first night was scary. We started at 10 pm with 700 riders in our wave (out of a total of 4,069 riders) riding shoulder to shoulder into the dark. Even though I had ridden the 1,000 km distance, I had not tested my ability to endure

sleeplessness. On the first night I kept wanting to lie down between 3 - 5 am, just before dawn. With the 10 pm start, the first sleep 90 hour riders might hope for is 24 hours after they begin.

We arrived at the first control at 141 Km, 7 minutes ahead of our plan. We had been passed by many of the second and third wave riders who started later than us. I knew that I could not keep up the pace.

I convinced John and our friend, Garry Elmitt, to slow down for the next 2 controls. It was hell. I was achy, weak, and felt flu-like, not to mention sleep deprived. Every control, I would tell John, "I'm dropping. I'll just have something to eat, and see how I feel, but I doubt it..." And on we would go to the next control, just to repeat the same scenario. Saint John was ever patient.

There were a few reasons I kept going. On the first night we rode into the darkness of rural France, and could see only the shapes and shadows of the beautiful villas and treed hillsides and farms on our route. I knew if I dropped, I would miss all the scenery. Also the thought of the "sad, lonely train ride back to Paris" kept me going. I had dropped in a ride this summer, and the thought of the plane ride home as a DNFer was unbearable. As new Randos, Cheryl Lynch had vouched for our riding abilities, and even our character on more than one occasion; how could I DNF?. I could not add a 51 year old Canadian female to the DNF stats; everyone would think I was too old! Stupid reasons. I was too sick to ride. I knew it after the first night.

Garry was riding too fast, for me; we had to let him go. I felt guilty as St. John was now forced to ride my snail's pace. Our first sleep was on a table in the cafeteria of the control at Loudeac. I tried to stretch out on the cafeteria floor, but too many bodies, and a spilled can of coke chased me to the table.

John slept across from me with his arms folded on the table and his head on his arms. The alarm on my watch woke us. I sat up at the cafeteria table rubbed my sleepy eyes, as we had only had 15 minutes sleep. A couple of French cyclists were having breakfast beside us , at our table. I was wakened with the most cheerful "Bonjour, Madam". I just had to laugh.

After possibly the best hot croissant ever baked, and coffee for breakfast, we tried to ride again. That was short lived. Fatigue was the ever-present demon.

We kept trying to stop for power naps. Eventually we succumbed. I spread out my space blanket and John and I slept in a cattle field, at the top of a beautiful misty hillside, in the dawn light. And it was cold. We woke in an hour and our teeth were chattering. Again a rude shock to the system. It is very difficult to operate a bike when your body won't stop shaking. Oh, but it was pretty scenery.

We literally lived on caffeine pills. Six or more a night, for four nights. It kept us going. The downside was that when an opportunity to sleep came, the pills made it impossible.

Because I was sick and rode slowly, we used up all our sleep time and were constantly chasing a time deficit to make the closing times of the controls.

On night 3 we rode with SIR members, Amy and Robin Pieper. Our caffeine pills helped them as well. The ride became a black road ahead, following lights up endless hills, and falling asleep on my bike. Thankfully I would wake up when I hit gravel on the side of the road. At one point I didn't know if John was in front or behind. Me, I was so out of it.

Day 3 was hot. We slowed to a crawl after the sun got high in the sky. Falling asleep, and weaving, even a visit to a local café for some coffee did not help much. We found our ditch and had our 1 hour sleep. This is where I believe we had some "divine intervention". It was like I had been struck with a thunderbolt. I wanted to try to finish in time - so many riders were riding by our ditch, all hoping to make it, riding like bats out of hell. I wanted to go out in a blaze of glory, to finish, or explode in the process. I believe Roger Street and my friend Denise Mason had a lot to do with getting us going. They were watching over us. I was riding with Denise's bandana, she died of cancer in May. Roger had been our patron, and he always believed in us.

I woke John up. He agreed to go for it. He said "stick on my butt". I did. This is what he had wanted to do for the entire ride. We passed so many riders saying, "This train's goin' to Paris, hop on!" And they tried. We rode with several people for a short time, but our pace was too fast. We were "on fire".

So many hills, so few directional arrows....but we made it to the control. The spookiest experience was the rural road to Mortagne Au Perche. We started out with a few riders. As the night wore on, our riding companions disappeared and the roadside ahead became littered with sleeping riders beside their bikes, reflective gear glinting eerily in our headlights. Victims of the road. It was like a war zone - bodies everywhere. Oh, the hill to that control!

The up hills were killer, the down hills icy cold and endless. It seemed we would never reach the control. Some riders passed us going very fast. We thought they were just frivolously racing. We met Stephen Hinde , he said there was a lot of up and down before the town. We had no idea how far it was to the control. I looked at my watch, wondering when the torture would be over. I noticed I only had 15 minutes to make the control cut off. I booted it. I made it to the control, but John was nowhere to be seen. Last time I rode with him, he was cursing the hills, the darkness, the cold, etc., approximately 10 km back.

I checked in to the control. Then I waited in the still cold air for John. Was this the end? Finally he rode up. I told him to ride up to the door, jump off his bike, and run into the control. He only had 2 minutes until cut off! Now we knew why those riders were racing up the hills!

We had no sleep since the ditch. Weariness was setting in. The last 82 km had been hard. It seemed like we were riding around in circles. The entire course was crudely chip-sealed. It was taking its toll on our wrists and crotches. There was a lot of standing on the pedals. And new swear words were discovered.

We made it to the last control - no time to sleep now. Another

great meal, and off we went. The sun was hot, but thankfully a breeze cooled us. John was fading and wanted to stop for a coke, as water was not quenching his thirst. Of course, there were no stores open on the route. Thank God we didn't get a flat in this section. I was not capable of fixing anything! It was a very long 58 km.

We had a motorcycle escort into town. Finally the finish line. Some of our friends calling our names. Stashing our bikes and running to the control. We became PBP finishers.

A week later back at home in Vancouver, my doctor recommends I be tested for low iron levels, as I seem to be exhausted for some reason!

Ray Wight of Prairie Randonneurs said that PBP is scheduled every four years, so riders have time to forget. Fortunately, I have a very good memory!

D.N.F. @P.B.P.fr

Stella Meades

D.N.F. @P.B.P.fr When Sandy completed P.B.P. in 1999 he said it had been the hardest thing he had ever done and he was never going to do it again. I had been at the finish that year watching the riders come in and remembered very clearly seeing what the effects of the ride were. But knowing Sandy I was not too surprised this last spring to hear him making serious noises about riding it again. I had never completed a brevet series and thought I would join him and see what happened. The furthest I had ridden thus far as a randonneur was the 300 km and a fleche in 2001. After the spring 2000 brevet I began reading articles on P.B.P. and caught up in Sandy's enthusiasm began to be interested. I kept my thoughts quiet, telling myself to smarten up, this was well beyond my capabilities, we had done very little riding the year before, I was too old etc. etc. But the idea of doing P.B.P. would not go away. I read Ron Himshoot's article "Eating an Elephant" with his advice to people planning to ride P.B.P. I then plucked up my courage and told Stephen Hinde. He greeted my announcement with a slight pause then said "We'll see you at the start line then in August".

We eventually finished the brevets but I found them very difficult. The 400 km with our 10pm start showed me how much I hate night riding and a night-time start: abandoning the Island 600 at 300 Km in Port Alberni, soaked through and cold, showed me how much I hate wet hilly rides: completing the last-chance 600 in Kamloops with forty degree heat showed me - well you get the picture. At my advanced age wisdom should have been clicking in, but it was nowhere to be seen. Plans went ahead, flights booked, money paid and the registration was completed for P.B.P. 2003.

Three weeks, three days, two hours and forty minutes before we were due to leave for France Sandy fell off a ladder and broke his right arm. He sat in Nanaimo Hospital emergency department telling the Doctor he had to be ready to ride 1200 km on August 18th. The Doctor looked at me pityingly, wondering how I managed with a husband in the throes of dementia.

I learnt quite a lot about myself in the next few weeks. If Sandy really was unable to start on August 18th I would just have to do it alone. I found that riding and changing tires on my own was possible but rather lonely. But I underestimated my husband. One of Sandy's strongest assets is a bull headed determination. He refused to contemplate not going to France so on August 1st we left for Beaune where Sandy's son and his family lived.

We arrived just in time to experience the most horrific heat wave that France had had for many years. Fortunately we were offered the use of an old stone house with probably the only air conditioned bedroom in Burgundy, if we would look after the owner's dog. It was just what we needed. Sandy spent the first few days sleeping in that wonderful bedroom and on August 7th rode his bike four kilometers around the ring road in Beaune. He rode a little more every day and on August 11th we started the 400 km ride to Plaisir. The 102 plus degree heat dogged us for three days and keeping hydrated after the middle of the day was impossible. On the fourth day we woke to a wonderful thunderstorm, rain poured down. I swore I would never complain about riding in rain again.

On arriving in Plaisir I began to feel excitement for the first time. Up until this point there had been an air of unreality about the whole adventure, but we were here and it looked as though we would actually be at the start on Monday night. I passed the bike check with no problems, although Sandy had to do some hard talking to get his bike through - "where were the replacement light bulbs for your L.E.D. lights?" I decided to ride the prologue on Monday morning as a means of calming my anxiety and to help me sleep in the afternoon. We enjoyed the ride but it neither calmed me nor helped me sleep, I was having a hard time not feeling intimidated by the sheer number of riders and their obviously stronger riding abilities. I was assailed with a lack of confidence, reinforced by my feeling that I really had a cheek being here at all, and who was I to imagine I could ride 1200km in 90 hours? Sandy worked his usual magic though and helped me regain my equilibrium.

We watched the 8pm starters and it was wonderful to actually be there and be a part of this amazing event. We joined the long snake of riders making their way towards the 10pm start. When we approached the start line we were in a group of about 50 riders who were stopped by mistake. After about three minutes of rather frantic discussions between officials we were allowed to leave. This was to our advantage as we left with a very small group, one anxiety dealt with. Off we went into the night. As I had thought we would be riding with hundreds of other riders it was disconcerting to be almost alone. We had bought radio-telephones to keep in touch with each other. Although they had worked well on training rides they were not working well now and began to be an annoying extra thing to deal with. We decided to put them away, something we were to regret later. Sandy was urging me to grab onto small pelatons but they were all either faster than us or we were faster than them. One fast group overtook us and I overheard Tina Hoeben and Sarah Tennant commenting to each other on the nice pace they were keeping.

Eventually we found a good group and began to fly along. Unfortunately, we soon lost each other in the crowd and each

became worried about the other. Our plan, if we lost each other, had been to continue on to the next control but somehow in the night this was forgotten and our comedy of errors was about to begin. At first I thought Sandy was in front of me (because he usually is) but as I rode further on and there was no sign of him I began to wonder if he was in fact behind and his arm was causing him problems. I stopped a couple of times calling out to passing cyclists "is that you Sandy?" - no answer, so each time I rode on still hoping he was up ahead. Meanwhile, behind me, Sandy thinking I was behind him (as I usually am) decided to turn around thinking perhaps I had ended up in a ditch or worse! After a couple of kilometers he came to his senses, decided to stop worrying, and turned around hoping to find me up ahead. As I stopped for the third time, calling out plaintively for my husband, to my great relief he appeared out of the night. Feeling very relieved but aware we had now lost precious time, we rode on to Mortagne

We had planned on stopping in Mortagne for food, and as I filled my tray to overflowing we met Val White. She had been mostly riding alone through the night and was feeling in need of company. As we set off for Villaines the sun was coming up and we were already way behind our planned time. Never mind I thought, it is daylight and we will soon make up this lost time. Earlier in the year I had asked Sandy what the ride was like in respect to hills and he had remembered that it was "hilly in parts". As we rode up and down those endless hills he said he had completely forgotten how many there were. I also remembered reading an article that said the real hills only start after Loudeac. Never mind, I thought, I will soon be able to have a nap in Villaines. Sandy's son Geoff was supporting us and as we rode into Villaines we saw him waiting near the control.

I ate the most wonderful bowl of muesli I had ever had, and half a cantaloup and then napped for ten minutes. I am not sure what Sandy did but when I woke up, feeling somewhat stunned, we set off for Fougeres. At first I just felt tired, but expected it to pass, then a lead like feeling began to creep over me. I ate some graham crackers, drank some French power drink and kept on. The temperature began to rise and I was getting very hot in my nighttime riding gear. At my age, I had been told, the hot sweats of menopause should be well gone but not so. I stopped at the side of the road and began to desperately pull off my wet, clammy clothes. Modesty was flung to the wind and passing motorists were treated to quite a sight. Back on the bike I felt a little better, but before long my body felt more leaden than ever. I had bonked once before on the 400 Km brevet but had managed to overcome it, this time nothing was working. My brain could not get passed the thoughts that there would be no sleep between here and the finish and that I was holding Sandy back. I knew from experience that, for me, the 300 km point is the most vulnerable part of a brevet. Where was the self -fortitude I had promised myself? - where was the strength of will I had visualised coming to my rescue? - all had completely vanished and now lay mixed in the dust of this French road. With Sandy gradually pulling away and the next hill looming as a nightmare to be got through I realised my adventure was possibly coming to a very premature end.

About 20 km outside Fougeres I pulled up beside Sandy who was waiting at the side of the road. We had agreed before leaving

Canada that if one of us abandoned the other would keep on. I told him what I had decided, reminded him of our agreement, and urged him to go on. He then told me that he was having trouble with his arm and elbow, this made it difficult to stand and because of this he was already experiencing seat problems. He told me he was also coming to the realisation that he would eventually have to abandon. What a terrible moment, we stood there crying in each other's arms trying to console each other. We rode on to the next small village and called Geoff to tell him to come and pick us up. While we waited, drinking beer, we saw Barb Henning ride by; we cheered her on and watched the other cyclists go by. Some were obviously struggling and would have trouble reaching the next control with much time to spare. Then we realised that the 5am starters were appearing and they were flying by. At this point we were just feeling numb. While we were loading the bikes onto the van, Danelle Laidlaw and John Bates stopped for a few minutes and commiserated with us. We spent that night in Rennes. As we lay in bed all we could feel was relief and we slept like babes. After we arrived home at the end of August I kept waking in the night in panic thinking I had to get on my bike and ride. I sleep-walked a few times, waking up in the kitchen not knowing where I was. When I did wake a feeling of relief would wash over me and I would crawl back into bed and sleep. But gradually a time of reckoning began, disappointment over having to abandon would not leave me. I remembered all the good things about qualifying and starting the ride, the French people out at midnight calling out encouragement, the great feeling of going into the first control at Villaines, the two young girls giving us water near Fougeres and much more - but the disappointment settled like a weight in my chest. So one day I asked myself what would make me feel better and I realised the only answer was to try again. Earlier in this article I had said that at my age wisdom should kick in - maybe after four years it will.

PBP 2003: La grand'Adventure!

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Introduction

PBP 2003 is history. Proudly and humbly I can say that I am now part of it, as much as it is part of me. Inseparable. It's in the gut. I'm smitten! What follows is an attempt to recount this adventure. Unfortunately it is incomplete, because I can't recall it all. Too many impressions, some very vivid, many moments of elation, enjoyment pur sang, the people, the camaraderie, le paysage francais. Others so raw emotionally, that is almost too painful to remember, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Some images have become so fused, that they've left me confused as to what happened where, and when. A pity, but alas! Others have completely vanished. Gone into oblivion. All I can say is that I have to return and cycle it again in 2007. This account then covers the preparation, the intermezzo of anticipation, PBP 2003 itself, and some final musings.

Preparation

Preparation began a few years ago, when I started doing brevets, including the RM 1200 in 2002 (Veni, Vidi, Vici: My first RM1200). Winter training involved long-track speed-skating and cross-country skiing. Furthermore our local bike club held roller-training sessions three times a week. Admittedly, I usually made only two of them, where we were subjected to the rigor of Troy Jakobsen's Spinervale videos with sprints, hill climbs, time trials and other simulations. These work quite well, though his comments like "you're not working hard enough pal" can certainly be insulting, especially at moments when everyone's just dripping from sweat. In March 2003 my new bike arrived, a Marinoni Ciclo. Steel frame, STI shifters, 3 x 10 transmission (53-42-30 and 13-27), and a carbon fibre fork for smoother riding. Very spiffy looking, I might add. By April it was road riding with frequent 30 km distances, followed by 50 and 100 km populaires. Mid April I rode the Camrose 200 brevet near Edmonton with 4 Alberta randonneurs (including two PBP anciens) in 8:47 hours under ideal conditions (7 hours on the bike, the rest eating, loafing and socializing). Three more brevets followed in the Peace region, including a cold and snowy 200 km, and windy 300 and 400 km brevets. The latter two were completed solo, which they say is good for character building. For the final PBP qualifier, I signed up for the Vancouver Island 600, scheduled only a week after my 400 km. Although I didn't feel fully recovered, it took some 36 hours, including 14 hours of cycling in steady rain at 12 0C. More character building! We were among the first in BC to qualify for PBP (First Blood). Elation!

The Intermezzo: Anticipation and Staying Fit

After qualifying in late May, the challenge was of course to stay fit and motivated for the next three months. While the brevet schedule offered all kinds of distances, I stuck to shorter rides of 30 to 50 kilometers, including hill climbs, a couple of bike races and time trials with the local bike club. Some of the training was hit and miss, due to the lack of time, too much work and a litany of other excuses, worthy of an A+. In early July I did a couple of 160 km training rides spaced one week apart on a 'roller-coaster' course. They felt good. In late July we took a ten-day holiday without cycling. Instead, physical labour and relaxation did the trick. I must admit that after the holidays I was tempted to sign up for the Alberta PBP Hell-Week, held only three weeks before PBP. This involved doing four brevets (300-200-300-200 km) in as many days. Just this nagging feeling: "did I train enough? Would more distance be better?" I resisted and did not go. In retrospect, inertia proved to be a good thing. I figured that doing too much shortly before PBP could be counterproductive.

Instead I did short stuff, speed work, hills and medium distances. Eric Ferguson's training plan, with his recommendation to 'take no prisoners' after qualifying for PBP proved excellent advice (Big Ones and Training Schedule). I guess Churchill's response to the question if he ever felt like exercising was: "when I have that urge, I just lay down till it goes away" should also apply to the cycling urge during the final pre-PBP weeks.

Getting There: Traveling to Europe

Early August I traveled to the Netherlands to visit my family and to acclimatize. The latter was no luxury, since the much talked

about heat wave baked most of Western Europe. Temperatures soared to 35 0C, day after day. I did a couple of 50 km rides at a good pace in those temperatures, relaxed for a few days. Then I covered 100-120 km each day for three days in a row, starting early in the morning, so that I would beat the heat and finish by noon and. Again the distances were long enough to signal the body not to get lazy, but short enough not to get fatigued. Wednesday before PBP I took the Thalys from Rotterdam to Paris. When I arrived at Gare du Nord, it was so hot that I decided to take a fast and expensive cab ride to the hotel in Plaisir (55 Euros). Upon arrival I met many PBP compatriots, assembled the bike and took a reassuring spin to the start site. The next morning, and every morning thereafter, the hotel treated us to incredible breakfasts. Merci beaucoup! In the next few days we visited the Palace at Versailles, and frequented shopping hangouts such as Auchan and Decathlon for some last minute purchases. On Friday we explored the first 60 km of the PBP course from Plaisir to Nogent le Roi. We had a chance to get a feel for the roads and countryside. Cycling back was a blast, especially when sprinting uphill near Montfort l'Amaury. Too bad we could not have earned points for a fictitious King of the Mountain jersey. There was lot of torque in my legs. It felt great, and I knew that I was ready for PBP. Clyde, Phil and Mike thanks for the fun on this stretch.

The bike check on Sunday was a pretty painless affair. Earlier, someone had 'heard' that LED lights would not be acceptable. Rumours? Or a case of PBP angst? But there was no need to panic. In less than two minutes the bike check was done, so was the actual registration at the Gymnase. Very efficient!

Unfortunately the weather remained hot. Then came Monday morning with the best newspaper headline I'd seen in a long time: "Le canule est casse!" The heat wave has been broken. Hurrah. There was a collective sigh of relief for the thousands of organizers, volunteers and participants. The 30 km prologue through Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines that morning took place under foggy and drizzly conditions. I don't think anyone was sad about that. That evening, I saw the most colorful group of randonneurs (and their machines) lining up for a proverbial last supper. We stuck around to watch the departure of two waves of the 80-hour group. That was impressive and exciting. Wow. Our turn would be next. Time to head back to the hotel for a few winks.

St Quentin-en-Yvelines (Km 0.00): We Are Off!!!

At 3:00 am the alarm sounded. A light breakfast, a few more details, and we cycled through the empty streets to the start some 10 km away. When we arrived, many cyclists had already assembled. At 4:45 am tandems, recumbents and tricycles vanished in the dark. At 5:00 am the air horn sounded and we were off!

The clock had started ticking. What to do next? Our mission: to complete twelve hundred and twenty five kilometers in 84 hours. The clock wouldn't stop until we were back from the round trip to Brest in Brittany at the Atlantic coast. Little did many know what lay ahead, other than steady work, little sleep, great scenery and camaraderie.

A pilot car guided us through town in the early morning hours. Adrenalin and legs were pumping furiously, creating a high pace.

I guess many were worried that they would be left behind. Soon les anciens, previous PBP finishers, settled in at their own pace. They had seen it all before. Been there, done that. The mad rush to the front of the pack to get to Brest tout de suite. But Brest is a long way, and there are many clicks and hills between here and there. No need to get excited. After all, one also has to make it back. Finishing PBP means not only completing the first hills and kilometers, but also the last ones. That's the biggest challenge. There is absolutely no need to beat yourself up in the first hour, but it is ooooh-so tempting to latch on to a fast bunch. By the time the pack got to Montfort, it was stretched substantially. The hammerheads were gone and sanity started to prevail, in so far that is possible in PBP.

After Montfort we cruised through rolling terrain, small villages originating from much earlier times, and the peaceful forests of Rambouillet. Between 7:00 and 7:30 am we descended into Nogent le Roi (km 57), a cool place with very old buildings. After the ascent out of Nogent, we were soon traversing through a drought-stricken countryside. Fields with dried-up corn, its leaves rustling with the slightest breeze. Shriveled-up tournesols, sunflowers, that no longer followed the sun, because they couldn't. C'était très triste! In between we passed through many small settlements, too many to remember, too impressive to forget though. I must return to absorb and to savour the flavour. The buildings, the architecture, the landscaping, the flowers. People walking home with fresh baguettes wrapped in white paper under their arms, ready to have lunch, encouraging us, waving, wishing us bon courage et voyage and many other good things. And so we moved along, arriving at noon in Mortagne au Perche (Km 141) (The times noted here are estimates only, until the official control card verifies the exact time) While this place was a contrôle ravitaillement, little food was available. Later we learnt that great food was served across the road.

Ah well. After a 45 minute break, we left for Villaines la Juhel (223 km) the first official control. We arrived around 4:00 pm, time for a real meal. Being part of the 84 hour group had the advantage that most controls were quiet, thus eliminating waiting time and congestion. Soon we mounted our machines to ride via Javron, Lassay les Chateaux, Ambrières les Vallées and other pretty places to reach Fougeres (Km 311) at about 8:30 pm. After Fougeres night fell and we followed narrow roads in darkness, safety vests and lights on. The country-side became very quiet. Where flèches (route markers) were few and far between, it was sometimes hard to know if we were still en route. When doubts arose we were often reassured by moving red tail lights ahead of us as distant beacons. This is how the ride progressed to Tinténiac (km 366), where we arrived at about midnight. After a sitdown meal onward via St. Meen le Grand, Merdrignac to Loudeac (km 452) . At one of these controls-- I can't recall which one -- we took an hour sleep break or so. Just outside Tinténiac my bike chain started skipping. An apparent stiff link caused some concern. With help from others the problem was soon resolved. We passed through St Martin le Pres (km 487.5) , where the organizers surprised us with a secret control. We then followed a lot of hollow roads through a magnificent countryside via Corlay and St. Nicholas de Pelem to Carhaix-Plouguer (Km 529). Here I had the stiff chain link checked.

After a less than gentle treatment by a bike mechanic, the problem 'appeared' to be fixed. At least I thought so, for [t]his treatment almost meant the end of my PBP later in the ride. More about that later. Leaving Carhaix behind -- and below us -- we ascended the narrow winding road under hot conditions to Huelgoat. The scenery was very pretty. In this part of Brittany town signs are bilingual: Breton and French (Bilingual Road Sign). Interesting both from a cultural, historical and political perspective. The steady climb up Roc Trevezel was not as tough as I had thought. Due to the elevation change, a totally different landscape emerged: windblown grasslands with magnificent views overlooking Brittany. We felt on top of the world and took a break and breather to enjoy the scenery.

Following the break we descended the long road down only reaching speeds up to about 50 - 55 kph. Why not faster, I wondered since I had reached higher speeds up to 85 kph during rides in the BC. The answer lay hidden in the grade. It was not all that steep, which was confirmed on our way back and up the Roc. Cruising through Sizun we then coasted - no pun intended - to Brest (Km 615). We had reached the halfway point. Crossing the Pont Albert Louppe in the coastal city was great. The views from and of this bridge were spectacular. Arthur Miller might find an inspiration here. At the Brest control (5:00 pm) I took a hot shower, supplied the body with necessary solids and liquids, relaxed for a while, and then back on the road by about 6:00 pm. The route back through the streets of Brest seemed never ending. Finally, the outskirts and a sense of 'we are going to make it' (to Paris) started to sink in. So far I had slept very little, but felt quite well. We maintained a good pace as we 'cyclo-scaled' the Roc from the Westside. Near the radio tower site at the top, every one stopped to put on warm clothes. The evening air cooled quickly, and the long descent ahead could cause quite a chill. We bypassed Huelgoat and 'slid' down into the control at Carhaix-Plouguer (Km 696) , where we collected another stamp, then onward in the dark, while moving distant red taillights kept us on track. By the time we reached Loudeac (Km 773) I started to feel tired, mainly because of lack of sleep. The temperatures were hovering around 7 0C, rather chilly. Dawn came about and with it a secret control at Illifaut; (Km 810) . It must have been about 6:30 am. This stop had some great food and very juicy peaches. A twenty minute-sleep on the floor was marvelous. Someone even provided a space blanket for cover. (Thanks Stephen, but where is the picture?). The power nap was just what I needed. Soon we hopped on the bikes and cycled to St Meen le Grand. Here a French cyclist rode up to us, started a conversation and proudly pointed out that we were in the birthplace of the great Louison Bobet, cycling legend, local son, and national hero, who won the Tour de France three times in a row: 1953, 1954 and 1955. That was half a century ago!!! I was barely old enough to learn to cycle. The town established a museum with all of Bobet's paraphernalia (Musée Bobet). Unfortunately the rider did not mention this, otherwise we could/would have dropped in for a quick visit. We'll save that cycling history for next time. The cycling pace started to slow down a bit as we moved onward to Fougeres (km 914 km). As our need for rest breaks increased, we decided to stop for an extended meal.

Later on that afternoon we made another stop in Ambrières les

Vallees overlooking the Varenne valley, definitely a great place for a holiday sometime in the future. For the time being however we wanted to make it to Villaines-la-Juhel (Km 1,002), where we arrived late that night. A quick meal and another snooze on the floor. We started off sometime before midnight with a group of 5 - 7 riders from BC, ready to enter the last and possibly toughest night of PBP. Knowing that there was a little over 200 kilometers to go to the finish line made us feel pumped. And that's when and where things seemed to go wrong. They say that somewhere in a long ride every rider hits a few low points. These are the so-called "meet thyself" experiences, and these are not necessarily very pretty. While we like to highlight successes, we may not be ready to admit when it does not go right. Let me explain here. I don't know exactly what happened. Whether it was the excitement of smelling the barn, the food we ate, the liquids we drank, but something came over us. Collectively and individually we must have lost our senses at that time, for we started to race!

Of course, we all know that this is not a smart thing to do at this point. Consolidation is critical. I ended up hooking off and started struggling on my own. This was probably the loneliest stretch of PBP. Fatigued, lack of sleep, low on energy, and almost drained, I continued more slowly. I was also upset that this was the result of letting the pace get carried away. Negative thoughts bubbled up. Emotionally raw and empty, I wondered if this was how riders prematurely end their PBP quest. A default situation! Up to that point it had been fun, and lots of it. PBP was the ride of my life and dreams. Now it seemed to all fall to pieces, including myself. The fun was gone. I felt abandoned, closer to crying than anything else. Oh God, was it ever tough at that moment. All I could think was that if everyone else wanted to race to Paris, so be it. But I would get there at my own pace, even if I had to crawl. Too stubborn to abandon, that consideration actually did not come up. I refused. Fortunately, the group stopped somewhere before, in or after La Hutte. It appeared that I wasn't the only one suffering. Everyone needed a break. Slowly I ate, drank, rearranged the frazzled emotions, and refocused. And this is where the camaraderie kicked in. One talks to others: listeners, who can and will sympathize with your pain and plight, those who understand personal suffering, because they have been there. Clyde, Darren, Dave and others provided that support needed on the 40 km stretch to Mortagne. The amount of my gratitude covers that distance, and then some. Thanks guys.

We continued at a saner pace. At a roadside stand where shrine-like cyclist images were lit-up, a group of middle aged French women served free coffee and food in the wee hours of the third PBP night. Talk about dedication, enthusiasm and Samaritan service for the suffering souls. As the ride continued, the road became more and more crowded. Ever since the return from Brest, riders from the 90 and 84-hour groups had blended. At this time danger also increased as packs formed with riders, who were fatigued, sleepy, and in many cases inexperienced in pack riding in the dark. Bodies and bikes were struggling. Some cycled in a weaving fashion, like drunken sailors staggering aimlessly, if that is possible on a bike. On some of the rather winding descents riders would go from the left to the right side of the road, obviously oblivious to any possible oncoming traffic. It was amazing that no mishaps occurred. Many a rider decided to stop

and drop on their own volition, instead of getting surprised by gravity. There they lay, sprawled like bowling pins along the berm of the road, in open fields, on benches and other inviting places, zonked out in an attempt to recover for the final stretch (bodies on the roadside). To an outsider it must have looked like a battlefield. Riders would suffer from hallucinations. In my case tall shrubs appeared like silhouettes of cowboys out of a western movie scene, sleepily leaning against a building, ready to move at the drop of a (cowboy) hat. Then there was a rider whose SON light system malfunctioned, resulting in his headlamp flickering continuously, creating this scene reminiscent of the sixties with its psychedelic effects. O'Leary would have been proud. Finally around 3:30 am we got into Mortagne-au-Perche (Km 1084)..

First things first, meant getting the card stamped, then slow refueling and then time for another snooze. Slept on the floor again; amazing how good a hard floor feels. It must have been about 4:30 am that we set out from Mortagne. Scores of cyclists on well lit machines ascended yet another hill. Merely half hour into the ride, a rattling sound, and suddenly no more power transmission. The chain had broken. A sinking feeling came over me. A broken chain, a broken dream? Not reaching Paris in time seemed a distinct possibility. Is this what the event had come to? So close, yet so far. Luckily Clyde had a chain tool, and after removing a link or two, we got it working again. Hurrah. There is mercy and help when one needs it most. The upside of stopping to fix the chain was that I had a chance to observe and absorb this endless serpentine of moving headlights crawling up the hill. Not a word was spoken. Hundreds of randos inched up the endless hill. Not a sound. Yet one could sense the silent groans and grunts. Determined, fatigued, focused. Tenaciously moving forward, upward, and toward the goal: Paris. Rotate, push, breath in, breath out. Silent suffering in the dark of night, close to the edge, yet driven to achieve. Silent conversations with oneself: dialogues or doubts, monologues or mutter. Who or what would prevail? In silence and struggle we found this common bond. Luctor et emero.

So we pushed onward through Longny au Perche, Senonches, Chateauneuf-en-Thymerais to the control at Nogent-le-Roi (Km 1,168) where we checked in at 9:07 am. We had a quick meal, checked our watches. With 57 km left, we decided to keep a pace of 25 kph and see if we could finish in less than 80 hours. Not too fast, because we knew that the finish would be reached before long. The weather was beautiful. The roads were very familiar now. The hill at Montfort, which a week ago we had attacked with a vengeance worthy a pro-cyclist, was now conquered more slowly. I had to make full use of the granny gears. I did not think that I would have to go that low, shifting I mean. The last few kilometers through the suburbs of Paris, and finally le Gymnase Drotis de l'Homme in St. Quentin (Km 1,225) Arrived at the last control at 12:28 pm, 79:28 after we left the same place. Some 4.5 hours within the 84-hour time limit. Wow. Veni vidi vici.

Post Mortem: Alive and Well to Tell it

In the months since PBP, I have had a chance to reflect on this event. It was in one word marvelous, which can only be attributed to one essential component: people. Whether is the organizers who did a superb job, the volunteers who were never too tired to

help, the kids along the road cheering us on, displaying the Canadian stickers we'd given them, the French people awake at all hours of the night providing food and drink. It is the people who made it happen. I won't forget the encouragement of someone playing the harmonica, the decorated towns and bicycles, painted road signs for the local heros et tous les autres, the cheers in the dark. Fellow riders sharing experiences, Harold and Dan's excitement for this event, which they had completed many years before. What else can I say about my fellow 'homo cycliens' (with due apologies to the latinists). Your support was great. All this has left an impression as big as completing the event.

In response to the question would I ride PBP again, I can only repeat what I said right after the event: oui! How would I ride it next time and what would I change. I would not make many changes in my training plan. I would not change the overall ride strategy. In the preparation for this event, Clyde from Vancouver and I decided to ride together in this event. This I think worked out quite well. I would highly encourage anyone to ride with a buddy, someone who has the same goal and capabilities. I did the same - albeit by default - in the RM 1200 in 2002. I'd probably sign up again for the 84-hour group, mainly because of the less congested controls on the way out. The things I'd change involve actually executing the meal plan. My plan was to use liquid food during the ride and solids at the controls. I stuck to this plan on the way out, but lapsed on the way back. This could have become problematic and I think that it did contribute to my first low point in the ride. Many pharmacies in France do carry EnsurePlus equivalent foods, so one can always buy it en route. In terms of gear I probably carried too much on the bike, however in case of ugly weather, I would have needed it. Yes, and the next time I will carry the chain tool which I left inadvertently at home. I also need to learn to take more power naps during the breaks. This I think is critical especially in the second half of the event. There were a few physical effects from the ride. Disturbed sleep patterns were re-established quite quickly. The insatiable appetite however took a bit longer to manage. A light tingling in the fingers did last until about Christmas.

Mentally and psychologically I am still thinking a lot about the event, the experience, the people. A wonderful event! A deep appreciation for the ability to do this. Why? I did because I could. Appreciation must go to Driekje, my wife and family, BC Randonneurs and Blizzard Bike Club members and others who offered encouragement. I wish you all could have been there. To the group who stuck together on the Vancouver Island 600, the 'wet' coast brevet in May 2003. This was the test. One realizes that the individual achievement is really the result of the convergence of the efforts of so many. My first PBP left an indelible mark. For me a dream come true. PBP, ma reve, c'est une realite! I would like to be part of PBP again in 2007, only three years and 6 months away. Au revoir!

Ten Thousand Point One

Kevin Bruce

A year ago today, on January 1, 2003, I set a personal goal of cycling a total of at least 10,000 km for the calendar year. As

secondary goals, I intended to complete the entire series of Rando events (200, 300, 400, and 600 km) for the first time, cycle in at least one other series besides the Lower Mainland, and cycle in at least one other province besides BC. Since I do not own a car, cycling is a way of life with me but, even so, 10,000 km was a lofty goal, yet one that I felt was within my reach.

Over the course of the spring and summer, I managed to put together all the required distances to achieve my first-ever Super Randonneur medal, including a ride with the Interior club in May. When I went back to Ontario to visit my family in July, I rode out to Vancouver International Airport, checked my bike, then cycled from Pearson International to visit my Mom and brother some 120 km east in Port Hope.

Having accomplished all of my secondary goals in by the end of August, there was still the matter of 10,000 km on the year to deal with. Following the Annual General Meeting in September, I had logged 8,000 km, and so covering another 2,000 km in the remaining three months seemed very do-able. To encourage myself, I bought a new and lighter bike at Campione Cycles at 8th and Burrard, thus ensuring that the remaining 2000 km would go by as swiftly as possible.

Commuting to work and back everyday adds about 40 km per week to my total, but that would not be enough. I still had to ride on evenings and weekends whenever I could. By the end of November, I was at 9,525 km, and so I could now taste that magical five-digit goal. I am fortunate that my job allows for two weeks off at Christmas, and when my holidays started on December 20, I had only 325 km left. The following Sunday, December 21, I rode to Mission and back, thus adding another 130 km to my total. In the week following, I did a couple of easy rides from my home in East Van to Spanish Banks then along Marine Drive past UBC and then home at 38 km each, plus a longer ride out the Barnet Highway to the Mary Hill Bypass, then up Gagliardi and home via Adanac for another 66 km.

When I woke up on Sunday, December 28, I had only 54.5 km to go. The day was bright and sunny, but colder than a jealous ex-girlfriend's stare. I thought about waiting until later in the week in hopes that the weather might break, but after checking the forecast and seeing - yikes! - snow predicted, I decided that this had to be the day. I waited until noon, figuring that by that time of day the temperature would be at a maximum and that the roads would be relatively dry and free from slippery ice patches. Indeed, the temperature was at a maximum for the day: 2 degrees above freezing. I put on several layers of nylon and various other synthetic fibers and headed out.

The route I chose was from East Van to Marine Drive and out to New West to the Queensborough Bridge, then along River Road in Richmond to the Arthur Laing Bridge near the airport then back home. This route is almost exactly 50 km from my place, so I knew that I would have to take a slight detour in order to rack up the needed 54.5 km.

The first thing I noticed as I headed up the Sunset Bike Route to get to 45th Avenue, was that as I ascended to only slightly higher elevations, that there were more ice patches than down near where I live. I picked my way carefully between them, made it

over the crest, and headed down to Marine Drive. As I entered the long straightaway to New Westminster, I was very glad of my decision earlier this year to put on a pair of Continental Gatorskin tires. These things are virtually indestructible. In the winter, there is considerably more 'road flotsam' than in summer, and as I cruised along the paved shoulder, I could hear the snap! of small stones as they shot out from under my tires and even the crunch! of bits of glass - yes, glass - as the Gatorskins trod through these obstacles oblivious to danger. I have put 3000 km on these tires and have not had an honest-to-god flat, but have twice had tires go soft which has at least allowed me to get somewhere that I might fix it, or even home. At one point, as I sped along Marine Drive, I heard a metallic ca-chink! which had me momentarily worried as it was a distinctly unusual sound. Cautiously, I slowed down, tested all my gears, and tried both brakes. Everything was working fine and so, confident that there were no mechanical problems, I carried on.

The Queensborough Bridge is never fun at the best of times, with its restriction of cyclists to the narrow sidewalk that must be shared with pedestrians, but on this chilly winter day there were no such obstacles in my way and so I sailed across to the Richmond side unimpeded. The zig-zag bike path on the other side, however, was a different story. It was completely covered by an ice sheet, so I dismounted and, as I gingerly tiptoed my way down to the roadway, patted myself on the back for having the foresight to be wearing mountain bike shoes with cleats.

River Road is always delightful as it runs so close the Fraser River and carries very little traffic on weekends. Inevitably, though, it gives way to the industrial area, which, although not as scenic, is interesting in its own way. As I made my way past the various gravel pits, sawmills and warehouses in the industrial area, I could feel the rear end of the bike start to bump a bit. I dismounted in the parking lot of a marine supply company and inspected the bike. The rear tire was going soft. Not flat, just soft. Maybe back on Marine Drive something got into the casing and was now working its way into the tube. It didn't matter too much since I knew that with the Gatorskins, all I had to do was pump the tire back up and I should at least be able to get back to Vancouver. I leaned the bike against the building and pulled the pump off the frame. As I went to attach the pump to the valve, I found that the connector on the pump was missing. Oh my god! That was it! The metallic ca-chink! back on Marine Drive!!! Damn!

A soft tire, a useless pump, and about two miles to the nearest highway where there might be a bus with bike rack was not the scenario I had planned for this particular afternoon. Since the tire was not completely flat, I knew that I could ride it at least for a little while so long as I stood on the pedals as much as possible. I re-mounted and continued. Progress was slow and tentative, but there was sufficient air in the rear tire to keep the bike from riding on the rim and so I just kept going. I made it to the Arthur Laing Bridge and back over to the Vancouver side, and I knew that if I could just get over the crest on the Cypress Bike Route, I would be okay. From there, I could coast all the way down to 8th and Burrard and stop in a Campione Cycles who I knew were open on Sundays from noon to five. As I ascended toward 49th Ave, I was once again reminded how much more ice there was on the roads

at this slightly higher elevation. Fortunately, there was virtually no traffic and so no life-and-death decisions had to be made - until I got to Shaughnessy. As I descended through the million-dollar homes of Vancouver's elite along the tree-lined streets of the Cypress Bike route, I came to an intersection where I was faced with a stop sign and through traffic to my right and left. A sheet of ice covered the intersection and I was now skating on top of it. My choices were either a) crash the bike to avoid going through the intersection and risk only broken bones, or b) barrel straight through the intersection and hope for the best. Given these choices, the first seems like the more sensible. It occurred to me that since this was Shaughnessy, if got hit by a car here, surely I'd be facing someone who could afford a lawyer. Still, I'm a gambler by nature, so I just barreled through and made it unscathed. Within minutes after this non-near disaster, I was at the door of Campione Cycles only to find that they were closed for the holidays. I thought about heading over to Mountain Equipment Co-op and just buying a new pump so that I could finish my ride, but I'd left my lock at home in an effort to keep weight down, so that was not an option. Once again, I mounted the bike and very slowly and cautiously, standing on the pedals as often as possible, headed home to East Van where I could use my floor pump to add some badly needed tire pressure. When I got to my front door, I checked my odometer and it read 9997.5 km. Only 2.5 km to go! I grabbed the floor pump, wriggled the attachment onto the valve, locked it in place, and pumped away until the pressure read 120 psi. I pulled the attachment off the valve. In my excited haste, I forgot to release the lock, and pulled the valve stem out with it. I muttered a few unprintable words as the tire hissed all of its air out and went irreparably flat. Taking a few deep breaths to shunt away sudden thoughts of giving up cycling forever, I lifted the bike upside down, released the axel, unhooked the chain from the cassette, levered the tire off and changed the inner tube. I even replaced the tire with a brand new one to ensure that nothing would stop me from completing just two-point-five goddamn more kilometers. After carefully locking the pump attachment on the valve and inflating to 120 psi, I very deliberately - and oh so carefully - RELEASED the lock and pulled it off the valve. The tire held air. I was ready to go again.

The sun was now dipping quickly to the horizon, but with just 2.5 km to go, I had only to ride 1.25 km and back. For reasons obvious to me but perhaps not to others, I just happen to know that it is exactly 1.25 km from my door to the Waldorf Hotel Cold Beer and Wine Store on Hastings Street. I headed straight there. After picking up a nice little sangiovese, I headed home with the wine fit snuggly in my water bottle cage. I celebrated that evening by ordering a pizza and downing several glasses of red wine while telling my cat the whole story of my adventure. (She doesn't really care but does listen politely.)

The next day, of course, it snowed and continued snowing, as we all know, for a couple days thereafter. If I hadn't ridden the Sunday before New Year's Day, I would not have made it. My total for the year? 10,000.1 km. Yes, that's right, ten-thousand-point-ONE for all of 2003. And here I sit writing this on January 1, 2004. What should I plan for this coming year? Hmmm....

Birds Attack

Harold Bridge

In pre-helmet days, mid 1980s, I have been pecked by a bird of unknown species while cycling. Despite popular opinion I do know it wasn't a woodpecker! But the best bird attack story goes back to August 1970.

I awoke early that day & contrary to my normal enthusiasm for turning over & going back to sleep, I got up. I decided go for a ride prior to cycling to work. It was a glorious morning & once over the Pitt River Bridge I was in the quiet farmland of Pitt Meadows.

Riding south on a straight road I saw ahead of me a cat slinking along toward 4 finch size birds that were pecking at something in the road. My silent approach enabled me to come up quite close to the cat before it realised I was there. Startled, it took off & ofcourse the birds did too.

They climbed & circled & were heading north. I carried on south with the cat sprinting along the middle of the road in front of me. Suddenly, the 4 birds, in line astern, dived down over my head like a flight of Spitfires attacking an army convoy. Each bird took a peck at the catbefore it turned up its driveway to the security of its farm.

Was fun or revenge in the birds' minds? Whatever, the memory of that display will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Rogues' Gallery

Lyle Beaulac

Just so you can attach faces to names, here are some candid photos of a few club volunteers taken at various rides over the last couple of years. There are inevitably many people that I will have missed here, but space is limited. I hope to include more photos of club members in subsequent newsletters.



Pres. Michel Richard



V.P. Lyle Beaulac



Treas. Wayne Harrington



Database keeper Cheryl Lynch



L.M.R.C. (ret.) Harold Bridge



Sec. & WebGuy Eric Fergusson



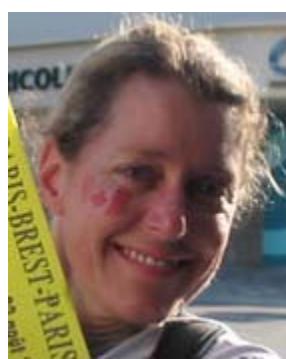
Clothier Danelle Laidlaw



V.I.R.C. Stephen Hinde



Nice Lady Carol Hinde



Pins & Grins Karen Smith