



Cascade 1200K: Rainy Pass

by Tim Lucas

The Cascade 1200K was held June 23 to June 27, 2012. Tim Lucas traveled from the Tar Heel State to enjoy the adventure and bring us back this ride report.

Day One: I stayed at the base motel in Monroe, Washington Friday evening. Breakfast at 5:00am and 80 cyclists from around the world roll out at 6:00am for an epic randonneuring adventure. A cloudy, cool morning quickly produces cold rain that lasts several hours. I settle in, getting as comfortable as possible. Pedal hard, stay warm; weather will change eventually. The long climb into Mt. Rainier National Park keeps the engine warm. Exiting the park to the south, we cruise along a creek between cascading waterfalls on both sides of the road. At times, the sound of rushing water is so loud you can't carry on a conversation. It's a very mystical place.

We have lunch in Eatonville (mile 95). I'm riding a bit with Ed from Portland, OR. We stop at Subway with several others. Ed is one of those guys who always carries a big smile, no matter what's going down. Finally, mid-afternoon, it stops raining and we're in Packwood (mile 140), at the base of White Pass, where a 17-mile, 2800-foot climb awaits. Three hours later, I reach the summit and take some pics to prove I was there. Now it's wheel! time. This is my favorite descent on this trip.

Smooth asphalt, a wide shoulder, and easy turns make it fast and furious.

Clear Lake (mile 170) is our final stop before the overnight control. We're frigid. I'm shaking badly from the cold descent. I have to hold my hot chocolate with both hands to keep from spilling. Volunteers ply us with warm stuff. I recover a bit, but pedaling is the ultimate cure. We ride around the huge lake, then to Naches (mile 208), arriving at 11:00pm. Shower and fresh clothes. After a dinner that includes hot soup, it's off to the gym for sleep. The air mattress in my drop bag comes in handy. Three hours' sleep.

Day Two: Awake at 4:30am. Blueberry pancakes, hot off the griddle. The support is awesome. The pancakes are the best ever. Rolling at 5:30am. We're doing an out-and-back to Lodgepole campground near Chinook Pass, 45 miles into the wind. Volunteers serve more food and coffee. Back down to Naches. Now we head east of the mountains into the high desert plains. In previous years, temps soared into the 100s here, but today it's only 85F;

pleasant, after yesterday's cold rain. We ride long rollers and then shallow grades that permit recovery.

First flat at mile 305. Glass in the rear tire. Packed up and ready to go, I notice the flat front tire. I remove a thorn; must have been from the tumbleweeds that occasionally blow across the road. Two flats from different objects at the same time.

I see snowmelt irrigation of many acres of hops. Now I'm getting thirsty. Wow, this is a lot of hops. Stocking up for those long winters, I presume. We have lunch in Fruitvale. Afterwards, we travel around the city on greenway bike trails before returning to the desert.

En route to Mattawa, we cross the Columbia River and turn right. The road goes straight up to the top of a plateau. Surely this isn't right, I think as I check the cue sheet and read, Yes, up that hill.

I'm finally over the top and see more of these plateaus ahead, but none are as tough as that one.

I'm in my lowest gear and I have to stand to turn the pedals. Gotta be 15+ percent. Ouch!

Getting dark now, and I see bicycle lights ahead and behind me on the long, straight road. I finally roll into Quincy (mile 418) around 12:30am. After a hot meal and shower, it's bedtime on another gym floor. Only two hours' sleep.

Day Three: Up at 4:00am. I chat with John Morris from Durham briefly before he leaves, then eat a continental breakfast and roll by 5:00am. Today we're cruising around several lakes to Dry Falls. We have a very angry headwind. This is madness! I have a hard time just holding on. Dry Falls is another beautiful place, but then we have to climb to the moon to get out of there. We go west then north to Bridgeport, across the river to Brewster. More spectacular river views.

We're now in Malott (mile 535), at the base of the mountains. Loup Loup Pass is a 17-mile climb that takes 3+ hours. I'm leapfrogging several riders, including my new Japanese friend who keeps reminding me how many meters of climbing remain. We summit just before sunset and throw on everything we have for the cold descent. Two deer cross my path within a mile. I'm riding

the brakes while others fly by. Sunset is a bad time for dodging deer.

At the bottom, it's 25 miles to the overnight control in Mazama. I do sprints, trying to stay focused, and catch up to Matthew from Southern California on his recumbent. I usually don't ride well with others because I cycle an inconsistent pace, but I chill a bit and make a friend. We stop a couple of times and walk around to clear our heads. It's a beautiful evening, and the summer Milky Way is brilliant in the night sky, glowing so bright you could read by it. It also brightens my spirits. We cruise along the Lost River and it sets the mood. An hour or so later, we make the control. Three Canadians arrive soon after and we grab dinner, showers, and this time we have rooms with beds. Yea! 2.5 hours of sleep.

Day Four: Breakfast comes at 3:45am, but I don't stir for another half hour. Yesterday took everything I had. I start rolling at 5:10am, thinking that I'm getting an early start. There are 20 or so bikes still at camp when I leave. Fewer miles today, but the event's biggest climb is the

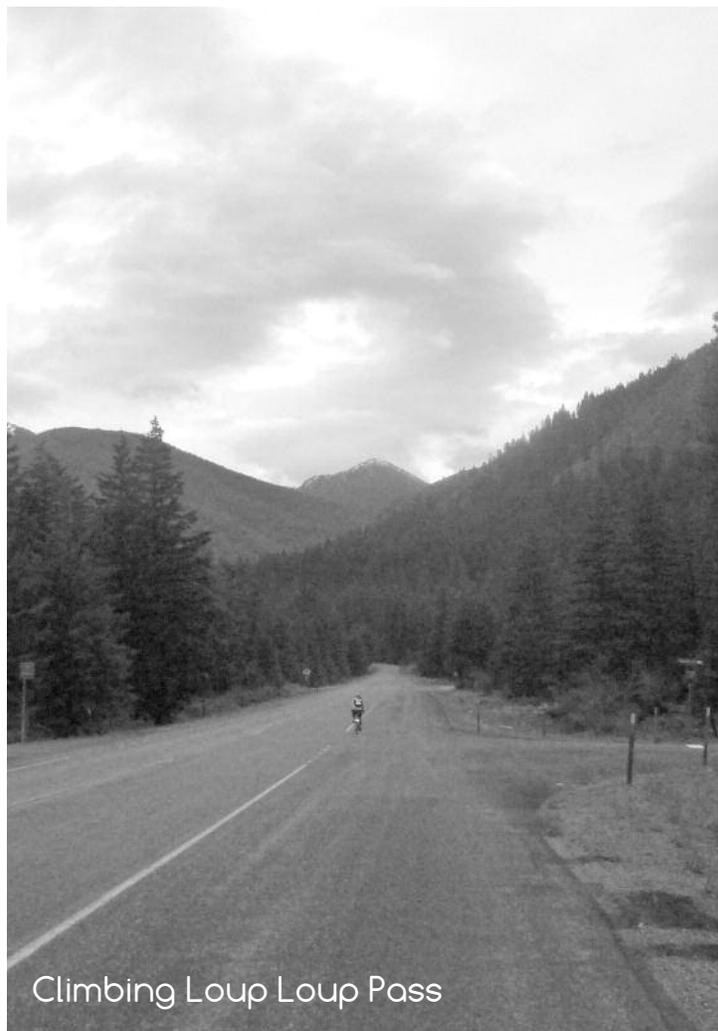


Photo by David Litt.



Photo by David Litt.

East of Elbe, near the entrance to Mt Rainier National Park.

first order of business. It's 18 miles to the top of the world: Washington Pass.

A couple hours in, I'm relaxed and feeling great. My pace is better than on my previous climbs. About three miles from the summit, we cross the snowline and I flat soon after. Did I mention it's 36F and raining? Climbing provided warmth, so I quickly get the tire changed before the engine cools down.

As the mountain peaks come into view I stop for pics. This is a wondrous place. I'm in awe and enjoying being here. I spend perhaps too much time goofing off, posing my bike against a snow bank, and taking some video. Finally, I jump back on the bike and climb the last mile to the summit, where I see a rider loading his bike into a support vehicle. His ride is over. I pull over to photograph the sign. A volunteer — I didn't get his name so I'll call him "Nick" because he reminds me of Nick Nolte — walks up to me and asks if I want to load my bike. "Why?" I respond. "Because the next control is 56 miles away and you're not going to make it before the cut-off. I am the sweeper," he explains, "and you are the last man standing." "What about those 20 bikes I left at camp?" I ask. "They're DNFs, going on the truck," he responds. How could this be!?! I think, as my elation turns to despair.

My Big Screw-up: This is where I discover that this year's route was shortened from its historic 1240K to 1201K. I had planned based on ride reports and cue sheets from previous years. Oops. I wondered why breakfast was so early today, but didn't put the pieces together until it was too late. I calculated time and distance to the Marblemount control. I knew there were some serious downhills coming up, but there was also a climb up Rainy Pass, though this was only a couple of miles long. "What about the last 30 miles to Marblemount?" I ask Nick. He responds that it's rollers and flats. A glimmer of hope.

Physically, I feel great. I just need to put together the ride of my life. I mount the Ridley, tell Nick I'm going to finish what I started, and roll. The rain makes the descent a little hairy. I shiver, which creates some serious wobble. Zoom the straights, knees squeezing the top tube for stability, brake hard before each turn, and stand and pedal through the turns for warmth.

I'm out of the saddle going up Rainy Pass. Near the top, I see Nick, who says I'm going to make it.

Down again. Support truck ahead has food. Matthew is pulling away as I approach. My hands are frozen; I brought the wrong gloves for this weather. Volunteers find me some liners that help. I fuel up and head into the rollers. Calculating speed and arrival time. Giving it everything I have. Finally, I catch another rider and then see three Canadians, who are finishing up a flat change.

I roll into the little town of Newhalem, just 14.6 miles from the control, and Ed is waving me down, "You are still very short on time, but this store has coffee." "Do they have gloves?" I ask. My fingers are frozen; it takes both hands to shift. "Grab some coffee and I'll see what I can do." Ed DNF'd after he locked up his knee on a freak, awkward pedal stroke and now he is helping others. This is a great sport! Ed brings me his own waterproof gloves. Lifesaver. I have one hour to ride 14.6 miles to Marblemount. Please God, I pray, No serious hills. No flats. Amen.

I nearly reel in Matthew but I can't catch him. He's killing it, too. We reach the control five minutes before it closes. I am totally wasted but ecstatic. My Japanese

friend shows me his pretty watch. Nice! . . . Oh crap! Sign in, doofus, you have three minutes!

We can ride easy to the finish. No hard sections, and the time limits are relaxed. Just have to stay awake and focused. It's still cold and raining, but the rain stops during the next section. I'm riding again with Matthew, and we're joined at times by the Canadians and the Japanese rider.

Granite Falls is the last control. We stop at McDonald's with 23 miles left. Our international group stays together to the finish. We experience some minor issues, including my 4th flat, slow climbs, and obligatory battery changes. It's a slog, but I'm thrilled as we roll in together. Post-ride beer and pizza! Breakfast party the next morning. Pack up the bike, wash clothes, and waste the day away under beautiful, 70F, clear skies. Dinner with John from Durham then depart home. 750 miles and 40,000 feet of climbing in 88:55. Add some cold, rainy weather, and you have EPIC! That ride totally rocked!

Tim Lucas (RUSA 6016) lives and rides in North Carolina.

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