

Century Ride

June 16, 2001

About four to six weeks ago I sent out an email to the ultra-cycling and randoneuring community (both endurance cycling groups) asking how to deal with boredom on long rides. After all, spending twenty-four hours, let alone six to ten hours with no conversation with another human has been a puzzle to me. I can ride alone for around four hours without a problem, but beyond that I get lonely and bored.

What I received in the way of responses was fantastic. They ranged from doing calculus in your head, computing caloric intake against estimated calories expended, calculating average speed, estimated arrival time at any given point, singing (if they only knew), listening to your bicycle, your body, communing with the cows, the dogs, the corn, soy beans and wheat, etc. A debate also ensued about should a cyclist listen to a radio while riding or not. The best responses came from several St. Louis folks who said they have the same problem and "lets get together for a ride."

This turned into plans for a 101 mile ride on Saturday, June 16th. As the ride leader, I had to provide good maps with where all the turns are, mileage, and notations of where the food stops and bathrooms were. I told the group I would like to start riding by 7:00 am and we would meet at the town park in St. Jacob, IL. My route would be the St. Louis 200 kilometer Brevet route, less the Edwardsville start/finish.

Guess who was running late? Yup, the ride leader. I show up at 6:55 AM and immediately was given a hard time by the group. Aside from me, three of the five people who wanted to ride had shown up, the other two called me to tell me they changed their minds and weren't coming. My group for the day was Zubin Chandran, Jan Held, Jeff Weible aka 'Roadi Jeff' and myself.

With a review of the maps, a pace determined (around 15 mph), sun screen applied, water bottles and camelbacks full, we head north toward Marine, IL just six miles up the road. As we pass the town bank I glance at the temperature reading of 62 degrees, a nice cool start. We decided that we would ride together as long as we wanted but could pull out front or fall off the back if we wanted as well. After all, a hundred miles was a long time to ride at a given pace if it is too fast or slow.

Zubin, had published the ride as a 'Points Challenge' ride with the Ultra Marathon Cycling Association (UMCA). As a published 100 mile ride (century), we had to complete the ride and maintain an average pace of around nine miles per hour to earn point's in the 'Points Challenge'. While the time cut off was real, we quickly set a pace around 17 mph. As none of us had ever ridden together or knew each other, we passed the early miles rotating around talking to each other about our bikes, favorite rides, food strategies, families, etc. Jeff rode a Softride with Spinergy wheels. Very high end, very cool looking bike. Zubin rode an nice older Trek road bike, Jan rode a Cannondale bike with front suspension to absorb the vibration of the road, I rode my Litespeed Classic.

About three miles up the road I decide to take a swig of Gatorade, but when I looked down, I noticed two very empty water bottle cages. I left my water bottles in my car and only remembered to wear my camelback.

Our first stop was to the east at around mile twenty in Pocahontas, IL. The town had the required gas station/quicke mart and bathrooms. I bought a Gatorade while we talked with an elderly man and women who walked from their home into town. They told us they do this every day and that it is 11,280 paces to the gas station and 11,350 paces home (up hill). Actual values may vary, but they knew how far it was both ways in paces.

We turned south at Pocahontas and started towards Breese IL about 16 miles away. We kept the pace up due to the cool temperatures and gentle breeze as well as fresh legs. Being in farm country, rarely do the farmers keep their dogs behind a fence or tied up in any way. So we had been chased by several dogs. So far they just barked and ran long the side of the road. I told the group that down the road was a dog that chased out in the road and would get right up in front of you.

With the warning in our heads I saw the farm ahead and the dog. As usual the dog was running across the field and heading toward us. The farm and the dog were on our left across the road as we rode by. The dog ran up in front and cut me off causing me to slow down. The dog passed behind my bike and went around the right side and barked and chased Jan. The dog decided to bite and grabbed Jan's right calf and broke the skin.

We stopped, turned around and went to the farm house. We told the owners that the dog had bitten Jan and we wanted their names, address, phone number, dog's name "Shadow" and vet name, phone number and shot records.

They provided the needed information along with some supplies to clean Jan's wound, then told us we should find another road to ride. Jan told them the road was a public road not private and that they needed to restrain their dog. It was a little tense, but that was to be expected. While they confessed that their dog does chase cyclists, it had never bitten anyone. Well... until now.

All cleaned up and bandaged, we remounted our bikes and finished the section into Breese and pulled in at the Burger King at mile 36. Jan used the bathroom to clean up her leg again and decided to cut the ride short and head back so she could contact her doctor, lawyer and insurance company. It wasn't a serious bite, but none the less it just pisses you off that the owners wouldn't restrain their dog. By the time Jan is done with them I think she will be riding a brand new bike, taking a nice vacation and attending the funeral of one disobedient farm dog!

After a quick break at the Burger King for French toast, lemonade, and a refill on the water bottles, we remount our bikes and begin heading west towards Albers. Here is where we would part company with Jan, as she continued west toward Summerfield then north back to her car in St. Jacob.

Zubin, Jeff and I turn south then east, then south-west again toward Okawville at mile 63. The road here was perfect. It must have been recently repaved as there weren't even cracks in the road. What a joy to ride after a couple miles of gravel and tar. The wind was at our back and it felt great.

Jeff picked up the conversation with stories of a PAC Tour (training tour for people wanting to race across America in RAAM) as well as memories of his first 100 mile ride back in the 1970's as well as his first 400 mile, one day ride. This is Zubin's and my first century of the year and Jeff is by far the most experienced ultra rider of the bunch. This means that his stories are the best. This also means that the pace has dropped to an average of 16.1 mph so we can both talk, ride and laugh at the same time.

We pulled into Okawville at noon, the winds are beginning to pick up as were the temperatures. We take about a half hour munching on our choices. I picked an egg salad sandwich and a Strawberry-Kiwi Gatorade. I decide to purchase bottled water here and refill my camelback while Jeff and Zubin refill from the bathroom sink.

Zubin decides he will stay with us for the next few miles as we head south out of Okawville while we get our legs used to turning circles again, then he would ride the rest of the century at a slower pace.

After heading south for a few miles, we knew the time had come to face the winds as we turned west on County Road 6 toward Venedy. Jeff took the lead breaking the wind for a while then we decided to ride side by side. It was only a six mile section, but our pace fell to around 13-14 mph.

A farmer had pulled his tractor out on the road ahead of us and I thought about riding behind the tractor for a while, and getting the benefit of drafting, but he was driving even slower than we were cycling. That's the way it goes.

We reached New Baden at mile 84 and stopped one last time for a refill on water and Gatorade. Jeff snacked on an ice cream bar. I was out of the Hammer Gel I was using and pulled out a couple Power Gel packets. This would get me back. To be honest, nothing tastes all that great when it has been sitting in your jersey pocket in 90 degree heat for hours on end. I did prefer the vanilla Hammer Gel taste and consistency better than the Strawberry-Banana Power Gel which was too thick and tasted artificial.

Out of New Baden we head west again for the last stretch of head winds. Jeff and I watched the rows of corn swaying with the wind. It looked like a sea of green with waves rolling across it with the blowing wind. After three miles, we turned north for the final miles back into St. Jacob and a steady crosswind. Having ridden most of these sections before, I knew that after the last short climb and turn in the road I would see the stop sign in St. Jacob. At that point it was about a half mile to the stop sign, a left turn and back to the park and a bathroom.

Once I saw the stop sign I decided it was time to 'finish strong', and picked up the pace and rode around 19 mph to the stop sign. As I passed the bank again in St. Jacob, I saw that the current temperature had climbed to 92 degrees. I then pedaled the final quarter mile back to the car. Jeff pulled in right behind me.

All in all it was a good ride. I finished the 101 miles with a ride time of 6 hours 25 minutes averaging 15.74 mph. It was only sixteen minutes slower and point 68 mph slower than my BEST hundred mile ride last year. We had a little over an hour and a half off bike time, but I think at least 30 minutes of that was due to the dog bite.

Rose Ann's birthday is next weekend so I won't be putting in any long rides until Saturday, June 30th. At that point I will only have a couple weeks before my first BIG ride, the "Ride Across Indiana" (RAIN) on July 14th. While not a race, there is a 14 hour cut off for finishing the 165 miles. I plan on riding at least 120-130 miles on my next long ride and then finishing with a 75-80 mile ride the weekend before RAIN. Along with some 25-30 mile rides during the week I should be in pretty good shape to finish the Indiana ride strong.

After RAIN, I will have three weeks until my first 24 hour race. The Mississippi Valley 24 Hour Challenge will be held August 11-12. Not ever having ridden for 24 hours I plan on having fun and seeing just how far I can ride. My longest ride EVER was last summer and was 167 miles which I rode in a little over 11 hours. I'm hoping to make it 250 miles with perhaps three hours of off bike time. This would be an average speed of just under 12 mph. If I have a really good day I think I could do better. Hey, anything above 167

miles will be a new record for me. The riders who will win this race will easily ride between 420 and 500 miles and spend less than 30 minutes off the bike in the whole 24 hours.

Wish me luck, see you all on the road.