

200 Kilometer Brevet (125 miles)

Edwardsville, Illinois

April 13, 2002

My motto for this year's 200 kilometer brevet would be "Third time is the charm". My friend Tom Cole got me interested in riding organized long distance rides three years ago. In 2000 we had planned to ride the 200 kilometer (125 mile) brevet that was being held in late March. The weather was absolutely terrible. It was cold, below freezing in fact, snowing and a blustery wind had the wind chill somewhere in the teens. We arrived at the commuter parking lot in Edwardsville Illinois for check in. Tom registered for the ride. I couldn't think of a good reason to get out of the car. I didn't. Tom rode perhaps 15 miles then decided a good hot breakfast sounded better than freezing the rest of the day. So much for brevet riding in the year 2000.

2001 was worse. I came down with mononucleosis and was not only off the bike for six weeks, but out of work and in bed for a month. March and April were complete wash outs due to health reasons. So much for brevet riding in 2001.

2002 had to be better. Right? I started the year pretty well and managed to ride around 575 miles by the end of March. I hadn't logged any rides over 50 miles since the previous fall. Not great long distance training, but at least I was riding my bicycle. I even worked on hills for a change as that is my major weakness.

At the end of March I came down with the flu, sinus infection, cough etc. I didn't feel much like riding, so I didn't. The Sunday before the brevet, I broke my toe in the shower. Things were not going well.

To be honest I was looking for an excuse not to ride. However my young friend Anna Kleinsorge was so excited about riding, that I felt compelled to give it a try. So having stubbornness (lack of clear reasoning) in my genetic make-up, I decided that I was going to at least try to ride the brevet. If my toe or the flu which was hanging on thwarted my efforts, I would have a good excuse for not finishing instead of lack of fitness. In my mind I wanted to at least finish so I would qualify to ride the 300 kilometer / 186 mile brevet in May.

I had been watching the weather forecasts for Saturday since earlier in the week. I checked three local TV stations each day along with two of the major on-line weather sites. The combined wisdom said the weather was going to be between 44 and 53 degrees Fahrenheit in the morning and between 69 and 74 in the afternoon with partly cloudy to mostly sunny skies and zero to ten percent chance of rain. In other words, it was spring in St. Louis.

I arrived at the commuter parking lot in Edwardsville Illinois where the ride would begin at 6:30 AM. The current temperature was 54 degrees according to various thermometers on several banks I passed. Several of the professional weather guessers had missed to the low side. It wasn't raining, and it wasn't fog, but you could see the moisture hanging in the air. I know the sun rose this Saturday morning, but you couldn't see it through the low clouds and mist.

After everyone had registered and paid their ride entry fee, the ride organizer, Aaron Rumble called us all over to review the route map. Most people were riding around the parking lot. Anna and I had our bikes ready to go, but parked over next to our cars. I shook hands with my friend Jeff Weible and told him I would talk with him later in the week as this would be the last time today I would see him.

Being my first brevet, I didn't realize that when the review of the instructions concluded, the ride started immediately. Everyone except Anna and me were rolling out of the parking lot. By the time we put our helmets on, zipped up our jackets and I locked the van, we were already two minutes behind the group. Great start! We would either catch up or not. 125 miles is a long ride so I felt comfortable we would see at least some of the other riders during the day.

Anna's parents, Ray and Jane spent the day in their car and would show up in the little towns to make sure Anna was safe. It was nice to know that someone was out there checking up on us from time to time and giving both of us moral support.

Since I wasn't prepared mentally to ride 125 miles, I did the next best thing. I broke the ride down into small portions. Surely I could ride 10 miles to Marine, then 15 miles to Pocahontas and so on until the ride was over. Today would be a bunch of back to back short rides. That I could do.

The little town of Marine was our first stop. Follow the pattern here. Little town, quickie mart, bathroom, food. That would be our day. Sure enough we caught up to two riders wearing jerseys from Sunset Cycles, a bike shop in south St. Louis. Steve and Virgil were just coming out of the store when Anna was going in. Steve, Virgil and I spoke for a few minutes before they donned their helmets and headed down the road.

So far we were still in the rear, but close behind. Anna and I followed Steve and Virgil about a minute behind. As brevets are ridden at your own pace, Steve and Virgil slowly opened a gap until they disappeared into the morning mist. It was too long of a day to chase riders down.

Time to eat one of those packaged, processed energy bars that look like, ... well we won't go there. I had an interesting supply of food stuffs for the day. I had a couple of PowerBars (Oatmeal and Raisin) which looked nasty, but tasted pretty good. I also had a couple Balance Bars, one Chocolate/banana (nasty) the other Almond Brownie (good). I had also made up two bottles with Sustained Energy, a complex carbohydrate and protein drink along with two flasks of Hammer Gel (another semi-liquid complex carbohydrate energy source). I would also be taking an electrolyte supplement every hour or so. Anything else I wanted along the way I would have to purchase in the little towns.

The first wildlife we saw was shortly after we passed through the little town of Grantfork. We saw a wild turkey strutting across the road just ahead of us. It was crossing from a hillside into a stand of trees. I slowed my pace a little in hopes of spotting the male. Not seeing anything else in the area, I resumed my pace.

About a mile outside of Pocahontas we saw two riders alongside the road changing a flat. We slowed to see if they needed anything. They had just finished fixing the flat and were getting ready to remount the wheel. Finally! Anna and I weren't the last ones on the road.

We stopped at a Mobile gas station in Pocahontas (mile 25) for a bathroom break, and I saw the two riders roll by. We were back at the end of the group again. I was still doing fine with the food and water I was carrying, so we rolled off again turning south.

Our first official stop would be at a quickie mart in the town of Breese Illinois near the 42 mile mark on the route. On a brevet you must stop at designated places along the route and have your brevet card (passport) signed and your time of passage listed. This is proof that you made it to a certain point on the ride. Anna and I arrived in Breese and had hoped to see another rider, but after asking the quickie mart employee, the last rider was about 20 minutes ahead of us. I bought an orange juice, munched on another PowerBar and used the bathroom, while Anna inhaled a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a banana.

After remounting our bicycles, we started out of the parking lot. I was watching the traffic coming from the left and slowed my pace to a near standstill waiting for cars to pass. Anna, also slowed, but forgot to unclip from her pedals and over she went. What grace, what dignity, what a good laugh. Everyone does this at some point. You just forget to unclip your feet from the pedal and over you go. I gave her a score of 5.8 but the French judge only gave her a 5.2 for artistic expression. A formal investigation of judge tampering has been launched.

Finally in an upright position and some level of dignity restored we headed off again. First to the south for a few more miles, then turning west towards Albers. The temperatures had finally made it into the low 60's with overcast skies and the wind, well it didn't exist. At least the weather folks got that right.

We stopped briefly at Airport Rd and State Route 160 a nice stretch of road that would take us to Okawville and the southern loop of the ride. Anna decided she wanted to clean up her elbow which she scratched during the fall. I was getting a little grumpy, so it was time to eat and drink some more.

Route 160 would be the link between the southern 40 mile loop and the top loop. I was pretty sure we would see some of the fast riders coming back along this stretch of road. Sure enough a group of four or five riders were already finishing the lower loop and heading back north. They were moving! I wasn't sure, but I thought my friend Jeff was in this group.

As we rode across the Kaskaskia River, we noticed a rather large turtle on its back across the road. Anna decided on our way back she would stop and turn it back over if it was still there.

Anna and I arrived in Okawville (miles 68) our second and last official checkpoint for the brevet. We arrived in time to meet up with John Prindable who rode with Anna last year on her first brevet. I guess having mononucleosis was a good thing as the weather last year was cold, rainy and blessed the riders with a strong headwind the last 45 miles. We sat in the quickie mart and ate lunch, used the bathroom, and enjoyed a little break time. John took off ahead of us by five or ten minutes. Anna and I were once again at the rear of the group.

I checked the bike computer as we were getting ready to pull out and noticed that our ride speed was averaging around 16.5 mph. This was well above what I was expecting or hoping for. However our off bike time was almost what I had planned for the entire ride. During the rest of the ride, we would have only two or three towns along the way with quickie marts, so I wasn't too worried about racking up large amounts of off bike time.

Our southern loop took us a little south of Okawville then we turned west toward Venedy then north towards Route 160 and New Baden. We started across the Kaskaskia River, this time heading west and remembered the turtle. Anna sprinted ahead only to

find the turtle was no longer among the living. We saw so much road kill on this ride we started making jokes about possum fried rice, raccoon fried rice, turtle fried rice, delicate little birdie fried rice. Everything with fried rice. Okay, you get on your bike, ride a lot of miles, eat PowerBars and not think weird thoughts about road kill.

We arrived in New Baden (mile 89) and stopped in a gas station / quickie mart / deli or something similar. I bought another orange juice and decided to call my wife, Rose Ann, and let her know I was still alive and doing well.

Have you seen those Verizon Wireless television commercials with a guy talking into his cellular phone saying "Can you hear me now"? Well, he's talking to himself because there is no one at the other end. Central Illinois has terrible cell phone service. I ended up purchasing a prepaid calling card. I can usually find a pay phone, but rarely can I find a decent cellular signal.

I asked the kid at the cash register when the last rider was through and he told me a man and a woman went through about 20 minutes earlier and a guy in his 50's went through about 15 minutes ago. We were still picking up the tail end, but not by too much.

As I was standing by my bicycle, a man walked out of the quickie mart and talked with me about the Illinois lottery, which was currently topping the 300 million dollar mark. He told me I needed to buy a couple of tickets so I wouldn't have to go around riding a bicycle. I told him if I won 300 million dollars, I could quit work and ride my bicycle a lot more!

The bathrooms at the quickie mart weren't working, but across the street in the New Baden city park, the bathrooms were open. After a brief visit and a snack, Anna and I were heading north again. We managed to miss a left hand turn on Pheiffer Road, and didn't realize it until we were already heading west on Wesclin Road, one mile to the north. We ended up in the right place, Summerfield Road. It's funny we missed the Pheiffer Road turn as I've ridden that road so many times. I've also ridden Wesclin so many times I don't think I could count them all.

On Summerfield Road two things happened. First we caught up with John Prindable and second, the rolling hills started. John stopped at the other end of New Baden at a Shell station in search of a deli. Unfortunately, the Shell station had closed their deli, but there was a Subway Sandwich store next door. He was carrying a portion of his sandwich with him.

The rolling hills along Summerfield are nothing to really worry about. They are short, not too steep, but they do slow you down and make your legs burn after almost 100 miles in the saddle. Anna would just accelerate up the hills. I would stand and just get over them. John stayed with us for several miles, but outside of St. Jacob, John slowed his pace and Anna and I lengthened our gap.

I love the town of St. Jacob, it hosts one of my favorite group bicycle rides, "The Strawberry Festival" held in May. After the optional bicycle ride, they have craft booths, good bar-b-que and lots of strawberry desserts. I absolutely love it!

At the north end of town (mile 106) we stopped for the final time at the local quickie mart where I bought another orange juice, and a lottery ticket and ate a couple of servings of my Hammer Gel. This would see me through until the finish. John was just a couple of minutes behind us at this point. We sat outside the store and relaxed for a few minutes. John pulled out the remainder of his sandwich when Aaron Rumble pulled up in his Mazda Miata. He was sweeping the course checking to see where the back end of the ride was. It was right here!

The first group managed to finish the entire ride by 1:26 PM, less than seven hours after they started. It was somewhere around 3:30 to 3:45 PM and we had 20 miles to go. Anna decided she wanted to ride the last section as fast as she could. I said that was fine with me. I just wanted to finish. I headed north on Marine Road about a minute ahead of Anna. I saw her coming up behind me and expected her to pass me and keep on going. When she caught me, she said "I don't know what I was thinking. My legs are tired". Reason broke out and a steady non-painful pace was set for this last section.

We made a left turn from Fruit Road onto Highway 157 into Edwardsville and knew the finish was just a couple of miles away. There was a nice sweeping downhill section that I coasted at 25 mph. I knew it was too good to be true because for every downhill, there is ... (you guessed it) an uphill. By this time my legs were very tired, but I dropped my gearing down and kept climbing, as did my heart rate.

We arrived at the Edwardsville Police station at 4:55 PM and completed the 125.11 miles (official distance was 124.5) in 10 ½ hours, well within the 13 ½ hour time limit. My riding average speed was 15.6 mph overall with around 2 ½ hours total off bike time. When taking into consideration the stops, my elapsed speed was just over 12 miles per hour. By finishing within the cutoff time, I qualified to ride the 300 kilometer (186 mile) brevet on May 11th. The determining factor now will be the weather. I'm not all that interested in riding 186 miles in the rain, so only time will tell if I enter this next ride or not.

The weather guessers missed it again. The official temperature for St. Louis today was 52 degrees for the morning low and it only reached 65 degrees in the afternoon and the winds ranged from 5 – 13 mph. I had wanted to remove my jacket several times, but never felt warm enough. In fact I switched back and forth between my short finger gloves and my long finger gloves most of the day.