

Introduction

Way back when I was in college I spent some time in Europe on a fully loaded bike tour, solo. As I was by myself, I was forced to interact with the locals a little more than I would have if I was on a tour or even with another person. One of the things I learned on this trip is that Europeans have some very different views on the way things should be in comparison to the way things are at home. Some of their views and the ways that they do things are not as good as we do them at home, and others I think are better. Before you start sending me Freedom Fries, I would like to remind you that the reason that Starbucks is so successful is that they *copied* the profoundly successful business plan of a *typical* coffee house in Italy. They filled a niche that was missing here. The growth rate of Randonneurs USA which I think is a bit of a copy of the Fédération Française de Cyclotourisme is not quite matching that of Starbucks, but it is quite high as I believe it provides an outlet for hard riding cyclists that is “non-competitive”, a niche that is missing here. Many Randonneurs are not necessarily interested in finishing fast, but in finishing with a bit of panache. Completing a brevet or randonnée gives Lisa and me a tremendous feeling of satisfaction. Lisa’s and I find this feeling to be a tremendous motivator to maintain our health/fitness, in spite of the forces of kids, work, etc. on us to do otherwise.

After a very successful and enjoyable Super Randonneur Series, we decided to continue to train for PBP and go for the Randonneur 5000 award along the way as it is likely that Lisa could be one of the first 20 to 50 women to earn this award in the US. This award requires a 1,000 kilometer ride. The 1,000k is the black sheep of the Randonneuring world as is not as prestigious as the 1,200k events and is not required for qualification for a 1,200k like the 200k, 300k, 400k or 600k events are. This means that there are typically not as many options and they are not as well supported.

After extensively researching 1,000k rides we decided to ride the Vancouver Island End to End 1,000k or as it latter became know as the Tortoise and the Hare ride. This ride fit better into our and our kid’s schedules than the other options and had the benefit of being in an area that had the potential being a beautiful ride as well. While this ride fit into our schedule, it was a very tight fit. Our second oldest son was graduating high school on Thursday night and the ride was starting in Victoria on Saturday morning 1,000 miles away at 3:00am. No problem, we can fly out of LAX at 7:00 am and be in Victoria by 1:00pm on Friday. Fourteen hours should be plenty of time to put the bikes back together, get to our hotel, deal with all of our stuff, and rest up for our 625 mile non-stop cycling adventure.

Pre Ride Travel

After a whirlwind week of finishing up at work, setting up the kids with Lisa’s sister for childcare, packing the bikes, drop bags, Dan’s graduation, we were finally on our way to LAX in the pre-dawn hours so we could get to there two hours prior to our flight for

check in. Thankfully traffic was not much of a problem and we made the drive down there in a record time of one and a half hours.

During the drive down I was worrying about the weight of our double wide bike bag. My plan to pay the airline for only one bike by packing two into a double BikePro RaceCase had hit a minor snag. The maximum weight of the bag is not to exceed 70lbs according to the baggage rules for Air Canada. With both bikes in the case, it was well over 70lbs. With the seats, seat posts, chains, racks, fenders in another bag it was still 73lbs. I could pull the bikes apart a little more and distribute the parts in our other luggage, but I am worried about the amount of time required to put these things back together. The rules say that bags over 70lbs will not be accepted. This could be a problem. I could pull the wheels to my bike out and easily make the bag less than 70lbs, but the wheels are too big to carry on according to the rules and then we have too many bags to check in. Not only that, the wheels are in bags that offer little protection from the baggage gorillas. My feeling is that no matter what, I am going to pay for my attempt to go cheap. Lisa says, don't worry about it. She might as well tell me to grow hair out of the top of my head – I have tried, it ain't gonna happen.

Well we get to the airport check in counter and it took the man at the counter 0.000001 seconds to say that the bag was unacceptably overweight after we placed it on the scale. \$#!^, I knew it. Implement plan B, I yank out my wheels (mine are heavier with a dyno hub etc.) and say I am going to carry these on. To my surprise, he says OK. We check our other baggage and head off for the gate. Well in this post 9/11 world, getting to the gate at LAX is an experience. On our way to the gate one of the security guards says that we will not be able to carry on the wheels. I respond by saying that the guy at the check in counter said we could, he looks at me as if I am speaking Swahili and says take it to the security check and see what they say. The crowd is so big at the security check that the guards doing the x-raying and scanning of shoes do not notice my wheels until I am trying to jamb them into the x-ray machine. After some looks of what is this idiot trying to put into my x-ray machine, the operator seemed to take on the challenge of trying to get the wheels, that just barely fit at an extreme angle, through. Thank God, I got a compliant, capable X-ray machine operator. Now all I had to do was get them on the plane. This proved to be not much of an issue. The wheels were in bags with handles. I put the handles through a hanger and put them in the coat check at the front of the plane as nonchalantly as possible. Other than a question from the stewardess on the way out of “what are those” because she and her co-workers were “curious”, there were no problems and not even an eyebrow raised.

Finally we are on the plane, our bikes are on the plane and I can relax – at least until we get to our connecting flight in Vancouver.

As the plane takes off, turns north and begins gaining altitude, I notice that we are directly overhead of the break at Malibu. Long ago I was as passionate about surfing as I am now about cycling. I almost drowned Lisa trying to teach her how to surf. Now that I think about it she did get a concussion from one of our bike rides early on. Somebody has to be wondering why this woman loves me when it seems like I am trying to kill her

with the things we do for fun. Anyway, I notice that the waves are coming from the west still, not big ones, but definitely from the west. Malibu breaks best when the waves come from south, usually in late summer. A small swell from the west would indicate a “small” storm out near the Aleutian Islands about a week ago. I just hope that what ever caused these waves will not be on top of us on Vancouver Island. I am expecting some rain, but the waves seem to indicate that there will be more than some.

I also think about the parallels between cycling and surfing. With surfers, particularly longboarders, the challenge is to do something difficult while making it look easy, with extra points for style and flair. Surfers do such a good job of this that most non-surfers have no clue as to how hard, and frankly dangerous it can be. Society at large is fascinated by this to the point that we recognize this relaxed style in the face of danger as an integral part of surf culture. I think that Randonneurs are similar as someone else put it “randonneuring is all about the civilized enjoyment of cycling...the quest for the perfect cyclist, any distance, any weather, self-sufficient.” Randonneurs do a good job of making things that are difficult look easy too. Frequently I hear stories about when randonneurs tell a non-cyclist about a brevet or randonnée they see their eyes glaze over. We might as well tell them we were surfing when it was 10 feet overhead, same look. I suppose the only difference is that Sublime has not written a song about a brevet yet. One other thing, it is hard to look cool and sexy after 90 hours on the bike, though we do clean up well.

Our plane lands in Vancouver where we need to change planes go through customs and catch our next flight out in 45 minutes. Yeah, right. This might be possible if you had nothing but a carry on but with the bikes and all the other crap we had combined with the fact that we had no clue as to where we were to get our oversized bike bag by the time we got in line to go through customs it was clear we would miss our connecting flight. In retrospect, we could have made it if one of us had gone to collect the bags and one of us got in line to go through customs, c'est la vie. Thankfully another flight was out in an hour.

We finally land in Victoria and make it to our hotel in the late afternoon. Ken Bonner the ride organizer, met us at our hotel so we could transport our bikes from the hotel to the bike shop that Lisa had contacted so I did not have to spend all night putting the bikes back together. Ken who has ridden more brevets than anyone else in North America (we are guessing South America too) was incredibly helpful and friendly – a true Randonneur. It also seems that he is well known to the folks that work at the bike shop as well. When we first walked into the shop and announced that we were the Americans who called last week about needing their bikes put together today, they balked and said that they could not do it until tomorrow as we had showed up too late for them to be completed. At this point Ken walked out of the shadows and mentioned that we were to start a 1,000 kilometer brevet at 3:00am and immediately tags were placed on the bikes with the owner of the shop telling his mechanics to stop work on the other bikes and get these done before 5:00pm. Magic!

While I was communicating which parts went with which bikes at the shop, Lisa had gone to a nearby mini-market to get some food to go in the drop bags.

Ken who was riding at 3:00am too, wanted to get back home and get some sleep. Ken took us back to our hotel and we put the food that Lisa got into the two drop bags that his wife, who would be supporting him at the controls, would drop at the hotels that we had reserved along the route. This would be our only support unless we could stay with Ken or the other rider Jim whose wife would be meeting him at the controls.

While at the hotel we started to get our stuff out of our luggage to put into our bike bags, fill our water bottles and camelbacks, mix up Cytomax and Sustained Energy etc. Before we knew it, it was time to pick up the bikes. It was a bit of a trick to get both of them into the taxi, but it worked.

With all of our non-essential gear and typical tourist clothes in the bike bag checked with the hotel desk. We actually got to sleep at around 9:00pm.

We're Off!

The alarm goes off at 1:30am giving us 4½ hours of sleep, right in line with our qualifying brevets. I think we have been told that our lack of sleep before our brevets could be due to the fact that we try and cram too much into our lives, but we did not really understand what the person was saying, I think they were speaking Swahili.

Our hotel, the Holiday Inn in Victoria was about two miles from the ride start, a Tim Hortons. We wanted to get to the ride start about a half an hour early and we made this on time. Just after we found the Tim Hortons (a donut, coffee, sandwich shop chain restaurant that seems to be ubiquitous in Canada) Ken and the only other rider on the brevet, Jim Fiddler showed up. Ken handed us our brevet cards and revised route sheets



and we were ready to go. Ken said that he would stay with us until we got on the main road out of town near a Shell gas station as it is a convoluted course that follows a bike route / path along the main road out of Victoria.

After a few photos we're off a couple minutes late, but hey, it's early in the ride and we have plenty of time so who cares.

We ride through the dark and I am glad that I don't have to navigate as we seem to be going down back alleys, into

residential neighborhoods on and off the freeway. At this point I think both Lisa and I just focused on staying with Ken and Jim. We realize that we have no chance of staying with Ken, but we might be able to stay with Jim until the larger climbs past Campbell River about 170 miles into the ride.

With the Shell station that Ken said that he would get us to in site, Lisa gets a flat. Ken says his good byes and we know that it will be awhile before we see him again. Jim opts to hang out with us until we fix the flat. He is very impressed with my Topeak Road Morph with its little gauge and the fact that I am able to pump up the tire to 120 pounds quickly and easily. In the back of my mind I am thankful to Foster for telling us about it at a club meeting. At this point we are at the base of the Malahat climb. This climb is approximately 6% to 8% and about six miles long. The climb is not too bad for us but we tend to climb slow and go a little faster on the flats. We try to stay with Jim but it is not to be and he pulled away. I was hoping that we could catch him on the flatter sections on the other side of the climb.

Near the top of the climb Lisa gets another flat, bummer. My hopes of seeing anyone else connected with this ride for the next three days is rapidly diminishing.

Ken had warned us about the rumble strips near the fog lines on the descent so we were on the look out for them. We avoided them for the most part but both Lisa and I hit them for a moment or two and immediately realized why Ken had been so emphatic about avoiding them. Good thing we were going relatively slow and it was not raining for our first rumble.



Aside from our brief encounters with the rumble strips we had a good descent and then hit the “flatter” section of the course. The flatter section actually consisted of a number of rolling hills that were in the 3% to 5% range and gained from 100 to 300 feet, just big enough to be annoying. We were making good time but just before the first control, then I had a flat. I was beginning to wonder if I had brought enough tubes. At the first control Lisa

mentions that she is a little tired, and her stomach was not feeling too good. I ignore this information with all my might, but I know that it is my job as domestique is to provide support.

On one of the larger, small climbs in this area we find a spot out of the way and lay down for about fifteen to twenty minutes. Back on the bike we are riding strongly and just before the second control we stop at a McDonald’s for breakfast. Lisa does not even stop, eating on the bike. I opt to eat fast (I may not be able to ride fast but man can I eat

fast.) and catch her. We are reunited soon and are riding well when we come into the 4th control about 99 miles into the ride.



Here we meet Brenda, Jim's wife who says that he is less than an hour ahead of us. Not bad given our two flats and sleep break. Brenda greets us like we have been riding with the BC Randonneurs for years and offers up some potato salad and drinks. At this point I am hoping that we can stay within a reasonable distance of Jim, so that we can give Brenda "something to do" while traveling between checkpoints.

Not long after our stop at Qualicum Beach, Lisa says that she is getting nauseous. Humm... not a good sign. Tums, Roloids don't work. Although she has yet to throw up she takes something that she got from the doctor to keep you from doing that. Only problem was it started coming out the other direction. We made the next 10 miles of flat road in a little over three hours, hopping from bathroom to bathroom.

While Lisa was in the bathroom at a rest stop along the highway a local cyclist showed up. We chatted while she waited for the bathroom and I described the ride we were on. I also told her that I think we are done, as at this pace I did not think we were going to make it to the next control. I figured, hey we are here on Vancouver Island; hopefully we can get to a hotel in Courtenay and eventually credit card tour the route. About this time I said to myself – hey dumb ass you have some Imodium in your bag. Lisa, being an occupational therapist, takes care of all things medical in our family, so I figured if she can't make herself well, what can I do?



After the Imodium, we were on the road again. Magic.

We made it to the fifth control with time to spare, but all hopes of staying in touch with Jim and more importantly Brenda were dashed. We were on our own, and the only people that had any clue as to what we were doing were miles ahead of us. While going

through Courtney we picked up some supplies, one tube, the entire stock available at the only bike shop near the route and more Imodium.



The course has a climb of about 5% to 6% for about 5 miles on the north side of Campbell River. The climb is not too bad and we make good time over it but it starts to rain. Not heavily, but steady. The climb out of Campbell River also marks the point that the “wilderness section” begins. On a descent into the checkpoint at Sayward, I try and put on my rain booties only to discover that I have one of mine and one of Lisa’s, the one with the broken zipper from

the pair that she was not going to use. How nice, who wants dry feet anyway.

We come into the control at Sayward, a gas station with a mini-mart, cold and tired at twilight. After a few questions of something similar to “what in the world are you two doing on bicycles out in the rain at this time?” with our response being our description of the ride, we were shown the employee break room to dry off and warm up a little. I bought a couple of energy drinks, red something or other that was supposed to be identical to Red Bull but cheaper according to the nice lady (By the way, Red Bull is a copy of an Asian drink that an Austrian businessman brought to the west.) While energy drinks like Red Bull have only 80 mg of caffeine I find them much easier to drink on the bike than coffee which for a 12oz cup has about 200 mg of caffeine. The energy drinks also have a load of sugar which I am also looking for, with a little carbonation to settle the stomach – they go down smooth before the top of the first climb.

Unfortunately I did not get enough of them. Military studies of subjects who hadn’t slept for 48 hours showed that 600 mg of caffeine improved alertness and mood as much as 20 mg of amphetamine. I figure I was about 440 mg of caffeine or a little more than two cups of coffee short.

The long, slow, wet, climb out of Sayward to Woss was very tough for me. Normally I am able to go much further than Lisa on the same amount of sleep, but I am suffering at this point. Lisa is trying her best to keep me awake and I perk up a little when we see a large owl following us that appears to be hunting in the glow of our lights. Traffic is non-existent with the exception of a couple of cars that are going about a hundred miles an hour, although it seems that Canadian drivers in general are much more courteous to bicyclists, passing in the other lane with plenty of room between us and them.

We reach Woss after what seems like an eternity to me, it is about 2:00 am and we have to be on the road at 5:00 am. But we still have to get in our hotel room. Having made arrangements for a late check in we know that we are to go to the house that is behind the hotel – and wake them up to get our key. The problem is that we are dead tired and we are uncertain which building is “behind” the hotel. After determining which building it must be we discover that what appears to be the front door is blocked by a fence to keep in some small dogs with no apparent gate. After studying this situation with our sleep deprived brains, we determined that I should climb over the fence and knock on the door. Thankfully, getting over was not tough and I did not even have to knock as a pack of small dogs started barking madly. A sleep deprived man appeared and handed me a key and said that our drop bag was in our room and that since he already had our credit card information that all we had to do was leave the key in the room and leave our bag there too, music to my ears.

We get into our room and find our drop bag. It was a good thing we had food in it as there was not going to be anything open in Woss until well after we were on the road. The ham, cheese, crackers, bananas and apples went down well. A very welcome but too short hot shower and off to sleep for about an hour and a half. I felt much better after sleeping but apparently I was still a little out of it as I took our drop bag out of the room and locked the door with the key inside – so I ended up leaving the bag on the porch behind the hotel.



It was not raining when we left Woss but it started soon after. The rain was fairly heavy at times and stayed with us all the way to Port Hardy. At this point we are deep into the wilderness section. There are several settlements and campgrounds that don't quite qualify as towns. Hence, there does seem to be a number of people out there in the wilderness, although we

did not actually see any. Unfortunately, I think if you needed something other than a phone for an emergency helicopter I think you would be out of luck. This section is somewhat hilly. While not particularly difficult, it just slows you down and with the rain it was a little slower still. In spite of all this we were in good spirits, it was relatively bright even with the cloud cover and with our hour and a half of sleep we actually felt relatively refreshed. We lantern rouge and decided to enjoy it, we just rode a reasonable pace, viewing the forest and the wildlife. Lisa saw a couple of bears, all I saw was a

bunch of rabbits without ears, or at least very tiny ears, deer and a few Bald Eagles, one of which was sitting on a branch overlooking the road in the pouring rain.



It was not long after Woss that we encountered Ken on his way back. This too lifted our moods, as we were actually able to speak to someone who did not look at us like we were out of our minds. We parted ways with Ken and it was not long after when Ken's wife showed up and we got another mood boost.

Up to this point I had not been taking many photos although I now wish that I had. My camera which was in my special

waterproof camera pocket of my jacket had gotten so wet that it was no longer functioning. This was a bit of a bummer as I found this out when I was attempting to take a picture of a Do Not Feed the Bears sign and Lisa saw a bear looking at me trying to take the picture.

We encountered both Brenda and Jim separately and very much enjoyed the moments of camaraderie. This section was practically a Randonneur social as far as we were concerned.

Well, one of the things that Randonneurs have to deal with are saddle sores. With all this rain the moisture was causing a little more friction than these two Southern California cyclists were used to. We even put on fenders to avoid this – can you believe it – FENDERS! I mean who rides with fenders? Can you believe we needed them? Have you ever actually seen them on a bike? I bet lots of people don't even know what they are for. Any way, it was a good thing that Lisa had researched the saddle sore issue a little and had prepared for this. She had something called Nupercainal a hemorrhoidal and topical analgesic ointment. This stuff worked great. It did not solve the problem of what was causing the pain but it did make the pain go away, which at this point was good enough for me.

We finally get to the turnaround at Port Hardy, soaking wet and very hungry. We pull into the control, a gas station with a mini-mart, and ask if there is a Laundromat nearby. The guy responds with – it's in back. Oh yeah! Dry clothes here we come. We run across the street to the A&W and order a massive amount of food and take it to the Laundromat. We did not get quite as nudist as Roger and Sandra did with their trash bag suits, but we stripped down as far as we could given that there were other people around. As our clothes dried we put the Coneheads to shame by consuming mass quantities. After we ate, we dosed briefly as our clothes finished drying.

When we finally left Port Hardy it was not raining and it looked as if it might actually start to clear up. Alas, the rain had a couple more shots at us, but nothing like before. Outside of Port Hardy I realized that I had left without getting a disposable camera, Doh! Thankfully, there was another gas station with a mini-mart at the turnoff to Port McNeil. Photo function restored.



Not much past the turn off to Port McNeil Lisa said that she wanted to sleep a little. This was a little odd for me as the sun was finally breaking through once in a while and it was the middle of the day. It turned out to be well worth it as she felt much better after about a half hour rest. Even though it was not raining everything was wet so I pulled out one of our emergency blankets so we could lie down without getting wet. This worked

reasonably well although when we were ready to go there was no way that I was going to get the blanket to pack up as small as it was, kind of like trying to popcorn back into the kernel. Rather than trash all of this good stuff we took another tip from Sandra and cut portions of it to put in our shoes and in our leg warmers. This did not work too well for us, though they did make my feet warmer they also did not allow the sweat to go anywhere, making my sock wetter even though it was no longer raining. The portions under my leg warmers just rubbed me the wrong way.

We made pretty good time back to Woss and we were enjoying a much dryer wilderness. One of the things that we had to eat in this section was some saltine crackers (we had already gone through the ham and cheese that was to go with them). I found that they really hit the spot, although it was a little tough to breath and eat them at the same time on the bike. But after a while I got pretty good at doing both.

At Woss I stopped to pick up some supplies while Lisa kept going. I was to pick up two things, oil for our now very squeaky bikes and something for heartburn that Lisa was having. I forgot both, but I did get lots of food and drinks.



The section from Woss to Sayward was fairly uneventful with the exception of the last 10 or 15 miles. There are several small climbs between Woss and Sayward and I had been trying to keep track of them using my altimeter and the course profile. This was a little difficult as the profile that I had, had smoothed out many of the smaller climbs to be more readable, which I think is a good idea but I had blown my creditability several times saying that we had “X” number of climbs left only to be proved wrong. At the crest of what I was sure was the final climb, with nothing but a long downhill into Sayward, Lisa announces that she is too tired to go on and that she wants to sleep here a while. Immediately a couple of things flash through my mind. 1. Ken said don’t sleep on the side of the road in the wilderness section. 2. Our hotel is at the bottom of the hill that we are on top of. We can coast into the room that has a shower and a warm bed. After a few moments debating this issue, we hear a very large splash, similar to the splashes that I have caused at Lake Mead by rolling large boulders off a cliff. One can only wonder what would cause such a splash in the Canadian Wilderness in the middle of the night. At this moment the momentum in the debate swings my way as a little adrenaline starts to flow. I think Lisa decided that if she is going to be forced to go on without sleeping she is going to get to Sayward fast. On our way we pass several signs warning trucks of the steep downhill section coming, I think the sign said 10% downhill grade. Although it is not raining now the roads are still wet. Lisa has a Light & Motion ARC Li-ion which lights up the road like a car. (the downside is a *very* expensive battery) I have a SON Dynohub with an E6 and a Cateye HL-EL500 which is more than adequate at speeds less than 30 miles an hour, but she is not going less than 30 miles an hour. I don’t know how fast she was going as I was too terrified to look. She was pissed and she was moving. As anyone who has ridden with her knows, she can descend. I don’t think she even thought about the brakes. I dare not lose her as I need to stay with her so I can see too. At this speed we reach the bottom in short order and pull into the control at Sayward cold, tired but happy to be able to sleep soon.

Only problem is that everything is closed. We go to what looks like the hotel desk which is also a general store, pound on the door, nothing. We look around at some of the other buildings, nothing that looks like an office. Back down the end of the street to the other end of the complex – it must be back where we pounded on the door. Pound on the door again, nothing. We look around some more and I find that the door to the laundry room is open. I suggest that we sleep on the floor in the laundry room as we are wasting a lot of time and I am getting tired. The woman who was going to fall asleep on the bike at the top of the hill was now in full battle mode. She was at the hotel, she had paid for this room, and she was going to get in even if she had to chew through the wall. We found a phone and called the office. No answer, just a machine. I suggest the laundry room, she just glares back and calls again and again. Magic – someone answers. Moments later lights appear in the general store and a sleep deprived woman who looks rather disgusted with us opens the door. As it is a general store and we are hungry we quickly grab a few things, are handed our drop bag and keys and make way to the room, forgetting to get our brevet card signed. Thankfully when we get to our room, our next door neighbor is outside for a smoke and we get him to sign our cards.

After a couple hours of sleep Lisa's mood had improved little. Prior to the ride I had established some drop dead times for leaving the various controls. I figured we needed to leave Sayward by 3:00am to get to Campbell River on time and allow for mechanical problems. While she complied with my desire to leave she made it very clear that she was not happy about it. Being a little sleep deprived and grumpy myself I said to go ahead while I pack all the stuff that was in our drop bag in addition to what I was previously carrying on to my bike. This took me about a half an hour as I was calming down from our discussion and it was quite tricky to get all of the extra stuff on the bike. When I realized how much of a head start she had I panicked. I quickly calculated that the best I could do would be to go 20% faster than her, well it would take me five times as long or 150 minutes or two and a half hours to catch her. She would easily be to the top of the climb by then.

I put it into overdrive.

I am pushing so hard I am having a hard time eating, so I don't, figuring I can bonk at the top of the hill and recover on the way down. The sun is on its way up and I am still powering it. It is now Monday, it is not raining and the logging trucks that have been absent so far are now flying out of Campbell River like the monkeys in the Wizard of Oz. These trucks are bigger than anything I have seen on the road in the US. They are scary and they don't go slow. I am now giving it all I have, I have got to catch her before she starts descending and I would like both of us to be past Campbell River before any of these monster trucks start coming back loaded to the sawmill just north of Campbell River. Just past the crest of the top of the climb I spot her in the distance. I feel like crap, but I still push. I finally catch her and she is just tooling along and says that she was wondering where I was as she even waited a little for me. She was in a much better mood and she was not too mad at me for making her wait after I got her up too early, thank God.

The descent goes smoothly and she pulls along the flatter sections into Campbell River as I am still bonking. Once we get into Campbell River our plan is to find a FedEx drop box and send our extra stuff from the drop bag back to our hotel in Victoria. We needed to do it this way as both Jim and Ken were way ahead of us now as was their / our support. All we had to find the drop box was my recollection of the map that I looked at on the internet prior to the ride as I had inadvertently thrown the map away with the extra route slips back in Sayward. Can you say brain dead? We found a UPS store, which was closed, but no FedEx drop box after quite a bit of time looking and asking the locals. We finally figured we had better just go and carry the extra weight all the way back as we were within a half an hour of the closing time of the control and we still had not clocked in. We got to the control twenty minutes before it closed and found that adjacent to the control is a post office that is open. We buy a box and stamps, copy the address of the hotel from the FedEx Airbill and off it goes.

We feel pretty comfortable time wise now as the section between Campbell River and Qualicum Beach is the flattest of the ride. I am starving so food is a major priority and we end up at a place called Willies, a family restaurant in a non-descript strip retail center

just south of the control. After mass quantities and some of the best clam chowder I have ever had, Lisa who is sitting on the bench seat lies down and takes a little nap. I am sitting in a chair and very much would like to sleep as well but feel that this is not the place to lay down on the floor and pass out. So I just lean back a little and rest my eyes. The next thing I know is I hear some giggling and a camera click. The owner was taking a picture of the crazy Americans that fell asleep at the table to put into her scrapbook.

On our way out we stop at a pharmacy for some Zantac for Lisa and at a home center for some oil for the chains. With all this, we ended up spending about three hours in Campbell River.

The ride from Campbell River to Qualicum Beach was for the most part pleasant and relatively easy. Although by the time we make it to Qualicum Beach Lisa is not feeling well, needing to stop at the bathroom again and I am getting a little grumpy. We stop for lunch to mend our moods. We make it to Nanaimo in the afternoon and other than a little wind it has been a beautiful, clear day with several stops for food and a rest. This section of the ride and the amount of time we waste off the bike makes me think that every ten minutes counts. Thankfully we make it to the control with hours to spare.



As we are getting closer to Victoria and the amount of traffic on the roads is increasing exponentially. Gone are the quiet roads, trees and ocean views. Well some trees and ocean views remain but it is hard to enjoy them with the traffic wizzing by, though there is a wide shoulder. The hills begin to become more accentuated; still, we make reasonable time. We pull into

Ladysmith about dusk and decide to have dinner at a Tim Hortons. On the way into Tim Hortons Lisa ends up in the wrong gear going up a steep slope in the driveway and falls

over like the guy did on Laugh In, in front of a bunch of people. Too tired to care, she holds her head high and makes it seem like that is how she always gets off her bike. Once inside, Lisa eats a little and I consume mass quantities again. Lisa also takes some Zantac to settle her stomach. One of the employees at Tim Hortons came over and talked to us as he was a cyclist too. We told him a little of our adventure and he told us of the large amount of road rash that he had from descending Malahat. He also said something I found very interesting about the amount of rain we had at the north end of the island – “yeah it does rain a lot up there; it is a west coast rainforest after all” well I guess I missed the rainforest memo.

At this point I am thinking that we have plenty of time, we are lantern rouge, we are not going to set any speed records, so why push the pace at all. We spend over an hour hanging out at Tim Hortons and leave about the time that it is getting full dark. It is also getting pretty cold. I keep looking at the course profile trying to determine how many more climbs there are and I would tell her that if we get to 300 feet in elevation we would be at a certain spot on the profile. Well it would seem that we would climb for about 150 feet and then descend, climb 200 feet and descend. This would go on for hours without ever getting to 300 feet, it became rather frustrating, but we just started joking about it and were in pretty good spirits. We were going to be able to get off the bike “soon” and we were going to make it.

At night, unless there is a need for me to pull, Lisa will be in front as her light is so bright if I am in front the glare makes is so I cannot see. We are on a climb and I see her start to shake her head. I now know that this means that she is really sleepy, learning from my prior mistakes I immediately start looking for a place to stop. Thankfully we happen upon what seems to be a lumber yard. We look around for a nice out of the way place and find a picnic table with a rain cover over it. We lay down on top of the table and covered up with our remaining emergency blanket. About an hour later we wake up warm and toasty, being insulated from the ground combined with the emergency blanket worked very well. We could not have felt better if we had slept at a five star hotel. In the few moments it took us to get back on the bikes we realized that it was freezing out there.

On our ride today up Yerba Buena¹ on the tandem, Lisa commented that there is something beautiful about a climb that just goes up, you climb five feet, you are five feet closer to the top. After our five star hotel stop, the climb fit her definition of a beautiful climb. We were finally on the Malahat climb. I can not remember what time it was but it was definitely late. There wasn't man or beast on the road. We reached the top of the climb what seemed to be very quickly and started descending. I am very pleased to have gone down this road when we did as I can only imagine the amount of car traffic there would be here during the day.

We finally reach the outskirts of Victoria and now we are navigating the section that Ken led us through three days ago. My brains feel like they have gone through the same process that they put Egyptian mummy brains through, liquefied and drained out the back

¹ Yerba Buena climbs about eight miles from Pacific Coast Highway into the Santa Monica Mountains at 5% to 8%.

of the skull through a small hole. While not necessarily sleepy, I am having a really hard time putting the instructions from the route sheet into action. This actually helps Lisa, as with the mental stimulation of trying to figure out where to go she is perking up. We finally reach Tim Hortons just over 73 hours after we left.



Post Ride

Now all we have to do is get back to the hotel. The only thing we had to do was decide which way to go. It was on the same street as the final control – it really was not that complicated. After about 15 minutes we decide on which way to go and it turned out to be the right way, I guess we had a 50:50 shot at it.

We spent the next three days in Victoria doing the tourist thing. It was very nice. It reminded me of several movies I have seen, ones where you have a couple that is facing an outside threat and they pull together and defeat it. Usually at the end of these movies they realize that they have fallen in love and the action adventure flick gets all mushy. Well it was kind of like that, except we were living it.

We also got invited to the best wine and cheese party I have ever been to at Ken Bonner's house. Margot, Ken's wife is as good at throwing a party as Ken is at riding a bike. This was wonderful as it gave us a chance to swap stories. The camaraderie gained from the shared experience was amazing. The next day Brenda took us on a tour of Victoria which was a wonderful way to see what we had missed in the dark. I am left with the feeling that the Canadians really know how to make you feel welcome. I think we are missing that at home. Unfortunately, I don't think anyone can turn that into a franchise.





Finishers of the 2006 Tortoise and Hare 1000k
Back Row – The Hares – Ken Bonner, Jim Fiddler
Front Row – The Tortoises – Lisa and Greg Jones