

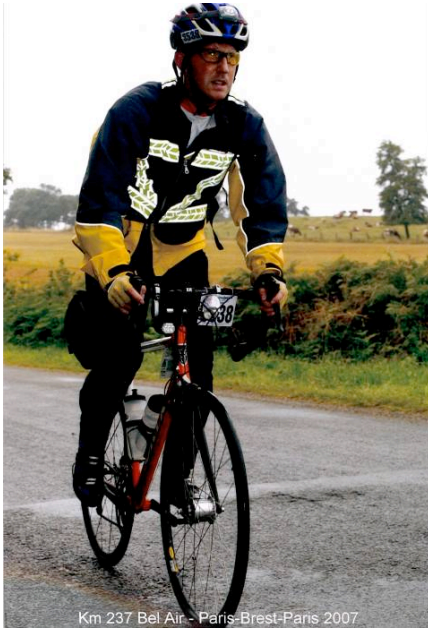
Paris Brest Paris – The summary

I took the 10 pm start, simply because I did not know what to expect and figured that if I needed the most amount of time then that might just work out. Also, the group that I did my brevets with were all taking the 10 pm.



After standing in line for 3 hours, the rain began to fall just as we arrived at the start line. Our Randonneur chapter group of 7 riders wished one another well and the fireworks went off. As our 10:15 wave went under the starting archway, I had to unclip for the first tight corner and actually came to a complete stop so the large group could navigate the bottleneck. That was the last time I saw our chapter together. As our wave made its way out of town the rain fell harder.

At the first stop 6 of our group found each other. As we refilled our water bottles the others sat down to eat. I knew that I was weakest riding at night and since I had packed a few jam and nutella sandwiches (I had eaten two already) I said “see you guys on the road” and took off on my own. I knew that they would ride faster to catch up, but I just didn’t want to stop for too long. Leaving Mortagne was when the first feeling of sleep deprivation started to take hold. I was continually dozing on the bike for the next couple of hours in the dark. Since I don’t drink coffee or drink coke I had brought along some caffeine pills to use. I popped one in my mouth and hoped it would take effect. As I hallucinated off and on for the next while I really wondered if I should just pull over. But then my mind started to clear and the daylight started to break, the first sign I had made it through my first night.



After that the wind and the rain numbed my thoughts and body all morning long. As I wheeled into the first true control, I had stayed awake all night and was ready for some breakfast.



I truly expected to see the other Huron Chapter members arrive, but as I pulled out I knew that I would be riding alone for the next little while. The rain continued to fall and the head wind continued to be an issue. With the wet and cold on my knees, the pain began to set in. As it started to hurt more, my mind started going deeper into questioning if I could continue. I was still on target to get to Loudeac in 24 hours which was my goal, but I was constantly wondering if I should quit. I was tired and sore. I decided to take another caffeine pill. Soon my mind cleared and I wasn't asking if I should continue- I knew I should. But my knees still hurt.

I was amazed at the crowds of spectators in Loudeac as I rolled in at 9:45 pm. I dropped my bike and went to find the sleep station. There were still cots left and I decided to start my sleep rather than eat. I signed up for a 4 hour nap. I bedded down in my cot and had a tough sleep that was littered with bad dreams and a bad smell in the air that stuck in my nose for the rest of the ride. I actually thought it was the smell of the dirt in France, but a

nurse told me it was the smell of ketones from the riders (myself included) who were burning muscle for energy. I awoke when I started shivering so hard that I could not sleep. Then I tried to straighten my legs and I could not believe how stiff and sore my knees were. I had only slept for 2 hours and 45 minutes.

As I stepped outside of the sleep station I felt I had entered a war zone. Bikes were laying everywhere as there was no space to lean them. The line-up for the cots was huge. An ambulance was taking people away on stretchers. The cafeteria was full of cyclists sleeping anywhere they could. I actually felt bad that I had just slept on a cot. I filled up my plate and took a seat beside what I thought was just another sleeping cyclist. Then I realised it was actually three of my friends sleeping at the table around me. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to take their picture. I finished the meal and the boys were just waking up so we had a quick chat and then I was off.



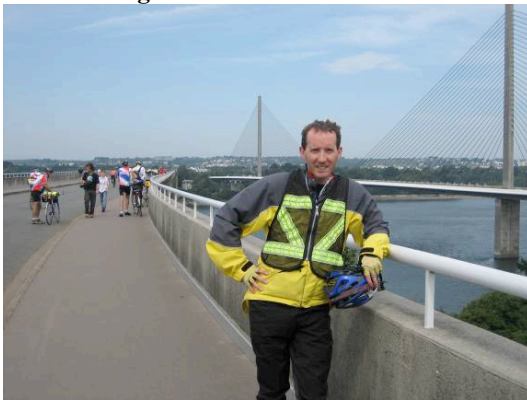
I was tired leaving Loudeac (it was around 3 am) and I had to pull over in some small town to sleep against the town sign. My knees were hurting more as I rode on. I decided to talk to the medical group at Carhaix to see if they might say that I was doing irreparable damage. Instead they told me to rub some anti-inflammatory and told me to keep riding. I told myself I would try and get to Brest and decide from there.

Climbing all those hills to Brest was hard on me and my body. On one of the long climbs I was passed by the rider on the old garlic bike. He and I traded back and forth for that one long climb. Before the long descent to Brest, I pulled over and took some photos of the hills and the riders going down. I was thinking that I would not be back biking here again because it was time to throw in the towel. The bridge was another photo opportunity and the steep hill to the control was horrible.



Km 391 Quédillac - Paris-Brest-Paris 2007

On the bridge to Brest



I drank my free beer at Brest and asked the interpreter how I could get back to Paris and not by biking. She looked me in the eye and asked why not ride my bike. I think she was calling me out on this and I really didn't have a decent excuse. Sure I was in pain but who wasn't at this point. I ran into my friends again and they told me not to give up. I was on a high all of a sudden and I left Brest feeling good. I decided that even though the pain was going to be in my knees I would just keep riding. I was almost hit by a young driver leaving town but other than that the ride back to Loudeac was excellent. I climbed the hills strongly and kept the rest breaks to a minimum.

My new pain was beginning in my saddle. Polysporin was helping ease the pain, but I knew that this soreness would plague me for the rest of the ride. The second night in Loudeac was worse than the first. I did get a cot but the sleep was painful and I was awake from shivering within 90 minutes. I had my first shower here and changed my clothes but that didn't help much because it was raining when I left. The highlight was sitting with a French rider that was going to finish his 7th PBP. Amazing!

For the next 2 hours of darkness, I had no difficulty staying awake. As the day went on I really began to feel like I could finish this race. I began to savour the moments of talking

with other riders and watching the people standing at the ends of their laneways and waving out their windows cheering us on. It goes without saying it was like nothing I have ever experienced in Canada.



Do I look tired?

As I left Villaines with 220 km's to go, I knew my next ailment was about to take hold. I was unable to see the road anymore when I was down in the drops. Shermer's neck was beginning and I couldn't do anything to stop it. I began holding my head up with one hand or sitting back as far as possible so that I would sit straight up and this allowed my head to stay up – but it also meant that I could only reach my handlebars with one hand. So either way, I was riding slower and it was depressing as my legs still felt good.

At Mortagne I needed medical attention which turned into a neck massage. This didn't help the Shermer's neck but did give me more rotation and took away some of the stiffness. I decided that I would try and go all night in case my neck seized right up during another sleep stop and hopefully make it to St. Quentin very early on Friday morning.

To this day I don't know if this was a smart idea or not, as the next few hours were a complete mess for me. I was dozing in and out of sleep on the descents and I was mentally lost for some time. I remember speaking with an Australian and thinking 'how did I get to Australia, because I know that I am in Quebec' when really I was in France. I fought these thoughts for a couple hours and finally decided to sleep in a rain soaked ditch for 30 minutes to clear my head. This helped clear my head enough to make it to the next town to get some sleep in the town square. Another 30 minutes and I was off again. I was amazed at all the cyclists sleeping anywhere they could.

Trying to find Dreux was difficult. Someone told me there would always be cyclists that I could see en route, but it seemed that I was all on my own a lot of the time and for this section I didn't see another cyclist for 2 hours. When I did find Dreux I made another stop at the medical centre and this time they gave me a nice neck brace. It only lasted a while because it was too low so it didn't really help and made me feel like I was choking.

I can truly say I did not enjoy the ride from Dreux to St. Quentin. I could not keep my head up and I felt like I was going in circles and I was thinking the ride organizers had

put in too many short steep hills in that last section. My odometer was not working from the moisture so it felt like St. Quentin would never arrive. Even when I made it to the town limits there were still 15 kilometers to go – and that short 15 seemed forever. Again I was on my own almost the entire last section and only hooked up with some riders in the town limits. We were arriving at morning rush hour and the construction also slowed the arrival. But eventually I crossed the finish line.

At the end



I drank my free beer and then headed to McDonalds for a Royal Mac. Back at the Novotel, I showered and slept for 4 hours and then hit the laundry machines because I still could not get that smell out of my nose and hoped that washing all of my clothes would help rid me of it.

Our entire chapter finished the ride and that night we had a huge celebratory meal with our families.



I did a biking tour of Paris a couple days later and returned home 4 days after the end of the race. One month later my neck still annoys me but otherwise I feel fine and can't help but wonder about how I could improve my finish time. I truly look back on PBP fondly even though the weather was worse than I had anticipated. See you in 2011.