

A ride of extremes

Bec Morton

Howard and I had a pretty stressful couple of days prior to PBP start...

Howard's rack bag fell off his bike (on cobbles, which is why he didn't notice immediately) when we were returning from PBP registration. We'd gone about 3 km down the road before Ming Wang noticed it was missing. We carefully retraced our route to the place where it must have fallen off, but the bag was nowhere to be found. It contained all Howard's PBP registration material including his electronic tag, bike plates, jersey and vest as well as his wallet. That meant there was lots of running around to be done both that day and the day I started PBP. Thankfully the wonderful PBP organisers were able to reissue

and we'd have a "day of rest", eating, socialising, dozing. However, it didn't work out that way and I only had time to lie down for a couple of hours after a very late lunch and by then I was too wound up to sleep. Consequently I was already tired when I rolled up to the Gymnase with Dave Hart. As planned, I started in the last wave of the 90-hour group, which was 8 pm, figuring that I would have less crowded checkpoints that way. Unable to keep the pace, I drifted off the back of the main group after the first few kilometres. In the first 60 km I had two punctures and I stopped to help Seattle Randonneur

manage and taking naps as required. I gave a brief interview in an almost deserted Villaines (221 km) and, when asked what time I planned to be back through the contrôle, I remember answering, "Hopefully some time before the cut off!"

The weather had been reasonably good throughout the first night, with just a light sprinkle of rain from time to time, but it deteriorated rapidly after I left Villaines. Heavy rain soaked through my clothing, ran down my neck and filled my shoes with water. Feeling cold and miserable I stopped at one of the many roadside stalls for a reviving hot chocolate, where I spied some photos of Aussie riders who had chosen the same spot for a break in 2007. The weather cleared as I made my way towards Tinténiac and I was completely dry by the time I rolled in there. I met Wayne Hickman and Caroline Williams from WA coming down the stairs and they offered to ride with me, but I told them I would be at least another 20 minutes and that they should ride on.

Giant black clouds were rolling ominously across the sky ahead as I left Tinténiac. Big fat drops began to tumble down just as I got to a route diversion (which I later learned was due to the tragic death of an American PBP rider in a road accident) and I quickly donned my rain jacket once more. Spectacular lightning flashed almost constantly across the sky accompanied by deep rumbling thunder. Thankfully the storm and heavy rain passed quickly, as did the strong gusty wind which almost blew me over several times a little later into my journey towards Loudéac.

As the night rolled on, I started to feel very weary and disoriented. At one point I became convinced that I had passed the same spot three times and was therefore riding in a never-ending circle with no hope of reaching Loudéac. Thankfully I was wrong and eventually I rolled into Loudéac (449 km) at 12.42 am. As my brain was not functioning properly I made several



The 8 pm ride start—Bec, Stuart, Ming, Dave, and Peter

most of Howard's registration material. The owners of the "bike shop" stall at registration gathered all their Topeak MTX bags from the shop overnight so Howard was able to buy a new rack bag to use on PBP. Also, we had friends support us in other ways by loaning us cash, buying batteries and offering to help in any way they could.

I woke at 4.30 am on the day of the ride start and, with my mind ticking over all the things still to be done, I was unable to go back to sleep. Our original plan was that we'd be well organised

Ken Krichman, who had a broken rear derailleur. Ken had already enlisted the help of an Indian rider to convert his bike to a single speed, but was in need of my chainbreaker. These three stops probably cost me at least 90 minutes and I started to suffer from sleep deprivation very early in the ride which further slowed me down.

I had the first of my countless power naps at Mortagne, just 140 km into the ride. This didn't bode well for the rest of the ride, but I knew I just had to keep progressing as steadily as I could

unnecessary journeys across the enormously spread out contrôle, performing all the required tasks in random order. I decided to forgo a little sleep by having a shower before changing my clothes, a decision I do not regret, even though I only managed a 45 minute sleep. I had a brief chat to Katherine Bryant (the only other female rider from NSW) who happened to turn up for a shower at the same time as me.

I headed out of Loudéac in the early hours of the morning and soon met up with Pat Lehane from Queensland. I know Pat well as we'd been lost together on PBP in 2007 and we had joined forces to help each other through the Western Districts Wanderer 1000 in 2010. We chatted for a while before I needed to stop for yet another power nap just before dawn. Because Pat had started in an earlier wave, he rode on alone to make sure he got to the Carhaix contrôle on time.

A good feed at Carhaix and the promise of extended contrôle closing times beyond Brest buoyed my spirits as I continued westward. I kept an eye out for fellow Aussies as I descended 'the Roc', smiling and waving when I could. I rode over the bridge and down into Brest with Jeffrey Barrett from Cronulla who was riding in the 84-hour group (which started at 5.20 am the morning after me) and we arrived just before 2.30 pm. I should have been mindful of getting through the contrôle quickly so that I could push on back to Carhaix and then Loudéac for a decent (i.e. longer than 45 minute) sleep. However accumulated fatigue caused me to fall asleep in the very warm dining area after I had eaten with Katherine, her husband Ian, Warren Page and Jonathan Page. Consequently, I ended up leaving the Brest contrôle about an hour after it closed—a big mistake and certainly not in my ride plan!

Cursing my stupidity and panicking more than a little, I pushed as hard as I could back up over the Roc, trying to ensure that I was ahead of the contrôle closing time at Carhaix. Howard caught me up for the first time about 20 km out of Carhaix. He had had a very tough first day, riding in an almost constant thunderstorm and also suffering from gastro, which put him near the back of the 84-hour group. Howard and I rode together into Carhaix (703 km), where we ate, and chatted with Sandy Vigar and Pepe Ochoa, who was suffering

with his very painful Shermer's Neck. While we were eating we decided that Howard should ride ahead on the hillier terrain between Carhaix and Loudéac.

As in 2007, the Carhaix to Loudéac leg ended up being by far the worst section of the ride for me. Night had fallen and I rode alongside similarly sleep-deprived riders, so it wasn't long before I could not keep my eyes open. I was determined to ride on to Loudéac, where my bag was waiting, so I passed the sleep stop at Saint-Nicolas without so much as a backwards glance. Almost constant microsleeps contributed significantly to my extremely foggy memory of this stretch—in fact, I feel like I was actually asleep for most of the trip. It was pure luck that I did not fall or crash. Many times I woke to find



Howard and Bec near Fougères

myself heading off the road, or veering towards another rider. Once I even had the bizarre experience of waking myself up by talking in my sleep! After what seemed like an eternity, I finally made it safely into Loudéac (782 km) at 2.39 am. Surprisingly, I was a little more organised this time, choosing to get my card stamped and then eat before passing through the massive bike parking area to pick up my drop bag. I booked in for a sleep then had a shower and changed before bedding down for another painfully short 45-minute sleep.

Because it had now been days since I had slept for longer than 45 minutes at a time, I had to have a couple more power naps on the way to Tinténiac—one sprawled on concrete (the grass was wet) on the side of the road and one on the slightly more comfortable

cardboard floor in Quedillac. Howard caught me again about 15 km from Tinténiac, which gave me a real lift and we rode in together. At that stage I was only 30 minutes ahead of cut off and feeling quite desperate about keeping ahead of contrôle closing times in my current state of exhaustion.

My Brest dining buddies Ian, Katherine and Warren were already at Tinténiac (867 km) and getting ready to leave. Howard had already decided to ride the rest of the way with me, but he asked the others if they would wait and ride together with us to Fougères to help boost me a bit further ahead of cut off. I rode so well to Fougères (921 km) that everyone decided to stick together for a bit longer. Somewhere along the way we also picked up Ming and Pepe, so we now had a strong group riding quickly over the rolling terrain through the warm sunshine. It was heaven! I continued to ride so much faster than usual that, periodically, a member of the group would say, "I can't believe you are still riding so well." Also, Howard threatened to strip me of my 'tortoise' status. At one point I told them all that I was just hoping that it wasn't a dream and that I wasn't going to wake up and discover that I was still in Brest! The kilometres sped by and we made very good time, arriving at the very lively Villaines contrôle (1009 km) in high spirits just after 6 pm.

The wheels started to fall off again when Howard punctured some time after we left Villaines. Katherine and I rode on with the rest of the bunch while Ian helped Howard fix the flat. Concerned that the boys hadn't caught us, we stopped at a bar in a busy little town to wait for them. When they arrived we pumped a couple of coffees and a coke into Howard as he had started to ride slowly and fall asleep soon after it became dark. The caffeine didn't seem to have much effect and Katherine and Ian waited for us as I rode with Howard talking to him constantly and telling him to keep pedalling. I've discovered that as long as your legs are moving you are not asleep. We got into Mortagne (1090 km) after midnight and while we were eating we decided that Howard and I would head out after a two-and-a-half hour sleep and Katherine, Ian and Warren would sleep longer and catch us up the following day. I saw Ken Krichman again at Mortagne. He told me that he was able to have his bike repaired at the first

contrôle, which was great news. I saw later that he successfully completed PBP too.

Howard was still very tired when the two of us set out from Mortagne and we had to stop for a couple of pre-dawn power naps. However, as soon as the sun came up and we had refuelled at an extremely conveniently located patisserie (where we picked up Ming again) we started to ride very strongly once more. With Howard, Ming, a Spanish guy and myself rotating at the front of a growing peloton, we powered into Dreux.



Villaines-Howard, Bec, Ian, Katherine and Warren

Katherine, Ian and Warren came into Dreux while we were eating and left 15 minutes behind us. With tummies full of pastries and other edible delights, Ming, Howard and I zoomed along through the sunshine over the flat terrain towards Saint-Quentin. We picked up Geoff Austin from Victoria and later Peter McCallum from Queensland along the way. As planned, we regrouped with Katherine, Ian and Warren about 5 km from the finish which meant that I had the privilege of being one of eight Aussies who rolled into the final roundabout together, past the cheering crowd and across the finish line. What a blast!

It was magical to finish such an epic adventure with Howard and a group of good friends. A brilliant party atmosphere awaited us at the Gymnase. Even though I was completely exhausted, I absolutely loved it. We had loads of time to eat, drink, chat and swap jerseys, which we didn't do in 2007, so I'm now the proud owner of jerseys from Sweden, Denmark and Madrid.

So, will I do it all again in 2015? Maybe.

Paris–Brest–Paris

There and back again (just like Bilbo)

Ian Garrity

What began as a faint idea by my wife Katherine in late 2009 ("Hmmm, the next Paris Brest Paris is in 2011...I wanted to do this 14 years ago.....hmmmm") had been carried through into reality. The training, the qualifying (and prequalifying), the introduction to the Audax 'lifestyle' ("We're just doing a 600 this weekend") and the attachment of vast amounts of bags and lights to otherwise good looking bikes had all been completed. Our new Audax mates had been full of advice and had told us planning for the ride was important. So we had put our heads together and formulated the rudiments of 'a plan'...

First of all, which wave to go in? The 80-hour people left at 4 pm Sunday, the 90-hour people from 6 pm, and the rest—the 84-hour group—at 5 am Monday morning.

Our first decision to make was that we were going to ride together; the

Now, where to sleep? We decided on Loudéac (where we could have a bag drop) for two nights and Mortagne-au-Perche as the last sleep spot, which allowed a nice 'easy' 140 km ride to Paris for the last day. So that was our 'plan'—then the temptation, on my behalf, to



Ian and Pepe in the corral waiting for the start.

second was that we were not going to go for a 'time'. This determined all other considerations. We had also done all our training rides 'low tech', so no Garmin (since PBP is signposted the entire way), no powdered energy drinks, no gels, etc. On our rides we took 'normal' food such as bread rolls, bananas (until their price went stratospheric), muesli bars and food and drink purchased along the way. Our 'plan' was that for Paris-Brest-Paris, we should do nothing different to what we had prepared our bodies for: we would ride our normal pace during the day/night and have four hour sleeps, and then ride at our usual pace the next morning. Thus the 84-hour group was the only choice for us.

go bald and grow a beard in traditional male Audax fashion, and for Katherine to wear a 'Legionnaires Cap' as a helmet cover had, however, both been resisted—we hoped we were ready.

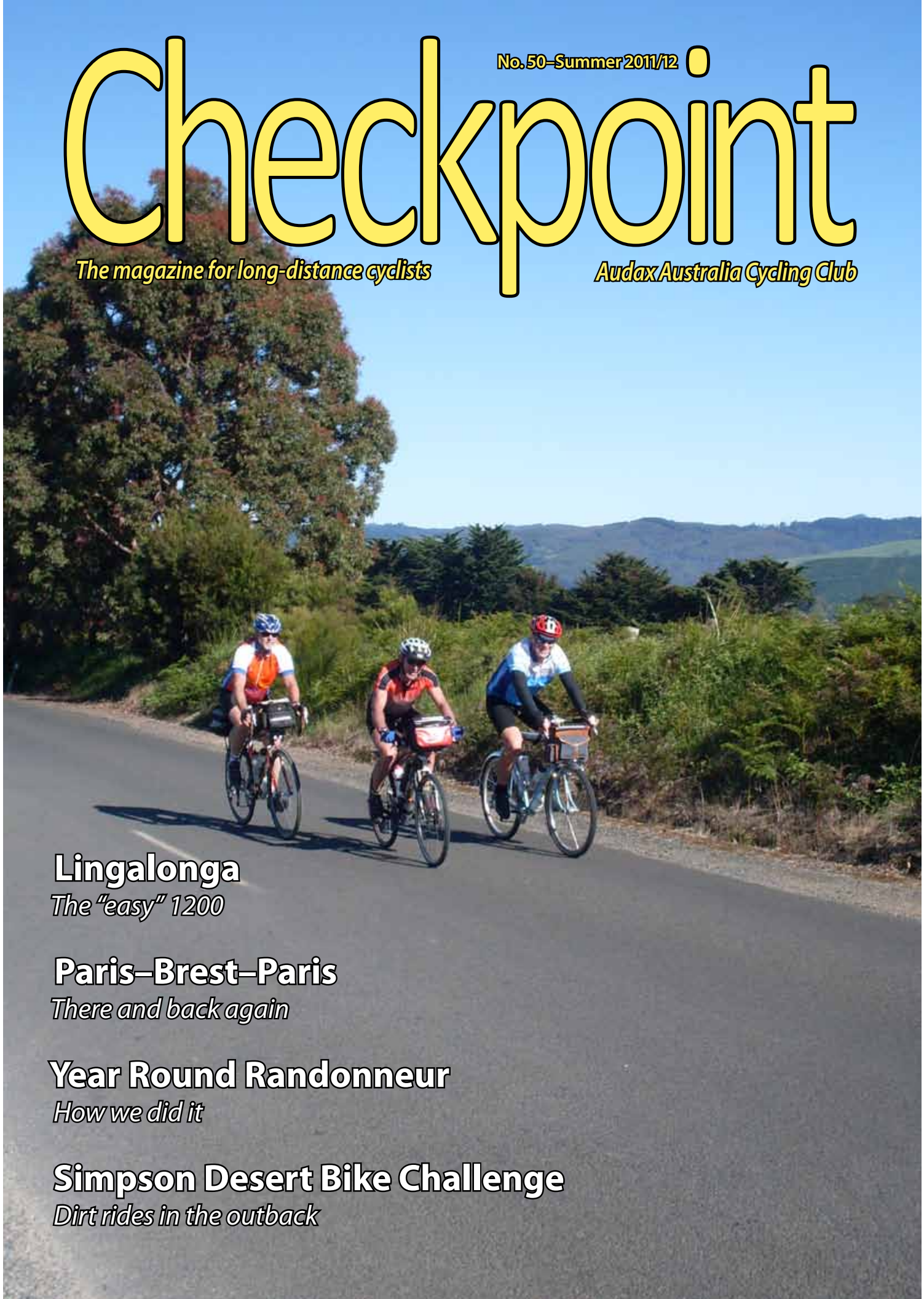
With bikes, bags and apprehensions about riding 1200 km in three and a half days all well and truly packed, we were whisked away by Emirates (chosen because they have a baggage allowance of 30 kg per person rather than 23, meaning the dreaded 'Excess Baggage' fairy didn't pay a visit), and deposited in magical Paris at 1.20 pm the Wednesday before the ride. It was slightly less magical Paris at 6.45 pm when we finally checked into the team hotel, mainly because of train/

No. 50–Summer 2011/12

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