

Through a Landscape of Beauty and Kindness----The Rocky Mountain 1200

Is she kind as she is fair

For beauty lives with kindness

W. Shakespeare

In my relatively short career of randonneuring, especially in ultra-marathon events, I discovered our sport is mainly concerned with distance and time. With this in mind, Rob Welsh and I made out a schedule to ride the Rocky Mountain 1200 in 70 hours. We comfortably accomplished this goal, but in so doing discovered far deeper meaning in our surroundings. The RM 1200 revealed to us a route of sheer beauty and unparalleled kindness.

The first act of kindness occurred even before the event began. I was forced to cancel my registration in mid-June. But when circumstances changed in mid-July, Roger and Ali Holt not only allowed me to re-enter but gave me encouragement. As I lined up Thursday morning with the 84 hour group, I felt very grateful to the organizers. While we cycled along the North Thompson River, the lovely, rolling farmland seemed to remind me of this indebtedness.

We easily reached the first control where the kindness continued. I felt like "Prince Velo" when one person quickly took my bike from my hands while a second removed the water bottles for refilling. I had my control card signed and stamped and was then shown an array of food to make any hungry cyclist happy. This routine happened again and again at each control.

The next 100 km over Messiter Summit to Blue River presented our only major problems of the journey----Rob ran into serious flat problems. A blown tire was followed by 5 flats. When I passed Rob my last spare tube, with no patch glue remaining, I realized it was our last chance. Vic Ringkvist kindly lent Rob an extra tire, tube and glue at the Blue River control. With two more flats after Blue River, we finally reached Valemount. The two very helpful drivers of the "sag wagon" heard of our troubles and had extra tubes waiting for us at the control and had arranged for a local bike store owner to re-open so we could re-stock on extra tubes. Of course, we never had a flat again. But by now, as we had earlier watched rider after rider pass us repairing yet another flat, we found ourselves members of the "lantern rouge"----dead last but very grateful for the concern and aid of so many keen volunteers. We were on the road again, happy as the mountains began to emerge from the North Thompson plateau.

The first clear views of Mt. Robson in cooling, early evening light buoyed our spirits further. We then passed the much photographed Moose Lake and continued into the cold, starry Jasper night. A warm welcome at the Jasper control, followed by shepherd's pie, a shuttle to the show-

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ers, a short sleep, and a gentle wake up call found us back on schedule and so appreciative of the continued support.

The early morning ride to Beauty Creek began in 1 degree darkness. We anxiously watched the sun begin to rise above the peaks and too slowly reveal its warmth. This all changed quickly at the Beauty Creek control where good cheer, laughter and a cook waiting for our order made it all seem like a grand holiday in Europe rather than a grueling ultra-marathon.

The almost 150 km that followed to Lake Louise has to be one of the world's most scenic stretches of road---sharp and rounded mountains were piercing the sky in all directions. Ray Parker was standing just below the Bow Summit where I posed for an action picture and gratefully accepted some grapefruit juice. The Sunwapta and Bow Summits provided good ascent challenges but also gave us thrilling descents, all in a truly spectacular backdrop.

Reaching the almost mecca-like Lake Louise, my smile enlarged to a huge grin as I witnessed another vast array of food as I answered the many queries: "Can I get you . . .?" A quick feed of delicious pasta salad led to an easy ride up and down the old scenic highway to Castle Junction. More kindness fueled our thoughts while home-made cookies filled our pockets. We retraced our route to Lake Louise, soon followed by darkness as we approached the Kicking Horse Pass. We caught up to Jennifer Chang who asked if she could join us for the somewhat dangerous route to Golden. Jennifer expressed her gratitude many times and we remained happy to have the extra company. Time went quickly as we descended to Field and felt the dark air quickly warm as we approached Golden.

After another welcome dinner and shower, we had a second short sleep. Early morning light revealed more hills and several bears as we approached the last climb up to Roger's Pass. The easy 67 km cruise from the top of the Pass to Revelstoke allowed us to enjoy the surrounding glaciated peaks and green valleys. This beauty was once again enhanced by the Revelstoke control where Gary, Jacques, Mike and others took care of all our needs. The lentil soup and appearance of good friends elongated our stay to over an hour.

Normally, the ride from Revelstoke to Enderby is an easy cycle with few hills but the hot, strong west wind and heavy traffic make this section the least enjoyable of the route. A change of wind direction at Sicamous and the appearance of Mara Lake provided respite from the parching wind. And then, once again, upon entering the Enderby control, I felt like a prince in my my own "velo" kingdom. This keen group of volunteers seemingly could not do enough for us and relegated the last tough 100 kms to a distant memory.

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Cycling through more picturesque small and large farms led us into the “back door” of Salmon Arm. Here we were greeted by the ever- effervescent Karen and instantly felt like we were sitting in our own living room as we were served with fresh blueberries and ice cream. A smarter person would have stayed for several hours to enjoy the food and ambiance but we were on a schedule.

We reluctantly but eagerly departed to cycle the last 110 km. The Salmon Arm and Chase hills found me standing too often to avoid sitting on my saddle while Rob provided an excellent pace. But the scent of sage in the Kamloops air urged us on through the third and last night. As we approached the finish, I realized as riding partners, we each had the opportunity to leave the other. Consideration kept us together to the end---and we were both the fortunate beneficiaries. Thanks Rob!

As in any ultra-marathon, we were happy to reach the end. We finished the 1210 km in our goal of 70 hours. However, I discovered something more important. Cycling the Rocky Mountain 1200 is not just about distance and time----it is truly a grand synthesis of beauty and kindness. In so many parts, the beauty of this route is indescribable as was the kindness of the so many volunteers and people we met. As Shakespeare once wrote in an entirely different context, “beauty lives with kindness.” No where is this more true than cycling the challenging and very well-organized Rocky Mountain 1200.

Graham Fishlock