

Planning

I did a lot of planning for this trip. One of my thoughts was to ride straight from Naperville – which would have been about a 441 km ride – just a bit too far. Another idea for a 260 km route was to take Amtrak from Naperville to Princeton or Kewaunee – but Amtrak requires reservations, and takes at most four bikes – so this seemed too complicated for a group. Finally I settled on starting about 30 miles west of Naperville, which worked out to a 400 km ride. Since I've never needed 24 hours to complete a 400 km ride this seemed like a good compromise. I created a clever spreadsheet that showed based on what time we arrived at different controls what our rolling average needed to be from that point on (more on that later).

The Team

The team was Doug McLerran, Rick Cosaro, Ken Priddy, and myself (Eric Peterson). At 54 I'm the oldest, the others are in their late 40s. Doug and I both did PBP last year – my first and Doug's third. Doug is a real handy guy to have around as he has been cycling in one form or another since he was 21, including PacTour, along with track and road racing. Rick's been riding for just a few years (he says he used to be a punk rocker) but I've ridden a lot with him and he has an amazing capacity to push himself and is a guy you can count on. Ken was a bit of an unknown but he's done some brevets and once did a 100 mile trail run and he had just completed a hilly 300K in Kentucky.

The Start

As I applied some sunscreen at just before 8AM I had a hope, a false one as it turned out, that this was going to be a nice day for a ride. It was not to be. After getting our brevet cards stamped at the BP station in Hinckley, IL, we rode out of the tree cover of the parking lot heading west and could see that the sunny sky overhead was being rapidly overtaken by grey clouds, and that there was wind, very strong, out of the southwest. We were on our way. The route was pretty much straight west starting out, until we would angle north to pass through the first control in Dixon and then angle south on the way to the second control at Clinton, just across the Mississippi.

Hinckley to Dixon: 53 miles (8:04 - 12:33, 11.8 avg) - Into the Wind

The four of us did our best to do some pacelining. Due to the wind angle the lead rider had to pretty much ride down the middle of the road in order for the remaining three to get much of a draft. The traffic was very light so this worked out OK. I would try and stay up front for a mile, the others did a bit more or less. Within an hour it started raining and after a while we stopped at a graveyard to put on some rain gear. It was so windy that you had to be careful not to let the wind blow your bike over. Three of us had decent rain gear but Ken had some sort of plastic windbreaker that caught a lot of wind and made a huge racket as it flapped furiously in the wind ([video of Ken's Windbreaker](#)). It was like riding with a spinnaker attached to your upper body. We labored on for hours at a pretty slow pace - we could not maintain more than 12-13 mph and even that pace I thought was too much to maintain for very long. We caught one break when we ride north on IL-251 for 3 miles but then we turned back into the wind which seemed to be getting fiercer as it shifted to straight west. We caught another little break riding north through Franklin Grove and then we turned west past a very pretty area near a state park which had some rollers which offered some wind relief. A bit after that we rolled down to cross the river and we were in Dixon. According to my GPS our rolling average for that stretch was just 11.8 mph. After checking in at the control we went to McDonalds for some hot food.

Dixon to Clinton, IA: 43 miles (96 cumulative), 1:19 - 5:13, 11.1 avg - We Lose One Rider

After Dixon we headed west again, the rain picked up a bit, it seemed colder, and the wind was shifting to the northwest. I'd pre-ridden the route up to this point but now we went off on some roads that I had not ridden - they were straight on the map but had a fair amount of up and down. It was a nice break from riding straight into the wind. At this point Ken started to fall behind on the climbs, and we would then need to regroup. Doug started to voice his

concern, but we decided to ride on a bit and see how things went. After a while though Doug, Rick, and I just kept going on one long stretch that had no turns to see how big the gap was going to get. It wasn't that we were trying to ride faster, rather we were facing the reality that if we went slower we were in danger of not completing the ride in 24 hours - and we were not even yet close to the halfway point. At the next turn we waited ten minutes until Ken showed up. Ken knew he was slowing us down and he assured us that he was OK with us going on without him. He could have ridden into Sterling, IL and called his wife but I found out later that he turned around and rode home, arriving at 10PM with 170 miles! I have no doubt that Ken could have completed the ride to Waterloo but not in the 24 hours allotted. Meanwhile we continued on through Morrison which has some big old houses on a hill above US-30. We and then came around into Fulton, IL where Doug took another video of the wind, blowing the flags on a street in Fulton - ([Flags in Fulton](#)). Along this whole stretch I was feeling quite tired and pretty much just sat on someone's wheel - the wind seemed like it had evaporated all my energy - although in reality I knew I had not been eating enough while on the bike. Once in Iowa we checked in at the control then stopped for a dinner at an Italian restaurant where the staff was very accomodating. We ate some good food, relaxed, drank a lot of water, and warmed up. According to my spreadsheet we had plenty of time, even though we were more than ten hours into the ride and had not yet ridden 100 miles. Hmmm, something did not add up.

Clinton to Maquoketa: 37 miles (133 cumulative), 6:25 - 9:25, 12.4 avg - Into the Hills

The wind was finally dying down as we rode through the pretty countryside. After Illinois it was a relief to be in Iowa which was more scenic with its rolling hills dotted with farms. Since the sun was going down though it soon wouldn't make much difference. We rolled through the little towns of Goose Lake, Charlotte, and Delmar. At US-61 we missed a turn and added a couple of bonus miles. In this area I'm pretty sure that I spotted what appeared to be a large LCD screen in a field that I think was someone's private outdoor theater - it appeared to be playing some movie but I could not tell which one. In the darkness Maquoketa appeared in the distance as a glittering assortment of traffic lights and street lights and it seemed to take forever to get there. At the control we found an adjoining Godfather's pizza and ordered a large pizza with Italian sausage, green peppers, black olives, and mushrooms.

Maquoketa to Monticello: 36 miles (169 cumulative), 10:31 - 1:16, 12.9 avg - Into the Night

Luckily Doug had scouted my original route on his way to the Waterloo 300K so I had modified the section that would have had us riding down US-61 which Doug said is essentially a super-highway. We rolled past Maquoketa Caves State Park which I had thought about using for a nap stop but by now I had figured out that there would be no time for stopping. Here's why - when I modified my spreadsheet to calculate how fast we would need to be riding in order to get the Jesup by 6:00AM (rather than Waterloo by 8:00AM), I had forgotten to decrease the riding hours from 24 hours to 22 hours. Oops. So in Clinton we actually had two hours less than I thought. Anyway this meant that we would have to work harder, and not be able to stop for a nap, if we were to complete the ride by 8:00AM. Worse, it meant that we would need to work really hard to make the 22:00 hour checkpoint at 6:00AM in Jesup.

This stretch would be our shortest leg (except for the last one) and we started riding a little faster despite the hills. I think it was along this stretch that we saw our first "deer pack" run across the road just in front of us. This was a little unsettling as it would have been very bad to get run over, or run into, a deer. I figured that since they were capable of moving much faster than we were that the deer would have an easy time avoiding that situation. There was some sudden braking as the deer materialized so it was lucky we did not crash into each other. It was a clear night, cold, and the stars were out. I was amazed at how little traffic there was out in the country. It was cool to be moving along under our own power cruising through the darkness, passing through some tiny hamlets but no real towns until we got to Monticello where we stopped at a "Kum and Go". I was feeling sleepy so I filled up my water bottle with Mountain Dew, had a cappuccino with "extra caffeine", and bought some No-Doz. Doug put on

his rain pants because he was cold and I added a long-sleeved polypro shirt. I wondered what the locals thought about us as we sat on the floor at 1AM. We heard from someone that it was prom night in Monticello.

Monticello to Jesup: 62 miles (231 cumulative), 1:53 - 6:15, 14.2 avg - The Long Agony

Without a doubt this very long section was the hardest. Luckily the cold air helped keep me awake because I wanted desperately to lie down and fall asleep. Doug rallied us to keep together and conserve energy by drafting although it was mostly Doug leading the way. We adopted our pace to draft going up the hills but would usually drift apart going down. We saw two more groups of deer. This stretch took us through the small towns of Coggon, Troy Mills, Quasqueton, and Rowley. Around 4AM Rick said he could not pull anymore. I know I was digging deep, very deep, just to keep the pedals turning. I was getting really tired of turning the cranks. Around 4:30AM I started scanning the sky to the east anxious for the sun to come up. When the dawn rose, although I was still very tired, at least it seemed a bit safer now that we could see our surroundings. We were busting our butts to get to Jesup by 6:00 AM - it looked like it would be close but we would be late - did that mean we would be disqualified? I tried to remember the rules but couldn't. As the sun came up we could see frost covering the landscape. We got to Jesup just 15 minutes late. Doug's hands were freezing so I gave him my lobster mitts. I had to hustle Rick and Doug out of there because every minute counted at this point.

Jesup to Waterloo: 18 miles (249 cumulative), 6:39 - 8:02, 13.3 avg - Road Construction

At last - the home stretch, except that 18 miles seemed like a really long way, plus the road was probably in the worst condition of all the roads on the ride. A few miles into it, there were signs saying "road closed" with a detour on US-6. We elected to ignore the signs and eventually got to a 1/2 mile stretch where the road was gone, with just a dirt foundation. Luckily it was packed down enough to make it rideable, although there was still some significant muddy stretches. Doug went ahead and got chased by two little harmless dogs, it was quite comical to watch from behind as they ran along yapping. We could now see Waterloo / Cedar Falls in the distance. As we rode into the outskirts of town, Rick noticed a group off in the distance. We sped up a bit to catch them and there was another fleche team riding in - that was very cool. I recognized one of the riders (Marc Olsen) who has a blue Ramboulliet just like mine, except bigger. We rode along together and then I think another team joined us. We meandered our way over to Robert's house and I was so happy to see my van and finish the ride. We hung outside for a bit and took some pictures, then we went in to turn in our cards and have some of the food that Robert and Carrie had for the riders. Kathy, my better half, had driven up the night before so after Robert's we went to the motel to clean up, then we hit the road back to Naperville.

Post Ride Analysis

The ride was hard, way harder than we anticipated. That was due mainly to the wind. The rain and cool temperatures did not help the situation. When I was planning the ride, I imagined nice spring weather, with light breezes, and sunshine. (You would think I had never ridden a brevet before.) Before we started, we were wondering about what we would have to do to keep our pace down, and were we would be stopping for naps. According to my GPS the reality was that we were riding for almost nineteen hours. So we had only five hours for controls and stopping to eat. The plan was to stop for 30 minutes at each control but we exceeded that almost every time. We had no flats or mechanical issues. I guess I would say that there was not much that we could have done better. We could have drafted more, and personally I should have eaten more in the first part of the ride. But we worked well together as a team, helped each other out, and stuck it out to the end.

Here are some pictures from the ride: [2008 Fleche Pictures - team "North by Northwest"](#)