

Chapeau – a tribute to Don and the Seattle volunteers

Every ride has a theme –
volunteers. They made the
manageable, the nights
stomachs, water bottles
bikes and most
me smile **THANK**



this one was all about
heat bearable, the climbs
shorter, they filled our
and socks, fixed our
importantly, they made
YOU!

Prologue

While I had obsessively planned and trained for PBP, 2008 had been an off year - my legs were weak and lacked miles. Keeping up with my cycling friends Maile, Carol, Chris, Lowell, Bill etc. had become a wishful thinking. Two months before the C1200 it dawned on me that this ride might well be harder than PBP, but at least the moderate climate in the NW should help, right. Maile and Lowell told me, without a hint of sympathy, that more riding was the only remedy. To prepare myself for the long Cascade climbs I moved for a few weeks to my Alpine retreat, where I merged my professional work and cycling! I completed the 400k and 600k Brevet in the Bavarian Alps and felt more positive about the prospects of succeeding in completing the C1200.

Randonneurs are peregrine by nature, typically traveling to distant destinations in pursuit of happiness. On June 27th, 2008 Randonneurs and Randoneuses from 4 continents descended on Monroe, just north of Seattle, to take on a heated adventure – tackling the Cascades. Among them were four DC Randonneurs, Carol Bell, Maile Neel, Bill Olson (from NJ) and Lothar Hennighausen. Carol and Maile needed to ride the 1000k as part of their R5000 requirement (they topped it off with a 260k Permanent on day 4), while Bill (also known as Wheelsucker Willie) and Lothar were foolish enough to attempt the 1200k.

Day 1

0600, **Mark Roehrig** sent off 70+ riders. Over the next 90 hours I got to know the faces of the volunteers, their kind words and their help, although their names eluded me in many cases (however, I noticed that the most common name was MARK).



Eamon saved my day! Early into the ride I noticed that my right sandal had excessive lateral movement and I was unable to unclick, resulting almost in a crash. Upon closer inspection I noticed a missing screw in the right cleat. At the first control I was pointed to a fellow named **EAMON** for help. Eamon told me that had everything in his toolbox, except this kind of screw and he started calling bike

shops on the route. Another, rather scruffy, fellow named **DON** overheard our conversation and came up with an altruistic solution rarely observed in the wild. He retrieved his cycling shoes from his beaten up truck and Eamon (note, he is on the phone while working – don't try this at home) salvaged the screw for me. This was certainly not the last time I ran into Eamon and Don and benefited from their skills and generosity.

While my shoes were repaired I topped off my bottles and gorged down an infinite number of those great cookies sitting on the control table and exactly this did me in fore the rest of the day. I had already eaten numerous muffins for breakfast and my system was unable to handle the overload of simple sugars. I was sick and if there had been a taxi stand on the way to White Pass, I would have thrown the proverbial towel and DNFd. At the gas station rest stop before tackling White Pass I met a rider who had completed the C1200 in 2006. He decided to turn around and DNF rather than face the heat of the desert – what an encouragement. He told me that it had been too painful in 2006.



Ice to the rescue! This little fella made sure our ice socks were properly filled with the life saving elixier.

I don't do well in the heat (after all I grew up in rainy Germany) and climbing White Pass in the cool of the evening was welcome. Halfway up the pass was an OASIS manned by **DON** who offered gels with a selection of flavors. I settled for Espresso.

It was pitch black when I crossed the Pass and after a long descend a wonderful burned soup was waiting for us at the Lake control. I am a soup guy and my stomach immediately felt

better. Arrival in Naches Sunday morning at 0100 hours. Whatever I had for dinner, it was great and I was back on the road at 0530 hours.

Day 2

Ferocious headwinds on the way up to the camp ground below Chinook Pass and again daunting headwinds on the way down. Somehow **SIR** has no good relationship with the Randonneur gods. Since I was in the second half of the drawn out field of riders, the ride up Chinook Pass gave me a wonderful opportunity to greet all my friends heading back to

Naches. Hi Maile and Carol and so many others. Wow, with this speed they would get a full night sleep in Quincy. I settled in for the long haul.



This darn good burned soup! It must have been on day 2, Karel (the tough Dutch rider from Montana) and I had been riding into a stiff headwind for what appeared to be hours, only to finally arrive at the gas station control. At PBP I rushed through the controls, being afraid I would not be able to complete the ride in the allotted time. At the C1200 my philosophy was just the opposite, I spent a lot of time at the controls talking to my new friends and those good Samaritans.

When I grow up I want to be a volunteer at the C1200! Naturally, I had to pay for hanging out with my friends in the form of getting little sleep, but this will be discussed later. This control was so much fun and I spent more than an hour eating Mike's burned soup, more noodle soup to be topped off with DON's special Espresso. Some kids from LA told us they could easily do the 1200 on their skateboards – something to consider.

SIR Don preparing Espresso.

Arrival in Quincy Monday morning at 0200 hours, many riders are already heading out to avoid the heat that will scorch the earth and riders alike in a few hours. Shower, chili, 2 hours pinned on the wrestling mat, ham and eggs and plenty of coffee and back on the road at 0630 hours – I have it down to a science. Yes, and our truck driver ??? gave me this wonderful remedy for my sore butt. I am a cheap guy who normally uses Vaseline, but I became a convert and Lantiseptic will be a staple in the Hennighausen household.



Day 3

Irrigation transformed a desert into a biblical land. Orchards, grain as far as the eye can see, and vineyards the source of my biofuel – wine. Loup Loup is supposedly the big and only climb of the day. SIR, you fooled us. There was plenty of climbing to the first secret control overlooking prehistoric lands. Mark is relaxed as ever and Don passes out whatever we need. By now coke has become my main source of simple sugars

and chocolate milk became an absolute NO after the disaster of day 1. Mark insisted that

I appreciated the scenery before heading on, after all this was supposed to be an educational tour.

I filled up in two bottles since it was only 26 miles to Farmers control. Mark (which one?) failed to mention long steep climbs and desert heat. As I approached the bottom of Moses valley, burning air hit me like a brick wall – Moses was a smart man, he hiked and did not ride a bike. Don, a true Samaritan, patrolled the course refilling socks and bottles. And then there was Albert, manning a roadside stand under an umbrella. It had the surreal appearance of an ice cream stand in the desert (if anybody has a picture, please send it to me).



I spent a lot of time at Farmer's control in an effort to avoid the heat that I despise so much, pushing me further behind. At the control at bottom of Loup Loup Pass I caught myself again chatting with Mike and Don and eating "non-burned" soup and ham sandwiches. I took off in the dark climbing Loup Loup and listening to Maile's PBP collection.

I pulled into the Mazama control Tuesday morning at 0300 hours – would I make it in time to Monroe? There was no spare bed, so

I walked into room 9 to take a shower (sorry to the sleepy XX volunteer who was startled to experience a XY rider in the shower when she walked into the bathroom). After a chicken dinner I hit the couch on the balcony overlooking the breakfast room and was awakened one hour later by Carol's sweet New Zealand accent. After ~15 sausage links, fried potatoes, coffee and strawberries I hit the road around 0600 hours – there is no rest for the weary.

Day 4

The last day and only 168 miles, piece of cake. Well, I was sleep deprived, my hands and feet were completely numb (I had to visually ensure that they were still part of my body), my butt was sore and skin started to peel off but my legs felt just fine. Mind over matter was the theme of the day.

Climbing Washington Pass was fun. In contrast to the night ascent of Loup Loup I did see where I was going. Volunteers were waiting at the pass to take pictures of the cycling heroes (or insane). As I had only slept one hour the previous night I got tired

quickly and napped by the roadside. I found myself among numerous C1200 luminaries/lunatics, including the Olson Bros, their friend Mike, Barry and Martin from down under, the guy who builds his own bike and Eiji from JP. After a quick dip and another climb to Rainy Pass we were ready for a 25 mile decent. The scenery was spectacular and initially the descent was fast. At some point the downhill was turning into a chimney almost blowing us back up the mountain.



Deja vu

On Tuesday afternoon and throughout the night I experienced a Déjà vu. I could have sworn that I had been on this ride before with the same riders. I was able to predict all the turns, the hills, everything. I called my wife Priscilla asking whether we had cycled here before – “not with me” was her answer. It is scary to realize that the brain can play tricks with you.

As the day progressed I looked for riders I could join for the final night leg. I met Eiji at a rest stop, but he was too fast for me, so were the Olson Bros and the fellow from Utah. Finally I settled in with Steve and Barry and Martin from down under. We rode together for hours and enjoyed our company. Barry (or was it Martin) consumed a greasy deep-fried chicken at one of the stops and I jokingly wondered whether the cholesterol was bad for his health. He responded in this profound Australian accent that refueled with the meat and that the fat was to be applied on his sore behind. He also wondered why America had not gotten rid of 1 and 2 cent coins, an antiquated currency.

The now so familiar Don checked us in at the last control located conveniently at a McDonalds, another chance to eat forbidden food. And then it was off into the night. Left, right, left, right, straight, left The ride director must have picked a route to cover every single street in the neighborhoods we passed.

Finally, after 90:04 hours we pulled into the parking lot in Monroe and had a well-deserved beer and cold pizza.

Finally home, Wednesday, July 2nd 0004 hours



Peter, Martin, Steve, Barry and Lothar at the finish

Epilogue

I arrived a day early in Seattle to visit professional colleagues, discuss joint interest and give a lecture. It apparently was a coherent lecture about my day job with a lot of extra info about the upcoming C1200. I gave another talk on Thursday, July 3rd at the Institute for Systems Biology. This was quite a different story. I was wasted from the ride and my talk probably did not make too much sense. A lot of this lecture focused on hormones, exercise and obesity and how cycling could save the world. After my lecture my host took me out for lunch and we ran into a rider on a recumbent equipped with 2 E6 lights. Yes, it was the rider from the C1200, still going strong. What a small world

On Thursday evening I traveled to Tacoma to meet up with my son, a 1st class Cadet on the US Coast Guard Cutter Barque Eagle. He was in the Northern Pacific this summer and we celebrated his 21st birthday and the C1200 with a fine dinner in an Indochine restaurant.

Zach and Papa Hennighausen on the USCGC Barque EAGLE

