

Flight to Vancouver

Prologue

Wednesday, June 23rd

0km

My last minute packing didn't finish until almost 12:30am and I woke up at 4:15am the next morning to catch my 7am flight. It takes a special person to drive you to the airport at 5am on a Wednesday morning. Luckily for me, my grandmother is a very special person.

Airport check-in was a breeze. (Note to father: "I told you so."). The flight was fine, and all of my luggage arrived safely. From the airport, I took a taxi (with all of my stuff) to Totem Residence at UBC. (Note to father: "I told you so.")

Arriving at UBC was very similar to arriving at UWO 7 years ago: I didn't know anyone, I didn't know where to go on campus, I had a lot of luggage with me, and, most importantly, I was about to embark on a great adventure. The feeling of deja-vous as I checked into the residence room was wonderful for a former-residence addict like me.

I got my bike assembled easily, and spent a lot of time repacking my bags after the hurried job I did the night before. Then I started to meet my fellow riders. About 75 percent of them are white males aged 55 and older. There are also 2 women, in their 30's/40's. John is a 16-year-old kid from Edmonton. Paul is a 20-something guy from Melbourne. There is also another younger guy from Toronto, and a guy from Scotland. This group of 13 will take the optional trip to Victoria tomorrow. About 20 others will join us on Saturday for the rest of the trip.

I'm exhausted, and will certainly sleep well tonight.

Vancouver to Victoria

Day -2

Thursday, June 24th

82km

After months of preparation today was the first day of cycling across Canada. Our first ride as a group of 13 was quite unceremonious. We rode about 1.5km to breakfast at the Student Union Building. After that, we cycled about 26km to the Deas Island Tunnel, where we loaded our bikes onto a truck and drove through the tunnel. (That's right...after less then 30km of cycling we had already stopped to eat and caught a ride on a truck.). The reason for the truck, of course, is that bikes weren't allowed to ride in the tunnel.

After 14 more km we took a ferry to Vancouver Island. The ferry ride gave us some wonderful views of the many small Islands between the Tsawwassen ferry dock and the Swartz Bay ferry dock. Beautiful, mountainous, evergreen covered Islands.

After the ferry, it was another 40km to the hostel in Victoria. Paul and I seemed to repeatedly pull away from the pack on hills. Some of the older people were less interested in charging up and racing down. They all got a good laugh when Paul and I made a wrong turn and ended up speeding down a steep hill, only to turn around and climb back up it.

Thankfully my bike worked perfectly today. Tom got 2 flat-tires and Roger got one too.

Victoria to Vancouver

Day -1
Friday, June 25th
93km

We left the hostel at 9am and headed to a photograph session at “Mike 0” - the beginning of the trans-Canada highway. We will, essentially, be following the TCH until it terminates in Newfoundland.

After a quick wheel-dip in the ocean, we were off back to Victoria. Dave joined us at Mile 0. He is from the area, and took us on a scenic ride back to the ferry. Rolling tree-lined hills with sweeping turns and frequent ocean vistas were a real treat to cycle.

At the end of the day, with less than 25 km to go, I got 2 flat tires in 2 blocks! (To put that in perspective, I had 2 flat tires in 3,000km last year and 2 more in 2,500km before leaving for the trip this year.) The first was caused by a piece of glass, which is a common cause of flat tires. The second was caused by a long nail, which stuck into the bottom of my tire and came out the side. I'd never seen anything like it. Most of the group kept riding without me, but 5 people stayed to finish the ride with me.

Orientation in Vancouver

Day 1

Saturday, June 26th

0km

Nothing very exciting today. We sat in a conference room and the trip organizer explained some of the logistical details to us. The full group has now been assembled, and the 33 of us (plus 1 driver) head off tomorrow.

We loaded our stuff onto the truck in the afternoon, and some of the riders prepared spaghetti and salad for our dinner. There is going to be a lot of oatmeal, peanut butter, bread and pasta on this trip. Luckily, I enjoy all of the above. (For 4 years of high school and 1.5 at Bain I ate peanut butter sandwiches every day at lunch.) However, some of the international riders are in for a rough adjustment. Peanut butter sandwiches in particular seem to be unique to North America. Alan, from Scotland couldn't imagine mixing peanut butter and jam in a sandwich. "It's a shame to waste a perfectly good jam sandwich", he said.

After dinner, Paul, Colin and I bought an electric razor and gave each other buzz cuts. Most of the group is balding, so this will help us fit in better. The catch is that we all look quite similar now. Especially in the matching "Tour du Canada" jerseys that we were all given today. However, Colin remains short, Paul has an Auzzie accent, and I am the pretty one, so people should not have too much trouble.

Last night in a bed until sometime in August. Hopefully my RIM will continue to get reception as we ride through the more rural sections of the country.

Vancouver to Mission

Day 2
Sunday, June 27th
94km

Today was the last “first day”. The first “first day” was when we cycled for the first time - to Victoria. The second first day was leaving Mile 0 in Victoria to return to Vancouver. Today, as a group of 33, we left Vancouver and rode to Mission.

We started the day with group photos at UBC and then the tradition of dipping our rear wheels in the ocean. I had already dipped my wheel at mile 0, so I didn't bother today. It seems a little crazy to put your bike into salt water before riding it across the country. Then again, it is a little crazy to ride your bike across the country anyways, so you might as well.

I rode with the “fast group” today. Paul and I almost always stay together, and we have developed a reputation as the pace setters. I have been riding between 25 and 35km per hour, which is very quick for me. These first two days have been relatively short and relatively flat, so I don't feel bad about expending some extra energy to sprint along.

We've also been riding with Colin, Roger and a few other new people that weren't on the mile 0 days. Roger is a long time member of the Ottawa cycling club, and he had us riding in a slow pace-line for much of the day today. Single file “drafting” is supposed to use much less energy, but it takes some practice to get it right.

The scenery was wonderful again. We had a great view of downtown Vancouver as we rode around the outskirts. It reminded me of Hong Kong, with its high-rise towers sitting on the water in front of snow-capped mountains. We had other nice mountain views throughout the day. The rivers with large floating logs on them were also a first for me.

Our campsite today is on a trout farm, so we had whole fried trout for dinner with rice and veggie stir-fry. All made from scratch, including the fish that were scooped from the pond just for us.

Mission to Hope

Day 3

Monday, June 28th

96km

Last night was the first night in the tent. All went well, although the tent and bedroll did not pack up nearly as small as they were originally. Given our single shelf of truck storage, I'm starting to think that I over packed a bit. Some of this over packing is my own fault. (E.g. the second full-sized pillow.) Some of the over packing was due to bad advice from past riders (e.g. The mechanics overalls...especially since mine are XXXL.)

Today's ride had its ups and downs. The ups were the mountains, which we rode through all day. The downs were my bike and me. I fell. Or, to be more accurate, I rode into a tree. I'm ok though, luckily.

I was riding in a fast group of three. Paul was in front. Me in the middle. Dave behind. We were just building speed after a right hand turn when my front wheel hit a baseball-sized rock. For a split second, my handlebars jerked from my hands and veered sharply to the right. In the blink of an eye I had ridden off the road, across 2 feet of long grass, and into some overgrown bushes. My bike barely missed a large tree, but the bottom of my right arm scrapped against it.

In the end, I had a large bruise and scrape on my arm, but was otherwise fine. Not too bad at all.

My bike was not so lucky. My brakes/shifters were severely mangled and my rear wheel was warped. A group of us performed emergency bicycle maintenance on the side of the road to allow me to keep riding. We got the brakes/shifters back to roughly the right position, and we yanked the wheel until it was "true" enough to rotate around unobstructed. That got me through the remaining 75km to Hope. The biggest problem was that I had no rear brake because it would have rubbed against the wobbly wheel. I managed alright though. There was one 11 percent graded downhill where I put on a jacked and used it as a sail to slow my decent. I only went 65km/h while everyone else went 75km/h. I didn't have much choice really.

I took my bike into Hope's only bike shop. They were really more of a mountain bike shop (along with fishing, tennis, golf, etc.) But then played with spoke tension to get the wheel closer to true. There is no bike shop on tomorrow's ride, but there is one in Merritt, where we will ride on Wednesday. With any luck, the bike will make it to Merritt where it can see a proper mechanic or potentially have its rear wheel replaced.

Lorne, one of the other riders, also had a crash today. His wheels slipped on some loose gravel and he went down hard on his shoulder, hip and back. He "limped" into camp and took a taxi to the hospital. They said it was a "deep muscle bruise". He's not sure if he will ride tomorrow. So, relative to him, I was lucky today. And the mountains were wonderful...so it's hard to be upset.

Hope to Spences Bridge

Day 4
Tuesday, June 29th
123km

There are several one-liners that might sum up today's ride:

- So this IS a cycling trip after all
- OK BC...we get it...you have a lot of mountains
- F@@K!!!

Today's ride was probably the hardest I have ever done. There were several long, steep climbs as we traveled slowly through the mountains.

Since my bike was not in fine form, I rode with some new (slower) people today. The ride started out with a long decent out of the campsite. (This explained all of the truck engine sounds I heard last night.) For the first 40km we did a lot more down than up, and I aggressively charged up every rise in the terrain that we encountered. There were a few tunnels along the way as well. At the first tunnel, the whole group stopped, but on all sorts of reflective clothing, turned on bike lights, and carefully rode through the tunnel single file. By the last of the tunnels, we decided to ride slowly on the small sidewalk, and skip all the other stuff.

One of my favorite moments of the day came at the top of a long climb. There was a small restaurant at the side of the road, which we hoped would have cold water and washrooms for us. We pulled over, only to see that there was a small "Back in 5 minutes" sign on the locked door. Murray's line was perfect, "Where the hell you gonna go in 5 minutes from here?"

The biggest climb of the day was called Jackass pass. This was the recipe for a tough climb: Take one long, steep hill. Add generous amounts of direct sunlight, and bounce some more heat off of the rock cliffs beside the road. Finally, add fresh asphalt, being poured even as we climbed the hill. Bake (and pedal) until done.

At the top of the climb, was a beautiful view of the mountains and river below. I devoured a bottle of water and took a bunch of photos. Other people described celebrations with high-fives and cheering. Then I got back on my bike, cycled around the bend in the mountain, and discovered the second half of Jackass Pass. I certainly felt like one.

Spences Bridge to Merritt

Day 5

Wednesday, June 30th

78km

Last night I slept really well. Total physical exhaustion will do that to you. I wasn't even bothered by the rushing river beside our campsite...or the trucks roaring by every 5 minutes...or the CN trains screeching past on our left...or the CP trains chugging by on our right. Thanks to 4 years of residence life, I slept perfectly. I didn't even hear my alarm in the morning, and slept in until 6:30am.

Today's ride was billed as a quiet country road with one hill at about the halfway point. 3 or 4 steep climbs later, we figured that Bud (the tour organizer) meant one long hill from start to finish.

I rode with Paul again today. We left later than most, due to my late wake-up, but caught most of the group on the first climb. We rode the rest of the way with Rick (from PEI). I forgot to stretch before the ride, and my lower back was really aching for most of the trip. Paul and Rick were nice and waited for me at the tops of the bigger hills.

15km from Merritt, someone had set up a nice lemonade stand just for us. I thought it was a mirage. In the middle of no where was a pretty house with a lush green lawn, bright white lawn chairs in the shade, and a cooler full of 25 cent Gatorade.

We arrived in Merritt around noon, and immediately dropped the bike off at Bonzai Cycle. They put a new rear wheel on the bike for 80 bucks. They fixed up the brakes and gears as well.

I did laundry for the first time tonight, and washed my bike as well.

Rest Day in Merritt

Day 6
Thursday, July 1st
0km

Our first rest day on the trip. Just in time too - my butt was starting to get sore and my back was really stiff yesterday.

It was a very lazy day today. I went swimming a few times in a nearby river, and wandered around Merritt a bit.

This afternoon we had a group gathering, where we all spoke briefly about our backgrounds. Since I don't have any stories from today, I'll provide some statistics on the group instead:

Number of riders:
Male 24
Female 9
Total 33

Average age:
Male 46.9
Female 40.6 (or so they'd have us believe)
Overall 45.2

Median age:
Male: 54.5
Female: 40.0
Overall: 46.0

Number of Riders by age (M/F/T):
0-19: 1/0/1
20-29: 4/3/7
30-39: 3/1/4
40-49: 3/3/6
50-59: 9/1/10
60-69: 4/1/5

Merritt to Pritchard

Day 7
Friday, July 2nd
147km

Forgot to mention the grocery store that we shopped at yesterday. "Overwaitees". Doesn't that alienate some of their best customers?

I woke up at 5:50am today. All the old men on this trip get up at the crack of dawn, and I wanted to be sure of getting breakfast. We go to bed around 9:30pm though, so it all works out I suppose.

Today was a very quick day. I rode with Paul and we were screaming along. We averaged over 30km/h (estimated since my computer is broken). The top speed was about 74km/h coming down a hill into Kamloops.

You know that your out in the boonies when Kamloops BC is far and away the largest city you've seen in days.

I didn't see much of Kamloops. My good friend Rob attends The University the Caribou. I didn't see either. Kamloops is a very hilly city, and we rocketed through the sharply sloped streets at 55km/h.

Pritchard to Sicamous

Day 8
Saturday, July 3rd
122km

I rode with Paul and Rick again today. It was another really fast ride. 29.4km/h average speed over some reasonably hilly terrain. The slow uphill are only partially offset by the blazing fast downhill. Top speeds of 65km/h are now an everyday occurrence. We are also getting a lot better at drafting in fast pace lines. I can comfortably ride at 35km/h a few inches behind Paul's wheel.

We have also developed a bit of our own language. "Chasing rabbits" is used to describe our practice of overtaking slower groups of cyclists. Since we leave camp late (7:30am maybe) and ride fast, we usually pass everyone. We generally coast along around at about 30km/h, but we'll speed up to about 42km/h when we pass people...just to impress them. It's the little things that make the trip fun.

The irony is that after a full day of Rabbit hunting, we missed our turn and ended up being the third group into camp.

Today's campsite was right on a lake. We went swimming, and rented a boat to ride around the lake. The boat towed an inflatable tube for people to ride on. It was a lot of fun, and a nice change from all of the cycling. There was also a putt-putt course that we played on the campsite.

Sicamous to Albert Canyon

Day 9
Sunday, July 4th
115km

Pretty easy riding day today. Flat terrain from Sicamous to Revelstoke, and only some moderate climbing from Revelstoke to Albert Canyon.

Rode with Paul again to Revelstoke. Everyone stopped at a pub for lunch to watch the Euro soccer final between Portugal and Greece. I left at halftime and rode the remaining 40km with Roslyn. The slower pace made the climbing very manageable.

Today was the first rain that we've had all trip. We've had fantastic weather in general. No rain. Low wind. Not overly warm...except for the blazingly hot day of climbing into Spence's Bridge on day 6.

The rain today came down pretty hard as we arrived in Revelstoke. It didn't last long though, and I had a nylon jacket to put on which I have been carrying in my trunk bag every day.

Today was also the first time that I've cooked for the group. The 33 riders were divided into 8 groups of 4 riders (1 has 5...for those doing the math). So I only have to cook on every 8th day.

We made burritos with fried chicken and salad. It received rave reviews. In each group is one "experienced cook" that leads the cooking. This was not me. I lead the chopping and pot cleaning.

We stayed at a hot springs campsite tonight. The hot springs were a bit of a disappointment. They looked like regular municipal pools. I think there were probably heat pumps hidden in the bushes.

Albert Canyon to Golden

Day 10
Monday, July 5th
120km

Another day of very long climbs. I didn't find it too bad though. The climbs were not too steep...just very long. From the minute we left camp we were climbing.

Since my team cooked last night, we were also in charge of breakfast this morning. We made "potato melts" with big chunks of potato fried with peppers, onions, and melted cheese. In addition to this hot breakfast, we also served cold cereals, fruits, breads and peanut butter. Overall, the food on the trip has been pretty good. It is very fresh and healthy. Not usually too fancy, but we have a lot more variety than I would have if I were traveling without the van support.

The other big advantages of the trip are: a van to carry all of your stuff, route maps every day, prebooked lodging, groceries provided, and, perhaps most importantly, people to share the experience with. I've found that the times I've spent riding with others have been much more enjoyable than the few times when I've ridden alone for part of a day.

Because of the cooking, I was one of the last people to leave camp. I met up with a group about 45 minutes later though. We made it to the top of Roger's pass where we put on arm warmers, leg warmers, gloves, vests, etc. for the long, fast decent that followed. It was amazing. 70km/h for about 3 minutes straight. There were a bunch of snow tunnels on the way down too, so I took off my sunglasses. This left me with tears streaming down my face by the bottom of the hill.

In response to a "Slow down and be careful" e-ma from mom this morning, it is worth pointing out that we have very little control over our speed on these descents. The speed comes entirely from the pitch of the road, and barely at all from any pedaling I might do. Braking is not a good option on these descents either. Mostly because the brakes aren't actually strong enough to slow the bike much, but also because prolonged heavy braking reduces steering control and risks heating up the rims and popping a tire. So what I'm trying to say ma, is that I'll be careful. :)

Rest day in Golden

Day 11
Tuesday, July 6th
0km

After a hard day's ride into Golden, we get today off before another hard day's ride out of Golden.

I slept in until 9am, which is a real treat after the 5:30am mornings of last week.

A bunch of us went white water rafting. On the kicking horse river in the afternoon. Rafting was a new experience for me, and a lot of fun. They gave us layers of wet suits, sweaters, gloves, booties, etc. before sending us down the class 3 and 4 rapids with only a guide to protect us. We got soaked in the 4-degree water, but saw the scenery from a different angle and had an exhilarating time.

At one point, I jokingly asked, "when do we get to the swimming area?" Our guide said, whenever you like, so we all jumped out of the boat and into the rapids. That was a lot of fun. Even better than the rafting.

Golden to Field

Day 12

Wednesday, July 7th

110km

Another day of steep climbs. There was some really nice scenery along the way though - the foggy white clouds covered the rocky grey mountaintops.

I rode with Paul and Rick again, but we didn't push ourselves too hard up the hills.

Since the route was only 65km or so, we went for a couple of side trips today. Just outside of Field, we turned off the Trans-Canada highway and visited "Emerald Lake" and the "Natural Bridge". Emerald lake is a deep green lake that gets its color from tiny sediments of rock that get swept-up as the water flows off of the glaciers. The Natural Bridge is a fast-flowing river that passes under a rock "bridge". Both warranted many photos.

After that, we rode past our campsite and up some steep climbs to ttttt falls - the tallest waterfall in Canada. It was also quite impressive - and this is from someone who grew up minutes from Niagara Falls. The ttttt falls were much less touristy than Niagara. (I suppose that almost everywhere is.) The road to them had several steep climbs, and I rode switchbacks on it for the first time. (Switchbacks are a series of sharply pitched, hairpin turns.)

After that, we headed back to the campsite. Just as we arrived, it started to rain. The day was very cool, but now it was very cold and very wet. With bad weather, we ate supper, sat in tents talking for a bit, and went to bed.

Note: My Blueberry doesn't always seem to have coverage out here in the mountains, so don't worry if I haven't posted an update in a few days.

Field (BC) to Banff (AB)

Day 13
Thursday, July 8th
90km

Note: In my day 14 update, I mentioned “ttttttt” falls. This was actually Takakkaw Falls. As far as I know, ttttttt falls are not even on our route this summer.

Last night, and this morning were very cold. Happily, my sleeping bag and fleece PJs were equal to the task.

The cold weather did give me the opportunity to sport some different cycling clothing. Neoprene booties, tights, a long-sleeved jersey and gloves all made their first appearances today.

Our ride today was short, relatively flat, and scenic. Paul sprinted ahead because he was on cooking duty, so I rode with Rosalyn and Johnny.

The ride started with a climb up Kicking Horse Pass. We then stopped at the BC - Alberta boundary for some photos. The boundary is also located on the continental divide, which was really quite interesting. There was a small, babbling stream, which forked. Half of the water went to the Arctic Ocean, and half to the Pacific...something like 4500km away.

Next stop was Lake Louise. I was there a few years ago, but it was exciting to show up on a bike.

Storm Mountain Lookout and Johnson Canyon were also worthwhile tops today. The mountains looked magical with their peaks lost in the clouds.

Today we also encountered Texas Gates for the first time. These are barriers on highway on/off ramps that keep wild animals off of the highways. They consist of a big pit, with a series of metal cylinders laid across it. Cars can safely drive across, but the cylinders are too far apart for animals to walk across. These crossings are, apparently, very dangerous for cyclists - especially when wet. We stopped and walked our bikes across both Texas Gates we passed.

After dinner, most people took a short shuttle bus into Banff. We looked around at the different tourist shops. I bought a toiletries bag at The Bay, to replace my old one, which had a broken zipper.

Banff to Cochrane

Day 14
Friday, July 9th
103km

Fairly uneventful day today. Weather started off cold, but warmed up by noon.

Today was the first day that I felt like we were leaving the mountains. The second half of the ride saw the grey, rocky, towering mountains replaced with green, lush, rolling hills.

Got some laundry done so that I can enjoy my rest day on Sunday. Six of the young people from the group went on a side trip tonight. They are riding to Calgary, and going to the stampede tomorrow, while the rest of the group rides to Drumheller. They then plan to ride to Drumheller the next day, while the rest of us enjoy a rest day. I decided that I needed my rest more than I needed two nights of partying at the Calgary Stampede.

Special Message

Saturday, July 10th
5:25pm just outside Calgary

I've just been told that one of our cyclists was involved in an accident today. The media has been around here, so you might get word of it. I don't have any details yet, other than it wasn't me. So don't worry mom...I'm fine.

Dan

Cochrane to Drumheller

Day 15
Saturday, July 10th
167km

Today, Colin was hit by a car. No word yet on his status. There's no faster way to silence 32 cyclists than a serious collision.

We don't have many details so far. Colin was cycling alone at the time, a minute or two in front of another group of TDC cyclists. I was riding with Paul, Rick and Roselyn about an hour or so in front of him.

He was hit from behind, by a Honda Civic, which was traveling in the same direction as he was. The female driver and two male passengers of the car were not hurt. Colin's bike is a write-off. The car is apparently seriously damaged too, with a crumpled front end, smashed windshield and dented roof. Colin ended up on the trunk of the car. He was taken, by emergency helicopter, to a large Calgary hospital. That's all we know so far.

It was a tough day for cycling. It was a long day on very rough roads with a brutal crosswind for most of the ride. I was exhausted when we arrived. Our group rode from about 7:30am to 3:00pm, stopping for lunch, washroom breaks, and a visit to Horseshoe Canyon. One or two additional riders had arrived by 4pm, but most arrived around 5pm or later. Tough day for cycling.

The crosswinds and rough roads were relentless. Our paceline barely helped at all, as we rode in pairs, side-by-side to try and escape the wind. The shoulder of the road was rough and littered with debris, and the right hand side of the traffic lane had potholes every few feet. In addition to making cycling and steering tougher, the wind also made it harder to hear approaching vehicles.

Despite all of this, it did not feel like an unsafe day to cycle. The road was very straight and very flat. There were a few gradual, rolling hills, but we spent most of the day surrounded by flat fields. There was excellent visibility, and the wind kept all of us cyclists at reasonable speeds.

In particular, the spot where Colin was hit was flat, with a lot of visibility. If anything, it was a gentle incline. Thus, while it is possible that Colin swerved because of a gust of wind or pothole, there is absolutely no reason that he should have been hit by a car. 80 percent of the vehicles today were giving us an entire lane when they passed us. They occasionally stir-up dust in the shoulder across the road as they passed. When they couldn't give us a lot of room, they would slow right down and wait for a good time to pass.

At the end of the day, this logic is little comfort. Perhaps the accident was absolutely avoidable. Perhaps completely improbable. Perhaps entirely the driver's fault. But Colin is still in the hospital.

Rest day in Drumheller

Day 16
Sunday, July 11th
0km

We've just been told that Colin passed away this morning. His family flew from Toronto to Calgary last night.

I've never know someone who died so suddenly and unexpectedly. I spoke with Colin yesterday morning. He served me breakfast.

At the beginning of the trip, Colin, Paul and I bought an electric razor and shaved each other's heads.

He let me keep my stuff in his room overnight in Vancouver, so that I wouldn't have to pay for my room.

I cycled with him several times.

Paul says that he had talked with Colin two days ago about Lorne's leg injury from the beginning of the trip. They had agreed that it would suck to get injured and have to spend a day riding the truck instead of cycling.

I don't think that his death has actually sunk in yet. I only heard the news 5 minutes ago. This morning, the report was that his condition was improving.

The campsite is completely silent. As I sit in my folding chair in front of my tent, I don't hear a single voice. Some people are out enjoying their rest day...not having heard the news yet. Others are alone in their tents. Some sit alone. Some sit in groups. No body talks. There's nothing to say.

We are all shocked. We are all sad. We are all scared. We are all thankful to be safe ourselves.

There is no way for a cyclist to avoid a collision like this. He was hit from behind on a long, flat stretch of road with relatively few cars on it. We can be vigilant about staying on the shoulder of the road, but there will always be things in the shoulder that must be avoided. Cyclists will always ride in the road on occasion. This could have been any of us. It could have been me.

So far this trip has been like a dream. It's been a complete departure from the reality of my life. I look different. I act different. I feel different. My daily schedule is different. I am with different people in different places.

The reality of this trip will eventually sink in. Probably not until it is over. Only then will we really have a good perspective on the adventures we have been through.

Drumheller to Youngstown

Day 17
Monday, July 12th
140km

Sorrow came in waves at the campsite yesterday, as group after group returned to camp and heard the news. The last group, who had been to the Calgary Stampede, got in around 10pm. By this point, I had finished being sad, and became a shoulder to cry on. There were lots of hugs for girls and backslaps for guys.

I think that Roger and Roselyn were particularly bothered by Colin's death. Roger was only a kilometer behind Colin, and arrived at the scene of the accident before the helicopter. He tried to comfort Colin as he lay lifeless on the trunk of the car. That's a tough thing to see. Roselyn spent yesterday with he brother, who lives in Calgary. They went to the hospital to visit Colin, and couldn't find him anywhere. Even though she didn't see him, the act of searching a hospital in vain made the whole thing real for her.

It doesn't seem real for Paul or I. Colin might just as well have broken his foot and dropped out of the tour.

We had a short group meeting last night to air some of the questions, concerns, and comments or the group. A bunch of the girls cried. A bunch of the men gave "we're all in this together" speeches with frogs in their throats. Then we went to bed.

It rained last night. Poured with rain. Waves of rain. Pounding sheets. I didn't sleep well.

Things always seem less intense in the morning. The rain had stopped. The sun was out. The morning routine took place as if nothing was different. 32 cyclists left camp, and Tour du Canada 2004 continued.

It was a great day for cycling. Warm, but not hot. Sunny. Strong tailwind most of the way. We averaged 30km/h, and completed the 140km in about 5 hours and 15 minutes.

The road was very flat, and we could see fields stretched our for miles and miles. Most seemed like rugged, unfarmed land with a mixture of tall grasses and other plants.

Youngstown is a special stop on the tour. This little town of 170 residents puts on a free potluck dinner for the TDC each year. It was fantastic. A real demonstration of human kindness. There was food everywhere.

They had also set-up a TV with taped highlights of the Tour du France, and a local bike shop mechanic set up shop for repairs. Ten dollars got your bike anything it needed. We showered in the local elementary school...where the shower nozzles were about waist high. The area priest even said a few words about dealing with grief. It was all very charming, and will certainly be remembered as a highlight of the tour.

Youngstown (AB) to Kindersley (SK)

Day 18
Tuesday, July 13th
154km

We're definitely out of the mountains now. The routes are getting longer and flatter, the days are getting warmer, and the rest-days are getting less frequent.

We passed into Saskatchewan this afternoon. The beginning of Saskatchewan looks a lot like the end of Alberta. Since we are riding so far South, Alberta seemed to fly by.

I slept-in this morning and "swept" the route with Rosalyn, Lorne and Janna today. Sweeping the route means packing up the truck, leaving camp last, and staying behind all of the other riders - in case they have an accident or some kind of mechanical difficulty.

The problem with sweeping is that you have to ride at a very slow pace. Steve is a 60-something year old man who is last to camp just about every day. Not only is he slow, but he also sleeps in and leaves late. He also doesn't like to feel rushed, so we all stayed about 250m behind Steve all day.

The problem with a slow pace is a sore butt. The longer you sit in the saddle, the more butt pain you're going to have. The short mountain days gave us strong legs. The repeated long days are giving everyone sore butts. There are numerous cremes, ointments and balms going around camp, but nothing seems to work perfectly.

After the long ride, I had just enough time to set up my tent before dinner. After eating, I decided to shave off the beard. Today's ride was rally hot, and I found the beard itchy.

I really should have trimmed it with scissors or our electric trimmer first, because it took ages to shave off with my Mach 3. Everyone was shocked by my clean-shaven look. They all got to know me with a beard. The consensus view was that I look much younger and a little chubbier clean-shaven. Not exactly glowing reviews I suppose. A couple of the older woman on the trip said I looked much nicer. Women in general don't seem to like facial hair. I'm starting to think that all of the old male cyclists on the trip have beards just to piss off their wives.

After the shave, I sat down to write this and head to bed early. Tomorrow is an another long day, and I need to leave early because I am on galley duty.

Kindersley to Outlook

Day 19
Wednesday, July 14th
157km

Another long, flat day. My butt felt pretty tender after that long day in the saddle as a sweep. I was on cooking duty tonight, so I sprinted ahead with Paul. Rick was sweeping today, so it was just the two of us.

I brought extra water for the long trip, and left my raincoat behind. Luckily, we made it in to camp before the skies opened up and tipped down with rain. Most people were caught out in the torrential downpour. There were even a few minutes of hail.

Luckily there was a picnic shelter for us to wait out the storm. Our campsite was at the bottom of a hill. On his way down the hill, in the pouring rain and hail, Dave hit a speed bump and flew off his bike. His helmet shattered, but protected his head for the most part. His leg and arm had pretty bad road rash too. We all rushed over, carried him to the shelter, and called an ambulance. Luckily, Roselyn and Ronnie (two of the riders on the trip) are nurses, so they took care of him until the ambulance arrived. He really had his Bell rung, and couldn't remember who we were, how he had hit his head, or why he was in Outlook Saskatchewan. He kept saying this like, "So we're on a bike trip?"..."Did I hit my head?"..."We're in Outlook Saskatchewan?"..."Did I hit my head?"

Someone commented that the town ought to be called Lookout Saskatchewan.

The ambulance took him to the local doctor, who let Dave sleep at his house for observation. He'll be riding in the truck for the next couple of days, and needs to buy a new helmet before he can ride again.

Since Ronnie went in the ambulance with Dave, our cooking crew was down to 3. Happily, the rain stopped and we were able to get a nice pasta dinner ready in time.

Outlook to Craik

Day 20

Thursday, July 15th

123km

Had to wake up at 5:30am to get breakfast ready. We made pancakes. I stayed until 9:15am to get the truck loaded. The cook crew has to put away the cooking carts and tables, as well as everyone's hockey bags, which are left outside of the truck. Happily, I didn't have to sweep again so I rode at a brisk pace.

Nothing much to see today. Lots of flat fields and little else. You can see the big grain silos for 10km away!

There was a pretty good tail wind today, so I made really good time even though I was cycling alone.

Craik to Regina

Day 21
Friday, July 16th
126km

Another day of prairie riding. Nothing much was different to speak of.

I rode in a 4-person paceline with Rosalyn, Ryan and Peter all day. We kept up a very strong pace...around 35km/h for a lot of the day.

A highlight of the trip was a stop at a Subway, to eat subs. The bread was so soft and fresh, and the BLT made a nice change from the PB and J that we all have been enjoying every lunch.

After arriving, setting up and eating, we called a cab to take us to the local "Watering Hole" (this was actually the name of the pub that someone had seen an advertisement for). After piling into a cab, we drove for 0.5km (no joke) and got out. It was right across the street from us. Everyone thought that it was hilarious to cycle 126km and then have a cab drop us across the street.

Rest day in Regina

Day 22
Saturday, July 17th
0km

Had a pretty busy “rest” day today. We probably walked 20km.

I let myself sleep in really late. Didn't wake up until 7:10am. Can you believe that? Saturday morning. Rest day. I can sleep as much as I like, and I'm up just after 7am. The 5am starts all week have really thrown my internal clock out of whack.

Did a bunch of laundry in the morning, and then went to Perkins for breakfast with Paul, Rick and Rosalyn.

Next, we picked up some “Bag Balm”, which is used to treat saddle sores. We bought it from a farmer's co-op. It is actually used to treat sore cow udders. (How did you think it got its name?). Shania Twain apparently uses the stuff on her face, so I'm expecting big things.

After that, we walked around downtown Regina for a bit. There is a large, man-made lake that is very nice. Some areas of the lake were still under construction, and I got a kick out of the construction company's slogan, which appeared on several signs. Somehow “Building Value” seemed out of place for what was clearly a make-work project. A local even boasted that the side of the lake had the longest bridge over the smallest body of water in the world. It might be true. There is a big long bridge that crosses a trickle of water that I could probably jump across.

We had lunch at a local pub, and then had some of our digital photos of Colin printed to send to his parents. On that note, apparently the Ontario courts had a moment of silence for Colin a few days ago. Did anyone hear anything about this? Colin had worked for the Ontario attorney general's office (or something like that) for about 9 years. I think that his dad might also be a judge.

After that, we met up with the rest of our group for dinner at Eastside Mario's, and packed up everything for tomorrow's ride.

Regina to Neudorf

Day 23
Sunday, July 18th
131km

Today is the first of six long days of riding. By the time we get another rest day, we will have left Saskatchewan, passed right through Manitoba, and entered Ontario.

Paul was on cooking duty tonight, so he and Rick left early and rode hard all day. I don't enjoy my rides as much when I hammer the whole way, so I rode most of the day with Rosalyn. We started out with Eric and Jose, who I probably have not mentioned before. Eric is a veteran of last year's tour, who is joining us for a few weeks this summer. He is probably the strongest rider in the group. He is in his late 20's, in the army, about a foot shorter than me, and can pull at 45km/h for 10 minutes. Jose is a 45-year-old mother from Quebec who speaks very broken english and can ride pretty quickly too. Eric, Paul, Rick, me, Rosalyn and Jose are probably the fastest riders in the group...although Eric, Paul and Rick are really in a league of their own.

As soon as we picked up a bit of a tailwind, Eric and Jose were off at 40km/h. Who needs that first thing in the morning? Rosalyn and I rode the rest of the day alone.

We stopped in the "town" of Lemberg for water at the end of the day. I use quotes because there is almost nothing in Lemberg. We couldn't find a corner store, but we did find a bar with a horse tied up out front. Inside were two men, having beers. One of them finished his beer, went outside, untied the horse, and rode off. That's the kind of town this was. I wondered if it was safe to drive a horse after an afternoon at a bar. I suppose its ok...as long as the horse wasn't drinking.

We stayed on the lawn outside Neudorf arena. I entertained people with a peppy version of "Neudorf, Neudorf". (Start spreading the news...). We had local sausages for dinner. They were bought from the little store in town. The storeowner had made them herself, and came to the arena to be sure we liked them. The meat came from a local pig farm. The farmer also came to the arena to be sure that we liked the sausages.

Neudorf (SK) to Binscarth (MB)

Day 24
Monday, July 19th
175km

A very long, fairly hot day. I regretted not getting more rest on our day off in Regina. I'm felt a bit tired today. The heat and saddle sores that are developing didn't help matters.

We did get a break from the "same-old, same-old" prairies today. We rode through the Qu'Appelle River Valley, which was very scenic. The river was the first we'd seen in days, and the valley walls were covered in lumpy, mounds of green grass.

Because of the heat, we ended up filling our water bottles at a house, just across the Manitoba border.

The real kicker for the day was the long, steep climb out of the Assiniboine River Valley, just before Binscarth. The last thing I needed after 165km was a big hill.

Today's campsite had a big pool, and we all enjoyed a refreshing swim.

Binscarth to Minnedosa

Day 25
Tuesday, July 20th
134km

There was constant rain last night. It continued past my 6:00am wake-up time, leading me to sleep in for an extra 45 minutes. It let up as I had breakfast, and I was able to take down my tent without getting everything soaked.

The weather was good for the rest of the day. It was overcast and cool with no rain - a nice change from yesterday's heat.

For the most part, today's ride was uneventful. There was a slight headwind, which made it feel like we were crawling along most of the time.

We stopped briefly at a little bakery in Shoal Lake to enjoy some cinnamon buns that were good enough to warrant inclusion on today's map.

Minnedosa to Portage la Prairie

Day 26

Wednesday, July 21st

135km

Wind can make or break a cyclist's day. I woke up this morning to the sounds of 33 tents flapping in a strong wind. Through my small tent window, I could see Tom trying to hold his tent down while he folded it up. "Just tell me it's a tailwind Tom," I said. It was.

What an amazing day for cycling. Or, to be more specific, what an amazing day to cycle east. I rode with Paul, Rick and Eric today. We were all still tired from yesterday's effort, so we were only putting out a moderate effort today. However, thanks to the tailwind, we were cruising at 45 to 50km/h for long stretches of straight road.

Paul broke a pedal binding near the beginning of the day, so Rick had to tie his shoe to his pedal for the rest of the trip. It certainly didn't slow us down any.

In fact, the only thing that did slow us down was a 15km stretch of gravel road, just outside of Portage. It sucked. Our speed dropped to 20km/h.

Our campsite today is on a small island. Rick, from PEI, considers it a home away from home. Just as I got my tent set up today, it started to pour with rain. Alan, from Scotland, said he considered that HIS home away from home.

Portage la Prairie to Beausejour

Day 27

Thursday, July 22nd

160km

We woke up in the rain again today. The weather was just nasty: cold, windy, and very wet. However, the consensus around camp was that the rain wouldn't last, so I put on some warm, water resistant clothing instead of my full rain gear.

About 1km into the ride the rain really started to come down. We were soaked, and I was starting to feel like an idiot for not wearing any of the expensive rain gear that I had purchased.

Luckily, the rain only lasted about an hour before the sun came out to dry us off. It was so nice that we stopped at an ice-cream store for an hour and a half mid-ride, enjoying ice creams and sunning ourselves on picnic tables.

Today was the flattest day of the entire trip. The only time we went up or down was to cross a small bridge. The wind had a big impact again today, though. It was with us for a long stretch after our ice-cream break, and we held speeds of 45km/h. Then we turned a corner and it became a brutal cross wind. The difference in effort required was amazing, and our speed dropped to 25km/h.

I arrived in camp very tired. This series of long days has really taken a lot out of me. Tomorrow is the 6th long, flat day in a row. My butt is sore just thinking about it. To make matters worse, I am cooking tomorrow, so I need to make it in to camp at a decent time AND I don't get to relax until dinner and dishes are done.

I'm down to my 6th, and final, pair of clean shorts tomorrow. There's a reason that they are the last pair to be worn...they aren't very comfortable on long rides.

Beausejour (MB) to Kenora (ON)

Day 28
Friday, July 23rd
171km

It was freezing cold last night. You could see your breath in the tent. I was warm enough under all of my layers, but I didn't feel much like getting out of bed and into cold cycling clothes.

I rode with Paul today. Rick was on breakfast crew, so he didn't get to leave until the truck was fully packed. Roselyn woke up early, and left about 45 minutes before Paul and I.

Paul and I hadn't been rabbit chasing together for a while, and we enjoyed flying past people in the morning. I figured that we would catch Roselyn at the small bakery, 40km into the day, but she hadn't stopped there. We stopped and enjoyed some large cinnamon buns...straight from the oven.

We rode hard again to the next little town, around the 77km mark, and still no sign of Rosalyn. By this point, we had passed all of the other rabbits...Rosalyn was the only rider ahead of us. We had a sit down lunch in this little town of Renne, before heading out again. Peter, from England, joined us at this point.

The terrain was very much hillier than yesterday. After Renne, most of the route was rolling. Nothing too steep, but not pancake flat like the prairies anymore. In addition to hills, granite rock faces started to appear at the side of the road today. There were also a few "group of 7" style lakes, with granite rocks and tall evergreens around them.

We crossed into Ontario today. It is deceiving though. Ontario is so large, that I am actually still very far from home. But just making it back to the province I started in feels like an accomplishment.

In the end, we never did catch up with Rosalyn; she beat us to camp by an hour. That's right...Paul and I got beat. We got beat bad, and we got beat by a girl. We chased hard too...29.5km/h average speed, over some pretty hilly terrain. It was the breaks that did us in. Rosalyn only stopped a few times, to eat quickly. That was her advantage. That's what Paul and I are telling ourselves.

I did laundry after arriving in camp, and made supper with my cook crew. We made a chicken Thai curry. It went over really well with the group. I am definitely looking forward to a nice rest tomorrow.

Rest day in Kenora

Day 29
Saturday, July 24th
0km

What a great rest day! After six days of long rides, I suppose that any non-riding day would have been a welcome change, but I really had a good time in Kenora.

To start the day off right, I managed to sleep in until 8:00am, which is a lot better than I have done on previous rest days. (The key was setting up my tent in the far corner of the lawn, away from the majority of the people and out of the hot morning sun.)

A group of us took a taxi into town around 10am. We did a bit of shopping for odds and ends, had lunch at Boston Pizza, and I got a haircut...at a proper barbershop. (No more buzz cut for me...although it's not that far off I suppose.)

In the afternoon, we took a tour in a floatplane. It was amazing!!! Roselyn, Janna, Lorne and I were in this tiny, rickety old floatplane with the pilot. It was a very small plane with a very loud engine. The windows didn't even close on it.

The pilot took us up and flew over the city and some of the nicer cottages out on the Lake of the Woods. He would point out things like the cottage owned by a member of Led Zeppelin.

The lake was spectacular. Its massive, and filled with a maze of rocky islands covered in evergreen trees. There were hundreds of secluded little islands, with just enough space for a cottage, porch and floatplane dock.

At one point, the pilot asked, "Do you guys wanna do something fun?" To which the obvious reply (sorry mom) was "Of course". So he gained some altitude and then raised 5 fingers in the air, and began to count down' 5...4...3...2...1...he banked the little plane sharply to the left and swooped into a nosedive for about 30 seconds. Amazingly fun. Better than any roller coaster I've every been on. We all screamed our heads off.

After that, he pivoted the flight controls over to me. I was sitting right beside him in the co-pilot seat. I flew the plane as straight as I could for about a minute. Then I held up 5 fingers and began to count down. Everyone thought this was hilariously funny.

Before landing, we circled our campsite a few times, and took photos of our tents. It was such a great adventure.

When we landed, we asked Lorne where he had locked up his bike. (Lorne had skipped the taxi and ridden into town.) Instead of securing it to the floatplane dock, which was in a very visible location, Lorne had locked his bike to a railing, halfway up a tree-lined pathway.

“Don't worry,” he said, “I camouflaged it.”

“Did you camouflage it like a gang of alcoholic natives?” was my reply?

Lorne's bike was surrounded by a group of 5 or 6 very disheveled natives with bottles of mouthwash in their hands. Luckily, the bike was still there, and only the tools and spare parts from his seat bag were missing.

Looking back, the dozens of empty Listerine bottles should have been a sign that the path was not a good place to leave a bike.

For dinner, about 25 of us went to a fancy steak house for a very nice meal. So relaxing. We told the story of Lorne's “bike camouflage” and laughed out loud for a solid two minutes.

Kenora to Caliper Lake

Day 30
Sunday, July 25th
130km

Woke up early this morning and made french toast for the group with my cook crew.

Luckily (for me) Roselyn had two flat tires first thing in the morning, so I caught her at a Tim Horton's just outside the campsite. Thus, I didn't have to ride alone.

It was a great day for cycling. Sunny, but not too hot. A slight breeze, but nothing too bad. And interesting, rolling countryside with lots of trees and rocks and lakes to keep us amused.

At about the halfway point, Rosalyn fell off of her bike while turning into a convenience store. There was a lot of sand on the shoulder of the road, and her tires slid out from under her. She's fine, although she has some nice "road rash" on her hand, arm, hip and leg". Luckily for us, the support truck was just ahead of us at the time, so we got the first aid kit out and patched her up. She showed her grit (and nurse training?) By scraping the gravel out of her wounds without so much as a flinch. My eyes got watery just watching.

We're camping at the Caliper Lake Provincial Park tonight, which has very nice showers and a good lake for swimming.

I haven't given a Dave update in a while. If you remember, Dave fell off his bike in Outlook, Saskatchewan. He took a few days off and then tried riding a few days. He made it, but was really finding his hip stiff and sore, so he decided to take a week or so off. His wife was in the area visiting friends (they are from Victoria), so he went off with them for the week. I suppose a real bed would be better for his hip than a tent.

Jose also left our group for a while. She flew from Winnipeg to Montreal for a "personal emergency". Not sure what happened. Probably a death in her family.

Both Dave and Jose are supposed to join the group again in a few days, when we reach Thunder Bay.

Caliper Lake to Taylor's Cove

Day 31
Monday, July 26th
130km

Woke up around 5:30am today, so that we could get out before the heat and have some time to relax once we got to camp. I was really tired though, and I'm not sure it was worth losing 30 minutes of sleep.

Today's ride was very pleasant. Nice weather, slightly favorable winds, and rolling hills to keep things interesting.

Back in Drumheller, Johnny's mom came to visit him in camp. We all got a kick out of meeting her. Today, we stopped after 60km in the town of Emo, and Arnie's mom was waiting for him in a local restaurant. This was even more entertaining: Johnny is 16...Arnie is 63!!! I think his mom gave him a big hug and asked if he was eating enough.

After Emo, we rode to Fort Frances. Some people crossed the border into Minnesota. I didn't bother.

There were some long bridges, across Rainy Lake, coming out of Fort Frances that were very scenic. I tried to convince people to go skinny-dipping, since it was so hot, but there were no takers.

We also crossed through the town of Cuchiching. (David, this isn't THE Cuchiching...is it?)

Today's campsite also had a great lake for swimming. Lots of mosquitoes though...I got eaten alive.

Taylor's Cove to Quetico

Day 32
Tuesday, July 27th
154km

For anyone interested, our cue sheet for today was as follows:

- From campsite, turn left onto Route 11
- Cycle 150km on Route 11
- Turn right into Dawson Trail Campground

It is interesting that Route 11 continues East to Toronto, and eventually becomes Young Street.

Good ride today. A bit hot, but not too bad. A bit of a tail wind too, which always makes things easier.

The terrain was very similar to yesterday: lots of rolling hills with trees and rocks on either side. Several “typical northern Ontario lakes” too.

I woke up at 5:30am today, and got on the road quickly. I cycled alone, until I caught up with Roger and Tito, who were the lead pair at the time. The three of us cycled together until the first town, approx. 30km into the day. We stopped to get drinks and Rosalyn caught us, and joined us for the rest of the day.

There were no cities directly on our route today, so we only stopped twice: once for lunch at the side of the road, and once for a snack at a tourist information booth.

Us - “Your job must get boring at times.”

17 year-old tourist information booth guy - “You have no idea.”

The lake at camp today was beautiful. We swam in the dark water as the wind brought its surface to life. We swam out to a big rock, which we haled ourselves up onto, and sat in the sun for a few hours.

Quetico to Thunder Bay

Day 33

Wednesday, July 28th

172km

Pretty tough going today. Long ride with really lousy roads (stupid Younge St) and a fierce headwind.

Our first challenge of the day was finding lunch. As we approached Shebandowan, we saw a big billboard advertising the Shebandowan Hotel, which apparently features "Rooms, Food, Gifts, and Gas" (as is the trend in finer hotels these days). Impressed with their advertising, we rode right past a perfectly good restaurant to turn off of highway 11 and ride 1.5km into Shebandowan. Much to our disappointment, the hotel is only open on weekends. I can't imagine why anyone would want to spend a weekend in Shebandowan, but who am I to judge. I was very disappointed that I had to eat my peanut butter sandwiches instead of some tasty Shebandowan delicacy, but we ate and moved on. (As a side note, hotel owners don't appreciate you peeing on their bushes...even when you've ridden 1.5km into the middle of nowhere to go to their hotel AND the bushes are over by the railway tracks, far away from the building.)

After that little adventure, we continued on to Shabaqua Corners...passing into the Eastern Time zone along the way. Finally, my clocks all show the correct time again.

The highlight of today's ride was Kakabeka Falls, which was really impressive. It was very wide, very tall, and very pretty...with big rocks sticking out and several tiers collecting falling water. Not the same volume of water as Niagara, but nice all the same.

Kakabeka was also a highlight because we turned east at the falls and escaped the nasty headwind that had plagued us for most of the day. It was so bad that we were pedaling on downhills!

We had a great, 8-man paceline going on for the last 30km into Thunder Bay. That pretty much beat the crosswind, and made the ride pleasant despite the rough road surface.

We stayed in Bartley residence at Lakehead University. This was great for 2 reasons. First, we got to sleep inside, in a bed, without setting up a tent. And second, it gave me an opportunity to quench my residence addiction. I'll spare you a long description or the later, but suffice it to say that the stairs and halls and rooms of Nipigon House in Bartley residence shared the same "feeling" as my beloved Western dorms.

Rest day in Thunder Bay

Day 34

Thursday, July 29th

0km

Enjoyed a night indoors last night. A long ride and a night out made for one tired Dan. A few of us went out to “Warp 9”, which, apparently, is very popular with the Lakehead students and few other locals. Given that school is out for the summer, it was only us and the bartenders. Free pool and 50 cent foosball kept us amused though.

We took a cab into the city this morning, went for breakfast, checked out the local Cyclepath, and wandered around some shops.

After that, we went back to the university to put some photos on the internet.

Finally, we went back into town, mailed my old hub to La Bicicletta in Toronto (where it can be turned into a new rear wheel for me) and went out for dinner at East Side Mario’s. I ate a whole plate of nachos and an entire pasta meal. They say we burn 6,000 calories a day, so I assume that applies to rest days as well.

Thunder Bay to Gravel River

Day 35
Friday, July 30th
165km

Back on the road with a long day of cycling. From the road out of Thunder Bay, we got a great view of the "Sleeping Giant" island at sunrise.

Our next stop was the Terry Fox memorial, which is located in a very nice park at the top of a hill. Very nice spot with another great view of the sleeping giant.

Route 17/11 was pretty bad today. There is only a tiny little shoulder, and even it is frequently deteriorated. There is only one lane in each direction, and there was a lot of traffic. However, we didn't have any problems.

There was really only one significant climb today, near the end of the route. Rosalyn and I took it in our granny gears, and it wasn't too bad at all.

Our cue sheet wasn't very accurate with mileage today. First we were 10km short, then 10km long, and we finished 10km shorter than our sheet said. The first group to camp actually went 20km past the camp before realizing their error and coming back. (Those were 20 VERY hilly km too, which made it all the more entertaining for the rest of us.)

In their defense, the camp was really hard to spot. It was actually a crappy little run down motel. The kind of motel where people get murdered in horror movies. The kind of motel that probably rents by the hour. We pitched tents out back.

The mosquitoes were everywhere! No word of a lie, I had 7 bites before I had pitched my tent.

Gravel River to Neys

Day 36
Saturday, July 31st
118km

Shorter day today, but probably the most climbing we've ever done. There were 6 major climbs, with 6 matching descents. It was a lot of fun.

The climbs were actually a lot of fun. They were long, but not overly steep. I “spun” up them in my granny gear, and didn't find them too tough. The downhill were great. My top speed was 70.5km/h, but I was above 65km/h for long stretches on several hills.

We are staying in Neys Provincial Park tonight, which has some very nice showers. (It the little things that make all the difference.) The bugs are out again, but not nearly as bad as last night. I think half of the bugs tonight hitched a ride on our truck from our last site.

Neys to White Lake

Day 37
Sunday, August 1st
102km

Today was the “official” halfway point of the trip. According to the planned route (which rarely ties perfectly with the distance on my speedometer) we have finished 3,843km after today's ride, out of an eventual total of 7,544km. Neither of these distances includes the trip from Vancouver to Victoria and back, which was an optional extra trip.

To look at things slightly differently, today is day 39 out of a total of 74 days, so we are more than halfway in terms of time.

Anyway you look at it, the trip seems to be flying by. So much has happened, but I can't believe that we are already finished with the Rockies and prairies and into Ontario. I've heard that Quebec and the Maritimes are very scenic, so at least I have something to look forward to on the second half of this adventure.

To celebrate “half-way-day”, the entire group stopped for lunch in a park today. Usually we eat breakfast and dinner together in camp, and eat lunch with the people we are riding with. Today, the truck stopped and put out tomato and cheese sandwiches and ice cream for us all.

We all got a laugh out of today's route map, which looks a lot like the outline of a woman's body. At least, it looks a lot like that to the 23 men that haven't seen their wives or girlfriends since June.

It was a really cold morning again. Heavy headwind too, which cooled us down even more. I didn't bother with my windbreaker jacket though, because it creates a lot of drag in heavy wind. At lunch, I ditched the windbreaker and put on a bunch of warm clothes. By the time I had finished climbing out of Marathon (the town where we stopped for lunch) I had stripped off all of the warm stuff and was back to my shorts and jersey. I'd rather be cold than hot when I'm climbing hills.

After Marathon, there was really nothing else until the campsite, other than the Hemlo gold mine, one of the richest gold fields in the world. The road to the Battle Mountain mine is called the “Yellow Brick road” because a contractor mistakenly used gold ore instead of gravel to make the road.

We got rained on for a few minutes (my warm stuff didn't help keep me dry at all...I needed the windbreaker) but the sun was out quickly to fry us off.

I was hoping to go for a swim in camp today, but we saw a huge leech in the water when we went down to the beach, and that took the fun out of swimming. Once you've seen a

leech in the water, every leaf, reed and pebble that touches you registers as a leech in your mind.

To keep you all updated, Dave is still not back with the group. Jose rejoined the group for the ride into Thunder Bay, but apparently Dave's doctor wanted to give his hip some more healing time. Not sure when he'll rejoin us.

The cell phone coverage up here in Northern Ontario is pretty bad, so these updates are all piling up I'm my outbox waiting to send. Sorry about that. Apparently, the coverage should improve in a few days.

White Lake to Wawa

Day 38
Monday, August 2nd
127km

Pretty easy day heading into a rest day. Since Rick was cooking breakfast, I invited Paul to ride with Rosalyn and I. Thus, for the first 80km or so, we were racing along the flats and charging up the hills. Johnny and Roger also joined our group for most of the day, which gave us a 5 person pace line. We made great time, but I think I would have preferred a somewhat more leisurely pace.

The only city between White Lake and Wawa is White River. (For the curious among you, all of the water that I have seen around here has been regular water colored.) White River's claim to fame is that the black bear cub "Winnie" (short for Winnipeg) which inspired A.A.Milne's Winnie the Pooh came from White River. It also once held the record for coldest recorded temperature in Canada. Consequently, the town boasts a Winnie the Pooh statue, a Winnie the Pooh gift shop, and a giant thermometer with -70 degrees on it. It also had an A&W restaurant where we had a lunch.

It was overcast and threatening rain all day, but we only got a few drops worth on the ride.

I was on galley duty tonight, so from 4pm to 7pm I was cooking, eating, and cleaning up dinner.

After dinner, Rosalyn and I walked into Wawa. It was very misty and dark, and we were hoping to see some wildlife, but didn't see any. I forgot to include it in my blog, but we actually saw a small bear yesterday. It was sitting at the side of the road, and we got a really nice photo. I didn't want to stop for fear that a bigger mama bear would charge out of the woods and eat us.

We met up with the rest of our group at a pub in Wawa. The story of the night was Ryan, who was flirting with a local girl when she told him off loudly, in front of our entire group. Rosalyn and I weren't there in time to see it, but every person told us their version of the story once we arrived. (It was like the Kennedy assassination...everyone remembers what they were doing at the time.)

Rest day in Wawa

Day 39

Tuesday, August 3rd

0km

Pretty low-key day. Did my laundry in the morning, and shot a basketball around with a couple of other guys. ("Air Longo" was actually derogatory in this case.)

We took a cab into Wawa, had lunch, and looked around some of the local shops. There's really not much in Wawa. The giant goose statue can only entertain you for so long.

After lunch, I came back to camp and worked on my bike a bit. To be more accurate, I watched Rick work on my bike a bit. Rick has become the on-site mechanic for our group. He'll fix anything on your bike for a beer...which we can buy for two bucks on the support truck. Today, Rick put on my new chain and some new handlebar tape. The new chain was a proactive step while the handlebar tape needed replacing since my little crash back at the beginning of the trip. The new tape looks a bit silly - black and yellow "splash" pattern vs. the plain black of my old tape. However, it offers much more cushioning for my hands than the black electrical tape, which is really all I was left to ride on since the crash.

Rick has also converted me to White Lightning chain lube, from my old Pedro's stuff. I need to apply the white lightning before every ride, vs. once a week or less with my old stuff. However, I never need to clean or degrease my chain, and my whole drivetrain will be much cleaner. Ultimately, Rick is a lot faster rider than me right now...so I need to do something to level the playing field.

We made some tuna sandwiches for dinner, and then Rosalyn and I took a canoe out on the Magpie River for a short ride. Lots of mosquitoes and no moose - the opposite of what we were hoping for.

Wawa to Pancake Bay

Day 40

Wednesday, August 4th

154km

I can't believe that there is still no cell phone coverage in camp. How can people live out here??? I haven't been able to send or receive e-mails since Thunder Bay. Camping just isn't camping without a working RIM. I can only imagine the (literally) dozens of times that my poor mother must be logging onto my web page each day...hoping that I have added something. Tomorrow we go through Sault Ste Marie, which MUSY have coverage.

Great day today. My team cooked breakfast, which consisted of fried bagels (we don't have a toaster), porridge and cold cereals. I had all three for my breakfast.

After that, we packed up the truck and hit the road. I rode alone for most of the morning. There was a great tailwind and some downhill stretches early on, so I was flying.

We spent most of the day cycling through Lake Superior Provincial Park. This is a great route to cycle, with constant climbs and descents. There were also numerous vistas, looking out into the tranquil bays of Lake Superior. The sun was out and bright, but it was a very mild day, which was great for cycling.

At about the 70km mark, I met up with Lorne, and rode the next 35km with him. There were some long, steep climbs and the perfect tail wind seemed to become a vicious crosswind for long stretches. The downhills were particularly tricky today, as the wind really made you fight to keep control of your bike. It seemed to gust randomly on the long downhills, perhaps bouncing off of the rocky embankments at the side of the road, or the trucks that were roaring past. Whatever the cause, the wind really sapped the fun out of the downhills for me today.

At the 100km mark, we stopped for lunch. Paul and Rick were at the same place, so I rode the rest of the way with them.

Pancake Bay to Thessalon

Day 41
Thursday, August 5th
162km

What a great day of cycling! Gorgeous scenery, strong tailwind, glowing sunshine but cool temperature, and a lovely stop in Sault Ste Marie.

It was really cold this morning. I could see my breath as I set off cycling in my arm warmers, leg warmers, vest and gloves.

The 75km into the Soo flew by. There was only one significant climb to contend with, but even that wasn't too bad with the cool weather.

In the Soo, everyone stopped at a Tim Horton's for lunch. We haven't seen very many Timmy's on our route thus far (at least relative to what I'm used to in southern Ontario), so it was a treat for a lot of the caffeine addicts.

Jason even stopped off in the truck, so I grabbed my RIM and sent off several days worth of trip updates. Good thing too, because I don't have any reception here at the campsite tonight.

After lunch, we stopped at the local library for some internet access and a quick phone call to mom. Then we paid a visit to a local bike shop and hit the road again.

The second half of the ride was almost as nice as the first. The tailwind became a cross wind in a few places, but the scenery and sunshine held.

We saw a giant Looney at the side of the road, and stopped for a photo. Turns out that the artist who designed the Looney was from the small town we were in - somewhere around Echo Bay.

Today's campsite is right on Lake Superior. 45 paces from my tent door is water. There's a small, tree-covered island about 500m into the lake, which makes the view from camp magnificent. If anyone is ever planning to camp around Thessalon (this means you Jim Dalimore) then you should definitely stay here at Pincrest Park. (705) 842-2635.

Thessalon to Massey

Day 42
Friday, August 6th
130km

Another very cold morning. I wore all of my “warmers”. It’s tough to dress properly because the days start off so cold and get so warm in the afternoon.

We stopped at the Tim Horton's in Blind River. (There's a name that inspires confidence in the drinking water, eh?). I fear that we may end up stopping at every Timmy's we encounter for the rest of the trip. As soon as we rode up, we saw Paul and Rick's bikes. By the time we left, Johnny, Jose, Pierre, and Leslie had all shown up.

About 89km into the route we had a rest stop compliments of Bill, a TDC rider from 2000. He is 71 now, and gave out bottles of cold water and cut up oranges at the side of the road. Very kind of him. Bill had a thick Scottish accent, and Alan (the Scot on our trip this year) said, “He's the first Canadian I've met where I understood 100% of the things he said.”

When Johnny and Jose got to the rest stop, they said that they had been pulled over by a cop...lights and sirens and everything. The cop told them that they were supposed to be riding at least 30 feet apart. This is crazy. Most people ride less than 3 feet apart. In a quick paceline, Paul and Rick ride about 30 inches apart. Johnny, to his credit, just kept saying, “OK...OK...OK”. I think that Jose pretended not to speak english...which is not really much of a stretch.

We stayed at Chutes Provincial Park, just outside of Massey. Provincial parks are usually nice because of the ample, clean washrooms...and this was no exception. It’s called Chutes because there are a few waterfalls on the park. I didn't find these very impressive as far as waterfalls go, but the river was nice.

We all got a laugh over dinner when we heard someone in a neighboring campsite say in a firm voice, “NO...NO...What part of no don't you understand?” This was only funny after we realized that the person was talking to a small dog.

Massey to Manitowaning

Day 43
Saturday, August 7th
110km

Even colder morning today. Its getting harder and harder to get myself out of the warm sleeping bag in the morning.

Another Timmies stop this morning. A good portion of the cyclists on this trip are really caffeine addicts.

Just before the Timmies, we found ourselves riding in the middle of the cycling stage of a triathlon. This was funny for several reasons. First, we were all wearing about 12 layers of clothing while the leading triatheletes were only wearing tiny little shorts and shirts. (Thus, we looked like real triathelete wimps.). Second, it appeared that we were actually ahead of most of the triatheletes for the portion of the ride where our routes overlapped...which must have worried some of the competitors. ("How did those wimps get ahead of me?!?"). Finally, we got a good laugh when several of the spectators saw us turn off the route into the Tim Horton's. It's not too often that a group of overdressed triatheletes stop for coffee when they are leading a race.

After the Timmies, we turned off highway 17 (which we've been on for days) and onto highway 6 south. This was a really hill ride onto Manitoulin Island. We stopped for an ice cream just across the bridge onto the island, and then finished the ride to Manitowaning.

Rosalyn and Rick had been riding fast all morning, so I tried to lose them on the way into Manitowang. It didn't work, but we spent the last 15km of the ride traveling at 45 to 55km/h.

The lake at today's campsite was great for swimming. Soft, sandy bottom and crystal clear water. Lovely way to unwind after a hot day on the road.

Manitowaning to Tobermory

Day 44
Sunday, August 8th
42km

For some, today was half empty. For others...half full. It was either the worst rest day of the trip, or the easiest riding day.

We started out with no breakfast. The kitchen half of the truck was packed away yesterday, and we all woke up a little early to get out tents packed away onto the truck quickly.

All of this was in preparation for the ferry crossing into Tobermory. In order to make the 9:30am ferry, the truck had to arrive at the docks around 7:30am.

For the riders, it was an easy 36km to the dock, a 1 hour and 45 minute ferry ride, and a 6km ride to our campsite in Tobermory.

After getting our tents set up, we cycled the 6km back into the city to do some laundry. Luckily for us, there is a laundry mat smack in the middle of the touristy dock area of Tobermory. Thus, we were able to eat and window-shop while we waited for our clothes.

On the bad news front, Roger's bike was stolen. He rode his bike to visit his son yesterday, and it was gone this morning. As a result, he ended up riding in the truck today. So disappointing for him. Luckily, for Roger, he will be able to ride Dave's bike for the next couple of days until his other bike arrives in Alliston. (Roger is from Ottawa and I think that his wife is going to bring him his other bike.)

On an even worse news, it looks like Dave might not be able to cycle at all for the rest of the trip. Nothing is confirmed, and he wants to come back, but his doctor won't let him right now. What terrible luck for him.

Tobermory to Owen Sound

Day 45
Monday, August 9th
113km

Leisurely ride (with lots of breakfasts) today before a long, tough ride tomorrow. Three pieces of french toast in camp, and I hit the road.

We stopped at the 41km mark for a second breakfast at a small restaurant by the side of the road. What started out as a pee break turned into an hour-long meal. I had eggs, home fries, sausage, toast, etc. Yummy.

After that, it was another 30km to Wiarton...home of Wiarton Willie. We went to see the city's most famous rodent, but he wasn't really in the mood for socializing. He stayed inside his little hut, but we saw him scurry around every now and then. Paul said that he got photos of each of Willie's parts so that he can paste them together later. Happily, the statue of Willie was out and available for photos.

After our photo-opp with big limestone Willie, we went for a third breakfast at a little restaurant in town. I had a toasted western sandwich and, as is the third breakfast tradition, we finished off the meal with some ice-cream cones.

The map sheet into Owen Sound left much to be desired. Everyone in the group got lost...all in slightly different ways. At one point, we stopped in a Timmies and watched as TDC cyclist after TDC cyclist rode by...each heading in a completely opposite direction.

The first sign of trouble was a bunch of signs saying things like "Route 1 is now route 17." On its own, this would not be so bad, except for the fact that there was already a route 17, with was perpendicular to the old route 1. I took a photo of their intersection.

The other sign of trouble was the "Dead End" sign, which appeared just as I thought that I had gotten us back on track. As the navigator, I was dreading Rosalyn's reaction to the dead end street when we spotted Leslie across the street...just as lost as us. There were some friendly Union gas guys there, who drew us an excellent map to the campsite.

When we stopped to ask for directions, Rosalyn noticed that she had lost a screw from one of her bike shoes, and announced to the group "I need a screw." This is probably not the best thing to yell at a group of union gas employees, and we got a variety of clever (and not to be repeated here) responses. We had such a laugh, that we took a photo of the union gas guys. As soon as the camera came out, they all rushed around looking fir their helmets..."Just in case the wrong people see the photo."

Owen Sound to Alliston

Day 46
Tuesday, August 10th
127km

What a busy day!

Woke up at 5:30am to get a jump on the day. We rode into Alliston today, where dad was meeting me...so I wanted to arrive in good time.

I was really well organized, so everything got packed away quickly. I was ready to go when I noticed that I was missing my wallet. Unpack everything, search around the truck, rifle through Roger's stuff on the shelf beside me...nothing. Stupid wallet.

At that point, we'd wasted 45 minutes searching around with nothing to show for it, so we rode off anyways.

Enter massive headwind. Stupid headwind. What a great way to start a ride that is supposed to last 167km!!! I was definitely not in the best of spirits. Plus, it was threatening to rain. Big black clouds, gusty, swirly winds and the distant grumble of thunder.

In the face of all this adversity, we coped the only way we knew how...found a shorter route. Instead of meandering all around the safe, scenic local roads, we opted to take highway 10 all the way down to highway 89, and then 89 all the way to camp. On a map, 10 and 89 looked like two pool cues in the middle of the spaghetti route that bud had given us. It was a brilliant move, which ended up saving about 45km.

Just about everyone in the group took this route, but I was riding with Rosalyn, Johnny, Paul and Rick...so we got into camp first.

I unpacked EVERYTHING at the campsite, and still couldn't find my wallet. I called a Tim Horton's and a bike shop where we had stopped yesterday, but no luck. I gave up and called CIBC to report my cards stolen.

As a CIBC employee, I realize that I am somewhat biased, however, CIBC did an amazing job of helping me out. I explained the situation, and the fact that I would be traveling from city to city for the next 3 weeks...in desperate need of money. (Can you imagine cycling without second breakfast?) They put a rush on my request, and said that I could pick up a new credit and debit card at the branch by my parent's house tomorrow. I was completely impressed.

With my finances in order, I packed up all my stuff to take back to Niagara with me. This was my big chance to get rid of all the useless crap I had brought with me. (The worse offender was the pair of XXXL overalls that I bought as après bike apparel, even

though I don't need après bike apparel and I could potentially fit an entire paceline into the pants with me.)

Colin's family also made an appearance at the camp today. His parents and some other relatives were there, as well as a close friend of his. They brought some snacks for people, and traded some Colin stories with us. I passed on the condolences and kind words that everyone had sent to me after the accident.

Dad arrived shortly after that, and took Paul, Rick and Johnny into Toronto for supper and then onto Niagara. The original plan was to go out for dinner with my grandmother, but she had prepared a typical grandmother feast for us, so we ate at her place. The food was wonderful, and more than sufficient to feed 4 hungry cyclists. The dining room table, complete with mini chandelier, was a far cry from sitting on the ground, resting our plates on our laps. Such a treat.

After dinner, I took the guys downtown Toronto. In only 2 hours we saw:

- the TTC
- the ROM (from the outside)
- the view from the Hyatt bar (happily, we were asked to leave because Johnny was only 16, as opposed to being asked to leave because we looked like smelly camping cyclists.)
- Yorkville
- Queen's park
- University Ave
- Dundas Square
- the Eaton's centre
- old city hall
- new city hall
- Muchmusic
- the Skydome
- the CN tower
- Union Station
- BCE place
- Commerce Court North
- my apartment

It was a very busy 2 hours. Luckily, we are all used to taking photos from moving bikes, so it was not much of an adjustment to take photos without breaking stride while walking.

After our trip around TO, dad picked us up and drove us back to Niagara Falls. We arrived at 10:30pm, which is about two hours later than a standard bedtime. We were all zonked, and went straight to bed.

Rest day in Alliston

Day 47

Wednesday, August 11th

0km

Another busy rest day with lots of walking. With only a few more rest days left in the summer, and lots of interesting places left to see, I think it might be a while before we get any real “rest”.

I played tour guide again, taking Paul, Rick and Johnny around the falls area.

We took in the tackiness of Clifton hill, walked out on the rainbow bridge (Paul is perfectly comfortable descending a hill at 80km/h on his bike, but he does seem to get a bit flustered when you trick him onto a bridge, and have him to explain that he is an Australian citizen without a passport when he tries to come back into Canada. The best part was that we said that we had not actually entered the US, while he had an “I love NY” shirt on.)

After that, we rode the maid of the mist, which I hadn't done in years. It was raining pretty hard, which got us even wetter than the mist usually would have.

We walked to the brink of the falls for a few photos before heading up the incline railway to lunch at TGI Fridays. After that was the IMAX movie Niagara, which I believe was filmed around 1987...honestly!

We stopped off at the local CIBC and got me a new debit and credit card. Yay CIBC!!!

Dinner at home was great. I'm not sure how I'm going to return to camp food after both nana and mom put out huge spreads of delicious food.

Dad is driving us back to camp as I type. As we drive north, we head towards dark clouds and it's just started to rain. Isn't camping great?!?

Mom and grandma contributed some great food for the past 2 days, and dad took 2 days off to chauffeur us around. Thanks everyone, it was great!

Alliston to Darlington

Day 48
Thursday, August 12th
130km

I have a confession to make. I haven't written this log for the last 3 days, and I can't really remember many details about the days. For this, I apologize. What I can remember is...

After a "rest" day in Niagara, my legs were pretty stiff getting back on the bike.

Being so close to home, I started to recognize a lot of the streets that we rode on. Today's cue sheet included: Bathurst, Yonge, Leslie, and Bloor...although we were never very close to downtown Toronto.

We were, luckily, very close to Rosalyn's house, and at about the 50km mark, Rosalyn's sister and her sister's fiancé set up a little refreshment stand. They had cold lemonade and warm Chelsea buns, which Rosalyn's mom had baked from scratch that morning. Mmmmm...

We had a pretty lazy ride all in all. The first 75km or so were with Paul, so we kept a brisk paceline. But eventually Rick (who had been cooking breakfast) caught up with the group, and Paul sped off with him. After that, we took our time and stopped at several coffee shops along the way.

We stayed in Darlington Provincial Park, which is on Lake Ontario, just east of the GM head office in Oshawa.

Because of our slow riding and frequent stops, Rosalyn and I didn't get into camp until almost 4pm. This was bad, because my team was cooking that night, and we usually start cooking around that time. Luckily, the truck had been slowed by the Toronto traffic, and arrived only slightly before we did. Thus, I had plenty of time to set up my tent and shower before the cooking began.

We made hamburgers tonight, and had cut up veggies and tortilla chips with dip on the side. The food seemed to go over well, although the avocados weren't ripe enough to use in the dip, and there was only enough ground beef for two tiny burgers each. (We figured that two small burgers were more filling than one large one.)

Darlington to Campbellford

Day 49

Friday, August 13th

132km

Today was a lousy day for cycling. There was rain, headwind, gravel roads, and lots and lots of short, steep climbs. All of these things also combined to put Rosalyn in a less-than-cheery mood for much of the afternoon, which didn't help my day any. For example, at one point she refused to ride above 10km/h...for one whole hour!!! Friday the 13th really IS an unlucky day.

The day started well enough. I had to make breakfast (toasted bagels and oatmeal) and pack up the truck, so we didn't get on the road until 8:30am or so. We stopped at the first Tim Horton's, which was about 10km into the ride, and stayed for about 2 hours. In retrospect, this was a very stupid idea. However, at the time, the weather was fine and we didn't think that the terrain would be too bad.

By the end of the day, we were sure that we'd be ages behind everyone getting into camp, and we'd probably miss supper. However, we caught up with Steve (the slowest rider in the group) about 20km from camp, and then ran into several other cyclists outside a small coffee shop. They had made a wrong turn somewhere, and added 20km to their ride.

Less worried now about being late into camp, we dried off a bit in the coffee shop and had some sandwiches.

In the end, we were among the last ones into camp, but we were just in time to eat after showering and setting up tents.

Campbellford to Canoe Lake

Day 50

Saturday, August 14th

144km

Again, I apologize for not writing this log in a more timely manner, and I further apologize for forgetting most of the details of this ride.

The weather was much improved today, and riders were in better spirits.

Rosalyn and I rode in a big paceline today with Roger, Murray, Tito, Trudy and Jose. I hadn't ridden in a big group in a while, and it was nice to have more people in front of me blocking wind.

The campsite tonight was at Canoe Lake. The lake was very pretty, but the campsite left much to be desired...mostly in the washroom department. There was only one grubby little shower. Ewwww...

Canoe Lake to Ottawa

Day 51
Sunday, August 15th
124km

Another great riding day. Today's memorable feature was fog. Thick, wet, low lying fog for most of the morning. It made for some great photos.

Canoe Lake looked wonderfully surreal as the sun rose and brightened the fog while we were riding out of the camp. There was a lone canoeist in the middle of the lake, who became the unknowing subject of many TDC photographs. Several cemeteries along the route also made for fantastic photo opportunities.

The fog was so wet that my glasses had beads of water on them, and I had to ride without them. My arms and eyelashes collected droplets of water as well. In fact, most of the time we couldn't see the end of the rolling hill that we were climbing up or coasting down.

There was one hill just after Westport that was a real shocker. Everyone agrees that it was the steepest climb of the trip so far...even though it only lasted a few hundred meters.

The route map for today had us riding on a lot of bicycle paths as we arrived in Ottawa. A few of the Ottawa natives recommended an alternate route into the city, to avoid the Sunday afternoon crowds. This is the route that Rosalyn and I took.

We stayed in Dundas residence at Carlton University today. Always nice to have a night indoors. I don't actually have any trouble sleeping in my tent, but somehow it is easier to get organized indoors.

Ryan's parents hosted a BBQ for all of us tonight. He probably had about 30 friends and family over to his house, as well as most of the riders. There was plenty of food for everyone, which was very much appreciated.

My sister, Alison, and her boyfriend, Rob, stopped by the party to visit with me for a few hours. Alison is going into her final year at Sheridan College, and spending her summer as a medical resource for Olympia sports camp near Orillia. Rob lives in Prescott, which is about an hour from Ottawa, and Alison was visiting him for the weekend. It was nice to see both of them, and catch up on summer stories, Alison has limited internet time this summer, and limited interest in reading all of my blogs, so she was hearing most of my stories for the first time.

Rest day in Ottawa

Day 52

Monday, August 16th

0km

Pretty busy rest day. I haven't been to Ottawa in years, so I went around doing tourist things for most of the day.

I did laundry first thing in the morning. It was great to have ample laundry facilities in the residence. Next stop was an all-we-could-eat breakfast at the residence cafeteria. This was GREAT. There were so many different foods available, and the cost was included in our stay here.

After breakfast, we took a taxi over to the bike shop that Roger recommended. I got a new right hand shifter, to replace the one that I had damaged back at the beginning of the trip. It has worked very well since the accident, but it is badly warped and wasn't shifting very smoothly lately.

After dropping off the bike, Paul, Rick and I hopped onto a Greyhound sightseeing bus, and had a 2 hour tour of the city. This probably wasn't worth the \$30 price tag, but we did get to see most of the city's landmarks without walking around very much. Annoyingly, the bus had a habit of speeding past scenic spots, and stopping with nothing interesting around - which made picture taking much more challenging.

After that, we stopped at a mall to pick up a few odds and ends, picked up my bike, and headed back to the residence.

I'm about to go and eat now, and will probably hit the sack early tonight to catch up on some sleep. (We've learned the importance of rest days.)

Ottawa (ON) to Hudson (PQ)

Day 53

Tuesday, August 17th

172km

Today was a wonderful day for cycling. The sun was out, the wind was tail and the roads were gently rolling through some lovely countryside and quaint little villages.

We left Carlton and headed along the canal, passing all of the important government and national buildings along the way. The view of the parliament buildings from along the canal is fantastic. I will definitely be returning here this winter to skate the canal. In fact, we took almost the same route as yesterday's bus tour - without the \$30 fee.

There were lots of very cute little towns along the route today, but none of them had any proper restaurants. We kept stopping and getting chips or chocolate bars to hold us over. Eventually we found a pub that served greasy sandwiches...which I didn't even enjoy. (Maybe I'm actually starting to like all the healthy camp food I've been eating.)

Our crossing into Quebec was very quick and uneventful. There wasn't even a cheesy "Welcome to Quebec - Home of Poutine" sign for us to take a photo of.

There was a ferry ride today, but it only lasted a few minutes as we crossed the Ottawa River from Carillon to Pointe Fortune.

This was the last of the 100-mile plus days. In some ways, it's a relief to know that "the worst is over", but it also is starting to feel like the trip is almost over...which is very sad.

Hudson to Mont St. Hilaire

Day 54

Wednesday, August 18th

117km

Happy Birthday to me.

Today's cue sheet had the most instructions per km of cycling of any day on the trip. There were 49 instructions for only 115km of cycling, which made for a slow day with lots of stop signs.

It was another wonderful day of cycling. Slight tailwind, good temperature, lots of great things to see.

The highlight of the day was a trip through old Montreal. It was great. The bike trails that we took were fantastic! Beautiful trails along the river and great views of old Montreal and the downtown skyscrapers in the distance.

Even the Montreal suburbs were nice. There was a beautiful bike path leading into the city, right on the water. The streets had row after row of 3 story houses with metal stairs/fire escapes on each of them.

After Montreal, the roads into Mont St. Hilaire weren't so great. Lots of potholes to avoid. A very bumpy ride.

Mont St. Hilaire to Pointe-du-Lac

Day 55

Thursday, August 19th

125km

We got wet today. Oh man did we ever get wet.

Today was supposed to be “a spectacular day for scenery.” However, most of my ride was spent staring at the potholed road in front of me, and wiping the rain off of my face.

I woke up several times during the night to the sounds of wind howling and tent flaps flapping. The sky was dark and the gusty winds were a sure sign that a storm was in the cards.

We made it to the Sorrel-St. Ignace ferry without a drop. There were, however, some confusing road signs, construction, and cue sheet errors for us to contend with.

As soon as we stepped off the ferry it started to rain. It poured with rain for almost 2 hours. Luckily, it stayed quite warm, so I was very wet but not cold. I didn't even bother putting on my plastic rain jacket, because I thought it would make me too warm.

We took a break in a little restaurant to get some food and try to wait out the rain. Our plan worked, and we spent the last 40km of the ride drying out.

We are “camping” tonight in what I've been told is a former convent. The good news is that we get to sleep in beds indoors, and don't have to put up our tents. The bad news is that we are 4-6 in each tiny little room...and some of these old guys are snorers.

After dinner, the cooking crew brought out a birthday cake for me. They were late by a day...but it's the thought that counts.

Pointe du Lac to Quebec City

Day 56
Friday, August 20th
148km

Another fantastic day for cycling. Perhaps I'm just starting to savor each day of cycling as we come to the end of our trip.

The sun was out, but the air was cool as we rode into Trois Rivieres early in the day. We took a very good route through this picturesque city - allowing us to see the three rivers, as well as a few old churches. The Sanctuaire Notre Dame du Cap was the most famous of these religious buildings. (I thought it was a bit cheesy to have an "official" restaurant on the site.)

After that was a long stretch of riding along route 138. This was very picturesque countryside, right along the Fleuve Saint Laurent. There were plenty of rolling hills and little towns to keep the ride interesting.

Coming into Quebec City there were a few really steep hills to climb. I thought we'd finished the tough climbs in Northern Ontario!

After a brief misadventure looking for "Rue Charles Huot", we did make it to Laval University. The residences rooms are a lot smaller here than they were in Ottawa. They have turned single rooms into doubles.

We had a pizza supper, did laundry, and went to bed early tonight.

Rest day in Quebec City

Day 57

Saturday, August 21st

0km

Breakfast at Laval University was not quite the same as the all-you-can eat experience of Carlton. They counted, portioned, and measured out every little thing here. The food was ok, but a big group of us still headed down to the old part of the city, in search of second breakfast.

There was a lot of walking through the old streets. The colorful stone buildings at the side of the road were only slightly less charming when we realized that they housed Subway, Radioshack, and...yes...even a CIBC Wood Gundy office.

We had an ice cream at the Chateau Frontinac while watching a busker perform on a ten-foot uni-cycle. Next, it was 310 steps up to the old fort (the citadel ?sp?) And a great view of the city. We ate lunch (a chicken burger with poutine) and took the bus back to the university.

I, bravely, got a haircut at the university...from someone who didn't speak english. Luckily, since it's almost time to return to the "real world" where people have "real haircuts", the lady cutting my hair did a good job.

We had a quick dinner at the on campus pub and then headed to bed around 8:30pm. Over dinner, the discussion focused on Laval University's apparent strategy of building residences with very tiny rooms across the street from nice, big bars with cheap beer. This is one way to fit a lot of students in a small space without hearing too many complaints.

Quebec City to Riviere Ouelle

Day 58
Sunday, August 22nd
141km

Another WONDERFUL day of cycling.

My friend Jeremy (who rode across the country last year...alone!) told me that Quebec was a great place to cycle...and I certainly agree. The sun was out, but the day was nice and cool. There was a good tail wind, mostly good roads, and lots of great scenery and cute little towns to ride through. The day flew by.

From the university, there was a long, steep downhill (with a few ignored stop signs) down to the river. We took a short ferry trip across the river, which gave us one last look at the Chateau Frontinac, before riding on route 132 for the rest of the day.

(As a side note, our tour guide yesterday said that the Chateau Frontinac was “the most photographed building in the world.”. Can this possible be true? I suppose that there's no way to measure it, but surely there are more likely candidates.)

Tonight, our cooking crew reprieved our chicken Thai curry dish. It took a really long time to make because the gas elements kept burning out in the wind, but tasted good. In the end, we cooked and cleaned from 4pm to 8pm...which felt like an eternity. The mosquitoes came back in full force this evening too...which made dish time that much more enjoyable.

Finally, I neglected to mention the (false) fire alarm that happened in Point-du-Lac...at the nunnery place. Everyone was sound asleep when the ringing bells had us up and out of bed. After 4 years in residence, I have seen my fair share of fire alarms...but this one was a bit different.

As soon as we established that nothing was actually burning, people became very grumpy. I actually thought to myself, “It was probably punk kids. Why would anyone be so cruel as to wake us all up at...10:30pm.” The loud bells had been ringing for about 4 minutes before Lorne got a little wrench from his bike and removed all of the metal bells from the walls. In the end, the bells were shut off (by the proper authorities) and the abundant flies near the detectors were blamed for the whole ordeal.

Riviere Ouelle to Trois Pistoles

Day 59
Monday, August 23rd
118km

It was the worst of times, it was the worster of times, it was the best of times.

I woke up at 5:15am, because I set my alarm wrong. I realized quickly and went back to bed for half an hour.

Cooking breakfast seemed to take forever this morning. We had fried eggs and bacon, oatmeal and fruit salad. I didn't do much, other than wash up the pans and load up the truck at the end. It was only 8:30am when Peter (from my cook crew) and I headed out.

It was a cool and overcast morning, but there was a pretty good tail wind and no other traffic on the road. Peter and I made great time as we chatted about his life back in England, his various investments over the years, and our future plans. The time, and beautiful countryside, flew by.

Just outside of Riviere du Loup it got very cold and started to rain. We stopped at an information booth and got directions to the local library...which we found...although it didn't open for four hours...thanks tourist booth lady!?!

Next we stopped at a Desjardins credit union so that Peter could take out some cash. I am cash rich now that Paul has repaid me the \$770 that he'd borrowed over the summer, after losing his wallet in BC. His replacement cards just showed up last week. I can't find a CIBC anywhere to deposit all my cash...just National Banks and Desjardins in every little town we go through.

On a somewhat related note, last night I found the wallet that I lost on my way into Alliston. Although my debit and credit cards have already been replaced, it was good to get my driver's license and \$20 back. The wallet was on Bob's shelf...which is 2 below mine. It must have fallen and gotten mixed in with his stuff.

But I digress...

After the bank, Peter and I stopped for lunch at a mom and pop hamburger joint.

On our way out, we met up with Ryan, and cycled the rest of the day with him. It didn't take long for the rain to stop and the air to warm up. Then the wind REALLY picked up...in our direction. We were cruising at 35-45km/h without any effort at all. It was amazing. On a couple of curving downhills (with suggested speeds of 25km/h) we were over 50km/h!!! So much fun!!!

Our campsite was right on the river again tonight, and we enjoyed a fantastic sunset as the tide came in. Lots of photos.

Really cold night tonight so I've covered myself in fleece to sleep.

Trois Pistoles to Amqui

Day 60

Tuesday, August 24th

158km

It was freezing cold when I woke up this morning. So cold that I had visions of me cycling today in every piece of warm clothing I could muster. But common sense prevailed, and I wore only a few warm things, which could fold up small and fit in my bike bag once the temperature rose.

It was an easy route today...route 132 all the way. It was not an easy day though...we are passing through the Appalachian Mountains and there were several tough climbs.

Aside from the temperature, the weather was very cooperative again today. The wind was not too strong, and was mostly at our backs. The sun was out and shining brightly. The brilliant sun and crisp air were sure signs that fall was approaching. What happened to hot August weather this year???

I don't think I've spoken at all about the churches of Quebec. Every tiny little, middle-of-nowhere, one stop sign and no gas station town in Quebec has a massive church. In Saskatchewan, the tall grain silos denoted a town. In Quebec, it is the churches.

Today's ride was, yet again, fantastically scenic. As per usual, scenic coincided with hilly, but it was worth it. The tree-covered hills, wandering roads and bright blue cloud filled skies combined for many a panorama. I really think that the sky must be bigger in Quebec. I've taken a dozen or so (digital) photos of the clouds in the bright blue sky, but none of them come close to capturing it.

Amqui (PQ) to Campbellton (NB)

Day 61

Wednesday, August 25th

105km

Short ride today, but very scenic. We followed the Matapedia River, which is (apparently) a world-class fly fishing destination. The river was shallow and clear, so we could see the rocks at the bottom. It cut through a valley along with route 132 and a set of train tracks. There were rolling, evergreen-packed hills on either side of the road.

It was 3 degrees Celsius when we woke up this morning. We were all chilled to the bone, and rushing around to put on our cold weather clothing. About 8km into the ride, we stopped for a hot chocolate and to warm up inside.

Throughout the day, it gradually got hotter and hotter. This became a problem when I ran out of space to carry my unwanted clothing items. By 50km, I was down to my warm weather apparel with extra stuff shoved in every pocket and my trunk bag full.

Just passed Matapedia, we crossed into New Brunswick and the Atlantic Time zone.

The towns of Atholville and Campbellton were very close to the campsite, so we stopped into a library to use the internet and a Wal-Mart to pick up a few things.

Campbellton to Petit Rocher

Day 62

Thursday, August 26th

98km

Short day today with a big hill in the middle.

We stopped at a Tim Horton's less than a km from camp. They sure got a lot of business from us on this trip. I should write to them to see if we could be in a commercial. That would probably be go for a free Tim-Bit or two.

Dalhousie was 30km from camp, and featured a 450m climb with a 13% grade. That is definitely enough to get your heart going...but it wasn't too bad in the end.

After the climb, our route followed the coast of Chaleur Bay, which was very scenic. The symmetric ripples stretched all the way to the horizon.

There was some comic relief when we stopped at a small engine repair shop to eat some sandwiches. Rosalyn almost "used" one of the port-a-potties at the side of the building...which the store kept there to be rented out. Alas, she figured it out before any real damage was done.

Petit Rocher to Saint-Louis-de-Kent

Day 63
Friday, August 27th
151km

Really challenging day! Who knew there were so many hills in New Brunswick. The entire day was one rolling hill after another. None overly steep, but several were one, two, three or even four kilometers long!!!

To make matters worse, we had a pretty stiff headwind for the first 95km of the ride. Despite this, we still managed to average 25km/h into Miramichi, where we stopped for a second lunch and Gatorade refill.

Coming out of Miramichi, the wind turned into more of a crosswind, which was a big improvement. For whatever reason, we decided that we ought to average 32km/h without the tailwind...so we finished off the ride at top speed and were the second group into camp.

Our only stop in the last 50km was to change a flat tire for a little old lady that was cycling on route 11 with us. It turns out that she was riding out to see Bill, one of the cyclists from our group, so it's a good thing that we stopped.

I did two loads of laundry as soon as I got into camp, which might last me until the end of the trip.

Dinner tonight featured a whole lobster for each rider, as well as pasta and potato salad. Quite a treat.

It was a lot warmer today than it has been for the past couple of days. We were actually pretty warm on the bikes, and the humidity in the campsite was really stifling before the sun went down.

Looking forward to the rest day tomorrow. Last rest day of the trip.

Rest day in Saint-Louis-de-Kent

Day 64

Saturday, August 28th

0km

...actually, we did ride 5km into town and back...but I won't count that in the official total.

I forgot to mention it yesterday, but I am sick. Not really sick, but a bit under the weather. It started out as allergies, which I get every year from mid-August to mid-September, but I think it is more than that. I had a really sore throat yesterday, and a general feeling of malaise that I don't usually get with my allergies. A few other people in the group seem to have the same thing, so perhaps there is a little head cold going around.

Some have even speculated that we might have the "maritime flu", which is a strange illness encountered each year by some TDC riders. Apparently, lack of protein over a summer of intense exercise can eventually lead to flu-like symptoms. I'm not sure that I actually buy into this theory, but you never know. I have been eating a lot of meat over the summer, so I can't imagine having a protein shortage.

In any case, it didn't seem to adversely affect my riding very much. If anything, I felt less congested while I was riding. Although, the heavy breathing made my sore throat even worse. The toughest part is getting good sleep at night amidst all my congestion.

This was the last rest day of the trip, and I didn't do much of anything. It was really hot and humid, so I spent some time swimming in and lounging around the camp pool. I found a giant chess set too, with pieces about as tall as my arm, so I had a few matches. (Dan 2, Lorne 0, Steve 0).

A bunch of us rode 2.5km into town for lunch. We were in our street clothes, and it felt so strange to be using these high performance bikes to run errands.

That was pretty much it for the day. I ate left over pasta for dinner, and went to bed around 8:30pm.

Saint-Louis-de-Kent to Murray Beach

Day 65

Sunday, August 29th

145km

Very scenic ride today along the Northumberland Strait. From my tent tonight, I look out across the strait and can see PEI in the distance.

Throughout the day, there were classic east coast scenes where dark blue water met a strip of clean white sand and a field of long green grass blowing in the wind.

At the 90km mark, we stopped briefly in Shediac...home of the world's largest lobster. (A cement lobster statue...similar to the Wawa Goose.). Again, don't these towns realize that no one else is in the competition for "World's largest X statue"???

My sore throat is all but gone today, but my cough, nasal congestion and chest congestion are all worse than ever. Happily, they still aren't too bad while I am actually riding...its the rest stops where I go through all the Kleenex.

Murray Beach (NB) to Brackley Beach (PEI)

Day 66
Monday, August 30th
112km

At around 5:00am it started to pour with rain. This pretty much lasted through breakfast, and I had to take down my tent in the rain.

Our 12km ride to the Confederation Bridge turned into a 20km ride when I made a wrong turn based on bad route notes. (Several others did the same, and everyone agreed that the cue sheet was incorrect.). Usually an 8km detour isn't that bad, but it is even more frustrating in heavy wind and torrential rain.

They don't allow cyclists on the bridge, so we all loaded into a van shuttle and someone drove us across...10 at a time.

Once we arrived on the island, we grabbed a quick lunch and then headed out on the road again. By this time the wind and rain had stopped and it was quite warm, although still overcast.

Rick was kind enough to show us around the island. We went to Green Gables and Cavendish beach before heading to camp.

Boy is PEI ever hilly. Rick was right at home charging up the steep rolling hills, but I really had a good workout and a tough time keeping up. The entire island, from what I saw today, is nothing but hills.

The island is also very small, as evidenced by our encounter with a red Toyota. As we rode along, the car drove past us and pulled onto the shoulder. The driver hopped out and gave Rick a big hug. "How's the cycling going?"

"Real good. How you been?"

"Real good."

"You coming out tonight?"

"Of course."

"This is Paul, Rosalyn, Dan and Johnny. Guys...this is my son, Richard."

"Nice to meet you. See ya later Dad."

"See you tonight."

Their whole conversation lasted about 45 seconds, and gave no hint that they hadn't seen each other in two months. Rick's son just happened to be driving by.

The rest of Rick's family and friends were at the campsite when we arrived. They put on a fantastic meal, with seafood chowder, fresh muscles, potatoes, meats, and so much more. It was fantastic and a real treat.

Brackley Beach (PEI) to Lower Barney's River (NS)

Day 67

Tuesday, August 31st

142km

Really tough day today. We woke up around 5:30am to make the first ferry off of the island and 11am. The ferry was more than 80km away, so the timing would be tight.

Just after I got my tent down it started to rain pretty hard. We hit the road around 6:40am and it was still very dark. There were ominous black clouds everywhere, a fierce headwind, sharp rain slashing down on us, and rolling hills all of the way to the ferry. Just about the toughest conditions you could cycle in I think.

We did pass through Charlottetown and several of the historic building there, but we didn't bother to stop or take any photos due to the heavy rain.

We made it to the ferry around 10:50am and went across to Nova Scotia with about half of the cyclists. The ferry took about an hour and a half, and gave us a chance to have a hearty second breakfast.

The rain had pretty much stopped by the time we reached Caribou, NS. The wind, however, was still out in full force. For about 20km it was either a headwind or crosswind.

At the 100km mark, a large group of us got a bit confused by the directions, and ended up at a Tim Horton's asking for help. A kilometer down the road, who do we meet...but Bud...the guy who runs the trip and made the map. He was cycling around, looking for blueberry pie, he said...really. He led us back onto the route, and even stopped to help Rosalyn with a tangled chain problem. Perfect timing.

The last 23km or so were great. We changed directions and had the strong wind at our backs. Cycling is so much fun with a tailwind. The windy, hilly roads were no longer obstacles, but rather points of interest and fun...thanks to the extra speed we picked up.

Tonight was the last night for my galley crew to cook. I was the only one out of the four of us to make the first ferry, so I got into camp well before the others. We didn't get cooking until 5:30pm...and we usually serve the food at 6pm! Luckily, we had a lot of leftovers from Rick's family, and we were able to through together some rice and chili to round out the meal.

Lower Barney's River to Whycogomagh

Day 68

Wednesday, September 1st

150km

Another long, fairly tough day.

We made scrambled eggs and oatmeal for breakfast this morning. And with that, galley duty was finished for good.

Rick cook breakfast with us today, since Peter had filled in for Rick yesterday morning. This was good, because I got to ride with Rick for the first third of the day.

My goal every galley duty shift was to catch the other cyclists before they reached camp. Most of the cyclists usually left at least an hour and a half before the cook crew, so I met my goal fairly rarely. Today however, we left at about 8:10...only 40 minutes after most riders. PLUS...I had Rick with me to pull me into the wind.

Together, with Rick doing most of the work, we caught up with everyone about 45km into the day. Rick stopped for a second breakfast, and I rode the rest of the day with Rosalyn.

We stayed dry for most of the day, but the winds and hills were still a big factor...especially for the 50 or so kilometers after Canso Causeway. Some of the long windy climbs were very reminiscent of the Rockies. One long climb even had construction crews and fresh asphalt...deja vous Jackass Pass...minus the heat and severe steepness.

Whycogomagh to Little Bras d'Or

Day 69

Thursday, September 2nd

134km

Just as we were about to head out this morning, I noticed that one of my seat rails was cracked. (There are two seat rails, attached to my bike seat and joined into the seat post.) The rails were carbon fiber, so perhaps they were not up to some of the rough roads that we have been on lately. My co-riders didn't buy this story, however, and everyone called me as "fat ass" for the entire day.

Instead of risking a completely broken seat, and the prospect of riding out of the saddle all day, I switched seats & seat posts with Dave's bike. (Dave was the rider injured in Outlook, Sask. Whose bike is still on the truck.) While Dave's seat took some getting used to, it got me through the day with only minimal discomfort and no troubles.

Today was a short, 93km ride, with an optional 37km loop on the Cabot trail. I rode with Rosalyn in the morning, but she didn't feel like riding the Cabot trail, so I spent the afternoon riding alone.

The small portion of the Cabot trail that I rode was really nice. Nothing "unbelievable", but really nice all the same. Lots of rolling, sweeping roads with nice views of St. Ann's Gut (a small bay). The sun was out and it was warm, but there was a crispness in the air that gave the feeling of a fall ride.

After cycling around the gut, there was a short (25m) ferry trip and then a long, steep climb back to route 105...the main route for the day. From there, the climbing continued...right to the top of Kelly's mountain. This was a really tough climb...one of the hardest of the trip. The descent was fantastic too. The first really long, steep descent in a long time.

At camp tonight, we dried out our tents and packed up all of our stuff in preparation for tomorrow's ferry trip to Newfoundland. The big Ryder truck (that has housed our stuff all summer) will not be coming to NFLD with us. Instead, we'll have a covered pickup truck with a trailer.

After putting together a daypack for tomorrow, and packing everything else up, Rick, Paul, Rosalyn, Peter, Tito and I rode into town to stay at a Best Western next to the ferry. This way, all of our stuff will be packed away nice and dry...and we got to eat a nice dinner and sleep in comfy beds.

Ferry ride from North Sydney (NS) to Argentia (NF)

Day 70

Friday, September 3rd

0km

Since we rode from the campsite (in Little Bras d'Or) into North Sydney last night, we just had a short ride to the ferry terminal this morning.

We enjoyed a long sleep-in in our hotel rooms, and had breakfast in the hotel as well.

With checkout time at 11am, we had 2.5 hours to kill before meeting at the ferry. We went to a local mall, ate at a Tim Horton's, and sat around the ferry terminal for most of this time.

At 1:30pm, we loaded our bikes on top of the support truck and trailer, and took a shuttle onto the boat.

I had never been on such a large, ocean going vessel before, and I had never slept on a boat either. I had been looking forward to the trip for a while, but it was really nothing too exciting.

There weren't many people onboard, so there were lots of seats around. Our group pretty much stayed in a large TV lounge, watching TV and movies on a couple of big screens. Some people went down to the pub where there was live traditional Newfoundland music, but I didn't bother.

For dinner, we ate sandwiches that we made ourselves, and at night we slept in a large "submarine style" quarters. They called it "dormitory style" accommodation (as opposed to a private cabin), but I have never seen a dormitory room with 25 tiny little bunk beds in it. Luckily, it was a calm trip and I was able to get some sleep.

Argentina to St. John's

Day 71

Saturday, September 4th

143km

What a way to end. Perhaps the toughest day of the trip with one of the toughest climbs of the trip up Signal hill at the finish line.

At 5:30am, a PA announcement on the ferry woke everyone up. We had a cafeteria breakfast on the ship, before it docked at 6:30am. By the time we got our bikes, made lunches, filled water bottles, and hit the road, it was probably 7:30am or so.

It was cold. As soon as we stepped off the ferry, we knew it was going to be a cool day. It was also spitting with rain, which would make it even colder. I had my arm warmers, leg warmers, vest and plastic rain jacket with me, but not my Gortex pants, jacket, hat, gloves, booties, etc. All of that gear for really foul weather was packed away on the truck.

For the first 90km, the weather varied between overcast with spitting rain and overcast without spitting rain. There was a still headwind throughout though, which made it really tough riding.

By the coast, there was some great scenery. Lots of big hills with rivers and lakes in between. However, once we got inland, the scenery became pretty dull. Long, straight roads with lots of hills and long grasses on either side.

Paul, Rick, Rosalyn and I stopped at a restaurant in Holyrod for lunch. The waitress asked where we were cycling from, and we told her that we had started out in Victoria. "And you're finishing up right here in Holyrod?" she asked to our amusement. We joked that "No, were going to keep going to Upper Gullies or Foxtrap" we joked once she had left.

As soon as we left the restaurant, it started to rain. Thus, the stage was not set for 50 of the toughest kilometers of cycling I have every completed. The rain was pouring down and everyone was soaked to the bone and freezing cold. There was a strong headwind and lots of climbing to do.

At around 113km, we took a wrong turn and rode all the way up a giant hill before realizing our mistake and riding all the way back down. The rain was so heavy that it was hard to see at times, and most of the intersections had no street signs. How frustrating!!!

By 3:00pm, we were at the Tim Horton's 11km from Signal Hill. The plan had been for everyone to. Meet there at 3pm, and then ride into St. John's together. However, there were only 7 of us in the lead group, and we knew that some people would be hours

behind, so we didn't bother waiting. I was so cold and so wet that I didn't even go into the Timmies, because I didn't think I would be able to go back outside again if I did.

About 3km later, only 8km from the end, Paul got his 3rd flat tire of the entire trip. We all stood there shaking and we tried to change the tube with frozen hands.

Rick managed to get Paul fixed up quickly, and soon we were at the bottom of Signal Hill. At the top were a sensational view of St. John's and the finish line of our odyssey. However, a full kilometer of unimaginably steep climbing was still ahead of us.

I started driving up the hill and instantly found myself in too high a gear. I switched gears and my chain came off. What bad luck. Paul stopped with me while I quickly put it back on, and we started the climb again.

The climb was very tough, but we gave it everything we had. On one section, the grade flattened briefly, but my fingers were so numb that I couldn't shift gears. I had to reach around the bar and grasp the shifter with my entire fist to get it to go. In the end, it was Paul, Rick and I reaching the peak at the same time. Perfect ending. It was just like our early days of climbing in the Rockies...us three pulling ahead on the tough climbs.

Tito, Rosalyn, Bob and Pierre were up shortly after we were, and we exchanged hugs and hearty congratulations. We snapped a few quick photos (what an AMAZING view) and rode halfway down the hill to the Battery hotel where we spent the night. It was so cold at the top that we only stayed a few minutes before rushing down to warm showers and a night of pizza, packing and partying.

Upon reflection, it was the perfect way to end the trip. It wouldn't have been the same to have a warm tailwind pushing us across some flat terrain all day before we reached the water and called it quits. No, today was much more appropriate. It underscored the sense of accomplishment for us, and demonstrated the commitment that we all had for what we were doing. It was a wonderful climax, and an unforgettable ending to an unforgettable trip.

Flight Home to Toronto

Epilogue

Sunday, September 5th

0km

I'm sitting on the airplane now, flying back to Toronto and the life I left behind for 11 weeks this summer.

This morning, I finished packing up all of my stuff and had a good-bye brunch with the rest of the group.

We had a moment of silence for Collin, and a few people said words of thanks to the trip organizers, the driver, and Rick...the bike doctor. Ryan read a funny poem that he had written about the trip, which got a lot of laughs.

And then I said my goodbyes, piled everything into a taxi, and headed for the airport.

Can't wait to see everyone when I get back. Hopefully, some of the photos came out well.

I would whole-heartedly recommend this trip to anyone who is interested. With 16-year-old boys to 68-year-old women, we had a truly diverse group this summer. Some people had ridden for years and put thousands of kilometers on their bikes before the trip. Many were complete cycling rookies who signed up for the trip without even owning a bike and did only 2 months of light training in the spring. A desire for adventure and a lot of determination were the only real common elements.

What a great summer! I wonder where my next adventure will take me...