

Rocky Mountain 1200km – July 23-27, 2008 – Trip Report

What a great ride! Starting in the interior of British Columbia at Kamloops, the route took us on a big loop, going up the Yellowhead Highway to Jasper, down the world famous Columbia Ice Field Parkway to Lake Louise, then through the Rocky Mountains again through Golden, Revelstoke, Salmon Arm then back to Kam loops. 110 riders signed up, from Canada, the US, Australia, Brazil, UK, France and a contingent from Japan, where randonneuring is growing, as it is in many parts of the world. There were about 10 women riders. This was the 7th running of the Rocky Mountain 1200 since the mid 1990s. It is now run every four years, in the year after Paris-Brest-Paris.

Mark Olsen of Rochester, and myself, Rob Welsh, represented Minnesota in one of the most beautiful and best supported super randonnee rides anywhere. Mark was joined by his brother, Bill, from New Jersey. My friend Graham Fishlock, from Vancouver Island, rode with me.

I had heard that this ride was supposed to be a little easier than PBP, but I am not so sure. This was definitely a ride for experienced randonneurs as you needed to deal with riding in remote locations under challenging conditions. The weather, however, was MUCH better than PBP 2007. We had three days of sunshine, with just a little mountain rain on the Rogers Pass ascent, although it got down to freezing one night in the mountains. We ascended at least 10 major climbs, most of them several kilometers long. For the most part the climbs were steady grinds but a couple of them on the Columbia Icefield Parkway were real stinkers that had a few riders walking. The down hills were great. In one stretch we rode for 70 kilometers virtually all downhill. Of course, we spent two days climbing to that elevation so we felt it was well earned.

The roads were generally good with only a few rough sections. We rode on the shoulder of highways pretty well the whole way. Much of the route had steady truck traffic, with RVs and trailers. With a wide shoulder, it was safe and the drivers were very good about getting over, but it did take getting used to. For the BC riders this is a normal part of long rides in a huge province with lots of mountains and not too many people.

The other interesting factor was night riding on roads with no cross roads, no signs, no indicators of any kind for long stretches. Talk about sensory deprivation. It was really good to have a partner to ride with on these sections. On the ride from Lake Louise to Golden, we caught up with a Japanese woman rider. I give her a lot of credit for starting the section on her own, but she was very happy to ride with us over two passes and some winding down hills.

During the long days though the scenery was terrific. In addition to the Columbia Icefield Parkway, which is truly one of the most spectacular bike rides anywhere, the views of Mt Robson, Rogers Pass and a pretty section along Shuswap Lake, among many others, made this almost like a bike vacation tour.

The controles and ride support were really well done. The volunteers were very well organized, enthusiastic, helpful and knew what it felt like do these rides. BC randonneuring is well developed with strong contingents in several areas in the province. This gives them a strong base to call on for special events. They also recruited help from Alberta and Seattle randonneurs to

staff controls. Most controles had a sleeping area, with mats and wake up calls. It is amazing how comfortable a mat and a blanket on a gym floor actually is. There was a variety of good hot and cold food available at each stop, and people to help serve you. My favorite meal was a bowl of mashed potatoes and gravy, 110 km from the finish.

One of the neat things about BC Randonneuring is that they hold a banquet after their major events to celebrate and share experiences. On Sunday, a few hours after the ride finished, riders and volunteers all got together for a nice meal, some general awards and congratulations. Mark and Bill Olsen each got special awards for completing 1200km rides in both Canada and the US in the same year. They met again in September to do the Last Chance 1200km. Mark completed three 1200km rides this year, Bill did four.

Only a few years ago, it was generally believed that doing one 1200km brevet a year was the most a person could take, physically and mentally. With the expansion of the number of longer brevets, more riders with experience, organizations like RUSA, and people like Mark and Bill, who just keep riding, these limits are being redefined. I'm ready to do a couple next year myself after seeing what these riders have accomplished and my great experience this year at the RM 1200!
