

# PARIS-BREST-PARIS 1987 ON A TANDEM

by Patti Brehler

Well, here we are, after a long year of training and preparation -- Paris France! Where did we get all this gear?! Can't leave any of it laying around - signs posted in the airport warn that unattended baggage is "blown up!" I want to leave a bag in the aisle to watch it get blown up, but Lou says "no." We have to carry it all. I'm thankful that with the tandem, we only have one bike box. How do we get to our hotel? We want to get shopping!

The tandem is unpacked and put together. Our first "shakedown" ride we get lost trying to find the start of PBP. I guess the hours we spent on the tandem rollers watching "Sesame Street" in French from Windsor, Ontario were not enough - Lou is having trouble asking local police for directions. In frustration the officer finally jumps out of the car and grabs Tom Spanti-deas' bike, turns it 180 degrees around and points: that way! It's a wild ride, then, when they also whip the squad car around and gesture for us to follow them. Breakneck speed through the streets of Rueil-Malmaison. There it is! Headquarters and the start of the 1987 PBP. Only three uphill kilometers from our hotel, the FIAPAD. We appreciate this fact three days later when we have to somehow ride the tandem back to the FIAPAD after finishing the ride!

Lou and I turn a lot of heads as we find our way to the beautiful Bois de Boulogne park. We heard that many French cyclists ride a two mile traffic-free circuit here. I guess not too many tandems are seen here, much less with two women

dressed in pink leopard skin-suits! We have fun trying to communicate with the old men standing along the side with their classic racing bikes watching the young men (and us!) ride laps. They are amazed at our 56 tooth chainring and think our legs look strong. When they find out we are here to ride PBP we wonder what we are in for as they roll their eyes and gesture HILLS with their hands. I'm glad I put a triple on the bike before we came to France.

We've got more confidence now finding our way around Paris. More help! We even figured out the subway system after our first "Metro" century. Lines are color-coded, and we were on the wrong line to exit near our hotel. "No problem," our friend Mike Dobies told us as we zoomed by our stop. Mike had traveled to Europe with his family and assured us that if we stayed on the car to the end of the line, it would turn around and we could get off on the way back. Another French word we learned, when, after sitting in the empty stopped car at the end of the line, the conductor came by and gestured "changez, changez." We had to get off and "change" to another line to get back to the FIAPAD. Lessons learned quickly, we soon were "Metro-ing" all over Paris -- even finding a stop near a McDonalds for Lon Haldeman!

The crowded group breakfast before the 4:00 AM start of the Eleventh PBP featured the typical piles of crusty French bread and plenty of yogurt. Lou again tested her limited French by asking a rider "ou est le pissoir?"

Directed to a nearby door, we entered and quickly exited after finding inside a row of men standing in front of a row of urinals. I think our faces were as pink as our leopard tights, especially when we were greeted by tables of laughing French riders who tried to assure us that we had indeed gone into the right place! We didn't know that many restroom facilities in France are co-ed! In spite of wishing we could have had more information about what to expect prior to arriving in France, Lou and I soon realized that part of the fun and the challenge of participating in PBP would be encountering the unexpected. Our sense of humor would prove to be an asset in successfully completing this event.

I'm a little nervous now, waiting for the start. In reviewing our maps and directions the night before, we decided not to worry too much about getting out of Paris proper. We were looking forward to following the long snakes of red taillights. Now here we are at the front of all the riders! Tandems are to start first, and since we are the only female tandem team, they want us to start at the very front! It will be a frantic pace trying to stay with these other tandems and in sight of the escorting gendarmes!

Daybreak and out of the city. Long open fields of hay; then sunflowers. We can see and follow the route easily now so can afford to stop to take advantage of the protection afforded by the sunflowers. Relieving ourselves continues to be an adventure. The French riders have no qualms urinating anywhere. Along the route we find restroom facilities of all types. My favorite is the

porcelain square on the floor with a simple hole between two foot pads. I'm expected to squat over this thing after days on the bike?! It turns out to be easier than it looks. The challenge lies in getting out without wet feet - there is a rope to pull to "flush" it and water goes everywhere!

The road from Foire Exposition to Tinteniach seems the most level of the ride. Six French riders find a good draft behind our tandem. Reaching the control at Tinteniach we can't find our support car but are greeted by friends and family of the men we are riding with. Our lack of French is proving not to be a hindrance. And word has spread ahead of us - we are hearing cries of "Leopards Rose!" (Pink Leopards) from spectators along the route. We are encouraged by their support.

Almost to Brest and neither of us has a sore butt! No one told us of the estimated hill-per-kilometer. I'm glad Lou and I stand so comfortably together. We feel great today even after bonking last night and having to sleep two hours in Loudéac. We push a little harder here at this climb up to Carhaix-Plouguer. A newsphotographer is ahead standing up through the sunroof of his driver's car taking photos of us. He laughs when I swing my camera around and take his picture! Weeks later he sends us copies of Lou and I climbing on the tandem.

Ah, Brest! Lou and I are welcomed by future PBP riders everywhere we go, but have a particularly poignant meeting here. While repairing things before leaving the control for our return to Paris, a very old French woman struggles to get our attention.

With her is a young girl of perhaps six or seven years of age. We can't understand what she wants and we are all starting to get somewhat frustrated. Suddenly the little girl grabs my jacket and pulls my face to hers to give me three kisses on my cheeks. She does the same to Lou. The kilometers out of Brest fly by and I'm not sure if it's the tailwind we now enjoy, or the strength we find from realizing that what we are accomplishing is greater than just finishing a bike ride.

We're learning more French. We know the words for coke, coffee, chicken, rice, soup, potatoes, eggs. We know these because we eat all these at every control. During PBP Lou and I end up spending over \$250 between us just for food at the controls. And it never seems enough! We carry heavy French bread sandwiches to eat on the bike. This isn't easy. Once, after a three kilometer climb, when I thought we had made it up on a ridge and would be level for a while, we each started to eat one. Unexpectedly, the road took a sudden turn and we found ourselves tumbling on a descent! Runaway tandem! Lou says I calmly asked her: "Would you please hold my sandwich, I think I need two hands to brake." Our hysterics were heard in the town at the bottom of the hill as I struggled to control the bike around sharp turns while Lou, hands full, couldn't hold on for dear life!

The Secret Controls. We make up stories about spies and armed gendarmes lying in ambush in the dark for us, and feel safe being together. That's a special advantage to team cycling. We are, often, our own entertainment. It's never boring traveling with Lou.

I never know what she'll come up with and she's always there to read the map, hand me food, make me laugh, prod me in the ass when I'm feeling down. She's taught me a lot about giving my best effort and that it's the DOING that counts, not the result. A special bond develops between tandem partners, one that's not easily understood except perhaps by another tandem rider. It's like we're almost sisters (and twins, at that!). We've gone through a lot in the last ten years, training together and then riding tandem since 1984. We've laughed together, cried together, and even fought with each other. I wouldn't have it any other way. Thanks, Lou!

Forty kilometers from Paris, it's nice to have our friend Mike Dobies with us to point out that our rear tire is going flat. (And we thought we were just getting tired!) Although Mike started with the 10:00 AM group, he was able to catch up to us and will now accompany us to the finish. He makes a good back rest for Lou as she grabs a power nap while I'm changing our tube. Feeling sleepy is a hazard during any ultra-marathon event, but it gets especially worse on the back of a tandem. We've learned that in as short a period of time as fifteen minutes, our bodies can awaken with a marked improvement in alertness. By utilizing this technique when it becomes impossible to remain alert on the bike, we've been able to function the last three days with only four hours of actual sleep. (Two hours the first night, one hour each the second and third nights.)

Seventy-nine hours and forty minutes after our wild beginning, we're back at PBP headquarters

and the finish in Rueil-Malmaison. We are handed a huge bouquet of flowers and told we are the "premier" women's tandem. We're herded through the last control and congratulated with a ticket for a free beer. It feels so good! One of the French riders who was with us the first evening into Tinteniach is here to greet us. He finished much earlier. An excited group of Swiss riders passes us glasses of champagne that they've opened in celebration of their own ride. They come by our room at the FIAPAD two mornings later to exchange jerseys with us before they leave, but we never wake up to answer their knock! I take my shoes off... ahhh... but worry about getting them back on again to ride back to the hotel, my feet are so swollen! It's like a dream, this finish. Somehow we finally manage to get back on the tandem, thankful those last three kilometers to the FIAPAD are downhill. We did it!

We shower, eat (again!), and are back to PBP headquarters (without even a power nap) to be there for the "official" finish at 10:00 PM. Someone hands me a copy of a French newspaper that has a photograph of Lou and I in it. We have photos taken with the gallant gendarmes and more up on the stage with PBP officials and Kay Ryschon (first female), Scott Dickson (first male), and Lon Haldeman and Bob Breedlove (first male tandem). Lou and I feel like we could party all night long, but the rest of our friends want to get back to the FIAPAD to sleep! Au revoir!

### A note on Power Naps

Lou and I have practiced using what we call power naps for many years. They are, simply, short (20 minutes or less) rests when you

close your eyes and try to relax. With practice, you will actually fall asleep and you will be surprised at the results. Try it! By getting your body used to "shutting down" briefly during everyday life, it will respond quickly to power naps during an ultra-marathon event.

**USE THEM DURING TRAINING.** I worked an afternoon shift from 3:30 PM until midnight for twelve years, and I would train in the morning when I felt my best. A quick power nap before leaving for work in the afternoon would help get me through the shift. Now, working days from 7:00 AM until 3:00 PM, I often take a power nap when I get home from work so I will feel refreshed before my evening workout.

**HELPS STRESS.** A nurse I know who heads the afternoon shift operating rooms at Children's Hospital is also a firm believer in power naps. She survives her stress-filled week with them.

**AIDS PERFORMANCE.** A new tandem partner I rode a 24 hour marathon with this last summer learned about power naps during our ride. She plays with the Grand Rapids Symphony and called to tell me that word about power naps is spreading through the orchestra. Before a recent performance, one of her fellow musicians only had enough time to either practice and warm up, or take a power nap. He opted for the power nap!

**DURING ULTRA EVENTS.** During the 1990 Race Across AMerica, I crewed for the mixed-tandem team of Ron Dossenbach and Sue Pavlat. They learned in a dramatic way the "power" of power naps. The last push to the finish they wanted to ride through the night without

their usual 2-3 hour sleep time. Not long after nightfall, they became very sleepy and the crew that was with them decided to put them down to sleep for one hour. When they were awakened, Ron was completely disoriented and had to be told where he was and what he was doing. He said that it took him quite a while to gather his senses. My crew came on duty a short time later, and I was determined to get them through the night without another sleep. We did everything we could to keep Ron awake and I pushed him as far as I thought safe. About 5:00 AM, when it became evident that the situation could become dangerous, I stopped the team and put them down for a fifteen minute power nap. Afraid of again becoming disoriented, Ron was adamant about just sleeping for fifteen minutes. That

was all he got! We were all amazed at the change in both riders, then, as they awoke very alert and continued aggressively through until daylight to arrive at the finish line in Savannah at 11:30 AM.

I would advise power napping to be part of anyone's schedule. If you are preparing for the 1991 PBP, start napping now and it will help you through those dark nights on the road. But be careful where you choose to nap! During a 24 hour ride I did last summer, I tried to take one along side a deserted stretch of the route. At least two cars happened by and seeing me lying on the ground next to the tandem, thought I needed help. They were not assured by my tandem partner that all I wanted was a power nap!

**From a conversation with Elaine Mariolle ---**

I asked Elaine what advice she had for someone planning to ride PBP for the first time. She said that for someone who is not planning to race, it is not necessary to do "mega miles, but do your homework. Do the brevets, do some night riding, be sure you are comfortable with your equipment and find out what foods work for you. We are going to somebody else's country. Think about that. If you are worried about going the distance, try to do a 1000km, but don't do it too close to PBP. Give yourself plenty of time to recover."

More than as a race, Elaine is interested in participating in PBP to be part of this historic event. She is excited about being a part of the Centennial of the second oldest cycling event in the world and "getting my name in the Great Book." Going to France also has a certain personal relevance to Elaine because she has relatives from the south of France and she is interested in learning more about where she is from.

Elaine's advice on what to do once you get there is to "relax and enjoy that you can participate in this historic event. Be confident; people are capable of much more than they think."

--- Mareike Kuypers

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# MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE PARIS-BREST-PARIS BICYCLE CLASSIC (OR) IF YOU RIDE FROM PARIS TO BREST, YOU HAVE TO RIDE BACK

By Ken Zabielski

Paris-Brest-Paris 1987 was an incredible experience, an ordeal unlike any I've ever done on a bicycle. It's hard to describe the whole spectacle in this article. In short, I can describe only some of the aspects of the ride that made PBP what it is.

My PBP '87 experience began the day before the 1986 running of BAM (Bike Across Missouri). BAM was the culmination of my 1986 season. It was my final bicycling goal for that year. Now that all my 1986 cycling goals would soon be accomplished, I needed a new goal for 1987. I overheard a few fellows talking about a long ride in France held every four years. They called it Paris-Brest-Paris.

That was it! That was my goal for 1987! Never mind that I knew nothing of the distance, terrain, points of contact, membership or qualification requirements, cost, time, dates, or anything else. I was going to do PBP in 1987!

PBP became an obsession; a goal with many, many obstacles. The qualifiers! The paperwork! The requirements! The training! I don't have to tell you about the qualifiers, the requirements, and the paperwork. But I can tell you about my training. My 8000 miles of training consisted of 50 to 60 miles per night on the weekdays and double and triple centuries on the weekends. The weekday rides often ended at 9 PM while my weekend regimen began at 4 AM. After all

that, with the qualifiers, paperwork, and miscellaneous requirements, I can honestly say that riding a bike 1215 kilometers in France was the easiest part of PBP.

Chicago is my hometown. But in 1987 I was living, working, and cycling in the Washington D.C. area. Today, I hail from Columbus, Ohio. Such is the life of the itinerant Government worker. My life-style has let me come to know cyclists from all over the country. Many of the 210 Americans who did PBP in 1987 are friends of mine. That made the trip there less difficult. It also made for some confusing alliances.

In Washington D.C., my club was the Potomac Pedalers Touring Club, the PPTC. However, in Illinois, I am known as a member of the French Toast Bicycle Club (a.k.a. Le Club de Velo du Pain Doré). French Toast is a club on the North Shore of the Chicago suburbs. The club specializes in ultramarathon cycling. This is where I got my start in the sport.

Dave Berning, a member of PPTC, and I trained together extensively in 1987. We were to be teammates. In reality the PBP organizers officially listed me a member of the French Toast Bicycle Club. George Ammerman, a long time French Toast member, who took the memorable photos for this article, ended up as my teammate in France. How did this happen? I think it

was due to a quirk in the paperwork from Illinois where I did the 600km qualifier. I'll be wearing the French Toast colors in 1991.

Getting back to 1987, how did we do? My time was 83 hours and 25 minutes. Dave's time was exactly six hours less than mine. George's time was 88 hours. My poor time was due to many factors. Long lines for food; a massage every 100 miles or so for a leg injury; unexpected impenetrable fog for 100 miles from Paris; more hills than I had anticipated or trained for; and more rain than I could have imagined. It all added to my poor time. But Dave, George, and I finished. And we're proud!

The weather was cold, windy, and wet. During the four days of PBP 87 an Atlantic storm was pushing inland from the coast. It seemed as if the temperatures never got above 60. Someone told me it got as cold as 40 degrees one morning. We had headwinds in the first 375 miles of the race followed by 375 miles of tailwinds. And, depending on where you were during the ordeal, it often rained. For me it rained during sunup and sundown each day. The sun screen I packed especially for PBP never had its cap off.

My day on the bike usually began about sunrise and ended about 2 or 3 AM. I stayed on schedule until the fog hit near Bellême, 100 miles from Paris. My strategy for the last 140 miles was to ride straight through the night, finishing in Paris just after sunrise at 7 AM. The last 100 miles into Paris were marked by steady drizzle interrupted by occasional showers.

Thirty miles from Brest was

Roc Trevezel, a mountain we Americans called "The Rock." It was a 15 to 20 minute climb depending on your direction of travel. Going west down "The Rock," the headwinds slowed downhill speeds to only 40 kph. But with winds at our back on the return leg to Paris, downhill speeds of 80 to 90 kph were possible. Coming down "The Rock" I rode with a team of Spaniards who live in the Basque region in the Pyrenees. We raced downhill. What a thrill passing other cyclists on the very outside edge of the road at 90kph. The Spanish riders were more open and talkative than the average French rider. They took a liking to me, I think, because I was a good climber and because I was American. They didn't care much for the French and wouldn't let me use the little French I knew. They tried to teach me Spanish, which I quickly forgot. At one point in the road, we passed a Canadian woman whose name was Judy. As I yelled hello to Judy, about a dozen of the Spaniards started yelling "Judy, Judy!" à la Cary Grant. It was classic.

As I said before, the European riders are good; extremely good. Their technique of riding in a pack is definitely un-American. They call it Audax. Audax packs were more team oriented than I had anticipated. Audax riders ride extremely close in their packs, whether going uphill, downhill, on the flats, or just weaving slowly through the narrow winding streets of the French villages. The idea is to keep the team intact forever.

If to some of you this sounds appealing, listen on. Most use a triple crank set with a 13-18 straight block freewheel. They crawl uphill in a high gear as they

stand on the pedals in unison. Wheels overlap all the time. On the downhill their speeds pick up substantially, but the pack remains tight regardless. This they do by laying on their French-made Mafac brakes, which wail like banshees. And riders never point out dangerous obstacles or obstructions on the road to following team members. Not once did I hear the French equivalent of "Car up" or "Car back" within the Audax packs I rode. (That was partly due to the considerations the French motorists routinely give cyclists.)

In comparison, the Americans were ill-disciplined. We would either sprint ahead, fall behind, weave left or right, or crash within the packs. If you think you would like to cycle Audax-style, consider that the Audax packs travel over any type of terrain at a constant average speed, taking off-the-bike breaks every 50 to 70 miles. And incredibly, they all drank beer and wine, and ate meat, at the rest stops.

So I did too. I also ate fish, chicken, veggies, and plenty of bread on this ride. To control the indigestion, I filled my water bottles with St. Yorre Mineral Water which has a high concentration of bicarbonates. It was like drinking water bottles of Alka-Seltzer. Later, a Frenchman gave me a tea bag to place in my water bottle. So in one bottle I had all the basic ingredients to sustain life on the long ride: water, caffeine, and bicarbonates.

The French people are beautiful - not only the cyclists, such as the one who gave me the tea bag, but especially the people of Brittany whose villages we cycled through. Brittany is a land where

all the men resemble Bernard Hinault, and all the women love Bernard. Because of that, they love cycling. So they came out in droves to watch the race and participate. The Bretons stood along the roads in the day, the night, the dry, the rain, and on top of the hills and mountains to watch and cheer us on with wishes of "bon jour" and "bonne route," words of French that needed no translation. One American was surprised when his pack reached the top of a hill, where some women were standing in the rain under umbrellas. When the riders crested the hill, the women dropped their umbrellas and applauded the cyclists. The best was St. Remy. To decorate the town for the race, the people of St. Remy placed baskets of fresh flowers every 3 to 4 meters the length of the town.

The people flagged us down to offer us warm cafe and spiked cider. The children stood in the middle of the road to pass water to us. The people guarded the difficult intersections in the rain to make sure we didn't miss a turn. A couple of times when French spectators knew that I was an American, I heard a sincere "Vive l'Amerique." The natural response was "Vive la France." A couple of times I came out the other side of a village crying. I cried because I never felt such generosity towards cyclists. And I cried because I did not look forward to coming home.

I took French courses to learn their language. Although I wasn't fluent, my broken French was fairly effective. On one encounter, a French rider and I spoke about my collection of Tour de France and Paris-Roubaix tapes. We spoke of the great names of bicycle racing



we idolize. At one point I was enlisted to ride with a team of Frenchmen from Toulouse. I was able to ride with them because they chose a faster pace than the other Audax teams. I think I was an asset to them partly due to my strength in pulling the line, but more so because of my very bright West German halogen head lamp. Being French, they had to use the French equivalent which was not as good. Some of the riders in that team spoke broken English. So naturally, we spoke a combination of English and French, all broken. I thought that since I was learning French, they should learn some English. They now know that "Hammer! Hammer" is the loose English translation of "Allez! Allez!"

On the dark and cold stretch to the control point at Loudéac, a French fellow, Allain, and I had a conversation about our home towns. Actually, I was helping him into Loudéac when the battery for his light died. In return he was helping me into Loudéac after I had died mentally. At Medrignac, only 26 kilometers from Loudéac, we stopped at a village bar where he bought me a cup of cafe. My friend Allain and I spoke to each other with my broken French and English, which I assumed he understood a little of. But once in the bar, Allain found one of the bar regulars who knew some English. Only then did I learn that Allain could not speak one word of English. That proved to me that a language barrier will not hinder communications between people with a common cause. Our interpreter was glad to meet an American. He told me he wanted me to finish PBP but that I was not to sleep on my bike. When another group of cyclists entered the bar, everyone

in the place started singing, in French of course. It was a beautiful moment and a memory I will cherish forever.

Of course, not every French person acted kindly towards Americans. But I saw enough to know that the French place a high value on cycling. And for that reason, most accepted us without reservation. After cycling in France, my opinion is that many American visitors become frustrated by the French only because they fail to understand the culture of the French. Not that I am an expert on French culture. All that I can say is that I became a part of it for a few days. And I tried my best to do so.

Was PBP worth the expense of major financial sacrifices, neglected relationships, friendships and careers, deprivation of sleep, food, time, and a normal social life, and a drastic change in life-style with an uncommon dedication to cycling? The answer is yes!

In retrospect. I am again gearing up for the obsession that is PBP. Ken Zabielski will be back in 1991. But the 1991 version of me will be vastly different than the 1987 version. What's the difference? Refer back to my mention of a leg injury. It was actually several injuries to my right leg. What caused it? In 1987 I over-trained. I mostly rode long, flat miles. I lost flexibility. I lost speed and snap. I lost sleep. Looking back three years later, finishing PBP was mainly due to determination.

PBP 91 will be different because I learned how to cross train. I also trained for strength

and flexibility. This was my road to recovery. Cross training consisted of time trial, road race competition with the team, intervalled intervals, hillclimbing, and hill climbing to regain speed and improve my on-the-bike conditioning. The last two winters I did more laps in the swimming pool than in my entire 39 years of life. And I now own and use a Nordic track x-country ski machine. For strength I started lifting free weights. There are several good books devoted to weight training for cyclists. Finally, I regained my flexibility through an intensive program of stretching and sports massage therapy.

When I think of training today, I no longer think of long miles. I now think in terms of strength, stamina, flexibility, aerobic conditioning, and proper recovery periods. Since 1987, my new training philosophy not only kept me from quitting the sport, but also earned me a gold and bronze medal in ultramarathon

cycling and a bronze medal at a USCF district time trial championship.

Secondly, I hope to have a better command of the French language. I recorded on VCR a complete French language course given by some sort of TV college. With 26 hours of French instruction on tape, this cyclist won't have time for "Wheel of Fortune" in 1991.

Speaking of VCRs. My friend Dave Berning carried a video camcorder on his bicycle in 1987. With video footage shot before, during, and after PBP, we produced a homemade movie entailing our preparations and participation in PBP. It's a wonderful primer on some of the hurdles one must face in preparing for PBP. If you care to see it, look for advertising in the upcoming newsletters of the International Randonneurs.

See you all in Paris.

### David Fisk on riding PBP --

David Fisk is a widely experienced Vermont cyclist, a veteran of PBP, and the author of an article on PBP in the March 1990 "Bicycle Guide." He comments that one medical consideration often overlooked is depression: "Thinking of how lucky you are just to be participating in PBP may reduce depression. But probably not." Also, "extra vitamin A for night vision might be a good idea." Tendinitis: "Take some ibuprofen three to four times a day with food, to avoid stomach upset. Tylenol relieves pain, but does not reduce inflammation, the true cause of pain and damage." To avoid muscle cramps, "eat and drink enough, and enough variety, to get the salts you need to avoid cramp. The main salts are sodium and potassium; sodium is easy, get potassium from bananas." Food: "Avoid crusty bread, fire-cracker water. Otherwise, knock yourself out. Whatever you can stand that gives you the necessary energy, eat." Clothing: "Lycra, or lycra and polypropylene. You can wash it in a sink and dry it over your panniers. Take enough to keep you warm through an 11 hour 50 degree night." Lastly, for training and preparing for PBP, Dave recommends "perseverance and fitness; one of these alone won't get you through it."

# SUSAN NOTORANGELO'S 1983 PBP

by Lon Haldeman

Her head in my lap, Susan Notorangelo lay in the ditch with just enough energy to raise herself up to watch a French woman and her team of blue jersey escorts move into second place. It was midafternoon and 425 miles into PBP. Susan had taken 24 hours to reach the 375 mile turnaround at Brest, and the return to Paris was assured of being more difficult - lack of sleep was taking its toll.

On the way out to Brest, Susan and a blond French woman had leapfrogged the lead at record-setting pace. Now the blond woman and her group were 45 minutes down the road, and the team of blue jerseys had just passed by. Relegated to third among the women, Susan was sore, sleepy, and disillusioned. As we remounted and began to chase, Susan's face was peculiarly expressionless, and her dark eyes lacked their usual intensity. She told me that maybe she wasn't competitive enough to catch the other women and that endurance cycling just wasn't her sport. I assured her that no matter how strong the other women were now, it would be the one who rode best through the second night who would be in the lead by morning.

Before the ride, Susan had drawn a bead on the all-time women's record of 54 hours 46 minutes, which had been set on an easier highway route. In 1979 the course was changed to hillier back roads, and a new women's record of 56 hours 46 minutes was established. Susan now decided that if she couldn't catch the other French woman she still owed it to herself to try for her 54 hour goal.

I might have believed this change of heart had I not seen Susan ride under adversity before. In 1982 she crossed the United States in 11 days 16 hours, setting the women's transcontinental record. This summer during our cross-country tandem ride a stomach virus kept her from eating for four days, but she still maintained our average 280 miles per day. This sunny afternoon in the French countryside she was again exhausted but I had a feeling Susan wouldn't be content to pace herself for third place.

Since RAAM two weeks earlier had left me too tired to ride without sleep through two nights on the road, my plan was to leave with the faster group at 4 AM and ride non-stop to the halfway mark at Brest. Then I would rest for a few hours and be ready to ride back with Susan, who had left six hours behind me with the 10 AM group. I would be her pack mule, carrying extra food and clothing while trying to keep up her pace and spirits.

As our group of over 1400 riders left in the dark that morning, it was quite impressive to see a string of red taillights snake its way for miles through the outskirts of Paris. Many of the Americans were starting at this time, so we formed our own small English-speaking groups to keep ourselves company during the first three hours of darkness. The route was marked with day-glo paper arrows, and police gave motorcycle escorts through the major inter-sections. But we quickly learned that the most reliable route marker

was a French taillight out in front of us.

As the sun rose that morning I could see that much of the French countryside resembles the green rolling hills of Anywhere USA. The towns, however, are definitely different. The centuries-old architecture and massive stone walls dating from the Middle Ages dwarfed us as we rode through the narrow streets.

When riders reached the control checkpoints, they had to dismount and have their route card stamped and time-registered. Also, secret control stops had been set up to prohibit anyone from taking a shortcut, and roving officials monitored riders and checked for faulty lighting systems. Anyone caught with bad lighting was subject to a one hour penalty, so it was good insurance to carry spare bulbs and batteries. Dan Baummer's American ingenuity enabled him to continue after his light bracket broke: he reinforced it with pieces of soft sticky candy he was carrying.

Without speaking French, the only way I could get food was to point to what I wanted at the checkpoints. Unfortunately, I was arriving just as the checkpoints were setting up, and the only food displayed was six-inch loaves of bread. Later I learned the food served was very good, according to the riders who spoke a little French. The French riders ate best of all, as their families would meet them along the way with tables, chairs, and china place settings. All that was missing was mood lighting and soft music as they ate platefuls of spaghetti and sipped bottles of wine. The French probably think we Americans are

such barbarians with our pointing and eating with our fingers.

Although I was hungry when I arrived in Brest at 5 AM, I was more concerned with getting some sleep and warming up after the chilly nighttime ride. I awoke at eight and by 10 AM small groups of riders started arriving from Susan's starting time. The leading blond French woman and her team came in appearing very fresh and sat down to a breakfast of croissants and juice.

Minutes later Susan rolled in, looking like a downed fighter pilot who had just returned from enemy lines. She said she had ridden alone through the night while trading positions with her adversary at each checkpoint. Susan had been on my crew during RAAM and was suffering from the recent three weeks of not riding. Shaking with cold, she lay down under several blankets and slept for fifteen minutes, then had a massage and managed to eat. The blond French woman had left the checkpoint long ago, and now Susan had to ride her own pace if she was going to continue.

Susan remounted and we started back to Paris. The sun had begun to warm the foggy valleys, and strings of riders were now coming toward us heading to Brest. Susan said she had started the ride with Tom Gee, Bill Roberts, and Alex Bekkerman; they had stayed together until sundown. It was a lift for us to see many of the Americans doing well and ahead of their schedules for arriving at Brest. Sooner or later we saw quite a few of our contingent coming from the other direction, and they all called encouragement. "Go get her!" was the rallying cry.

## PARIS-BREST-PARIS

But by afternoon Susan's energy was fading. We agreed that a ten minute nap was needed and stopped in the grassy ditch while Susan laid her head on my lap.

As another French woman and her blue team passed by to move into second place, Susan knew there were still 300 miles to go to reach Paris. Although disillusioned, Susan got back on her bike and managed to keep her speed at 18 mph. We rolled into the next checkpoint at Loudéac and found the second place blue team filling their bottles and pockets. Susan's sister Beth was waiting for us with pudding and quiche as brother Mike changed and filled water bottles. His wife Phyllis helped Susan with a jersey change (for the cooler evening). Thanks to all their help, Susan was back on the road in less than two minutes, which moved her into second. Just then we encountered a Frenchman named Claude with whom I had ridden 200 miles the day before. Claude was eager to help an American woman, so our little group formed a paceline and managed to start catching some men who had passed us earlier. It was getting dark when we were stopped at the secret control point outside the village of Tinteniach. Just as Susan was leaving, we rolled the third place French woman's team who hurried to get their cards checked.

Susan knew as she rode into the second night she had to quicken her pace and hope the pack of French headlights didn't catch her. We arrived at the Fougères Castle control point sixty miles later and learned that the third place woman was now fifteen minutes back. It was 1 AM and Susan trailed the leading blond French woman by over fifty minutes. By 3 AM Susan had

become very sleepy and had stopped several times for rest. As a pack of headlights gained on us, I just knew it was the third place woman making her move. Then from the group someone spoke to us in English. It was American Dennis Hearst and a paceline of fast Frenchmen from the last 4 PM starting group. Dennis reassured us that the French woman was still fifteen minutes behind and that Susan was still second among the women. That buoyed our spirits and the fast pace of the group was exciting as we rode into the sunrise.

There were less than 150 miles remaining as our group pulled into the Villaines la Juhel checkpoint. Needing to make up time on the leading blond woman, Susan stamped her card and left while I went to get food. Because of my slowness to fill six water bottles with foaming cola and point to food, I was now over fifteen minutes behind Susan.

When I was ready to leave, much to my amazement, I walked the blond French woman and her team that Susan was chasing. We must have passed them during the night without knowing it when they stopped to sleep. Dennis and I left together in a rush and jammed to catch Susan, who was now miles up the road. When we finally did, Susan said she had ridden off the road because she was so tired. My news that she was now in the lead had little effect on her speed, but I could tell she didn't want to be caught.

Finally we arrived in the town of Bellême, 100 miles from Paris. This was the last food stop, so Dennis and I loaded down and after ten minutes chased after Susan.

It took us an hour at over 22 mph before we caught up again, and I could tell Susan was alert and ready to start hammering. She had a thirteen minute lead now, but the blond French woman and seven men were in hot pursuit. A headwind started as Dennis and I took long pulls at the front while trying to average 20 mph.

The last control was 45 miles from Paris, and Susan's lead had increased to 42 minutes. The short hills and many stoplights entering Paris made pacelines difficult, so Susan rode by herself the remaining miles. The all time record of 54 hours 46 minutes was still within reach, but late afternoon traffic was making riding uncertain. Susan was exhausted, and I didn't know how much farther we had to go. At last we rolled into the stadium parking lot where the final control was located. A crowd of cheering French had gathered to welcome Susan and present her with a three foot bouquet of flowers.

I knew Susan's time would be close to the record, so I checked

the official's watch as he stamped her card. Fifty four hours forty three minutes was the official time, beating the all time women's record by just three minutes and the course record by over two hours. Susan was escorted to a cot where she lay down and the tears of happiness at completion began to flow. It had been more difficult than expected, but Susan ranked it as her best ride ever.

Dennis Hearst finished a minute after Susan (he had started six hours later) with the time of 48 hours 44 minutes, to be the second American to complete the ride, after Scott Dickson. During the next thirty hours more than eighty Americans would finish one of the most challenging rides ever for them. At the awards ceremony after the ride, Jim Konski and the American International Randonneurs received a trophy for the country with the most foreign entrants. The Americans had done all right in this 14th Paris-Brest-Paris by riding well and also by representing themselves well off the bike.

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### David Fisk on Lighting --

For lighting Dave has had success using a fork-blade-mounted flashlight, a system used by many European riders: for the light, use "an off-the-shelf 2-D-cell Ray-O-Vac Workhorse, or an Eveready (waterproof), or a Tekna BLI (battery life indicator). The Ray-O-Vac is cheap and light, and the Eveready probably is too. The Tekna is almost as light and is probably a lot more durable, and has the additional advantages of a beam that adjusts from spot to wide, and a remaining-battery-life indicator. The BLI should allow you to avoid always carrying spare batteries or mentally recording the number of hours your present batteries have been used. I will use a Cateye taillight; it's two C cells will probably last the entire PBP." A design is available from Dave for a bracket to mount the light to the fork blade.

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## SUR LA ROUTE VERS BREST

by Lily Nathan

Brest! At 34.5 hours! Not long past noon, in a state of total exhilaration, with the internal clock laughing at sleep. With plenty of food on the bike, should I check in fast and start right out again? I'd made a slow start but rode a steady pace, in and out of the controls fast, eating on the bike. The riders ahead had pulled gradually away; since somewhere past the first control, I was mostly alone. Yet all day I "saw" riders: ahead on the crests of hills, behind in mirror-filtered glasses. Close up they turned into signs and posts and pieces of trees hanging down over the road.

Actually, I like riding alone, seeing and hearing the countryside, but I guess I missed the usual human company, the chance to talk, compare notes and speed up by sharing the pulls. Next time (will there always be a next time?) I'll do some hard training and stand up on the hills before the ride instead of on it.

Weather was overcast; no hot sun, no rain, no wind. The route was easy to follow; the controls came and went. Alone, I talked to myself, or to the people I'd ridden with other times. Why didn't I keep a journal? No time. But if there's time to keep track of miles and pace? No answer to that. Really, if I started, I wouldn't know where to stop. After 1971, Jock Wadley's 40+ pages of "Brestward Ho!" poured out of his memory. No notes at all. I'm convinced he left out much much more than he wrote. Describing takes so much longer than experiencing. And I can't write while I

close my eyes and think back and remember... Late in the day I had met a few riders - rode with the tandem for a talk about home clubs and got a mile's pull into a control - later was a group of twelve that caught me after dark before the next control. On the road they were really too fast, but at the stop too long, and I was first back out on the road. The tandem was gone before sunset, when light rain had stopped me for rain gear, thinking the warmth of dry clothes might be needed in the night. The rain was just a teaser, and when the sun set into a clear band of sky, I slowed to a crawl for a half hour to watch over my shoulder an incredibly bright full rainbow with a dimmer full double. Gone the sun, it was back to serious riding, sometimes very fast with a bright light, more often prudently slow. And because it's hard to be serious all the time, sometimes very slow, with the front lights switched off on empty roads where no one needed to see me. How can a beam of lighted road compare with the whole dome of night, softly lit by fireflies and skylight? I tried singing out loud (no one to complain that I was off key), but I was too timid to break the quiet of the night. The songs were too long unsung; the words wouldn't come back. So I hummed and whistled instead, and sometimes new words fit themselves into the music. Back home were the song sheets from French class, and my cousin's 345 Chansons de Folklore. Before the next time I'll find time to relearn them.

But mainly the night and I were quiet, till the roosters

decided to hurry the dawn. They woke, but I got tired. I shifted down way lower than usual for the rolling hills, glad no one else was around to see. I was so tired I didn't notice the real rider who came up from behind, but he was gone just as fast as the ones I'd dreamt up the day before. The endless hills, hardly to notice on a better day, ended, and 300 miles into the ride, I suddenly felt ready to conquer the world. I would read the cue sheet too fast, forgetting the turns I just made, and backtracking twice to be sure I really was where I was. Worst, at the last control I forgot how I came into town and then couldn't find the way out. Two smarter bikers showed up and led me on. They were behind only because they'd sensibly slept last night.

With less than 20 miles to go, we poured it on together, uphill and down, till I slowed in the outskirts of the city, or they speeded up. Alone once more, but not far behind, I stood in high gear all the way, jamming up to the red lights to catch them as they turned green, to the green lights to catch them before they turned red. The hardest thing was putting on the brakes at the control.... BREST!

Brest? Mais on ne parle pas français a l'Hotel Syracuse, and the ambience of the city streets was quite un-French. Just another hallucination, this one more fun than the others because I'm playing tricks on my mind instead of the other way around. It was only July 1, 1990, in Syracuse NY, and Paris-Brest and Brest-Paris were still there to look forward to, fourteen months ahead. And, blessing in disguise, at least four more brevets to ride next year. I'm

halfway there. Cocky from success after this year's brevets, I could say (but oughtn't) that riding them was easy. DOING them was the best possible training, and I can't think of a nicer place to have done them than in the heartland of US randonneur country.

But PBP is more serious business, twice the distance of the longest qualifier, and the brevets don't come near to approximating it. Most recreational riders will take close to the 90 hour limit to finish. 90 hours? Well, 34.5 plus 8(!) to sleep at Brest plus 34.5 back? That's a respectable 77 hours with 13 hours extra (and I'll really be in shape then!...).

But the lines at French controls are long; 3+ days' food/clothes/batteries? may be more than I want to carry on a bike for 750 miles; there'll be dealing with an unfamiliar route and finding/buying food; and suppose it's rainy and cold (again) for four days? Add to that some jet lag and language lag. My French will take a week of real use to wear in. Besides, tired, I couldn't even follow cues in English! Five weeks after the last brevet, I'm still just thinking about strategies. Were this already PBP year, it'd be boxing the bike time.

But there's a full year ahead, and just MAYBE the time between here and April will be long enough to figure out bike, equipment, lighting, food, clothes, raingear, weight on the bike... and for considering physical and mental problems: numb hands, quirky knees, sore derriere; keeping warm and dry to stay alert and alive; deciding on pace and when/how to sleep. The time between brevets was just long enough to unpack, go



to work, and pack up again. But the biggest stumbling block to working out strategies was that the longest rides, 400km and 600km, were just "day rides," albeit from before dawn to some time after dark. Of course, a 240 followed the 360, but not till the first loop had ended at a reserved room with shower, new clothes, food, and extra equipment. Just a back-to-back pair of weekend rides, with sleep if you wanted it. NEXT time I want to keep on riding till the second dark falls. This is looking ahead to arrival in Paris well ahead of PBP, jet lag gone and rested for the start, and bypassing the first night's crowd on food lines and bed lines. But early afternoon arrival in Brest will be the wrong time for sleep, and I'm aiming at a real night's sleep after the onset of second darkness, at a control or a likely local stop. Then back on the bike to see the sunrise for just another long day's ride... better some trial and error in the US first!

Voila! The newsletter just arrived with the impressive list of US brevet riders and the PBP route! Now I can find it on the Michelin maps (sitting on my table long since) for the whole route, with point to point distances and one, two, and three chevrons to indicate the grades of the hills. This could mean a couple of weeks of fun, but I think I'll save it for a January blizzard while I get down to serious business.

LIGHTS: R&D (Rain and Dark). Some time in October/November, when the long nights aren't freezing yet, and I'm still somewhat in shape, at least three all night rides on unfamiliar roads (if I can find some in New Jersey). What are the kms/hr, and how many batteries

does it take? Night riding in rain or mist... does the generator slip in the wet? Is the speed down to  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$ ? Do I hate it enough to train instead for faster daylight riding? Fiddling with equipment is one of my weak spots; I only do it if I absolutely have to. I know by now what I'm comfortable with on the bike: sturdy/familiar/simple/reliable vs ultralight/complicated/high tech. But lights for three nights are a new wrinkle and thus an unanswered question. I've heard a lot of stories but no happy endings yet. After riding the 600 with three in front (batt-batt-gen) and two in back (batt-gen), I'm leaning toward double lighting but no generator. After picking up the good (read HEAVY) battery light at the hotel, I rode the six hours till dawn and never engaged the generator. At least I'm planning to wear out all this equipment in the next 25 years so nothing goes to waste.

RAIN: My touring days pre-date polypro-lycra-goretex-coolmax and I'm still thriving on wool. I rode the 200 in cold April rain, in wool under coated nylon. I wasn't cold, but I sure wasn't dry. I don't think I would have stayed warm for another 1000. I've never heard anyone say it's possible to ride HARD in whatever raingear and still stay dry. I'm going to give a try to the "sheep" method, heard for years (never quite believed) from a long-time year-round commuter in our club (he survived it long enough to retire). Layers of wool that breathe, head, top and bottom. The outside layer gets "damp" but the skin stays dry. Maybe...

CLOTHES/FOOD: Fair weather clothes and food are the least problem. A thin wool hat, gloves, plus arm and leg warmers have

always changed short sleeve wool jersey and wool shorts into cold weather gear. Two sets? Something extra? Maybe there'll be a vehicle to keep extras but I'm not counting on it yet. Bread and cheese and fruit and water keep me going forever; (last France trip there were a marvelous lot of pastries too). I'll keep enough food on the bike to be able to skip long food lines, and I'll look for the épicerie before I'm hungry or before the stash runs out.

PACE: Steady. Unless I get a lot stronger, very little communing with birds and flowers, stars and moon. Eating on sign-in lines and en route. Jabbering in French and Spanish and German and hodgepodge on lines and judiciously alongside riders of my pace. I can't push when I'm talking, or vice versa, and when I start talking I always forget I'm supposed to be getting somewhere. My 2+ weeks are already on the vacation calendar, so talking and relaxing will be before and after those 1200km.

GRAIN OF SALT: Take a large dose of flexibility. All the advance strategies could go right

down the drain. Storm. Heat. Wind. Equipment failure. Body failure. Getting lost. Mais, c'est la vie. But suppose the fair winds blow us west to Brest and back east to Paris, or the perfect paceline materialized out of nowhere. Just have to wait and see.

MOTIVATION: A hard thing to analyze. Regret at not having ridden in '83 or '87? In '83 I rode 11000 miles, 102 club rides, 21 centuries, and 1 double. I had joined the International Randonneurs after hearing about the brevets but I didn't know PBP existed. All that local riding kept me from getting to my first brevet. I didn't renew. If personal matters hadn't intervened, I'm convinced I would have been returning to PBP in 1991. But my riding dwindled to under 2000 a year, nothing but commuting. Last fall I got back on the bike in the country and couldn't get off. Is it a middleaged grasp at a challenge? The resurgence of the old love of the open roads and the calm expanses of night? All I know is I'm in for it and I'll take it however it comes.

### On the Road ---

On one especially steep hill a Frenchman had driven his station wagon to the top. It was full of cakes, cookies, and a wide variety of cold drinks, and water for water bottles. He had nothing to do with the organization PBP. He knew that this especially difficult hill on the third day would develop a need for food and drink. So he brought refreshments for dozens of riders.

Another example, one of many, is the French woman who, with her ten year old son, stayed up all night to make sure riders did not take a wrong turn going through her village.

-- Ruben Marshall

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# THE PARIS-ROUBAIX BREVET

By Robert "Doc" Holliday

Thursday 10:00 AM

As the plane was descending into the clouds over Paris, I realized the full impact of the adventure ahead of me.

The brevet, Paris-Roubaix, is only 266km long and a bit bumpy. About twenty-eight miles of bumps or cobbles. The cobbles are the least of my worries. The brevet begins in Villers-St. Paul. Look on the map -- it isn't there! A helpful taxi driver offered to drive me there for 700 francs (about \$125). I rode the train. After leaving the train at Creil, I spent three hours looking for lodging. The only room available was over a bar. It was a room that was usually rented for one to two hours at a time. The owner was not happy to have a "permanent" occupant! The noise abated about 2:00 AM. Better than sleeping in the rain and cold fifty degree weather.

Sunday 3:00 AM

I haven't slept at all due to the noise. There are other riders staying at the Pub hotel due to lack of reservations at good hotels. I decide to get up and start with the rest of the riders at 4:00 AM.

Sunday 4:45 AM

After the lighting check and having my brevet card stamped I am ready to go. There are 2000 riders for the brevet -- mostly French and Flemish, and a few British, Swiss, and of course Dutch riders.

There are three other Americans, all service men stationed in Germany.

Visibility at the beginning is diminished to one quarter of a mile due to fog. The riders' taillights ahead play tricks on the eyes as the dawn approaches.

At 58km we encounter the first control. It is in a muddy field. After getting my card stamped, I grab some more water for my Ultra Energy drink and head out.

The control helps to scatter the riders. The hills also assist. There are some 8% grades -- 40 mph downhill.

Sunday 10:00 AM

The fog has cut visibility to fifty feet. The first set of cobbles at eighty-six miles was a real surprise. They were very rough and slick because of the rain during the past few days. One must ride the cobbles as if on ice. There can be no uneven pedaling.

At 180km, the terrain flattens. We have passed through three cobble sections. The ride is rougher than one can imagine. Many riders fall on the mud-slickened cobbles. Some break bones. The fog is like riding through a cloud. My glasses collect the mist and I am glad for the terry backing on my gloves.

The cobblestones make the bars jump around. I expected that. What I didn't expect was the pain inflicted on the legs. It felt as

if someone were beating all over my legs with a hundred hammers all at once. At 210km, the fog has lifted. It is starting to rain. We now have a fifteen mph headwind. I notice an increased number of spectators along the route. Nothing like a little free entertainment. The centuries-old cobbles are smooth, wet, and muddy. I pretend I am riding rollers and hang on.

When we exit a particularly bad section, we are greeted by a secret control. These assure that no rider cheats.

There is an ambulance at the control and several first aid workers busy treating injured riders. The bent and broken bikes at the side of the road attest to the ferocity of the cobbles.

With fifty km to go, I assume that the cobbles end. That is just as well. My Cinelli stem is broken and my bars are loose. I can't wait to get out of the rain. In the last fifty km we rode fourteen km of cobbles. It seems like

eighty miles. My handlebars swivel up and down if I use the hoods or drops. The cobbles near the end seem worse than any before. Maybe I'm just sore. My seat moves up against me like a jackhammer, pounding continuously. The handlebars do likewise. The rain begins to diminish, but the cobbles are still unbelievably slick.

Suddenly the route comes out onto a large boulevard. A French rider next to me says "Finis!" We begin to ride faster and corner on the edge of traction. The road is ours. The velodrome is six km distant. The spectators along the approach to the velodrome clap and cheer.

There is a large crowd in the velodrome and I feel like a finisher in a European classic road race. The organizers made sure that we rode around the velodrome and even made the famous Roubaix showers available to us.

What a great experience!  
Would I do it again? Never!

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James L. Konski  
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## PARIS-BREST-PARIS 1975

by Harriet Fell

In 1974, while spending the year working in France, I joined the cycling section of ASFLO (Association Sportive de la Faculté et les Laboratoires d'Orsay), the athletic association of the Université de Paris Sud. I'd been cycle-touring on my own for four years and this was my first club. We went out every Sunday morning at a half hour past dawn and rode 50 to 100 kilometers, depending on the weather. The routes were not arrowed; we stayed together, taking turns pulling the peloton and regrouping after a climb spread us out. We'd always stop for coffee at a cafe and be back home in time to wash up before the big Sunday lunch.

One Sunday morning in April I was picked up somewhat before dawn so I could ride with the club in a 200km brevet that was leaving from the west side of Paris. I had not yet heard of Paris-Brest-Paris. I was assured that this ride would be fun and not hard. I'd once gone that far touring so I was willing to give it a try. About a dozen of us rode together. The weather was terrible, freezing rain. Marvelous crystalline structures formed on the beards of my friends. I take a while to warm up and this was not warming up weather. I felt really slow until lunchtime. Lunch is a big deal in France. We went to a restaurant and sat down to a five course meal. I've never gotten used to these big meals in the middle of the day, especially when cycling, but it is part of being in France. I make one exception to observing local custom, I don't drink wine when cycling. When we hit the road, an hour and a half

after stopping, I was a lot faster, relatively speaking. We finished the ride, together, in eleven hours and ten minutes.

We rode the 300km brevet on May 18, one week after the official brevet. Our club ran an invitational rally on May 11, with 500 participants, and we had special permission to do the ride a week late. We joined the official route west of Paris and stopped at each cafe that had been a control point. Each time we were met with the same jokes about being somewhat late and each time the proprietor stamped our cards with the cafe's address stamp. The route (320km from our starting point) was a big loop through Normandy. There are many river valleys with descents and climbs about two km long. It is fairly flat when you're on top but the winds were fierce. We stayed together just to fight the wind. We did 170km before our very long lunch. The climbs out of the valleys felt a lot harder on the way back. Two of our members were having more trouble than I was. We waited at the top of each climb. I really hurt every time we stopped and started up again. Thirty km before the end, the two slow riders decided to finish the ride alone and the going got a little easier. We were back home at 8:45 PM, 17.5 hours after our start. The other two riders came in two hours later. I felt a certain pride at having made it, my first double century, but this wasn't my idea of fun.

When my comrades started planning for the 400km brevet I was happy to note that I would be at a conference in Warwick, England the