

2008 Hairshirt - Sunday June 24th
322 km bicycle ride sponsored by the Toronto Bicycling Network.

I pulled into Kingsbridge Park, Chippewa 166 km from the start, covered in sweat and grime, dropped my bike and went running for the washroom. "That's the Ladies' you know" smirked an American couple standing outside with their bikes. "We'll watch your bike - the Men's washroom is around the back". On my return a few minutes later, they 'd been looking at my route sheet and quizzed me as to where I had come from and where I was heading. Of course after receiving my reply came the inevitable question, "but WHY are you doing it?" Stuffing one of the remaining blueberry pancakes stored in my back pocket into my mouth, I garbled some incoherent reply and took off, leaving them none the wiser.

The day had started at 3:45am after a good four hours of sleep. I looked out of the window. Pitch black and no full moon. That was a good omen. Breakfast of Oatmeal, Toast & Jam, Orange Juice and Tea, then off to Square One to arrive by 5:20am. Owen had already cycled there from the east end and one other fellow rolled in on his bike after coming from somewhere east of Yonge. The full moon must have been on that side of town! By the start time about 30 riders had assembled. The weather forecast was for temperatures of up to 25C with some thunder showers and 10 - 15kph winds from the south and south west.

We set off at 6:12 am. At first a big crowd of us stayed together, stopping at the the many traffic lights. Quite a few of the riders were not regulars with the TBN, so the first few kilometers were spent trying to assess my chances of hanging in with the front runners. Finally we hit the open road and after the first few small climbs our numbers were whittled down to just twelve. The speed settled into the high 30's. One fellow (Rares Palca) seemed quite content to sit at the front doing the vast majority of the work, pushing into the unrelenting headwind, only taking the occasional break to let others lead. Further into the ride everyone was taking a turn at the front, and Ron Clark was encouraging us not to let the speed drop below 40. My time with this group was limited and at the 110 km mark with only 10 km to the first rest stop, self-preservation took over and I backed off, knowing the group would get to the stop only minutes ahead of me. The best laid plans..... not a cyclist to be seen at the stop, so it was straight through in pursuit, pushing on to Kingsbridge Park and my friendly, but uncomprehending American friends.

Stopping at the park to fill my water bottles and take a first washroom break, little did I know that, for a brief moment in time, everyone else was behind me. Ha! They had taken a wrong turn, but would soon catch up as I headed off down the Niagara River Parkway towards the Falls. Like a swarm of bees they started to go by and once again the fun began. My big mistake, this time, was to settle in behind a guy with legs that looked as if he could do squats with an elephant on his back. Trying to take my turn to pull the group, after he moved over, was not very successful. Nearing Niagara-on-the-Lake I felt as if I was already oozing bodily fluids from every pore. Thanks to Paige for holding back to pull me along the last couple of km's. We edged through the tourists making our way to the first real rest stop at a variety store on the far side of the town.

The temperature had gone up to 25C but felt like 29C with the humidity. After 20 minutes' rest and still overheated it was time to let the others go on and to ride alone at a sustainable pace.

The wind was 19 kph from the SW. “This is where the real hairshirt starts” mentioned Ron - a nine time rider. He was right. I was starting to don my very own hairshirt, and it was itchy goats' hair, hopefully not flea infested and worn around the loins as the ancient monks were known to do - only 127km to go.

The route out of Niagara-on-the-Lake went through Port Dalhousie and on towards Jordan. A quick bottle of cold Coca Cola in Jordan revived my flagging energy; enough to head on up the escarpment and onwards to the dreaded FLY ROAD. I sometimes wake from nightmares of having to cycle “The Fly Road” alone, from now through eternity - all the time against a relentless headwind. It was on this stretch that another cyclist I had been riding with on the previous Thursday tagged in with me. He was just doing his own ride and had reached the 200km mark seemingly suffering no adverse effects and happy to have company. He started to amiably chat away, offering to do some pulling against the headwind. As this was a particularly low point for me a 20kph pace had to be maintained as he pulled off into the distance. It's funny how it goes but after 5 minutes recovering at this speed my pace picked back up and we rode together again for some way before our routes parted.

Down the escarpment I headed, through Winona, straight towards pitch black thunder clouds and along roads that were almost completely flooded. Into battle I went against agitated drivers who had been held up at the lift bridge, their cars dented by hailstones. This was the return to civilization from the wilderness on top of the escarpment.

Now faced with the rapid and substantial temperature drop and miserable weather conditions, my energy level and feeling of well-being soared. It must be the Irish / English genes. Finally, after almost 11 hours a real tailwind drove me on through Burlington, Burloak and Oakville, with just one last stop for chocolate milk to fuel the 30km dash back to Square One. Some of the lead group were still there enjoying a well deserved rest and recapping their own ride experiences. No-one felt the need to ask why we do this.

Ride Stats:

Start time	6:12 am
Finish Time	6:01 pm
Elapsed time:	11hr 49 min
Riding time:	11 hr 9 min
Stopped time:	0 hr 40min
Total Distance	325.4k
Average speed first half	33.0 kph
Average speed second half	25.4 kph
Overall average	29.2 kph

First stop 166 km – 5 minutes

Second stop 198km - 20 minutes

Third stop 226km – 5 minutes

Fourth stop 295km - 10 minutes

Food and Liquid:	Cals
Total consumed en-route:	1,830
Approx calories burned:	7,300

Conditions:

Temp: Started cool - rising to 25C. Felt like 29 with humidity.
Wind: Mostly headwinds 10 – 19 kph - except last home stretch.
(As recorded by Weather Network for that area)

Scenery:

Grade 3 Tarmac with many pot holes and ruts;
Continental, Michelin and Vittoria tires on various high end bikes;
Spandex clad butts - all shapes and sizes.

Lessons Learnt:

Don't have the corns burnt from the bottoms of your feet two days before a big ride.

Pre Ride:

3127 km's year to date.
TNT week before: 207k out – 160k back
During week: 5 light rides of 20k to 50k – mostly easy pace.

Special thanks to Owen Rogers for all the work that went into planning the event and doing the research needed to ensure that the route would be trouble free on the day.