

## ***The Gift of 77 hours of Paris-Brest-Paris.***

***By Trev J. Stocki***

### ***Prologue:***

If you would have told me one year before PBP 2007, “Trevor, next year you will be participating in Paris-Brest-Paris.” I would not have believed you. At that time I was no longer riding to work. I was in too much pain from my neck/shoulder. I was happy just to be playing Ultimate again. So being able to participate in PBP in 2007 was a gift. I had a lot of fun and this is that story.

It began with me arriving in Paris, Charles de Galle airport. I had trouble finding tickets for the RER to get to Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines but I got them and got on the train. Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines is the suburb of Paris where PBP starts. I didn't have time to figure out the directions for myself, so I was following Mike Lau's handy email post. I got off the RER at the Notre Dame stop and the connection I wanted was closed due to construction. Who knew? I went up escalators with my two suitcases (one was a bike Friday) and searched around. No luck. I found another cyclist, he was lost too. He was Ray McFall from Seattle. I looked at my map of the RER and came up with a new way to go, Ray agreed and we visited. We got to the station we needed to change at and it wasn't clear where to go. I tried asking someone in French, but we switched to English. Eventually we figured out that we needed to go up some stairs to another platform. It took me forever, but Ray waited for me. I think he missed his train. He found another person from California who was lost, Roy Wallack. Roy had been on the trains all day and confused. In the spirit of Randonneuring, I helped them both to get to Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. We got there, but it took all morning.

I got to my hotel in Plasir and it was a great atmosphere. I thought because I got there early that I would be alone, but there were a lot of Randos from BC and Brazil there. It was great visiting with all of them. It was helpful too... John (from BC) had made a map to the start. He also told me where all the amenities were. It was a great atmosphere for people helping people before the ride.

### ***The Crash***

So on the Friday before the PBP, a bunch of the BC Randos decided to ride to the starting point and ride part of the course. They invited me and I decided to go. I was really excited about participating in PBP. We met a couple Randos from Washington DC and rode with them on part of the first section of the route. I was concerned that I didn't have enough food because, believe or not, I packed light.

So along one section of a busy road, there was a median in the middle of the road and what LOOKED like a white line and a shoulder. We were riding close to the “white line” because it was a narrow road. All of a sudden, I was tilting left and right trying to keep the bike up. Then bang, I hit the road, scraping up my right elbow. Since it was a busy road, I got up, and got to the grass immediately. The most surprising thing was that

the first car stopped asked if I was ok. I was impressed. Karen Smith and a person from DC came over and helped me out. I think Amy from Seattle also came over. Karen and the person from DC bandaged me up.

I started riding again and Patrick and Jen offered me a cliff bar. The DC guy seemed really, really familiar. So, I asked him about whether he did the RM 1200 or other cycling things. Turned out he is Ron, a Health Physicist who I met and helped at a conference at Coimbra, Portugal through my work.

### ***Before the ride Jitters...***

Because of the crash I had to run some extra errands that I didn't expect to do. Karen, Bill, Amy, and Alain were all very helpful with information about my road rash on my elbow. I had to go buy some more Compeed and other medical supplies. I also had my brake checked out at Decathlon by their mechanics, but they said it was ok. It was the only problem I found with my bike after the crash.

Breakfasts at the hotel were great and a great way to contact people and find out useful information. Sunday was the day of the team Canada photo and the bike check. BC club announced during breakfast the time of their departure for the photo and bike check. I decided to ride with them. The ride was good. We got into town and I was getting excited about the ride. I saw some Seattle Randos and met up with Ray from the RER train adventure.

I went in for registration. There seemed to be confusion about the PBP jersey sizes. When I went to get mine, someone wanted to trade sizes with me, because theirs didn't fit. I got mine and it fit! So we did not trade. Then someone else asked in French if they could try mine on. I let them. It fit him too! So they were really happy and very grateful that I let them try it on. I was happy to help. I didn't know why they were so grateful, but it seemed part and parcel of the great atmosphere.

After wandering around a bit they announced that there would be no bike check, because of the rain. I thought that it was a bit strange. I went back to my bike and found the Ottawa guys to see if they wanted to go for lunch. That's when the attention began. Because I had a non-standard bike, a couple of people from UK asked me about my bike. I enjoyed talking to them. Italians also talked to me, but in Italian about my bike. I don't speak Italian but we seemed to be able to speak in hand gestures. The extra attention was enjoyable. Sue Pond pointed out to me that the French media will love me because of the strange bike and it turns out some of them also spoke to me.

The day of the ride, I got some extra sleep after breakfast. In the afternoon, I had to go and drop off my drop bag, so I rode there. I found that I couldn't clip out of my SPD pedals. I adjusted them, but I still had problems. I must have adjusted them the wrong way, because the cleats moved. At the drop bag place (Holiday Inn because Desparas travel didn't do a drop bag at our hotel), I got some help from one of the BC Randos (Ross Nichol). I thought I had solved the problem, but on the ride back to the hotel, it was still there. I got back to the hotel and worked on it, while I should have been sleeping. I really wished I got more sleep that day and the day before it.

At 5 pm, team Brazil took a picture at our hotel. I asked to swap my Canadian jersey with Richard, a Brazilian I enjoyed having breakfast with. He told me the

incredible story about a relative who survived lung cancer!! So for the first day I was wearing the colours of Brazil. It was fun.

I bought a pre-PBP supper ticket. I shouldn't have done that. If not getting enough sleep was mistake #1, then going to the supper was mistake #2. I left at 6 pm after some other riders had already left. Bill Pye left with me. We rode together and we stood in the enormous line together for food. It was a waste of time, I should have gone for supper somewhere else. I did take a picture of a weird 2 gear bike, where pedaling backwards was the lower gear. I heard about it during the ride.

## ***The Start***

Bill and I got to the start together. We got separated in the large line up. It was a carnival atmosphere. I think I saw the start of the 80 hour group. They were cruising as they started. The line up was immense.

Once inside the stadium, we were all lined up on the track. There were two lines. I think I accidentally chose the longer one. I took a nature break by the tree. Bill and I rejoined in the line. In the line I met Tom, from Seattle. He is a very nice person, but he told me a story I really didn't need to hear just before starting this ride:

He knew of a guy who owned a Bike Friday and loved it. That person bought a Bike Friday for his wife and on a descent she crash, broke her neck and died. Tom further explained that the lack of gyroscopic effect on the Bike Friday, makes it more prone to tip over.

This in combination with my crash on Friday was bad. For about 200 km into the ride, I ended up taking every descent over-cautiously. It wasted valuable time. This was mistake #3 for me. Other than being kind of morbid, Tom was a genuine nice guy.

As I waited to start, the rain started, so I put on more clothes. I wanted to get my caffeine out of my pannier, so I opened it. An Aussie was incredibly nice and held and moved my bike as we moved in line. It was great!!! Then in the line I met my Aussie "twin" Mark. He said he was happy to see another Bike Friday rider and that he had been touring through France with his friends who owned standard bikes. We chatted about owning a Bike Friday and it was great. He talked about Bike Friday only tours and how each owner was a bit "Maverick". I understood that as I have been the same way.

They had the bike check at the end of the line. I am not sure what they did with people who failed the check. I went through and then got my book stamped. My start time was 10:50 pm instead of the 9:30 pm, but the closing times of the controls were set to the start time of 9:30 pm. So this was why mistake #2 was critical.

## ***The're off!***

I got my book stamped and was in a group waiting for the start pistol/firework/flare. I lost Bill again as he had to take a nature break. Some American press took a picture of me and said they would send it to Bike Friday. I thought that was cool.

The gun sounded and we were off. The good thing about starting in this late group was no-one was feeling super aggressive. We didn't have the craziness that I heard of in other start groups, so it was safer.

A few kilometres in, I noticed how hot I was, so I quickly pulled over and took off some clothes. I heard someone say "there is Trevor." I said back quickly, so they didn't think I had a problem, "just taking off clothes."

We got out of town and it was amazing, red tail lights as far as the eye can see! It was just as what was described to me by other Randos. I felt overwhelmed that I was actually there. It was like a huge feeling of "holy #&\*\$ing crap!" I am here. It was amazing. Then a few BC Randos passed me. They said Hi. I tried to grab their wheel, but I was not strong enough and got dropped.

I was feeling fairly strong though, I started noticing that some of the packs were weaker than me and started passing them. I found I mostly passed them on the climbs. I started talking to someone from the UK and a climb came up and unfortunately I dropped him. I didn't mean to, it just happened. He was riding a bike that I thought was a Bike Friday but it was some other small wheeled bike.

Then sometime on this stretch, I was riding up a hill, just got over the crest and accidentally dropped my water bottle cap. So I stopped, then I decided it would be crazy to find it, as I would get hit by on coming cyclists. I took a quick nature break and continued on. I had 4 water bottles with me, so it was ok and I only needed the 4 for this first stretch. Looking back one of these 4 water bottles should have been full of coke.

As I was passing people, I said <<A votre gauche>>, short for <<Je passe a votre gauche.>> I figured might as well speak French while I was there. Then on a hill I said that and I heard "hey that was Trevor". It was Amy Harman and her husband Bob, from Seattle who were in the room next to me at the hotel. Unfortunately, I was halfway way up the hill before I realized it. It was good to know someone I knew was behind me.

Then I came up on a traffic light that I could not see. It was very strange it was like we were going down an alley or something and a bunch of cyclists stopped. I saw the light after passing them. Then I stopped and said sorry.

Then I saw Vytas' favourite bar/café named la Fleur des Pains. It had a bicycle with a mannequin on top. It was great! They were giving free water and free coffee, so I reloaded. I also took a few pictures.

I continued on, eventually I got really, really tired. I jumped off the bike had some caffeine, and took a nature break.

I got on my bike; I was still feeling really, really sleepy. I decided, I needed a 10 minute nap on the road. I was at a "Y" intersection and I napped at the top of the intersection. I set my timer and laid down on the grass. Then, a bike came right at me and stopped. He told me to turn my lights off (he must have thought he was following me, but it was really my bike on the grass). So I decided to turn off my lights each time I

would stop from now on. After the break, which was not planned and in a way was stupid, because I have ridden through the night before on other rides. This stop was a waste of time, but I needed it. It really showed how important sleeping before the event was.

I remember making another quick stop at a garbage can (like I said too many stops), where I saw other cyclists sleeping. I did not sleep this time.

Then the rain came. It was cold, I remember at one point I was wearing my jersey, a sweater and a jacket (or two). I had a hard time seeing the road, so I took my glasses off. Eventually during the rain I got to Mortagne au Perche which was a << Contrôle ravitaillement >>, where there was only refreshments. I saw a café that was open, so I went there and had a coffee. I thought it was the check point but it wasn't so I got out fast and hurried to the check point.

I tried to be as efficient as possible at the check point. I got pasta, water and something to drink, probably more coffee. I saw Sue Pond there. I asked her if I could join here and she said yes, so I sat with her. She was nearly done her meal, but she didn't look like she was in good shape, it looked like the bad weather took its toll on her too. I ate really fast and was actually done before Sue. I told her I just needed to put gatoraid powder in my bottle and I could go. I asked her if we could ride together. She said yes and we left together.

### ***The stretch after Mortagne-au-Perche.***

Sue wasn't feeling good about the ride and wished there was more done to prepare for this. I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. Riding with her on that section, didn't seem comfortable. I didn't know what was wrong. Maybe it was just that she was having a rough ride.

I had to stop a few times to take off clothes as it was warming up. Each time I would catch up with Sue again. Then there was a big hill in a small town. I didn't mean to, but I dropped Sue on the hill. I really needed a nature break, so I thought I was still dropping her and got off my bike. I thought she was behind me. Turned out she caught me and passed me as I stopped, but I didn't know. It was not easy to recognise her as everyone was wearing the same yellow jackets. So I waited for a couple of groups to come up the hill before I gave up on waiting and then kept going. I had hoped nothing happened to her.

I rode for quite some time, slowly passing group after group, I asked them if they saw a girl on a green Bianchi. They didn't know what I was talking about. Eventually there was long straight stretch. I saw way off on the distance someone with the exact same standing position as Sue. I thought, "Could that be her?" So I lifted my pace, but I didn't put the hammer down. Slowly, I got closer and realized it was her. I was happy that she didn't have a flat or some other problem.

Then we rode together, side by side. The cars didn't seem to like it, which didn't make any sense to me, from the advice Vytas gave at the meeting before the ride, which was to just ride on the road and ignore the cars, because they would wait. Sue was pissed off at me about riding with her this way and let me know about it. It all seem strange to

me, until later in the ride, I realized that it was a National highway, so maybe that was why the cars were not happy.

Then something remarkable happened. A rider came up beside me during a climb and started asking me questions in French about my bike Friday. It was amazing. I answered in French and it was a fun conversation, he introduced me to his friend as we were climbing. He was climbing quite fast and had more stuff than me. I was impressed. Eventually he dropped me and his friend. It was great that I could use French to communicate. Unfortunately I dropped Sue in the process of riding with this guy. I was very happy to speak French with him as I had been taking French part time at work since January 2005.

At the top of the climb I found Tom from Seattle. Again he told me a story about someone having a heart attack on a ride. He seemed really nice and it was good to talk to someone where it didn't seem uncomfortable. We rode for a bit but got separated.

### ***The carnival check point of Villaines***

Before the check point in the town of Villaines de Juhel, I saw a small convenience store. I stopped and bought some bananas and some power aid (that way I didn't have to mix more). I then set off for the check point.

If I was touched by the fact that I had a conversation in French with climber guy, then I was knocked off my feet (figuratively) with what happened next... I arrived at the checkpoint. It was a carnival like atmosphere. There was one street where on one side spectators could watch and the cyclists could park there bikes on the other. It was like we were caged animals on display. As I arrived there were announcements on a loudspeaker. I was getting closer to the check point and I heard << Il y a un vélo avec les petites pneus. C'est un Canadian >>. He was talking about me!!! He asked me in French if it was more difficult to ride with small wheels. I responded in French and I tried to explain the concept of gear-inches, but I didn't know the words in French. Then he just corrected what I was about to say, saying something like "it is the same" in French. It was soooo cool!!! I was sooo touched!!! My first ever interview in French! Then I went into the control.

I got my card stamped and looked for food. Then I saw Sue, she was going through the control. She was having difficulty because her control card didn't get stamped at the start. She explained in French. I stood by in support, just in case. Then a higher up official signed off on the first control and we went to have lunch.

We had lunch with some people from her hotel, from Iowa. I ate pasta. I saw Tom, but he didn't see me so he didn't join us. Sue said she had a drop bag and I told her I needed to do few things at my bike, and I might see her on the road.

I got rid of garbage in my pockets and spoke to some of the crowd. I believe that it was getting harder to get my cleats out of my pedals, so I adjusted them. I got ready; I looked for Sue and didn't see her, so I left. I found my pedals were still messed up so I stopped and adjusted them again. I figured that I won't have to get out for a while, so I should get going. It wasn't impossible to get out, but difficult. One side was easy, one side wasn't.

On the road, I still had problems with my cleats and I remember stopping a few times before the next check point to adjust the tension on the pedals. In this section it actually got warm and sunny! I took off my jacket and was wearing my newly swapped Brazilian jersey. I would explain to other riders “I am just from Brazil for today”. I met up with a German rider, who remembered me from the Rocky Mountain. It was nice talking to him. Eventually we got separated.

As I was riding I got a tap on the shoulder as someone was passing me. He said “keep pushing Trevor”. It was Michael Lau! As he passed me a long line of cyclists passed me. The encouragement lifted my spirits. It was great. I saw Michael’s group stop for a coffee somewhere along the route, ahead of me. I should have stopped for one as I really needed one. On this section there were a lot of groups of people cheering us on. It was great and helped keep me going.

## **Fougères**

I got to Fougères and the place where they stamp the control booklet was far from the 1<sup>st</sup> bicycle parking area. I walked up and figured the stretch would do me good. I saw Michael from BC, he looked like he was in rough shape. I went to ask the organizers about the control times, because I had a late start. They told me not to worry about them and to just ensure I do the ride within 90 hours, which I told Michael. If I had a clearer head I would have asked for a sheet of the 84 hour closing times, so that I would know exactly when the organisers were going home.

I went and ate my usually meal of pasta, Orangina, and coffee. I put gatoraid powder in my water bottles. I also took off my shoes and took any mud out from beside the SPD cleats; this helped a lot with my problem of getting out of the pedals.

Then I saw Sue, she was almost ready to go. She looked like a completely different woman. She looked like she was just about to start the ride and was full of energy. This inspired me and lifted my spirits, I was happy she was out of that negative place she was in before. She was wearing her Rando Ontario jersey and looked like she had changed back in Villianes. I chatted with her and we started riding together. Her seat bolt must have loosened and she told me that her seat wasn’t right. I stopped with her and held her bike as she worked on it. There had been many stories of people breaking their seat post bolts (before PBP, I been to Decathlon and I looked for this type of bolt for Michael Lau, because his broke). Sue said that she would only tighten it a little, after telling me that she knew of a lot of people with broken seat post bolts. She tightened it and we started going. She said it didn’t feel right and told me to continue on, so I did.

I was inspired by her, so I was actually able to lift up my pace. The hills just outside of the check point were really, really nasty and it seemed like the route went there on purpose. Eventually there was a flat quiet country road. I took a nature break.

I saw some riders with “Les amis de Vélocio” on their jerseys! I thought it was soo cool. So I said “Vélocio!” in a very enthusiastic voice. Vélocio invented the sport of cyclotourism and the derailleur. I would have loved to swap jerseys with them! I spoke French with them a little but I wish I visited them longer.

Then I saw Sue pass me while drafting a tandem. They were flying, as she passed me, she said “Hi” or something to me. I was happy she said something, but sad because I didn’t think I would see her again.

I continued on and I passed a guy with team Mappi(sp?) shorts and I said “on your left”. He joked with me, “what? Do you think you are in America?” I didn’t have a witty retort, but after I thought of telling him the story about Amy how I said “a votre gauche” to them... I did tell him that story later on in the ride.

I got to the next control, Tinténiac, and looking back, maybe I should have slept for an hour there. I had something to eat and saw Guy from Ottawa there. He said he had just slept and planned on riding through the night. He was just leaving as I arrived. I got ready for night riding and set off.

### ***The rough road to Loudéac***

As I said I should have slept an hour in Tinténiac. The road to Loudéac was tough; the first town was on top of a very big hill. When I got into town I had to sleep. So I found a park bench and slept there for 10 minutes. It helped a lot, but I was still feeling drowsy. I did all the tricks, chewed gum (that Richard the Brazilian gave me before the start), used caffeine gel shots. I was still feeling sleepy. I know I took at least two other sleep stops on benches on the road.

Eventually an Aussie passed me and said his name. I didn’t recognise him, but I guessed he was the one who helped me in the line up at the start. I couldn’t keep up with him. I was feeling very down and I knew that I would be outside of the control time for Loudéac. I knew that the organisers told me that there were an extra two hours tacked on because of the weather. I hoped that was still true.

I was having a rough time going. I remember that I was falling a sleep on the bike. I called Ev and said something like “I have 6 km to the check point and I have 6 minutes to get there, which means 60 km/hr”, which is clearly impossible for me unless it was a long descent. I thought for sure I was done.

Somehow I got myself to the control and expected to be asked to leave. I was sooo tired. I walked up to get my card stamped and asked <<Est-ce que je peux continuer?>> They said “yes, you got in a good time. Keep going.” I was within the 2 hour extra bonus time. I was ecstatic. From that point on, I knew I was getting close to being booted out, so I treated each control as a lottery, if they keep me in then I won the lottery.

I chose to sleep for two hours at Loudéac, this may have been a mistake #4 because I didn’t have any time banked. Maybe I should have slept for less time. I had a drop bag there and changed from my Brazil jersey to my BC Randos one. I didn’t have time for a shower. As I ate breakfast I saw Peter Grant and Vytas. The fact that they caught me at the 450 km mark (they were in the 84 hour group) said that I was not having a good ride. Peter told me quietly and away from Vytas that he was going to abandon the ride. I couldn’t believe it. Peter rides forever. I didn’t know what to say, so I said nothing. Vytas came to the table and said to me “to keep pushing on and that he didn’t want another DNF.” It is weird because I didn’t think Peter had told Vytas yet.

Peter was the 1<sup>st</sup> of a string of people I knew who abandoned; it gave me mixed emotions: 1) sad for them and 2) it made me feel stronger somehow. It is hard to explain.

After breakfast, Vytas and I went to our bikes and he left. I needed a couple more minutes to do my water bottles. Then I left. It is too bad because it would have been nice to ride with Vytas.

### ***The road to Carhaix.***

The road outside of Loudéac was straight up. It was just climbing and climbing. This is the part of cycling I love, or so I thought. At the top of the climb was the town called Trévé. There was a hedge carved out to spell that name, so I absolutely had to stop and take a picture of it. I then continued climbing. As I did, a Swede (Marc?) caught up to me and stayed at my pace for awhile. I can't remember his name. We had a good conversation; it was nice to have someone to talk to. Eventually he didn't like my pace and went off ahead. I also saw my German friend from the Rocky Mountain 1200 and chatted with him.

There was a secret control (secret only because it was not indicated on the queue sheet), like any other control, the officials told us where to ride. When I stopped a couple of Frenchmen were asking me about my bike, I spoke to them briefly and told them I had to go.

I got to Carhaix, they said I could continue on, so I was happy that I would be able to go to Brest. That way at least I would see the route because the route back was basically the same.

I saw Michael from BC there, he told me he had stomach problems and that he had abandoned and that he had to hurry to catch the one and only train back. I told him I was going to Brest and he said he should have abandoned there because there would be more trains there.

I left my pannier bag open and went to rinse and wash my water bottles with the small amount of liquid soap I had brought with me (Alan Ritchie's recommendation). When I got back it had rained. I hoped that my pannier was not full of water.

### ***The slow road to Brest: would I make it halfway?***

I started down the road to Brest. At first it was a busy road, and then it turned off onto a very quiet, forested road. I was riding along and two Frenchmen spoke to me. Then a person coming from the opposite direction came and said something. I didn't understand it, so I asked one of the Frenchmen and he seemed to indicate that it was not about us. As I continued on, I found a female cyclist waiting, I asked her if she was ok and she said she was waiting for her friend.

As I continued on the road, I found my speed was very slow, even on the descents. Looking back, it could have been the wind, maybe, but it seemed fairly sheltered on that road. I then thought, could I have a flat? I pulled over and checked both tires with a gauge to be sure. Nope, the tires were fine. I thought maybe my pannier was full of water, from the rain? Nope, it was fine. I did find that I was carrying a small

coil lock that I meant to leave behind; I decided to drop it off in Loudéac on the way back if I got that far.

I decided my speed was completely mental, and decided to pick up the pace. It worked for a while.

I got out of that forest and there was a big hill going up. It went up and up and up. As I climbed I passed other cyclists. I began to realize that I didn't have much time to make it to Brest, so I picked up the pace. Eventually, I arrived at very beautiful alpine meadow. Because of the climb I took off my jacket (for one of the few times). On the other side of the road going the opposite direction were the cyclists who had already been to Brest. You would think that would bring me down but it did the opposite. I saw cyclists I knew on the other side of the road, I cheered them on and they cheered me on. I saw (not in order): Karen Smith, Patti & Bob on their tandem, Guy from Ottawa, Eric Fergusson, Patrick & Jenny on their tandem and other cyclists I recognized from the hotel. I also got to see some of the unique bicycles like the back-to-back recumbent tandem!

I stopped at a grocery store in the next town. I knew I didn't have the time, but I needed a coke.

## ***The Bridges***

I continued to hammer on to Brest, at one point I didn't understand the arrow, so I asked a local person. I continued on; Another Canadian from Saskatchewan was riding with me for a while, it was nice. Finally, I ended up in a park and there it was: the bridges to Brest that I have seen before in videos and pictures. I got incredibly emotional as I had made it to the halfway mark, while knowing that just before Loudéac, I thought my ride was over. I stopped and took a couple of pictures of my bike on the bridge.

It was windy on the bridge, but I continued on. I got across and there was the city sign, with some cyclists taking pictures, I decided not to stop as I knew my time was tight. I couldn't believe I was there. It was very hilly with a lot of climbing up to the check point. I got to the check point and ask my usually question "est-ce que je peux continuer?" The answer was "oui et quelle est-ce que vous voulez boire?" In Brest they gave a free drink to celebrate the fact that you made it halfway. I could have had a beer, but I could not afford its sleepy effects, so I had a coke.

I found Alain there; he said he had severe saddle soars. I told him that you could ask the doctor to put ointment on them. So he did that.

I then went to the mechanic and asked him about my brake and my pedals. He thought they were fine. I didn't want him to bend the metal back and fatigue it on my break. I was hoping he would lube my pedals like Norm did on the Monday afternoon, but no luck.

I asked a volunteer where the food was, she kindly walked me over there. I found Alain over there, we ate supper together, and he said his saddle sores were still too raw. I showed him my left hand, which was not functioning well because I kept it in the same position on the bike while braking for all the descents. It was ulnar neuropathy. Alan told me the story of his doctor co-league who had a patient with the worst case of

Neuropathy and it was from PBP! I told Alan that I would keep an eye on it. He told me that he was going to abandon and he wished me luck.

I got my lights ready for night riding and gave my mostly used batteries to a volunteer. He kept them. I was happy they would be used.

### ***The road back to Carhaix.***

I was happy there was daylight as I left the large city of Brest. It was easier to navigate. I met up with a Mark from the UK. He was riding with me and he didn't like the sound of my chain. I only put on Teflon lube, so I was sure the rain did it in. He offered to lube my chain, which I gladly accepted. We stopped and he pulled out a syringe full of oil and he just squirted a bit on my chain. I told him that I was slow on the descents and if we got separated then thank you very much. We continued to ride but, unfortunately, I dropped him on the climbs.

It was weird, I seem to remember leaving the city and re-entering it. Anyway on one of the descents, a bunch of German riders caught me. I kept up with them, but didn't join their group. I felt uncomfortable because they were all speaking German. I didn't want them to switch to English just for me.

On one of the climbs one of the German women got dropped. I asked her if she spoke English, she said not really or very little. I told her that I had the opposite problem, that I had problems with descents. I tried to explain in hand gestures, but no luck. I hope I didn't end up freaking her out. She caught up with her group and I kept the same pace.

There was a chance at a stop light for me to join their group; I was in the middle of all of them. I should have taken that chance (yet another mistake), but I was feeling too shy, so I didn't.

It was starting to get dark. I found my self playing leap frog with the large German group and there were a few French riders who would say "Bon soir" as they passed me, so I did the same. I would say that to the Germans too. They would say it back. I was riding with this group, but very loosely. Once it got dark, if I saw someone on the side of the road, I would ask them if they were ok, in French, just in case something was wrong, because it seemed like we were the last on the road.

At the top of one big hill, it seemed like the Germans and Italians stopped for something. I kept on going. My knee was getting really sore. I had not been doing any quad or ITB stretches because I seemed to be constantly trying to make the time cutoffs. I decided to get off my bike and stretch, it was just getting too sore. I stretched while holding my bike up. A French person asked me what was wrong, I told him I had to stretch and he continued on. Then my knee felt better and I continued on. Eventually I rejoined with the Italians, they didn't speak English and I didn't speak Italian. I didn't even think of speaking French to them. Strangely they stopped at a round-about. I continued on, they yelled out "Hey Guy". Then I stopped. I rode with them the rest of the way to Carhaix.

## **Carhaix**

At Carhaix, I ate. I was behind on time, but I decided that I needed an hour sleep anyway (mistake #4). I probably shouldn't have, but I was exhausted. Before I left the control, there was a French rider with a big feather in his helmet, he looked like a cat. He said in a loud voice with a Parisian accent to everyone at the control "it is better to be late in Paris, than crashed on the road, so get some sleep".

The sleeping place was far from the bikes, and it was full of cots, so it was really, really noisy. I had a hard time sleeping but I think I got two 20 minute sleeps in the hour. In those sleeps I was not sure if I was asleep or awake.

I got back to my bike, got ready to go, and started going. I was met up with someone and he said he wanted to ride with me, so that he didn't get lost. We were not sure about the directions, so we waited 30 seconds to see what the riders behind us were doing. Then we were off. Actually he ended up dropping me. Then I caught a rider and said to him "don't worry if you drop me". Turned out it was a totally different person. I apologized.

Then a tandem caught up with me, they said "cool!! A bike Friday". They had a woman on a regular bike following them. Eventually the tandem had to stop for a nature break and I was riding with the woman. From their accents I could tell they were from the US. I spoke with her for a while and then we were getting unsure about the directions, because we had not seen an arrow for a while. I hoped we didn't miss a turn. It seemed to be ok somehow.

It began raining again, it would stop and start. Somehow I lost the American woman and I was alone. It stopped raining. I got really, really tired and decided to take a 10 minute nap on the side of the road. After about 7 minutes, a car pulled up beside me. It was an official. I told him <<une petite dormi>>. He corrected my French by saying <<dormir>> and was relieved I was only sleeping. I continued on. I could see now that the cars were patrolling to keep us safe. I was happy about that.

The sun was coming up. It was good. For some strange reason an Italian guy whistled at me and asked me to stop. I can't remember what he wanted, so eventually I kept going.

I ended up riding with another guy and I saw another woman behind us. We were confused about something and had to stop. We checked with the women and seem like were on the right track.

I continued on and got to Loudéac.

## ***The time crisis at Loudéac***

I got to Loudéac and as I was coming into the control area, Sue Pond was leaving. We briefly said hi. I saw Bill Pye and he said that Sue had gotten in with the Belgians and he couldn't keep up, or something similar to that.

At the control, they told me to make the next time cut off, which was physically impossible. In hindsight, I should have skipped the meal and just drank the Ensure in my drop bag, but I ate pasta which wasted time. I got to my drop bag and found a place just

to change into some new clothes. No time for a shower. I got my water bottles ready and hit the road.

I don't know if I was angry at the guy or if I was just scared of not finishing, but I translated that fear/anger into speed and pushed really, really hard. I was not a happy camper. I knew I would pay for it later, but it felt good. I briefly joined a group where a woman from the UK spoke with me. Unfortunately, I think I was beginning to pay for what I did and I got dropped by them. I began to get really tired.

I decided to take a nap on bench. I placed my bike by the bench. The sun was up by now and it didn't seem to be effective. I heard a car pull up. I thought "oh crap, are they going to steal my bike?" I just slightly opened my eye. It was a photographer! He was talking a picture of me sleeping! I hoped it was one of the commercial photographers for the ride. Then he left. I heard a group of riders pass me; they said "do you think he is posing?" I thought to myself, no I am just trying to get some sleep. It didn't work, because the sun was up. I shouldn't have even tried. Oh well. I got back on my bike and rode.

I got to the secret control before Tinténiac. I got in and out fast. I couldn't decide what I wanted, but got out quickly. I should have had a coffee or better a coke. Oh well.

As I got closer to Tinténiac, the Brazilians caught me. I tried drafting them, but no luck. I couldn't keep their pace, I was slowing and it was bad. They stopped for a coffee at this place across from a church. I remember stopping there before for coffee and some sleep (I slept near the church entrance). I had coffee with them and continued on. Eventually I felt really, really sleepy again and tried to sleep in a field. Again it didn't work. I knew I was not going to make the time cutoff. I was getting a bit discouraged. I was alone on the road.

### **<<Je vous lance>>**

I saw a woman and her small daughter clapping me on the side of the road. I had stickers that I intended to give to people along the route. Ev got them for me and cut them into individual stickers before I left for France. I decided screw the time cutoff. I am stopping and giving that girl some stickers. I stopped and spoke French to them. At first they wanted stickers from other countries. I said I only and Canadian ones because I am Canadian (all in French). She told me a story about a British guy who had stopped and he was crying because he was not going to make the time cut off. I told her I was in the same boat (in French). She told me that food was only X number km away (it was before the check point). She thanked me for stopping. Then she said << Attendez, je vous lance, Attention!>> then she pushed me off!!! IT WAS AS IF I WAS A RACER IN THE TOUR DE FRANCE!!!! I was incredibly touched! I nearly wept. Any discouragement I had was gone.

## ***Many thanks to all the volunteers: extra Cafeteria in Tinténiac.***

I continued on to Tinténiac. I got there; got my card swiped and they had opened their cafeteria for us!!! I was really happy. I had something to eat and I saw the Brazilians there and I saw Marc from the UK who had given me some lube for my chain just outside of Brest. I was happy that he was still going. I ate my food with him and chatted, some of his friends stopped by. He was going to sleep at the table for a bit, so I left him. I said Hi to the Brazilians; Guilherme (one of the Brazilians) told me he was happy to see me there. I think I also saw Bill Pye there.

I actually ended up using the women's washroom because the men's washroom seemed too far away and there were other guys in there. I got on my bike and left after the Brazilians.

## ***The long road to Fougères:***

The road to Fougères, seemed long. I wasn't feeling great. I was very gassy and kept thinking "do I have stomach problems? Why am I so hot? I am sick?"

I saw the Swede who had rode with me before. He was having trouble getting out of his cleats. He had stopped by the road side.

Some of the roads in France have dashed white lines in the centre of the road. If you look closely there is a small, very thin, yellow line right down the middle of the road. I think it is to mark the middle of the road. A car passed me; it looked as though the tires pulled on the little yellow line as if it was a piece of string and the string bounced back. I gave my head a shake. Ok. That was the first hallucination. I kept on thinking, "why am I so hot?" Then I realized. It was because I was going up a hill with my jacket on. I began to realize that the "stomach issues" was maybe a hallucination as well. I decide to stop and check my shorts at the private piece of road. I was fine.

I arrived in a small town and there was a small grocery store open. They had bananas! (I couldn't find any at the last check point). They also had chocolate muffins. I bought some bananas for the road and ate 3 chocolate muffins. I think it was the first time I ate chocolate on the trip. Can you believe it? Then as I was eating the muffins, the Swede came crashing in, literally. He slid sideways on his bike on the road to stop. The store owner immediately asked "are you ok?" He said "yes, yes, I need a bathroom very fast". She said something about the church. He said "I know, but..." She then helped him out. I guess his hallucination was real. I left and saw the bathrooms by the church.

I felt much better after the food. I think I was bonked before that. As I got closer to Fougères, I remembered the nasty hills they sent us on. I hoped they wouldn't send us there on the return route. I was wrong. As I came up to one of the nasty hills, I saw a guy on a recumbent walking his bike up the hill. I made a comment to him about the nasty hills and then passed him.

I got to the control at Fougères. I decided because I was under the gun to ride right up to the control (last time I walked to stretch). As I walked to the building after parking my bike, I heard people say that the control was closed. I ignored them and continued walking. I got to the control and all the magnetic swipe readers had been put

away. I gave them my documents; they said they would enter me into the computer by hand. I was relieved. I had just barely made it. Whew! I won the lottery again! I should have taken this as writing on the wall for things to come, but instead, I went to eat and get ready for night riding.

I ate with Bill Pye. He told me that he would abandon because of a few problems he was having (I can't remember what they were). I decided to continue on. I probably should have tried to minimize my time at that control. Instead I got everything ready for night riding and I re-arranged things in my pannier.

### ***The Dark road to Villianes.***

Leaving Fougères, the bicycle parking lot was very empty. I hurried to set everything up. I saw Bill Pye one last time as one of the organizers was trying to find his bike. I got on my bike and rode. There was no organizer kindly pointing which way to go. I was worried I would be alone for the rest of the ride, with no one behind me. I saw one red light of a rider in front of me. I was following him and the arrows. It started to get dark, so I stopped to put my helmet light on. I got back on my bike and rode. I caught up with a German rider and passed him as he stopped.

Then there was a long hill ahead of me. I could see two red lights on the hill. One was at the top of the hill and one was part way up. The lower one turned off go another direction; one continued straight up the hill. I thought the one up the hill missed a turn so at the top of my lungs I yelled "Hey!!!" No luck. No change. I got to the point where they separated; there was no arrow, so I continued on.

Either a rider passed me or I caught her. I am not sure which. We started riding together. I tried to talk to her in English, but it didn't work (remember the German girl the night before). This girl, whom I was riding with, said with a French accent that I spoke too fast in English. It took me a few minutes, but I got the courage to speak to her in French. It worked. She explained her plan of doing 20 km/hr and how she did not eat at the last checkpoint. We started talking in French. It was good. In a way it was the best part of the ride for me as I felt for the first time, truly functionally bilingual. I didn't know every word, but would sometimes use English words, but that seemed rare. I was happy to have someone to ride with and chat with. I didn't quite catch her name, it was a French name, but I didn't recognize it.

As we rode, a rider caught up with us and passed us. He said, with American accent "bonne courage" as he left. I could just see his red light leaving us in the dust.

It was late at night, we entered a town, and there was a small shop open. They asked in French, do you want a crepe? She said to them, <<pourquoi pas?>> We stopped. I knew she needed to eat and I needed coffee. I asked for a coffee, they gave it to me for free! Even after I asked in French, how much it cost. They put a bunch of crepes in a plastic cup for her. They gave me one which I ate. I didn't want any for the road. I had bananas and the like. The crepes were really good. We hit the road again. She told me she was from the east of Paris.

Then she apologized to me and said that we won't go on anymore. She said she really needed sleep. I told her that I was dying to sleep. There was a T intersection that we stopped at, where the horizontal part of the "T" was the part of road we were riding

on. I started to set my watch to wake us up in 10 minutes and put my bike in the grass. She said she had to sleep right now and slowly put herself on the ground. THE ROAD!! I didn't know what to do. We weren't on the main road, but I was worried. I wasn't sure what to do, I was really tired and went to sleep in the grass... but I couldn't sleep!!! What if she got run over!!! Eventually the 10 minutes ended and Thank God, nothing happened. She got up and we got back on our bikes.

I told her how worried I was and maybe next time, not to sleep on the road. We continued riding. I must have taken a good tone with her and she didn't seem upset or anything. Whew! Looking back I should have moved her from the road.

We continued riding and this time I was getting really, really sleepy. I told her. We were in another town and she found an alcove to someone's doorway. We sat on the steps and slept there. 10 minutes later we were back up and on our bikes.

The lines on the road were very good at this point. It was beginning to rain again. There were a bunch of descents that we needed to do. She descended like a downhill skier or a professional bike racer. I used this to my advantage as I could see all the best "lines" (downhill ski jargon) to descend. Where were these descending skills at the start of the ride? Any fear of descents was gone. There was only one corner which seemed a bit gnarly, but I managed it. She had stopped before starting a climb. I asked her if she raced and told her that her descending skills were amazing. She said she was a racer. She had to take a quick break to do something but then we continued on.

She offered me some of the crepes, I said I was ok. As we continued on, there were no longer lines on the road and it was pitch black. It was hard to see the road and there was a lot of descending. I was beginning to fall asleep on the bike. It was bad combination, sleeping on the bike and descents. I began to do every trick, gum, caffeine, talking to myself. It helped, but eventually I needed to stop again to sleep. I told her this and we stopped on the side of the road. This time, she didn't sleep on the road, but on the grass. I woke myself a couple of times because I was snoring. We woke up and I apologized for the snoring.

I was finding it was hard to keep up with her. Maybe I was pushing too hard to stay with her. I remember us finding a giant red arrow! Beside it was a regular fleche, so it was the correct way. We caught up with some other riders. I told her that I couldn't keep up with her and that she should go on without me (she was waiting for me somewhere). That was the last I saw of her. I wished I took down her frame number to see if she had finished.

### ***The delirium of Villianes.***

As I got into the town of Villianes there was a sign saying the name of the town. Beside it a cyclist was pointing to the sign saying over and over again "this is the control". Next to him is someone saying "no that just the name of the town". If I was more with it, I would have ignored all these guys and kept going. I got to a building (turns out it was a hospital), where I saw a lot of cyclists sleeping. I saw Tom from Seattle, he told me that he spent 4 hours looking for the controls and riding with a bunch of cyclists and they kept changing. I should have thought these guys are out of it and just stayed on the road. I kept hearing from other cyclists that the control was closed. So I got off my bike and walk around the Hospital. I was confused. Was this the control, but now it is closed? I

called Ev to tell her what was going on. Eventually I saw another cyclist who said it was closed. I got some common sense and asked him “where is the control?” He said straight ahead. I found the control and there were bikes there. I found some volunteers. They said the place for the stamps looked closed but they had sleeping facilities and food. I called Ev to tell her that I found the control but it was closed. Ev urged me to get them to sign my control card, but I felt weird about it. Maybe I should have and then continued on. I had something like 12 hours to do 225 km (a very tough 225 km). I decided no, that I was done. I was outside the control times and I was very sleepy. I could have kept going, but I would constantly have the question on my mind, would it count?

Hindsight in this case was not 20/20. Looking back I could have asked the volunteer to put his name and phone number down, as proof. But then after talking with Dave McCaw when I got home in Ottawa, he said “you did the right thing, the control times are there for a reason, and you got back with all your legs and arms, and didn’t crash”. I also checked Sue’s time (when I got back to Ottawa) for the last 225 km, it took her 15 hours, I was going slower than her, and so I wouldn’t have made it.

Anyway what is done is done. I was really happy that the volunteers were there that late after the control was closed, to help us stragglers out. They were incredibly friendly and helpful. I didn’t look at my watch at that time, but from my phone records with Ev the time was 4:45 am. I went and told Tom where the control was. I went to get something to eat and met other cyclists. They were talking about riding the last sections the next day. I thought I would eat, sleep and then decide. They also told me how they stopped stamping at this control at 1:30 am except for one French woman. I wonder if that was the person I was riding with. I really should have gotten her frame number, to see if she finished.

The volunteers were great throughout the ride. I had decided that if I had to stop riding somewhere along the ride, that I would give the rest of my Canadian stickers to them. So I did. I gave them to a young girl who was helping out. She didn’t understand what I was doing at first, and then someone told her to keep them.

The volunteers thought that it wasn’t safe to have all these bikes out by the road, so I locked mine with a German guy’s bike. That was very nice of him! Then I went to sleep.

### ***The morning after the madness & how to get back to Paris.***

The next morning I got up and I felt a lot better. My hand was still giving me trouble, so I decided not to ride the last sections. I ate breakfast and decided to take a taxi to the train station. Someone (Mathew?) from Seattle offered to split the price with me because it was quite pricey. I went to figure out the train schedule with some of the volunteers. They gave me the times of the trains and the taxi had already shown up. I quickly grabbed my stuff and got in the taxi. Others like John and Sarah from BC, were going to ride to a different train station nearby.

We took the taxi to Le Mans. The taxi driver drove very aggressively, I thought as the Seattle Rando and I talked “so this is what the roads looked like from the car’s point of view”. We didn’t take the route back. We ended up at the train station in LeMans and I had to change our tickets about 3 times to get it right. Was my French

failing me? I think I was I just sooo tired. We missed one train, which I saw my Brazilian friends take. They looked very very sad. Just before our train came, a bunch of riders arrived from another train. A Dane was very astute and decide to get things organized and spoke with the train management. He got an extra car put on, so we could but our bikes on that car.

Some people where going to Paris and others to Versailles (I think). The Dane got us tags so we could mark them. I was a bit nervous about the whole thing.

The train ride to Paris was not as depressing as I thought it would be. We met a professional writer who was doing the ride on a certain bike to write a story about doing PBP on that bike. He had some great stories about the hallucinations that people had, so we were all laughing. What else could we do? Some people got off at Versailles and we continued on. My bike was the first bike in the car, so would be the last bike out. When we got to Paris, I didn't realize that we were at the end of a train line and I thought the train would leave at any minute, so I got in the car and started handing bikes to people. It seemed like no one was helping (except the people I met on the train). They were all standing outside of the train car. Eventually I heard a whistle and thought "Shit! The train is leaving!!!" So I grabbed my bike and jumped from the car. Everyone was shocked. I felt really stupid as the train was not going. I landed ok. I guess my Achilles tendons were ok (unlike the Rocky Mountain 1200). A group of us got on our train and headed back to St. Quentin-en-Yvelines.

The worst thing about not finishing is that you don't get all the hoopla at the end of the ride at the finished. I felt like I really missed out. Back at the hotel I visited with a lot of new friends and old ones and traded storeys. I was feeling really down. One strange but funny moment was when I was having supper with Jenny and Patrick from BC and we were eating pizza. My left hand was soo messed up I could not hold a knife or fork properly. Jenny had the exact same problem. She said "Look Trevor can't hold a knife or fork, just like me!" She asked me how long it would take to heal, I said nerve damage can take months. Hence the reason for the last section below.

## ***Dénouement***

It is now Janury 2008, and I still haven't completely recovered from PBP and that is a story in itself.

Once I got back to Ottawa, I rode my minimal distance to and from work (10 km each way). We had car problems on one of our cars and I thought I needed to do this, because Ev needs a car for work. I saw my physio and she told me to mobilize my fingers which didn't function. I had the classic ulnar nerve claw paralysis and after about a week my finger began to work again, but my hand was very weak. Another thing which I should probably not have done was that I played ultimate a couple times a week. I was finding it was harder and harder to catch the disc after each game.

In early October, I saw a specialist who attached electrodes to me and sent signals down the nerve which had the problem, the ulnar nerve. He told me I had two options: surgery (which is 50/50 for this procedure), or to wear a splint on my arm 24 hours a day 7 days a week to immobilize my arm. So I chose the splint. Ev and Chris Kraft made it for me, since that is within their profession. The splint was very good; I was only allowed to take it off in the shower. After the next visit with the specialist, he

told me to do elbow mobilization exercises in the shower, because my elbow was locking up in a straight position. He also told me I could ride a recumbent bike at the gym, but no competitive sports. I was sooo happy to do some form of exercise again.

I had no use of my left elbow from early October, till just before Christmas. The neuropathy in my hand had gotten better each day I was in that splint. Eventually I could skip using the splint and use 3 sets of tensor bandages. I found them hard to wrap around my arm, so often I would go back to the splint. I would have the occasional setback, but on Dec 17<sup>th</sup>, I had gotten the use my elbow back for Christmas!!!

Now like I said, it is January 2008 and I have a new problem, my lack of range of motion in my elbow. I am slowly making progress with that each day.

## ***Thank yous***

I want to thank Vytas and Mike Lau for their constant support over the years. Of course Dan Beavon, who was the one who told me inspirational stories about PBP the first year I moved to Ottawa. I need to thank Jean Robert from Montreal who road with me the first 100 km of a 200 km ride, where it took me forever to finish that ride. Other than my nerve, I think I was more messed up after that ride, than PBP. Things were looking really bleak after that ride. I need to thank Alain for his constant eagerness to do PBP throughout the cycling season; it inspired me to do the ride, especially seeing the little PBP logo on the back of his jersey on the 600 km Brevet that really inspired me to go to France. I need to thank the guys at Full Tilt bike shop as they were always did quick quality work to help me with my bicycle repairs and maintenance. I need to thank my close friend Janet for not letting me play the last game of ultimate in the summer (to reduce the risk of injury). I also need to thank Real Prefontaine for putting us in the same hotel as the BCers, it was great being in the same hotel with them, as my first year of randonneuring was in BC. Of course, I need to thank all the BC randos I met and had helped me out. Especially the three randos that helped me on the road after my fall, Karen, Amy, and Ron.

The woman who launched me just like in the tour de France, needs to be thanked. If it wasn't for spectators like her along the road side, PBP wouldn't be what it is today. Of course I would be remiss for not thanking all the volunteers along the route, without them, there would be no PBP.

I found my knowledge of the French language before, after and during the ride an incredible asset. I need to thank the people who helped me with my French before going on this ride: Janet, Amy, Brad, Michèle, Ingrid, and, of course, Pam, who would force me to speak French before ultimate. Also I need to thank my excellent teachers at Stats Can.

I need to thank Mark for the oil outside of Brest and the young French woman I rode with the last night. I need to thank my physio Heather Grewar who without her hard work and outside of the box thinking with regards to my neck/shoulder problem, I wouldn't have been able to qualify for PBP. Finally I need to thank my wife for all of her support. Riding 1000 km of PBP's 1227 km after not really riding long distance due to an injury the year before, was a gift.

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