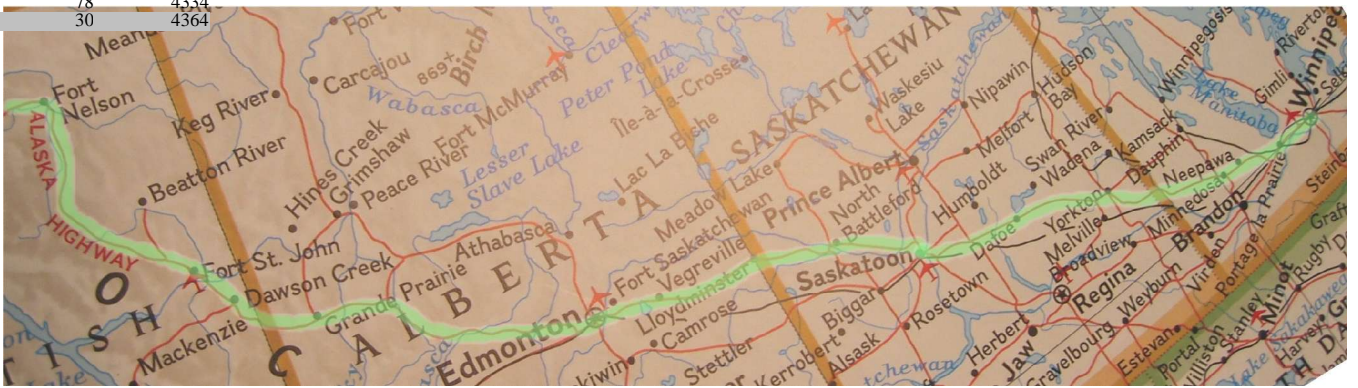


Fairbanks to Winnipeg

Fairbanks	0	0
North Pole	40	40
Richardson	86	126
Big Delta	34	160
Delta Junction	15	175
Dot Lake	86	261
Tok	94	355
Tetlin Junction	20	375
Northway	63	438
Beaver Creek	71	509
Burwash Landing	152	661
Kluane	71	732
Haines Junction	79	811
Canyon Creek	34	845
Whitehorse	118	963
Johnsen Crossing	124	1087
Teslin	67	1154
Swift River	124	1278
Rancheria	30	1308
Watson Lake	121	1429
Coal River	140	1569
Liard River	70	1639
Muncho Lake	60	1699
Toad River	50	1749
Summit Lake	50	1799
Fort Nelson	160	1959
Prophet River	80	2039
Sikanni Chief	130	2169
Pink Mountain	50	2219
Wonowon	70	2289
Fort St. John	73	2362
Dawson Creek	74	2436
Borden	42	2478
Grande Prairie	91	2569
Valley View	115	2684
Fox Creek	88	2772
White Court	72	2844
Mayerthorpe	45	2889
Gunn	60	2949
Carvel	34	2983
Jct. 60 W of Edmonton	26	3009
Jct. 21 E of Edmonton	40	3049
Lavoy	87	3136
Vermillion	85	3221
Lloydminster	50	3271
Maidstone	55	3326
Brattleford	82	3408
Saskatoon	148	3556
Colonsay	72	3628
Jansen	97	3725
Elliot	54	3779
Yorkton	118	3897
MB Border	85	3982
Binscarth	35	4017
Shoal Lake	56	4073
Minnedosa	53	4126
Neepawa	36	4162
Gladstone	37	4199
Portage La Prairie	57	4256
Winnipeg	78	4334
Home	30	4364



Alaska trip report.

July 30th, 2004

Route: Fairbanks, Whitehorse, Watson Lake, Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Lloydminster, Battleford, Saskatoon, Yorkton, Minnedosa, Portage La Prairie, Winnipeg, Home, sweet home.

State/ Provinces: Alaska, Yukon, BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba.

Statistics:

Start date and time: July 10th 4:00 AM

Finish date and time: July 24th 2:55 PM (11:55 AM Alaska time)

Total elapsed time: 13 days 7 hrs 55 min.

Total approx. distance: 4400 km.

Total pedal rotations: 1,000,000 per leg

Avg. distance per 24 hrs: 330 km

Approx. average riding time per day was around 16 hrs. (this included about 2 hours for food and bathroom needs.

Avg. "off " bike time at night was around 8 hrs.(activities during this time included finding accommodations (at least a bed), food, showering, minor bike needs, washing one set of cycling clothes, about 5 hrs of sleep, food, bathroom, and packing up.)

2 flat tires

No major bike repairs

Purpose and goals of the ride

In 2001 I had attempted a Fundraising Ride home from Inuvik (Northwest Territories) to Point Pelee in Southern Ontario (furthest point north in Canada accessible by road to the furthest point south), a distance of 7200km. This was a supported ride with motor home behind me offering security, protection and any and all of my personal needs. I had underestimated the terrain, however. If I had any hope of meeting my planned daily targets, I needed to ride 19 to 20 hrs each day. This was the only way I could hope to meet my schedule. After 4.5 days of this merciless schedule, complete exhaustion and severe breathing difficulty forced me to abandon my trip in 2001. I had simply misjudged the challenge. Since that time I have cycled the Winnipeg to southern Ontario stretch, but have always planned on redoing my first failed attempt of the north. In order to keep the cost down, I chose to attempt this ride without a crew. I needed to carry my own "stuff" for the entire 4400KM. This added significant weight, making the second attempt more difficult. I chose a different starting point (Fairbanks), so I only required one bike this time. All 730km of the road from Inuvik to the Klondike Junction are gravel, which requires different wheels. I also set no planned daily distance, but rather a planned daily time on the bike. The terrain (mountains) and conditions (road, weather, etc.) would determine the daily distance.

My second goal was to learn how many hours "off bike" time is enough to repeat this extreme effort day in and day out, without breaking down physically or mentally. Where is my breaking point?

The third purpose was to simply get physical and mental training for my “Cross Canada” fundraising event in 2005 for the MCF orphanage organization in Kenya, Africa.

The Journey Home

I arrived in Fairbanks at 8:15 pm. on Friday, July 9th. The only hotel reservation I had made was for my first night. The Days Inn was the place for preparation, a few hrs of sleep (3.5 hrs) and I also left my return ticket torn up in the garbage. That was the final commitment. Getting home was now dependent on my own strength, my bike, and my Lord. This realization made it difficult to sleep.

As I landed in Fairbanks, the smoke from all the forest fires made it difficult to see. I was quite concerned about the possible impact this might have on my breathing.

The 4:00 AM start came quickly. The sun was up. In Alaska, in June and July, the sun does not really set. A sunset looks like somebody sliding through home base, but continuing on to circle the bases again. It is an experience I wish everybody could enjoy at least once in their life.

The weather was great, except for the haze as a result of all the fires in the area. The haze never effected my breathing, for which I was thankful. My first days on the ride home consisted of low teen temperatures at night and mid-to-high twenty temperatures during the day. NO RAIN. I was very grateful. Fairbanks to Whitehorse is just under 1000km. If all went well, I could reach it in 3 days. Since population and services are scare, a concern of mine was night accommodations, water, and food. Four times I asked for and received water from tourists. Every evening created a fair bit of anxiety. I never knew where or if I would find a bed. The first night I rode 15km gravel road off my route to an Indian reservation to a so-called lodge. This “lodge” was a combination airplane hangar, pub, restaurant, and yes it had a few rooms with yellow running water. Upon entering the lodge office “pub” I was greeted with a “Hi, where have you been?” by one of the female patrons.

Her vision must have gotten better, because eventually she realized her mistake. She now wanted to apologize with a hug, but to my relief, she did settle for a “high five”.

I ended up helping make my own sandwich in the cooking area, and quickly retreated to my room with 1960's shag carpets. Not much changed in roadside accommodation till I reached Dawson Creek. I had different expectations when I heard the word “lodge”. In Alaska or the Yukon it can simply mean an old housetrailer, cut in a few extra doors, put numbers on top, and call it “Valley View Lodge”. It worked for me. All 13 nights on the road I had a “bed”, for which I was extremely grateful. My only other option would have been to ride through the night. I never had to do that.

Kluane Lake is about 275 km west of Whitehorse. I was fortunate to cycle along its shores for about 2.5 hrs.early in the morning, I was spending time listening to worship hymns, spending time in quiet prayer and meditation, while watching the fog lift slowly. As the sun strengthens, it gently casts rays through the pine forest. On one side is the lake, while the other side of the Alaska Highway is bordered by a mountain range with snowcaps glistening in the morning sun. A scene like that, and there were many, casts no doubt that earth was created by a wonderful and majestic God.

In Fairbanks and also later in Edmonton, I picked up some of my supplies that I had sent ahead.

While the scenery has a lot of rugged beauty, the wildlife is abundant. I was fortunate to see much of wildlife known to the far north.

Within a few hours on the first day I saw a moose with its calf.

I saw wild horses that were not so wild. They would not get out of my way.

A few feet away from me, a herd of thirty bison were grazing in the ditch.

I saw caribou and elk as well as deer.

Mountain goats were “hanging out” on the road by the dozens. As I approached, they scampered down the side of the cliff. I thought they were goners, because the slope was so steep. No problem for them, however.

A few hundred ft ahead, I saw, what I believed to be a cougar, or at least an animal belonging to the cat family.

The ditches, many overgrown with shrubs and high grass, were also ideal berry picking places for black bears. I saw a number of them. I wonder how many I rode by, due to the growth on the side of the road.

One evening, a number of tourists slowed and rolled their window down and gave me warnings about a grizzly on my side of the road. At first I thought nothing of it. When the third vehicle felt obligated to alert me to this imminent encounter with a grizzly, I started to wonder a bit. As I approached the talked about bend in the road, sure enough, there he was. The grass and shrubs were high. Sitting on his rear, he towered over them. He was busy getting his bed time snack of berries. Vehicles were of no concern to him. He was also at least 50 to 60 ft away from the road. As I approached with my bike, he right away took note. He sat up straight to watch me ride by. I was pleased that he had not signed up for a “meals on wheels” program.

Forest fires

Although the haze did not affect me, the aftermath of the devastating fires on both sides of the highway left a lasting impression. I could still smell the cold ashes of the burnt pine trees. It was eerie, to say the least. I also spotted a number of small fires way in the distance. On one occasion a helicopter with a big water bucket on a long cable picked up water from a lake on the left side of the road, transported it directly over my head to extinguish a fire on the right side of the road. Had he wanted to, he could have certainly soaked me thoroughly. That was a rather unique spectacle.

A bizarre incident

On day ten, I left Fox Creek early morning again. Now that I was no longer way up north, the sun just started to reveal its beauty and splendor again. It was a peaceful ride.

An early morning mental lapse almost derailed my progress, or could have even put an end to my trip. I left a bungee cord untied. After about half an hour of riding, this suddenly got caught in the spokes. Everything came to an abrupt stop. The cord was stretched so tight, that it looked like a nylon rope. Half an hour later I had successfully untangled the mess, with no damage to the wheel. My Rolf Vector wheels continuously deliver more than what is reasonable to expect. After getting back to riding and enjoying God’s creation, I heard steps approaching from behind. I glanced back, thinking I saw a dog chasing me. In the middle of nowhere. A dog??? A second look quickly changed that. I was being chased by a coyote. I yelled at it to go away, but no such luck. The coyote was after my calves. That made cycling rather difficult, and outrunning was not an option any more. I unclipped my shoe and proceeded to kick at it, while cycling with my left foot. Not liking the resistance, the coyote switched over to the other side, where my foot was still clipped in. Repeating my defence led to a number of minutes of kick, pedal, pedal, kick episodes. The coyote kept coming at me. Then I heard a car approaching from the rear. I thought, great the coyote will be scared off when the car stops. All that happened was it backed off as the car sped by at full speed. When all was clear, he came at me again. By this time I was angry with its

persistence. I was not afraid of serious injury, but I also thought this coyote had to be sick to attack a human on a bike. Even a “nick or scratch” from it, would have forced me to find a hospital and have it checked out. I wanted nothing to do with that. I was on my way home and making good progress. As it approached me from the left, it overshot a bit. Now it was slightly in front of my left foot. Well within range. All the years of soccer finally came in handy. The tip of my cycling shoe connected so perfectly to the side of its head. I just heard a “thud”. He staggered and went off to the side, into the ditch and lay down. I am afraid I was not a good Samaritan. Needless to say, I did not offer it any of my advice. The next hour I looked behind me every couple of minutes.

Roads, weather, terrain

Although the Alaska highway is paved, the surface is rough on the 23mm road tires I was riding on. Many long sections are always under construction. Repairs consist of crushing up the existing surface, adding tar and ground up slate rocks, then rolling it smooth. The end result is an even surface for cars, rather jagged for a road bike, however. Just sitting on it to remove leg warmers hurt.

It was always a little unnerving on down hills. My odometer (something I rely on a lot) gave out on the first day. I never knew exactly the speeds I reached on some of those down hills. I just knew when an unexpected gravel section came in the midst of a high speed descent, don't use the breaks, just hang on.

I was blessed with excellent weather. No rain for the first ten days. The wind was never a big factor. Overall, I would say I had more favourable wind direction, then non-favourable.

Fairbanks to Dawson Creek is in the mountains, the grades are such, that I was able to climb (including the extra gear) with a double chain ring, versus a triple. You may as well learn to love those hills.

Traffic

I was pleased with the traffic in general. It was only on the stretch from Russell, MB to Shoal Lake, MB (75km) that I sensed danger being on the road. Alaska and the Yukon basically have RV traffic. One motor home is bigger and more expensive than the next. They all, of course, have to pull a \$45,000 SUV behind them. All the gravel must have done quite a number on the paint jobs. It would be interesting to hear some of the rather creative explanations to Autopac.

The middle third syndrome

Any Ultra marathon event I have participated in tends to divide itself into three parts. This is especially applicable on 24 to 48 hr events. There is the first third where there is still excitement from the start. You had all these dreams, goals, and ambitions. You were going to do this. This was going to be a once in a lifetime accomplishment. Then reality hits hard. You are done physically. It is not fun. Everything hurts. You begin to doubt your ability to continue. You question your decision to enter this race. You feel like you are simply in over your head. Now what? You are barely a third of the way through, you are ready to give up. I can best compare this state to cycling through the tunnels on Trans Canada highway around the Hells Gate area. There are 8 tunnels in total. I remember the first time I cycled through one of them. I almost freaked out. All noises are so exaggerated. A small car sounds like a locomotive coming your way. There is also this damp air that is eerie, especially accompanied by dim lighting. Six of the eight

tunnels are short enough to always be able to see a light (either behind you or in front of you) at the end of the tunnel. There is a lot of comfort in that light. Two tunnels are so long with a couple of curves that this light disappears. The anxiety level goes up. Everything becomes extremely exaggerated. You lose the sense of security the light at the end of the tunnel offers. I call it hope. You only have one option, if you want to see the light. Stay on the bike and pedal.

So it is with the middle third in an ultra marathon event. You see no light, you see no hope. This feeling of despair will last for hours, maybe even a day. That is a long time without hope. If participants drop out, this is usually where it happens. I have been one of those on a number of occasions. This same trip in 2001 ended at the beginning of this middle third. If you find a way to fight your way through this seemingly impossible task, there will be light again. There will be hope again. Your physical condition will be no better, probably even worse. The last third will have even more pain, discomfort, than before, but you have hope that this will come to an end. That is what keeps you going hour after hour. Realizing that this trip would take a lot more than 48 hrs, the length of the middle third could last anywhere from 4 to 7 days. I truly feared the temptations I would face during that time. I did not think I was strong enough mentally to continue on that long without my light at the end of the tunnel. I knew all my challenges would seem overwhelming. I decided to take a different approach. I created 14 individual events in my mind. I never worried or thought about tomorrow. I dealt with today. My middle third, although very difficult, only lasted about 5hrs. I found a way to deal with it. Tomorrow was another day.

Lessons learned

I learned that an avg. of 8 hrs “off bike time” at night was enough for me to recover to the point that physically I was able to repeat the workload day in and day out.

I learned the 8 hrs. “off bike time” was enough for me to mentally and emotionally recover to the point that I was able to go out the next morning again.

I learned that working within your limits can lead to exceeding your expectations while working beyond your limitations can lead to DNFs.(did not finish)

I learned that extra weight on your bike makes climbing a huge challenge, but increases the speed on your descent.

I learned most humans are stronger physically, than mentally. We give up before we need to.

I learned that acupuncture works. When the rest of your body hurts more than your butt, you forget about that discomfort.

I have learned that boredom is only a state of mind, easily overcome by a focus on the task at hand.

I have learned 13 days 8 hrs on the bike makes your body stink, no matter how many showers you take.

I have learned that your body becomes a little like a machine. Consume a lot of calories, work hard, your system simply works much faster. In with the new, out with the old. Up to six times a day. At times I felt like a car filling up with gas. Fifteen minutes after eating my energy level was back.

I have learned that sleep can be the most precious gift.

I have learned progress is made one rotation at a time.

I have learned that coyotes are not very smart.

I have learned that perseverance is the cornerstone of success.

I have learned that God is and will continue to be in charge of anything I do.

I have learned that Fairbanks is far away from home, but coming home is worth all the effort it took.

Conclusion

My cycling has become a key part in developing my character. I like to ride my bike, yes, but I can't say that is what draws me to this activity. I believe it is the emotions I experience on a journey like this, that shape and mold the person I am and I have yet to become. Riding my bike is just a tool. God has placed all of us on this earth to make a difference in this world. We are created to serve Him and others. This happens at work, at home, and with friends. We are created to transmit God's love for man by sharing it with each other. We are here to encourage and motivate one another. There is a lot of work left to be done. I never will be the best long-distance rider. I have no ambition to be that either. I have made a commitment to God that I will serve, even through my cycling activities. The project I am planning (Cross Canada Fund Raising initiative for an Orphanage in Africa) for next year is a big one. I will continue to need support and prayer. This journey was just one step of preparation.

I just want to make a special acknowledgement to my family and the support I receive.

It is not easy for Ruth, my wife, to allow me to venture out like this. There are a lot of unknowns. A lot of things at home fall under her responsibility. My kids are so great as well. They are supportive (they do say 'better you than us, Dad').

Next year's project is a family project. I just happen to be the one in the saddle.

I want to thank God, my personal Lord and Saviour, for protection, strength, health, courage, and good weather.

Thanks
Arvid

ARVID LOEWEN: Riding History & Preparation for Spoke 2005

1993: - my first 40 km bike ride. I was unable to finish and Ruth had to come and pick me up, with 10 km to go.

1994: - began solo 100-200 km rides on weekends.

1995 – 2001: - participated in approximately 15 ultra-marathon events/races such as:

1. Boston-Montreal-Boston, 1200 km
2. Rocky Mountain 1200 km
3. Paris-Brest-Paris 1200 km
4. Firecracker 500(miles) - Iowa, USA 1st place in Rookie category which qualified me for RAAM (Race across America)

Race across Oregon 840 km

Furnace Creek 508 (miles) – also known as the toughest 48 hours in sport

Training rides from London, Ontario to Winnipeg (2400 km), Vancouver to Edmonton (1200 km), and Edmonton to Winnipeg (1300 km)

Spoke '99 – Fundraising for Family Life Network. 2400 km in 5 days, 11.5 hours. Vancouver to Winnipeg

Spoke 2001 – Inuvik to Point Pelee, 7200 km DNF (I was not able to finish and had to abandon after 4.5 days)

Fairbanks to Winnipeg, summer 2004, 4400 km training ride in preparation for Spoke 2005. 13 days, 8 hours

Since 1994 my average annual riding distance is approx. 13-15,000 km

Ultra-marathon cycling offers the unique opportunity to develop character as a result of the physical, mental, and emotional challenges. It offers an opportunity to experience emotional extremes (highs and lows) within a very defined period of time. Although non-stop races lasting anywhere from 24 – 72 hours are fulfilling, my real satisfaction comes from when I can use my ability to persevere to benefit a good cause such as Mully Children's Family.