

Recumbent Touring

Miles for Clean Air

A Tour of the Canadian Rockies by Double Vision

Story & photos by Alice Snodgrass



It really all started some years ago, when I talked my brother, Sheryl, into going on bike rides with me. At that time we both had single standard, or "weegee" bikes, as we now call them. This lasted for only a few rides. We had trouble talking and felt like we weren't riding together as would get separated altogether because of traffic or different riding abilities. Soon we weren't enjoying our outings as much as we had hoped. We then bought our first "weegee" tandem. We really enjoyed always being together, being able to talk. We also found that a tandem really is great for riders with different riding abilities. You both put what you can into it and your net performance is the result. Our riding improved as we began to give more and more repeated rides.

We began having some trouble with back pain on longer rides. I had big problems with my hands and arm getting numb. This took a lot of our new found fun away. We worked hard to change our riding style and different things on the bike to correct this. With very little success we got pretty frustrated.

Then it happened! I rode a recumbent bike. At that point I had to have one! After Sheryl rode one it

was on easy sell. So after much research we bought a "Double Vision" recumbent from Advanced Transportation Products in Seattle, Washington. From that time on we really began to truly enjoy our riding. What an awesome move for our riding pleasure and comfort. We began doing more rides and made longer rides. No more back aches, no more sore shoulders and hands. What a pleasure!

Our favorite local riders are the ones put on by the American Lung Association of Washington (ALAW). When we heard about a ride they were putting on, Sheryl thought this would be a great long distance test for our new tandem. Only a few years before, Sheryl thought a ride of 5 miles to Starbucks was a big ride!

It's called the Kalispell to Calgary, Five Parks Ride, it was a 10 day trip with 5 days of riding with 2 layover days. We met at a campground in Kalispell, Montana. About 55 riders rolled in throughout the day. As we pulled our bike out folks gathered around to ask if that was what we were going to ride on the whole trip? Tents started popping up and new friendships began.

DAY 1—MONTROUSE

After breakfast, the day's course briefing, and last minute packing—we were off. The warmth of the sun was wonderful as we pedaled back roads, taking in the beautiful farms with snow capped mountains in the background and enjoying the flat roads. This was a great warm up day, taking our time, getting to know fellow riders. Passing through several small Montana towns like Whitefish, the day's temperature climbed to the mid 80's.

After about thirty miles we came to a water park which we just could not resist. We dived our suits and hit the water! We stayed for several hours, enjoying the sun and the water slides. A sign should be posted at the biggest slide - hold on to your shorts! Everyone got a nuclear weegee going down this 80 foot drop! We found several other bikers cramped by the cool water. After lunch we were back on the road completing about 40 miles total for the day as we rolled into West Glacier, Montana.

DAY 2—GLACIER

At the Glacier National Park boundary, day 2 was an early start. We had to be over the top of "Clog

in the Sun Highway" by 11:00 am. We started the day about 40 miles from the summit with 20 miles being a constant 5% grade. This is such a powerful area it was hard to keep pushing ahead. So many things to see, big lodges and cold clear lakes. We nearly made the top when we had a flat tire. This was by far the most beautiful place I have ever changed a flat! I really didn't seem to mind the work. With more steep cliffs and awesome waterfalls, we made the summit, Logan Pass.

This is our first crossing of the continental divide. At 6,804 feet, we are on top of the world. Our bike was running great. We found the recumbent to climb at the same pace as our conventional tandem, but with a lot more comfort. After going on a little walk through the snow to see mountain goats at the visitors center we returned to our bike ready to try this baby on the downhill! With 20 miles of downhill we didn't let our speed climb too much, because we were enjoying the scenery of what seemed to be an endless U-shaped glacier can valley. Our drum brake was just the ticket for maintaining our speed. Near the bottom we did our 10 loops and the speedometer showed our maximum speed at 22 miles per hour.

We rode the full mile day near St. Marys, Montana at the tribal owned Cheung Blackhorse Campground. A beautiful spot with camping on a lake. We were fortunate to be there during a Power Show and the camping area across the lake was full of people. Our camp was set up, we enjoyed a great dinner and enjoyed the growing friendships of fellow riders. The evening I gave someone some cartoon rides. Many asked, "Is there a shock on the back?" The ride is so smooth." Just before sunset the sky blackened and we found ourselves having to hark away in our tents to keep dry. Other campers were not so lucky trying to use anything available to keep the rain out.

DAY 3—CANADA

The rain had ended and soon the sun was out again. We traveled north reaching the Canadian Border to Alberta. Passing through Customs the agents there were more interested in our bikes than where we were from. At this point we also entered Watsons National Park. The park was great to ride in with wide roads and shoulders. This day was just the perfect temperature for cycling, shorts and no shirts all day. We had many stops for photo opportunities. The last downhill before lunch our speed was up to 55 mph. Sheryl was thrilled to know how stable the bike felt at that speed. It wasn't because challenge for her to go faster and faster. Lunch took us to the Prince of Wales Lodge with many other riders. It was a beautiful spot along Watsons Lake looking back towards the Rocky Mountains. We stayed in long and late in the evening, but we finally dragged ourselves away. Just a few miles from our lunch stop, we saw a bear and his cub. We rode our onto the plains of southwestern Alberta. Long straight stretches of rolling country leads took us to Pincher Creek ending a 70-mile day. The city park we camped in was next to the municipal pond with a hot tub and showers. This was our night to help with the cooking deal. We were impressed with the type and amount of food that was made available to us. The American Lung Association bike leader were shopping each day for fresh food and special requests like local micro brews. That night around midnight we awoke to a very impressive thunder and lightning storm followed by strong winds that all but blew us all out of the park.

DAY 4—ALBERTA

This was our longest day and

not because of the millage. We started the morning with warm sunny skies over the rolling hills, enjoying the lack of traffic on the wide back roads. Turning out at Pincher Creek, we saw an entire hillside covered with wind mills used to generate electricity. BIRD-FLAG. As we rode on we soon found why those giant propellers were located where they were. A strong headwind of at least 20mph with gusts reaching higher was coming in at us on one

side in the distance. Picking close we found ourselves at the base of this one. We stopped and took in the awesome power of Mother Nature in Pincher, Alberta.

In 1806, Frank was a small mining town at the base of a large ridge of mountains. Around 4000 a.m. one morning, the ridge gave way and the entire hillside slid, covering Frank in thousands of tons of dirt and stone. The slide continued to push its way to the other side of the valley. Years



later the road was built over the debris. The size of the hillside and the remaining debris some 14 years later was humbling.

Continuing on we wound our way back across the Continental Divide for the second time to cross British Columbia. The wind was calm on the west side and we had lunch in Sparwood, BC. The afternoon ride followed the country highway west to the winter ski town of Fernie, BC where we ended the day with 83.1 miles. We stayed in the local youth hostel/motel. We helped prepare another satisfying meal of homemade

pizza, salad and tons of ice cream. After hot showers, we wandered around Old Town Fernie with vintage buildings and a train station, looking for the next morning bakery and coffee stop for.

With fresh pastries and lattes, we were on our way. Sheryl loves the ability to sit back and pedal, with her cold hands wrapped around her lattes, warming her hands a delicious Northwest pastime. We passed some very pretty "Widgeo hills," that come up around them was wishing for some warmth. Other riders commented on how clean she looked as we slipped down the road. We rode with a group of 11 but so no riders near the rolling country roads which now were starting to head north again. Passing rivers and through valleys, by mid morning we were enjoying warm sunny skies. Mid day we stopped to swim and take in more food. It had been 60 miles since breakfast. There has been and with a very crumbly blood sugar depleted motor we made it in Fort Steele, British Columbia. Fort Steele was a booming silver town in the late 1800's. Nearby Carleton Place obtained the railroad contract which took most of the businesses out of Fort Steele. Locals have turned the original town buildings and homes into a "Heritage Town."

DAY 5—BEST LATTE

The main history of the town is played out from early to finish during the day through mine productions. These productions are acted out in the streets by employees of Fort Steele in period costumes. Lunch at one of the operating hotels was a ray back in time as well. We were happy to have gotten in early enough to have this experience. Two miles up the road we camped and enjoyed a swim in the campground pool.

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DAY 6—BLUE DIRT

This was one of the longest millage days coming in around 85 miles. The route was fairly narrow and relaxing. We took the back way around Lake Wabensetee, on Highway 1 was full of traffic. We were thrilled to have miles of a quiet trailless road along the glacier-fed river to the lake. We stopped in for lunch in Windermere at the Blue Dog. People come out of towns and the excitement to look at our bikes. It was sixty to spot where we had parked the bike with the crowd around it. Making our way over the last pass of the day, we were drinking about Red Bull Hot Springs. Once in the town of Kamloops, we decided

in shape and spend the night in a real bed.

DAY 7—KOOTENAY

The first order of business was the hot springs. Within the boundaries of Kootenay National Park and steep canyon walls, a wonderful facility with snack bars, locker rooms, and of course the huge pools where the hot water is brought here was calling our names. We soaked, had massages at the treatment center 30 steps from the water. We stayed most of the day visiting with people from all over the world. Dregging members out from our beds on Friday the day, we headed back to the motel to do laundry. We met up with several other hikers, at a local pub and dined the evening away.

DAY 8—THE LONGEST DAY

The trip through Kootenay National Park was a continuation of long climbs over 50s ridges. Starting with an 8% grade, Sinclair Canyon made us glad we had a good breakfast. It was hard to pass the hot springs on this damp, cool morning. One out of the canyon, we made our way up the next 18 mile hill. The day grew darker and at the top we all stopped for more clothing. We had a great downhill run even with the rain beginning to fall. We enjoyed the ride, but by the bottom we were wet and cold. Again, the Magasin-Bi-dynamic hikers have been a dream come true for supplying power on the tandem.

We rode past more crystal blue glacier-fed rivers, over rolling hills, none of the more lucky riders saw a moose and bear kill. By this time we were wet and very cold. The temperatures was in the upper 40's. Quite a change from our 90 and 100 degree days. We happened upon the Kootenay Park Lodge. Most of the hikers were stopping to dry out and regroup. The lodge was in the middle of nowhere and powered by generators and propane. The log structure was the picture of peace and quiet. We were very disappointed when we found that they were closed because of snow stings! After making all our coats pressed against the windows, they opened again for us. The owners put together a feast of potatoes, eggs with cheese, bread and peas of hot coffee. We all made ourselves at home. The old rock fireplace was covered with falling logs. Sheryl was curled up in a blanket across of their

couches, and everyone was raving around in smoking feet. It looked like an old home Christmas party. Once warm, we had a hard time returning to the cold tent that waited for us. Once on the road, the mist stopped and we enjoyed the quiet ride north.

with reservations at the Banff Springs Hotel and Spa. Built at the turn of the century by the railroad to attract Victorian tourists, the hotel stands on one of the most scenic views in Canada. What an outrageous place! (Riding up to the hotel in check-in, the visitors came

DAY 10—CALGARY

Packing up we left and arrived 80 miles in Calgary. This morning was the coldest yet. By mid morning we were stripping down to shorts and tee shirts. With fluorescent roads and a wonderful tail wind pushing us, our speed was up as we moved out from the Rockies into the rolling open areas of Alberta. Climbing past herds of buffalo and through Indian reservations I was thinking of how well the recentest tandem had done for us and how well we had done on the bike as a team. No problems other than a few flats and a small adjustment to the seatpost. No hands falling asleep, no back and shoulder pain and best of the best no butt pain. Riding upright and looking around is the only way to ride as far as we're concerned. We stopped for pie in Cochrans. Climbed a steep hill with too much food in our bellies that we're on top of the plateau that we would follow into Calgary.

The ride ended at the Canadian Olympic Park, site of the Winter Olympics in the last 80's. Now it is used for training Canadian Olympic hopefuls and tourists. The lower end of the Long course offered ideas to those who thought in my. Sheryl was the first to line up. When a ride! To think, this was only the lower course of the course. We were sad, happy, wishing it could go on, glad it was over, wanting a long, very long hot shower. The evening came with group photos, dinner, poems, thoughts, friends and thank yous. We drifted off to sleep all under one roof of the huge garden we set up for us by the park.

DAY 11—KALISPELL, BY BUS

This was final park stop. The American Long volunteers and organizers treated us wonderfully the entire trip and were even more generous as we loaded bikes and trailers into trucks and buses. The 4:30 bus is back up to return to Kalispell to meet part of our trek. From the French side, back in Percé, and one last look and the "Largest Water Park in Montana" we pulled into the campground where we all first met 12 days before.

The trip was great. ALWAYS ride on the best sides. But it was having a bike that allowed speed, control and my desire to enjoy riding as much again, that made the experience one I had to share.

1997 Update: Sheryl is talking about riding coast to coast with next summer! To her she's back! ☺



We saw elk, and had a close encounter with a Big Horn Sheep. For the third and final time we crossed the Continental Divide and back into Alberta. This boundary was also the entrance into Banff National Park. The roads into the park are split so there is only one direction of traffic to contend with. This was wonderful. The only mishap was heading out to the highway. The livestock gates in the road to keep the animals from straying into danger almost cut us our best week. The steel bars are 3 inches around, had 7 to 8 inches apart and sit atop a 2 foot deep ditch. We had crossed many of these gates and had no problems. But the distance between the bars had never been so far. We barely were able to keep our speed up to maintain forward, when we saw ahead an into the supercolossal sign. Later that night a friend was making his rounds after catching his front wheel in the gap and having to set one side under the hand. No broken bones, but when the sign says walk, walk.

One of the hills was Banff. Surrounded by snow capped mountains it was as beautiful as I remembered. Not ever having been to Banff herself, Sheryl decided to surprise me

with three separate stations, gathered in the center of the parking area and looked at us for a long moment trying to decide which one of them was going to have to park this crazy thing. Another gear night, indeed, we would ride. The mechanics that were still cramping did not have those luxuries.

DAY 9—LAKE LOUISE

We awoke to fresh snow on the mountain tops and temperatures in the upper 30's. The day was not too hot of weather. We liked the trails, watched at a herd of elk grazed on the driving range of the hotel golf course and explored the town. Some reminiscing to the last springs or took a bus trip to Lake Louise. Funny no one wanted this the 40 mile round trip? We met at a great restaurant with others from the ride. Still cold from the night before, we felt guilty when asked "Where did you guys stay last night?"

After dinner we checked into a small bed and breakfast with other hikers who wanted a good bed. The evening was a combination of celebratory and somber emotions. This was our last night on the road before Calgary, but the last end of an incredible trip.