

North Country 600k

Volunteer Pre-ride Report

I began the volunteer pre-ride this past weekend from my house in Montpelier at around 3:40 AM. As I rode the 4 miles up to the start control I was happy to be climbing this hill as a pre-ride warm-up rather than at the end of the 600k, as was originally planned. I departed the start control at the Comfort Inn a couple of minutes after 4:00AM. Along the first section of the ride a brief period of light rain began, just enough to fulfill the requisite for this ride to be considered a 2011 New England brevet. The skies cleared & the sun came out as I made my way up and over NH-118, "Gonzo Pass". I was pleasantly surprised to find that the climb, although still difficult, felt less painful than it did when I last rode it this past fall. Some lingering clouds remained over the summits of the surrounding mountains but not enough to obstruct the amazing views along the Kancamagus Highway. I got into a good rhythm and made good time up the reasonable highway grades enjoying the scenery along the way. I enjoyed a great slice of pizza in North Conway before moving on & heading back through Conway. There was a fair amount of traffic as I made my way along narrow roads through East Conway. However, the traffic quickly disappeared as I traveled along the more rural roads of North Fryeburg, Maine. A moderate north headwind increased as I made my way through open farmland, slowing my progress. The climb over Evans Pass began gradually enough but soon the grade increased sharply. I enjoyed the brief views of the cliffs at the top of the pass before settling in for the descent. The road surface on the descent left a bit to be desired and a degree of caution was necessary.

As I made my way towards Bethel, ME along the Androscoggin River a light rain began again. A few miles out from Bethel I met up with Jim & Christine, two local randonneurs, who provided me with a guided tour of the beautiful area they live in. We rode along quiet country roads following the Androscoggin River downstream to Rumford. Along this stretch we met up with another local rider, Ann I believe, who rode with us for a short stretch before having mechanical issues & heading home. After a quick stop at Sam's Italian Foods we made our way back upstream towards Andover. With the long climb up East B Hill Road approaching we took another stop at the general store in Andover to refuel. Both Jim & Christine have ridden East B Hill Road many times in the past but never from this direction. They remarked about the high speeds attained heading down the road we were now ascending. Although the road steepened considerably it didn't last long and we enjoyed nice mountain views from the height of land. After an all too brief descent we ascended another short section before reaching ME-26. At this point Jim & Catherine headed back home through Grafton Notch & I made my way to the sleep control in Upton. I enjoyed the company of both Jim & Catherine and really appreciated being able to ride with them for a bit during this long solo ride.

I took a short stop at the sleep control in Upton to both enjoy the amazing sunset over Lake Umbagog & to take a 2nd look at the cabin we'll be using for the brevet. After the long climbs of the day I would have appreciated a warm dinner & a rest at this point. But after an all too brief stop I tore myself away from

the views & quickly made my way back into New Hampshire. As the sun set I was pelted with hordes of bugs & was glad to have had a handkerchief to cover my nose & mouth with. Once the sun fully set the bugs abated & I was left with a quiet, dark climb up towards Dixville Notch. As I made my way uphill I spotted the first of many moose I'd see on the ride. Towards the top of Dixville Notch the grade steepened & I was amazed at the very late alpenglow in the towering cliffs above the road. Immediately after cresting the top of the climb I was rewarded with the incredible view of the Balsams Grand Resort, lit up & reflecting off of the mountain lake. I took a break to refill my water bottles at the spring near the entrance to the Balsams before heading on to the town of Colebrook. I stopped at the convenience store in Colebrook with about a ½ hour to spare before closing time. This being the last open store I would encounter until the next morning & over 100 miles later I made sure to fully stock up.

Shortly after re-entering Vermont I came across the second moose of the ride quietly walking through a nearby field. After making the turn onto VT-105 the road began to climb steadily out of the Connecticut River Valley. The late night ride along this road was surely one to remember. With a dense fog, no moonlight and no one else around the sense of isolation was striking. After a quiet first few miles the woods along the roadside suddenly came alive with activity. Within a short distance I scared up five or six moose. The sudden change from quiet solitude to feeling very small amongst 1000 pound animals was quite dramatic. With limited visibility it was interesting wondering which way these large animals were running as they made their way along the roadside. Fortunately all the moose ran in the other direction & I made my way very slowly downhill into sleepy Island Pond.

This seems like a good time to once again reiterate the need for several high quality, extremely bright lights for this ride. I actually had four headlights on my bike plus a helmet light. Even with all of those lights it was still difficult at times, with the fog, to get a good sense of what was happening in the woods next to the road. I often found myself stopping to turn my bike in the direction of the moose so that I could see where they were heading. A nearly full moon on the night of the brevet should help with visibility but is no substitute for good lights. In addition, be sure to exercise extreme caution when descending at night on this ride. Many car/moose collisions happen in this area with dire consequences for both the occupants of the vehicle and the moose. I have not yet heard of a bicycle/moose collision but can only guess at the consequences. If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with cycling near moose I would suggest limiting your nighttime riding as much as possible and/or pairing up with another rider for the overnight portion of the ride. Moose are generally not an aggressive animal and will normally only act aggressively if provoked or frightened. When you see moose along this ride do not approach or corner them in anyway. Also as with any wild animal, never get between a mother and calf moose. With all of that being said, I have cycled past many, many moose & have never had any issues. They are just very large animals that need to be treated with a good degree of respect. If there is any other info I can provide to make your ride through moose country a pleasant experience please let me know.

In East Burke I stopped at an ATM machine to obtain a receipt verifying the time of my passage at this control location. The luxuriant accommodations of the booth housing the ATM machine proved very tempting and I quickly found myself sound asleep sitting in the corner. After about a ½ hour nap I awoke to see the first signs of the sun & the beginning of the 2nd day of the ride. I welcomed the warming, life giving rays of the sun and thought back on the previous night through moose country,

wondering if it was all a dream. The sun fully rose as I made my way past Lake Willoughby and enjoyed the dramatic view of the cliffs dropping down to the water's edge. A quick stop for a warm breakfast sandwich in Orleans helped me to regain energy. I was further motivated as I started to feel close to home & began to really enjoy the beginnings of a new day.

As I made my way through Irasville and on to North Wolcott I entered very familiar territory once again. I stopped briefly at the Cumberland Farms in Morrisville to check in & to refuel before the last stage of the ride. I had previously heard rumors that this store would shortly be renovated & checking in with the staff I was very pleased to hear that they would be open until 11:59 PM on Sunday, July 17th. They will stay open just long enough to welcome the last few riders on the 600k before closing for a full 3 weeks. I felt fully energized as I made my way along one of my favorite local rides through Elmore and Worcester. Somehow I fooled myself into believing I was just out for a short training ride & made good time on my way home. The short, steep climb just before reaching the finish control at my house felt shorter than it usually does as I felt a late surge of energy.

Overall the ride went really well and I'm glad to be able to make the final minor last minute changes to the cue sheet. I really enjoyed the easy conversations with Jim & Catherine and the nighttime ride through the Northeast Kingdom is one I won't soon forget. I look forward to sharing this ride with all of you & hope everyone enjoys it as much as I have.

Cheers,

Anthony