

Paris-Brest-Paris 2015

Sam's Long Story

Friday, Aug 14th, Two Days to Go

The plan for this time around was to just focus on the event alone, so I would fly out just before the event and leave just after, leaving no extra time for touring or relaxing. My flight from Winnipeg left at 7:35 and dropped me off in Toronto for an 11 hour layover. I was told the bike would be transferred to the next airplane by the crew, but that still left me nervous about being separated from it for that long. I just had to trust it would appear in Paris. The long layover also left me a bit hungry as I can only eat so many \$15 sandwiches.



Saturday, Aug 15th, One Day to Go

The flight overseas started at sunset and ended at sunrise. Even though the night was short because we were flying towards the sunrise, it still felt natural, helping to reduce jetlag. Thankfully, I had a window seat and the first bit of land I saw was the city of Brest. It was still hard to imagine that the next evening I'd be starting my ride through France. It was also hard to trust that my bike was actually on the plane with me.

At the airport, a man named Dave from Denver spotted me with my bike case and asked if I was doing PBP. He was also alone in France, so we split a taxi to the starting town.



I checked into the hotel and had to set up the bike in an hour then ride it to the velodrome for the Canadian group photo. I met lots of other riders at that time but had a hard time remembering faces and names. I then had to bike back to hotel to finish getting the bike set up for bike check. I missed my turn to the hotel and got lost. I circled around for a bit until a friendly Aussie with GPS led me back to the hotel. He had already been over in France for five weeks touring around and was planning to start PBP the next day.

Setting up the bike was fun and relaxing and there was lots of energy at bike check as all the riders anticipated what was about to take place.

After bike check, the evening was ending, but I still hadn't eaten supper. I set out on foot from the hotel to find a meal, walking by three closed places before finding a small delivery pizza spot. This worked out best because I took the pizza back to the hotel where I continued to get set up for the next day. I still hadn't worked out where I would store my bike case during the ride, so that thought was still playing on my mind. If this hotel wouldn't take it, Andrea and Steven, Ontario riders I had gotten to know, would let me store it at their hotel room for the week. Somehow, that still kept me up and I had a hard time falling asleep when I laid down at 21:30, but eventually slept from midnight to 08:30.

Sunday, Aug 16th, Day 1

I checked out early and successfully stored my bike at the hotel, telling them I'd pick it up on Thursday. I wandered over to the velodrome, now just me and the bike, and found not much going on in the morning. I biked over to meet up with Andrea and Steven at their hotel and had a great conversation with them before heading back to the velodrome for an excellent lunch. I sat with a British man who lives in Brittany and his French speaking son, an Aussie who lives in Greece, a 74 year old French man, Graham from BC, and a couple from Colorado who were wanting to move to the town right beside Graham. Very interesting conversations, to say the least. There were about three hours until the event start and I was eager to get going.

Everything so far had been organised very well. The start procedure was super organized, with multiple gates and corrals to filter riders in their waves. I was told that this was the best organized start they've ever done. I hung out at the velodrome to watch the waves roll out every 15 minutes until it was my time to cue up.



I rode out at 18:15 in the 11th wave with Steven. Right from the start I had to just let the fast riders go and not attempt to keep up with them. I was still dealing with my knee injury from the qualifying 600, so it was a slow and steady plan for me. Also working against me was that the bike mysteriously became wobbly while I was queuing up for the start. I would always have to delicately hold the handlebars or the wheel would wobble back and forth. Not a good way to start a four day bike ride. I couldn't figure out how to adjust it to get it to ride smooth again, so I put up with it and did my best to be careful. This slowed me down a lot on the descents as it felt like the bike was constantly trying to kill me.

It turned out that Steven and I rode at a similar pace (he also had a knee injury), so we saw a lot of each other in the first day.

On a side note, most of the cars in France run on diesel, so I would often hear what sounded like a big semi-truck approaching from behind only to be passed by a noisy little hatchback.



The countryside of France was more beautiful than I expected. Natural forests skirted and patched every field, so more often than not, I was biking with dense forest at least on one side of me. These forests were not cut far back from the road as they are in Canada, so the trees would often overhang the roads providing shade as we biked along.

As we rode along, there were people gathered by the roadway clapping and cheering "bon courage" every 15 minutes or so. Most of the towns had people at every corner cheering. This was a new feeling for me. I passed a baby in a stroller who was watching the riders with her mom and grandmother. When she saw us pass, she kicked, bounced, waved her arms and screamed for joy, giving all that the little baby could give to show her excitement. I missed my own little guy at that moment but felt so overjoyed at how happy we made a baby.

A thought came to me early in day one. Where in life do you get to do what you love for a long period of time and have groups of people applaud you for doing it throughout the day? The specialness of the event was sinking in.

As the sun went down, I heard a voice beside me, “Hi Canada, I’m Ron from BC.” We got to talking and he later laughed, “...people applauding me for athleticism, ha!” He looked like he was working hard to keep the pace he was at and said that if he finishes this one on time, he’ll never do it again. He likes the 200s because you can do it in a day, feel like you accomplished something, but still walk the next day.

I reached Mortagne-au-Perche (140 km) about six hours into the ride. It was only a food stop on the way out, but would be a control on the way back to Paris.

At this point my knees were mildly annoyed, but generally feeling good after biking for six hours.

Monday, Aug 17th, Day 2

The overnight ride was going well. Now that the fast guys of each start wave were far ahead, those around me were more my pace and I was no longer being unexpectedly passed by large groups of fast riders. I somewhat started to settle to the pace of those around me, but I was still wasn’t riding in a pace line with the others. Laid down for a 20 minute nap at 04:00, but didn’t fall asleep. The rest still let me get back up feeling alert again.

I reached the first control in Villaines-la-Juhel (220 km in 11h15) at 05:30. It looked hopeful that they had open WiFi, but I couldn’t get it to work.

I ate a meal there and sat with a group of seven Eliptigo riders. They were mostly British with two Americans and they were all hilarious. They loved the fact that they served “café bol,” which was coffee literally in a bowl.

My pace was a bit ahead of my slow and steady schedule, but I was still feeling good. I rode really well after the sun came up. It was very foggy in the morning, so I had to put my rain gloves on to keep my fingers from getting wet. Mornings called for wardrobe changes that feel like a waste of time if they’re not done right. I took off my thick tights too early and my knees got achy, so I had to waste another stop to put my thinner tights back on.

Suddenly there were lots of groups passing me. I must have been slowing down, which was alright. As I rode, lots of people in the crowds would see my shorts and cheer “Canada” and cheer louder. It was clear that the French people love Canada. Other Canadians shared similar experiences to this.





Before reaching Fougères, we were riding on the same roads as the Tour de France route from the month before. The roads were still painted with professional riders' names and the community-made decorations were still up. Things like giant bikes, hay bales stacked up high with messages painted on them, bikes set up with dummies riding them wearing the different leaders' jerseys, sign posts and flag banners with the different jersey colours, and messages painted on the sides of barns. Beside these were elaborate signs and banners made for the PBP riders. It was a special feeling to be sharing the road with the pros and have the crowds treat us with a similar welcome and encouragement.

I was starting to feel the knees again and backed it off to keep them comfortable.

Along the road I caught up to two Italians dressed in early 20th century cycling gear, complete with thick mustaches riding vintage road bikes. One single speed the other fixed gear. Every person that passed turned their heads to make some kind of comment. It was hard to resist staring at such a spectacle (I later found out they finished in 84 hours).

I reached the second control at Fougères (309 km in 16h30) at 10:45 to find long lineups at all the control facilities.

On I went into the afternoon making good time to third control. I was beginning to feel like I was pushing my luck and that I should stop to eat a big meal and take it easy again. Injury avoidance was top of mind. As the afternoon wound down through the beautiful hills, I was feeling up for riding through the second night.

I very briefly met up with Steven again standing in a line at the third control in Tinténac (363 km in 19h47). I was surprised to see him again, thinking he was long gone. He said he was feeling pretty good so far.



I spent a lot of time looking around at how beautiful the cities and countryside are. Nothing was perfectly groomed like in Manitoba, where the ditches beside the highways are cut right back to the edge of the farmer's fields far from the road. All the roads here are bordered with thick bush made up of vines, ferns and wild flowers. Dense forests were everywhere and provided breathtaking views and a mystical atmosphere.

On the way to Loudéac, I saw the lead group on their return trip from Brest with no one behind them for a very long time. It was clear that if you fell off the lead group, you would never see them again. So I would have been around 400 km in at that point, and they would be already been over 800 km.



At that point, a guy about my age rode up beside me and asked, “so are you still happy you started this ride?” His name was Wannes from Belgium. We talked for a long time about how Europe has managed to keep so much of its land natural, despite its long history. He explained that people have been around long enough in Europe to know that the resources are finite. North Americans still seem to believe that we’ll never use up the natural resources, so natural land and the resources are treated very

differently there. Quite sad, really. Wannes could speak several languages from growing up between so many different countries and said that he learned them mostly from watching TV. So he admits that his vocabulary is quite limited to what’s seen on TV.

To qualify for PBP he barely finished the series, having only four weekends in the year in which he could do the brevets. If he missed one, he wouldn’t have had another chance to take time off work for another attempt. He was like me in that he had done the series and barely any more riding before taking on PBP (not the best training strategy). We discussed each of our local randonneur scenes and he shared about his bike tour to the south of France with his girlfriend. We were able to relate on several levels and were happy that we met along the road. He then rode on ahead to his normal pace.

Later on down the road, I spoke with another young guy from Sweden who says he was originally from Chili. He spoke perfect English with an American accent because he spent a year in Minnesota as a foreign exchange student. He was riding a super aero Cervélo sprinter’s bike and I said, “I wouldn’t have thought a bike like that would be comfortable on a long ride like this,” to which he quickly replied, “It isn’t! It’s just the bike I have.”

Later on down the road we came to a dead stop as the road was completely blocked by cows. This was a special moment as I got to watch how the big group of us enjoyed the surprise and laughed and joked with the farmer who was doing his best to herd them out of the way. The mood was very light-hearted and people took it as part of the fun of PBP. A narrow path was cleared and we cautiously squeezed by the cows, but little by little they seemed more interested in sniffing our smelly shorts, so they squeezed us into a single file as we avoided their big noses.

Still on the road to Loudéac, I was feeling good, but unsure about when I should sleep next. I had hoped to get straight to Brest before sleeping for a couple hours, but I was willing to stay at one of the controls before that if I was feeling the need.

I decided to spend some time resting in Loudéac (448 km in 24h57), but not actually sleep yet. I changed my shorts for the first time, which was a shame because crowds would no longer be calling out “Canada” to me without it clearly written on my legs. I had another “café bol” along with a full meal. I was feeling really good, but still playing it cautious with my knees, always telling myself to “relax my way to Brest.” The bike somehow felt much more comfortable than the day before. It seemed to have cured itself of the wobble I picked up at the start. Maybe



it was just nervous. I could now confidently descend very well. I liked how the group had thinned out more at this point so all those around me were pretty much right at the same performance level as me. I more or less stuck with a recognizable group of riders and we'd continually leapfrog each other depending on our speeds and break schedule.

Tuesday, Aug 18th, Day 3



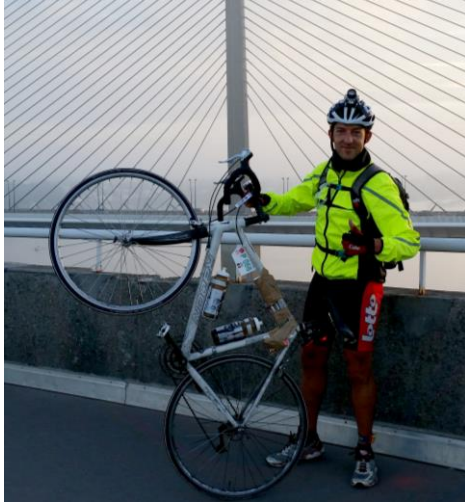
I rode through the evening to make it to the Carhaix-Plouguer (526 km in 31h25) control at 01:40. I rode with two friendly Americans from Florida. One of them had a British accent. The other kept trying to follow her route notes, and I pointed out the arrows along the course that they didn't seem to know about. They later thanked me for that helpful tip.

I was then riding through my second night and about to reach the tough bit of the night where it gets really cold shortly before sunrise. I hoped to reach Brest by sunrise to stay on pace. Lots of people were sleeping along the road at that time, but I had very little desire to. I figured I might as well keep moving while I had the motivation and sleep when I reached Brest.

I was very cold despite having thick thermal layers on. The fog was so thick I could see the water droplets in my headlight beam. The dampness heightened the effect of the cold. Nights are often hard mentally and this one was no different. All I could see was what was in my headlight beam and I could no longer recognize those around me, so all conversations stopped. I was left with the conversations in my own head, which seemed to conspire against me.

I kept riding on and for the first time since the start, I found open WiFi at a small town shortly before Brest. I took some time to communicate with Jess and Robert and update them on how I was doing and why I had been so silent online. She later shared our conversation online with others to pass on the update, so I was very thankful for that.

From that town it was much longer than I expected to actually reach Brest as it felt like we circled around the city several times. Looking at the map later, this was obviously a misconception. I made a bad choice at that time because I continually thought my bed in Brest was just around the corner, so I didn't want to wreck my long-awaited sleeping opportunity by eating an energy bar just before I laid down. It turned out that I went too long without eating and lost energy and felt hungry so my speed dropped off. I ended up hungry and annoyed at how long it was taking to reach Brest. Wannes met up with me again in the last couple hours before Brest. He said he took the "scenic route" after pulling out ahead of me the day before, so that's why we were still matching pace overall.



The long road to Brest was worth it as we broke out of the tree-veiled road to a beautiful view of the ocean and the sun rising behind the city's beautiful suspension bridge. Wannes and I stopped to take pictures. How could we pass that scene by? All troubles faded away against that view. Beautiful bridge and ocean view right at sunrise.

I rented a cot at the Brest control (614 km in 37h58) after arriving at 08:13. The bed was in a college dormitory, so it was quiet and comfortable. I slept for 90 minutes then woke up naturally. My knees were both very stiff and sore, I felt low on energy and was low on motivation and optimism. I discovered that I only had a two hour buffer at that point, not even close to what I was hoping for after riding to Brest non-stop. I didn't

have much time, so I almost skipped breakfast because of the long lineup, but because I was standing there unable to make a decision, I knew I needed to eat something. That was a good choice. I packed up my cold weather gear from the night before, stretched then reset myself and my gear for another day on the bike. The pain in my knees made me concerned for the long climbs coming up on the way back to Carhaix.

As soon as I started pedaling, though, I felt great and my smile returned. My knees warmed up again and all was well. I stopped at the same WiFi spot as I had the night before and chatted with Jess while eating a sandwich and drinking a coffee from a little café. I also managed to send my first Facebook post of the ride with one of the pictures of Brest. The rest of the route to Carhaix-Plouguer (698 km in 46h17) went really well and I had lots of fun riding through the hills on that sunny day. I arrived a bit ahead of when I thought I would. It really felt like the hardest was now behind me and it would just be a game of patience to keep that wheel spinning long enough to get back to Paris. I was feeling great.



As I rode on to Loudéac, I continued feeling good, but decided to take a daytime nap in hopes that it would replace the need for a nighttime nap which are more difficult in the cold. It didn't work out too well, as I didn't end up falling asleep in the 45 minutes that I laid there, but laying down itself was nice. My legs had been feeling very good compared to the day before. Not that I had been riding quickly, but I was avoiding re-injury while moving fast enough. I stopped for a baguette and coffee at St-Nicolas-du-Pélem. It looked like there was a decent rain up ahead, but with all the turns the road takes, I couldn't figure out the chance of riding into it like you easily can in Manitoba. Regardless, I planned to ride through it. What other choice did I have?

I checked into Loudéac (780 km in 53h08) at 23:23 with only two hours to spare. Thankfully, there was no rain after all. I thought I was going too fast for my knees, probably because I wasn't actually riding with data, but my inability to put time back into my buffer proved otherwise. At that pace, I left no room for another two hour sleep there which I was planning on. I hoped that two hours sleeping during the

night would mean two more hours of sightseeing during the day. Instead, I ate another big meal and got back out on the road for a third night of riding straight through.

Wednesday, Aug 19th, Day 4

The riders were now pretty mixed in abilities again as the fast ones from the Monday morning starts had caught up to me.

I did a decent job of "keeping that wheel spinning," which I kept repeating to myself, but had to stop for two quick sit naps during the third night. I managed to add half an hour to my buffer by the time I reached Tinténac (865 km in 60h15) at 06:30, which I used to sleep in the grass outside the control for 25 minutes with my legs uphill. My total sleep time was now up to two hours. Not as much as I was hoping for at this point. I felt as if my speed was limited by the pain in my knees rather than fatigue, so I chose to get back on the bike to "keep that wheel spinning" rather than get more sleep.

I forgot my pains momentarily as I entered a small town and was surprised by three kids that started jumping, clapping and singing the tune of the "can-can" as I passed them. I hope they knew how much of a difference they were making simply by bringing a smile to the riders' faces.

At both of the last two controls I had planned to sleep for a couple hours, but had to cancel that plan upon arrival because I didn't have the time. I was starting to think that I might not be able to afford another sleep stop at all despite having one more night to get through before the finish.

I pressed on towards the next control, but I stopped in Feins to change out of my night gear and put my legs up for a bit. They were back to being cranky with the lack of rest I had given them. I was really beginning to feel how the randonneur pace is not generous when things don't go well, like having to ride injured. The pressure to keep the pace up despite the pain was rising.



I arrived at the Fougères control (919 km in 63h25) maintaining the buffer despite my stop in Feins. The field was thinning out as the riders spread out along the whole course. Most of them around me seemed to be tired and fighting some kind of specific pains, but their spirits were high. The atmosphere was still fun and friendly.

There in town I spoke with another Marinoni rider, Casey from Montreal. Later on I spotted a fifth Marinoni on the road. Casey had gotten to visit Marinoni's shop in Montreal to be measured up for the custom bike. Fantastic.

While eating in Fougères, I met two Americans. One was a young guy who just started randonneur cycling in November. He described fighting the constant sleepy feeling as if you're always about to fall (think keeping balance on a tight rope). He also shed light on a question I had about why the cheering crowds were not shouting "allez" as I was told they would. He said that if he would push hard in front of them, they would cheer and shout "allez." So I was too slow for them to shout "allez" at me. The two

Americans knew each other and they commented on how their vastly different pace strategies still got them to the same point at the same time down the road. He was able to check on the position of a group of Americans he was riding with and was debating whether he should wait an hour for them to catch up or keep going on alone. I'm not sure what he ended up deciding, but I was thankful that I wasn't holding anyone up if they had been waiting to ride with me.

These two also taught me that the cut-off times listed on the control card were based on a 17:15 start, so I actually had an extra hour from what they listed! This gave me hope that I might be able to build that buffer back up to afford a sleep.

It was a long way to the next control and my knee really started hurting. To add to the regular pains, my right Achilles tendon started crying in pain each time I pushed my foot down. I didn't want to ignore it, but had to stop often to attempt at a shoe adjustment that would alleviate the pain. It felt like my shoe was putting pressure on the back of my foot, so I inserted whatever I could find (including folded plastic bags, used napkins and tree bark) under the insole to raise up my heel. It seemed to work well enough to stop the progression of further pain.



The shock of the ride came as I arrived at the Villaines-la-Juhel control (1008 km in 70h04). They had thrown a massive street festival at which I heard them announce that 2000 people came out just to celebrate us passing through. It was amazing, but I was so tired that it threw off my mental focus completely and I had a hard time making decisions. It took me an extra-long time to park my bike, while people on the other side of the fence watched with interest, then head to the control tables to get my card stamped. I forgot to take my bottles with me, which added on walking time later on. Because of the rising pain, I saw the medic there who put cooling gel on my ankle and knee. It felt good for a minute, but right back to normal pain when I stood up. I was annoyed at my useless waste of time, but I wasn't going to attempt further

treatment because I knew the issues were too deep for them to cure anyhow. When about to leave the control, I thought I had lost my white sun cap, so I backtracked around the control looking for it. It turned out to be in my pocket. Annoyed at how much time I had wasted at the noisy control, I opted to skip walking through the crowd for the meal they were serving there and just get back onto the road.

Before leaving town, I stopped at a restaurant and ordered French fries (which they just call "frites"). I met Paul, the Central Florida Brevet Administrator there. He was riding a fixed gear bike for a second time at PBP. My tiredness was showing in that restaurant as I couldn't keep my languages straight. There were three men speaking Portuguese, I thought the waiter was speaking Spanish to me, Paul was

speaking English to me, and other restaurant staff were mixing English and French. So when my turn to speak came, I always got it wrong. For some reason, Spanish became my preferred language. I was losing it.

They had WiFi there, so I chatted once again with Jess who encouraged me to stop wasting time sitting there and get back out on the road. She was very right. While talking to her I wrapped my knee with a tensor bandage under my leg warmers then said goodbye and pedalled off at a consistent cadence and pressure. I had to continually stay focused on my effort level to avoid building on that pain. The pressure was getting to me as the finish was within 200 km but the pain was rising.

I eventually stopped for a meal in another small town and have memories of having a good conversation with someone, but now have no idea who. I think we rode on together for a bit until we stopped at a spot where he planned to sleep. I laid down to stretch and relax before taking on the final night, but didn't end up sleeping there. Once again, I still felt a bit refreshed after spending a half hour in the grass.

I was barely feeling up for riding through my fourth night in a row. I just needed to make it to the next control to feel like I still had a chance of finishing. Before getting back on the road I re-wrapped my knee, took some shot blocks and headed out determined to maintain a perfectly constant cadence and pressure and not stop at all along the way. I found the strategy worked as I kept right up with the others around me who would pass, but later be laying in the ditch as I passed them back.

When I arrived at Mortagne-au-Perche (1088 km in 77h34), I ate a big meal and still didn't have enough of a buffer to sleep there. Every square foot of floor space at that stop was filled with sleeping bodies. It was tempting to join them, but I didn't feel overly sleepy and was hopeful to repeat the same slow and steady strategy to Dreux.



Thursday, Aug 20th, Day 5

My plan didn't go so well. It started off alright, slow and steady, but pretty soon I was fighting to stay conscious. The lines of reality and imagination blurred and I found myself identifying more with the dream than the road in front of me. I couldn't connect that I was actually riding in PBP at the moment, and it seemed like I was out of body, spectating the event and could simply turn off the TV and go to bed then see where it was at in the morning.

I thought I was having conversations with random people in random settings (including my son, Miles, in some hallway somewhere) and often spoke gibberish phrases out loud. When my mind would see the seemingly strange images of a moving road at night, I would have no idea what that had anything to do with the "reality" of where my dreams were. I seemed to be questioning the importance of the ride in my head, as if I could just slow down or stop altogether without consequence, so I started to reason with myself, speaking out loud, to convince myself that what I was doing was important. I was saying

things like, "it actually matters how fast you ride," "you are currently riding PBP," and, "keep that wheel spinning to be set up well for tomorrow."

I ended up having to stop multiple times in the night to put my head down, but I still couldn't sleep because I was afraid to lose any more time. Seeing the other riders pass by gave me the delusion that they had all left and I was on my own at the back of the entire field with the course about to close. All of this combined to make the fourth night quite terrifying. I actually thought the ride was rolling on without me and I would be out of time, but I was too tired to stay conscious on the bike.

Somehow through this confusion, I managed to point out a left turn that others in front of me had missed and more behind me said they would have missed if I hadn't signalled. For the record, it was a correct turn.

I was feeling like I was at the end of my rope by the time the sun came up, but I didn't realize how much time I had lost until I rolled into the Dreux control (1166 km in 84h23). There I realised that I was down to a one hour buffer and couldn't waste any time at the control. I ate breakfast very quickly, put a baguette in my pocket, and ran back out to my bike that was now sitting in the rain. I knew my knee probably wouldn't handle it, but I was willing to push it from then on because I knew I was cutting it close to the 90 hour limit. I had five hours to go 64 km, which under normal circumstances would have been easy, but this was far from normal. I was seriously concerned and my constant smile turned into a straight face.

As I was leaving Dreux, I somehow met up with my Swedish friend again. At least I think I did. Moments later I honestly felt like I had imagined our whole conversation and he was just a hallucination. I do vividly remember looking at his carbon fibre framed glasses, though. Speaking of losing it, I found myself speaking Spanish out loud again and I overheard two Frenchmen commenting on how strange it was that this English guy was speaking Spanish to French people. I kept my mouth shut from then on.

The final stage seemed to go on forever. I expected it to feel that way, but my memory was messing me up as I would think each town we passed through was the last before the finish. My rear derailleur got out of line with my two lowest gears since the rain started in Dreux, but I didn't want to stop. Instead I pushed up the hills in third gear, taking everything I had left, but keeping me going nice and quickly. My mind and body were so annoyed with the drawn out finish that I was usually off in the dream world of the finish line instead of concentrating on managing my effort to make sure I even reached the line in the first place. Turn after turn I had to work up new motivation to keep pushing. It hardly sunk in what I was in the process of accomplishing until I reached the crowds clapping and cheering "bravo" at the end. Then it hit. I held back tears, had a huge smile, but was too tired to lift my arms in victory.

The finish line was right beside the velodrome, where we had queued up for the start. We biked over the chip reader and I heard a beep as I passed it. PBP was done. I had completed it, but because I never stopped to check the time, I wasn't completely sure I had completed it within the time limit. I walked through the full parking lot, everyone congratulating each other. The atmosphere was incredible. We were all dead tired, but completely happy.

I then stumbled into the velodrome to have the control card stamped for the last time. I saw the volunteer mark a time that was before the 12:15 cut-off and I was overjoyed. Up until that point, I still had a doubt inside that I had made it in time. I called Jess over Facebook messenger and she willingly

took my call at 03:30 her time. Speaking with her was nice and helped to connect what happened to what this means in the bigger picture. I was now a PBP finisher, something I've been striving towards for three years.

Outro, Then What Happened?

Standing in line for the meal at the end of the ride was physically painful and left me feeling pretty lonely. I think that loneliness kept me from taking pictures. It seemed that everyone else around had other rider friends or family around to happily talk to. I was alone. I was also realizing the logistical nightmare I had set myself up for to actually get home the next day. Trying to do PBP as cheaply as possible, I didn't book a hotel room for the final night.

I was feeling like the event had nearly beaten me, but I somehow managed to succeed. Barely. I thought that I would not want to take on that kind of pain again. Maybe 2015 would be my only PBP year.

I hung out around the velodrome a little longer after the meal, hoping to use their WiFi to catch up on the Facebook messages people had left, but every time I looked at my phone, I would fall asleep. I knew that wasn't going to work. I showered, but had to put my wet clothes back on, then grabbed my bike to go pick up my bike case at the hotel it was left at (which I was already checked out of). I took my stuff to the side of the hotel where I packed everything up to be airport ready. Sadly, my shoes and lots of my clothes were wet when I packed them up.



I hoped to make it over to the Novotel where lots of the Canadians were staying and a meal was going to be held later in the evening. I asked my hotel clerk to help set me up with a taxi, but I declined after thinking it was too expensive. I decided to walk there dragging my bike case behind me. I made it a block and the strap was cutting into my fingers and I knew it was impossible to make it the whole distance (which would have taken an hour on a good day). I was clearly not thinking straight, but stood still trying to figure out what to do. I decided my only option was to go back to the clerk and accept the expensive taxi. I used their WiFi while waiting for it to arrive. He said that the large number of foreigners in town had made it extra busy for him.

The cab driver and I got along well and I reserved his services for my midnight ride to the airport. Sadly, this would use up almost all of the Euros I had left, but would have been more expensive if I hadn't reserved. Clearly, I needed Jess along with me to avoid such simple planning mistakes.

I was early at the Novotel for the dinner, so I sat in the bar and spent half of my remaining nine Euros on an Affligem blonde beer, which hit the spot. Around me were other PBP finishers telling their stories, which I enjoyed listening to while I sat there alone. I ended up falling asleep in the hotel lobby waiting for the dinner to start. When I woke up, I exchanged smiles with the people around me who seemed to think I was entertaining.

The dinner was excellent. About thirty or forty Canadians were there and I got to speak with many of them. With great food, we shared stories and thoughts on the ride. Everyone seemed to have some kind of deep struggle that required them to stretch themselves to keep searching for solutions to overcome the problems. That was an inspiring crowd. As the stories were shared, the magic and allure of the event grew once again. I was already looking forward to my next chance to take part in such a beautiful event. There really is nothing else like it.

The cabbie and I got to know each other better on the long ride to the airport. He talked about how everyone says that the roads are so beautiful in France, but he says what they don't realize is that they end up giving about 70% of their income to the government to pay for services like the nice roads. That makes it very difficult for him to get ahead and he has put everything else in life on hold to be "married to his work." I felt a bit bad for him. I like being married to my wife and looked forward to seeing her again the next evening.

I arrived at the airport at 01:00 on Friday and attempted to sleep in the empty arrivals terminal while waiting for time to tick by. My brother and his wife, Dan and Adrienne, arrived in Paris that morning to begin their three weeks of touring Europe. It was exciting to see them in the half hour we had and I had my last meal in France of two croissants and a glass of water with them.

After sleeping every second of being seated in the 777 (apart from the in-flight meals), I arrived in Montreal for a long layover in which I didn't sleep. I tried to write more of my story so I wouldn't forget it while eating a pizza.

I flew home to Winnipeg to find Jess and the boys, my parents, and Jezza's parents there to welcome me, with signs congratulating me. I was so thrilled to see them. Air Canada kindly offered to deliver the bike case to our apartment the next day (because it didn't fit on the last plane), so we went off to Denny's where I ate a big meal while the others watched and I answered questions about the event. Just like the night before, the more I recounted the stories, the more I looked forward to my next opportunity to experience the magic of Paris-Brest-Paris.

