



There were five of us from the west who went to France some who went early and one like me who went just one week before the start. We met some of the finest people there, especially other Australian cyclists.

Before going to the PBP, I read everything available on the ride. Information from the Australian PBP organisers was invaluable and I followed up on many of the suggestions. Another must was to attend a night course to add to my French vocabulary.

My campaign started before the 1991 PBP ride, but I was given an ultimatum. Go to the PBP or wait a year and travel through the USA, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore sadly I chose the latter. After the experience of the 1995 PBP I felt I had been cheated in 1991. The PBP was easily the best adventure. Experimenting with my bike during the 1200/1500km ride nearly bought me undone in 1994. I suffered with a hamstring problem for some months after that ride and seemed to never get better.

After sorting out the bike to ride I gradually changed it to accommodate the needs for the PBP. Singapore Airlines agreed to take my bike at no cost as accompanying baggage. My flight started from Perth then Singapore changing planes for Paris. After disembarking at the Charles de Gaulle Airport I waited where the extra baggage would be brought, and it was there I met Paul Maynard who was from Sydney. We joined forces and gradually worked our way from the terminal to Rossy 1 railway station. Getting our cases and bike boxes on and off trains was a lot of fun. We finally arrived at St Quentin-en-Yvelines Railway Station where we caught a cab to the Novatel hotel. The cab cost 100FF the (normal charge is 40ff) because the cabbie said the extra was for a handling

charge which we mostly did anyway. After we were booked in, Paul and I assembled our bikes and went for a ride to the local shopping area nearby in the main shopping area and the PBP starting point.

Later we used the PBP route information to ride out about 30km, got lost half a dozen times and finally turned back to the Novatel at about 6:30pm. We dressed and went down to the dining area to have dinner. Sometime after Lyndon Stacy arrived and then we were three. Jet lag started to take over and we were asleep for the night at about 9:30pm even though it was still daylight outside.

In the morning we packed our bikes. Lyndon and I were going to La Croupes training camp in Normandy and Paul wanted to return to the hotel. After breakfast on Monday we left towards Nogent-Le-Roi, 60km from St Quentin-en-Yvelines where we stopped in the main street to buy some food and water. By the way the water was safe to drink from taps in France. Anyway I didn't get sick and I did not hear about anyone else with water problems. We climbed the hill out of the town to a small shady spot alongside a large rock wall and ate the food. Lyndon decided that he would return to the hotel with Paul so I set out alone. I had intended doing the journey alone anyway. Michelin maps reduced to A4 size and marked up showing the route, I reckoned I would pedal about 200km to the training camp.

It was a pleasant surprise to be reasonably understood and found that the country people loved Australians. It took me about 10 hours to do the distance and I was very happy to see some familiar faces at La Couptes. Colin and Barbara Farmer, Bob Bednarz, Phil Giddins, Sue Tailor and Phil Bellette were some of those to greet me and I met for the

first time other people from other states of Australia. Peter "Fast" Eddie Cole, Don Watson, Sharon Ferguson and Richard McCarthy were some who shared the cabins. I must apologise for not remembering all of the others but we did enjoy the experience. The owners turned on a barbecue for our last night which was most enjoyable.

La Coupte is the name of a small community with a very old church in the valley below and about four houses surrounded by farms. When we rode from the cottages, where we ate and slept, it was always downhill and uphill and downhill, etc. Ask Sue Taylor how confusing the road system is out near Saint Pierre. I won't tell the story here but it was worth remembering. My telecard gave me access to home to keep in touch with my wife Ronice where-ever I was in France. On Friday Phil Giddins, Sue Taylor, Phil Bellette, Bob Bednarz, Peter Cole and myself loaded our bikes up and headed back to Paris. We arrived back in the afternoon but Colin and Barbara took two days to do the distance. After some problems with room allocations we settled down to relax before the big one.

On Saturday morning several of us went for a ride out along the route before turning back to get some more rest. Sunday was the day for bike inspections and I performed the cardinal sin. I changed a globe in the generator driven tail-light and when I arrived at the place to have my bike checked to my surprise the rear light from the generator didn't work. I rapidly changed the globe in the head light to the same wattage as the tail-light and all was well but there had been a mild panic on my part. The attendants gave us our PBP bidon and we progressed to the soccer pitch to park our bikes. Then it was into the gymnasium to collect our brevet cards, a French Super Randonneur badge, a plastic swipe card and a neck pouch. Then back to the hotel to relax in our rooms and have a final check of the things which make for a successful PBP.

We woke on Monday morning and had all day to vacate our rooms, store the baggage in a special room down stairs and do some final relaxing. At 8:00pm Colin, Barbara and I rode over to the start to line up on the soccer pitch joining other riders from all over the world. At 10pm the official start time came and we started shuffling forward. We could see hundreds of bikes leaving the start line ahead of us and as we walked up a pathway leading to the road, our cards were marked to show that we didn't actually leave at 10pm. This would show the organisers that we had some time up our sleeves if we were in after the official closing time of 4pm Friday. I looked at my watch as we crossed the line; it was 10:45pm. The hustle and bustle with the large number of riders travelling along the roads near the start was electrifying. Everyone was excited and who wouldn't be when there were so many people lining the route cheering us on.

In front, as far as the eye could see, there were little red lights snaking across the French country-side. I was riding along with someone from England when I realised that I had left Colin and Barbara far behind. I had agreed to stay

with them for a while and I decided to lighten my load on the side of the road when I heard their familiar voices coming out of the dark. I saddled up again and moved alongside. I think Colin had given up hope of finding me in the large number of riders. Distance and the night soon ate up hours and we eventually made our first food stop just before dawn at Montagne-Au-Peche. There were people and bikes everywhere but we finally worked out the system. After feeding ourselves we peddled on to the first control check point at Villaine-La-Juhel. Things were much the same there and control check points came and went until 440km at Loudeac where I had my first rest. After getting some food I had about half an hour of sleep in the front seat of the car that Des Taylor had hired. He woke me when Don Watson and Bob Bednarz were ready to go on to Carhaix. We left together. Somewhere in the hills Bob disappeared and Don and myself needed more sleep. It was cold and damp so we wrapped ourselves in space blankets and stretched out on the grass at the side of the road. An American rider stopped to check if we had had an accident and after some assurances he left. After that we found ourselves awake again so peddled on to Carhaix. We saw some of the very fast riders coming back from Brest at this stage and they seemed to be going over the hills at about the same speed as we were going down. Breakfast at Carhaix with Phil and Sue was very comforting and we were ready for the large climb towards Brest. Don and I stopped about half way up the climb and after a short rest we continued to the secret control at the top. This was Tour de France country. The names of many famous riders were painted on the roads. Somewhere on the downhill side toward Brest I lost touch with Don and after eating lunch, I found Bob Bednarz and some other Aussie riders and we climbed our way out of the coastal town back to Carhaix. At the top we put our waterproof jackets on for the downhill run. During the day I kept meeting riders from Australia and other countries and had an early evening meal at Carhaix with Sue Taylor, Phil Bellette, Phil Giddins and Bob Bednarz.

Back at Loudeac there was more time to have a reasonable sleep before we left with Colin and Barbara Farmer, who were still going strong. Somehow during the day we were all split up again and I re-joined riding with Don Watson for a while until he told me to go on about 50km out of Montagne-au-Peche. The hills are steep and long in this area. Leaving any of the control check points was discomfiting, because it usually warm and there are people to talk with. After filling my bidons from a garden hose and collecting my bike I headed off to catch up with Sue & Phil.

During the ride through the forests and hills after Montagne-au-Peche I found myself riding alongside a Frenchman who couldn't speak English and from what he told me, he was making every effort to finish this time. In 1991 he was a DNF and very upset about it. His name was Daniel and I could not see his face but he did have a very



good Petzl helmet light to pick up the direction arrows. We soon caught a group of riders who were from Norway, Denmark, USA and Canada. Apart from their home language each spoke very good English which made me feel a little inadequate. The group was able to set up a reasonably good pace through the dark hills and forests. I lost Daniel somewhere along this part and continued on alone after I stopped to change over some batteries in my lighting system and have a bite to eat. There were so many others riding past where I had stopped that alone is hardly a good description of the situation. I caught up with the familiar site of the tandem of Phil, Sue and the koala and we rode together until Sue or Phil stopped for a rest and something to eat. We parted company and I rode on strongly to Nougent la Roi, the last control.

It was just before dawn when I dismounted and as my rear was very sore, it was a welcome change to sit on a wooden bench. I bought an omelette, apple puree, a bowl of black coffee, a large coke and a nectarine. The apple puree went well with the omelette and the body deprived of caffeine for some months reacted with the coffee and coke. I completed the last 57km in just over two hours. What an experience to ride through large crowds applauding your final efforts and the many attendants very willing to help with your bike near the final control at the gymnasium. Into the large hall where everyone was busy processing cards and rider's needs was like a dream after such an effort. Signing the final sheet handing over my Brevet and swipe cards was the almost final act. Bob Bednarz had arrive shortly before me and we congratulated each other warmly and I went out onto the soccer pitch to collect my bike. I was talking to Richard Koch, a Canadian, who was also staying at the Novatel, when a small young man went skipping and singing by. He must have heard me talking and called out; "Don".

It was Daniel, I also recognised his voice and we congratulated each other before he went skipping off to the

control desk. Richard and I swapped our dirty ride shirts and finally rode off toward the hotel. After booking in and going to my room I ran a deep bath but it was too hot so I sat down on the lounge and fell asleep for two hours. The bath was just right and after I was dressed I went down for some lunch with some other riders who had just arrived. Back to the room I sat down on the lounge again and had another two hours sleep. Later in the foyer everyone was gathering and just before five o'clock, Colin and Barbara came in to very warm applause. They finished the distance with half an hour to spare and seemed well relaxed. This time did not take into account the three quarters of an hour lost crossing the start line.

Taxis were ordered and we went off to an Italian restaurant where we all pigged out and kept a waiter busy bringing water. Many photos were taken and names and addresses swapped as most of us had the feeling that all the fun and thrill of the PBP was fast coming to an end. Three of us caught a cab back to the hotel and enjoyed a beer at the late night bar before going to bed.

Saturday's breakfast was a no holds barred affair and I found that not all people were as happy as myself. One young Canadian lady had registered for the 84 hour time limit and failed to arrive at Brest before the control closed. She was very unhappy and this should be a lesson for any person intending to do the same thing next time. Good advice is to register for the 90 hour limit. Each finisher gets the same award. I was very happy to complete the ride in 83 hours 20 minutes or 82 hours 35 minutes - my unofficial corrected time from the start line. The first riders home completed the route 40 hours faster than me but I got more value for my money.

The rest of the day was spent resting and preparing bikes for transport home to Australia. Most had an early night and were packed ready to leave the Hotel.

My wife Ronice arrived on Sunday at Charles de Gaulle and we travelled the rail system to Saint Quentin and then to the Novatel. We had our own room and relaxed for the day being very tired after the long flight. On Monday we left Paris after I had taken my bike to the airport to arrange transport back to Australia as unaccompanied baggage. Cost \$500.

We stayed with Ronice's sister for eight days in a small town near Dole before returning to Paris to start a 25 day tour of Europe by bus. After three days back in London, we travelled on a 14 day tour of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland. Six extra days in England and we flew home via a 6 day stay in Zimbabwe.

We had gone so far, met so many wonderful people, seen so many countries and sites that the adventure of the PBP is like a dream in the total panorama of our photos, videos and souvenirs of the late summer early autumn of Europe. I now use my experience and pass on to others the lessons learnt during that very eventful two weeks of riding in France.