

## 2008 Red Cross Fundraiser



I made my Red Cross fundraiser trip on Sunday, May 4th. It was cold and rainy on the 3rd with better weather forecast for the 4th, so I listened to Maggie for once and delayed by a day. I planned to start at dawn, about 6am. I launched my kayak in Rochester at the 37th Street put-in at 6:21 am. I had a little problem with my rudder right off the bat, so I actually got going at 6:28 am. I made good progress, about 6 mph most of the trip, hitting my time points very close to expected times.

The kayak trip was long but beautiful and peaceful. It was not too cool, about 42 degrees at the start, warming to nearly 60 at the finish. The water was high and fast with recent rains. That was good for speed, and also provided some fun rapids, but no truly scary or risky parts.

The upper stretch is very pretty, surprisingly wild, given the proximity to Rochester. I saw or heard three beavers and a muskrat. I didn't see any deer or raccoon, which is unusual. Fear not, neither is endangered. I saw a number of osprey and hawks and only one owl. I didn't see my first eagle until Lake Zumbro, but quite a few after that. I saw my first goslings of the spring, lots of mallards, wood ducks, and geese. There were quite a few kingfishers, though less than usual, along with blue herons, vultures, and a variety of small birds. The most interesting bird was a Little Blue Heron who was very curious about me.

I made good time at the portage at the power dam on Lake Zumbro, taking only 20 minutes. The pool below the dam actually has muskies, as well as huge carp. The stretch below the dam is one of the prettiest and most undeveloped along the river. It took me 2 hours to go from the dam to the finish at Zumbro Falls. I pulled out at 11:58, exactly 5 1/2 hours from the start. The trip was not bad. My right shoulder was a bit sore, but otherwise, I made good time and tolerated the 30 mile trip quite well.

When I got out of the water, Ken Parker and Kelsey met me with Kelsey's dog Reef. They helped me load up my kayak. I changed into bike clothes and headed out for my ride.

A 100-mile ride is challenging for me under most circumstances. When starting at 12:30, already tired, travelling not-very-familiar roads, worrying about having enough time to finish, it's tougher. The 26-mile first leg from Zumbro Falls to Wabasha is very scenic, and I had a tail wind and good speed. It's very hilly, though, which took a lot out of my legs. It finishes with a greater than one mile steep climb to the top of Coffee Mill Ski Area before a long fast descent into Wabasha. I met Ken there to go over our route and next meeting place.

I crossed the river to Nelson and headed south on WI 35 to a planned turn. I misjudged the location and doubled back to Nelson looking for it. After that mishap, we changed our navigational strategy. I had planned to ride small roads going east from the river, but knowing that the route was complex and cell phone connections poor, we decided not to risk getting separated. So we stuck mostly to WI 35. It's a very scenic route for a drive, a bit busy for cycling, but it has a good shoulder virtually all the way with very little gravel or glass. By afternoon it was

sunny and in the 60's, so there were hundreds of motorcycles out. Most, but not all, ignore bicycles. There were a few jerks and lots of noise.

The river and surrounding hills were gorgeous. The backwaters were quite high. I've gained an appreciation of the backwaters from kayaking and canoeing in recent years. The main channel of the Mississippi is like a highway, 200 yards wide, full of boats, busy, choppy. The backwaters are over a mile wide, placid, full of wildlife, and just a few fishermen. They are gorgeous and wild. There were plenty of turtles basking in the sun and many Great Egrets, in addition to other birds I've already mentioned.

I rode steadily along the river road. I worried about finishing before sunset, but I managed a pretty steady pace, despite headwinds, a little over 16 mph on average. Ken met me about every 10 miles to refill water bottles. I also needed the mental break by that time of day; just needing to think of 10 miles was a lot easier than worrying about finishing and the miles in between. I was pretty sore and tired by this time of day. Alma, Cochrane, Czechville, Fountain City, Bluff Siding, Marshland, Winona, Centerville, Galesville, all went slowly past. As I approached LaCrosse, our little two lane road suddenly became a limited access 65 mph highway, so we got off at the next exit and finished the ride near Holmen, WI. Ken and I had met at intervals along the way, but he followed me the last mile or two through the streets of Holmen. I told him I understood how all those girls felt about him in high school.

I finished at 7:42 p.m. just outside of Holmen. It felt good to finish. I was very tired. We stopped for gas and headed for Interstate 90 to get home, not too long after dark. I slept well that night.

Thus far I have \$4704 collected and \$7180 pledged. That works out to a little over \$55 per mile.

To all of you who have sent your checks, many thanks. You should receive your acknowledgement from the American Red Cross soon if you have not already.

To those who have pledged, please send your checks to me at the address below, made out to the American Red Cross.

If you have not pledged, it's never too late to send a check. I'll be happy to pass them along.

If you can't send a check now, let's hope the economy improves soon and you can do something at a later date.

Many thanks to all for all manners and amounts of support, particularly to Ken Parker for his "domestique" support.



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