

My 2008 Pan Mass Challenge Ride

The Introduction-

I'll keep this part short and sweet since if you're reading this you know the background and circumstances surrounding my involvement in the PMC. This year I decided to write a narrative of my experience of the PMC weekend so everyone who donates may feel a little closer to the event to which they've contributed. So enough of that, let me try to take you through my weekend in the hopes you feel like you were there in some way.

Friday, August 1st-

The day started out with the chance to sleep in a bit. I'm typically up around 5:45 am to be into work for 6:45 am, but this was the morning of our company mid year meeting (interestingly held a full month past the mid point of the calendar year) and I was to be at the function hall in Wrentham, MA for between 8 and 9 am. I arose at a luxurious 6:45 am and was out the door by 7. The meeting did not end early, as I hoped it would. I left Wrentham around 3 that afternoon, the upside being I was treated to a buffet lunch with good food in generous quantity. I made a quick stop at the farmhouse in Dudley where I printed the logos of two websites from whose members I received some very generous donations. The logos were printed on iron on transfers so they could be put on patches of cotton fabric and pinned to my jersey for Sunday's leg of the ride (everyone is encouraged to wear the PMC issued jersey on Saturday). I did some of my packing and started a load of laundry, and then left my house again around 5.

After a quick stop at my parents' house to drop off the iron on transfers (which my mother had graciously agreed to transfer to some scrap cotton cloth she had) I drove up to the Sturbridge Host Hotel where registration and a buffet dinner was waiting for me. I parked in a dirt lot after receiving instruction from a volunteer and I could hear the din of the crowd as I got out of my car some distance away.

The Host Hotel was buzzing with activity. People going in, coming out, working on their bikes, checking luggage, finding facilities, browsing the cycling expo and doing any of the infinite number of tasks required just to coordinate registration, the buffet dinner and the opening ceremonies scheduled for 7:30 that night. I fought my way inside and found the registration room. Fortunately it was in the same location as last year. I could hear the intermittent ringing of bells, sounded every time a first year rider registered. It reminded me of two years prior, when I registered my first time. No one told me about the bells, and I remember being surprised and pleasantly embarrassed all at the same time. I waited in what I thought would be a long line to register, but like the rest of the lines encountered throughout the weekend, it moved quickly, thanks to the remarkable efficiency and organization that are the hallmarks of this event.

The volunteer behind the registration table found my information after a few seconds of looking and attached the hospital-like bracelet on my wrist. The bracelet is one of the keys to the organization of the event. It has a unique bar code for each rider, the rider's name, emergency contact information, route, transportation and lodging information. The bar code is scanned several times over the weekend, tracking each rider, and ensuring no one is lost. It's made of thick Tyvek that's water resistant, tear resistant and, as anyone knows who's ever tried to pull one off their wrist without the aid of a sharp

blade, pretty nearly indestructible. I was also given my goodie bag containing my PMC 2008 jersey, socks, water bottle, luggage tags, name tag, bike tag and a few promotional gifts from the PMC sponsor Overstock.com.

I took my bag around to the back of the Host where there was an enormous tent with more commotion and loud conversation. I fought my way upstream to the food tent where the volunteers checked that I had a bracelet (since the dinner was free for riders, and while open to guests of the riders, guests were required to pay for the food). I saw the four or five identical buffet tables containing all kinds of good carbohydrates and protein to prepare the riders for the two day long ordeal that lay ahead of us. I heaped on piles of vegetable salad, seafood salad, ravioli, penne pasta and a dinner roll. I snagged an ice cold bottle of water and made my way back to the big dining tent and found an empty table.

It wasn't long before I had a fellow rider seated next to me. This is one aspect of the weekend I enjoy immensely. There is almost never anyone in bad spirits and everyone is unusually friendly. Under different circumstances, I'd color such a person strange, but this weekend, you struck up a conversation with anyone. We didn't hold a conversation for long as we were both busy fueling (which I think sounds better than "buried eyeballs deep in obscene amounts of food").

My friend left for another plate of food as I sat and digested mine and sipped my water. The weather was pristine; 75 degrees, low humidity and a slight breeze rippling the surface of Cedar Pond, on the shores of which the Host is situated.

After about a half hour I glanced at my watch. The time was 6:30 pm. I decided it was time to eat some more and get home so I could finish packing and be in bed early. Ordinarily before such an event, I would "carbo-load" much later at night, optimally, around 6 hours before the event, but the schedule of the weekend, of course, dictated otherwise.

After being checked by the volunteers again I collected a plate full of food just slightly smaller than the first. I found the same table empty again and this time was joined by a pleasant young woman from New York City riding for the first time. She was a bit anxious about the ride but confident nonetheless. She was worried the riding in New York was too flat to train adequately for the hills along the first half of our route and that her time for training was limited by her busy schedule working for Goldman Sachs. I tried to persuade her that the climbs the route went over were not all that severe although I guess people from different parts will see them differently. I use some of the steep hills around the northeast part of Connecticut for high intensity training when I don't have the time for a long ride but truth be told, I wished I had been out more in the past weeks than I actually had. A cold virus contracted three weeks prior (yes, in July) had put me out of commission just in time for the weekend I was to be the best man in my best friend's wedding in South Carolina. I think the first time rider felt better knowing this and hearing I still wasn't concerned about the climbs.

I finished my food and she left to get a seat for the opening ceremonies. She was staying at the Host that night, but I had to drive to Woodstock (CT) to see my parents and get my patches, go home and finish packing and try to be in bed at a reasonable hour.

So after a quick stop in Woodstock and receiving the two patches and well wishes from my parents, I was home in Dudley to finish packing, shower, fold some laundry and watch some of the opening ceremonies. The few bits I managed to see were touching. There was a story about a pediatric doctor who worked at DFCI that couldn't ride this year due to scheduling conflicts but a brain tumor patient of his volunteered to ride for him. There was another feature about the newly formed Massachusetts State

Police team and some stories of cancer survivors treated at DFCI and at the Jimmy Fund clinic.

I managed to get in bed at 9:30, which was a bit later than I wanted but earlier than I was expecting. It got hot and humid that night and I didn't get the best sleep. I'm usually a little anxious as well, but less so than the two previous years. I knew a little better what to expect. After checking that my alarm clock was successfully set for 4:15 am for the fourth or fifth time, my eyelids drooped and I dozed off to the drone of my floor fan.

Saturday, August 2nd, Sturbridge to Bourne-

This was one of those nights that it felt like 5 minutes after falling asleep, the loud alarm was buzzing in my ear and prompting adrenaline to surge through my blood vessels. I uncharacteristically jumped from my bed and began my preparations for the morning, which I had rehearsed in my head several times the night before. I changed into my Lycra shorts and PMC jersey that I had lain out. I used my morning toiletries and packed them away with the rest of my luggage. I inflated my bike tires to 100 psi and brought my bike outside, put some lubricant on the chain and stuffed it (carefully) into the back of my Subaru. I forced down a Nutra-Grain bar and drank some water, grabbed my luggage, keys and the plastic bag containing my cell phone, identification and a bit of money and stuffed that in one of the back pockets of my jersey.

As I was halfway out the door I remembered the two flasks of sports gel I had on my counter. For those who have never heard of sports gel, I use a liquid nutrition product that comes in the form of a thick syrup. The particular brand I use has no simple sugars (most of which have names that end in “-ose,” e.g. sucrose or glucose) and is made with mostly maltodextrin, electrolytes and some natural flavoring. It's often easier to digest than solid foods as it doesn't require as much blood to be sent to the stomach to break down like a solid would, thus reducing nausea. That it doesn't contain any simple sugars means there is no spike in blood sugar which inevitably results in a sugar crash shortly thereafter. I stuffed the two five-serving plastic bottles into my jersey, and hopped in my car. The time was 4:40 am.

As I approached the Host Hotel that morning, I began seeing riders on their bikes already out on the surrounding roads, warming up and checking for mechanical problems. It was barely past 5:10 am when I pulled into my parking spot where my car would remain for the weekend. I parked next to fellow riders who were busy preparing for the morning. I got my bike out, made sure my water bottles weren't leaking and checked my luggage one last time. I carried my bag to the luggage trucks and found the appropriate truck bound for the Mass Maritime Academy and the dorm where I would be staying. The Host was as busy at that early hour as it had been the night before and I had as much trouble just getting through one of the sets of double doors on the front of the building. After a quick pit stop in the men's room I found where breakfast was being served and snagged a couple of bananas and a couple half pints of milk. I'm not normally one to eat as soon as I get out of bed, so the two breakfast bars, the two bananas and milk seemed like a lot (even though, as far as calories are concerned, was insignificant to what I would burn off throughout the morning).

Back at my car, I found someone to borrow sunblock from, since I had mine smartly packed away and on the luggage truck already. I didn't feel bad about asking someone, and the guy I borrowed from was excited to share. It's part of the camaraderie of the weekend. Even though I didn't know anyone there I never really felt alone.

By 5:45 am many riders were lined up in the starting lanes and many others had left their bikes to mark

their spot. A large section of the Host parking lot is devoted to start lanes and they are marked off from left to right intended for those who ride fastest to those who ride slowest. As in the past years, I found a spot at the back of the fastest lane. I was initially intimidated but later learned a lot of people over estimate their ability, or just plain want to start before the rest of the riders.

Billy Starr (PMC founder and saint) got up on a hydraulic scissors lift at the front of the parking lot and addressed the riders, who were now swarming around the start line to find their bikes and grab a good spot. He introduced the performer who then sang the National Anthem, and with a few more words released the riders at the front of the pack at 6 am sharp. I felt my heart rate increase with the excitement of the moment. The sun was just beginning to rise on a typical August morning. I checked one last time that I was in the right gear, swung my leg over my bike and clipped into one of my pedals. I left my other foot free to push against the ground, as the start lane was at least 100 feet long and wall to wall with riders. One had to creep up this way to the entrance to the parking lot where it was thin enough to clip in both feet and begin riding. I reached that point after a large man behind me lost his balance and used my seat to prevent himself falling on my bike. We both agreed that would be a lousy way to start the weekend.

The exit from the Host puts the riders on US Route 20 East where it intersects with Mass Route 131. There is a sharp left turn out of the exit. The turn and both sides of the driveway are lined with people holding signs supporting riders, telling of cancer survival and various phrases of encouragement. There is a group of cheerleaders from a local school arcing around the turn on Route 20, which is shut down completely for our entrance. The cheering is the first of much that we would all receive throughout the weekend. It is an uplifting moment, it is hard to control the urge to take off at full sprint. I vowed this year to pace myself better in the hopes of arriving early, to limit the time I had to be in the saddle and hopefully avoid any afternoon summer thunderstorms.

It was a great feeling to finally be underway and moving quickly along Route 20. The train of riders stretched across both lanes of eastbound travel and as far back and forward as visibility permitted. We cruised effortlessly through the still morning air. I stayed to the left hand side comfortably passing most people and joining a few riders who were doing the passing. The first hill we came to is by the big shopping plaza on 20 and I heard the usual first cries of despair from one or two riders, perhaps still asleep at the early hour, or perhaps just first year riders hailing from very flat parts of the country.

We turned off Route 20 and climbed up the hill towards the Masonic Home in Charlton, MA. I passed lots of people on this hill and had no one pass me. Most of the serious speed demons had spots at the front of the pack anyway. I managed to pull myself into a lull between a smaller group ahead and a progressively shrinking but still large group behind. We then climbed up by Baypath Regional High School and I was glad I had scouted out these roads a couple of weeks before the ride. Knowing a climb takes away a lot of anxiety for me and lets me concentrate on working the pedals up the hill. We descended the east side of Mugget Hill after catching another glimpse of the rising sun and coasted down into Oxford.

In case you are worried you are about to read a James Michener length novel, fear not. I am able to recount in detail the first part of this ride only because I know the area well. The rest of the ride consists of a new road almost every mile and a new town every three or so. I would like to point out that just after the second fairly tough climb somewhere near the Oxford-Sutton border, my most loyal fan and spectator, my Uncle Jim, was again out early in the morning with his cowbell ringing away and cheering on the riders. He is a serious endurance athlete himself, having competed in triathlons, cycling races and ultramarathons. He knew better than most of us out there what it was like to suffer

through a sporting event and it was nice to relay that to the riders around me after he ran along with me for twenty or thirty feet yelling like a crazed French cycling fan. It gives me a great mental boost every year I see him out there.

The rest of the first part of the ride went on without much incident. We arrived at the first water stop after what seemed like a very fast 25 miles. I didn't need a rest or water or food at this point but I did need to use the portable toilets. I was well hydrated before the start of the event and between standing in place for a half hour before the event and then riding for an hour and a quarter without sweating much I was hearing nature call quite loudly. I was in and out and back on the road in minutes.

The morning continued in this fashion mile after mile. I checked my watch frequently to judge my progress. I took sips from my water bottles and my gel flasks often to stay hydrated and alert. 7:30 came and went as did 8:30. Somewhere in there I flew by the second water stop at the 42 mile mark. I felt like a million bucks and still had a fair bit of water. Anytime I skipped through a water stop like that, besides attracting the admiration of some of the volunteers, I usually found myself with no one to share the road with. I didn't mind because I typically ride alone and it's a familiar and sometimes comforting feeling.

I did actually see one rider ahead that I caught up to on a slight down hill. His name was Mark Warren and he was from Old Saybrook, CT. He saw my tag still read Woodstock, CT (since it was printed before my move to Dudley) and we struck up a conversation. We rode together for quite some time and even built up a small paceline at one point of around five or six riders. We moved along at a good clip, taking turns on the front, similar to how geese fly and migrate, except it is done in a straight line, rather than a v-shape. Drafting behind another rider, while dangerous for the inexperienced, reduces the effort of exertion on a flat road by as much as 40%. It can be the difference between finishing such an event comfortably and finishing slowly and painfully.

I kept ticking over the pedals and enjoying the scenery. There were people along much of the route, some had set up water stands with cold water, and some with food as well. Many just stood or sat in lawn chairs with signs or various noise making devices. Almost all of them said "thank you for riding" or something to that effect. I don't know how many of them know how much easier that makes the riding, but as anyone who has participated in any type of endurance race or event will tell you, it really does make a huge difference.

I glanced at my watch and incredibly the time was 10 am. We pulled into the lunch stop at 69 miles. I still felt quite good, although the first signs of fatigue were definitely there. I still had good supplies and left my riding partners who wanted to stop for a rest and some food and drink. The ones who are on teams also have a chance to meet up with their "Pedal Partner," a young child undergoing treatment for cancer at the Jimmy Fund clinic with whom the team is paired so they might have some additional inspiration; the child also has some excitement and joy from the support of an entire team of cyclists. One day I aspire to start a team and sign up with the Pedal Partner program but for now I am just happy to string together the annual fund raising and riding this event demands.

I pedaled along fairly comfortably for the short distance to the next stop at 83 miles. The road was still absent of much rider traffic despite having just merged with the Wellesley-Bourne route. As I pushed through the fairly flat miles approaching that fourth stop, I felt the first twangs in my left calf signaling the start of a potentially painful cramping. A calf cramp feels like your calf muscle is trying to roll itself up into a ball behind your knee, like a window shade. Fortunately on a bike, one can stretch out the calf to an extent, by coasting along with the heel pushed down. I knew it was a sign I probably

wasn't drinking enough water, and especially electrolytes. I pulled into that fourth water stop to fill one bottle with water and another with a sugar and electrolyte rich sports drink, and again to use the portable toilet. I stretched out the legs again, as I had at the start of the ride. I was a little wary about stretching so soon after getting up, as the muscles at that point are still short from a night spent relaxed and one, therefore, doesn't get the full benefits of stretching the muscle when it is at its normal length.

The twangs went away and I hopped back on the saddle. After being on the bike for such a long time, it begins to feel like another appendage, like it's a part of you. A new age cyclist wierdo would probably call that "being one with the bike" but I just think it's a sign you've been on the bike enough time to call it an endurance event. You control the bike without conscious effort. The road blemishes you avoid pass under you as you continue to take in the landscape ahead and most everything is on autopilot. Some people get lost in their thoughts at points like this, and I had to keep myself focused on watching out for traffic and keeping an eye on those little green arrow route markers.

The miles continued to pass. The land eventually grew totally absent of elevation changes and I smelled salty air and decaying plant life- tell tail signs I was close to the shore. I breezed by the fifth and last water stop at 100 miles and made my way into Bourne. There were a couple of steep but short hills that lead the riders through the center of Bourne and I was out of the saddle for all of them, passing one or two lonely riders on each one. I don't consider myself a climber in the least, but I have the advantage of having some steep hills available to train on. It might be that I'm just less intimidated by the climbs on the PMC route after having made more trips than I can count through Bigelow Hollow and one up Wachusett Mountain. Whatever the reason, I always passed other riders on the hills and was rarely passed myself.

At one point, I peaked above the tree line and saw my home marker- the large but graceful looking white painted electricity generating wind turbine on MMA's campus, spinning peacefully around in the summer breeze. The last time I had checked my watch was about 11:20 am. I was so enamored with Bourne's scenery and quaint downtown (and the mildly painful sharp rises in the road) I hadn't looked at my watch again since. As I turned onto Route 6 for a short stretch, I knew I was all but there. I allowed myself to look once as I turned down the small side road to the MMA entrance. 12:00 noon. I had reached campus in fewer than 6 hours including water stops. My average speed was just shy of 18.5 mph. Not bad, I thought to myself.

I dismounted as I coasted up to the tent, the finish lined with spectators cheering away. It was quieter than last year, probably because I was finishing significantly earlier. The Bourne volunteers (who were amazing) scanned my bracelet in and cheerfully parked my bike. It was one of a few in a large array of empty bike racks, awaiting the equipment from the weary riders to come, anywhere between that time and as late as 8:00 pm that night.

I found my dorm room (the number was on my bracelet, conveniently enough) and I had, to my dismay, beaten my luggage to it. After standing there in a stupor for a few minutes (the brain was definitely running on a lean mixture at that point) I heard a little commotion coming from the other end of the dorm. I tore open the velcro closures on my shoes and left them in my room. I found, at the other end of the hall, a young man with a PMC volunteer shirt on with a pile of luggage. He was breathing heavily and sweating in the stifling dorm. We were on floor four of a four floor dorm (and yes, I had to walk up that many stairs, and yes it did hurt). I felt bad for the guy since it looked like he was just half way done with the floor. As luck would have it, he was just about to carry my bag to my room as I turned the corner and I took it right from him. I think I was as relieved to see my luggage as he was to get rid of it.

I quickly showered, put on my fresh clothes, claimed my spot on the floor (with a mattress provided of course) under the dorm room's only window, and made my way back down to the common for my massage.

I had more reason this year to look forward to my 15 minute complimentary massage than last year because my girlfriend, Meredith, in her fifth year of a six year Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Simmons College in Boston had volunteered to be a massage therapist for the event. I called her and told her I had already arrived and showered. I arrived early enough that I didn't have to schedule a time for a massage, they just let me right in. I walked right over to her table and she greeted me with a hug and a kiss. I hoped other riders knew not to expect that from their massage therapist; I pictured some ugly commotion arising from that.

After receiving a very nice deep tissue massage that relaxed my aching calves and other muscles, she stretched out my legs and the quickest fifteen minutes of my entire life were over. She wisely told me to get something to drink and eat because I looked pale. As soon as I sat up from the massage table, I knew she was very right (not a surprise). I felt dizzy and disoriented, and had all the classic signs of hypoglycemia- low blood sugar.

I took some deep breaths and focused on walking a straight line to the huge food tent with hundreds of chairs set up at long tables awaiting huge crowds of riders. The first thing I saw was clam chowder. Not the best for a quick cure of a hypoglycemic condition, but good enough. I think the oyster crackers helped the most, actually. After I finished, my hand eventually stopped trembling and I felt confident I could arise without passing out and causing a big scene. I chugged a bottle of Snapple antioxidant water (whatever that was, it had sugar in it, and that was my only concern).

I proceeded to gorge myself on food. There were cheeseburgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers, grilled chicken, a salad bar, baked potatoes, chili, pizza and calzones. I favored the baked potatoes (insert bad Irish heritage joke here) mainly for the starch content, of course. I milled around and watched other riders limp in from the finish. Around 3 pm, after passing out for a few minutes on the table in front of me, I decided to go up to my room for a nap. I set my phone alarm for 4 pm. By then, my other two roommates had arrived and gone. I met one at the dorm after I awoke at 4 pm. I was about to go down for more food when I noticed out of one of the dorm's windows a bit of weather blowing in from the east. Not long after, it was raining hard and I opted to wait it out in the dorm. This turned out to be a good decision. Soon after, I received a call from Meredith who was due to go on break (it was now closer to 5 pm). Just before she called me, the wind blew hard enough to lift the synthetic canvas of the large food tent up off of one of its supporting poles which then fell on top of the hamburger/hot dog table. Everyone was told to go to their dorms. I felt for the riders who were just arriving. The news of no food, even temporarily, was a huge blow to anyone's spirit at that point.

Fortunately, the problem with the tent was not serious and no one was hurt. A line of yellow caution tape blocked off a portion of the tent as they moved the affected serving area outside the tent. As I went back down to what was now a very crowded food tent, I saw the founder of the event, Billy Starr, discussing options with the chief of Bourne Fire-Rescue. Later I saw him again, chatting on his cell phone. An interesting little fact about him, despite all the work he does leading up to the event, he's organized it so well, that come the weekend of the PMC, he's just another rider and has few official duties (except of course, for extenuating circumstances such as the tent). It wasn't too long before the Newport Tent Company arrived from Newport, RI to fix the tent. Everyone cheered as we watched the missing poles be replaced and the iron tent stakes driven back into the ground.

I managed to eat myself nearly into another coma and around 7:30 I strained my way back up to the fourth floor to my room. I talked to my roommates for a while and finally heard from Meredith at 8:45 pm. She was supposed to finish at 8:00, but like every year, the line for a massage does not magically disappear at 8. She soldiered through what ended up being a nearly 9 hour shift and I was amazed to see how chipper and upbeat she still was when I went down to say good bye at 9 pm. It was a brief but again, uplifting moment and she was finally on her way to her family's house in Dennis on the bay side of the Cape.

I was back up in my room by 9:15 and asleep shortly thereafter. I stripped down to boxer shorts and yet was still sweating. The thunderstorm had brought slightly cooler wind but we had no way to exchange our suffocating dead, hot air with the cooler air that was just outside our window (that frustratingly opened a slim 4"). I woke up several times in the night to roll over, as one spot would get sore and needed adjustment. It was similar to camping. I woke up one last time at 3:45 am Sunday morning 15 minutes before reveille ...

Sunday, August 3rd, Bourne to Provincetown-

I must tell you, if you've made it this far into my narrative, I'm impressed. I figure it took only slightly less endurance to read this much than it did to ride those 190 miles. As I alluded to at the end of my last paragraph, we were awoken at the crack of 4 am. It's the worst part of the weekend as far as I can tell. You awake with the knowledge of how much riding still lies ahead with thoughts of your less-than-adequate night's sleep you're just now leaving. Since I was already awake, I was first up and flipped on the lights. In with the contacts, brush the teeth. I packed my clothing from the day before, changed into the days attire in the bathroom, (including my [AlpineZone.com](#) and [SkiDiva.com](#) patches) and packed my bag such that everything I needed for my shower in Provincetown was easily accessible. I left the room around 4:30 am and gingerly walked downstairs in barefeet. I didn't pack my sandals to avoid any unnecessary weight, but I had to pack my sneakers in my bag for the trip and didn't want to clod around in my awkward bike shoes for fear I might slip and hurt myself.

Once I made it to the grass outside and away from the treacherous stairs in the dorm I did put on the bike shoes and brought my luggage to the appropriate truck. There was all kinds of fruit and yogurt and breakfast bars in the food tent that was already busy with activity. There were also egg sandwiches. I hesitated at first, since the fat in the cheese probably wasn't the best to eat before riding but it was only a single slice. I was more interested in the carbohydrates in the English muffin and the salts in the bacon. I had a slice of melon and some fruit juice to wash it down. I made sure I had my sports gel with me and walked across the campus to find my bike.

The bikes glistened under the lights of the MMA baseball field, still wet from the rain. All of the bikes were made from materials that where either naturally corrosion resistant, such as aluminum, titanium or carbon fiber, or were steel alloys that would be unaffected as long as they didn't remain wet for too long. I found my bike close to the gates of the field and wheeled it to a quiet spot along the entrance of the campus to stretch out. I went through my stretching routine, hopped on the bike and was on my way. There is no mass start on Sunday like there is on Saturday. There's no need to go through the coordination and effort of arranging a mass start and having to close down roads and such, so riders leave at their leisure.

It was just 5 am on the dot as I warmed up on the flat roads on the West side of the Cape Cod Canal. I caught the tail end of a line of riders with Red Sox themed jerseys and followed them around to the

entrance of the Bourne Bridge. The bridge, spanning the canal, actually has a good little rise to it that will wake the legs up. I unfortunately had my chain jump off my front chain rings and had to hop up on the sidewalk to put it back on. I found a break in the riders fairly easily and got back on the bike. I feared merging back in would be more difficult than it was since they were able to block off one lane of travel for the bikes but there was still a fair bit of bike traffic in that one lane. I coasted down the bridge and around the rotary to the entrance of the canal recreation path.

The riders of the PMC did not own the path at that hour, as one would expect. There were several fishermen out on the banks of the canal as well as a select few joggers and early morning walkers. All of the riders were diligent in their observance of the other path users and the canal was past us soon without incident. I lost the next group I had joined up with at the end of the canal as they stopped to tweak their mechanical settings in the parking lot at the end of the recreation path. I rode on with a few other stragglers.

We all climbed a slight rise in the road underneath a US Route 6 overpass and made a left onto what's known as the Service Road. The rise in the previous road is a precursor to a nasty little hill that was wreaking havoc on some of the riders. I found I couldn't slow my pace comfortably to stay with my group of riders and pushed on up the hill. I stayed seated and was over the top in pretty short order. The road continues to undulate up and down like a roller coaster, with smooth pavement and no traffic. The route followed the usual series of turns snaking around the towns and avoiding the high traffic roads as much as possible.

I felt surprisingly good that morning with the legs warm and the air in favorable conditions. I felt good enough to use the first water stop as a bathroom only again. As I hopped out of my saddle to pump up a little hill into a parking lot with much energy and passed another rider without so much energy I heard someone in the crowd greeting us say "wow, I think there's a professional here." I smiled at the naive but flattering remark and sailed over to the long line of portable toilets. Once again, there was no wait. I was in and out. The whole weekend was like this; it is such a well oiled machine, orchestrated with such precision, it almost feels too easy as a rider. Almost.

I joined up with another group riding at a good clip about a third of the way to the next water stop. They had a strong rider out front, much stronger than me, though I could keep pace tucked safely in the line. I again passed people whenever we went up a hill and worked my way nearer the front of the line. I was not working too hard and felt good as we approached the second stop. I think some teams tend to go too hard and focus too much on just getting to the next water stop and then resting. I was doing a much better job at pacing myself, enough so that I just continued right on through stop two and 40 miles. The halfway point of Day 2. I was very pleased with how I felt.

There was a stretch of recreation path again after the second water stop. Again, I found myself alone and having to watch closely for route markers. At all the major intersections there were local police there for us to direct traffic. They were all great and did a wonderful job of keeping the riders safe and moving along even when it was a lone rider like me.

After a bit, I did start getting passed, for which I was grateful. I knew I was ahead of most of the riders who were slower than me and at my pace, and I knew that faster riders who were stopping at the rest areas would eventually catch me again.

I went through some towns with familiar names, and by using the sun that now peaked out from behind the partly cloudy skies, I knew I had turned the corner, as it were, and I was on my way due north.

I was soon on a steep little hill up to the third and final water stop. I filled my bottles and used the bathroom one last time, almost giddy with anticipation of the finish a scant 20 miles from the very spot I stood. I left the stop alone again, and had a few people pass me on the winding roads leading up to Provincetown. As I crossed into Truro I started to remember some nasty little rises in the road from last year and soon after learned I had a good memory (probably because they were quite painful despite not being terribly long). I felt strangely stronger at the top of each one, however, whether it was from the adrenaline working or maybe just a little increased blood flow to the legs I don't know. I do know that every time I leaped out of my saddle and started pumping up those hills, I had no problems riding on at the crest.

When I was around 8 miles out I realized I hadn't check my watch since 8:30. I was riding hard and almost glanced down at it when I heard what I thought was a car approaching from behind. The noise turned out to be the sound of about 20 riders riding together as one pack getting ready to leave me in their wake. I had a choice at that moment to continue on my pace alone, or...

I hopped out of my saddle and up shifted my bike simultaneously. I caught on to the rear wheel of the last rider and settled comfortably into their much faster pace. With the excitement of the finishing looming ahead I hadn't noticed the headwind that was kicking up. We were now on an exposed section of Route 6, and as one of the riders in our group told me, I didn't want to be caught out on these sections alone. We had our own little peleton (which in a race typically refers to the main pack of riders sometimes acting as a cohesive unit, but the term is used more liberally among recreational cyclists) and were cruising on in to the finish. Again, I noticed, every time we hit a hill, I could work my way past some of the weaker riders and into a more protected spot. In the middle of the pack, I was safe from winds coming from any direction and had a nice buffer of riders behind me. We were making way at somewhere around 25 mph on the flats.

We hit the split in the road where the riders going to the alternate finish line, known as the "Family Finish," veered off and the big pack splintered in a moment of confusion. I banked off to the right with about ten other riders and we spun hard over the last bit to the main finish at the Provincetown Inn. The finish line was full of people, cameras and volunteers. We were scanned again and walked gratefully to the shower tent with one more glance back out our hero's welcome.

I looked at my watch. It read 9:15 am. I checked it again, thinking I misread the numbers. I read correctly. I averaged just under 19 mph and over half the time riding all by myself. I was very, very pleased with my riding. There were so few riders there ahead of us, I had the shower tent all to myself, which I took advantage of after finding my luggage one more time. The down side of finishing early is the luggage truck to Boston and the bike truck to Sturbridge were not open yet, so I had to wait to get my belongings in order. I took the opportunity after showering to go right to the food tent and eat. I ate a quantity of food about proportionate to the effort of the weekend.

The grill had just started when I went to get my cup of chowder (credit due here, by the way, to Legal Seafoods, who provided their very tasty chowder). I relaxed the morning and early afternoon away. I eventually found the luggage and bike trucks open and put both where they belonged. I walked the mile to the ferry pier at 2:20 pm for the 3:00 pm ferry departure.

It was an interesting walk again this year, as it was last year. I was amused at how few people in Provincetown to this day, after 28 Pan Mass Challenges, still don't know what the event is or why there are so many people walking their crowded streets from the Inn to MacMillan Wharf with bikes and

bags and all wearing matching Tyvek bracelets. It was in stark contrast to the people in other parts of the state, who went out of their way to set up water stops or just to be out along the route to cheer us on. I will give credit to one young woman, in a black bikini and painted from head to toe like a dalmatian who was walking past and yelling out that she appreciated our hard work and everyone that was with the PMC.

I boarded the ferry and Billy Starr was standing at the gang plank greeting the riders taking the ferry back to Boston. I shook his hand and told him how much fun I had and thanked him for the event. He smiled and thanked me right back, as genuine as if I'd known him my whole life. I still laugh in disbelief when I see that we so often idolize in the public eye actors, professional athletes and career politicians. Billy Starr is a role model among role models. At various points during the event he was alone and very accessible for conversation. Whenever I did see him alone, I noticed he always had a smile on his face and I could tell how much he enjoyed doing this every year, and seeing everything come together so, dare I say, perfectly.

The ferry arrived in Boston Harbor to be first greeted by the Harbor Master in his skiff. He did a few circles around the ferry with his strobe lights on and his siren going and then pulled along side and unfurled a small banner with "PMC" written on it. Everyone on the ferry cheered and waived as he escorted us in. A fireboat from the Boston Fire Department joined the escort, pumping water through all of its monitor nozzles sending water up into the air for a great show.

We eventually reached the pier in Boston, lined with families of the riders. There were more signs and emotional greetings. It was the best moment for me, of the whole weekend. We all felt like heroes and thoroughly enjoyed our small moment, on an otherwise very quiet Sunday evening.

I took the coach bus they had prearranged back to Sturbridge after retrieving my luggage in Boston. I found my bike carefully laid out on the lawn of the Host back in Sturbridge where my weekend had started a short 36 hours ago. We were all still buzzing from the whole weekend. It was hard to come down from that feeling you have the whole weekend from such an amazing event and return to real life.

As much as I was pleased with how I rode, I never lost sight of the focus of the weekend. There were lots of emotional moments and exchanging of stories of cancer survivors and losses.

With the help of your generosity, I managed to raise \$8,214 of the \$35,000,000 total donated to the Jimmy Fund and DFCI this year by the PMC. I hope to do it all over again next year, with your support. I cannot begin to express my appreciation and admiration for each and every one of my donors. All I can tell you is that I am committed to riding if you are committed to giving. It's a joint effort with high rewards for everyone involved. Together we can beat this disease, and until we do, let us never lose focus of that.