



# Perspectives

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## Brief summary of the COVID season

KEVIN BESSETT

**G**etting it underway was challenging, but GMBC had a 2020 season.

It started in early July and for me, it was nice to have a taste of normalcy again. I am sure that others felt the same. All club events ran except for the Wednesday night rides and the remaining practice crits which were both cancelled due to concern over the potential for large groups. Plenty of justification existed to write off 2020, but no one in the club leadership ranks wanted to do that. Hats off to them!

Here are a few stats for this abbreviated season: 58 events took place, which yielded a total participation of over 540 riders. That is impressive, but the best news of all is that the State did not need to reach out to GMBC for contact tracing. Thank you to everyone for putting up with filling out an online COVID screening form for each event. Here's hoping that the '21 season resembles something more normal. 🚲



A GMBC group ride headed over the Lake Champlain bridge for a ride up the western side of the lake to the Essex, NY - Charlotte, VT ferry.

PHOTO CREDIT: TOM BROIDDO



# From the desk of the VP

by JOHN WILLIAMS

**T**he VP ride season did not end with a whimper! Four riders set out on Saturday, November 14 for a new MUP (Mostly Un-Paved) ride plotted by yours truly. The temperatures were low, the winds high, the clouds dense, the roads gritty, the hills high, and the valleys low, along a river flow for 45 miles. The route presented many unknowns since none of us had previously ridden it, although we had intelligence that some challenging Class IV roads would greet us along the way.

About midway through the ride we found Class IV including Mayotte, Carrie, Will George, and Howrigan Roads in Fletcher. *(top photo)* We were presented with leaf-covered rocky surfaces with steep gradients. I admit we walked some of it. On the descent, we had deep, rutted mud puddles, stream crossings, and slippery rock surfaces. I had one crash on the descent but landed with a soft forward roll just at the perimeter of a puddle. No harm! Truly an epic ride and a memorable way to end the 2020 VP Ride season!

Despite the COVID situation, we had a good VP Ride season. Before each ride we gathered contact and travel/health information from each rider through the questionnaire Kevin set up for us. What could be better than inhaling fresh air while cycling through the changing seasons of Vermont's beautiful landscape? Our attendance ranged from two to 16 through the summer and fall. We visited some of our favorites: Crown Point to Essex, NY, Island Ride, North and Big Jay, App Gap, Smugglers Notch, GMBC Metric Century route, and more. One of my personal favorites was a ride from St. Albans east and north along the shore of Lake Carmi and along the US/Canadian border. The low traffic, smooth pavement, and sweeping views gave me a sense of being on top of the world! Many thanks to those who dropped back to provide a wheel for me to follow on many of the VP rides.

In the fall we returned the popular evening MUP rides with up to 16 riders participating in these adventures which often included sections of Class IV roads or wooded trails. Riding after dark (with a strong headlamp and rear flasher) offers a sense of calm and wonder. GMBC teamed with the Richard Tom Foundation to offer a Gravel Ride on October 17 *(See RTF article)*.

Despite COVID, we managed to have a very good (but different) season. Thanks to all who participated this year and let's hope 2021 brings a lessening of COVID concerns and more great rides ahead! 🚲

**Please send us photos of your rides! We need hi resolution digital files, at least 2MG is ideal. Along with your photos, please send a caption and who took the photo. Email photos to Phyl Newbeck at [phyl@together.net](mailto:phyl@together.net)**



Rick Blount approaching puddle...



GMBC VP riders sporting a variety of cloth face coverings on the ferry.

PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN WILLIAMS

PHOTO CREDIT: FRIENDLY PASSENGER ON THE ESSEX-CHARLOTTE FERRY

# Rethinking putting the bike away

by STEPHEN BARNER

If you're like most cyclists, you're regretting that day when you clean any remaining sweat off your bike, make sure everything is lubed up, and find a place in the basement where you can tuck it safely away for the winter. As a former shop rat, I encourage you to take your bike into your favorite bike shop for service BEFORE tucking it in for the winter, as your favorite mechanic will welcome the off-season work, but you should think twice before putting it away at all.

The problem is that, for many of us, winter sports don't start when bike season ends, and the frequency in which we engage in them may be enough to keep us sane, but not in shape. Spring then brings the pain of slowly regaining that lost conditioning. It really doesn't need to be this way!

Fact is, there are a lot of days in the winter when you can safely ride, and even enjoy the different experience, if you are prepared for it. For me, the biggest hurdle is keeping my hands and feet warm. I have a co-worker who can ride his 12-mile commute in 32-degree temps without shoe covers and be fine. If it's 40 degrees, I need something additional over my feet, and wool socks, if I'm going to avoid numb feet at that distance. Everyone is different and you need to find what works for you at the distance you want to ride. The most valuable advice I have is to start slowly and work your way up to your own comfort limits, as well as figuring out your budget for specialized equipment.

Start your foray into winter cycling with appropriate clothing and waiting for good conditions to ride. If you XC ski, you probably have all you need for nice, dry, winter days when the temps are above 25 degrees. We have lots of those here in Vermont. Make sure you wait for at least a few days after a snowfall so the roads will be clear of ice and keep your eyes open. There's no shame in dismounting and walking over an icy section. There's more

wind with cycling than XC skiing, so you may need an extra layer, warmer gloves and insulated shoe covers. Keep your first rides short until you know how far you can go before cold starts to be a problem.

Once you're comfortable with the concept, consider a pair of winter cycling boots, especially if you have cold feet. The hardcore winter cyclists in tougher climates than ours usually stick with regular boots like Sorels, sized to fit multiple layers of socks without tightness, and flat MTB pedals, without cleats. Many of the winter riders I see are wearing helmet liners that come down over their ears. If you've still got some hair, you may find that you can go down to 20 degrees with just a pair of light earmuffs. I like the folding ones from 180S. I have a couple of balaclavas, but it would have to be below 10 degrees before I would consider wearing one past the first few miles.

If you get to the point where you're looking at special winter cycling footwear, think about your bike. Winter is tough on a bike and the salt attacks finishes. Luckily, older, non-suspended mountain bikes are excellent for winter riding and can be bought cheaply, if you don't already have one buried in the garage. Offer your neighbor 50 bucks for the StumpJumper they haven't ridden in 20 years. Keep lots of lube on the chain, fix any issues, and make sure the tires and tubes are in good shape, as you don't want to have to deal with mechanicals on the road in the cold. Personally, I like full fenders for winter and foul-weather riding.

Finally, if you want to ride gravel or when there is ice on the road, you will want studded tires. If you go that route, make sure the studs have carbide inserts. Don't waste any time on studs made only of steel. I have long ridden Nokian (now Suomi) tires but have warmed to the Schwalbe Marathon Winter. Generally, the more studs the better. Studded tires and winter cycling shoes are typically the two most

expensive pieces of dedicated winter cycling equipment. Good lighting, front and rear, are especially important, given the shorter period of daylight.

So, don't think that cold weather needs to be the end of your riding. Set your own limits, get out there and enjoy the magic of winter cycling. I have found that riding on paved roads in snow before the shoulders have been plowed isn't fun and doesn't feel safe, so I wait two to three days after a storm before riding. (I must say, though, that riding at night in the snow when there are no cars around can be an ethereal experience.) On the other hand, dirt roads are fantastic as soon as they have been plowed, as long as you have studded tires or a fat bike. Get out and find out what you've been missing! 🚲

## 2020 Time Trial Series

By KEVIN BESSETT

Short. That sums up the truncated TT season. Six races took place from early August to mid-September, and it was a pleasure running each one this year (one guess why). Many thanks to all who helped time. The average participation of 11 at each race was about on par with the past several seasons. David White, Gordon Van Den Noort, and Jamie Willsey took top honors for attending the most events with five. So that's it. I hope that '21 is a better year in many ways 🚲





# News from the Richard Tom Foundation

by JOHN WILLIAMS AND RTF BOARD

It has been a challenging year for all organizations hosting athletic events including the Green Mountain Bicycle Club. The Richard Tom Foundation (RTF) is one of many foundations and organizations affected by this long year of Covid-19. We started 2020 on a high note, by celebrating the RTF-assisted purchase of a SnowDog Groomer for the Catamount Outdoor Family Center and as co-host of the RTF Fat Bike Rally. It was a warmish (but not too warm), sunny February day with plenty of snow and with the trails well-groomed for us at Catamount. Earl's Cyclery and Fitness and Catamount provided demo bikes free of charge and the level of excitement was palpable. Board Member Chris Morrissey ("CMO") and his wife Samantha provided music and burgers and brats cooked to order. Little did we realize that a dark cloud, in the form of Covid-19, was about to strike both locally and globally.

From mid-February, RTF still had hopes that the pandemic might "magically go away" (as some would say), and that we could host our annual Richard's Ride in May. Piece by piece we saw scheduled athletic events drop off the calendar. RTF soon followed by postponing Richard's Ride. We followed these trends through the summer when our Annual Labor Day RTF Kids' Crit was cancelled along with the Green Mountain Stage Race. RTF is the Title Sponsor for the GMSR Burlington Criterium.

Summer through fall, the RTF Board met virtually and frequently to consider other strategies for remaining active within the cycling community. We developed a three-pronged approach:



**Initiative 1: We developed a new program called BFF (Bikes for Free!).** Through this program and through our resident schoolteachers on the Board, we identified three boys who for various reasons did not have access to a quality bicycle. This summer, Board member Chris Morrissey ("CMO") launched a new bicycle shop in Bristol, Vermont (Cool Motion Outdoor Sports, <https://www.coolmotion-outdoorsports.com>). Through CMO's generosity and hard work, RTF was able to purchase two new bicycles and one reconditioned bicycle which were provided, along with new helmets, to each of these boys. Fifteen additional

re-conditioned used bikes with helmets were also given away via CMO's shop. Tons of smiles were generated, both giving and receiving. All young children should have access to the

freedom and joy associated with riding a bike! We will continue this program through 2021 and beyond, supported by our financial strength which many of you help us attain. Therefore, if you are aware of a family (we are not limiting this to children, parents may also qualify) that could use some help finding her or his "dream bike", please let us know. You can contact me at [jbikenski@gmail.com](mailto:jbikenski@gmail.com).

**Initiative 2:** As it became clear that hosting a full, in-person 2020 Richard's Ride would not be possible,



## Richard Tom FOUNDATION





we developed plans to host a Virtual Richard's Ride. The rules were simple: Ride anywhere, anytime in September or October, any distance and send a photo from your ride to our Facebook Page (<https://www.prod.facebook.com/richardtomfoundation/>). We provided incentives for donations (t-shirt, RTF 2019 jersey). Aquatec Environmental, Inc. committed up to \$1,000 in matching donations. Thanks to many GMBC members, and especially to our Richard's Ride Title Sponsor, Vermont Bicycle Tours, and others, we were able to raise over \$11,000 in donations. Thank you so much! This places RTF in a strong financial position moving into 2021 even without the funds which would have been generated during normal years through Richard's Ride.

**Initiative 3:** We held out hope of hosting at least one in-person event for 2020 and we did! We teamed with GMBC through our traditional Saturday "VP" ride series to offer a GMBC/RTF *Gravel Grinder Ride* on October 17. Riders were required to pre-register through the GMBC Covid Questionnaire prior to the ride. Tom Broido mapped out three routes of 35, 50 and 57 miles - each of them including the Cross Vermont Trail (Johnny Brook) in Richmond and



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM BROIDO

Two intrepid graveleers, Karl Garen (L) and John Stuart (R) ready to head out on a chilly morning for the GMBC/RTF Gravel Grinder.



PHOTO CREDIT: TOM BROIDO

### Virtual Richard's riders enjoying an early fall day.

on this chilly October day, staged from Cochran's Ski Area parking lot. Everyone was respectful by maintaining social distance and wearing masks when not actually riding. After the ride, folks were treated to sizzling burgers and brats fired up by Tom Broido. We again received generous donations left in our "\$ Can". Thank you, thank you!

As we approach 2021, RTF will be busy planning (and hoping!) that we can host an Actual (not Virtual) 2021 Richard's Ride in May. We will see. We will be monitoring the Covid situation through State and CDC guidelines as we move through the winter toward spring. An effective and safe vaccine is needed.

Thanks again to everyone for your support of RTF through the years and especially this year. All the work that we do as RTF Board Members (nine of us!) is dedicated to the one person that we knew, loved, and miss to this day: Richard Tom, who dedicated his full heart and enthusiasm to making the joy and adventure of cycling accessible to all. RTF continues to expand Richard's legacy and keep his spirit alive. 🚴

**Love Bikes, Love Life, Love Richard!**  
[www.richardtomfoundation.com](http://www.richardtomfoundation.com)





# Invisible voices on the handlebars

by TIKI ARCHAMBEAY

It was mid-summer while doing a metric century ride that I first heard about the GMBC's annual Century ride. The ride would take place on a Sunday like most of the casual rides throughout the summer and my fear was that my schedule officiating fall sports (volleyball) would prevent me from achieving this zenith of bicycling achievements. So during a summer vacation, I completed a proper Century only two days after a tropical storm blew through western New England. With nothing but downhill remaining in the riding season, a new seed was planted by a riding buddy, Phyl Newbeck: "You could do the Double Gap century."

"A Double Gap Century? What's that?" I asked with genuine curiosity. "Never heard of it." That's when she opened a new door to my biking world. Put simply, it is a Century ride including Middlebury Gap and App Gap that actually totals 108 miles. My first notion was shock that such a challenge existed. It sounded like pure insanity. Yet every day since discovering the option, I found myself obsessing over it. And more importantly, I downplayed the level of difficulty. "The Century ride was no problem," I thought. «Plus, I felt nothing the next day. A double gap ride can't be that bad." Most important was knowing that if I didn't at least attempt it, my winter would be filled with regret and more obsession.

And so, that day in mid-September when GMBC hosts its Century ride approached. The coronavirus had other plans for fall sports meaning there was suddenly a whole lot of time for me to play. I was excited to join the crew and possibly the one or two other fanatics who might be interested in the Double Gap Century as well. Unfortunately, the weather had other plans. Sunday was looking extremely windy with a very real chance of rain. Wind is just one more challenge to overcome and would be an unpleasant hurdle for a Double Gap Century. A little intelligence gathering from key

GMBC contacts allowed me to put a stake in the ground for a Saturday attempt, a day that would register as a perfect Vermont day in terms of weather.

I started later than I had hoped due to a Gatorade hunt. It was a no-brainer for me to pick some up at City Market in downtown Burlington since that's where I grab my usual breakfast sandwich to power me through rides, but the shelves were bare in the Gatorade section! It took two more stops to finally find some. Was this foreshadowing? A tinge of fear set in.

By 8:15, I was on the bike and headed out from Swift Street in South Burlington. Temps were still in the low 50's so I had to wear a long-sleeve shirt and handyman gloves, a reminder that I was woefully deficient in non-summer gear. Almost immediately after starting, I biked into a fog bank that hung around until Hinesburg (via Hinesburg Road off Spear Street due to a detour). It was demoralizing and chilly, but also invigorating and an excellent way to keep from overheating.

It was an amazing ride south after a short climb from 116 onto Bristol Road, which runs along a ridge. It was so stunning I had to stop and take some pictures. As on most rides, the feeling of bottling up the moment and views sometimes overwhelms the logic to stay on schedule and keep momentum. One stop can easily tack on 10 minutes. On a ride anticipated to take all day and with fading light, keeping time was key.

After continuing along Bristol Road for a ways, the second set of Road Closed signs came into view. Thanks to amazing intelligence from GMBC insiders, a modest detour kept me on track and only about 30 minutes behind schedule. The detour ambled about a mile west then south onto Hardscrabble Rd. along two miles of hard-packed dirt with some ugly washboard sections.

Reaching Bristol was a boost. Time for a reality check: Legs? Check. Shoulders? No knot yet. Neck? So far so good. Water? Good. Gatorade? Worth the effort. Onward....

It was after Bristol when Imposter Syndrome kicked in. I felt good and firmly warmed up, but seeing the mountains lurking just east of my route started chipping away at my ego. "Who are you to think you can climb a mountain on a bike?" said the evil inner voice. "Your legs are a little tired already. You'll never make it. There are still 70 miles to go!" It played over and over on the long stretch from Bristol to the beginning of Middlebury Gap at Rt. 125. I tried chasing it away with an energy gel. Then came the first significant incline at a turn near a stream. I stopped to get my head in the game and played some upbeat music. The strategy: just survive. "Stop when you need to stop," became my new inner monologue. "Go as slow as you need to go. Just tackle this hill one pedal at a time. Never mind the rest."

The first two inclines were brutal. It was reminiscent of the steep slopes on Boston Post Road from the Bridges of Franklin and Lamoille County ride, except with no end in sight. The sign along this stretch provoked utter panic: Breadloaf - 7 miles. "Seven more miles of THIS?!?! And that's not even the top! Just give up. You'll never do it." That damn voice was back within 30 seconds of climbing. I tried fighting it off. "Let's just get to the top of that turn then see if it's worth taking a break." Which then turned into: "You're doing it! That pedal went all the way around! Just two more..." up to where the incline broke into a gentle 6% grade. It felt downright luxurious! And for most of those seven miles to Breadloaf, the slope was up but nothing remarkable. "If it's like this to the top, piece of cake!" My deflated ego was recharging once more.

The luxury was short-lived. The slope climbed again significantly but not





like the heart-breaker at the start of the climb. Plus, now there was a new sign that said: Middlebury Snowbowl – 1,000 feet. “I can do that!” Pedaling past the entrance and up the remaining bit was where I finally reached the top and stopped for photos, snacks and a rest. Body check: sore, but still standing. Mental health check: the little devil and angel on my shoulders were in a full-on heated argument with each other.

Devil: “You just laid it all out there and you’re not even halfway!”

Angel: “But YOU’RE the one who said we couldn’t do it in the first place! Keep going!”

I texted my wife to let her know I might be in trouble. The Devil had merit by saying I left it all on the road. But the Angel was right too in that there was still gas in the tank, plus I knew this next stretch to Waitsfield quite well as we had just done this ride with delight the other weekend. Suddenly, a new party to the conversation joined: me. “Just get down to the store in Hancock, eat some lunch, and reassess. It’s literally all downhill.”

Lunch was terrific at the little store where we stopped during a prior ride to Texas Hill. The sandwich I bought disappeared in about three minutes, and a maple-glazed doughnut tasted so good it had me thinking of making a special trip to that store again just to score more doughnuts. I realized that I forgot to restart my MapMyRide app at the top of the gap. “Oh well, the bike computer will keep me honest. Now let’s just get to Waitsfield.”

I planned for my wife to meet me in Waitsfield where I would once again reassess. If I bailed, she was my ride back. If I continued, she could cheer me on. I am VERY blessed in that regard. I told her it would take me about 1.5 hours to cover the 20 miles north. In truth, it took me a little over one hour. Unsure if it was the music, the scenery, the smoothness of the ride, the laughable hills compared to Middlebury Gap, or the slight coolness whisking away all traces of sweat from my skin. But it felt so good! The well-

oiled machine was back!

And so with my wife not yet at the intersection of Rt. 17 where App Gap starts, my Angel felt emboldened. “You’ve got this!” he said. “This gap has less vertical than the last one so it’ll be over quicker. You survived those other steepes, so just a few more steep sections and you’re DONE with all the steepes you need to climb. Do it!”

The devil, whimpering, would not entirely relent. “You’ve forgotten the pain already?” he reminded from behind folded arms. “You feel good now, but wait until that first incline.”

“Screw you!” said the Angel. “We just cranked out 20 miles in about an hour. We’re strong like bull! How can you give up when you’re literally single-digit miles away from glory? Go, go, go!”

My third party, me, texted my wife: “I’m headed up. Meet you around Mad River Glen.”

And so all three of us embarked on our last Gap. The subtle incline was modest, and now there was a sign that said: Mad River Glen - 5 miles. “I’ve got this,” I started convincing myself. Then came the tortuous first steep incline. “Just survive!” I told myself as sweat stung my eyes. The climb was so intense that upon reaching MRG’s parking lot, my hands were white from gripping the handlebars so tightly. My derriere was sore for the first time all summer. The knot in my shoulders was throbbing. My neck was tired.

But I beat my wife to the second meeting place, a point of misguided pride. Taking my own advice from the start of the climb up Middlebury Gap, I stopped, gulped down some water, lightly munched some nuts, then texted that I was headed to the top. Within 20 feet, my wife arrived in the truck. “Can’t quit now,” I told her. “The top’s right around the corner,” I lied. I had to lie to keep myself on target.

As we chatted at the parking lot, we spotted a very good friend of ours coming off the ski hill where she and her son had just finished a hike. What are the odds of timing working out like

that? My wife officiated their wedding ceremony many moons ago. I’ve known this woman since the mid-90’s and had not seen her in a couple of years. So cool! We chatted briefly until my legs shocked me like a Taser with a warning signal of pain: “If you don’t move soon, we’re calling it a day.” Great, more combatants to enter the fray. They wobbled in a way that made me quickly and apologetically peel away and head back into Painville.

With determination, the climb resumed. This time, there would be no small plateaus on which to find a few moments of respite. No Breadloaf moments. Just grind and grit. I can’t remember if it was two miles from the MRG parking lot or 1.5 miles, but it was agonizing medieval torture. The legs were barely turning the pedals around, whether on the saddle or off. My grip was fatigued. My lungs were in my throat. I stopped twice just to reckon where I was. Then a biker passed and, seeing me stopped and gently head-butting my handlebars, said: “You’re almost there!”

“Was that one of my inner voices again?” I asked myself. I looked up and lo and behold, he was right! There, about 150 meters up, was the parking lot at the top. The adrenaline that shot through my body at that moment had me not only gaining on the biker who passed me, but drafting him tightly to the top. It was done! I made it to the top of App Gap at mile 88.4. My wife and son were cheering me on like an ambulance crew grateful to not need to rush the patient to a hospital.

And suddenly I felt ashamed. Ashamed for allowing doubt to creep in. Ashamed for the drama in stopping during the climb. Ashamed that it took me so long. Ashamed for feeling sore. Which revealed that even in victory, the Devil on my shoulder would turn the tables and refuse to be ignored.

The plan from there was simple: Log my 100 miles then hop into the truck for a ride home. Having no idea how far away anything was and not having

**Handlebars**

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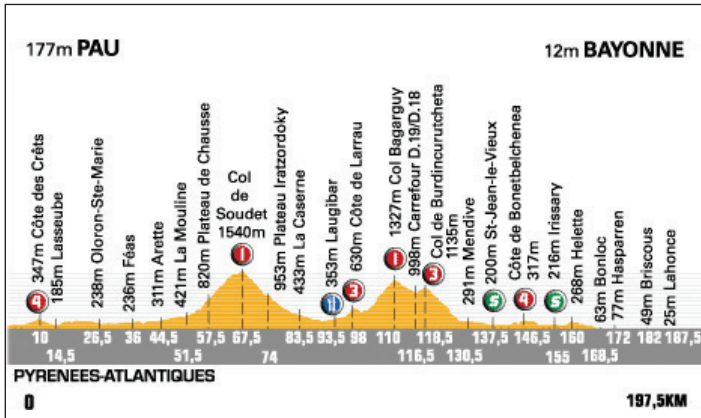


# L'Etape et Moi

BY SPENCER KNAPP

## PART TWO OF A THREE-PART SERIES

### Round 3: 2003 Pau-Bayonne



I returned the next year with roughly the same group of Vermont buddies, the same preparation, and the same goals, seeking redemption from the Round 2 misadventure. The 2003 L'Etape, replicating Stage 16 of that year's Tour, was my first in the Pyrenees: 187k from Pau to Bayonne over two major cols – the Soudet and Bagargui – in the Basque region of France on mostly remote, narrow, little-traveled roads. A gorgeous, wild part of France; very different from the Alps.

We again arrived a few days early to acclimate, staying first in a modest B&B near Louvie-Juzon at the base of the Col de Marie Blanque for some warm up rides. We shifted to the Hostellerie L'Horizon, a B&B in Jurancon, a short bike ride from Pau, the day before the event.



July 15 2003, Hostellerie L'Horizon, Jurancon  
L. to R: Bill, Jay, Scott, Roger, Mark, Alden, Dave, Spencer, Dick, Doug, Al

After registering in Pau, I decided to take a spin with Bill Cohen, now a Vermont Supreme Court Justice, on the picturesque roads through the vineyards of Jurancon. I'd been there years earlier with my wife on a tandem and my thoughts were drifting to nostalgic memories. That's where things went sideways this time.

On a tiny asphalt farm road, Bill and I came upon a phone line in the road, snaking across our path. Nothing consequential. Neither of us paid it much attention. Bill coasted across it without incident. But my front wheel somehow followed the snake and slammed me into the rough asphalt. Boom. I got up quickly and was bleeding heavily from badly ripped fingers, elbow and knee. Not too serious, but not pretty. I'd need repairs. On close examination, my helmet was cracked from back to front, but it seemed to have done its job. The bike wasn't hurt.

As I pulled myself together, two Tour de France motorcyclists with Mavic logos came out of nowhere – apparently taking a spin on their day off – and went into official mode. Learning our hotel was a few miles away, they offered to escort me back. I took them up on the offer and was quickly following the motorcycles at my limit through busy traffic on a main road as if I was being towed back to a Tour peloton. It was exciting but with blood streaming from various wounds and a very sore head, completely crazy.

Back at the hotel, my buddies leapt into action after seeing my situation (and making a few friendly comments about how stupid I am). Roger checked the bike, two others drove to a bike shop in Pau to find a replacement helmet, and Doug, my ER doc buddy, and Mariel, a French cycling friend (now a UVM Professor), took me to find someone to stitch me up. With help from our motorcycle friends, we found a small, community health center in the village of Jurancon. The doctor, a pleasant gerontologist, was in. Noticing the blood all over the floor, he put me at the front of the line and took me into his office for stitches. Doug winced concerns throughout the procedure. At one point, I thought he might grab the needle out of the doctor's hands. He didn't.

All went fairly well, wounds were closed, and when we asked "Combien?", the physician, a product of France's national health system, looked puzzled. "Rien," he replied. But we gave him some euros anyway, he gave me some pain-killers, and we were on our way.

With the pain-killers, I slept remarkably well that night, woke with a jolt before dawn, had an enormous breakfast, changed my bandages (with Doug's help), took a few more pain-killers (I would not have passed a drug test that day),



and then pedaled in the dim pre-dawn light to Pau for the start. Honestly, I felt OK. The pain-killers helped.

The race started fast, thinned out a bit over the short climb of the Cote de Crets near Jurancon and then really thinned after 50k as we started the steep 16k climb of the Col de Soudets. I don't remember it well, except that it was a hot, my bandages were unraveling in the heat, and stiches on my fingers were coming apart. Doug (God bless him!) stayed with me and checked the stitches regularly.



On the 16% grades of the Col de Bargagui July 16, 2003.

The second climb – really two climbs, the Col de Larrau followed by the Col de Bargagui – came at close to 100k. The Bargagui was a beast, open to the sun, very hot, and very steep (>15%) in the final several kilometers. I struggled, but hydrated more than ever, made it slowly to the top, refilled water bottles, and then continued mostly downhill to the finish in Pau. It wasn't pretty, but I improved my batting average on finishes after three L'Etapes and was pleased with that. Mari-el, it turned out, finished on the podium in the women's race – certainly the first Vermonter with that L'Etape distinction.



Mari-el on podium in Bayonne 2003 L'Etape du Tour.

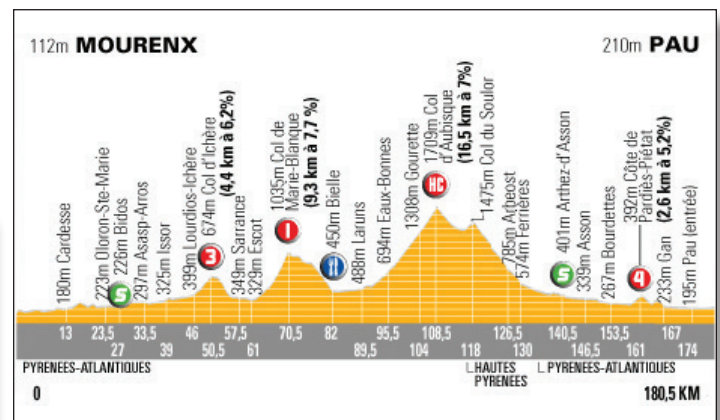
Putting my own ride in some perspective, a few days later on July 23, I watched Tyler Hamilton win Stage 16 of the Tour on this same course in an 80k solo breakaway with a broken collarbone severed in two places.

After L'Etape, we moved to Arreau at the base of the Col de Peyresourde, stayed at the fabulous Hotel d'Angleterre, explored the endless local climbs, and spent an afternoon waiting and watching as Stage 14 of that year's Tour finished up and over the slopes of the Peyresourde.



Roger and Dave on the Peyresourde waiting for the Tour. July 20, 2003.

## Round 4: 2005 Mourenx to Pau



Round 4, the 2005 L'Etape, returned to the Pyrenees for a 180k stage from Mourenx to Pau over the Ichere, Marie Blanche, Aubisque and Soulor. I returned with the roughly the same Vermont group, good preparation and grim determination, and in the end, finished without mishap – a near miracle. I had some similar goals to prior years and one extra: finish close to my buddy, Alden. He was younger and stronger, but I thought I might possibly outlast him this time.







**Col d'Ahuquy – the Basque Pyrenees south of Orthez, July 9, 2005.**

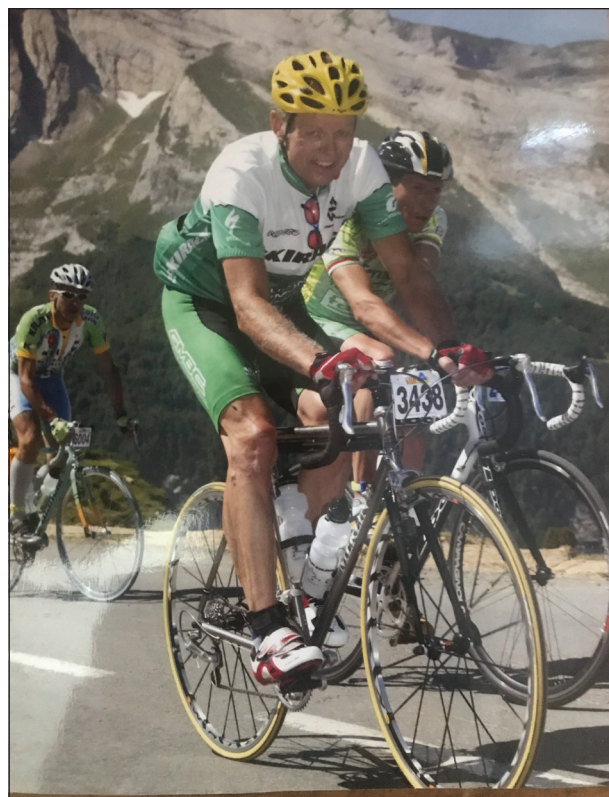
We arrived a few days early, as in the past, stayed at a modest hotel in Orthez along the Pau River about 20k west of the start town, and had some glorious warm-up rides into the Basque Pyrenees. Registration took place the day before the event in an outdoor velodrome in Mourenx filled with riders and vendors - a carnival atmosphere. In my excitement, I bought some new shoes.

After another restless sleep and a big breakfast, we pedaled easily to Mourenx in the dim morning light. The start was fast and frenzied on relatively flat roads. In the chaos of riders, I was separated from my Vermont buddies early, including Alden. I didn't know if he was in front or behind, but suspected the former.

As things started to settle, I thought I was fairly well placed and moving up steadily in a fast group of 100+. On the relatively short Col d'Ichere things jammed, and trying to keep pace, I chose to ride up the left in an open concrete drainage ditch, which worked well until the ditch filled with cow manure and I slid on my side, requiring a few embarrassing minutes to remount and re-enter the indignant peloton.

The groups stretched out slightly on the fairly modest 10k climb of the Col de Marie Blanque and the road opened at the top to a panoramic plateau with an aid station overrun with riders. On a picturesque descent to Bielle, the high Pyrenees came fully into view, and on the short, flat run-in to Laruns, the pace peaked as riders tried to move up before the start of the 16.5k climb of the Col d'Aubisque. We were nearly 90k in and with 90k to go, my legs weren't yet yelling at me. I continued to pass riders on the long climb.

At the ski village of Gourette,, the road took a sharp left and climbed steeply for the remaining 5k with steady grades of 7-10% on a narrow road fully exposed to a hot July sun. I started to struggle, standing in a low gear for extended periods to stretch my legs.



**Suffering on the Col d'Aubisque, July 11, 2005.**

At the top of the Aubisque, I caught sight of Alden's jersey not far ahead of me going over the top and quickly went after him, plunging down the short, perilous one-lane descent of the Aubisque, carved into the granite mountain side, and then hustled up the gentle Col de Soulor, where I saw Alden just leaving the aid station as I was refilling bottles. I called out. He didn't hear me and started off. I caught up just as we started the long, fast descent of the Soulor. His expression read both "Glad to see ya!" and a shocked "Damn, I can't believe you caught me!" We tucked and rode together downhill for another 40k, alternating in the lead and passing other riders where it was safe. On a roll.

We both felt great on the final short climb of the Cote de Paradies, passed riders, and had a mini hilltop sprint at the top (he got me), before continuing mostly downhill to cross the bridge into Pau and finish side-by-side in the Centre Ville. This was far different from previous L'Etapes. I was thrilled.

And that year I checked the results. Not quite top 50 but close: 74th. One to remember. 🚲

**Check out the next issue of  
Perspectives for the third in a  
three-part series of  
L'Etape et Moi**

# Touring rides in the age of COVID

by PHYL NEWBECK

This year's cycling season started without GMBC touring rides, thanks to the pandemic. As a result, many of us went out on our own or in small groups while others resorted to various online indoor riding options. Our official touring rides started the weekend of July 4<sup>th</sup> with new rules. Online sign-up was required, cyclists were asked not to ride if they were symptomatic or had visited areas where Covid-19 was prevalent, and masks and social distancing were required at the start and end of rides. A few of our regular leaders asked to be taken off the schedule so we had a reduced number of rides for the already truncated season.

With the new restrictions in place, we set off on two rides in the Upper Valley and one on the Islands. Horse Country, a hilly Upper Valley route, drew eight riders, all of whom opted for the longer (55-mile) version of the ride. At least one rider reported that the hill on Route 132 was a bit challenging in the heat at the end of the ride and several cyclists headed to the White River for a swim when they were done. The following day, five riders rode Pomfret Perambulations, sticking to the shorter (40-mile) version which still had over 3,500 feet of elevation gain. They took a break from the heat in the shade of the porch at the Barnard Store, looking out at Silver Lake.

Further north, nine riders including one doing his first GMBC ride left the Grand Isle Ferry parking area on the 60-mile Rouse's Rouser, up the Islands and over the Rouse's Point Bridge to New York. The wind switched direction mid-ride, providing a headwind in both states, but it was never particularly strong. We were scolded by two different sets of osprey parents as we pedaled near their nests; the presence of young ones was evident from the white splats all over the road. The only low point was a truck that appeared to deliberately spray us with exhaust. The group stuck close enough together that we

all were able to take the same ferry back to Vermont.

We had two more rides scheduled for the weekend of July 11 and 12, but the weather did not cooperate. Only one rider joined Russ Ford for the inaugural gravel Presidential Pedaling. There was some light rain and some mud but Russ still called the day a success. An early morning rain had diminished to sprinkles when seven riders met in Charlotte for Willsboro Wanderer. There was a brief shower as they pedaled to the ferry, but once they reached New York the rain ended and all seven did the long (50-mile) ride with 3,800 feet of climbing; a first for several of those cyclists. As the wind picked up and the air became steamier, they returned on the 2 p.m. ferry. Six social riders decided to start at 11:30 and aside from a light mist on the ferry, they also stayed dry. That group did a 33-mile version of the ride and returned on the 4 p.m. ferry with one cyclist riding home from the parking area for some extra mileage.

There were only two takers for the new gravel Almost to Canada on July 18 but the following day, nine people braved National Weather Service extreme heat alerts to ride Grand Isle Flats. Only two cyclists chose to do the full 60-mile route and two others contented themselves with a 40-miler to Hero's Welcome and back. The rest thought 28 miles was sufficient on a hot day with a return trip into a headwind. One rider's pedal broke and even after borrowing tools from a nearby farm, repairs could not be made so ride leader Kevin Batson fought the headwind to pick him up by car. Another rider's shoe separated from its sole but duct tape solved that problem.

Five of the 12 people who showed up for Not Quite Quebec on a steamy July 26 were smart enough to opt for the new 41-mile version of the ride. One heat-resistant cyclist did the full 60 miles while the rest chose the

middle distance. Phil Littler deserves a purple heart for his role as ride leader. After completing the short ride, he drove back along the 52-mile route to check on his charges which is how he discovered that two of us had missed a turn and were heading in the wrong direction. He turned us around and waited at the next intersection and then the one after that and it was at that intersection that he took one look at me and strongly suggested I finish the last three miles of the ride in his air-conditioned car. This is the second year in a row I've bonked from the heat on this ride and the second year in a row that I've been rescued by a gallant GMBC'er.

Jeff Warner was hoping for some NEK lurkers who don't generally go on GMBC rides, but the weather didn't cooperate so only two cyclists joined him for the new Northeast Kingdom Adventure on August 2. Even his wife Hilary had to opt out since she had recently visited a yellow-coded county in New Hampshire. Jeff reported the following: "We had a nice ride which started with some showers, but the riders persevered. We had a mellow tailwind with brief stops in Albany and Irasburg before an extended break on the green in Barton. The group cruised south along Route 16 with a stop at the Museum of Everyday Life and mused about why anyone would want to divert Runaway Pond. As we progressed, the head winds grew stronger. After a short stop in Greensboro Bend, the headwinds were stiff, but that only meant a nice tailwind for the final miles back to Greensboro."

It was hot (again) on August 8 when seven riders set out on the gravel version of the Covered Bridges of Chittenden County, picking up an additional eighth rider along the way. Lack of rain meant that some of the dirt roads had the dreaded washboard effect, but not all. At the halfway point,

**Touring Rides**

Continued on page 22



# Epic tri-state adventure

by BRIAN KINSMAN

In July of 1999, I set out for an epic one-week adventure through northern New Hampshire and western Maine. At the time, I was a widower raising a nine-year old and an 11-year-old. I negotiated with my sister for a week of childcare, which set the time limit for my trip. From there, I developed a plan to see as much as I could possibly see on my bicycle in a week. I decided on 100+ miles each day, with inexpensive motels along the way. In the end, I carried only a small rack pack tucked in behind me. I decided against panniers because the wind resistance and weight would limit my range. The little green pack, which I still use to this day, included one set of casual clothes and sandals to go out to eat. I washed my cycling gear each night in the motel sink. I had a few essential tools and spare parts, a windbreaker, laundry soap, my wallet and snacks. The ride I had mapped out had rural stretches of up to 40 miles between towns, so I did need to bring some eats each day. I made all motel reservations ahead, so I was committed to riding the set mileage each day, regardless of weather.

With my planning complete, I set out. I stayed at my brother's camp in Walden for the night to help me get an early start. Early in the morning, I drove down to Danville and parked my car in the free parking on the town green. I was right across from the library and town hall, so I figured it would be safe. After getting my bike off the car, attaching my green pack, and doing a mental double check, I started riding down to Peacham, through Groton and on to Woodsville. It was a super nice roll down to Woodsville, NH, but now I had to pay the price with a climb up and over Kinsman Notch on NH Route 112. It

was still morning, so the temperature wasn't too bad yet. Towards the top of the climb, it was getting hot and I found a swimming hole to jump in for a quick cool off. The forecast for the week was a heat wave of 90+ degrees.

I rolled on into Lincoln, NH, where I got some lunch and refilled my water. By now, the temperature was well into the 90's and I was facing the Kancamagus Highway. I was able to rationalize that for every 2,000 feet it gets seven degrees cooler, so it should feel great going up 5,000 feet. It was a special kind of fun. I blew through all my water very shortly up the climb,

but I found a National Forest campground to stop and refill. Up over the top I went. On the way down, I saw all the cars parked on the side of the road by a very popular swimming hole. I decided to stop and take a swim. It was about 3:30pm and I only had about an hour ride to the

motel in Conway, so plenty of time to relax. Oh, it felt so great!

The next day's ride started early. I had 100+ miles to Farmington, Maine. It was another hot day. I enjoyed a leisurely ride through the Lake Umbagog area. About the time I got to Long Lake, it wasn't as leisurely. I could see some really angry storm clouds behind me. The ride turned into a 30-mile TT. I did manage to stay ahead of it. That night I saw on the news that there was a bunch of wind damage, all happening just after I got past the area. Further along, I rolled through some interesting little towns named Naples, Norway and Paris. While the map showed towns, they were very small and without stores which required me to knock on a door and beg for water. The residents were happy to resupply me and enjoyed

hearing about my journey. In general, regular people seem to consider you not normal for riding your bike 100+ miles every day. Paris was a bigger town and I was able to get some lunch and extra water before continuing on to Farmington. All day, the shifting had been acting up on the bike. That evening I took a look at it and found that sports drink spray had gone down inside the cable jacket under the bottom bracket. While some may have been from drinking, I suspected some was because I didn't close the water bottle tightly after drinking. This also means I probably was losing some precious water this way. Lesson learned!

I started the day with an excellent breakfast at a little café. This would be a day when it would be very hard to find food, so I wanted a full tank. After breakfast, I started riding north on Route 27 toward Sugarloaf Ski Area. Soon, I came upon another road tripping cyclist. We kept each other company for a couple of hours, until he turned off in New Portland. When I got into the high country of the Carrabassett Valley, a cold front was coming in along with some rain. The combo of elevation, rain and a cold front made me fair game for hypothermia. In my zeal to fit everything into a small rack pack, I had omitted any rain gear. I now found myself riding in the high hills, in the rain, at 50 degrees and I had nothing but shorts, a jersey, and a wind breaker that was not waterproof. On the positive side, it was mostly uphill for a few hours. Eventually I warmed up with help from some late afternoon sun and rode through a nice little town called Rangeley. This was, I thought, to be the longest day at about 115 miles. I arrived in Oquossoc and went to the only inn in town to check-in. The gentlemen at the desk said I did not have a reservation and they had no vacancy. I went back out to the bike and pulled my itinerary out of my green pack. Clear as could be, it indicated a reservation at a motel back in Rangeley. Now if you haven't been to these parts, I will tell you it is

**The residents were happy to resupply me and enjoyed hearing about my journey. In general, regular people seem to consider you not normal for riding your bike 100+ miles every day.**



remote. There are not a lot of lodging options up here. I was stunned! I couldn't believe I was going to have to get back on the bike and ride back another 15 miles. I called the motel in Rangeley and confirmed the reservation. The reservation guy, who was also the owner, really felt bad for me. He said he was by himself and couldn't leave, but if there was any way he could, he'd come get me in his pickup truck. That simple expression of kindness gave me the strength of a domestique. I got on my bike and started riding. I got to the motel about 6:00 pm, after 140 miles of riding that day. I found a restaurant in town for supper. I distinctly remember the look on the waitress's

face when I ordered two entrees. Spaghetti and meatballs for one dinner and a large cut prime rib with all the fixings. The prime rib was the special, so I couldn't resist.


The next morning, I left very early. I was going to be riding through some prime moose country in northern Maine and New Hampshire. I was so looking forward to seeing some moose at 6:00 am. Traffic was very light, but I never did see a moose. I did, however, have a wonderful ride down through the Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge on the way to Wentworth Location and then Errol. From Errol, I headed up Route 26 to Dixville Notch. Another first as I'd never ridden up this way before. I actually didn't know about Dixville Notch, and hadn't really paid attention to that part of the mapping. It was quite a surprise for a tired pair of legs as I started climbing. Still, I've always enjoyed a good gap ride. After a little mental acclimation, I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a really nice ride down the backside to Colebrook. At the top, coming down the west side was a resort that at first glance looked

like something out of Disney World.

It was fairly late when I got to Colebrook. As I was most days, I was super hungry, but I realized I had just ridden through town about five miles ago to get to the motel. I asked the motel manager/owner where I could get food within walking distance. She said "nowhere, but you can take my husband's truck." While we were still talking, he came in, tossed me the keys and pointed to a late model GMC truck. I had thought it would be a better truck and I was hesitant to take it, but he insisted. To this day, this stands in my mind as a remarkable act of kindness. Up here in the far northeast corner of Vermont, these trucks are

an important part of peoples' livelihoods. To offer it up to a stranger who rode into town on a bicycle is amazing.

Day 5 would start in Colebrook and end in Danville. This would conclude my solo five-day 600-mile ride. I traveled along

VT Route 102 until Bloomfield and then took Route 105 to Island Pond. From there, I went down to East Burke and stopped for a lunch at the iconic Miss Lyndonville Diner in Lyndonville. If you want to fully appreciate a climb, do it with a full stomach as I did riding up Route 2 from St. Johnsbury to Danville. As always, it was a beautiful ride down through the Northeast Kingdom. I arrived back at my car and quietly congratulated myself. While it was very hot most of the week, the only day with rain was in Carrabassett Valley and that was only for two or three hours. I enjoyed cool evenings and blue skies most of the time. I write this now more than 20 years later and have been able to recall in amazing detail this journey. I still have thousands of images from along the way captured in my mind. Now that is a ride! 

**I write this now more than 20 years later and have been able to recall in amazing detail this journey. I still have thousands of images from along the way captured in my mind. Now that is a ride!**

## **So, here's a couple of takeaways:**

**1** The bicycle I was using was my "road bike," a retrofitted Specialized Rockhopper. I had 26 x 1 Ritchey Slick tires, a road triple crank with a smaller spread rear cluster, and some drop bars. I was primarily a mountain biker at the time and had converted my old mountain bike a couple of years earlier to have a road bike. It wasn't fancy, but it got the job done. It's true that it's not about the bike. It's all about the love of cycling.

**2** If you have an itinerary, you should reference it at least once during the course of a 120-mile day.

**3** Always bring some wet weather gear to ride in.

**4** My last point is, if you're going to randomly park your car somewhere, let someone know. When I got home, I had several messages from the VT State Police wondering where the heck I was, and if I was still alive. You see, the Town Clerk that I was sure would keep an eye on my car, really did. Except I never told them who I was or where I was going. I had to humbly contact the State Police and explain my complete lack of common sense in this matter. While they were happy to hear I was safe, they didn't enjoy the mystery that week of who the missing person was and whether they should send divers into Joe's Pond looking for me.



# A bucket list opportunity for rail trail riding:

## The great allegheny rail trail and C&O canal towpath from Pittsburgh to Washington DC.

By BRIAN HOWARD



In the summer of 2019, six of us decided to do this ride. The multi-day trip through scenic old railway towns provides lots to see and learn including the history of the railways and how much of the goods we now receive via modern day trucking started with the railways back in the late 1800's. Although there are many ways to do this trip, such as tour groups or camping, we decided to do a "roll your own" and plan out our daily mileage and stay at former whistle-stop towns' Bed and Breakfast establishments. We carried what we needed for the ride and post-ride in our rack/pannier bags. We met several times before the actual trip in winter and spring to discuss how long to ride each day and where to stay overnight. You can do the whole trip from Pittsburgh to Washington DC in seven days with about 80-mile days. Then you can return to Pittsburgh via Amtrak which has facilities for bike riders doing the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) ride. If you have the time, do the trip forward and in reverse for a total of 600 miles from end to end.

We all met in Pittsburgh in early June. It was just before school let out, and a bit before summer vacation time for most. This turned out to be the ideal week for us, and Mother Nature also was kind. We faced some rain, but the temps and humidity were very pleasant. It can be pretty hot and humid once you start reaching the West Virginia and DC area.

Most of the GAP ride parallels the Monongahela River, which was one of the most badly polluted rivers during the 50's and 60's and, rumor has it, once caught fire. When I saw the river on our trip, it appeared to be much cleaner. Our first side trip off the trail was in McKeesport, where Holly, one of our riders, wanted to go back and see the neighborhood where she grew up. She was accompanied by George and Candelin, to be sure she had safety in numbers. We met up later that day with the rest of the crew in Connellsville, just over 60 miles on our first overnight stop. We stayed at Connellsville Bread & Breakfast which was a funky kind of setup. I stayed in a storefront apartment-like room around the corner from the main B & B. The proprietors were very gracious, the breakfast was very yummy featuring homemade items including gluten-free, dairy-free items for me, which had been requested by Holly ahead of time to accommodate my dietary needs.

Connellsville, once known for its rich resources in coal and coke industry and home to several millionaires, provided a scenic ride for us along the Youghiogheny River, a tributary of the Monongahela. No longer the hustling and bustling city of the early 1900's, it still provides a lot of history, heritage and some beautiful homes and buildings.





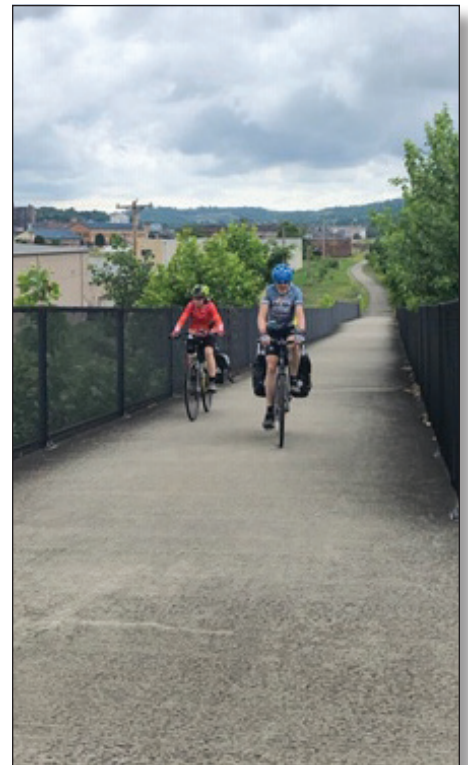
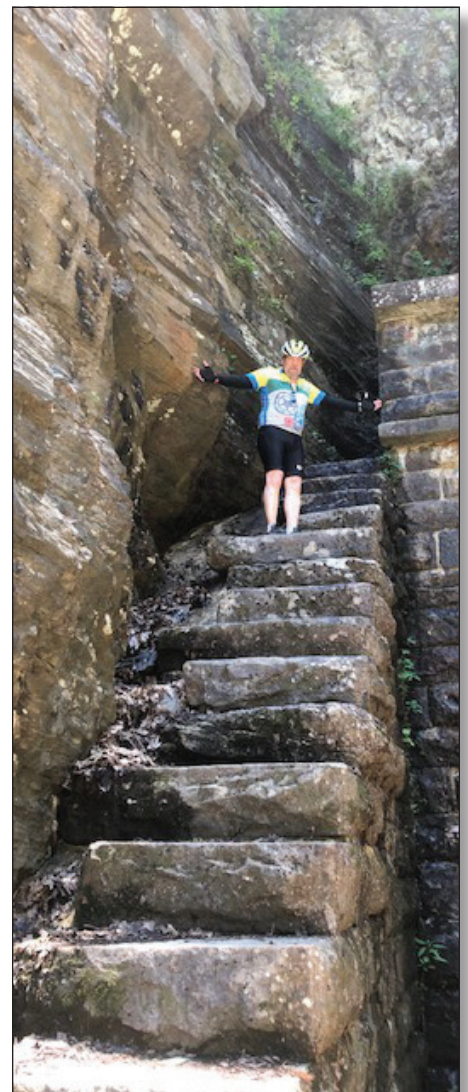
We then were off to the next destination, passing Ohiopyle State Park which is known for white water rafting and also offers hiking and even zip-lining if you are into that as a side trip. Since it was only eight miles from Connellsville, we decided to keep going to the next major stop, and perhaps hit Ohiopyle on the way back. Also, once you leave the Connellsville area, you start to gain elevation, not terribly steep but a constant 2 to 3% elevation gain for periods of time. With our heavier bikes, and fully loaded panniers, it was definitely a workout. We moved on until we reached the town of Rockwood. We covered about 50 miles that day.

Rockwood, an old rail stop town, has a mill shop complex, with an old opera house, and some gift and antique shops. We stayed at the edge of town, directly off the GAP trail at Rockwood B & B, which was convenient for an end of day stop and getting back on the trail in the morning. Again, the B & B stay was pleasurable and the breakfast was great with sausage made by the proprietor, and other homemade items. Several of these B & B also have an attached full bike shop, to help with any repairs, or just to house your bike overnight for safe storage.

The next leg of the trip was to Cumberland MD, where the GAP trail ends after 150 miles. We took a day off to enjoy the city, its rich history, and other offerings. We had to climb again and traverse a few tunnels in total darkness; you need bring a headlamp or bike light to reach the Continental Divide and the Mason Dixon line which separates PA from MD. This is also where the Continental-Confederate colonies line was delineated during the Civil War era. Our group split as we stayed at multiple B and B's; one at 9 Decatur Street, and one just down the street but owned by the same proprietor.

Cumberland, population 22,000, has a great town center, and displays of the canal boats which were used along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canals for commerce and travel. Cumberland is also known as the place where the first national road was built in the US. This was also the last stop for those in the group who had to get back to Pittsburgh to travel back home, with one person traveling to Buffalo.

Four of us headed out from Cumberland on the C & O Towpath which was very different in terrain, but still had historic displays along the way. Since it was late spring/early summer, the towpath was quite muddy and proved challenging to ride with cross bikes and 35mm hybrid tires. It kept you on your toes, and it was a balancing act to keep the bike and yourself upright. We took off the next day







for Hancock, WV, which was the final stop for us. The ride to Hancock was an adventure as we encountered a storm that was following us all the way to West Virginia, and finally caught us about 15 miles outside Hancock. It got so wet and muddy that we exited the C & O Towpath and found the Western Maryland Rec Path which paralleled the towpath all the way to Hancock. When we reached Hancock, we used the B&B's hose to wash down the totally mud-caked bikes. The mud got so bad, we had to stop several times along the way to clean and scrape it from our bike fenders to prevent it from rubbing against the tires and slowing us down.

We stayed the night in Hancock and walked into town to visit a local eatery called Buddy Lou's after a famous blues musician, where I left my prescription sunglasses on a window ledge at the table where we ate. I realized early the next morning before breakfast I had left them there. Matt and I walked back, climbed a small fence, and found the glasses right where I left them. We picked the glasses up and left before we were noticed as some nefarious characters trying to break in.


We walked back briskly about two miles from the B & B, had breakfast, and left with all our belongings back to Cumberland. We stayed in Cumberland at the same B & B and then next morning, saw the others off via Amtrak to Pittsburgh. We packed up our belongings and made our way back reversing our ride back to Pittsburgh.



We stayed in Rockwood again on the ride back; this time at a youth hostel which was very spartan compared to the previous accommodations and was a low-point of the trip. The other places were all booked by a large tour group coming through and we needed a place to stay so the youth hostel was our only choice. After that, we headed back to Connellsville and stayed a bit out of town at a very nice B & B. It was an old Victorian House, the beds were luxurious, and we each had AC units. It was starting to warm up on the return trip back to Pittsburgh, so it was a nice amenity to have. The last leg of the ride from Connellsville to Pittsburgh was 60 miles, and a long hot day was in store with possible thunderstorms lingering. It rained in the morning a bit, then got humid and hot, but we had been lucky for most of the trip with low humidity and mild temps. We made it back and stayed overnight at our Holiday Inn outside Pittsburgh, where we originally started our trip.

Holly got a ride from a nearby relative to stay with family for the next few days and Matt and I headed back to Vermont via Matt's trusty Chrysler van, making a few stops along the way including a visit to the famous Horseshoe Curve in

Altoona, PA; an engineering marvel, where they conquered the Allegheny Ridge to turn around the trains in a full horseshoe curve turn. It is a national historic site, and it was fun to watch an American Heritage Train, which we caught that same morning visiting the Gallitzin Tunnels, another nearby engineering feat that was built/drilled through the mountain-side for travel through the Allegheny Mountains in PA for commercial rail traffic.

The trip was a spectacular one, and provided lots of scenery and history to take in along the way. If you have the time to do the whole 333 miles one way down to DC, it's worth the trip. If you only have limited time, you can still see lots, enjoy both trails, and a possible mud fest, too, on the C & O and have a splendid time as we did. We met some interesting folks along the way on the trail, riding like us, and it was neat to visit the various train museums and town center in Cumberland, MD for the canal boat history. 





# Finding my tribe

by PIER BRILEY

I turned 50 on April 6<sup>th</sup>. It was during the first wave of Covid-19, so everything was completely shut down. There was nothing to do, so I asked a friend who had tremendous enthusiasm for biking if we could go for a ride. I rode my 20-year-old hybrid that had collected a lot of dust and rust. He rode his Canyon, Aeroad. It was chilly and windy and as we were returning down a hill, I noticed he wasn't pedaling at all, while I was pedaling my heart out...the distance was growing and I knew at that moment, I needed to try a road bike.

A week or two later, I impulsively bought an old Trek road bike off Craig's List. It needed pedals, a new tire, a little love... My friend helped me get it ready and I took off on my first solo ride shortly after. He gave me a 20-mile loop around Stowe to try out, but as I reached the finish, I knew I didn't want off and proceeded to ride to Morrisville along Route 100, chewed up and dangerous as it was... coming back along Stagecoach, loving the experience of climbing up the hills.

It wasn't until a few rides later that we actually rode together, and he asked me why I was holding my handlebars "down in the drops?" Well, because I had no idea that there was any other way. I learned so much from him those first few months! He made me learn to change a tire before I ever rode my bike. He taught me how to clean it and maintain it; there were some failures in the beginning, but eventually the lessons sunk in. I bought myself a new bike in June, and I can't tell you how much I love and cherish it. Learning alongside someone who loves the sport so much inspired me to work hard. I learned what being "dropped" meant. I was motivated to ride faster if I wanted any chance of keeping up – though usually that didn't happen.

I showed up for my first group ride in July, the VP ride to New York, terrified that I couldn't keep up, never having drafted before... no clue what I was doing. I rode my first segment with Kevin Bessett, not knowing who Kevin



Pier Briley


was, and another man...a perfect introduction to group riding as small as it was. Once we got to the break location, I joined a larger group slightly more prepared but still nervous. I've never encountered such a warm and welcoming group of people.

Waiting for the ferry in New York, I was so happy to have completed the ride and socializing with so many new faces. I remember being invited to join the Tuesday training group that was starting up. I signed up for the first one, again terrified that I was in over my head. I never missed one after that, always enjoying meeting new people, new experiences, and opportunities to better myself.

Fast forward to October. I have ridden nearly 5,000 miles, climbed 269,000 feet and have a fierce passion for going fast, far and high. What started as a way to share an activity with someone, quickly progressed into something that is wholly my own. While I have always been active, running daily, I discovered that biking is different; it has awakened a drive for physical challenges that I never felt before.

I did my first climb, Smugglers Notch, in May, my first Century in June and attempted my first Double Century in October. Had it not been for the darkness, I think I would have completed it as I got my second wind around mile 175, hit mile 180, saw a sign "9 miles to Morrisville" and strongly considered riding there and back to get closer to the 200...but it was getting dark and decided that it was foolish to risk safety for a number.

I have several more check marks to add to my list as I want to do every major climb in the state, and eventually the region. I love going the distance. I can settle in for a very long time on a bike knowing in my brain how to spread my energy out over it. I also love the short burst of speed and adrenaline that I get when I do the Tuesday night rides and give it my all for 25-30 miles.

I know I still have lots to learn, and that this is only the beginning of a many more miles on the saddle. I still get butterflies in my stomach every time I do a Gap ride (18 so far), but always want the challenge of grinding up a hill, and the rush of speeding down it. And there's a huge bonus, I've also gained a whole new group of friends by joining GMBC, some I consider to be close and dear and go well beyond biking now. I found my tribe. 

# Off road riding across New England

by PAT STABLER

**A**s we saw ride after ride being cancelled this spring, my husband Tom and I did our best to entertain ourselves road and gravel riding, both in Massachusetts where we normally live and in the Northeast Kingdom near our vacation home. We did some lovely rides, especially on the dirt near East Burke, but we were sad not to be riding with others. Then, an organization in Massachusetts called Ride Headquarters announced they would run a series of socially distant 100K gravel rides. The first ride started in Connecticut and would ride through parts of western Rhode Island. RHQ would give each person or family group a start time to spread people out, require masks off the bike and ensure safety at the rest stop. We decided to give it a try, even though I had never ridden 60 miles on my gravel bike.

Normally, Ride Headquarters (RHQ) and the original Ride Studio Café (RSC) run weekly rides of varying lengths, speeds and types. They have road rides, mixed terrain, and fat bike rides in the winter. Mixed terrain rides take advantage of an amazing number of trails in and around Lexington, MA and the western suburbs of Boston. Most people on the mixed terrain rides use gravel or cross bikes for rides traversing double and single track, some of which I would much more comfortably ride on a mountain bike. The trails have road sections in between, hence mixed terrain.

For the socially distant rides, RHQ created routes in southern New England that were 70% on dirt. The routes have paved roads, firm dirt roads, some unmaintained roads, and even some single track. It is amazing to be riding along a rough dirt road in central Massachusetts and come to an intersection with other equally rough dirt roads and nothing but woods as far as you can see.

RHQ designed the rides with COVID protocols to ensure the safety of the riders and the staff. Masks were

expected when not eating or drinking and when passing other cyclists. Start times were assigned to spread riders out. Social distancing was expected and adhered to. At the rest stops, snacks and comfort items were spread out on a table and napkins were used to touch the handle on the water spigots. There were no known cases of virus transmission during the five rides they sponsored.

For the first ride, we were assigned a 7:52 start time, meaning we had to leave our house around 5:30 to travel to Voluntown, CT where the ride started. The day started cool but looked like it would warm up to be a nice day. Tom and I were on our gravel bikes; he was on a cyclocross bike from his racing days and I was on a Specialized Diverge gravel bicycle. I really did not know exactly what to expect. I brought a variety of food and some clothing I shed quickly. Luckily, I brought a small backpack which worked well to store food and the extra clothing. We each have two water bottle holders, which proved to be sufficient, since the rest stop allowed us to refill. Some friends of ours joined us.

I felt comfortable on the paved roads and the firm dirt roads, but on that first ride, not comfortable at all on the rough roads and trails. Very rocky sections, those with sand or high grass (hiding who knows what) slowed me to a crawl or even to walking. However, the traffic was light even on the paved roads and the scenery was lovely. When we pulled up to the rest stop, I was hungry and planned to eat my peanut butter rollup. To my delight, they had iced mochas – even ones with almond milk that I could drink!

The combination of caffeine (which I normally do not consume) and the chocolate, put me into high gear on the next road section after the stop. At the end, RHQ provided us with some pre-packed foods and we sat in the sun and enjoyed visiting with other riders. I was extremely pleased with my accomplishment!

## These were the RHQ rides:

**June 13:** Voluntown, CT, 65 miles, 3925 feet climbing, 5:19 moving time

**July 12:** New London, NH, 65 miles, 4668 feet climbing, 5:53 moving time

**Aug 15:** Barre, MA, 64 miles, 4619 feet climbing, 6:15 moving time

**Sept 12:** Phillipston, MA, 65 miles, 4482 feet climbing, 6:08 moving time

**Oct 24:** Phillipston, MA, 64 miles, 4647 feet climbing, 5:52 moving time

We have since done four other similar rides which they sponsored. I have gained confidence in riding on rough conditions – this last ride only walking a couple of times. In addition to doing the RHQ rides, mountain bike lessons and days of mountain biking this year also helped make me more comfortable separating from the bike and believing the bike will go over many

things.

It has also been fun seeing parts of CT, RI, central MA and central NH that one would never normally come across. RHQ did a great job mapping out the routes. Three of the rides ended at breweries (Stone Cow and twice at Red Apple Farm), where we had good hot meals and drinks. Sixty-five miles is a lot on dirt roads/trails, but definitely worth it. The atmosphere, scenery and support made the rides a lot of fun. Tom and I did the 100K version for all five rides, but starting with the second ride, they offered a 100 mile option. The fourth ride had a 100 and a 150 mile option and the last ride offered 100K, 100 miles, 150 miles, and 200 miles. The 200 milers started between 12:30 and 1 a.m.!

Two weeks ago, we were surprised to receive emails from The Hibernator, a gravel ride run out of East Haven

**New England**

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# Finding a compatible group for biking

by DONNA LEBAN

Ever just want to go for a bike ride and wish you had a buddy who was up for doing exactly the same – and at the same pace, the same distance, and the same hilliness, etc? Add to that having the same hours and days of the week available or available whenever you feel like dropping everything and just going? Or what about someone who likes to plan trips a year in advance to go someplace new and amazing that will take a bit more in the way of resources and available time?

Isn't this always the hardest part of biking, particularly if you're a riding enthusiast- as many in the GMBC are- which means you may have a reputation as someone who is hard to keep up with? I assure you, being too fast is not an issue for me. However, as we boomers are getting to that age when many consider anything more than a 10-mile ride on the bike path a major expedition, finding compatible riders to enjoy a 35-60 mile ride becomes more challenging.

GMBC membership, when I first started riding with the group back in the early 1990's, attracted a fairly diverse set of riders. We sorted ourselves out pretty quickly at the beginning of the ride, and there was always a ride sweep to make sure nobody got too lost. Now, 30 years later, there are the stronger fast riders, then the fairly strong, somewhat fast riders, and then the riders who find

themselves lagging behind.

Lagging (or straggling) depending on your mood, for me has become the whole point of doing- and enjoying- a longer bike ride. I realized that enough of us were relaxed enough about riding that we could form our own group within the GMBC. Not everyone out there would consider an average of 11-12 mph straggling, particularly when there are hills – and there aren't many rides here in NW Vermont without hills. Eventually I started calling these rides "Social Rides" and lots of people began asking to be put on my email list.

This past year, a small percentage of those who count themselves as social riders (usually six or seven) came out almost every weekend for a ride – much to my delight and surprise despite all the concerns about social distancing. Starting the first week in June, and extending all the way until mid October, we managed to get in a total of 18 rides totaling somewhere around 700 miles, and remembered to keep our distance. We also wore masks as required for longer stops at a range of food emporiums from sit-down outdoor restaurants (that was the best 4<sup>th</sup> of July ride thanks to George) to ice cream stands. We even had an impromptu take-out dinner picnic near the falls in Vergennes at the end of our half-century ride, done the day before the club's century day

got cancelled due to bad weather.

Not all the rides were exactly as mapped by GMBC and a few combined elements of different rides, but maps aren't as critical when you stick more or less together and wait at turns. This is what defines a social ride, so anyone can be a social rider if you are a willing part of the group. It did take a bit of commitment for me to organize a different ride each weekend around weather forecasts that had a habit of changing between mid-week when I announced the ride and the Friday through Sunday ride date. We generally could shift to take advantage of the best riding weather.

So, pandemic or not, 2020 turned out to be one of my most enjoyable riding years in a while, except that our self-guided group tour to the Vancouver and the Gulf Islands in late June had to be cancelled. Hopefully next summer will allow us to do a different week-long trip a bit closer to home.

It doesn't take much effort to get onto the Social Riders email list, but actually showing up for a ride seems to be much tougher for many folks who signed up. Every year I keep promising to cull the list, and maybe next year I'll get ruthless and cut off anyone who hasn't shown up for at least one ride before the end of June.

Fair enough? 

## Handlebars

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phone reception, my wife and I agreed to meet at Lantman's in Hinesburg. "That's 12 miles away, right?" I asked. Turns out it was 20 miles away. But they were 20 miles churned out with purpose. Huntington and Hinesburg were a blur. I swept into Lantman's at around 5:30 pm.

Dismounting the bike brought a stiff slowness revealing that, like the Devil, my legs would also refuse to be ignored. Total miles: 107.3 according to my Bontrager bike computer. It missed a mile or two on the back side of App


Gap because I had not awoken the computer with a cadence. There is not a single need to pedal on that downhill as navigating hairpin turns at 30 mph brings up priorities other than stopping to get mileage corrected.

In the end, I'm glad I did it. I'm also not sure why I did it. Pride? Glory? To prove something? Nobody will really care about how I spent my lonely Saturday other than maybe a polite "Wow" or grunt of acknowledgement. So it's not that.

The best reason I can put behind it is time travel. When (if) I am 80 years old one day, I can look back on life

and view this as a physical feat exploring the limitations of my own body. We carry this gift of life around every day, so shouldn't we know how well it can drive? Perhaps more importantly, this ride forced me to reflect on the value of not giving up.

On a subsequent weekend bike ride with my now-dear friends, I once again pedaled up alongside Phyl Newbeck to chat. After recapping the Double Gap Century, she said, "You could do the LAMB ride."

"LAMB ride? What's that?" I asked with genuine curiosity. 

# GMBC Clothing

by JOHN WITMER

**G**MBC's clothing continues the popular vibrant colors introduced in 2017, featuring blue and bright green, while retaining the same GMBC logo and most of the sponsor logos from previous years. You can see some images on the GMBC website. The Richard Tom Foundation logo was added in 2017.

GMBC places two orders with Voler each year. The next orders will likely be in March and June of 2021.

To order inventory clothing, use the order form on the GMBC website which reflects the current inventory. Alternatively, you may mail this order form and a check made out to GMBC to the address below.

Add payment for shipping if you want your items mailed to you. This is generally recommended for those who don't regularly see me during the week.

Note on sizing: vests, jackets, and arm warmers are in men's sizes only. For women who may want men's size items, please note that women's sizes run about one size smaller than men's. For example, if you want women's size medium, order men's size small. Please consult Voler's sizing chart for more details. Most folks think their chart is accurate. The short-sleeve jerseys are sized to fit fairly snug.

**Voler's sizing chart:**  
[www.voler.com/fitguide](http://www.voler.com/fitguide)



## Clothing Order Total

**Clothing Total: \$** \_\_\_\_\_

1 item - \$4.00

2 items - 7.50

3 or more - \$9.00

**Shipping:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grand Total: \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write checks to: GMBC**

**Mail to: John Witmer  
147 Lamplite Lane  
Williston, VT 05495**

**Questions: 864-5897 or  
[witmerjohn@yahoo.com](mailto:witmerjohn@yahoo.com)**



# GMBC Clothing Order Form

Size	Quan	Price	Total	Year/Item
\$53				2018 Short Sleeve Jersey w/full length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$60				2018 Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$53				2017 Short Sleeve Jersey w/full length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M,L)
\$59				2017 Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (M,L)
\$17				2017 Arm Warmers (GMBC/Synergy) (M,L)
\$17				2017 Gloves (GMBC) (M)
\$47				2016 Short Sleeve Jersey with ¾ length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$50				2016 Short Sleeve Jersey w/full length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (XL)
\$50				2016 Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$52				2016 Bib Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (L)
\$47				2015 Short Sleeve Jersey with ¾ length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$50				2015 Short Sleeve Jersey w/full length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$52				2015 Bib Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (S,L,XL)
\$20				2015 Aero Shoe Covers (GMBC/Synergy) (L)
\$15				2015 Gloves (GMBC) (L)
\$47				2014 Short Sleeve Jersey with ¾ length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$52				2014 Long Sleeve Jersey w/full length zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$50				2014 Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (M)
\$47				2013 Short Sleeve Jersey with ¾ length hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (XL)
\$52				2013 Long Sleeve Jersey w/full length zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (L)
\$52				2013 Bib Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (XL)
\$20				2013 Arm Warmers (GMBC/Synergy) (L)
\$37				2012 Short Sleeve Jersey w/full-length zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (S,M,XL)
\$35				2012 Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (S,XL)
\$ 7				2012 Arm Warmers (GMBC/Synergy) (M,L)
\$10				2012 Aero Shoe Covers (GMBC) (M)
\$ 7				2011 Arm Warmers (GMBC/Synergy) (M,L)
\$35				2011 Wind Shell Jacket (GMBC/Synergy) (L)
\$ 5				2011 Gloves (GMBC) (S)
\$35				2010 Short Sleeve Jersey w/hidden zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (S)
\$37				2010 Short Sleeve Jersey w/full-length zipper (GMBC/Synergy) (S)
\$37				2010 Bib Shorts (GMBC/Synergy) (S)
\$ 7				2010 Arm Warmers (GMBC/Synergy) (M,L)
\$35				2010 Wind Shell Jacket (GMBC/Synergy) (XS)
\$40				2009 Long Sleeve Jersey w/full-length zipper (GMBC/Flatbread) (M)
\$35				2009 Shorts (GMBC/Flatbread) (XL)
\$ 5				2009 Gloves (GMBC) (S-L)
\$12				2002 Short Sleeve Jersey (Invensys) (WM,WL)



## Touring Rides

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two riders decided to return directly via Spear Street to avoid having to do additional hills in the heat.

We continued the covered bridges theme on August 16 with the Covered Bridges of Franklin and Lamoille County. Five riders did the 41-mile version which has some delightful stretches on Route 100C and Hogback Road while the rest opted for the 53-mile version which includes the lovely (but hilly) Boston Post Road. Those on the long ride were treated to the spectacle of an East Berkshire house, covered with huge billboards in the color and font of re-election signs for a president not much beloved in the state, only to realize that the wording on the billboards was decidedly not complimentary to the person then occupying the White House. The first four miles (also the last four for the short ride) are the only really bad stretches of pavement on this ride although a number of the towns we passed through could have done a bit more roadside mowing; those weeds tickle.

Four of the riders who signed up for Waitsfield and Waterfalls took one look at the sky and the forecast and decided to head back home but the seven who braved the dire forecast had a lovely ride. All seven of us had left our Chittenden County homes in the rain but aside from the lightest of drizzles at the very start of the ride, we stayed dry. An overcast sky kept things from getting too warm and there wasn't a single carpet tack to be found. Although two riders considered heading up Middlebury Gap, we all stuck together and turned around after a break at Texas Falls where one rider reminisced about a Rainbow Family Gathering which took place there in 1991. Several cyclists finished the ride with a picnic of Mad Tacos and Lawson's Finest while another headed straight to the Mad River for a dip.

Nine cyclists headed out on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail on August 30 on a day with just a hint of fall in the air. All but one rider stopped at the coffee

shop at Morrisville where fabulous pastries fortified them for the ride back. There was a little bit of rain but it wasn't enough to dampen anyone's pleasure.

We were back to gravel on September 5 for the brand new East Montpelier-Calais Country Ride. It was a beautiful day but only five people took advantage of the over 3,400 feet of climbing including one celebrating his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday. He and a 78-year-old rider were only sorry there wasn't one more hill to climb.

The following day we returned to pavement with Pleasant Valley Pedaling. Eleven riders met in Williston but one had to quit after three miles with mechanical issues, another started early because he was awaiting news about a family member, and a third bonked on the way back and had to be picked up at Jolley's in Jericho. Otherwise, it was a nice late summer day with very little traffic for a holiday weekend.

Hats off to Kevin Batson and Brian Howard for their work on this year's Century Day. First, they spent a significant amount of time rerouting the ride since there were two road closures. Second, they had the sense to cancel the ride after arriving at Wheeler Park with serious winds which were only expected to increase as the day progressed. Two riders chose to do a shorter ride together but everyone else agreed that conditions were unsafe.

Temperatures were in the low 40's on September 19, as five riders set out on Stone Walls and Solar Panels, which had previously been scheduled for May. The ride is only 28 miles but includes over 2,500 feet of climbing on mostly gravel roads. The only dicey part was the Class 4 section of Thompson Road which is closed in the winter. The ascent on Bryce Road had some slightly loose gravel but it was well worth it for the views of Mt. Mansfield and into the valley.

Obviously, our numbers were way down this year. Twenty people showed up for one ride but we only hit double digits on three more. With so many people buying gravel bikes, we

scheduled five different gravel rides. Bad weather meant low attendance for the first and second ones, two others had five people and the one on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail attracted nine people. We'll probably try a few more next year. We were pleased to welcome three new ride leaders this year and we picked up a couple of new touring riders, as well.

GMBC cyclists all complied with Covid-19 restrictions. We wore our masks in the parking area and whenever we went into stores, and kept our distance on the road. Although signing up ahead of time was new to us, people adjusted nicely and there were only a few riders who missed the deadline and had to answer questions and provide information at the start of the rides. Although our numbers were down, we believe we made the best of a difficult year and hope things will be better in 2021. 🚲

## New England

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Vermont. We forgot we had signed up for it back in December. The ride was a shorter distance, but in typical Vermont fashion, had much more significant climbing. The Hibernator team had also talked to some of the local farmers and gotten permission to cross their fields. Since it snowed the day before the ride, some of the field sections still had snow on them, which made them tough to ride – especially as many were steep. Tom did the full ride – 37 miles and 4,600 feet of climbing. I skipped the last two field tours and one big hill, so I did 33 miles and 3,700 feet of climbing. Vermont is certainly hilly! The Hibernator was a well-run event with an excellent BBQ afterwards. Tom enjoyed playing with a lively dog at the venue.

Hopefully, next year more of the usual rides like the Ranger, Rasputitsa, Raid Rockingham, etc. will run. We also hope to sponsor our NEK weekend again and maybe a gravel weekend from either NEK or our camp in central VT. However, we did enjoy the RHQ rides and are grateful to Ride Headquarters for making them happen. 🚲





# GMBC Sponsors & Friends



**Richard Tom  
FOUNDATION**



**Thanks for  
your support!**

## GMBC Club Membership

A single adult membership is \$25 and a family membership is \$30.  
Cyclists who are age 17 and under can join for just \$10.

The membership year runs from January 1st to December 31st,  
with lots of great benefits.

Members, encourage your friends to join!

For more information and the membership form visit

**<https://thegmbc.com/membership/>**

## GMBC Officers

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Treasurer .....	John Bertelsen .....	jo.bertel@gmail.com
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Time Trial (TT) Chair .....	Kevin Bessett .....	kevinbessett@gmavt.net
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**For information on GMBC clothing, visit  
<https://thegmbc.com/club-clothing/>**



**GMBC website - [thegmbc.com](https://thegmbc.com)**



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## Perspectives

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Our esteemed  
president and  
his court!

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