

# March Madness aka April Animation 300K

MACHKA CHARLENE B B-SUNDAY, 27 MARCH 2016

*An Audax event held each Easter in Queensland, near Brisbane.*

On January 30th, Rowan and I rode the Campbell Town Canter 200K in Tasmania. When we finished, we decided that we needed to find a 300K event to ride. Since 300K events are scarce in Tasmania, we started looking further afield. We considered an event in South Australia and then on a whim, I looked at what was available in Queensland ... and there it was the March Madness.

Neither of us had been to Queensland in years (I cycletoured there for a month in 2004 and Rowan lived there back in the early 1990s) so we decided to sign up for the event and make a holiday of it!

*(I'm Canadian, and I moved to Australia a few years ago. For reference for some of my North American friends ...)* Brisbane, Queensland is at about the same southern latitude (approx. 27 degrees south) as Orlando, Florida or Corpus Christie, Texas are at a northern latitude (approx 27 degrees north), and it is sub-tropical. So it can get quite hot and humid. Fortunately it is autumn, and is marginally cooler. It is also a part of the world where the sun drops fairly quickly and early. So much of the ride would be in the dark.

We flew in on Wednesday and had an enjoyable and relaxing couple days getting last minute things and making some attempt to acclimatise. Tasmania, these days, is rather chilly by comparison. We also did some exploration to find the starting area and familiarise ourselves with the first few kilometres of the route.

At 6 am on Saturday 26 March, we cycled to the start of the event where we met the other 4 riders doing the event and the organiser, Peter Jenkins. All was well with our lights and equipment ... safety is a consideration with these events ... and at 7 am, we rolled out under lightly clouded early morning skies, with birds singing all around us.

The ride to the first control was quite pleasant in terms of weather and the route ... except for the fact that we hit just about every traffic light getting out of town! That segment also included quite a bit of climbing, and I wondered a couple times if we had reached the first big climb we were promised. But no, those climbs were relatively small.

I had been wearing knee warmers and arm coolers because it had been just a bit cool at the start, and for sun protection, but just before Dayboro, I shed them. Arm coolers are a great idea for temps under 30C, but not so much for when it actually gets hot.

We were met at the edge of Dayboro, our first control, by Brian Hornby who pointed the way to the bakery which was the official control. Brian had been riding with the faster group ahead of us, but then decided to drop back and ride with us.

While we ate and drank, Brian informed us that we would start climbing the big climb almost immediately out of Dayboro, and that it was an approximate average 5% grade climb that went on for about 7 km to the top of Mount Mee. Then we would ride lumpy terrain across the top and do a sharp descent just before Woodford.

A jam doughnut and coke later, and Brian, Rowan and I were on our way again. Sure enough, we climbed. When it indicates a 5% average, that doesn't mean it is 5% all the way up ... there are some flatter bits, but then there are also some steeper bits. Our ride data showed as much as 16% in one or two places. By this point, the day was also

warming up and our on-board computers were showing temps over 30C. I tend to overheat on climbs, so I was feeling quite warm and just a little queasy by the time I got to the top. Electrolytes and more water seemed to settle things a bit.

At the top there was a spectacular view of Brisbane CBD and surrounding area. There were some great views on the way up too, and with my new-found confidence in climbing, I was able to actually look at them briefly instead of remaining fixed on a spot about a metre in front of my wheel.

We bobbed up and down and up and down across the top of Mount Mee for the next 20 km, and then there was the descent. I'm getting much better at straight or sweeping descents, but I'm still not so good at steep, curvy descents and I tend to ride the brakes. I stopped a couple times on the way down to let my blistering hot rims cool!

Once down, we rode through Woodford and onto the out-and-back to Kilcoy. And that's where we hit the hottest part of the day. In that section, on-board computers were registering 36 and 37 degrees. We met the faster riders on their way back from Kilcoy and stopped to chat for a moment, which gave me an opportunity to apply more sunscreen in the hopes it would provide a cooling effect.

When we got to Kilcoy, I was queasy again and figured I needed salt and something that would sit well ... potato chips it was! I also bought a package of four chocolate chip cookies and had one of them. The rest I put into the empty potato chip bag to take with me. Salted caramel has been all the rage ... now it is salted chocolate's turn!

Still really hot all the way back to Woodford, and unfortunately Rowan started having issues with cramping leg muscles. He was just managing the situation with electrolytes, magnesium, lots of water, and standing a good portion of the way.

We headed north, and soon we reached the second big climb of the day. This was a shorter but steeper climb. As I started, I called back to Rowan, "I'm going to give this my best shot, but I'll probably have to walk". My back was starting to give me trouble again, and although I have improved my climb skills, I wasn't sure how I would manage a steep climb. We did stop once for a short break, but otherwise, we cycled all the way up!

When we got to the top, thankfully we were into a bit of forest which provided shade, a light breeze had come up, and the temperature was starting to drop. We stopped at a little grocery store in Peachester for a quick bite to eat and then descended to the relatively flat area near the coast. Relatively flat, I say, because there were no more large climbs ... just a whole lot of little ones.

It was just about dark when we rolled into the next control at Mooloolah at the 192 km point. We were riding about 1.5 hours ahead of the cut-off time and Brian predicted that we might get in by midnight ... a 17-hour 300K!

Next, the route took us through the Glass House Mountains. The Glass House Mountains are eleven volcanic cores that rise of the coastal plains . We had caught glimpses of them throughout the ride, which was fortunate because it was now completely dark. However, we could just make out one large one next to the road. They look a whole lot bigger when you're right in among them!

I had been fighting queasiness most of the day, so I had been nibbling on a bit of this and a bit of that, but with about 70 km to go, I started to feel really hungry. I wondered if I could make it to the next control, and then remembered that I had three of the cookies I had purchased earlier in my handlebar bag. As we cycled along in the dark, I

unzipped my handlebar bag a little bit so I wouldn't accidentally drop anything, and then I began working away at the bag I put the cookies in to see if I could get at one. I had folded the bag over so it took a bit of doing until, at last, I could touch a cookie! Then I began working it loose and finally managed to snap it in half and extract a piece ... success!

About this time we started noticing flashes of lightning in the distance. At first, I thought it was just Rowan's headlight. I had my mirror set up so I could see his light behind me, and I figured I was just seeing the changes in his light as we went up and down little hills. But then a particularly bright flash confirmed the lightning theory!

The lightning went on for quite some time without seeming to come any closer and I hoped we'd pass by the storm system without incident. But then, all of a sudden, I felt a rain drop ... and then another ... and then another ... and then the sky opened up and it poured!! Within minutes we were as soaked as we would have been if we had jumped into a swimming pool. The wind came up as the storm system moved into our area, and we were soon quite cold. Almost funny after all the heat earlier in the day.

We splashed our way into the next control at Morayfield with a vague idea of warming up inside the BP, but they had the air conditioning on full blast and it was just too cold to remain inside for more than a few minutes. However, Rowan and I did put on our rain jackets, more to block the wind than anything else because we were already drenched. Unfortunately Brian didn't have one because we really weren't expecting rain.

Fortunately, although the rain didn't stop the rest of the way, it did ease up so the riding was a bit more comfortable. We were into the flattest section of the route and making really good time despite the darkness and rain. Maybe there was a bit of fast riding to keep us warm!

And again, I started feeling really hungry. I knew we still had about 40 km to go and I wouldn't make it to the end without more to eat. So I started working away at the cookie bag again, and managed to extract the last two cookies. Of course, as soon as I got them out they started to become soggy from the rain, but I didn't care. Soggy or not, I ate them.

We cycled right along the foreshore, and I could hear the waves, and over a long pedestrian cycling bridge which was quite nice. And then my computer seemed to go into slow motion ... ticking over the kilometres at a glacial pace. I was soaked and tired, various things ached, and I was really looking forward to being done. 30 km to go ... 29.5 km to go ... 29.2 km to go ... don't look at the computer! ... 28.7 km to go ... think about something else! ... 27.3 km to go ...

And then, finally, my computer was telling me that we should be within a kilometre or two of the finish but I didn't recognise anything around me until, suddenly, there was a sign by the side of the road indicating a "next left" that I did recognise! We were, indeed, almost finished. A couple corners later, and we were done.

Amazingly, we arrived 6 minutes after midnight, completing the ride in 17 hours and 6 minutes. Not bad for a 300 km ride with 3100 metres (10170 feet) of climbing ... through the extremes heat and chilly rain ...

We really appreciated the organisation of the ride by Peter, and our "tour guide" Brian ... without whom the dark and rainy portion of the ride would have been much more difficult.