



## Take me Home, Country Roads!

In last week's story I recounted how a silly mistake in losing my cycle wheel cost me some time and money, but the next foolish thing I did with the new bicycle cost me a lot more; I am still paying the price, more than thirty years later!

Before I purchased the bike, I did a fair amount of research, reading cycle magazines to learn as much as I could about both the bikes themselves, and bike culture in general. Along the way I learned about something called 'The Century'. The concept was very simple - you got on the bike and rode a distance of 100 miles, doing it within a time period of (I think it was) 10 hours. (Having read that, you can now probably write the rest of this week's story yourself, without needing to hear it from me!)

I needed no further encouragement. I was living at the time in a company-supplied apartment in Downsview, one of the outlying suburbs of Toronto. To the south was the city; to the north was open countryside, dotted with small towns and of course criss-crossed with country roads. It didn't take long with the help of an area map to work out a sensible route, one that would keep me away from heavy traffic. The countryside north of Toronto is gently rolling, but I noticed no major hills that would pose problems to a cyclist.

So one weekend, no more than a couple of weeks after purchasing the bike, I put some basic supplies - lunch, maps, puncture kit, drinks, etc. - into the pannier, checked the time, and set off.

All went well. Very well, actually. The bike was a wonderfully smooth road machine, with very low tire resistance, and I ate up the miles quickly. Well before the half-way point in my allotted time, I had arrived at the mid-point of the route and spent a pleasant 'break' having lunch by a lakeside in Barrie, a town north of Toronto.

Thinking that the return trip would perhaps take somewhat longer as I gradually grew more tired, I didn't tarry too long there, but soon jumped back on the bike and headed back south.

Now any experienced cyclist reading this has been waving a red flag ever since I set off. I was a completely healthy young man (around 27 or 28), but no matter how healthy one is, if you over-use any particular group of muscles that has not been properly 'acclimated' to the exercise in question, you are asking for trouble.

My knees began to overheat. This was a new sensation for me. I had expected to gradually feel more and more 'tired', and was ready to deal with that - "Push on!" But hot joints? Who ever heard of such a thing?

But I of course pressed on, taking ever more extended breaks along the way to try and cool down. At one point I sat for a while with my legs dangling in a stream, to try and cool them off.

The crunch came as I came near the city limits. The particular road I was on (I think the northern extension of Dufferin Street, or perhaps Keele) came into Toronto up a long slope, a very long slope.

I didn't make it. Partway up, something went 'pop' in my right knee (audibly!), I tumbled off the bike, and that was the end of the day's adventure. It was only a few miles to the apartment, and I hobbled home, pushing the bike.

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It perhaps doesn't speak too well of my character that the first job once I got home was to spread the map out on the table and measure very carefully (and optimistically, no doubt), to confirm that I had indeed scored my Century. I did nothing with my knee, simply kept weight off it for some days until it seemed to have settled down.

To this day I have no idea what I actually did to myself (popped a tendon? ligament?) but although I soon 'recovered' to a normal condition, the long-term consequences are still with me. Many years later in Japan, after about ten years of woodblock printmaking in the traditional cross-legged style on the floor, I found that it was simply impossible to continue that way, and built myself a custom seating arrangement, one that avoided stressing my knee joints.

We live and learn, and nine times out of ten, we learn too late, don't we!

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