

A Day in the Life of the Tour of Minnesota
2016, 42nd Year

5:30 Wake Up

Pack tent - get gear for the day

Load on gear trailer by 6:15

You will not have access to the gear bag until end of day

Bring rain gear on bike

6:00 -7:00 Breakfast

Sometimes on site or a short distance away

7:15 Safety message

A brief message about the route

7:30 Hit the road, we leave together

Rest stop 15-20 miles down the road

Regroup, refuel, rehydrate

Lunch around 35-40 miles

On short days lunch in camp

(Park Rapids, Itasca)

Regroup

Rest stop if a long day in afternoon

Regroup, refuel, rehydrate

Arrive at camp mid the afternoon

At camp

Set up tent and get organized

Shower

Check weather

2:00 – 5:00 Sightseeing and social activities on your own

5:00 Happy Hour

If there is an option

6:00 Dinner

We eat together

Turn in at your pleasure

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A Day in the life of the Tour of Minnesota by Karl Blazeovic

Unremembered dreams fade; the exhausted sleep deeply. Just after 5 am, I wake to the sound of tent zippers and sleeping bag zippers. The sky is already starting to brighten, thanks to the long days of mid-June. Time to get moving. I open the valve on the air mattress, dress, then head off to heed the call of nature. The mattress will be mostly deflated by the time I'm back.

The repacking ritual begins: gear into stuff sacks into weatherproof bags into that new rolling duffel bag with the heavy duty zippers. Everything fit before the trip, so why does it seem so tight now? It seems the bigger bag just encourages bringing more stuff.

By the time the tent comes down, the official wake-up call is making the rounds. The previous leader had a whistle. The new leader retired the whistle, although the rumor is he is a drummer. So far no one has seen a snare drum...

The breakfast line will start serving soon. What's on the menu? There are only so many things that can be reasonably prepared for 100+ hungry people quickly and efficiently. Ham and egg bake is one of them, but we're having pancakes and sausage today. The morning announcements end with the lost-and-found presentation, where a pair of sunglasses reunites with its owner and a lonely left-handed glove goes unclaimed.

It's time to go. I call my loved one back home, then zero my odometer, click in, and begin to roll. Experience has taught me that exuberant speed early in the day is only borrowed from later on, so restraint must be practiced. Low gear, high cadence, and a light effort greet the cool sunny morning. By 10 or 15 miles I'm fully warmed up.

Some enjoy long distance cycling with friends, some enjoy the solitude. Some come for the scenery, a sense of accomplishment and adventure, and the ritual of riding to the next town and staking claim to a small nylon-enclosed space, only to do it all again day after day. Some may ride simply because it feels so good when they stop. There is a bit for everyone, from the couple who still haul all their own touring gear, to those who strive to finish as fast as possible, and those who give it their all just to finish. Some sprint the hills, some stop for photographs of things few will take the time to see, yet others sing songs mile after mile.

The morning rest stop greets the group. We're just small enough that our entire entourage can gather without overwhelming small parks or picnic shelters, and that's part of the appeal of the structure of this ride: the miles are reasonable enough that slower riders are regularly reunited with their faster counterparts, and most organized stops do not depart until the trailing members have had a reasonable rest of their own.

Today, I'm eager to get going, so I'm refreshed, rehydrated, and ready to depart with the leading edge of the pack. I'm not the fastest, and this allows me to greet the stronger riders as they overtake me. At other times I may get a late start, which gives the opportunity to say hello to slower riders that I overtake in turn.

Lunch is a chance to thoroughly refuel, often stopping long enough update a journal or even

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snooze a bit. The afternoon finds me consulting my energy account: if the miles are mild and I haven't pushed too hard early, I can safely drive myself for an early arrival. I used to use a bike computer with speed, cadence, elapsed miles, and average speed, but found for me it didn't increase my riding enjoyment. I still glance at my speed or mileage from time to time, but tend to keep my cadence by the song playing in my head. I asked one strong rider how he knows his pace without a speedometer, and he stated that he simply counts water towers. "Six, so far today," he added.

Today's destination is just up ahead, and the most important decision of the day awaits: where should I pitch my tent? The new rider may look simply for soft, level ground, but the experienced rider knows to watch out for downspouts and low spots, bright security lights that buzz all night long, and who snores, who stays up late talking. I find what I hope is a good spot, and head off to take a shower.

By dinner time, the endorphin glow has me in its weary, comfortable grasp. I enjoy a slow meal with friends, sharing "did you see that..." and "that damn hill..." and "tailwind all day long until the last bit..." There are a few riders with the energy for dancing and late nights, but by and large the tenting grounds are a designated quiet zone by 9 pm. I check the weather, visit the facilities one last time, then zip myself in quickly to avoid tailgating mosquitoes. I make sure my gear is reasonably organized, enough to minimize repacking time next morning just in case all those zippers don't wake me early enough.