

What to Expect on a PA Brevet

4/4/08

A brevet (e.g. PA200k) is a bit different from the century or club rides that you may be used to. The following will give you an overview of what to expect, along with some tips that will hopefully make this an enjoyable and successful experience!

Before the Event

- Your responsibility as a participant includes:
 - Showing up in reasonable physical condition for the event
 - Bringing a reliable bike in good working order
 - Complying with all traffic laws along the course
 - Respecting the rights of all other users of the route (including pedestrians)
 - Planning for the situation where you can't finish the ride
- If you are not already a member of RUSA, consider joining. The membership dues are very reasonable and you will be able to get 'credit' for each brevet you complete by having your results officially recorded. This credit is in the form of awards for various levels of achievement. More importantly, if you plan someday to ride one of the longer brevets like a 1200k (e.g. BMB), you will need to officially complete a series of qualifying events as a RUSA member.
- One big difference between brevets and other organized rides is that the course is not marked with arrows. You will be given a cue-sheet to follow. You should have some sort of cue-sheet holder for your bike -- I find that a binder clip strapped with nylon ties and black tape to the stem works very well. You should download a preview of the cue sheet from the website and checkout your system ahead of time. You may want to reformat the cue sheet to improve the readability.
- Since navigation is a big part of brevet riding, it's a good idea to review the cue sheet ahead of time. There is a map on the website to give you a general idea of the route. You can look at some detailed maps (e.g. MapQuest) and trace the route.
- If there's a chance of rain, it's a good idea to laminate your cue-sheet. Otherwise, the cue sheet will become a soggy mess and eventually disintegrate. You can buy inexpensive peel-on lamination sheets at any office supply store. The lamination also helps stiffen the cue sheet and prevents it from flapping in the breeze while you're riding. Before laminating your sheet, check the web-site for any updates ... there might be some last minute changes due to road construction.
- Make sure you have all the equipment you need and it's in good working order. There is a bike inspection checklist on the web-site. The checklist has a list of '*mandatory*' items needed to participate on all PA brevets, a list of items needed for '*limited visibility*' conditions (night, rain, fog, etc.), and a list of '*suggested*' items that you typically will want to have.
- If you're traveling far to the event, you may want to consider staying at a nearby hotel or the start/finish hostel on the night before the event (hostel reservations can be made on the registration form or you can contact me to make last minute reservations). Additional hostel information is provided later on in this document.
- The week before the event, you can keep training but taper down towards the end of the week so you are well rested.

Day of the Event

- Wake-up early enough to eat a good breakfast and give yourself enough time to arrive at the start without feeling rushed.
- Plan to arrive at the hostel about an hour before the scheduled ride start. There is a parking lot at the hostel, halfway between the house and the road on the right. Don't park in the few spots right next to the house -- these are reserved for the house parents and event personnel.
- Check the message board at the hostel for any last minute instructions or route changes.
- The check-in table will be at the hostel to the left as you walk inside. There will be a sign-in sheet for you to sign. You will then receive your brevet card that you must keep with you for the entire ride.
- Breakfast items (hot oatmeal, coffee, fruit, etc.) will be available 1 hours before the ride start.
- Do any last minute preparations (assemble bike, pump tires, fill water bottles, etc.) and review your checklist.
- About 10 minutes before the scheduled ride start, there will be a brief rider meeting on the porch in front of the hostel.
- At the end of the meeting, the ride officially starts and riders depart as a group.

During the Event

- You may ride at your own pace alone, or with a group of like-minded cyclists. While brevet events are not races, there are some riders who will like to finish quickly in order to improve a personal best time. Other riders may choose to take a more leisurely pace and enjoy the great scenery on the route. Some riders prefer to ride alone while others enjoy the camaraderie of riding in a group. You are free to choose the style of riding that suits you best. A list of registered riders is posted before the event so you can make any group arrangements ahead of time. If you would like to be matched with a riding partner, please contact me.
- On the route, there will be a number of 'controles' or checkpoints. Each controle has an opening and closing time. You must reach each controle before the closing time in order to officially be recognized as a finisher. While the minimum average speed to reach the controles is rather modest (about 10 MPH), the clock is always ticking even while you are stopped. It's best to keep your scheduled stops as short as possible. Newcomers are often amazed at how efficiently experienced randonneurs are at getting through a controle. Controles are typically at a convenience store ... you may buy some food and at the check-out counter, you present your brevet card to the clerk. Ask the clerk to initial or stamp the card in the appropriate box and fill in the time using 24-hour notation (e.g. 13:30 for 1:30PM). There will also be a sign-in sheet at each controle. This sheet allows us to monitor your progress and help track you down in case you get lost.
- There may be a Delaware River bridge crossing on the route and often, these crossings are used as controles. You present your card for stamping to the bridge guard who is located in a small guardhouse on one or both ends of the bridge. It's also mandatory that you walk your bike across the bridge. Riding on the bridge walkway is dangerous to yourself and any pedestrians. It also really annoys the bridge guard and will reflect poorly on our group, so violations will be dealt with harshly. The first violation of this rule will result in a 2-hour penalty assessed. The second violation will result in a DQ (disqualification).
- There may also be 'information' controles and/or 'postcard' controles. An information controle is usually located at some out of the way area (like the top of a long climb). At the designated area, you stop and fill in your own card with the time and record the answer to a question about something in the general area listed in your card. A typical question might be: "What is the percent grade listed on the downhill truck warning sign?" For a postcard controle, the controle is at a mailbox where you sign a postcard given to you at the check-in and drop it in the mailbox. Indicate your time on the brevet card and write 'PC' as a stamp.
- There may also be an unannounced 'secret controle' along the way, staffed by a volunteer. It's important to stay on course. If you get lost, you must work your way back to the point where you got off course and avoid the temptation to take any shortcuts. Otherwise, you risk missing a secret controle which at minimum will result in a time penalty and may result in a DQ.
- Randonneuring is all about self-sufficiency: you are not allowed to get any support from a following car between controles. You may however, have a support car meet you at a controle. You may also stop along the way to get anything you need, you may get help from your fellow randonneur, or you may get assistance from event volunteers.
- In case of an emergency, call 911 if you need medical aid. Be sure that you have personal ID with you that has contact and medical insurance information in case you're knocked unconscious.
- Be sure to read and carry the Safety Instructions with you -- these are posted on the event web page.
- The cue sheet has phone numbers (cell phone and controles) to contact me if you run into difficulties or plan to withdraw from the ride. If you feel like quitting, it may be an indication that you're not eating enough. You may encounter a particularly tough stretch and feel overwhelmed if you think about the whole ride remaining ahead of you. Instead, think about just getting to the next controle or store, take a break and eat something -- before you know it, you'll be making that last turn back to the hostel!
- If you are still out riding past the cut-off time, please try to contact me at either the hostel or on my cell phone.

Post-Ride

- Sign the check-in sheet and your brevet card on the back and present it to the volunteer at the finish for the final stamp. The cards will be validated by RUSA and then mailed back to you at the end of the year.
- There are 2 showers available at the hostel in the upstairs bathroom (there is a sign on the door to indicate male/female usage).
- There will usually be food available (chips, soda, BBQ, pizza, etc.) on the porch and/or living room. This is a great opportunity to meet some of the other riders and share your experiences and goals.
- If you are very tired, it may be a good idea to take a nap in the dormitory before a long drive home.

- Within a couple of days, preliminary results will be posted on the PA Randonneurs web-site. After that, the results will be sent to RUSA and eventually posted on the RUSA web-site.

Hostel Reservations

- The hostel offers cost-effective overnight accommodations, for the events that start from Quakertown.
- Reservations can be made when you register for an event.
- There is a parking lot at the hostel, halfway between the house and the road on the right. Don't park in the few spots right next to the house -- these are reserved for the house parents and event personnel.
- There will be a sign-in sheet on the message board -- check your name off.
- Gerri Anne and John are the hostel parents ... if you meet them, you can identify yourself as being with the "Bike group/PA Randonneurs"
- There are 3 dorm rooms on the second floor designated as: Male, Female, and Family. Check the message board for any room assignments.
- You can claim a bunk in your assigned room. Sheets and pillow cases are in a metal cabinet on the second floor landing
- There are kitchen facilities available for your use (refrigerator, stove, etc.).
- You may store your bike in the Great Room, to your left when you walk in.
- There are 2 showers available at the hostel in the upstairs bathroom (there is a sign on the door to indicate male/female usage).
- When you are ready to leave, strip the sheets off your bed and place them in the hamper on the second floor landing.
- You may want to consider bringing along:
 - Pillow
 - Ipod and/or ear plugs and eye mask
 - Flashlight
- If roughing it with the dormitory-style hostel accommodations is not for you, there are several chain hotels in the Quakertown area.