

Border to Bluff Roller Ski

In support of the SE Minnesota Red Cross relief efforts for flood victims

Michael O'Connor and Henry Walker

We did it! We managed to roller ski over 70 miles a day completing the three-day ski across Minnesota last weekend. This was a fundraiser to support the SE Minnesota Red Cross and especially people affected by the recent floods in the area.

This was originally Henry's idea as a fund raiser for our ski team with the idea that we would check out the route this year, maybe ski part of it and to do it properly next year. Well things kind of snowballed from there and "the harebrain idea from Walker" became a "should be easy" plan. Helen, Michael's wife, suggested that we use this challenge to obtain contributions for the flood victims. A quick note to the Rochester Active Sports Club membership and SkinnySki members (thanks Bruce!) received a great response with over \$1,800 pledged – now we were committed with no backing out (at least not with our reputations intact).

The longest we had ever rollerskied in one session was 5 hours – and that was usually followed by a long afternoon nap. With virtually no experience in how to manage one's body for three straight days of roller skiing we threw everything we could think of into Michael's old RV. Roller ski stuff (wheels, grinder, poles etc) all sorts of energy drinks and pills (legal ones!). It turned out that having a RV available was essential, not only to carry our equipment, but also to have a place to cool off and relax, snack, and mix energy drinks. It also allowed our support crew to go ahead and find alternate routes as the road conditions changed.

The original plan was to leave on the Thursday, but changes in our support crew resulted in a day delay. Finally, Friday evening the two of us hopped into the RV (last time we would hop anywhere for 3 days) and with support from Helen, daughter, Aoife, and friend Maria, headed across Minnesota to Lake Hendricks.

We camped along the lakeshore just on the border and started at around 8 am on Saturday morning. Perfect weather – not too hot, not too cold with a light tail wind. The first stretch was a straight shot along CR 17 east from Lake Hendricks with a dogleg onto CR 8 into Ghent (world capital of Rolle Bolle – bet none of you knew that!). East of Ghent, CR8 began to dogleg north and south and eventually dead-ended at a swamp. The map indicated a road – but we think it was just wishful thinking on the part of the map maker. After 5 miles of skiing south and then north, we found CR 22 which looked in great shape and went due east. Stopping about once an hour for drinks and snacks we skied well across western Minnesota until we came to an intersection just north of Vesta. There our luck in road surfaces ran out as the road joined up with a busy CR 19 going into Redwood Falls. The road had a hard shoulder but with a wide rumble strip! Not enough space to skate ski so we had to double pole most of the remaining 15 miles into Redwood Falls. Finally after 72.4 miles, we arrived in Redwood Falls after 7 hours 36 minutes of skiing (included short refueling breaks). Although tired we both felt surprisingly good at the end of the first day. The moderate temperatures and low humidity really helped.

Sunday morning woke up with our bodies feeling the after effects of the 72 miles on Saturday. To add insult to our stiffness, the temperature was close to 70F at 7:30 am and we now had a strong 20 mph wind from the south gusting to 30 mph. Starting from Redwood Falls on CR 19 was not good. Somehow we thought everyone would either be in bed or church and we'd have the road to ourselves – no such luck. As we skied east out of Redwood Falls, the traffic was fast, the road was concrete and the hard shoulder was full of debris and in bad shape. So after 6 miles, we decided to cut south on CR 2 and try and connect with a smaller road that ran east parallel to CR 19. Well this bright idea turned into a 10-mile detour with 5 miles skiing south into the headwind. We eventually made it back up north to Franklin and back on the CR 19 road. We were now on a

2-lane road with no hard shoulder and fast traffic. Three miles of this convinced us that we'd be in an ambulance rather than in the RV by the end of the day if we kept on that road. So with no good road options, we got into the RV and drove due north about 4 miles to CR 2. We now had an excellent road heading east with only a few doglegs north and south. However we were now beginning to feel the effects of the high humidity and temperatures. As the temperature rose into the mid-80's, we were stopping every 30 minutes for fresh bottles and we were consuming electrolyte tablets by the fistful. By 2 pm we were well and truly cooked and in danger of heat stroke. Around then Jeff Robertson arrived to take over as support as Helen and Aoife had to get back to Rochester. It was a good opportunity to sit inside the RV for 1-2 hours where we could cool down, rehydrate and eat. Helen and Aoife headed off and we promptly fell asleep for half an hour. This was turning out to be a long day and we still had far to go. We decided for the rest of the day to always stop for 5 minutes every 30 minutes and rehydrate / eat / cool down. Back on the road again and we cruised to CR 22 just north of Gaylord. At one point, Jeff pulled the RV off the road in front of a farmer's tool shed to wait for our usual refueling stop. The farmer came out and asked him what he was doing. He explained that he was waiting for two guys who were roller skiing across Minnesota. He replied, "It looks to me like they have way too much time on their hands". This was one of many such encounters. Most of the time people would just smile lamely and quickly back away; hoping that whatever we had was not contagious.

With no good roads east of Gaylord we did our second jump south in the RV to CR8 and skied the last 16 miles into Le Sueur. We ended day 2 with almost 74 miles of skiing. The crosswinds and high temperatures made this a tough day and sapped a lot of energy from us. Still, the plan to stop every 30 minutes allowed us to stay hydrated and to keep on going. Sunday evening we camped in St. Peter just south of Le Sueur. We had both been skiing with V2 Aero's and they had worked very well for us, particularly on some of the rougher sections of road. However they now needed some TLC and tire changes to get them ready for the last day, so that evening was spent on repairs and preparations for Monday.

Monday started in Le Sueur at 7:30am and the bodies were awakened to a mile climb out of the valley on a route that headed to Lonsdale. Temperatures were supposed to rise into the mid-80's again, so we were anxious to get as many miles in as possible before it heated up. The wind was not our friend with a variable headwind or crosswind of 10-12 mph. CR 28 was in good condition and we made reasonable progress to Lonsdale given that we were both feeling the effects of 2 long days of roller skiing. Our pace slowed as our bodies rebelled against this whole foolish idea. The short breaks every 30 minutes were critical to keeping us going. Our good road dead-ended in Lonsdale and we were forced to find another route. At this point we were close to I-35 and every road seemed busy. We eventually decided to try CR 86 and drove 4 miles north of Lonsdale to start on that road. This road rapidly deteriorated with bad potholes and cracked surfaces. To add insult to this, the road had a lot of heavy traffic as it fed into I-35. Jeff pulled the RV directly behind us with the hazard lights on and protected us from getting killed by trucks doing 70 on a narrow 2-lane road. Fortunately shortly after we crossed I-35, traffic dropped off and road conditions improved and we made slow but steady progress east. The day had remained mostly cloudy and temps had never reached the 80F mark, plus the wind had switched to a 10 mph wind from the south and was no longer a big factor.

Crossing US 52 and coming into Cannon Falls was a great mental rush, not only from the standpoint of knowing there was just 20 more miles left, but to be able to ski on the Cannon River trail to Red Wing without vehicles made it pure bliss. The only problem now was the actual task of skiing. One of us was doing fine and one of us wanted to lie down in a quiet corner and die. Once on the trail there was only one spot that Jeff could easily support us. That was at Welch village about 10 miles along the way. We took our last refueling stop before the final 1 hour ski into Red Wing. Just as well there were no more uphill as one of us would still be out there. We finally rolled into Red Wing around 6pm very tired and very very happy to see Jeff and have a comfortable ride home.

In reflection this would have been a very manageable 4-day trip with ~50 miles / day. Shortening it to 3 days really stretched us to our limits (Michael's limit went twang halfway through the third day, while Henry was still going strong). You can probably eat anything you like on this type of event, with the key item being to make sure to stay hydrated and consume enough electrolytes to keep the body functioning. Low-fat chocolate milk was a great recovery drink at the end of each day. Having said that, neither of us wants to see that stuff again for the next 6 months. Surprisingly other than one or two small blisters, neither of us had any overuse injury and survived the event better than we expected.

Below is a summary of the miles, temps etc. We have posted maps of the routes each day on the bikely.com web site (can be accessed from the RASC web site). We will shortly have a full set of photos on the RASC web site as well.

Special thanks to Helen O'Connor and Jeff Robertson – there is absolutely no way we would have made it without all their help and support.

Photos

Day 1: http://www.rascmn.info/rasc_photo_album/rollerski-mn/rski-day1/album/index.html

Day 2: http://www.rascmn.info/rasc_photo_album/rollerski-mn/rski-day2/album/index.html

Day 3: http://www.rascmn.info/rasc_photo_album/rollerski-mn/rski-day3/album/index.html

Maps

Map of complete course:

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=106712091638173669674.000438d88ca047b23fa9f&z=8&om=1>

Day 1: 72.4 miles, <http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Rollerski-SD-border-to-Redwood-Falls>

Day 2: 73.9 miles,

Part 1 - <http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Roller-ski-across-MN-day-2-part-1>

Part 2 - <http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Rollerski-across-MN-day-2-part-2>

Part 3 - <http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Rollerski-across-Mn-day-2-part-3>

Day 3: 73.1 miles

Part 1 - <http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Rollerski-across-MN-day-3-part-1>

Part 2 - <http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/Rollerski-across-MN-day-3-part-3>

Setting a goal of three days required roller skiing over 70 miles a day – no easy feat in the hot sun and high cross winds to complete the 219.4 mile trip. Here is a daily summary of the journey and conditions:

	Miles	Ski Hours	Vertical Climb	Temperature	Wind (MPH)
Saturday	72.4	7:36	450 ft	59 - 75	Tail 0 -5
Sunday	73.9	8:14	600 ft	70 - 85	Cross 25 - 30
Monday	73.1	8:08	1500 ft	67 - 78	Head/ Cross 10 - 20
	219.4	23:58	2550 ft		

