

## Biking from St. Paul to Duluth May 22, 2010 - Paul Scanlon

The Heroes Campaign started in 2005 to fund local operations of the Southeast Minnesota Chapter of the American Red Cross. The campaign is in its sixth year. For the past 5 years, I have paddled my kayak and ridden my bike in personal challenges, each at the limit of what I thought I could accomplish. Last year, my daughter Kelsey and I joined 6 friends to ride bikes from Fairbanks to Coldfoot, Alaska, north of the Arctic Circle. This year Kelsey and I were asked to co-chair the Heroes Campaign.

I didn't expect to top last year's adventure, but I did set a personal challenge to ride from St. Paul to Duluth, supported by my friend and coworker, Ken Parker. I knew it would be about 150 miles. I wasn't sure if I could make that distance in one day, but I was sure I could do two 75 mile days, so I set aside two days. I prepared my solicitation letter to send out on May 19<sup>th</sup>. I realized that my schedule for weekends were somewhat limited, so as I watched the weather forecast for the weekend of May 22-23, I thought it might be the best option. I decided to go ahead with the ride on the morning of Saturday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

We started early. Ken met me at my house at 4 a.m. We packed up bikes and supplies and hit the road before 5 a.m. We got to the State Capitol at about 6:15. I put on my shoes and a light jacket, pumped up my tires and headed out. The sky was overcast, but not threatening and the temp was a little below 60 degrees. It was humid but not damp.



Michael O'Connor and Henry Walker provided route instructions based on their trip two years ago. The turn-by-turn detail for getting out of St. Paul was very helpful. St. Paul can be confusing. The path from the Capitol follows streets of St. Paul and its suburbs. Traffic was light at that hour. The Gateway Trail is a commuter trail that runs to near the center of St. Paul. We followed a northeasterly direction, passing the Western shore of Bald Eagle Lake, a scenic part of the trip.



We arrived in Hugo a little after 8 o'clock. From there we took the Hardwood Creek Trail and the Sunrise Prairie Trail. They run 24 miles north through Forest Lake, Wyoming, and Stacy to North Branch. The trails parallels old highway 61, which is a 2 lane county road that runs parallel to I-35, mostly straight north. At this stage, I felt pretty fresh and was making good time, averaging 17.3 mph. There was a slight tail wind and the temp was in the low 60's. Ken met me in Wyoming and we rode together to North Branch, about 12 miles. The trail was nice, in terms of avoiding traffic and making good time. It is pretty straight and flat (an old RR right-of-way). The wildlife highlight of that portion of the trip was seeing a big Tom turkey in full display. We reached North Branch in good time, a little after 9:30. Ken headed back to the car in Wyoming and I rode on.

The route follows Hwy 61 through Harris, Rush City, Pine City, and Beroun. From there its 5 miles to the point where 61 crosses over I-35 and then heads into Hinckley. The bridge over the highway was out and there was no alternate route other than taking the Interstate. We were forced to load up the bike on the bike rack so Ken could ferry me up to the Hinckley exit and back to Rt 23/61.

At this point it started to sprinkle, then pour, so I got pretty soaked on the 3 miles into Hinckley. I met Ken at about 11:30 at the trailhead for the Willard Munger State Trail. I had ridden 85 miles by this time. The Munger Trail runs 70 miles from Hinckley to Duluth. We sat in the car for a bite to eat and a short rest. It rained pretty heavily for about another 20 minutes, then it let up.

I headed out along the Munger Trail planning to meet Ken in Finlayson 15 miles up the trail in about an hour. I expected smooth sailing, but I was wrong. The trail was very wet, so a bit slow. Worse yet, there apparently were recent high winds that knocked down a lot of small trees on the trail. For 15 miles I had about 3-10 downed trees per mile that I had to ride around or through, jump over, or stop to climb over. Jumping over obstacles is fun on a mountain bike, but not on a road bike.



I arrived in Finlayson exasperated with the trail and decided to take the road. That turned out to be a good choice. Traffic was light, the road surface was mostly pretty good and there was usually a good shoulder (see above). At this point, with a hundred miles down, I was getting a bit tired, so we started to follow the ride plan we developed two years ago. Ken would meet me every 10 miles along the road. Having an intermediate goal helps when you are tired and the ultimate goal is still a long way off. I stayed on the road through Rutledge, Willow River, and Sturgeon Lake. About half way to Moose Lake, I tried the trail again and found it had dried out and was not covered with downed trees, so I stayed on the trail from there.

From Moose Lake, Rte 61 and the Munger Trail head in a more Northeasterly direction. The wind, meanwhile had shifted to an East-South-Easterly direction, so it became more of a crosswind or slight headwind. That, along with fatigue, slowed me a bit. I had averaged just over 17 mph early in the day. The stretch from Hinckley to Finlayson slowed up my average considerably. I was able to make up some speed over the next 20 miles, but eventually lost ground with the headwind.

After Moose Lake, we passed through the towns of Barnum, Mahtowa, Atkinson and Twin Lakes. At that point, the Munger Trail diverges from Rte 61, so Ken met me in the next town, Carleton. At this point I had gone 144 miles. We stopped for a brief rest and a little food and drink. From Carleton, the road no longer follows the trail, so we had to guess a bit about our next meeting point. We were told it was 14 miles along the trail from Carleton to Duluth city limits and 17 miles to the trailhead where Ken could meet me.

I headed out from Carleton. The trail descended intermittently from Carleton to Duluth. Its mostly wooded, in fact a large portion of that stretch is through Jay Cooke State Park, crossing and following the St. Louis River with gorgeous rapids in places.

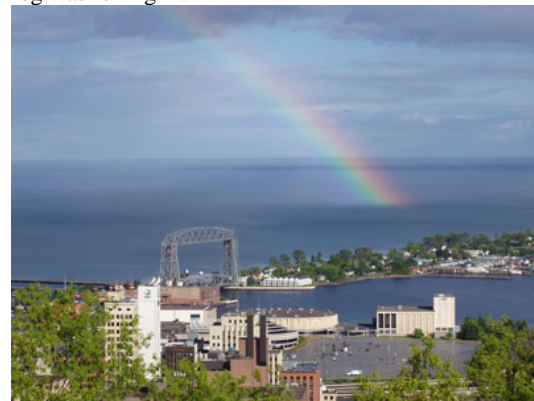
The trail is beautiful as it cuts its way downhill toward Duluth with deep cuts through solid rock in places. There was just one place where the woods opened enough to see the outskirts of Duluth and the skyway bridge to Superior.

The season near Duluth is several weeks behind the Southern part of the state. Birches and maples were in early stages of leafing out. Trilliums were in bloom by the thousands, along with a number of other early wildflowers. Despite fatigue, the last few miles passed fairly quickly as I approached the end. At 158 miles on my cycle computer, I reached the city limit of Duluth, marked along the path. About a mile later Ken called me on my cell phone to let me know that he was at a road crossing 3 miles back (Uphill).

I rode back to meet up with Ken and found him without difficulty. I was glad to get off my bike, and not too sore. It was just after 7 pm and still daylight. My total distance was 162.59 miles. Average speed was 16.2 mph. Riding time was just over 10 hours and total elapsed time was 12 hours and 35 minutes.



We tried to get some photos of Duluth, but just then a fog was rolling in.



We considered options, but heading home sounded good, so the photo above is from the Internet. Ken drove home with just a brief stop for some food in Hinckley. We got home just after 11pm.

If you wish to contribute to the American Red Cross 2010 Heroes Campaign  
Checks can be made out to: “American Red Cross” and sent to:

Paul Scanlon  
100 Mayo Park Drive SE  
Rochester MN 55904  
507-951-3450

If you would like to match your pledge from last year, but don't remember  
the amount, I can check my records.

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