

Actif Epica 2014 – Race Report by Charles Burchill

I finished, made my goal (which was not to die).

My plan was to go for a nice relaxing ride across the country, see a few things, and enjoy some good food and company. With the amount of snow this year I had been training with snowshoes and was still undecided about taking them until the last minute.

The start saw me off the back of the pack. The Lake was easier than I thought until the climb up onto Lakeshore and my first of many falls. The road was in good condition. Then came the first blown in section - out came the snowshoes and comfortable walk. Back on the road and another snow shoe across the field. I was already glad I brought the big shoes. Back on the bike for a bit and then the first real challenge - trail was too narrow or too deep to comfortably walk with the snowshoes, but they still worked out OK. The next section of road was difficult for me to ride - fell maybe 5 times, snowmobile track over hard pack and lots of bumps (washboard). I had a cold stomach and was wishing I had some news paper. Arrived in St Pierre-Jolys. Quick check in, picked up a wind baffle (thanks Ian and sponsors paperwork) and continued on, wind picking up.

Onto Crystal Springs - passed a number of runners. Roads were all in good condition and ride was reasonably quick given the wind. Stopped to eat and drink regularly - coconut bars work well, gummy bears not so much. Fig newtons work. Made it through Otterburne and the 'confusion' of TC trail signs. Another hike-a bike section into Crystal Springs. This section was probably the best for me - level, somewhat out of the wind, not too much walking. Checked in, filled water bottle with warm water, and carried on to the section that I have typically found the hardest over the last two years.

North on Crystal Springs into a biting wind. Glad that I had picked up additional wind protection. Caught up to two more runners. Out to the zig-zag and more snow shoeing. Walked just north of the path where the snow gave me lots of support. Steven Graupner passed me on this section and he disappeared into the blowing snow. Across the field to the south I could see riders and I wished them luck. Still on track and having an nice walk I made it out to St. Mary's rd. I met Tom and had a nice talk and a quick session on how not to swear into the camera - Crown Valley road I thought was clear (rumour had it plowed). More snow shoeing and then a ride where the road had blown clear. Passed Steven Graupner again.... The road had been cleared right before the park and another hike-a-bike. I didn't use my snow shoes, I should have! Through town and lunch. Changed into spare clothing. I picked up a real news paper - figured I might want some reading material (or wind barrier) along the way. Pierogi with sour cream, bacon, and cheese. The wind had been picking across the prairie.

A quick jaunt to St Adolphe, mostly on the roads, and up onto the dike and around the town. Mostly I could ride the top of the dike with periodic walking. Ginger ale, a coke, water, and more warm water. All along the way there were jelly beans at every stop - happiness is a warm jelly bean. Left the check point, back up on the hill - no warm water bottle, back to the check point. In the mean time snow mobiles and made the trail nice and soft - no more riding for a bit.

Past the people sliding on the hill and down St. Mary's to Twin Creek - didn't bother trying to walk across the rip-rap. Down the hill on the snow shoes, across the creek, and back on the bike. Shapansky..... wind is still getting stronger and the temperature is dropping. I want to get to the floodway by sundown. The south end of Shapansky was pretty much blown clear and the leaders had made a path through most of the worst drifts. Maybe three large drifts had to be walked. I arrived at Richardson and looked for Shapansky. There was no road to be seen!? Vern and Doris provided some encouraging words when I said I wanted to get to the Floodway by sunset - I don't think they believed me. After the bend in the road it was easier to ride again and I made good time, in the distance I could see a black smudge moving slowly up the side of the dike - people! Back onto the snowshoes and over the dike - there were blinky lights and glow sticks - what a nice touch. Tom met me part way across the floodway and we had a nice chat as we walked back to the un-official check-in. I was a little concerned that I had not put in a food/drink order earlier but he let me have some hot chocolate anyway. Put on my down 'emergency' shelter coat as the sun had gone down but the wind hadn't. Tom assured me it was smooth sailing - a little snow on two mile road but people had been riding through. By the time I arrived on two mile road the tracks had blown-in - it was a two mile hike. Flew down Seniuk, cross St. Mary's and into Maple Grove. I didn't use my snow shoes across the fields, I figured I had already walked this section (Thursday) 10 or more times - the trail was in good shape. I did notice that a few people had post-holed but overall a section what could have broken my spirit was OK. Into Ft. Richmond, home turf, and to the next check point. The wind had dropped and it seemed warmer. The UofM Check point was a treat - volunteers got me water, more jelly beans, salty mix, and an apple crisp thing.

Across the the old golf course, Bishop Greenway (which was clear), St. Vital road - making good time. I was a little concerned about Dunkirk as it had not been cleared on Friday but all was good, over the bridge and down onto the Churchill drive AT trail. Friday the trail had been a little soft but with the passage of many large tires it was in good shape. Final drop down on the river at MPA building was a little slippery - I walked down and along the river trail for a bit to warm up my toes. Back on the bike and through to the finish.

Awesome ride - much cheering at the finish line. When I remembered I had a cell phone (and turned it on). My daughter had already noted from the live blog that I had finished and they were on their way to pick me up. A coke, mini donuts, tall grass cinnamon buns, and some dry clothing (my last spare).

Home, to bed. Grand adventure.