

THE 2013 CAPE ARGUS RACE REPORT

by
Austin Caperton

I now have three unbelievable days on my bicycle to treasure the rest of my life. First was a century ride (100 miles) through the Rockies in 2009 to raise funds for cancer research, my wife Brenda and I are both survivors. This one was special because I did it with both of my sons and their friends. Second was my climb of the Roca Corba in Spain in 2010 with world-class cyclist and great friend Will Frischkorn who completed the Tour de France in 2008. And now the third, the Cape Argus cycling race in Cape Town, South Africa that I rode on Sunday, March 10, 2013 with 32,000 friends.

That's not a typo. Billed as the largest timed cycle race in the world, running for the 36th time, the Argus, as it is known, is a 108 kilometer race starting from downtown Cape Town, heading south along the eastern shore of the Western Cape, almost to the Cape of Good Hope, then turning back north to the city along the western shore. I can tell you it is impossible to describe or visualize 32,000 riders on road bikes, cruisers, mountain bikes, recumbent bikes and at least two unicycles.

Our start time was 08h04, which is 8:04 AM to Americans. We were required to be there an hour before. To give you an idea of the size of the field the elite racers were first off at 06h15 and the last were off around 09h30. We were queued up in stages of about 1000 riders and our "LL" group was the international group.



In the Starting Area



One of Many Costumes

The forecast was for bright sun, 15 mph winds out of the SSE, into which we would be heading for the first 50 kilometers, cool at the start and warming to 80. I went thru the standard agony of what to wear, but settled on a basic riding of bib shorts and a jersey, mainly because the others were dressed that way and I didn't want to appear a wimp. We were staying in the mountains above the city center and at 06h45 we rode off the mountain to the starting area about 1.5 miles distant.

We encountered a jungle of people and cycles trying to get thru a gate and into one of eight starting chutes. It was surprisingly, and amazingly, civilized. I was riding with our trip organizer Rory Paton-Ash, from South Africa now living in Atlanta, as well as Mark

and Julia Sanders from the U.K. now living in Pittsburg.

As avid as I am about cycling, I had never heard of this event before I met Rory through business in 2008. After discovering we were both cyclists, he began talking about the Argus. In the Fall of 2012 while having dinner together at a convention in Las Vegas he mentioned it again and I said, "Rory let's quit talking about it and do it." Within a couple of weeks he sent me an itinerary and I immediately booked flights for my wife Brenda and I then went online and registered for the race.



After the longest commercial flight in the world by time, Atlanta to Joberg. another 2 hour flight to Cape Town, then 3 days of cavorting and sightseeing we found ourselves in the starting chute ready to approach the starting line.

There were lots of fun, friendly people around us, all in a good mood, many dressed in zany costumes and adorned with all manner of unusual bike and personal accessories.

When starting time drew near we were directed to leave the starting chute and proceed to our starting area, one of two on each side of a wide city boulevard separated by a city square. The starting line was visible just ahead. The atmosphere was electric, rock music blaring through giant speakers and a DJ amping the riders and the crowd. He gave a 2 minute warning, then a 10 second countdown and we were off.

KILOMETERS (to go) 108 to 84

The start was surprisingly sane, likely since the elite riders were long gone. We travelled city streets for a very short distance, then entered the ramp to the M3 motorway (freeway). There is one slight climb out of the city followed by a reasonably fast descent to Hospital Bend at 104k to go. We had been warned that this bend comes early, everyone is eager and there a plenty of crashes here. We made it through no problem.

Rory and I had decided to ride as a team at the start. On the descent from the first little climb, which started at about 99k, I was ahead and lost sight of him. I suspected he had a mechanical issue so I slowed then pulled over for a minute or two. When he didn't show I took off. With this many riders there was no problem at all finding a rider or group moving at a nice pace that matched my capabilities.

Rory is a big, broad shouldered fellow and he was wearing a distinctive Heineken jersey. After a fast run in the flats with some very capable riders I caught sight of his

jersey just as we exited the M3 at 88k to go. We would stay together for the next 70 kilometers.

Kilometers 84 to 67 to go.....

At the 84 kilometer to go mark we arrived at the coast, on the western side of the Cape, at False Bay, so named because mariners traveling west from the Indian Ocean would enter False Bay thinking it was Cape Town Harbor. False Bay is the home of Seal Island where most of the South African great white shark programs are filmed. Lots of shark flags out along the route and they mean business!



False Bay - Home of Seal Island & White Sharks

All of the first 45k, into the wind! However with the number of riders it was easy to stay tucked in and find relief for most of the way. For those of you who do not cycle, tucking behind the rider in front, about a foot off their rear wheel, expends 35% less energy than the front rider. For the entire race there were always strings of riders as far as you could see. Along this eastern coast with False Bay on the left we were in and out of towns and coves. Each time I came around a point and began to enter a cove I could see bikers for miles ahead rounding the far point.

We were cruising fast and nicely thru small towns with wall-to-wall people on either side as you passed. I imagined it was like riding in the Tour de France, with a great deal of cheering and encouragement. Best costume award had to go to Borat who sported a neon green, over-the-shoulder thong with a very slight furry front. I knew he was in trouble when I saw Rory swerve all the way across the road and grab the fur exposing all!

Kilometers 67 to 59 to go.....

The first significant climb of the day leaves the sea at 67k. As the road rises the sea is on the left and we looked across False Bay to its eastern headland. We settled into a nice steady pace for this climb as we had a long way to go and two more climbs. At the top a turn to the left would have taken us to the Cape of Good Hope, the furthest southern point of the Western Cape.

Kilometers 59 to 48 to go.....

This section of the course is a long, gradual, reasonably fast, descent along the highlands. Finally we had a tailwind, little population, trees along the route, and long straights, the experience only slightly diminished by rather rough pavement before descending to the town of Scarborough and then the western coast.

Kilometers 48 to 44 to go.....

We came around a right hand turn just past Scarborough to one of the two most beautiful vistas on the course. Called Misty Cliffs, the road is right on the sea, with no houses between the road and the sea, 2,000 foot cliffs to the right, a rough sea crashing against the rocks to the left, and at the end of the 4k straight a cove with a huge windblown sand field extending what appears to be a mile up the grade from the beach.



Misty Cliffs...Road on the Right & Sand Field Ahead

Kilometers 44 to 29 to go.....

After Misty Cliffs we were back up above and away from the coast now cruising rolling terrain. We passed first through Ocean View, formerly a colored township. During the

era of apartheid “colored” was an official government designation and denoted persons of mixed race as opposed to native black Africans. Here the course, along the M65, was wide and lined with lots of children, many shouting "high fives." I obliged quite a few.

Between Ocean View and Noordhoek (hoek means curve), a former white township, was challenging. The wind came from the east through a low gap in the mountains and was quartering from the right. Riders were five abreast as far as the eye could see, at least a couple of kilometers, everyone trying to find a place to tuck in on the left side to avoid the quartering wind. The sun was heating up as well adding to the discomfort.

We made our one stop, about a minute, for Gatorade and a banana at the 35k mark just as we reached the end of the stretch and turned back downwind. Race organizers do a terrific job of setting up the event including the provision stops. Portable toilets, food, water, Gatorade, masseuses, nothing was missing. I had begun feeling a few mild cramps but was riding through them. I felt well hydrated and had been fueling normally, one PBJ, two Goos and four bottles of water.

Kilometers 29 to 20 to go.....

The second climb of the day is Chapman’s Peak. It's not a really long climb, maybe 3k, and not particularly steep. The staggering scenery makes it go by quickly. As you begin the climb and round a corner you look across Houts Bay to the headlands on the northern side of the bay. They rise from sea level to 1,500 feet. The road itself was cut through sheer cliffs by Italian POWs captured in north Africa by South African troops during WWII. The cliffs on the right rise up directly from the sea to 2,000 feet, and on the left you peer over a low guard wall to the sea below, which gets farther down as you ascend.



Nordhoek Beach

At the head of the bay is the town of Houts Bay. More sand fields rise into the mountains and from a distance they could be mistaken for ski slopes as the sand is very white. After reaching the top there is a kilometer flat riding before the rather technical, and fast, descent into town.



Start of Chapman's Peak Climb Looking Across Houts Bay

I bombed the descent. Knowing that Rory does not like to descend fast and as a proper teammate I slowed, cruised through the town and waited for him to join. I made a young African boy very happy when I tossed him one of my water bottles from University Cycles in Boulder, Colorado.

Kilometers 20 to 14 to go.....

As we left the town of Houts Bay there is a slight hill, or as bikers call it a false climb, followed by a

short level straight before the Suikerbossie (sugar bush), the final climb. It's about 2.5k and a bit steeper than previous climbs. But not like climbing from Hinton to Shady Spring which I do most weekends weather permitting.

At the top of the false climb disaster struck. Both legs fully cramped; quads, hamstrings and calves. I was able to slow and stop but couldn't get out of my cleats quickly enough, so I proceeded to topple into the road lying flat and unable to move. Luckily I was not hit from behind. Riders were probably 12 wide here moving slowly. It was with great effort and help from a spectator that I got to my feet and hobbled to the edge. Rory stopped with me. While I was moving around and massaging my legs a woman crossed the street and graciously administered some sports spray.

At this point my ability to finish was in jeopardy so I encouraged Rory to move on which he reluctantly agreed to do. After several minutes I was functioning again so I gingerly mounted my bike and resumed pedaling the short flat before the Suikerbossie. A third of the way up cramps struck again. The road was four lanes and the riders were using the left two. Anticipating a problem I was hugging the right side with two vacant lanes available for a bail out behind the line of spectators. Good thing. I was able to thread through the spectators and get off my bike without hitting the ground this time.

Standing there a spectator asked, "Do you need physio?" I did not understand and shook my head no. This time the cramps looked to be for good. In the midst of my agony I looked across the road and saw two quite attractive twenty-something ladies with green T-shirts, marked across the front with "PHYSIO." I waved to them and they worked their way across the road to me. The first did not ask whether I was cramping, just where. She offered me Coke with an Eno, their version of Alka-seltzer, which

speeds electrolytes to the muscles. Then with one lady on each leg they proceeded to massage me from thighs to ankles.

Picture me standing there with my arms outstretched holding my bike for balance and a beautiful woman massaging each leg. This was not the worst thing that ever happened to me during a ride. After a bit they reported that I was loosening up and I pronounced myself ready to go.



Top of the Suikerbossie...Cramps Conquered!

Starting very slowly, working my legs gingerly I was made the top! Spectacular view, fast on the last descent and pray for the finish line!

Kilometers 14 to the Finish.....

All flat along the coast from here with cliffs, the Twelve Apostles, along our right side, I immediately hooked onto a strong fast rider who sucked me through Camps Bay, Clifton (with the most expensive real estate in South Africa according to Rory) past Sea Point and towards the finish.

An overhead scaffold with 300 meters to go, then fencing on both sides with cheering spectators lining both sides, adrenaline rush, finish line in sight, more cheering, more adrenaline then under the finish banner. I couldn't resist, I raised my arms in victory.



The Finish!

Winding Down.....

With the adrenaline still rushing our group met at a local pub, Brenda and Rory's wife Shelagh who did not ride joined, for some really good beer. That evening before dinner we loaded in the van and headed up to Signal Point on the south side of Cape Town Harbor for more spectacular views and a couple more cocktails. Then it was on to Rory's sister Linda's home for dinner. What a day!

I signed up for the Argus in October of 2012. Prior to the race I



Me, Rory, Julia & Mark

reviewed the information and studied the course. I compared the climbs to ones I ride routinely around home. I speculated on times and average speeds. I was nervous much of the day before the race. But the evening before, with much difficulty, I put aside my competitive streak. I decided I would stick with Rory, assuming he didn't dust me, and that I would simply enjoy the experience. I did just that.

At the starting line Rory pointed out three quite lovely ladies. I advised him I had already visited with them, they were from Natal and just as nice as they looked. After the race Rory announced to our group, "Austin made a thousand new friends today, he talked to everyone." It was moment of great pride for me. The people I talked to were from all over South Africa, Belgium, France, the U.K., Kuwait and places I can't remember. The camaraderie of riding in the Argus was special and definitely the ride of a lifetime.



On Signal Mountain.....Brenda with Table Mountain, the Twelve Apostles & Lionshead Behind