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## There is Cycling Gold in Thunder Bay

By Heather Pardon

I love Thunder Bay. I first came here back in 1981 as a Junior Forest Ranger so I have always had fond memories of this part of Ontario. Situated on the northern shore of Lake Superior, it offers a rugged landscape and beautiful scenery that is unparalleled in the rest of Ontario. I also find the people of Thunder Bay to be warm and welcoming and you won't find that more so than at the Thunder Bay Cycling Club women's only weekly group ride.

I had my first taste of the group over email as both ride leaders, Kate and Pam, warmly welcomed me out to a ride after I'd enquired about joining along as a guest.



When I arrived at the ride meeting point, the Neebing Tavern (sign of a any good ride is when it begins and ends at a tavern or pub!) I was surprised to see approximately 30 or more women getting ready to hit the road. Wow, I thought to myself, I'd never thought there's be this many women out in a town this size and at this time in the season, in prime vacation time when ride attendance typically dwindles.

I introduced myself to Kate and Pam and a few other members in the group. I immediately felt comfortable, welcomed and at ease, which likely accounts for the obvious success of this group – I felt as if I was already amongst friends. Kudos to Kate and Pam for creating that special kind of environment for other women to enjoy and develop their cycling.

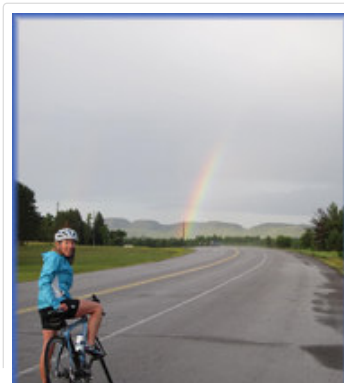
One of the reasons women enjoy riding together is the shared camaraderie and generally more easy-going nature of riding with other women, which differs from riding in mixed groups. It offers a more comfortable environment for women to share, learn and grow their skills and it was obvious by the end of the ride that Kate and Pam offer that to women in spades. This is a group where women at any level, on any type of bike – from hybrid to recumbent to high-end racing bikes – will feel at home.

We headed off, having split into three groups of those cycling 30, 40 and 50 km distances, under a mix of sunny and cloudy skies that quickly gave way to rain. As we rode out of town, I was enjoying the scenery of the lush green hills and surrounding sights too much to care about the darkening skies. At about the 10 km mark, it seemed we had the choice between two distinct weather systems. On the right, the sun was shining; to the left, our intended route, dark clouds loomed. We spent a few moments of discussion at one intersection pondering whether to change our route to avoid the certainty of getting drenched.

It was in that moment that I discovered that the women of Thunder Bay are a hearty lot, undaunted by much. We headed to the left.

Our route took us into the rain, as expected, and then up a 4 km climb to the top of Moose Hill. It was there that we got our reward, looking back and seeing a rainbow. We were able to bask in our efforts and some sunshine before getting rained on again.

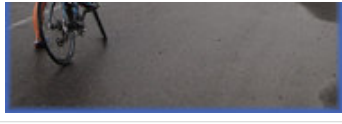
It's hard to complain about the weather however when you're surrounded by the lush beauty that cycling around Thunder Bay offers. Parts of the landscape are relatively flat but you can also venture into the hills for some stiff quad-burning climbs. Either way, you're surrounded by breathtaking landscapes and panoramic views of the changing skies. The highway that we were on boasted a wide paved shoulder and even once we ventured onto a sideroad, the traffic was light. It was a cyclists dream.



The universe gifted us for our efforts and enduring its' unpredictable weather with not one but two rainbows that evening, the second one ride back, as we neared the Neebing Tavern. I couldn't agree more; cycling in Thunder Bay and riding with the women's cycling group is the pot of gold at the end of the cycling rainbow. I've been a part of and led many rides over the years and have to say, it gets my vote as one of the best group ride experiences I've ever had. To Kate and Pam and the rest of the women in the group, thank you for sharing a great evening! To other women cyclists, if you're ever in Thunder Bay, be sure to hook up with this awesome group of women, you will truly have a "golden" experience.



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*coach Heather Pardon who recently sold and packed up her home, downsized her life, bought an RV and is taking her belongings and bicycle for an adventure across Canada this summer. Each week, Heather will be sharing photos and stories from her cycling adventures en route. You may also visit her personal blog at <http://wilddaisy.ca/Blog/> for more frequent updates from the road.*

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January 16th, 2010 at 2:35 pm What's your opinion?

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