



## 2015 Minnesota 2010

### WHO ORDERED THIS RAIN?

I decided to enter the Team Strange Minnesota 1000 again this year after taking two years off, one for reasons I don't recall, and last year because I didn't have a reliable motorcycle. I was really excited about riding again with the new-to-me ST1300, and also because I hadn't entered a rally with Peter and Paula as the rallymasters.

The rally started in Stillwater, MN, which is only about an hour away from my house, but I decided to get a cheap motel room in nearby Hudson, WI rather than ride back and forth three times. So I checked into the motel and rode over to the riders meeting and dinner on Friday night.

We ate well and received our bonus listings. I was extremely happy to see that there was a bunch of stuff in Northern Wisconsin and the UP of Michigan. I'd been in the UP a few weeks before and thought it would be nice to go there on a rally this year. Plus some things I'd always thought would be cool rally bonuses were on the list, like the Copper Peak ski flying hill. Plus I had a ready made rest bonus location at our cabin, which I'd done once before on an epic fail of a rally in 2007.

The other main option for the ride was to go in a loop around Central Minnesota, which didn't seem very interesting, so I didn't even look at it. I should have though...

There were also points to be had on Friday. They handed us all a pint glass. On Friday, we had to take a photo of it in front of a brewery (you can't turn around without seeing a brewery these days), and bring the glass back intact for points. There was a brewery about a mile from the start, so that was easy. You also got points for including your glass in a picture of any other bonus during the rally.

Since they started handing out the bonuses on USB drives a few years ago, it makes it really easy to route. I did go in and number the bonuses and change the names of the waypoints to the convention Ron Hanson used for all the rallies we used to do: Number-Points-Time Available (10-234-24h) for example. It's easy for me to be able to add and drop locations during the rally if need be this way, depending on what goes wrong or right, and numbering them makes it easy for me to find them quickly on my bonus sheet. I haven't embraced Ez-Bake or any of those solutions, and probably never will.

My route was pretty conservative – a little over 900 miles, but I thought it was decent, and not having ridden much in the past couple years, easily doable. My goal is usually to finish in the upper 50 percent of the riders these days. I love playing the game, but I'm not as competitive as I once was.

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The weather was supposed to be nice everywhere. 75 and sunny during the day, and 60's and clear at night. Perfect rally weather. When I woke up on Saturday it was cloudy and damp. Wasn't expecting that, and the radar showed a tiny strip of light rain from here to Eau Claire, moving north. I figured that would blow over soon. When we got there, we were handed two additional combo bonuses. I looked at them briefly.

By the time the rally started at 8:00, it was actually raining, and getting worse. Kerry Person and I were riding to the first couple locations together, and actually had to stop at a rest area to put on more clothes. Being cold and soaking less than an hour into the day is not fun. I also realized at this time that my heated jacket liner was not working.

The first bonus was an intersection near Chippewa Falls. Wisconsin county roads have letters, not numbers. This was the intersection of P and OO. So it read POO. I have the sense of humor of a 15 year old boy, so I thought it was great.

The next stop was in a town called Gilman. You had to take a picture of a swinging bridge. There were two bridges there in the park. I almost took the wrong one, but I realized it didn't swing, so there must be another. I was sitting under a shelter filling out my info so the paper wouldn't get wet, and Kerry rode up. He left, and I decided that since it was pouring, I would take a few minutes to park under a ledge and fix my heated jacket. It was just a loose ground wire, and I was back out in the rain – with heat.

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I kept checking the radar, thinking I would ride out of this, and it kept growing. A tiny strip turned into a giant green and blue glob over the map of Wisconsin. Of course those who went west didn't have rain.

It just kept getting worse, until I finally pulled off again in the tiny town of Ogema. I decided to sit under a Lions Club shelter in a park and look at my route again, since I didn't think I was going to be going all the way out to Marquette, MI in this crappy weather. I should have just turned around and gone back to Minnesota where it was dry, but I figured it would go away at some point. I realized at that point, that one of the new combos was worth as many points as going to my farthest easternmost locations. I wasn't going to go to the Snowmobile Hall of Fame initially, as it wasn't worth much, but with the combo, it was worth a lot, so I re-did my route and left.

Next stop was an old school bell in a tiny place called Harrison. The ride there would have been great, if not for the rain. After that, I headed to the Snowmobile Hall of Fame in St. Germain. I'd been there before – it's pretty cool. In this case, I was the only one there. I asked the girl working there if any other riders had been there. She said no, and I said I was surprised because they were a spot on a scavenger hunt. She was disinterested and went back to her book. I found what I needed and went back out. Connie and Randy Gabrick rode up a few minutes later while I was adjusting some things on the bike. I mentioned that I was the only rider that day. She seemed surprised because it was worth a lot of points. This made me think that pretty much nobody went east. Then a rider on an FJR rode up. I didn't know who it was, but turns out it was Mike Heitkamp. How do I know now? Because only four riders total went the bonus, and we were all

there at the same time.

I wasn't sure what I was going to do now. I started to head to Bessemer, with the intent of bailing early for the day since my day was a total washout at this point. But I couldn't do that. Even though my rally was all messed up, I couldn't not continue to play the game a little more. So I turned the other way, picked up a small bonus at Sayner and headed to Greenland, MI. This resulted in riding a very cool road, County Rd. K, which would have been awesome, had it not started to hail on me! It didn't last long, but it was still painful.

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The ride up to Greenland was oddly familiar. I kept seeing things that looked familiar, like Deja Vu. Well, the reason was, we'd literally traveled this exact same route over Memorial Day to tour an old copper mine. The bonus was about a ¼ of a mile past the mine on the same road. That's just really weird. The other thing that seems odd is that the time zone changes around here. Just a few counties in MI are on central time.

The bonus was to look at snowmobile on a pole, and tell what state the sticker was from (answer, Minnesota). My spaceman outfit and disheveled appearance brought the attention of a couple of Yoopers who walked over to chat. Normally on rallies, I'm just polite and then leave quickly when on the clock, but I wasn't in a hurry, so I talked for a bit. They suggested I go back the way I came as it was quicker. I knew this, but thanked them anyway. When I stopped for gas a little bit later, more Yoopers came to chat. This time piling out of a motor home with their weiner dog. Oh yes, and it was STILL raining.

This was my point to turn west in what ended up being a circular route. On my way back towards the Wisconsin border, I encountered more fun. Signs saying loose gravel, 35 mph. They'd just chipsealed the road. I hate that stuff. So I had not only rain, but wet, oily gravel too for ten miles. It wasn't as bad as some, but just another bit of fun to deal with.

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Next stop was one I've always thought would make a great bonus. Copper Peak near Bessemer, MI. It's the only ski flying hill in North America. Ski flying is an extreme form of ski jumping, because ski jumping isn't quite insane enough. In an odd bit of trivia, there are only five such facilities in the world, and I've visited two of them. Totally interesting place. I always thought it would be cool to make the rider take the ride to the top, but for this you just had to take a photo. Good news though – the rain stopped. This was the only point on the rally where the temps were over 59 degrees. The bike read 66 degrees there. But the tradeoff was that I was instantly engulfed with about a thousand mosquitos. This was going great!

It was around 7:30 pm at this point, and I had two more stops planned before taking my rest bonus at our cabin in Iron River, WI. Both very familiar to me. One was a small one in Washburn, and one a few miles up the road near Bayfield, WI at the ski area, Mt. Ashwabay. One big problem. Ashwabay is the site of Big Top Chatauqua – a summer concert series held in a big tent. I've seen a number of acts there – Willie Nelson, John Hiatt, Cowboy Junkies, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Brandi Carlisle – it's an amazing place to see live music. It's also restricted – they take tickets halfway up the road, and when the event is letting out, both lanes of traffic on the road are directed outbound – you can't get in there. I'd checked the night before to see if there was a concert – there was, and I knew this could be an issue. I wondered if Peter and Paula knew about this and planned it as a trick, much like the Canal Park bonuses during Grandma's Marathon,

or the time I tried to get to the Spam Museum and there was some big festival going on. Turns out they did not – it was just one of those things. As I approached the turn, I gauged that there was a good chance the bonus was inaccessible. I decided to at least get Washburn, until I turned on Hwy. 13. It was under construction and had been scraped to the bottom layer of pavement, which was still wet. Screw that, it was something like 26 points, and I didn't feel like dealing with that for 26 points, so I decided to go to the cabin to sleep.

I stopped at the Little Store in Iron River, which I knew had good receipts, and put in a small amount of gas, and went in and got some Subway – I tend to forget to eat on rallies. I threw the food in my trunk and rode to the cabin, where I had to ride through what looked like a hay field, since we hadn't been there in a few weeks and the grass was three feet high in places. Oh well.

I got some dry clothes on, showered (yes, I showered during a rally – I've done this before too), reviewed my paperwork while I ate my food, set the Screaming Meanie to wake me up at 3 am, and slept on the couch. Why the couch? Because if I'd have crawled into bed, I'd probably have just slept in. I considered it, but as I said, I can't not play the game once I've started. I was also startled by some kind of commotion down the road. I don't know if it was a domestic, or some drunken rednecks fighting, but there was a lot of "shut the fuck up" getting screamed, and what sounded like someone smashing a car. It's usually quiet up there, but since a cop lives around the bend from us, I figured he could deal with it. I ended up with about five hours of sleep, which on a rally is a lot, and is actually around what I normally get.

The alarm went off at 3 am, so I closed up the cabin, packed up the bike and set off in the dark at O' Deer Thirty to fill up and get my ending rest receipt. I had three more bonuses to get too. The GPS had been routing me back to Stillwater the whole day, and I figured leaving the cabin at 3:30 would have me back around 6:30, not accounting for a few minutes at each of the bonuses so say, 7:15 at the latest – plenty of time, especially since I wouldn't be going very fast before sunrise, with all the deer around.

The GPS said 7:38 arrival time. Uh oh – what did I do wrong? That left little time for error. I headed down County Rd. A, trying to watch for deer and not think about my time screwup. And there were a lot of deer. Probably a dozen or more between Iron River and Hayward. I'd run this route at night before, on the 2007 MN1000, and on my Lake Superior 1000, so I knew what to expect. I also missed a skunk by about three feet, which I also did on the 2007 rally. It really felt like Deja Vu. And of course the GPS tried to route me down a snowmobile trail/cow path, because that always happens up there – GPS are terrible in that part of the state.

I pulled into the Hayward bonus at 4:30 and struggled to take a photo in the dark. It was right next to a campground resort, so I did feel bad getting there so early and making noise. I'd lost a few minutes at this point, and I had to skip the Markville, MN bonus, which was one I'd really wanted to visit, simply because it's by the geographical oddity where for a short bit, you cross from Minnesota to Wisconsin without crossing a river – this also happened on the 2007 rally. I would far rather finish a rally with a bad score (which was inevitable anyway) than DNF. I hate getting a DNF.

## WHO ORDERED THIS FOG?

By dropping Markville, I gained about 30 minutes, and it was a good thing. From about Cumberland on, I rode through the thickest fog imaginable (because clearly, NOTHING was going to go right on this rally). I had to slow down considerably in places because I didn't want to come up on a car I couldn't see. Visibility was as low as 100 feet at times. Coming down the hill on US 8 in St. Croix Falls, a drive I've made about a thousand times, I was literally riding blind, and I can also tell you that navigating a roundabout with zero visibility is quite an experience as well.

I debated whether to go down the Wisconsin or Minnesota side of the river, and chose Minnesota, simply because there are no towns to go through. Finally a good decision, because the bridge at Osceola was closed, which I didn't know.

My last bonus of the rally was the Hay Lake School in Scandia. I really wanted to get this one for nostalgia reasons. I grew up a few miles from there, and went to grade school in Scandia. We used to go on field trips to the Hay Lake School when I was a kid, and it was kind of cool to go there on a rally 30-some years later, and ride back down Manning Ave. through Kelley Farms ranch, where as a little kid I'd point out the old metal quonset and yell COW BARN. I even yelled COW BARN into my helmet as I passed it for old times sake. That was probably the highlight of the rally oddly enough.

The fog was still bad as I got to the finish around 7:20, and I was one of the first riders to arrive, seeing John Coons sweeping the entrance with a broom (what a public servant!). I went in to get my photo taken on Peter's vintage racing sled (so cool) for the combo bonus, and since I was so early, talked to Peter, Allen Wilson, and Rick Corwine for a bit before the other riders came in, which was nice. Not like I was under a lot of stress or anything.

I watched the other riders come in, and went to be scored. I didn't lose any points at the scoring table, which was good, but I didn't have many to lose anyway, so it didn't matter. Breakfast was great, and there was bacon – I smelled bacon coming through Taylors Falls, and it was almost all I could think about the rest of the way. And of course, the weather turned warm and beautiful Sunday morning and it was nice here all that day.

Obviously, I didn't do well on the rally. It was my worst finish in ten MN1000's (except the year I DNF'ed when my tire was showing cords). I came in 4th from last place among finishers, and only rode 725 miles, my lowest actual mileage total, not counting the broken odometer cable incident in 2003. In hindsight, I was miserable, cold and wet almost the whole time. I dealt with deer, skunks, construction, heavy rain, hail and fog, mosquitos and mental errors. Most people would think "well he had a terrible time – why would anyone do this?" Not me. I love that I came back to ride this year and remembered why I missed it and why I still love playing the game.

It came up before and after the rally this year talking to others. You never tell stories about the good things and the successes on these events. The fun is telling the stories about the stupid things that happen – the screw ups – the things that go wrong. Those are the things we all laugh about when we get together. I

never talk about some awesome combo bonus I nailed for 600 points – I tell the story about driving my bike through a ditch in Monterey, Iowa trying to find a remote church, or falling down trying to ride through the sand in a wildlife refuge, or having to climb a fire tower in hot weather in full riding gear. Those are the experiences that we keep coming back to. That's what makes this fun. The competition draws you in and keeps you in, but the real fun comes from the crazy places you go and the things you do and the stories that come out of it, and that's what it's about to me.