

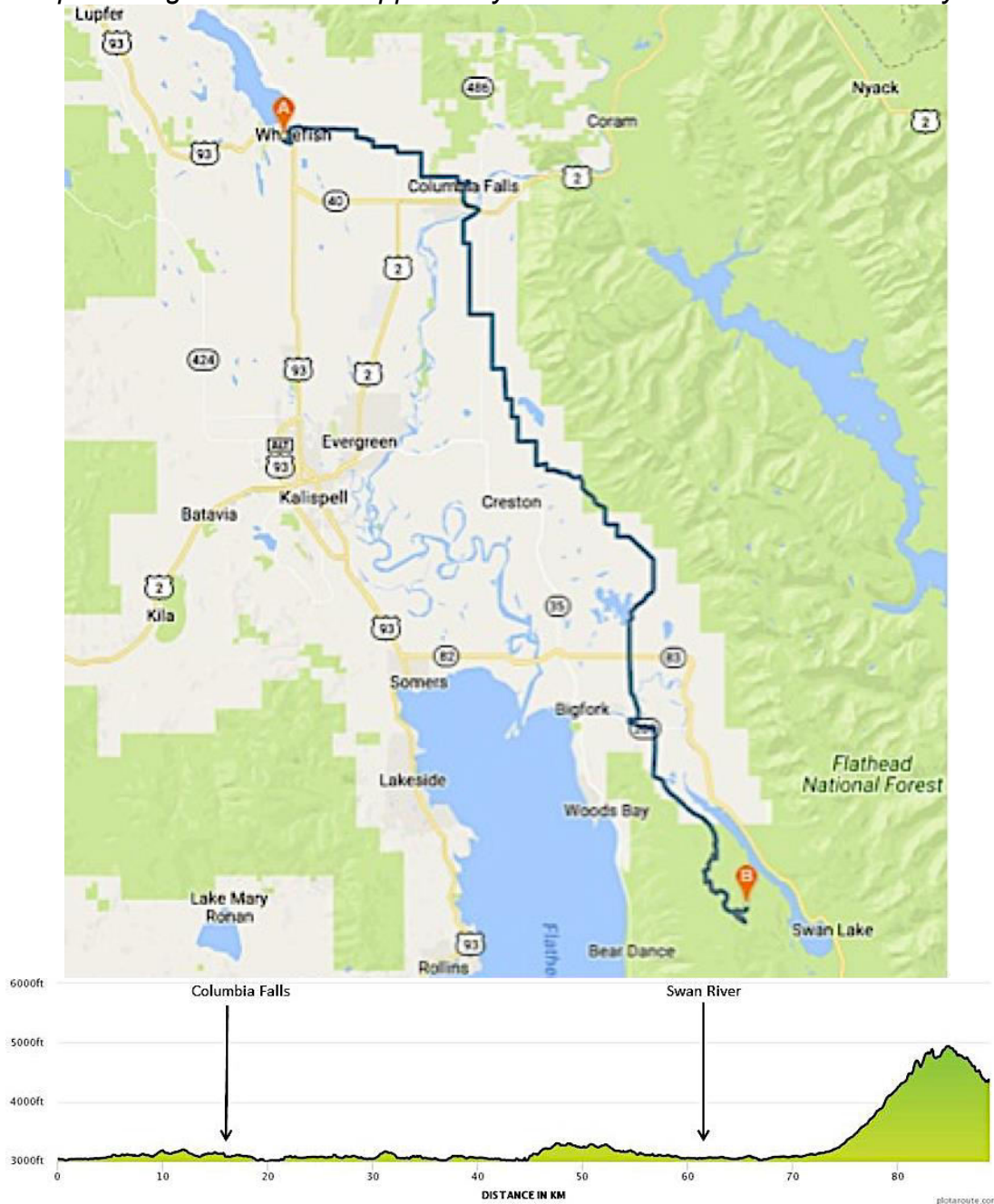
Day 5 13th June 2017
Whitefish to wet camp in the Mission Mountains

88.7k / 55.2miles

1440m / 4724ft (1035m / 3396ft descent)

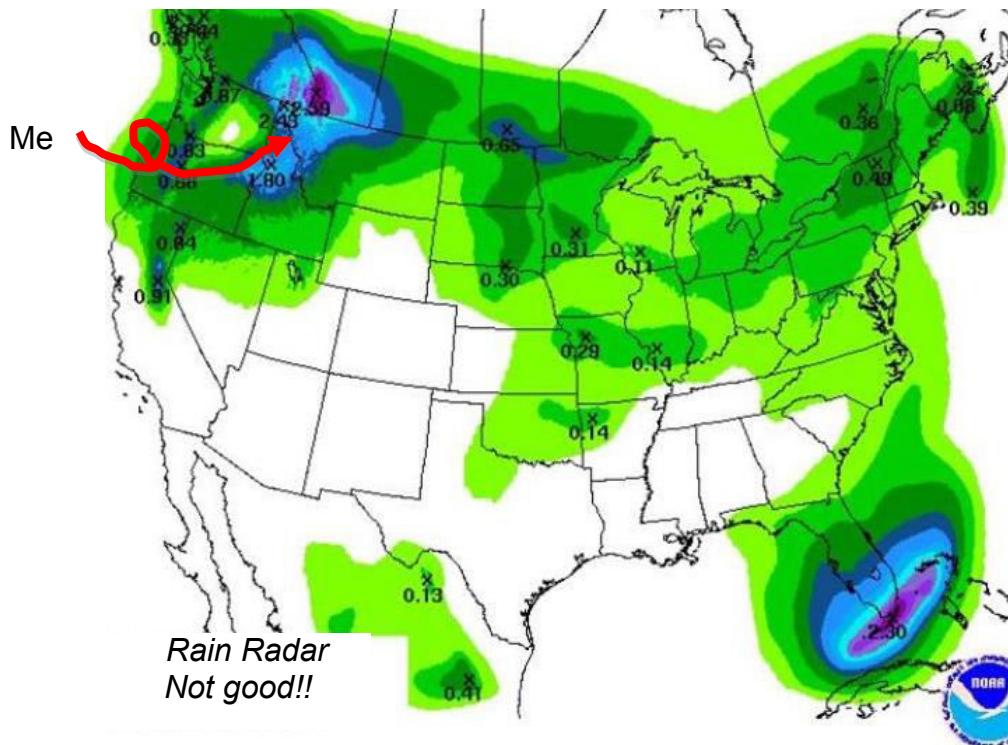
45.6%↑ 38.5%↓ 15.9%→ 26.7% max

It always rains on tents. Rainstorms will travel thousands of miles against prevailing winds for the opportunity to rain on a tent Dave Barry



I was up early and set off by 06.30. The route to rejoin the TD route was initially back north. It was windy but bright. The radar picture below dates from a couple of days before but shows what I was about to experience:

1. David McAlister Barry is a Pulitzer Prize winning American author and columnist who wrote a nationally syndicated humour column from 1983 to 2005. He has also written numerous books of humour and parody as well as comic novels



The terrain today was in sharp contrast to the hills of the last few days; flat valley floor with odd right, left, right angle bends around farmland fields.

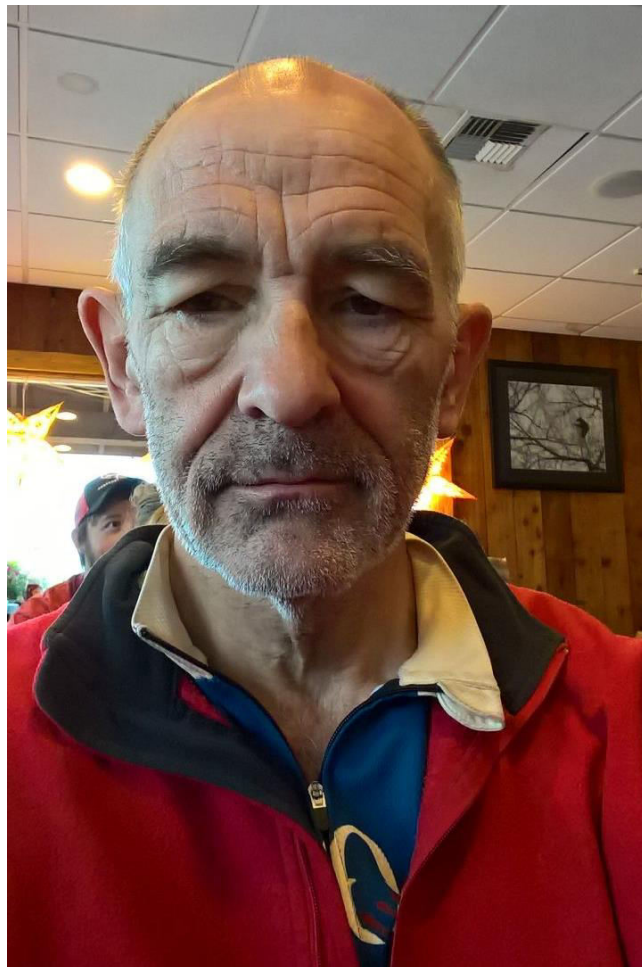
The first stop of interest was Columbia Falls where I had a coffee and chat with a local who described his time cycling in Europe.

As the picture on the right shows I was looking a little tired. Emma suggested I had been beaten up – I said indeed I had (by the trail).

While in the café I queued to pay for a refill only to find they were free!!

Cycling through Columbia Falls I saw the mural below. This is one of a series in town apparently. History and contents of this mural are detailed in Appendix 5.

As I progressed south ominous signs of rain clouds became increasingly apparent. I don't know if it was premonition but I stopped to take photos of these:





Snyder Drug Store Mural in Columbia Falls



*Looming rain clouds
approaching
from the southeast*

It duly started raining and continued relentlessly for the next 14 hrs.

I stopped, a drowned rat, at Swan River café had a hot chocolate, something to eat and a change of clothes. The place was full of steaming riders and car/truck drivers. I got talking to Glen who is the riding partner of Kevin, a cyclist from Derby who I had talked to over a beer before I embarked on this adventure.



Glen had had to come back to the café because he had left his rucksack behind.

I took the opportunity to Watts App home and call MTB cast and comment on the 'interesting' KoKo Claims reroute.

After waiting for the rain to stop (it didn't) I set off. I subsequently looked on t'Internet at what the rain was like this day and as per the Condon weather station found that 0.96" of rain fell over the next 12 hrs.

There was a very cathartic moment at 73k: I crossed the Swan River and was with immediately faced a significant decision at the T junction –

- turn right, off route, to Bigfork, friendly pretty town on the Flathead Lake (flat route, bed, food and warmth) or
- turn left Mission Mountain Wilderness, nothing until Seeley Lake 160k, (off road, on route, 1,800' climb, torrential rain, wet, cold).

I turned..... left!

My climb up the subsequent hill to nearly 5,000' went slowly but at least the exercise meant I was generating enough heat to keep relatively warm.

Under these circumstances one is cocooned inside one's own little world. Vision is limited, due to rain/mist on the glasses. The cagoule hood also restricts lateral peripheral vision and reduces external noises while at the same time the masking noise generated by the rain on the rainhood further contributes to the sense of isolation. Map reading is difficult so I relied on the GPS.

Unfortunately the weather did not relent when I topped out over the summit. As I freewheeled down the hill, because I was not exerting myself climbing, I found my core temp was dropping rapidly. An attempt at a map appreciation showed no near accommodation – nearest appeared to be Condon some 10k off route but that was approx. 90k away. (See postscript).

I had started to shiver and believe me it's difficult to steer while shivering uncontrollably. I was not in a good place and things would only get worse if I continued.

Under the circumstances I elected to camp out in the wilderness – bugger the bears. I reasoned it better to be 'dry' in a wet tent and risk a bear visit (given the rain intensity I suspect any local bears would be sheltering too) rather than carry on, only to get significant hypothermia and then be forced to stop and try to put up my tent some 10 -15k down the trail and risk a bear visit there instead.

As it was, due to my shivering, putting up the tent took a lot longer than usual.

Lying in the tent sounded just like I was in a power shower. Usually rain intensity varies, with periods when it slackens off, but this day it just went on and on and on and on. A very occasional rider passed and a couple stopped and asked if I was OK. I replied I was and asked if they could pass onto Facebook the fact that I was OK if they got a signal – they replied they would (See postscript below).

I was joined by Adrian (he of the Adrian City campsite fame), a pleasant student from Australia. He sheltered in my tent porch for a while before bedding down in his bivi bag.

In retrospect I think stopping and camping was exactly the correct thing to do here. The weather was really bad and I think I would have suffered serious hypothermia if I had carried on. The enforced rest was a significant additional benefit.

Despite the bear risk I slept remarkably well, if you ignore the progressing all pervading dampness and frank rivulets inside the tent, which gradually wet everything.

Postscript.

I was impressed with the ability of those few cyclists who, under the circumstances, continued on past my campsite. However, and this reflects my rookie status, it turned out they were heading for Swan Lake. I had not appreciated that there was a track (the FR 10229), which crossed the Swan River and thereby allows access to Swan Lake.

Normally I pride myself on my map reading skills but, as the picture from the map below shows, it is not immediately obvious that there is indeed a viable route across the river just south of the Wildlife Refuge. The road number obscures the road.

My rain sodden and steamed up glasses did not help here but I think this error is graphic evidence of the befuddled ideation I was exhibiting at the time and of course confusion is one of the signs of hypothermia.....

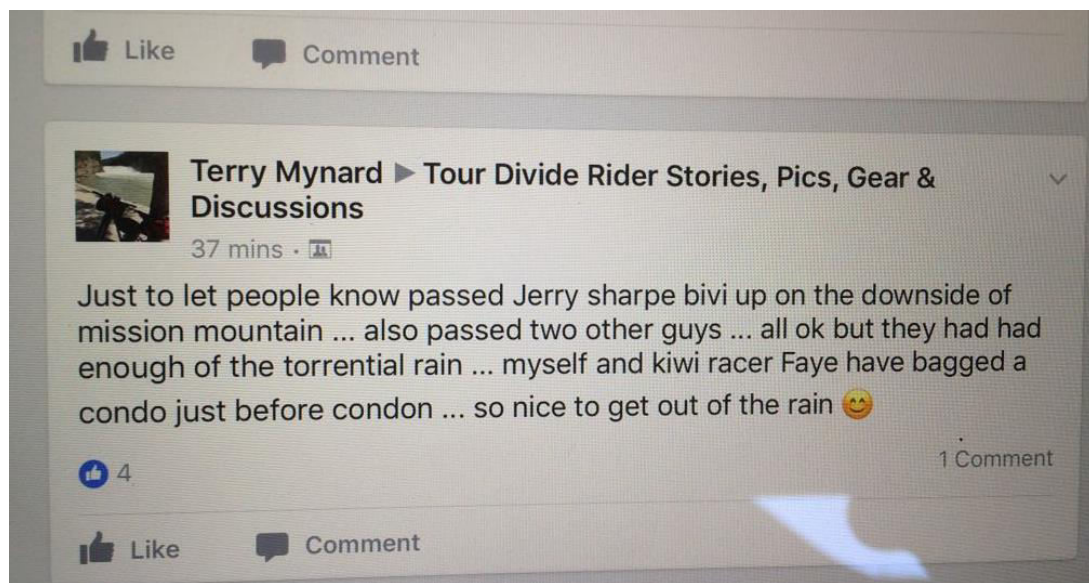


Location of my campsite

FR 10229
I did not appreciate that it bridged the Swan River

Relevant portion of ACA Map
Section 1 Roseville Mt to Polaris MT

This is the Facebook entry regarding my status on the day:



Jackie thanked Terry on Facebook for his kindness.

Looking at Trackleaders Terry who is a Brit left the TD on day 13 and then moved east and cycled round Minneapolis.