

# Solo around the Markermeer (211KM)

*Tips to prepare, to endure and to enjoy long distance cycling*

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May 29, 2019



This week I took my bike for a long distance (211KM) ride around the Dutch Markermeer, solo! Unlike participating in an organised event with service, support and company along the way, going solo requires a different preparation, mindset and planning. Read along for some practical tips for long distance cycling.

## Preparation

When you're planning to go for a long distance bike ride you better prepare yourself. Start with smaller rides, get used to your bike and sitting on the saddle for increasingly longer times. You and your bike need to be best friends before you set off for the long journey.

## Bike

I know my bike very well as it's [my commuter bike](#). For this long distance ride I have prepared my bike with some extra items:



*My bike prepared for long distance cycling*

- **Tools + Tire:** In my saddle bag, I have one spare tire and all the tools needed to take my entire bike apart and put it back together!
- **Extra tire:** Just as an extra precaution I like to bring an extra spare tire along. Stores will be closed in the early morning and there is always a chance of running a flat tire when you go through towns and cities.
- **Pump:** A mobile, but powerful pump with two modes: high volume and high pressure. Pro tip: try pumping your tires with your mobile pump at least once before departure!
- **Lock:** When you're cycling solo you'll might want to take advantage of shops along the way to get additional food and drinks. You don't want your bike get stolen during a long distance ride...
- **Lights:** Make sure you're visible when departing in the early morning, riding through foggy conditions or returning at night. Be prepared for the situation that your ride takes longer than planned (due to mechanical failure, challenging conditions or other reasons).
- **Screen:** Either know yourself very well or use an heart rate monitor to balance your efforts during the ride. Worst thing you can do is to go too fast in the beginning. Read about [my bike computer in this blog post](#).
- **Bell:** When riding alone you can't rely on others to 'clear the road' for you. Using a bike bell will yield friendlier responses rather than shouting aloud...
- **Energy drink:** One of my drink bottles is filled with isotonic sports drink. This contains a lot of sugar *and* salt. This is to compensate for the things you'll sweat out.
- **Water:** The other drink bottle simply contains water. Hydrating yourself along the way is essential. Make sure to drink enough and be prepared to replenish your



supply (in stores, restaurants, public toilets, public water taps, friendly villagers, etc).

- **Mud guards:** Even when it's not raining, the roads can be wet and dirty. You must not get cold along the way because of an unfortunate wet suit.
- **Efficient road tires:** For sure you'll want your tires to be as efficient as possible in terms of rolling resistance. You should try different tires and pressure levels. Make sure you'll practice to replace a flat tire, too!

## Food and drinks

When you're long distance cycling you need to bring along enough food and drinks. I usually bring along "Snelle Jelle", a sugary bread-like snack with high energy levels. I also like fruit biscuits as they have a crispier bite.



*My food and drink supply for this ride*

It's very important that you choose foods that you like. Other common options are fruit and energy gels. Whatever you choose, know that your body can process sugar more efficiently than fats during endurance workouts.



*Bring food that has a high energy level due to sugar, not fat!*

You should not eat too much before departure. I usually drink 1.5 liters of water and eat some fruit before I leave. But know that whatever works for me, might be different for you. Try different things to find out what suits you best.

## Route planning

To know where you're going is just as important as preparing your bike and your food+drink supply! Plan your route based on distance, available (day)time, environmental characteristics (mountains, hills, open windy areas) and points of interest.

Memorise the route, use a navigation system or bring a map. In The Netherlands there are plenty of indicated (bike) routes that are helpful to find your way. I have a (weird) personal preference to find my way without any means of navigation as it adds to the adventure, but you should not follow my craziness to this extend...



*Around the Markermeer, through the former Dutch "Zuider Zee"*

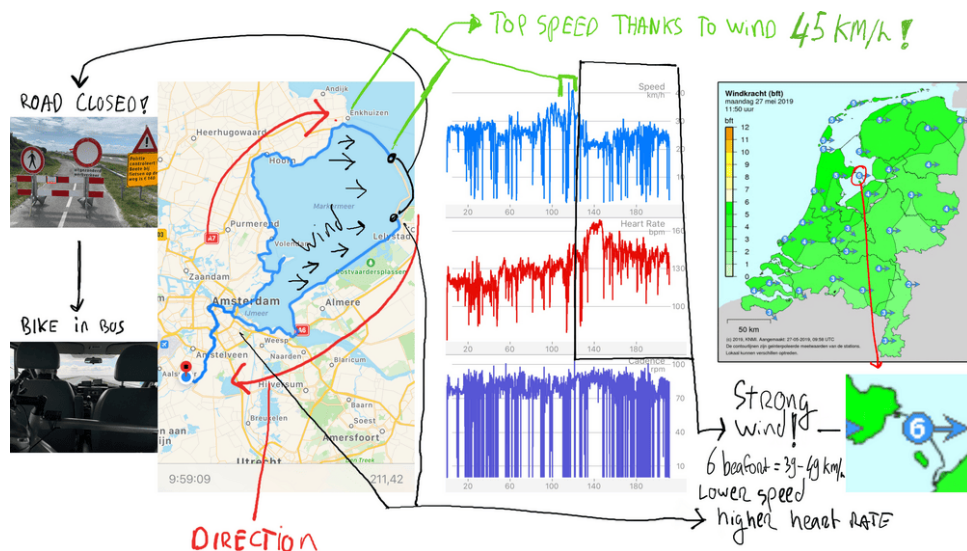
This time I planned to go around the Dutch Markermeer. Today it's a large lake, but it used to be much larger and it was called the "Zuider Zee". Following floods, it was decided to be enclosed with dams and to be pumped dry. Quite literally, it's a Dutch landmark in terms of water works. If you're unfamiliar, you should definitely check out the history of [Flevoland](#) and the [Zuiderzee Works](#), it's seriously amazing!

The fascinating thing about the Markermeer route is that you'll be cycling through very different environments. On the West there is "old Holland", with various famous villages and cities (like Hoorn, Edam, Volendam and Monnickendam). In the North you'll be cycling through the former sea on the [Houtribdijk](#), a 30KM man made dam enclosing the lake. It's quite the thing to have water left *and* right of you, for as far as you can see! The Eastern part of the route is the new (Flevo)land, characterised by (very) long straight lines, many open spaces and the [Oostvaarders Plassen nature reserve](#). The Southern part is old land again, with the [Muiderslot castle](#) and Amsterdam.

## Endurance

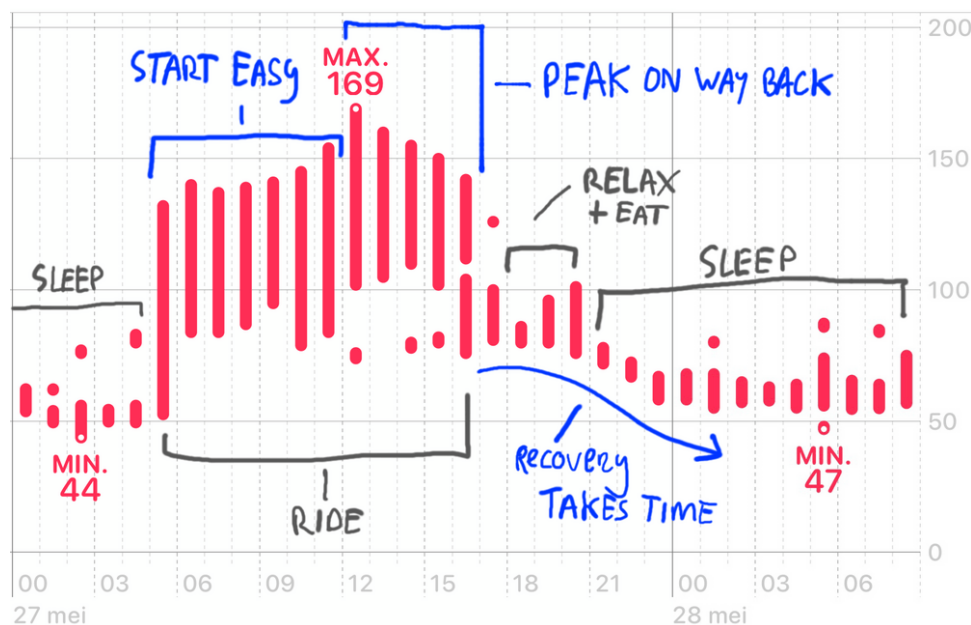
Well prepared, I departed in the early morning for my ride around the Markermeer. It's a good idea to (last minute) check the weather forecast for the day. The Dutch weather service predicted strong winds on the Markermeer. I planned to take it easy in the beginning to be ready for the (strong) winds during the second half of my ride.





Speed (blue) en effort (red, heart rates) around the Markermeer through strong winds (6 beaufort, 39-49KM/h)

I decided to cycle the route clockwise as I liked the challenge of facing the strong winds on the open dykes in Flevoland (between Lelystad and Almere). You can see that I started with minimal effort, indicated by the lower heart rates. The graphs clearly marks the turning point, about half way, from where you'll see increased rates and lower speeds.



Heart rates during the day and night of my long distance ride

Looking at my heart rates throughout the day and night, you can clearly see my ride standing out. I used an [Apple Watch](#) and a [Biostrap sensor](#) to capture my heart rates before *and* after my ride. Combined with the data from my [bike computer app](#), this provides an interesting insight in the time it takes to recover from my intense long distance ride!

## Enjoy

Long distance cycling is big fun because you'll experience the ride very intensely and detailed.

### Picturesque villages

By bike you're welcome where cars, trains, busses and planes can't come. Effortlessly traverse through villages and city centres.



*Harbour in Marken*



*Sluice at Schardam*

### Stunning views

With your bike you can stop (almost) anywhere to enjoy beautiful views. There is plenty to see if you take your time to look around.



*Beautiful sky on the Houtribdijk*

### **Fresh air**

Smell the flowers, the trees and the sea. Rediscover your nose when you help it escape the many air conditioned environments you might normally be in.



*Looking over the Markermeer at the (former) island of Marken*



## Heath of the sun

Although it's about 149 million kilometres away, you'll feel the sun, even if it's cloudy! For the better or the worse, it's an intense sensation! Create [Vitamine D](#) while you'll make the tanning studio obsolete.



*Oostvaardersplassen near Lelystad*

## Strength of the wind

Forget spinning classes in your local gym, there is nothing like the wind out in the open! It's a mighty ally or a fierce-full foe... depending on its direction and speed.



*Wind blowing strongly over the water with Amsterdam on the horizon, as seen from Almere*

### **Sound of silence**

If you're cycling solo you'll have plenty of time alone. Nature can be very calming when you're out in the early morning, way before other people have woken up. Relieve stress as you're pedalling along with lots of time to think about things. It's hard to overestimate the meditative effects of a long distance ride!



*Just you and the road ahead (Zeedijk near Marken)*

### **Embrace the surprise**

You never quite know what you'll encounter on your way. I never expected to cycle underneath a tall ship! Or to sit inside a little bus with a very friendly driver!



*Cycling underneath a tall ship!*





*Encountering an unexpected road block, about half way on the Houtribdijk*



*Me and my bike on the Houtribdijk! Not in the way I imagined!*

## Conclusion

With the proper preparation a long distance cycle ride is something incredibly awesome! It's intense, challenging, rewarding and fun!



*Smiling at the Markermeer*

Don't doubt yourself, anybody can do it! I am not a particularly good athlete, just a guy with a crazy idea and a little preparation. Sometimes that's enough!



*Home sweet home! 211 incredible kilometres!*