

## 2013 American Randonneur Award

# John Lee Ellis

John Lee Ellis has been the Colorado RBA since RUSA's founding in 1998, and for years he has served as the RBA-Liaison on RUSA's Board, representing the interests of RBA volunteers across the country. If you're an RBA and ever found yourself in need of guidance, chances are you turned to John Lee Ellis for his expert advice. He has played a vital role in formalizing our RBA procedures and in writing the 1200K Organizer's Guide.

John Lee has carried out all of his many volunteer roles with enthusiasm, and he is often the first to pitch in on new projects. RUSA has been fortunate to have his counsel over the years, and we are pleased to honor him with the 2013 American Randonneur Award. The award is given to one of our members who has made significant and outstanding contributions to randonneuring in the United States.

Of course, John Lee is a consummate rider. He has completed PBP four times and other 1200Ks as well, including Boston-Montreal-Boston, Alaska's Big Wild Ride, and two events that start in Colorado. Yes, John Lee's many contributions to American randonneuring include his organization of two 1200K events. Since 2001, riders have braved the unpredictable weather of eastern Colorado and Kansas on the Colorado Last Chance Randonnée. The terrain is not extraordinarily difficult (although not quite flat either), but wind, temperature extremes, and storms nearly always provide a challenge. But it's a challenge tempered by the great camaraderie that John Lee encourages.

Not content with one great 1200km event, in 2011 John Lee established a second grand randonnée -- the Colorado High Country 1200. (In 2012, he even offered both in the same year!). The CHC1200 showcases spectacular mountain scenery in Colorado and Wyoming, reaching elevations above 10,000 feet. Wildlife sightings, including impressive moose, enhance the fascinating geography. (A wonderful exploration of the route can be read at [home.com-cast.net/~chego1/CHC1200/chc1200.html](http://home.com-cast.net/~chego1/CHC1200/chc1200.html)).

Spencer Klaassen, who took over from John Lee as the RBA-L, offered this account of his first on-the-bike encounter with John Lee:

Travel back in time to 2005 and my very first 1200K. I am outside the hotel ready to head towards Kansas and back on the Last Chance 1200. I am as nervous I have ever been as I head out into the night with a few other riders. Soon, I am off the back from the main pack. An unknown rider comes up to me and we start to chat. Soon I learn this is the organizer (JLE). I don't remember exactly what we talked about but my anxiety dropped and I really started to enjoy



John Lee Ellis at 2008  
Cascade 1200K Randonnée.

the pre-dawn day. Our riding was in synch as we went up and down the rollers of the area.

Time passed and when the sun first came up, I think both of us were a little shocked. Me, by the beautiful green DeRosa that John Lee was riding, and he by the fact that I was riding a fixed wheel Bianchi. We have done many rides together since this time but we have not spent as much time riding side by side. This has not diminished our friendship, he with his warm and friendly smile, and me with my bad habit of riding fixed. What I gained most from the encounter is that randonneuring is not a sprint but a marathon. During the marathon, it is not against the rules to talk to a novice, calm his nerves, and help him enjoy this style of riding.

Here's another 1200K story from Jennifer Wise, RUSA #1:

John Lee Ellis was one of only 15 people to finish the very first BMB 1200K in 1988. He found his niche. He enjoys long distance cycling and is good at it. He made an impression on BMB founders Charlie Lamb and Hauke Kite Powell, for being gutsy, quietly confident and genuinely personable.

Not long after that, John Lee came to Newport, to talk with Pierce and me about entering the Race Across America (RAAM). We were both struck by his friendly demeanor, his lack of ego, and his strong cycling abilities. In 1991, John Lee entered RAAM, and while he was physically capable of finishing the ultra-long distance cycling event, his crew was not. John Lee was devastated about not finishing, but never uttered one word of criticism about his crew. The only thing he ever said was that he was heartbroken. The mark of a true gentleman is to be gracious, and treat triumph and disaster just the same. I've known John Lee a long time, and never heard him say a bad word about anyone. He is trustworthy, reliable, considerate and capable. John Lee is a fine person, a good friend and an excellent ambassador for Randonneurs USA and the sport of randonneuring. What a gentleman.

**Randonneurs USA congratulates John Lee Ellis for his many years of dedicated service to our organization and our sport.**