

The History of the Wolverine Sunday Ride

Back in the first half of the last Century, a.k.a. 1950, you could find out where the Sunday ride was going by reading the Saturday edition of the Detroit News. The News sponsored hiking groups as well as a couple of biking groups. The Wolverine associated group was known as Unit 9. Listed were a meeting place, a leader and a destination.

The meeting place was the StreetCar Loop in Palmer Park just north of Six Mile Road on Woodward. The leader may have been listed as Mike Walden or someone chosen by Mike.

There were a lot of Junior riders at that meeting place among which was a skinny TJ Hill. Clair Young and Jim Smith were part of the senior officer corps. Mike would often challenge all the juniors to a wrestling match. Mike always won in the end as he eliminated the juniors one by one with one of his three death grips. Once you gave up you stood on the sidelines to watch as the last and toughest junior was treated to special attention. With this over off we would go on the destination of the day.

One of those early destinations was Lakeville Lake where we would go swimming. Usually we would carry a bathing suit and a towel and change inside the towel. There was a time that this practice was frowned on by the Beach management. We were told to clean up our act or to never come back.

Another favorite swimming spot was at Cass Lake at one of the Dodge Brothers parks. On one such trip the entire pack conspired to throw Mike into the lake. Since there were 30 or more of us someone was able to tackle Mike when he was attending to fending off others. We pounced on him once he was down and with two or more people on each arm and leg we succeeded in dragging him into the lake. We all scattered then fearing for the inevitable retaliation.

Mike came out of the water and issued a dire warning. "I know who each of you were that were part of the dunking party and you are all going to pay but not necessarily right now." He then saw that Doris Travani was close at hand and he grabbed her and rolled her in the sand and then threw her into the lake. With that done he called a truce. From that time forward he always used that incident to dish out special punishment. He would grab hold of you and say, "you were one of the guys who threw me in the lake weren't you?"

Naturally we'd deny ever having been there let alone among the conspirators. Anyway no one was ever really hurt during these antics and it was lots of fun. When things were more serious he would give us lessons on how to ride between two riders when seemingly there was no room. He also gave us our first lesson in Madison hand slinging though we didn't have a velodrome at the time. We did team races on Outer Drive around several Islands. Sunday mornings were rather quite along Outer Drive in 1950.

We even had a race across the Davison Freeway doing a turn at each end.

Those were some days when Mike gave us our basic training and Jim Smith was there to add color or confrontation and Clair was there and we could only hope to be close to him at any finish line. Clair was certainly king of Chandler Park where he won 10 State titles and that all occurred after he returned from the Pacific where he was a Marine and fought on Guadalcanal and other island campaigns in WWII.

TJ Hill