

9.1 Miles

(from page 4)

Some of these 60+ year olds could hold their own against much younger riders, maybe not in a 100-yard sprint but give them 10 miles and they would show you the metal they are made of.

Later in the day (5pm–9pm), I'm no longer the youngest or the fastest because this is the time the "Big Dogs" are out.

There is always someone faster:

Once I get on the trail I don't like being passed and I like to have other riders (rabbits) ahead of me that I can chase down. As soon as I catch one, I start looking for the next one to set my sights on. This makes me work a little harder than I would otherwise.

There are a few regular riders in the park that I can't keep up with, well actually there are probably more than a few. I don't lose any sleep over this but it does make me work harder each time I go for a ride. You have to figure these other riders don't like getting passed either. On more than one occasion I have gone for a pleasure ride only to pass a rider and then find myself in a duel with them. To date I haven't seen any goal-line dances or spectacles by the victors after any of these encounters. The participants just seem to enjoy having a reason to push themselves to the limit.

Years ago when I was in good shape and out for a ride I could see in my rearview mirror that a rider coming up behind me. I picked up my pace a bit but to no avail the rider kept on coming. Finally they were on my tail and I had to concede they were going to pass me. The rider pulled out and along side of me, her long hair was flowing out of the back of her helmet as she sped by me and in less than a minute she was out of sight and never seen again.

I told my little episode to a buddy of mine who is an inline skater and he said he had the same experience. Some gal passed him and even though he was in good shape he couldn't catch her until she was stopped by the traffic light for the crossing at the highway. He noticed she had unusual wheels on her skates and asks what the heck are those? She explained what the wheels were and after he finished his skate he headed straight to the sporting goods store to get new wheels for his skates.

Critters spice up the ride:

On the trail you will find the ubiquitous geese, they are more of a nuisance than an interesting encounter. At times they like to occupy the asphalt trail and you wonder if they are dumb or just being rude because they don't move aside to let you pass. It's tough dealing with critters that don't abide by the rules.

The park deer are numerous but are usually only out near the trail right before dusk until early in the day. They are quick and wary so are interesting viewing but don't cause a riding hazard.

One day as I crested a small bridge over a creek I startled a raccoon that was on the bridge. It took off running, oddly enough right along side of me. I was going fast enough that I quickly outran this critter. The last thing I had on my mind when I started this ride was dealing with a startled raccoon. Luckily nothing more came of this encounter.

The elk at the corner of Higgins & Arlington Heights roads are penned in so don't pose a direct threat to riders. They do attract visitors who leave their bicycles, tricycles, baby carriages and etc. on the

trail while they wonder up to the fence to get a closer look at the elk. You have to stay alert so you don't crash into some kid's big wheel.

On warm days when the air is still you might inhale the stench of elk urine as you round the curve at the northwest corner of their pen. Not exactly what your body is craving if you have been on a hard ride and are gasping for air.

I don't want to forget the small critters, the flying insects. At times swarms of small bugs hover around certain areas of the trail. When you run into a swarm it's like running into a rain storm only the bugs don't just drain away, they get stuck in your hair, down your jersey, down your throat and in your eyes. I have a helmet with a visor and can tip my head down to block the bugs and reduce the number I swallow.

One day I came around an uphill curve and roused a big hawk that was hunkered over lunch on the trail. When he lifted off the ground his wingspread seemed to stretch from one side of the trail to the other. By the time I reached his lunch spot he was up in the air off to the side of the trail out of my way. I reciprocated by not taking his lunch.

Every once in a while I flush birds from tall grass along the trail. When their flight path coincides with the trail and you can look over at them flying only a few feet away, it's like you are flying too. Then they veer off into the trees and you realize you are on the ground.

I should stop and smell the roses:

The sunsets over the lake can be spectacular. I really should force myself to break from my training routine and stop to watch more.

The main rule:

The main rule on the trail is to stay to the right on the path. Some new visitors don't seem to know this rule but they tend to learn and follow it quickly enough as riders alert them and wiz by. Following the rule is really demonstrating respect for the other visitors of the park. There is far too little genuine respect in this world. For what it's worth, I believe there could never be too much genuine respect in the world.

What I learned:

- It's never too late to make a "come back".
- How to focus on my training goals
- How to adapt to different weather conditions
- How the weather affects park critters
- How the time of day affects the mix of visitors in the park
- How to tolerate those who don't know the trail rules
- That I can really enjoy a Cheese Danish without guilt

All this happens in just 9.1 miles. That's the round trip distance from my house to the park, around the park trail and back to my house.

So, what did you do last summer?

LMA

Final Thought:

Life is messy, stop whining and deal with it.

-- Larry M. Adrian