



September 16, 2008

High Cliff cyclists face uphill battle

Road a training ground for those with passion for riding

*By Steve Wideman
Post-Crescent staff writer*

SHERWOOD — Two lanes of faded asphalt climb and eventually disappear into the thick forest of High Cliff State Park east of here.

At the bottom of the 200-foot climb up the Niagara Escarpment, Mike and Sue Otto, for the fourth time in 30 minutes, prepare to ride up the steep roadway that only gets steeper before its limestone-bordered crest overlooking pancake-level portions of Sherwood and Lake Winnebago's glistening waters.

"We are flatlanders around here. That hill is the only big one around here. That's why so many people come here to train for bike races," said Mike Otto, who with his wife make frequent trips from their home in Sherwood to challenge the hill. "It's hard to ride up to begin with, then levels out for a short distance before getting real tough."

The final portion covering the last 200 or so feet climbs at a 17 percent gradient.

In comparison, the Alpe d'Huez mountain stage in the annual Tour de France, legendary for its steepness, has an average gradient of 7.9 percent (although the climb, at 13.8 kilometers or about 8.6 miles, is much longer).

"It's fun when you get to the top," said Sue Otto, who averages 8 to 9 miles an hour on the final, steepest part of the High Cliff climb.

Some cyclists, particularly those camping above the cliff, find themselves walking their bikes uphill after a fast and furious downhill ride where speed can easily top 40 miles per hour, said John Lichtenberg of Menasha, a former professional bike rider.

"I do see people struggling up the hill," said Lichtenberg, 46, who has traveled up and down the climb as many as 25 times in two hours.

"Sometimes if I see people riding slow I'll reach the bottom, turn around and try to pass them on the way up," Lichtenberg said. "I've been riding that hill for 27 years."

Lichtenberg uses the hill and its 200 feet of climbing to train for a much more difficult ride — the Horribly Hilly Hundreds near Mount Horeb, a 124-mile ride with 40 hills and 14,000 feet of climbing.

"It's really nice to have this hill here," Lichtenberg said.

High Cliff park manager Jason Wiese said he frequently sees cyclists "going up and down numerous times."

Wiese occasionally uses the park's patrol bike for his job.

"I'll ride up the hill. It's a good workout. It gets your breathing going pretty good," he said.
