

2011-03 Focus on Members

Our Focus Member this month is Erich Woisetschlaeger, a frequent presence on Dennis Whitney's rides.



A word about my exercise in composing deathless prose: I'm somewhat short on details that feature prominently in other members' essays, like how many miles I've traveled or what exotic locales I've ridden my bicycle in. That's because these are things I'd have to make up. So I tried instead to focus on what this whole riding business is like for me. I'm looking forward to sharing many more pleasurable rides with the many members I get to ride with.

So here's what I've written: It's the middle of July, 2009. I'm on my way home from a solo ride, quietly going down Rochdale Avenue in Roosevelt. A cyclist catches up to me, there's some conversation, and the following Friday I show up at Etra Park in East Windsor, where Dennis Whitney is ready to lead his group on one of his weekday rides. I like it, I join the club.

It's been a very good year and a half. And it's the folks I ride with who have made it so. The thing that has perhaps been most impressive is the underlying cheerfulness of the whole enterprise. In our everyday lives, we may have all sorts of problems: worries about our health, worries about our children, worries about finances, whatever. But when we get on our bikes and get moving, it's all about the moment. The air rushing past us, or maybe, when we're laboring up an incline, creeping past us. The hypnotic sound of many bike tires rolling on blacktop. The brief exchanges of teasing or of earnestly held philosophy from rider to rider. The dire warnings about "holes" and "rough road" propagating themselves down the line of riders. Encounters with some astonishingly polite motorists, and our "thank-you's" ringing out. The beautiful landscapes sliding by along the surprisingly many little-traveled roads that ride leaders are able to find. Lots and lots of detail like this, and for the most part, on most rides,

we all get a good deal of joy out of it. It's what keeps me coming back, and I'm sure it's what keeps everybody else coming back.

There is effort involved in getting to the joy I'm talking about. And somehow, sharing in that effort with others enhances the joy. I'm reminded of the days when I did a lot of hiking in the Adirondacks. You may have reached a peak hiking solo, but up there, there was usually a

we all get a good deal of joy out of it. It's what keeps me coming back, and I'm sure it's what keeps everybody else coming back.

There is effort involved in getting to the joy I'm talking about. And somehow, sharing in that effort with others enhances the joy. I'm reminded of the days when I did a lot of hiking in the Adirondacks. You may have reached a peak hiking solo, but up there, there was usually a

kind of easy camaraderie, which I attributed to the fact that we all knew how we'd gotten up there: by the sweat of our brow. It's not really much of a mystery: physical effort, if you don't overburden yourself, feels good. Every rider has experienced those special times when the whole group comes together at a good pace, everyone is actually working fairly hard and yet there is no stress, rather, it feels like the most natural thing in the world, like it could go on forever. Which of course it can't.

So, that's the physical effort that involves everyone. But there is another kind of effort that I've come to appreciate more and more as I've ridden more, an effort without which none of the other stuff could happen. And that's the mental and organizational effort that comes from the ride leaders. I'm constantly amazed at their detailed knowledge of all sorts of obscure, but beautiful roads, and their ability to string together stretches of those roads with minimal exposure of the riders to heavily traveled roads. In addition, there is their amazing ability to hold the whole enterprise together, even though sometimes it must seem to them that it's a task as unrewarding as herding cats. So, let's hear it for our ride leaders!

I could go on, believe me. But given the readership of this essay, I'd only be belaboring the obvious. It's been nice to have this opportunity, but now I really need to go back to thinking "Spring!" real hard.