

Mountain Biking Leaves Muddy Teeth

by
Raymond E. Muth

Valley News Dispatch 7/23/96 Community Columnist

Its wild. Its wacky. Its brutal. It leaves dirt in your teeth. It requires a heavy duty washing machine. And it will probably become the most popular draw to the Apollo area one day. Of course, I am talking about mountain bike racing through the Roaring Run Watershed Association's challenging maze of rocks, water and trees. I have officially caught the fever and I keep wondering if I need a sanity check.

I first became infected with the virus when I was asked to volunteer time at the Roaring Run mountain bike race this past June. Based on the strong participation of the StrongLand Chamber's mountain bicycle race on the trail last September, I thought it might be fun. My job sounded easy. I was to put up some yellow tape and then stand like a statue directing traffic through part of the course.

As I arrived a little late to help set up the race, I had to take a running jump for the back of Jack Tickle's pickup truck which had just given up waiting on me. I marveled at 4-wheel drive engineering as I rode in the bumpy bed through terrain mountain goats would have difficulty negotiating. Jack seemed to enjoy giving me that extra jolt of fun as he managed to hit every muddy ditch along the way.

Having survived Jack's amusement ride, I was next dispatched to carry a dozen steel rods up the trail. No problem. I followed two people up a hill and then through valleys and plains, through purple mountain majesties before finally I screamed, "you have got to be kidding me. People are going to ride this trail. They have to be insane." My suspicion seemed accurate when my remarks were immediately followed by uproarious laughter. "That's what makes this so great," the leader yelled.

After climbing to the top of Mt. Everest, I hammered in the rods, put up the tape and took my position down below. Moments later, a biker with muddy teeth began descending Mt. Everest. "Wow dude, this is totally rad," he screamed. Totally rad? "Hey the race hasn't started yet," I shouted. "Oh I know, I know. I just wanted to get a little practice in," he laughed.

Soon after the race started, cyclists covered in mud began whizzing past me. As an avid runner and former road cyclist, I was totally amazed by the strength, stamina and balance involved. "Wow, I have to try this someday," I thought. But after the race was over, I regained my senses and immediately dismissed any notion of picking up a new sport.

The following day, the virus spread. I received a phone call notifying me that I had won a bicycle donated by Gatto Cycle Shop in Tarentum with one of the raffle tickets I had purchased.

My temperature began to rise. I had never ridden a mountain bike with those funny wide tires but I was anxious to try. I took the bike from my home in Washington Township, down Route 66 across the deplorable Apollo bridge eyesore which only has a ramp on one end (go figure) and down Cherry Lane to the Roaring Run trail.

I didn't think it was possible but I quickly discovered that the Kiski River was even more spectacular to enjoy from a mountain bike as I motored along the trail. When I got to the bridge at the end of the crushed gravel trail, I decided to make a left along the creek and take on the mud, rocks and water. It was quite an adventure. It had to be one of the most physically challenging experiences I have ever come across.

When I returned home, my bike looked like it had been through a war, my legs were caked with mud and my smiling teeth felt a little grainy. I had the fever and there was no known cure. So the next time you come through Apollo and see someone with black teeth, its probably just a very happy mountain biker.



[E-Mail Ray](#)

[Home](#) | [About Me](#) | [Family](#) | [Critters](#) | [Work](#) | [Articles](#) | [Archives](#)