

FWEN.09.29.2017.HillyHundred.nts.jc

EVENT FIELD NOTES

Project Title: Event Fieldnotes for Dr. Brady's Fieldwork Class

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Fieldworker: Joel Chapman

Event/Context: Participating in 50th Annual Hilly Hundred

Date: September 7th, 8th, 2017

Location: Morgan and Brown County, Indiana

Others Present: Other Bicyclists

Keywords:

Corresponding Materials: None

I was asked back in May 2017 by my best friend's dad, Russel Stephens, if I would do the Hilly Hundred come fall. He had become a bicycling fanatic over the years, and I had just spent two years doing bicycle sandwich delivery for Jimmy Johns for the past two years. I told him yes. Come October, I had not prepared by riding 1000 miles in September Like Russel had. I was well into my first semester in graduate school and was finding it hard to find time to exercise. A little nervous about riding 100 miles of hills in 2 days, I kept to my commitment and signed up for the race

Russell arrived in Bloomington the Friday before the race and we checked out the route together, as well as pre-registered. The Hilly Hundred is huge event that attracts hundreds of cyclists from Indiana and surrounding states. This year that the 50th year of the race, and my first time.

Saturday morning, I woke up before dawn, dressed in my biker gear, and walked over to where Russel, or Russ, was staying. We ate a simple breakfast of cereal and we stopped to get some coffee and sports drinks at a gas station on the way to the starting line. To my surprise, Russ partakes in a ritual before, and after races, where he smokes a tiny amount of weed. I had the shorts, but Russ lent me one of his racing jerseys, so I wouldn't look like such a fool during the event. He also bought me a pair of gloves, and lend me a bandana. I was obviously not prepared. Saturday morning, it was very misty as we drove to where the starting line was. The race started anywhere from 8 – 10. It is not a very competitive race, it is mostly done for the simply the joy of riding, and riders of all ages are encouraged to participate. I saw riders aging from grade school, to the quite elderly. This put my lack of training concerns at ease. Right away when we arrived Russ was greeting familiar faces, mostly people who knew from his own cycling club back in Fort Wayne, where he is from. Of course, he was also greeting anyone wearing Cubs paraphernalia, with much enthusiasm, as they were in the playoffs. As we approached the starting line, it seemed the race had already started, but people were idling around, waiting for their friends to show up I presumed. We went ahead and took off. For the first leg of the race I was able to keep up with Russ, until just 10 minutes before the first rest stop, where he took off ahead of me. On the way to the first rest stop I was probably passed by 100 riders while I passed maybe 50. At the rest stop I am noticing that everyone is wearing about the same thing; jersey, pants, clip shoes, helmet. The jerseys have all kinds of clubs, races, schools, and breweries emblazed on them. Colorful socks with abnormal designs are also quite common. At this rest stop, or SAG, there is a Dixieland jazz band comprised of mostly older men in there 50s-70s

playing. We are in a small field in the middle of the country with different tent stations for water, food, and musical entertainment. This is where I sit and write of my observations while I am riding. There are also latrines nearby. The crowd of bikes seems to be people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, and of many different skill levels. There are virtually no people of color. Everyone is casually chatting as they rest and eat the doughnuts, muffins, and fruit, and sip on juice, that are provided by the tents. As you ride, the buzz of the bicycles can be heard all around you like the buzz of a large swarm of insects. This is especially the case when a large group of cyclists comes up behind you and suddenly passes you with ease. The ground is marked with lots of spray painted graffiti. Most of it is from the organizers of the event to direct where the riders should go, but some of it seems to be additions from the residents whom live on the roads where the route is placed. Judging from the content these people do not seem appreciative of the rider's presence. There are spray painted messages of "Hillys Go Home" "please crash" "don't come back" and images of a hand giving the middle finger, as well as many penises. One section where it was particularly prevalent, there was a trailer home that was blaring heavy metal music at obscenely high decibels, obviously sending a message to the riders of 'don't stop here if you know what's good for you.'

Along the route there were all kinds of old and new farm houses, cabins, and barns. Fields and fields of soy beans and corn, as well as pastures for animals. Most of the ride that Saturday was done with clouds covering us from the sun. At the SAG 2 there was a rock-a-billy band playing various kinds of covers. They served a lunch oh chicken, pasta, quinoa, cookies, apple cider, and ice cream. There seems to be a large group mentality and comradery as people mingle and chat. Later along the race there are out in their front lawns having a BBQ as they watch the race. And other less friendly people whose driveways feature signs that say, "free horse shit" with the sign sticking out of a literal pile of horse manure. Of course, this pile might have been free fertilizer that I had misread, but judging by the font, and the size of the pile, I think it was for the riders. The wind picked up in the last part of the race, and was working against us head on for a while. By mile 50 I was ready for it to be over and every mile after that seemed twice if the one before it. Right when returning to the car I noticed my back tire was slightly untrue, but I didn't think too much of it. Russ and I went to a bike store to get some electrolyte drinks and were walking around in our spandex shorts and jerseys. It was then I noticed how goofy we looked in normal public, contrasting to how normal our spandex made us look in the crowd of racers. I went home, took a nap, and had a large dinner of pasta and bread.

Day two of the race started out about the same as day one. I dressed in the dark, and walked over to where Russ was staying. We had a small breakfast of cereal, and stopped to get coffee and a Gatorade at a gas station before the race, and the other usual pre-race rituals. I was feeling a little sore, but not as sore as I thought I would have. Day two was the same common crowd. Today I noticed specific vocal cues to alert other riders of incoming vehicles. "Car Up" means car coming from ahead; "car back" means car coming from behind; "clear" signals that an intersection is good to pass. When in a line of riders that are fairly close together, its almost comical to hear the chain reaction of one rider after another enthusiastically shout "car up!" It is also common courtesy to show the location of pot holes to people riding behind you. At the first SAG there were again breakfast pastries, and a country band playing. It was after this first break that I noticed my back wheel had considerably become more untrue. It was quite wobbly, and I

could feel the vibrations. Another rider also pointed this out to me. I stopped and tried to fix it best I could, but I did not have the tools. As I was stopped along the side of the road many riders would ask me “are you ok?” and “do you have everything you need” as they passed. I nodded and said, “yeah I think so.” My back tire wasn’t great, but it was still rideable. I Decided to persevere until the next SAG, where I would take it to the mechanic on site.

On a particularly challenging hill called “Bean Blossom Hill” there were lots of riders slowing to a walk pace, and others quite literally walking their bike. One man had an external speaker, that seemed to be playing “Staying Alive” by the BeeGees on repeat as we climbed.

After many challenging hills my wheels status deteriorated more still. To the point where it would rub on each of the break pads as I pedaled. The point I knew I had to call it was when another rider passed me and simply exclaimed “wow.” At that point I dismounted and began to walk my bike. I was 30 miles into the second day, and only 5 miles from the lunch SAG, but it had become dangerous and impossible to continue. A few people stopped to help me, but after realizing they could not fix my wheel kept on. Russ was many miles ahead of me at this point. Luckily the race has many volunteer drivers, or SAG drivers that patrol the race looking for people in need of assistance. The signal to tell a driver you need help is to put your hand on top of your helmet. So I did, and one stopped. I had to stand up the road around the bend to spot for cars and tell them to slow down while he hitched my bike. Good thing I did because a car zoomed around the corner and sped around the SAG driver who picked me up. The SAG driver was the Ex-President of the hilly hundred, Charlie. Upon looking at my bike he had no idea what was going on with the wheel. He had never seen anything like it. So, it looked like the race was over for me. I hopped in the car. Charlie had to run a few errands to other rest stops before returning me to the finish/starting line. His wife was also in the car with us. Charlie told me that the comradery is really what brings people to this race. And I could tell, because him and his wife were waving to, and naming countless riders that would pass us in the opposite direction as the SAG car patrolled. Charlie spots the director of the event riding in the race and is surprised. Charlie is intently focused on the road, constantly looking for riders who might need assistance. He talks of how they had to change the route at the last minute, which meant an accurate map had to be drawn by hand. SAG drivers use HAM radios to communicate and coordinate. I learned that the system of markings on the pavement that tells cyclists where to turn, are called Dan Henrys. Much rain is coming, and I guess that it’s a good thing that my bike broke. After maybe two hours of riding with Charlie and his wife, he gets me back to the car. Shortly after, Russ, finished the race and is astonished to see me at the finish line. I explain the story, and he tells me I need to ride a bike that was made more recently than 1985 next time.