

# The Wheelmen To Show Off High-wheeled Bicycle Skills at Weekend Meet

By Sean Ely

It's not like bicycles on Mackinac Island are a rarity, but when those bicycles are high-wheelers, or "ordinary" bicycles from the early 1900s, with a giant front wheel, a tiny back wheel, and a seat eight feet off the ground, something out of the ordinary has to be going on.

The Wheelmen, a national organization, will be back on Mackinac Island for the 18th time during a weekend of grueling cycling excursions, activities, and games, all centered around the old-fashioned cycles. They compete for certificates, fudge coupons, and ribbons.

The Wheelmen come to the Island biennially, and will be here June 28 to July 1 for the Mackinac Meet.

"Mackinac Island is such a great place to have this event, because there is no motorized traffic and the time period is just perfect for the bicycles that are featured," said Bill Smith, the Mackinac Meet captain. "This is a vacation spot and a Michigan showplace."

Club members will take part in a 100-mile ride around the Island, also known as the "Century Ride," which was scheduled to begin at 6 a.m. Friday, June 29. Another event will be 25 miles long, and a third will be 10 miles. Bicycle games will take place on the basketball court behind Mackinac Island Public School

where pedaling speed is not the name of the game. One particular game will give participants the opportunity to ride across the perimeter of a box as slow as they can, without completely stopping or touching their feet to the ground.

Early Saturday morning, The Wheelmen can be seen in costume at Marquette Park with their high-wheel cycles and will be happy to pose for photographs and explain their high-wheeled contraptions. A special lamplight ride will take place at 9 p.m. Saturday, June 30, in front of the Murray Hotel.

All of The Wheelmen's bicycles date to 1918 or earlier, but participants may use any type of bicycle that they want while taking part in the grueling laps around the Island.

Being so high in the air can be dangerous.

"The number-one thing to keep in mind is safety," said Mr. Smith. "It's important for everybody to be safe, because I've seen many people do what is called a header, where someone goes off head first of their high-wheel bike, with their legs stuck under the handlebars. This happens when the front wheel stops suddenly and you are thrown over the bars before you have time to jump off ahead of the bike. People can get very hurt this way, and they have to go off the Island for advanced medical attention. We're trying to prevent this."

Even Mr. Smith, who has

been riding these earlier-year bicycles for many years, says that people who aren't careful around a group of riders can truly create a mess. He knows from personal experience.

"You really get used to riding so high up, after awhile, even though when I first started, I was scared to death because I was eight feet in the air," Mr. Smith said. "After awhile, you don't feel high up, and it actually feels like you're sitting in a La-Z-Boy watching TV. It feels like that until you

fall, at least."

In 1987, Mr. Smith tried going around a bicycle that a girl lost control of, but he ran out of asphalt and found himself flipping off the high-wheel and falling down one of the bluffs. He broke three ribs.

Mackinac Island's Century Ride around the Island has few hills, but tourists on bicycles, especially those who have not ridden bicycles for awhile, can present a challenge to the high-wheelers.

"Mackinac Island is known

as one of the easiest Century Rides by certain people," Mr. Smith said. "But, I don't think that's always true, because there will be a lot of people visiting who are not part of our club, and you'll see a child who is excited and staring up at Arch Rock, not realizing where he is going. Those people are the ones that scare the heck out of me. That's why I encourage The Wheelmen riders to have bells on their bikes."

Watching all of the events is free to the public.

# Navy Ship Docks at Mackinac Island for Weekend



The LCU 1680, a Navy Reserve vessel out of Buffalo, New York, docked on Mackinac Island from June 22 to 24 as part of a training exercise for its crew of 18. The boat has a flat bottom and the unique ability to cruise right up to a beach and unload soldiers and supplies.

By Eric Fish

Mackinac Island was paid a special visit by a Navy Reserve unit out of Buffalo, New York, on the weekend of Friday, June 22. Their boat, LCU 1680, was docked at the end of the Arnold Transit docks as part of the unit's training exercise. LCU is the navy boat designation for utility landing craft. It has a flat bottom and collapsible front bowel that works as a ramp for unloading. It's capable of cruising right up to a beach and dispatching troops, tanks, and other equipment, said John Dunham, the vessel's chief

engineer.

The vessel is operating with a crew of 18 people, but Mr. Dunham said that it fits 14 comfortably.

It is powered by two diesel engines and a pilot house featuring radar and global positioning technology.

As part of the training exercise, Mr. Dunham said the Navy attempts to sail all of the Great Lakes. This voyage of the LCU 1680, however, missed Lakes Superior and Ontario.

"This trip we were supposed to hit Erie, Huron, Michigan,

and Superior, but we're going to miss Superior because we decided to stay an extra day on Mackinac," Mr. Dunham said. "Everybody who's been here before raved about it, so we took a vote. We're going to stay here."

It was Mr. Dunham's first visit to the Island, but he could already understand what his Navy peers liked about it.

"This place is great," he said. "I can't wait to go off and go walk around."

The LCU 1680 docked Friday, June 22, and departed Sunday, June 24.

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