

BBBC History: The Beginning

by Lee Chouinard

In the Fall of 1999 Lee Chouinard and Worth Bruntjen were lamenting after a tennis match that we didn't have a bike club or a ski club in Bonita Bay, two sports which we were both enthusiastic about. We agreed the Lee would take the lead in starting a bike club and Worth would take the lead in restarting a ski club with each of us helping out the other.

The bike club was started the next year with a small group of about 16 people with varied biking experience. Lee Chouinard served as President and Jill Augustine served as Treasurer. Rides were typically 35 miles or less at speeds ranging from 10 mph for the short rides to 15 mph for the longer ones. The intermediate refreshment stop became a standard element of every ride and our first excursion outside the Bonita/Naples area was a trip to Shark Valley in the Everglades for a one day 15 mile ride. Lee and Worth designed our first club bike shirts and Worth and Bob Augustine obtained financial contributions from a number of sponsors to give us working capital to order shirts and operate the club. Worth Bruntjen was named Rider of the Year.

The 2001/2002 season was when we had our first Fall bike tour - a three day trip from John Pennekamp State park in Key Largo to Key West - there were 19 participants including bikers and drivers. The Fall Tour became a regular highlight of our bike club calendar. In the years that followed we would hold tours in all corners of Florida and beginning in 2008 these tours would morph, in typical BB fashion, from low cost biking focused tours to destination resort tours which offered a full spectrum of leisure activities in addition to biking. Participation would grow continuously to 80+ people in 2011. Andrew Combes was named Rider of the Year.

During the period from 2001 thru 2005 many special events were tried some of which became permanent fixtures in the club calendar and some of which were only done once. The exact years are fuzzy but some of the events were: the "Pedal and Paddle Ride" (a combined biking/kayaking day), the "Lions Club Pancake Breakfast Ride", the "Santa Ride", the "Scavenger Hunt Ride", the "Amazing Race Ride", the "Beach Party Ride", and the "Annual Awards Ride". Club members participated in many community bike events on a regular basis including the "Tour de Cape", "Bike Florida", "Clean Air Ride" and many events sponsored by the Naples Pathway Coalition and other community groups. The first BBBC Century ride was in 2003 and there were four riders. During this period "Rider of the Year" awards were made based on miles ridden and winners were: 2002, 3, & 4 Lee Chouinard and 2005 Jerry Kuny.

2005 was an important transition year and an eventful one for the club. During the summer of 2005 the club experienced a tragic loss when Worth Bruntjen died as the result of a head injury suffered on a club bike ride - the only fatal injury in the history of the club. Worth was a major force in the founding of the club, an ever present volunteer

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for club activities on a continuing basis, and a special friend to many members. In 2005, Jerry Kuny was elected to succeed Lee Chouinard as President and Bill Petty took over as Treasurer. Jerry ushered in a new period of growth for the club. Jerry designed and brought a web site on line to facilitate communications, new club jerseys were designed by Sue Armstrong incorporating the BB logo, safety clinics and bike repair clinics were held, and the club joined the League of American Bicyclists. The Fall Tour in 2005 was organized by Rick Maloy, an ex-BBBC member who had moved to Ponta Vedra and he organized a tour for us in the Jacksonville area. For the first time a special jersey was designed for the BBBC Century ride and was available for purchase by all participants. Over the years participation in Statute and Metric Century rides would grow from 4 in 2003 to 50+ in 2010. Beginning in 2005 "Rider of the Year" awards were no longer given based on miles but were instead based on a combination of ride participation and club citizenship (volunteer activities, leadership, etc). The winner for 2005/2006 was Anita Corbin.

During the 2006 - 2009 period the club continued to grow reaching over 150 members. Rides also continued to grow, getting longer and faster at all riding levels. Club songs were written and performed at the annual meetings by Mark Suwyn and Jim Gallo. In 2007 Tim Durbin succeeded Bill Petty as Treasurer and in 2009 Claude Weir succeeded Jerry Kuny as President. During this period a club charter was written by Claude and adopted by the members to formalize some of the unwritten procedures and policies which the club had been utilizing. Claude brought a much needed stronger focus on biking safety to the club as accident rates seemed to be accelerating. "Rider of the year awards were given to Jack Heckel (2006/2007), Claude Weir (2007/2008), and Tim Durbin (2008/2009). In 2009 the "Awards Banquet" was for the first time not held after a ride but was a separate "civilian dress" event hosted by Andrew and Nicola Combes. In 2012 we would further progress to making this an evening event at the Bonita Bay Club with over 100 participants.

During the summer of 2009, BBBC members did their first significant summer event when six members participated in RAGBRAI (a 7 day/500 mile bike ride across Iowa). The summer tour has now become a regular part of the BBBC calendar with subsequent tours in the Hudson River Valley in New York (2010), northern Minnesota (2011), and Chataqua, NY (2012). Also in March 2010, four members of the BBBC did a 2900 mile ride across America from San Diego to St Augustine. In 2011 Richard Powell succeeded Tim Durbin as Treasurer and Robin Tucker/Goyette succeeded Jerry Kuny as Statistician/Web Mistress. Recent "Riders of the Year" have been Pete Stiles (2009/2010), Robin Tucker/Goyette (2010/2011), and Jim Gallo (2011/2012). The club routinely now rides a collective 100,000+ miles during the October/April season with organized rides every day of the week except Sunday. "C" rides are now 30+ miles at 13 - 15 mph (almost the same as "A" rides were when the club first started). As an

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historical note, when the club first started there were no “A”, “B”, and “C” groups (plus all the plus and minus subtitles we now have) - instead we had the “Screaming Eagles”, the “Rabbits”, and the “Turtles” (who quickly renamed themselves the “Awesome Ospreys”).