

## It is Even a Bigger and Better Playing Field Now!

You can experience a “runner’s high” at High Cliff State Park whether you are running in it or actively engaging in one of many sports this safe haven has to offer. Whether you enjoy the activities ranging from sailing, biking, swimming, wind surfing to kayaking, this park seems to create a magical energy for sports lovers. Lately, there seems to be more and more athletes from the elite to weekend warriors pounding out High Cliff State Park’s most notorious hill on their bikes or running the trails. Well, let’s not really call the hill “notorious.” It is more like the park’s signature or icon. In 2004, the first year of the High Cliff Triathlon the hill was the “big fear” in everyone’s mind. In fact, many suggested we not make the hill a part of the course because it was just too hard. It turns out 2004 was the year of the unexpected white caps in Lake Winnebago. Consequently, not one complaint was heard about the hill after that.

The swim in inaugural 2004 triathlon may have been somewhat windy and wavy which was one of those small flukes. Everyone still talks about that. However, there is a solid and comforting fact which still remains. The bay at the High Cliff State park is waist deep and a person would have to swim out to the edge of the marina’s boulders to get into water 6 feet deep. Just like the park itself, the entire swimming area is gigantic, scenic and safe.

Since January of 07 it even gets bigger and better for the athletes and naturalists alike. The Friends of High Cliff (FOHC) have purchased private land in the Upper Park. This is part of the ancient, fossil-filled limestone high escarpment that runs from Niagara Falls to the Midwest. The private land had been planned for some type of development. The development would have divided the Park in half as it was right, square in the middle of two pieces of land the Park owns. This would have significantly hindered the realization of the Park’s full potential by destroying its natural beauty and geological features.

This recent purchase can now create a trail in the park that is close to 16-18 miles long. That is a manageable and desired training distance with the increasing amount of participation in local marathons, longer distance triathlons and mountain biking events. So just where does this potential trail begin? On the top of the hill you turn right onto the trail that follows the shoreline of Lake Winnebago. In the past, you could continue in this direction for a mile or two. Then all of a sudden, there was the heart and body *braking* sign that said “Private Property.” That was somewhat frustrating as many of us knew there was another part of the park just beyond the sign. That part of the park was impossible to get to and was only approachable by a back road bordering the park. The new land purchase by the FOHC can now create a longer trail following the escarpment. Yes, bring on the goose bumps. It is thrilling to think of how their purchase will facilitate a beautiful and larger view of the lake for all sightseers including walkers and hikers as well as runners and bikers.

Over the years the High Cliff Triathlon has developed a relationship with FOHC making a financial contribution back to their efforts. This non-profit organization works hard at maintaining the park, preserving its beauty and making a wise decision with the organization’s recent purchase. Of course, this all takes money. Living in the Fox Valley, we just may want to consider some type of contribution towards FOHC. After all, we are the main park users being so close by. Whether it is taking out a membership, which is a nominal fee of \$20 a year, or getting your company to make a larger contribution, we can support their efforts as a pay back for our enjoyment. This weekend they will be at the park from 4 am until 4 pm volunteering to make a safe and fun event for triathletes.

With High Cliff State Park hosting approximately 800,000 visitors each year, this natural resource is a part of us we can all be proud of and value. It is one of our state’s key recreational and natural areas in addition to supporting many events from cross country skiing, horseback riding to boat regattas. Do you ever remember, as a child, experiencing such a gigantic playground right in your own backyard? We are never too old to play. We are never too old to remember the efforts of others like the Friends of High Cliff.