

Kids of Steel Conquer Collingwood

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Chain cleaning and bike preparation before the time trial.

and 14 to 15 year olds. Younger kids focus on skills development while older kids move more into competitive concerns.

“We’ve used Collingwood for years for a few reasons,” says Linda Kirk, executive director of OAT. “There are few facilities that can house that many kids together and that is a key requirement for us. The National

took a committed board of directors and many private donations to promote the concept of the Ski Academy, buy the old house and refurbish it,” writes author Judy Ross. While ski-loving kids fill the high-ceilinged bedrooms during the school year, young triathletes hang out in the lounge in summer, as oblivious as the regular students are to the



It’s not a summer camp for kids who like arts and crafts followed by an easy paddle in the lake. The daily schedule is athletic. Up at 6:50 for core training, these kids could also have a swim completed before breakfast. A serious bike ride before lunch with a run in the afternoon keeps these kids fit. This camp is for kids of steel.

A bike practice time trial up the Niagara Escarpment with Georgian Bay in the distance.



Kids of Steel line up for the time trial: the fastest start last.

Kids of Steel (KOS) camps are run by the Ontario Association of Triathletes (OAT) for kids from about age six to 15 who like to participate in triathlons, which are three-part races involving swimming, cycling and running. Simon Whitfield brought the sport to national attention by winning a gold medal for Canada in the 2000 Olympic Games.

KOS events are designed to provide kids with a challenge yet

be fun, safe and short enough to be completed. OAT is the recognized provincial governing body for triathlon racing in Ontario. OAT’s KOS program is the largest in Canada, serving more than 6,000 kids interested in triathlon. More than 30 races were held last year.

OAT holds one-week summer camps in Collingwood, in the National Ski Academy house on Oak St. Camps are organized into age groups; this year there are camps for 12 to 13 year olds

Ski Academy is within walking distance of the pool, town and the beach, and in close proximity to good riding outside of town. This is becoming challenging due to the amount of building occurring in Collingwood recently but as yet we have not found another location that works as well.”

The coffee-table book *A View of the Bay: Collingwood and Beyond*, gives one chapter to the National Ski Academy house, formerly called Tornaveen. “It

“ornate ceiling medallions and richly panelled mahogany walls.” “By the time kids reach 16 we spend a lot more time on goal setting, nutrition, mental preparation and race tactics,” adds Kirk. “The social interaction is key, though. Kids this age love to be together, hence the need for a large place where they can all be together.”

The kids come from all over Ontario and beyond. Last year at one of the summer camps there were kids from Hamilton,

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Sarnia, Toronto, Peterborough, London, Oakville, Ingersoll, Dundas, Dorchester, Richmond Hill, Leamington, Brampton, Ajax, Orillia and even Texas. These kids were coached by Jay Johnson of California and Sharon MacKinnon of Hamilton.

Time Trial

After a hearty breakfast that capped off their core training and swim, they got to work cleaning their bike chains in the parking lot in preparation for their training ride up the Escarpment. The water hose was passed around as bikes were cleaned, oiled and tires were pumped up. A lot of time was spent preparing their bikes. Camp participants bring all their own equipment and have to take good care of their expensive bikes.

When everyone was ready, they mounted their bikes, and rode slowly out of town, MacKinnon directing the way. Johnson drove the van. At the foot of a quiet road with a long steady ascent up the Escarpment, the racers were arranged in starting position for timed intervals, the fastest starting last. Johnson gave the signal for each rider to begin, and off each one went. Soon a long line of cyclists wound up the long hill. While Mackinnon joined the kids on the ride, Johnson drove to the finish point to time each rider's practice.

At the end point some of the cyclists looked spent and wobbly, while others still looked strong. Each one was applauded for finishing and given his or her time. The view from the top of the Escarpment onto Georgian Bay was gorgeous, but the kids weren't interested in sightseeing. A cool-down ride before the downhill coast back to the house was followed by some welcome free time before lunch and the afternoon run.

"It was a great experience working with the athletes last year in Collingwood," says

The coach prepares the last cyclists for practice.



Typical Schedule

6:50 Core training	10:30 Time trial (bike)
7:15 Swim	12:30 Lunch
9:00 Breakfast	3:30 Run, games
9:30 Chain cleaning	5:30 Dinner

Mackinnon. "Collingwood is a lovely venue for triathlon. Nice terrain for biking and running. Love the trails! And it was great to swim in the local outdoor pool and also take advantage of the bay."

Camps will be held in Collingwood this summer, to "help children hone their skills, improve overall fitness, have fun and create some wonderful new friendships," as the Web site at www.triathlonontario.com states. July 5 is the start of the 12 to 13 year-old camp, while July 12 is the start of the 14 to 15 year-old camp. The camps are open to any members of OAT and cost \$750 for the week.

While the emphasis is on serious training and fitness, these Kids of Steel "learn a lot and they just love getting together," says Kirk. They likely also make memories to last a lifetime, just like all kids at summer camp. ■