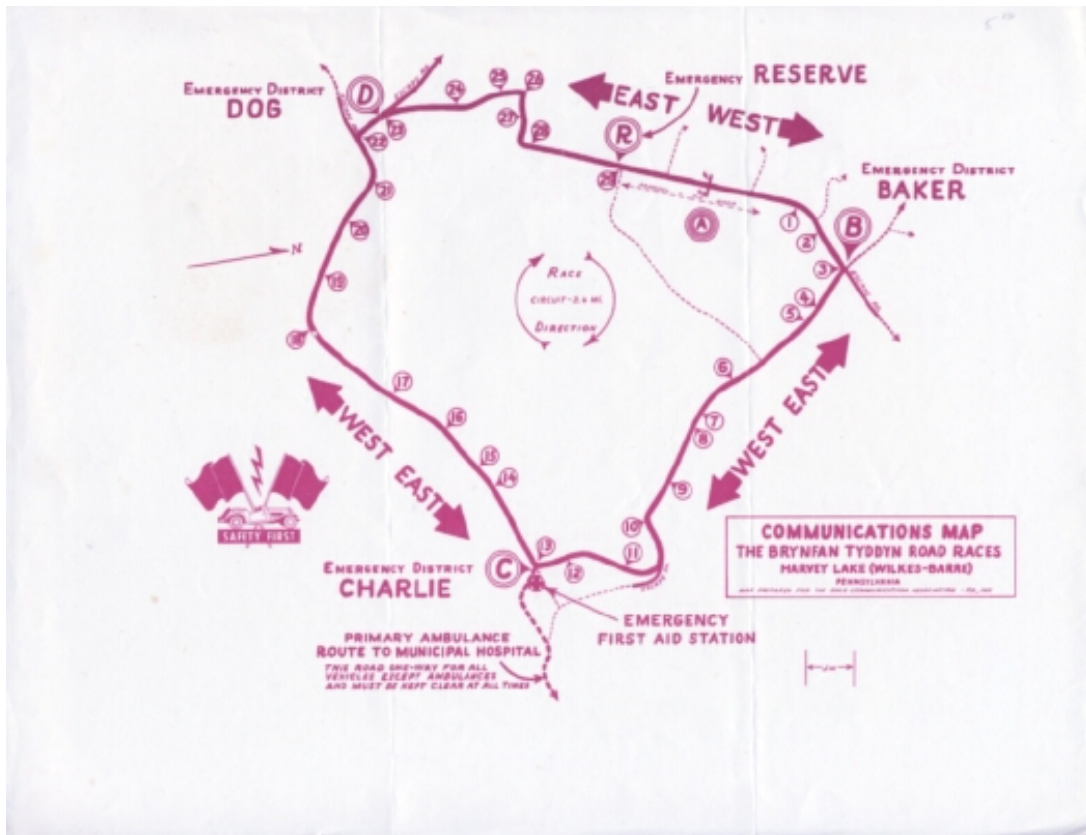


Brynfan Tyddyn Road Races

By F. Charles Petrillo



From 1952 to 1956 Harvey's Lake hosted the Brynfan Tyddyn road races in association with the famed Giant's Despair mountain races in Wilkes-Barre Township.

The Giant's Despair road race has a distinguished history from its first race in 1906 up Wilkes-Barre mountain from Georgetown just outside the Wilkes-Barre city limits. The mile-long course, with a 690 foot rise, was a challenge to early 20-60 horsepower autos and attracted national attention. The races continued until 1910 but lapsed until 1916 when a record crowd of 60,000 attended the races. They were not held during World War I and were not revived until May 1951.

The late T. Newell Wood (1909-1982) was the President of the Hill Climb Association and had a large estate located on present Schoolhouse Road, a couple of miles from the Sandy Beach area. Wood was a leader of the local Republican Party for nearly three decades. He served for twenty years as State Senator and four years as a Luzerne County Commissioner. He was chairman of the board of Kingston National Bank and President of Pressed Steel Company of Wilkes-Barre.



T. Newell Wood hauling race fans in his tractor.

With the revival of the Giant’s Despair races in 1951 Wood conceived the idea of a race the following year consisting of 10 laps around a 3.5 mile course largely bordering his 690 acre Lake estate. The name Brynfan Tyddyn was Welsh for “Large Farm on the Hilltop.” The races would be coupled with the long weekend Giant’s Despair races. On Saturday, July 26, 1952, there were five Lake events competing in the 35 mile race. While the challenge at Giant’s Despair was to beat a one minute mark on its one-mile course, the Lake challenge was to beat a 35 minute mark. The Lake races were a source of pride and officially sanctioned by the Sports Car Club of America.

In the initial race Cleveland driver Richard H. Irish, driving a Kieft 500, covered the course in 34:22.4 minutes – even after he momentarily lost control of his car on a curve approaching the finish line. Phil Walters, winner of the 1952 Giant’s Despair race in a record 1:02.3 minutes, won his Lake heat in 34:44.5 in a Porsche. For arranging the Lake races Wood was awarded a life membership in the Sports Car Club of America. An



Race cars at Brynfan Tyddyn, 1956

estimated combined 40,000 people lined Hill Climb and Lake the roads to witness the 1951 races.

In 1953 Fritz Koster, Fayetteville, NY, won the Saturday afternoon T. Newell Wood Challenge Trophy at the Lake in 35:55.2 minutes in a Maserati. Here the featured race was to be 15 laps around the 3.5 mile course but when another racer in an MG threw a wheel the race was halted at 11 laps.

By 1954 the Lake races were among the nation’s top sports car events – particularly when paired with Friday’s Giant’s Despair. The Lake races were designed for smaller sports cars. The Lake schedule for Saturday, July 7, 1954, was 10:00 A.M.: 10 laps for stock MG’s; 11:00 A.M.: 10 laps for Classes E and F less MG’s; 12 Noon: 10 laps for Formula III, Coopers and Klefts; 2 P.M.: 10 laps of Classes G and H; 3 P.M.: 15 laps,

Classes E and F modified. On a straightaway a speed over 90 miles-per-hour was possible. A local charity was a financial beneficiary of the Valley road races. In 1954 it was the Wyoming Valley Hospital.

In the 1954 main event, the fifth race, 15 laps, Otto Linton, Exton, Ohio, finished the race in 46:14.3 minutes in a OSCA sports car. The race was marred by several accidents and restarts. Don McKnought's Maserate flipped 4 times and he was taken to an area hospital but not without serious injuries. Other incidents did not permit the race to really get full speed until the eighth lap and Linton did not win until the last lap, overpowering Duncan Black, Maryland, driving a Lester MG.

The 1955 races at Giant's Despair and at the Lake drew 75,000 spectators. Duncan Black won the Hill Climb in 1:02.04 in a 4.5 Ferrari – and his name would be engraved on the \$5,000. Hollenback Trophy. At the Lake Lex Dupont, Wilmington, Delaware, had the best average time of 3:14.7 minutes for the 3.5 mile race, followed by 1954 winner Otto Linton in 3:17.95.

In the 1956 races famed racing driver Carroll Shelby conquered the one-minute barrier at the Hill Climb in 58.768 seconds and he also won the 15 lap Lake race in 44:47.4 minutes with an average lap speed of 2:58.1 on a wet road driving a 300 H.P. Grand Prix Ferrari in both races. He reportedly hit 135 miles-per-hour on the Lake course. Robert Bucher, Binghamton, also broke one-minute on the Hill Climb at 59:867 in a Cad-Allard Jr. car.

The 1956 Lake race however, witnessed the fatal pre-race accident of Carl Gardner, Jr., 33, who was an unauthorized driver on the speedway. Gardner, without authorization, took a Siata car owned by a Philadelphia competitor to test it along the course. The car, while not going excessively, briefly left the road and when Gardner attempted to correct his course he hit a telephone pole. Rushed to a hospital Gardner's injuries were fatal.

In July 1957 T. Newell Wood hosted over 400 drivers and guests at the Hotel Sterling, Wilkes-Barre, for Race Week and the Hill Climb. Dr. Louis Winkler, Bethlehem, in a Corvette, recorded a 58.3 second time for the Climb, but due to a mechanical timing error, Shelby's 1956 record of 58.768 still held. Winkler's time had to be disregarded for official purposes but he was awarded the Hollenback Trophy.

In any event, perhaps scarred by the 1956 fatality, the Lake races did not resume after the 1956 event.

