Bicyclists tour Watts on a CicLAvia ride

The cyclists take photos and recordings for a 'crowd-sourced' map of their route from Augustus Hawkins Natural Park in South L.A.'s Central-Alameda neighborhood to the Watts Towers.

By Jason Song, Los Angeles Times
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CicLAvia, the popular Los Angeles cycling event, took its first spin in Watts on Sunday.

Volunteers have long wanted to hold a ride in Watts similar to CicLAvia events that pass through downtown Los Angeles, known for closing streets to cars so cyclists have free rein. On Sunday, a large group gathered to tour the Watts area on bike, something organizers hope will encourage more civic engagement, even though they had to share the road with drivers.
“Look around,” Tafarai Bayne, one of the event’s organizers, told 60 or so cyclists gathered at Augustus Hawkins Natural Park in South L.A.’s Central-Alameda neighborhood. “These are your future comrades in making L.A. a better place.”

PHOTOS: Touring South L.A. by bike

In addition to riding from the park to the Watts Towers, cyclists were encouraged to take photos for a “crowd-sourced” map that will feature pictures and recordings cyclists took along the route.

CicLAvia has held similar events in the Leimert Park and Exposition Park neighborhoods and plans to continue holding monthly rides throughout the Los Angeles area.

The group’s diversity was obvious before the ride even began. As cyclists milled around the park’s courtyard in the morning, some arrived with fancy 21-speeds while one woman rode a bright green bike with a small license plate proclaiming “Ms. Vixen.”

Many were armed with iPhones and ear buds, but when an organizer assured the riders that they didn’t need a smartphone to participate, one man sighed audibly.

“Ooh, that means I can take pictures, then,” said Fred Buggs, who uses a scratched-up Samsung cellphone. “I’m not sure how old it is,” admitted Buggs, who lives near the park.

Buggs said he rides about 40 miles a week and was glad to see people visiting the area. He said he hoped they came away with a good impression.

“You have a thousand bad people here, but you also have about 10,000 good people,” Buggs said.

The group rode down Holmes Avenue as bystanders waved and honked their horns. Cyclists paused to hold up their phones to take pictures of interesting sights, including a statue of two dolphins in a frontyard and old train cars.

Francois Bar, a USC professor who will help create the final map, kept track of the photos during the ride on his iPad, which he had mounted on his handlebars.

When the group took a break at Watts Towers, a small crowd gathered around Bar’s 21-speed bike.

“When someone sends a photo, they like to see it right away,” Bar said.

Many said they participated in the ride because they had enjoyed earlier CicLAvia events and wanted to experience more of the city by bike.

Justin Runia brought his wife and 2-year-old daughter on the ride, hoping such events would soon become a regular part of their routine.

“We want to let people know there’s a demand,” Runia said.

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