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"Is That the Same Giant Slide We Got on as Children?"

Posted September 9, 2022 by Sarah Murphy

In his latest viral hit, rapper Gmac Cash asks a question that's been on the minds of a lot of Detroiters as of late. If you've been on social media lately, you've surely seen the videos going about of some particularly rocky rides on Belle Isle's Giant Slide. As Gmac Cash asks in his song in response to the clips, "is that the same giant slide we got on as children?"

The Big Yellow Slide

While the current slide has been in place for several years, it is not the original that Detroiters of a certain age remember riding. That original slide was opened on July 4th, 1968. It was manufactured by a California-based outfit called Sky-Slide International. It had a distinctive yellow fiberglass surface and was about 45 feet high. Riders would climb the stairs along the slide's right side to a platform from which they'd speed down atop a burlap potato sack over the slide's dips and humps.

The Funland Controversy

That original yellow slide was intended to be but one part of a grandiose \$400,000 privately run amusement park on the island called Funland, that would have also included mechanical rides like a Ferris wheel, a tilt-a-whirl, and a scale railroad. However, after the slide went up, the rest of the project was initially stalled by a state-wide construction worker strike. Soon after the slide and the wider Funland plan started to attract controversy.

Some people argued against the commercialization of the island and were completely opposed to the slide and the rest of the proposed amusement park. Others felt that the slide was great, but its 25-cent ticket price left a lot of the city's children unable to share in the fun and would lead to the haves enjoying Funland and the have-nots relegated to swings and other basic playground equipment. Meanwhile a prospective rival slide operator unsuccessfully tried to get in on action by proposing to open a similar slide at the neighboring Belle Isle Children's Zoo where they would charge half the price. While the Common Council originally unanimously approved the Funland plan, within a year, they resolved to scale back the amusement park project to just the slide and to cut the price of a ride to 15 cents.

The New Slide

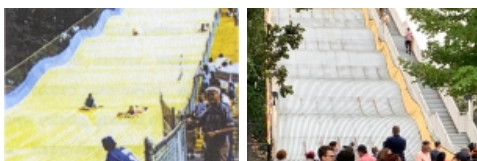
Several generations of riders later—around 2004—the original slide was in need of repair, and after a slide-less summer, plans were made to replace it with a newer slide for the 2005 season, which opened on June 24, 2005. This new slide is taller and wider than its predecessor. It was this slide that reopened following a lengthy pandemic-era closure to much buzz last weekend.

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The original Giant Slide appears near the end of its service here in a photo from the 2000 Belle Isle Park Master Plan. Since its re-reopening a whole lot of cameras



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