

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

Philadelphia Inquirer

April 18, 1897, p. 23

Cycle Route No. 1 (1897-98 Series.)

Philadelphia to Bristol, en Route to Trenton, Princeton and New York

The several centuries already announced to be held this season by the Welcome Wheelmen, the Wizbet, the Tioga and the Quaker City, over the Princeton and Newark course, draw early attention to the great highway between this city and New York, and suggest our giving it first place in our 1897 series of Trips Awheel. The first stage of the journey, which is presented here to-day, is a favorite with very many cyclists for whom centuries have no special attraction.

GETTING OUT OF TOWN.

In the minutes of Council for the 19th of the 9th month, 1686, we are informed that, on that date,

“The Council taking into consideration the unevenness of the road from Philadelphia to the Falls of Delaware (now Trenton) agreed that a Committee and the Surveyors of the County meet and lay out a more commodious road from the broad street in Philadelphia to the falls aforesaid.”

What a boon it will be when our present councils have finally smoothed down the “unevenness” of the road from “the broad street” not, indeed, all the way to Trenton, but even as far as Nicetown lane, the direct road to our first objective point, Frankford.

Time was when we struck the lane by way of Rising Sun lane and Butler street (see map), but the latter was barred up by the railroad company a couple of years ago; then some of us went to Frankford via Rising Sun lane, the Old Second street pike and Asylum road; this route, however, is longer and hilly – altogether an undesirably prelude to a long ride. On the other hand, Kensington and Frankford avenues are only available for wheelmen for whom miles of Belgian block have no terror, so that, pending the cutting through of Erie avenue, we can hardly do better than follow the zigzag line shown on the map.

We go up North Broad street to Lehigh avenue (three miles of asphalt to being with); turn east into Lehigh avenue as far as Fifth street (most of it asphalt), turn north on Fifth for seven blocks, then branch off R into Glenwood avenue and L into Second street. Here two blocks of a disgraceful roadway that has been unimproved for a quarter of a century brings us past the extreme end of Erie avenue (referred to above), to the disjointed extremity of Butler street at the corner of New Cathedral cemetery. We turn R along the cemetery and spin merrily eastward down Nicetown lane.

NICETOWN LANE.

This Nicetown lane was once the nightmare of many a cyclist; indeed it would have been useless to us at that time, had it not been for the breakneck goat-path that ran up and down the embankment by the side of it. A man picking his way along that path on an old "ordinary" took his life in his own hand every time. And what comments were made on the apparent irony of the name "Nice"-town lane!

It so happens that Nicetown, to which it leads westward, has no connection with the adjective "nice" at all. It was once "Necetown;" the "Widow Nece's house" was one of those that were burnt down by the British for mere spite on their return from an unsuccessful sortie during their occupancy of this city; and farther back it was Neus' town, so called after a German settler of that name.

Anyhow, the present appellation of the lane only impressed its wretchedness the more forcibly upon us, and it was an immense relief to us to see it being piked in 1894.

Seven and a quarter miles from start, we cross Kensington avenue; whether we turn L into it, or keep straight on to the old mill ahead of us, we strike the asphalt of the main street in Frankford (in reality a continuation of Frankford avenue) in a few whirls of our wheels.

FRANKFORD.

Every conceivable locality under the sun may have its namesake in this cosmopolitan country of ours; that "Frankford" should have been transplanted from the banks of the Rhine to those of the Delaware will seem but natural when we recollect that fifteen thousand acres of land hereabouts were purchased from William Penn in 1683 by the Frankford Company, whose representative here was Francis Daniel Pastorius, the founder of Germantown.

Frankford is alive with cyclists, and to their influence is no doubt due the recent improving of this and the neighboring highways.

As we run up this main street, notice L the date on the Jolly Post Inn; as far back as 1768 it was advertised for sale as a "noted inn."

A little further up (8 ¼ m.) as we pass by the Seven Stars Hotel, note, for future reference, the Frankford and Oxford pike branching off L on its way to the Old Second street pike.

The asphalt creases at Harrison street and the pavement over which we ride down to Little Tacony Creek is none of the smoothest; in order to appreciate it, such as it is, you should have known its predecessor.

At the foot of Rocky Hill, or the entrance to Cedar Hill Cemetery (8 ¾ m.), the road bifurcates; bear R for the Bristol pike; the L branch is the Bustleton pike; should you ever use it, have your saddle nicely padded and your pockets well stocked with pennies for toll.

This turn R, opposite Kiggins' Hotel, is Bridge street, which leads to the steamboat wharf on the Delaware.

THE BRISTOL PIKE.

Up the hill we climb, pass the North Cedar Hill Cemetery L, the Krakauer Beth Elohim Burial Ground, R, and down we run as comfortably as the habitual corduroy condition of this stretch permits, to Wissinoming Creek. "The place where we were scared" the Indians call it; it is a place where the Quaker city Wheelmen recently started a country house of their own.

Those smokey chimneys, yonder R also, show you the location of Tacony; this red clay bed labeled "Unruh street" would lead you there; so would this new (at present unnamed) stone road, a little farther.

Township line or Cottman street crosses our road, 11 m. from start, and makes a bee line R to Ryers Station on the Old Second street pike.

Now watch R for "Spring Brook," in the country seat that Edwin Forrest, the eminent tragedian, bequeathed in 1866 as a home for retired actors. The farm covers more than 100 acres, and the mansion is a veritable museum of old-time souvenirs.

And in a few minutes we reach the centre of Holmesburg, at the Green Tree (11 ¾ m.).

HOLMESBURG.

A thriving place is Holmesburg and an old settlement too, although laid out as a town only since 1800. Philadelphia was quite a "wee, young thing" when the old Lewis Mill was erected here on the Pennypack Creek in 1697; and from far and near, grain was brought across from New Jersey, as well as from William Penn's domain, to this, the only mill then in existence west of New England.

Indeed, tradition has it that the Pennypack was deep enough at high tide in those days for the small brigs and brigantines that traded with the West India Islands; and up they sailed to the very mill and got cargoes of barreled flour for their foreign trade.

The mill stood the wear and tear of almost 200 years, and ground the flour of successive generations until October 11, 1880, when a fire destroyed it; if you wish to see what is left of the venerable old thing, run down the next turn R, Mill street; it is but a short ride.

The continuation of Mill street on L, labeled "Welsh Road," would bring you to another memento of our early days. About a mile distant, near Rowland Station, is old "Crispin Cemetery," in which a modest monument bears, among others, the following inscription:

In
Memory of
THOMAS HOLME,
Died 1695,
Aged 71.
Surveyor-General of
WILLIAM PENN.
He drafted the plan

And laid out the city
of
PHILADELPHIA.

Need you be told, after this, whose name it is that “Holme’s burg” commemorates?

Nor is this the only local remembrance of the worthy Irishman who proved so serviceable to William Penn. The “Thomas Holme Free Library” of this place, containing some 3000 volumes, owes its existence to a legacy left by him.

See the Washington Hotel on R? Time was when this hostelry and a blacksmith shop were the only two human dwellings for miles along this road.

TO BUCKS COUNTY.

This hill going down to the Pennypack and its counterpart on the other side are noted as almost the only two worthy of the name between Philadelphia and Trenton.

This town on top of the eastern hill is Collegeville (don’t confound it with that other Collegeville, the official name of the old Perkiomen Bridge, in Montgomery County).

The General Wayne Inn, here on L, was once the Farmers’ Hotel, and is over 180 years old.

Three-quarters of a mile farther, opposite the fine old Brown estate (Brown Brothers, of Chesnut street), notice L the road to Bustleton and to Byberry. That elegant mansion you see on that road is Senator Porter’s; ex-Speaker Walton’s is about 100 yards back of it.

Half a mile farther, Stevenson road, L, would bring you to Torresdale, with its well-known Morelton Inn and a cluster of beautiful suburban homes.

Fifteen miles from the start we pass Torresdale Park and reach the ultima thule of Philadelphia county, separated from Bucks, as everybody knows, by yonder Poquessing Creek.

THE RED LION.

Over the creek we go (“Poquessing” means “mouse,” or “mousy” creek), and up we climb that sharp rise to the Red Lion Inn.

You may have seen a picture of it on the drop curtain of the Walnut Street Theatre. Here it is in the reality, very much the same as it was when Washington’s army encamped around it in 1781 on its march to Yorktown, where,

“Cornwallis led a country dance
The like was never seen, sir;
Much retrograde and little advance
And all with General Greene, sir.”

Seven years before that, on August 20, 1774, the Massachusetts delegates to the first Continental Congress, Samuel and John Adams, Thomas Cushing and Robert Treat Paine, has stopped here also on their way to Philadelphia, and had dined at the festive board of the Red Lion.

That ornamental iron gate on the road L below the Red Lion is the entrance to Colonel Edward Morrell's estate; the old Whelan homestead, up that road, was opened last week as the new home of the Torresdale County Club.

AN UNPLEASANT STRETCH.

Three-quarters of a mile beyond the inn our stone road ceases and we strike the loose sandy soil that keeps so many Philadelphia cyclists from paying more frequent visits to the capital of New Jersey, and from this point onward the sidepath is our only friend.

No matter how bad the road is, beware of the sidewalk though this next village, Andalusia. This is the place where, one day last summer, a quantity of tacks were carefully placed along the walk, with the business end upward, and a number of unwary cyclists had their tires badly injured.

A true Andalusian would have been too proud to descend to such practices. You have read, no doubt, about Andalusia, the Moorish "Land of the West," from one of whose ports, Palos, Columbus set sail on that eventful 3d of August, 1492. That name Andalusia was imported to this spot on the Bristol pike by a Philadelphia merchant, John Craig, "n memory of his successful ventures to Spain and her colonies."

Of course we must at any risk venture on the side path when we get out of the village. If we were compelled to use the roadway between this and Trenton we should have to bid this pike good-by, that's all.

Do we pay toll at this next crossing (16 1/4 m.)? Toll for what, in the name of the prophet?

Take note as you pass by of the turning R to Andalusia wharf (one mile distant), and of the L road to Byberry (two miles). A few yards farther that other L turn goes to Hulmeville, and almost opposite, on R, that imposing pile of stone buildings is a home for colored children. The railroad station, a short distance at the back of it, is Cornwell's.

At Maud Postoffice we are a little over 17 miles from start. Wonder who this particular Maud is or was.

And this is Eddington; L to Trevoise, 4 m.; R to Eddington Station. See that large, red brick building through the trees on the left? It is St. Francis' Industrial School for Orphan Boys. Our path, right here, is rather better than it used to be; and we are told there will be a general improvement all along this road in the near future.

And where could "Bridgewater" (19 ¼ m.) be but on the bank of a stream? Yet, stay, in England I came across at least one Bridgewater that has no connection with either a bridge or water. William the Conqueror had a boon companion, Walter de Douay, to whom he presented a tract of land. This

naturally became known as Burgh Walter, the “town of Walter,” and in the course of time Burgh Walter was meaninglessly corrupted to Bridgewater. So you see, after all,

“My gran’ther’s rule was safer’n’t is to crow;
‘Don’t never prophesy – onless ye know.’”

ON TO BRISTOL.

We cross the Neshaminy Creek, wind round to the left by the power house of the trolley company and the former grounds of the Neshaminy Grove House, the only remains of which at the present date are the charred walls you see yonder.

And this is Croydon Station – a funny place to call by that name. “Croydon” in old Celtic means “chalk hill,” and is very appropriate to the original Croydon, near London, but what brought it here?

That lane on R, by the side of the station, saw not a few wounded soldiers brought to what was known as St. James’ Hospital, at the time of the war. The building is now unoccupied; should you care to see it, you will reach it in a couple of minutes. There are picnic grounds close to it, and a wharf, whence you might return home by the Bristol steamer, if you were so minded, during the summer season.

By the way, is it not about time that our conservative friends should give up speaking of this place as “Schenck?” The dilapidated railroad shed that helped keep up the name long after it had been disused disappeared from the face of the earth two or three years ago.

What has not disappeared, fortunately, by the edge of the stretch of sand which now separates us from Bristol is the tiny side path that awaits us here from year to year. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

BRISTOL.

At the corner of St. Mark’s Cemetery (21 ½ m.) bear to the right, and a few minutes later we enter the borough of Bristol.

Keep off the sidewalk, don’t ride faster than seven miles an hour or without a bell, or at night without a light; if you do, you’ll be fined \$5, in witness whereof you may read the Burgess’ ordinance, if you want to.

At Closson’s Hotel our cyclometers register 22 miles from the Public Buildings. This hostelry has been a favorite with wheelmen from the earliest years of cycling; get some of the older members of the Frankford B. C. to tell you about the days when they rode to Closson’s almost every Sunday on their “ordinaries.” And if you make a stay here, don’t forget exhibiting your Inquirer Route Coupon at settling time; you’ll find it to your advantage.

Of the many interesting features of old Bristol something will be said before we start on the second stage of our journey.

A.E.