

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

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Cycle Route No. 26

The Towpath Along the Susquehanna. A Charming Ride from Port Deposit, Md. to Wrightsville, PA., Taken by the Writer Within the Last Three Weeks.

Our Trip No. 25 left us at Port Deposit, Md. You have heard, of course, of the early explorer, Capt. John Smith. The uppermost point that he reached on the Susquehanna was in this vicinity, and the first ferry established right here was named Smith's Ferry on that account. In the course of time said ferry passed out of the hands of Thomas Cresap – a familiar name in the history of Maryland – who had owned it as early as 1729, into those of Colonel John Cresswell (some of whose descendants are still large landowners here) and it went by the name of Cresswell's Ferry; meanwhile the tiny town that had grown up at the ferry – so tiny even in 1773 that the British when they came to Lapidum did not trouble to enter it – was known as Rock Run; and ultimately, to put an end to the inconvenience arising from these several names, the Legislature christened it "Port Deposit," in 1813.

The little place is a veritable mine of granite, as you may see; its inhabitants number about 2000; it has nothing in the way of architectural attraction save the imposing "Jacob Tome Institute," opposite the mansion of the multi-millionaire of that name; but there, right and left of us, flows the Susquehanna in its centuries old beauteousness.

EN ROUTE AGAIN.

Can't we cross it on a bridge over to Lapidum? No; there has been no bridge here practically since 1854. The structure that did duty for one in those days, had stood the task for twenty-four years, when one span of it was broken "by a drove of cattle passing over it;" it was never repaired and a freshet carried it away in 1857.

Its predecessor, by the way (and the first erected here) was destroyed in a peculiar manner in 1823. It was set on fire by the friction of an iron-shod sleigh that was driven swiftly over it.

If you are bound for Baltimore you may ferry across to Lapidum and then (1) go straight out through Hopewell Crossroads, Churchville and Belair to Baltimore, 39 miles, or (2) follow the canal towpath to Havre de Grace and reach Baltimore via Aberdeen, Abingdon and Cowenton, 48 miles.

A MISTAKE AT STARTING.

Our road thus far had been so dusty, so hilly, so stony; the balance of it to Baltimore held such little promise of betterment; the river looked so tempting that my little horse turned its head instinctively northward when starting time came; and I didn't find it in my heart to say "no."

We might have saved ourselves some trouble had we ferried across and got on to the towpath on the western bank at once; but we started so early that the boat had not begun running yet – so early that there was nobody up at John Falls' hotel when we left, and I came away without my breakfast, a mistake I must warn you against; the sequel will tell you why.

PORT DEPOSIT TO CONOWINGO.

A rolling road varying from “poor” to “good” takes us out of Port Deposit, past the quarries, and past Canal Station on our way towards Conowingo, where we shall find the first bridge north of Perryville.

Four and a half miles from start, don’t mind that conspicuous poster by the roadside, it’s about “fresh shad;” rather look out for your wheel down this steep, sandy descent.

This little town is Rowlandsville (not to be confounded with Rawlinsville, a few miles further north in Pennsylvania). Pass under the railroad bridge; cross Octoraro Creek (a Pennsylvania stream, even though its mouth is in Maryland, for it rises ‘way up near Sadsbury, on the Lancaster pike); bear L beyond it, then R around Rowlandsville Station, and on through these lovely woods.

Beware of that railroad crossing, a little over 7 miles from start; and about one mile further we strike the hamlet of Conowingo. It contains 100 inhabitants, one paper mill, likewise shut down, and one hotel, at this date opened, where a very frugal breakfast costs 40 (forty) cents!

Let us hasten to pay 5 cents toll at the foot of yonder bridge and rush through it (or through them rather, for there are in reality two, stretching over a distance of three-fourths of a mile) over to the other bank, nine miles from Port Deposit.

WILL KNOW BETTER HEREAFTER.

There we jot down in our notebook: “Port Deposit to Shure’s Landing via Conowingo, a big mistake; road, only fair; breakfast, ditto; hills, steep; hotel rates, ditto. In future, breakfast at Port Deposit and ferry across to Lapidum.

ALONG THE SUSQUEHANNA CANAL.

For this time we carry our wheels down the stone steps by the side of the weirhouse, across the canal on the footbridge, turn L along the towpath; and now for a ride that will soon make us forget any unpleasant experience we may have had on our way hither.

To say that the 30 miles’ ride along the disused canal towpath between this and Wrightsville is worth a special trip from Philadelphia is no exaggeration.

This is no place to draw an accurate pen picture of it and in any case I am painfully conscious that no jottings of mine could do justice to the picturesque scenes continuously presented to us by the Susquehanna along this ramble of ours on the very verge of her waters. Pray read between the lines and see the interjection points with which every second paragraph is dotted in the writer’s mind.

The easiest kind of ramble, too, this is; for a towpath must needs be level, and this one is, in addition, both smooth and free from the dangers that usually arise from the narrow width of other.

A TRIFLING DRAWBACK.

The only trifling drawback to the comfort of the traveler awheel is the condition of the bridges along the path; they will necessitate here and there a dismount, and at all times a little caution; but what of that? It stands to reason, of course, that where there is little or no vehicular traffic, it would not pay the thinly-scattered population hereabouts to repair the periodical havoc made by the combined violence of the tidal water and the inland streams, tiny and harmless as some of these may appear at this season.

Here is one, whose mouth you may notice on our L, a couple of miles from Shure's Landing. It makes up in breadth for what it lacks in depth, and they have named it Broad Creek; why not?

That's a handsome landscape on our R on the opposite bank of the river; is it not? It is part of Mount Pleasant township, in Cecil county, and it well deserves its name, you will agree.

BACK INTO PENNSYLVANIA.

And while we gaze about, we cross the State Line and come back to dear old Pennsylvania.

See that bridge spanning over our path (16 miles)? It will take you across to a hotel in yonder cluster of houses. This is Peach Bottom. Opposite, on R is Peter's Creek, in Lancaster county; great centres of activity, these, in the old canal days.

Should you not care to call a halt here, pass under the bridge and straight on. From this point onward all signs of ordinary vehicular traffic disappear from our path, but it is none the less excellent for cycling.

A LESSON BY THE WAYSIDE.

You should have heard the lesson I was taught, unintentionally though it was given to me, the very last time I was here, two weeks ago.

My appearance on the towpath near this house, one mile above Peach Bottom, diverted for a moment the attention of a little child who was watching the antics of a diminutive black pig about the place; and as I passed by, I threw out to him that meaningless of all meaningless human salutations, "Hello!"

"How do?" the pert little tot replied.

Well, thought I to myself, that's the time the baby scored one on the man.

THE HAVOC OF THOSE CREEKS.

Here is a wreck (about two miles above Peach Bottom) that will show you the strength of yonder creek on L. Muddy Creek, so-called. Such as you see it, it supplies the power for a big electric plant some three miles up its course; and not so long ago it just cleared away the bridge that stood here. Now we can easily walk along the edge of the dried-up dam on R and bear L up the embankment on the other side; in the rainy season we can just as easily be rowed across the stream.

A RELIC OF CANAL DAYS.

Twenty miles from Port Deposit, notice what probably was a prosperous store in canal days; its owner informed me that this was known as "Onion's Wilderness," not indeed, that the land is particularly adapted to the familiar odorous bulb of the lily family, but that it once belonged to a man of that name. He further supplied me with a large glass of delicious cider and when I laid down my modest nickel, wanted to know if I meant to pay for two. (Oh, that breakfast at Conowingo!)

BALTIMORE ROADS, BUT NOT FOR US.

And here is McCall's Ferry (23 m.); see it's spick-and-span postoffice on the offside of the canal. If you crossed the river here, one of the straightest roads you ever traveled would take you to Atglen and Parkesburg and on to Coatesville on the Lancaster pike (we shall be in that section one of these days). Its

continuation on our L meanders through Harford and Baltimore counties to Baltimore city; so do most roads in this section; alas that there should not be one really fit for our use!

Be careful of these rough and tumble bridges! Here is one (25 m.) the boards of which are, at this date, four inches, actual measurement above the level of the path. Some wheels are not worth sparing, I am told. Mine is; and so is yours, I feel sure.

YORK FURNACE AND LONG LEVEL.

As our cyclometers register 27 m. from start, another hotel awaits us on L. This is York Furnace Postoffice; the furnace itself is a short distance higher on our path.

You know we are in York county, of course; there is a road, right here, on the L of the canal, that would take us to York city. Can you tell me what induced the Proprietaries in 1741 to bestow upon this section the name of the most begot of the Stuarts? You remember Andrew Marvell's estimate of the man:

"What is thy opinion of James, duke of York?"

"The same that the frogs had of Jupiter's stork."

But this is a digression.

Another wrecked bridge (27 1/2 m.) shows us the location of the furnace and of the creek that once fed it.

Opposite on R lies the lovely valley of the Tequea Creek, the earthly paradise of the Indians of (what is now) Lancaster county.

A mile and we come to Shenk's Ferry, a well-known spot on both sides of the Susquehanna.

And a little farther, on the eastern bank, is the mouth of the serpentine Conestoga.

And a few miles' additional riding amidst these wild panoramas brings us to Newbridgeville (34 m.) a hamlet where a glass of real cow's milk may be obtained at the grocery store (some of us know the utility of these jottings); and at the end of another four miles we reach Long Level, at the head of what was known as "the five mile level" to Wrightsville.

Here a good and plentiful dinner costs 35 cents. (Breakfast 40 cents at Conowingo!)

Is not a water surface deceptive to the eye, when we attempt to measure it? Would you believe that the lovely Susquehanna is two and a half miles wide, right here?

Any fishing? Why, you come and try it at any of the localities we traversed to-day.

THE END OF A GORGEOUS RIDE.

Don't be tempted by that good-looking road in front of the hotel; keep to the towpath as long as you can. See that long, red-painted iron bridge yonder, and the red-brick town with the tall chimney stacks; that's our destination; but before we get there, keep an eye open for a lock four and a half miles from Long Level; there we have to bid farewell to the towpath, cross the canal on the footbridge and make our way around the lockhouse and through large tobacco fields on to the pike for a quarter of a mile.

These fields belong to Dr. J. L. Jameson, of Wrightsville, to whose courtesy the public owes the use of the cross-cut through them.

WRIGHTSVILLE.

In a few minutes we enter Front street, Wrightsville, and when we reach the station we have covered forty-two miles from Port Deposit.

Wrightsville is on the main road from Philadelphia to Gettysburg; and who, that is within forty miles of Gettysburg does not feel a desire to pay it a visit? On this occasion, however, circumstances (might as well say "duty" and have done with it) compelled me to turn homeward via Lancaster; and as this will form a portion of some of our subsequent trips, the present one may conveniently be brought to an end at Wrightsville. Suffice it to say that the road from Columbia to Lancaster is at present excellent, but that it will be some time before the Lancaster-Philadelphia pike can lay claim to any such eulogy.

THE BRIDGES AT WRIGHT'S FERRY.

The construction of the beautiful bridge which now spans the one and a quarter mile that separates this town from Columbia dates from yesterday; and the wreck of its predecessor, one year ago almost to a day, is still fresh in our memories. This is the fourth and naturally the finest bridge that has stood here since Wright's Ferry became Wrightsville. The first (approved by Governor Snyder in 1809) was swept away like so many of its contemporaries by a freshet; the second was burnt down in 1863 by order of General D. N. Couch, just in time to hinder the Confederates, who had reached Wrightsville under General Gordon, from invading Lancaster county.

The fire that destroyed the bridge at that time also burned a number of houses in Wrightsville and would probably have destroyed a larger part of the town had it not been for the assistance rendered by the Confederates in quenching the flames. This, by the way, led to a little episode which you may not have heard; it was told once by "The Spy" of Columbia.

GENERAL GORDON AT WRIGHTSVILLE.

The day after the fire General Gordon and his staff were handsomely entertained at dinner by a lady in Wrightsville, an unusual attention, which Gordon interpreted to mean that his hostess was a sympathizer with the Southern cause. During the course of the dinner the General threw out a hint as to the lady's sympathies and was dumbfounded when she told him that her husband and son were in the Union army by her advice and consent, and that she prayed to the God of battle daily for the success of the Union cause; but as the rebel soldiers had rendered her a great service in saving her home from destruction by fire, she thought she could do little less than return the courtesy by entertaining their commanding general.

The lady, whose name was not published at the time, is said to have been one of the Lloyds, of Wrightsville, a family who moved to our own city soon after the war.

A.E.

P.S. – The itinerary along Susquehanna's bank being so unmistakable, no route-coupon seems required for this trip. As to the hotels by the wayside, enough has been said in the text to protect the inner man and the traveler's purse against possible contingencies. A.E.