

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

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Cycle Route No. 28 (1897- 98 series)

Philadelphia to Lancaster: A Continuation of Trip No. 20

Judging from inquiries received at this office, it would really look as though the number of cyclists desirous to ride from this city either to Baltimore or Lancaster increased daily in the same ratio as the obstacles to a pleasant journey awheel to either of them.

The poor condition of the Lancaster "Pike" west of Coatesville suggested my running over the old Lancaster "Road," two weeks ago, to see if perchance there would be any advantage in taking it in preference to the former.

I fear it is six of one and a half dozen of the other in dry weather; while, during or immediately after rain, the pike, such as it is, is undoubtedly the lesser evil of the two.

PHILADELPHIA TO DOWNINGTON.

We traveled the Lancaster Pike as far as Downingtown, in our trip No. 20 (Aug. 22).

We now retrace our well-known itinerary through our beautiful western suburbs, cross over the railroad at Berwyn; and as we pedal away towards Green Tree and look for the first vista of the Chester Valley that usually greets us here, we see nothing between us and the opposite range of hills but a dense mist.

What if it means rain? Let us see what time it is: 7:15 A. M. "Rain before 7, clear by 11," the old jingle says, but it does not fit this time.

You've got no faith in old weather saws? I have. Show me a brick wall and, all theories against its existence notwithstanding, I will prostrate my belief at its foot most abjectly.

Some scientists will say, for instance, that there is no connection between the sun's crossing of a certain line in the celestial sphere and the weather changes popularly associated with the period in question; but what need we care whether the two facts can be theoretically reconciled, so long as they are constantly linked in practice, as they were again this very week (date of this trip, September 23).

In any case, we are in for fine weather to-day; see the glorious sun coming to cheer us.

Here we are at Green Tree! Shall we try the Indian King road? In truth, I am afraid of it; let us reach Downingtown as we did a few weeks ago, through Frazer, Glen Loch, Exton and Whitford.

Downingtown used to be reckoned midway between Philadelphia and Lancaster, and the "Midway House" tavern was a great favorite with the old-time wagoners. It has disappeared as a hostelry, but there are others nowadays, and one of them figured on the Inquirer Route-Coupon of Trip 20.

A POSSIBLE ROAD TO HARRISBURG.

Just outside the town, at the corner of the Baptist Church on R, notice the beginning of the Harrisburg and Downingtown pike; you might go to Harrisburg that way, following the picturesque pike through Brandywine Manor, Honeybrook, Blue Ball, Ephrata, Clay and Brickerville, and then branching R away from it through Cornwall and Lebanon so as to avail yourself of a better road for the balance of the journey by way of the Harrisburg and Reading pike. The distance from this corner to Harrisburg (by my cyclometer) is 79 miles.

Of the several ways to get to Harrisburg from Philadelphia, however, the best, in my judgment, is via Norristown, Pottstown and Reading, thence by the Harrisburg and Reading pike just alluded to.

GALLAGHERVILLE, THORNDALE AND CALN.

From Downingtown to Coatesville the road is not bad on the whole; the side path is better.

The next village is Gallagherville; they call it "Gallaggerville;" another grievance for poor Ireland, where every spalpeen knows that the proper pronunciation is "Gallaher," of course!

A mile off is Thorndale; if there be anything in a name, look out for your tires. L to the West Chester Road 4 m.; and a little farther, R to Guthrieville.

And two miles farther is Caln. The first settlers came from Calne, in Wilshire, England; and they must have thrived, too, for in 1726 a license was applied for by George Aston of this place; setting forth that he lived "on the great road leading from Philadelphia to Conestogoe" and was "grealty opprest by travelers."

Here 4 miles would take us to Mortonville on L and 5 miles to Brandywine Manor on R.

And now we run over that high bridge, and Coatesville is before us, (39 m.)

COATESVILLE.

Coatesville is a borough, too, as well as Downingtown, with a population running up very fast to the 4000 mark; quite a different place from what it looked when Moses Coates (whose father came over from Ireland about 1717) first settled on the banks of the Brandywine. It was the eastern branch of the Brandywine, you know, that we crossed at Downingtown; this one is the western.

THREE ROADS AHEAD.

Our little map shows three routes starting more or less directly westward from Coatesville. In addition to the poor condition of the roadbeds, there is a long steep gradient to overcome here. The well-known Mine Ridge and its offshoots stand across our way.

(1) THIS ONE AVOIDS THE RIDGE.

We can circumvent them by taking the Valley road through Pomeroy, Parkesburg and Atglen, there turning R through Christiana (Pa.) and striking the Lancaster pike through the "Gap" in the mountain, which was first utilized for a similar purpose, long ago, by the promoters of the Wilmington pike.

This itinerary is level, but the name of the road is "mud." This, however, will be found a patronymic not exclusively its own in the section.

(2) "PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST."

When I went straight through along the pike from this point last season I spoke of it as follows:

We keep straight on through West Coatesville past the Valley road on the L and Midway Hotel on the R.

This part of the borough was once a village named Midway, as it was half way between Philadelphia and Columbia. The fine railroad bridge (835 feet long and 73 high) which connects it with East Coatesville is worth a passing notice.

Mine Ridge now stands across our path, dividing Chester county from Lancaster county (certain well-filled coffers in Philadelphia could tell you how it came to be styled "Mine" Ridge). What if you have to do a little walking here and there? It will get you into training for climbing up the Alleghenies with your wheel some day.

It's only six miles to Sadsbury anyway, and when you strike Mount Vernon Hotel, 3 m. farther (49 m. from start) the invigorating air that fills your lungs at that elevation is alone "worth the price of admission to the whole show," as P. T. Barnum would have said.

And, moreover, a cyclist should have no soul, who could gaze, unmoved, from the top of this ridge on the panorama of hills.

"Broad, round and green that in the Southern sky,
With garniture of waving grass and grain,
Orchards and beechen forests, basking lie."

DOWN AGAIN.

The up grade from Coatesville to Mount Vernon Hotel spreads over nine miles of ground, practically speaking. The western slops is got over in less than three.

At the foot of the hill we strike old Slaymakerville. The Slaymakers came over from Strasburg, in Germany, as early as 1710.

A short distance L is the village that grew up around the Gap Tavern of other days and now bears the curt designation of "Gap."

For not being quite so rocky as on the ridge the pike is yet anything but smooth. Fortunately quite a number of resting places echelon our path, each tiny hamlet boasting its "hotel."

Here is Kinzer's (54 m.) and within three miles of it Williamstown and Leaman Place.

Paradise is but one mile farther. And, unsuggestive of an earthly paradise as is this present highway, it reminds me that the beautiful Pequea Valley on our R was the loved home of the Delaware Indians our familiar Lenni Lenape friends.

On Lafayette Hill, near this paradise, there long stood a pile of stones which marked the burial place of the Indian King Tanawa. It was raised by the original Huguenot settlers in this section, who were great friends of the "red man."

With many an up and down we reach Soudersburg (61 m. from home), and Greenland four miles farther. Here the pike, which has been gradually improving as we came nearer the end, becomes decidedly good. The next two miles to Conestoga Creek go far to make us forget their predecessors. There the old Lancaster road (alluded to above) joins us from the right at Bridgeport and we enter the city of Lancaster.

(3) THE OLD LANCASTER "ROAD."

Two weeks ago, as I said above, I decided to give the old Lancaster "road" a trial.

To reach it turn sharp R at the corner of Speakman's Hotel, in East Coatesville, and climb up a romantic hill (I did not say "an easy road") along the Brandywine. When you come to a bridge at Rock Run avoid a turn R which would bring you to Brandywine Manor; cross the bridge and, as you near the top of the hill (the disabling of my cyclometer along this very stretch prevents me from giving the exact distance), watch for a bifurcation and a small sign stuck on a tree on L with barely visible inscription, "Compas, 6 m."

Straight on you would ultimately strike the Lancaster road also, thorough Wagontown, but at the cost of an unprofitable detour.

We take the L fork, a fair clay road; hilly, of course.

At the next T crossing bear R and almost immediately L again, and you are on the old road from Philadelphia to Lancaster. There are abundant signs, just now, both here and further on; and the country is fine throughout, but our roadbed becomes very poor indeed, and we are glad to strike Compassville (or, for short, "Compas").

COMPASSVILLE (AND WAGONTOWN).

The Compass Hotel, standing here at the intersection of the roads, is the successor of the old "Mariner's Compass" Inn, which gave its name to the locality.

The origin of the name has excited some curiosity. Retired seamen have often been known to bestow on their inland homes names connected with their former calling, and in the absence of any historical evidence, this might be applicable as a guess to the present case; there is, however, a local tradition that the name was suggested by the remarkably sharp angles made here by the remarkable intersection of the several highways at this point.

By the way, the nearby Wagontown also owes its name to an old-time tavern on this road. "The Waggon," the relict of which is now used as a farm.

The inn is incidentally mentioned in the records of 1754 ; and in 1777, in the list of persons whom the Board of War requisitioned for wagons to remove the public stores in Philadelphia to the west side of the Schuylkill, we find "Wm. Clinging (Clingan) near the sign of the Waggon on the Lancaster Road."

SIDE GLANCES, RIGHT AND LEFT.

Passing various turns L to Gap and Mt. Vernon, R to Rockville and Honeybrook, we reach Pequea Postoffice, and the White Horse about 3 m. from Compassville.

The riding is still poor, though slightly better since we left Compassville. In wet weather it were folly to come this way awheel.

To Spring Garden Hotel and Ledger P. O. (2 m. farther) the roadside, if not the roadway, is an improvement.

Intercourse we reach at the end of 4 miles, and Bird-in-Hand 3 m. farther, with numerous branchings R and L, several (as might be expected) leading to Paradise (on the Lancaster pike).

AS TO PARADISE.

Nor must it be imagined that "Paradise" is nothing more than a name in this case. As a historical fact, when the place was first made a posttown ninety-three years ago, the original settler, Abraham Wittmer, desired it to be so designated "because to him it was a paradise."

Other have found their Eden elsewhere, judging from J. R. Musick's "Four Months in Paradise," in Godey's for October, whereby he means Harwall.

And, by the way, the current issue of St. Nicholas reminds us that according to the Mohammedan creed, ten animals besides man are admitted into Paradise: 1, the dog; 2, Balaam's ass; 3, Solomon's ant; 4, Jonah's whale; 5, the ram of Ishmael; 6, the Queen of Sheba's ass; 7, the camel of Salet; 8, the cuckoo of Belkis; 9, the ox of Moses; 10, the animals called Al Borak, which conveyed Mohammed to heaven.

A GRAND WIND-UP.

All this, by way of preparing you for what await us here after we have crossed cautiously the railroad track at Bird-in-Hand. Nothing less than a stone road (and no toll to pay, though there are toll houses) through Smoketown and Wittmer and on for seven miles to the Conestoga at Lancaster City! How about this for a finish?

Who said anything about bad roads, anyhow? Chester and Lancaster counties are worth seeing, at any cost; and a ride to Lancaster will repay any tourist awheel who can appreciate the beauties of nature and is in a positon to take the trip under favorable conditions.

For the rider against time a run to Lancaster at the present date offers nothing but labor, west of Coatesville.

The accident to my cyclometer having compelled me to rely on the generally untrustworthy mileage of roadside signs, I prefer not issuing a route-coupon for this part of the journey.

The distance from the Public Buildings to Centre Square and King street, in Lancaster, may, however, be put down to 69 miles.

A. E.