

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

Philadelphia Inquirer October 24, 1897, p. 36

Cycle Route 30 (1897 – 98 series)

Philadelphia to Harrisburg, En Route to Pittsburg (A Continuation of Either Trip 18 or Trip 28).

The traveler awheel from this city to Harrisburg has a choice of two pikes, the Reading and the Lancaster, and, in addition, a possible combination of the two by means of a link between Downingtown and Lebanon.

Until a couple of weeks ago I was unfamiliar with the present condition of the Harrisburg-Lancaster pike; now that I have gone over it (though not entirely awheel, as will be seen later on), I shall henceforth keep to my old favorite, the Reading route.

Should, however, the use of either of the other two prove compulsory on my readers at any time, a description of all three here follows:

(1) THE LANCASTER-HARRISBURG PIKE.

Starting from Centre Square, Lancaster, make your way out to the corner of Prince and James streets; there bear R and you have the Harrisburg pike before you. Decidedly roughish you will think it; that description will apply to it until we reach Elizabethtown, the roadside path (when you can get at it) is our best friend throughout.

Three miles from start at Oreville, 1 ½ miles' ride would take us to Rohrerstown on L, and three miles on R to Petersburg.

Two miles farther, past the Black Horse, we climb up to a school, or meeting house, where a turn L invites us to the Marietta pike, 2 m.

Landisville (7 ½ m.)) next greets us with its promising rows of young trees. Be careful, as usual, of yonder railroad tracks, and a mile or less takes us to Salunga.

“Salunga” sounds Italian, but in reality it is only the tail end of “Chicquesalunga,” our own rendering of the Indian name of the creek we are coming to presently, ¾ m. from here.

What was done with the front part of “Chicquesalunga?” Why, it was bestowed on the village on the bank of the creek. Here it is, it has been known as Chiques, Chicques, etc.; its postal designation is now Chickies; imagine the possibility of a further corruption to “Roosters.”

We bear R of course over the creek; a little farther we notice a turn R to Mastersonville; our road is fair, the path is good and we soon strike Mt. Joy, on little Chicquesalunga Creek.

This little borough was laid out the same year as Madison declared war on Great Britan, 1812; its founder was Jacob Rohrer (we alluded to Rohrerstown a while ago).

A mile and a half farther, Florin lies on our way (which? a gold or silver one?)

Three-quarters of a mile beyond Florin Hotel, we turn sharp R under railroad track.

Rheems is our next village (17 m.). Down hill we run under another railroad bridge and turn L beyond it.

This next borough (19 m.) is Elizabethtown, and here at the Central Hotel we are told that the nine miles which separate us from Middletown are absolutely uncyclable that all wheelmen take the steam cars when they come here, etc., etc.

A keen sense of the duty I owe to my readers impelled me to see things with my own eyes, even on this proverbially untravelable stretch, and we turned the heads of our wheels for it on the 5th of the present month. A couple of miles proved quite sufficient to convince us that it is in truth unfit for cycling, or, indeed, for any kind of vehicular traffic, and we returned "sadder and wiser" to the railroad depot.

Middletown is the "middle" town between Lancaster and Carlisle, and it was laid here, where Swatara Creek throws itself into the Susquehanna, away back in 1755.

The nine miles which bring us from this borough to Harrisburg, via Steelton (the home of Bessemer steel), are fair, but when we add the discomforts of the Lancaster-Harrisburg pike to those of the Philadelphia-Lancaster pike, this 105-mile route to Harrisburg cannot be said to be an enjoyable one so far as actual riding is concerned.

(2) THE READING-HARRISBURG PIKE.

Writing of this route last season, I spoke of it in part as follows (for road from this city to Reading, see Trip No. 18):

We go down the whole length of Penn street to that high bridge at the Pennsylvania R. R. depot and mark this spot as being 60 miles from home. The Harrisburg pike lies before you; perhaps I ought to give it its official title, the "Berks and Dauphin turnpike," begin in the year of grace 1816, and since then more or less carefully kept in repair. Its present condition is probably the best it has ever been in. You will find it excellent in some sections and never bad except toward its western extremity, where we have an opportunity to make a slight detour and avoid its ruggedness, if we choose to do so.

WESTWARD THROUGH BERKS.

A neat new suburb, Wyomissing, is springing up on our left, a mile beyond the toll gate; and three miles beyond it, on Cacoosing Creek, is the village of Sinking Spring.

The "sinking" spring for which the place was first noted and the water of which used to rise and sink again in the same basin, is here near the tollgate as we enter the village.

About the centre of the village we observe a turn R to Bernville and one L to Black Horse.

A few minutes bring us to Wernersville (68 m.). What think you of the South Mountain range yonder on our left? That large establishment that we see from the pike at the foot of that mountain, L, a short distance out of Wernersville, is the Pennsylvania State Insane Asylum (for chronic cases); those others, farther up on the heights, are summer resorts and sanitariums.

And that furnace father on gave its name to this next little place, Robesonia (71 m.).

We now strike in the direction of the Tulpehocken – the name is familiar to Germantowners – a creek studded with mills along its course through Lebanon and Berks counties; and near its bank we find a population of 1100 people clustered around the settlement made here in 1762 by Johann Womelsdorf, and now bearing his name.

Here we clear the rampart of mountains that has protected our left flank since we left Reading. On the whole our road has been at most “rolling” of late; this rise through the village (74 m.) gives us a foretaste of a couple of steep climbs that we shall have to overcome almost immediately; fortunately the road surface is A 1.

At the next tollgate, that turn L goes to Sheridan; who can hear of “Sheridan” and not be reminded of “Little Phil,” one of the few generals the world has known who were never defeated, and one who often wrung victory out of the very jaws of defeat. It does one good to see such names scattered about over the country. Let’s have more of them.

Stouchsburg (77 m.) is our next stage, with turnings L, beyond it, to Shaefferstown and Rehrersburg. Decidedly Teutonic names, these; that’s nothing to the people themselves; it’s a case of German, German everywhere, and not a word of genuine Deutsch.

INTO LEBANON COUNTY.

And we cross the line into Lebanon county, one of the finest in the State, lying in the great limestone valley between the South Mountain on our left and the Kittatinny range on our right. And we run up and down, and up again (a big long “up” this time) to Lambach’s Church and through the hamlet of Chickensville (not one colored face to be seen about the place either) and right along to Myerstown (81 m.).

Issac Myers, who laid the place out in 1768, would be proud of it now with its thrifty couple of thousand inhabitants.

Bahney House here on the right is a favorite with wheelmen hereabouts, for they get “special” rates from mine host Cornelius Moyer.

We had the company of the trolley cars from Reading to Womelsdorf; we shall have it again from this place to Lebanon.

Jonestown, an important borough, may be reached from here or from a crossing, three miles off, at the Half Way, as they used to call the tavern there, it being thought sufficiently near midway from Reading to Harrisburg to justify the designation. The tavern is now a private house, but the name clings on still.

And we have our “Narrows,” too, right here. This next tollgate is called after them; and there they are on our right a short distance from the pike; but if you look at them with recollections of the Narrows of the Delaware still vivid in your mind, you are doomed to disappointment. On the other hand, the good road we have here is not to be compared to the Delaware River road; one thing compensates for the other.

This turn L at the Narrows tollgate would bring us to Fredericksburg, formerly Nassau, formerly Stumpstown, a little town laid out by Frederick Stump in the middle of last century, and the almost entire destruction of which by fire created quite a sensation in the State some seventy years ago.

And here is another Avon! "Sweet Swan of Avon," does thy shade haunt the headwaters of the Tulpehocken?

LEBANON CITY.

From England we jump into Syria; here we are at Lebanon (87 m.). A big place this is; had nearly reached the fifteen thousand population mark last census. The creek on which it stands is the Quitapahilla. Some people sneer at Indian names; this is one that our smoothest poet could use, surely. By the way, it was this Quitapahilla, along with the Tulpehocken (which we followed for some miles) and the Swatara (which we are coming to presently) that supplied the water for the Union Canal, which intersects this county from east to west.

I dread referring to the possibility of accidents in connection with our trips; still, in case any mishap should befall you, it's a good thing to know that there are several fully-equipped bicycle concerns in this city.

Cornwall, with its mines, lies five miles on our left; and south of it, is the famous Conestoga wagon road of former days, of which more, anon.

INTO DAUPHIN COUNTY.

Through Sunny Side we run to Annville (92 miles), the old "Millerstown" of last century; for, you must know, although it has only as many hundred inhabitants as Lebanon has thousands, there is little difference between them in point of age. And across the Quitapahilla and up a sharp rise; these have not been numerous on our path of late; the road is good anyway.

And here is Palmyra (96 ½ miles); they used to call it Palmstown once on a time; I call it a neat little town, with most abominable street crossings of raised and uneven flag stones, just the kind of thing to snap a weak bicycle frame in two or shake a buggy to pieces for that matter. Ever suffered in that way myself? No, thank you; it is for others I wrote this.

Do you see this X with turn L to Campbellstown and R to Grantville? The other side of it we are in Dauphin county. It was first settled by French traders in the seventeenth century and by them christened Dauphin in honor of the "Dauphin," or eldest son of the then reigning family in France. Of one of these particular scions of royalty it was said that "there was enough in him to make four kings and one honest man." Well, never mind; that didn't prevent Dauphin from growing into a county with 97,000 inhabitants, a round dozen boroughs and a city that bears the proud title of capital of our dear old Commonwealth.

HUMMELSTOWN.

Be cautious as you ride down to this creek (Spring Creek), in sight of the town of Derry yonder on R; and again, when you go down this other steep descent, a mile farther, beyond which we find Swatara Station (101 miles).

What is that horrible thing we strike, somewhat more than a mile beyond this? Why, it's the beginning of the Main street of Hummelstown borough. Since it was first laid out, exactly 170 years ago, by Frederick Hummel, they changed the name of the place from Frederickstown to Hummesltown; but one thing they never attempted to change, apparently is this execrable stony track.

Unfortunately, with a slight intermission farther on as we go through the town, it is a foretaste of what the remainder of the pike is like between this place and Harrisburg. This unfortunate ending to our pleasant trip we can avoid, if circumstances are favorable.

THE PIKE, OR CHAMBERS' HILL.

We cross Swatara Creek; from the summit of the next hill we obtain a charming view of the Swatara Valley; and now a mile beyond the creek, is a turning L that I always take in preference to the pike, although I am informed by Secretary Anson P. Dave (of the L. A. W. State Highway Committee at Harrisburg), that local wheelmen use the latter, bad as it is, rather than this Chambers' Hill road, which I patronize. Their great objection to it is its clayey nature, which, in wet weather, must render it scarcely ridable.

As we are blessed with dry weather to-day, and the wind is just in the right direction to push us up Chambers' Hill, come and see it for yourselves.

Way up there, is a noted church, the predecessor of which was destroyed by just such a hurricane as we have today, five years ago; no wonder, on so exposed an elevation as this. Need your attention be drawn to our commanding view of the surrounding country?

And by and by we strike Oberlin (109) miles. You have heard of Jean Frederic Oberlin, the Alsatian philanthropist of world-wide fame, who died seventy years ago.

Here follow the trolley track for one block beyond the postoffice; then turn sharp R. follow the telegraph or telephone posts and you will have good riding to the Harrisburg Almshouse. There, turn sharp L: a road which might see better days (I don't believe it ever did), will lead you to the Susquehanna at Front street. Harrisburg, and the latter to Market street, the central thoroughfare of our State capital (113 miles).

(3) THE DOWNINGTOWN-EPHRATA ROUTE.

I distinctly stated above that I had not gone over the preceding route this season; the following I have not traveled for two years, but it is most unlikely to have undergone any change in the meantime.

The road from this city to Downingtown was described in Trip No. 20. Of the road from Downingtown to Lebanon I wrote as follows in October '95:

"BRANDYWINE MANOR."

At the Baptist church just outside Downingtown, we take the Harrisburg and Downingtown Pike to our right; at the toll-gate about a mile farther, we follow the right fork (no sign post anywhere), and when we reach the Brandywine Baptist Meeting House pause a moment to gaze at the surrounding view. Four miles of ups and downs bring us through Guthrieville to Brandywine Manor.

The curious may be interested to hear that Brandywine Manor has not, and never had, any existence save in name. The old Presbyterian Church right here, belonging to the Manor of Springton, was naturally known as the Manor Church, but it being located at the "Forks of Brandywine," the popular voice soon called it the "Brandywine Manor Church," and in the course of time the latter title became curtailed to the present meaningless name "Brandywine Manor."

WAYNE'S BIRTHPLACE.

A deeply indented country this is: the road is stony and cut into ruts, the side paths are scarce and bad. Things are a little better at Rockville; and Honey Brook is but a short distance away. What a pity to have changed "Waynesburg" for "Honey Brook!" "Mad" Anthony Wayne's home was in this township, and his name would be an honor to any locality, surely.

TO EPHRATA.

Over Welsh Mountain we pass into Lancaster county, a descent a mile long bringing us to Beartown. No chance of coasting, however, or even of enjoying the beautiful scenery without a dismount, so continuously is our attention called for by our mount.

The old Sorrel Horse, a mile and a half ahead, has been modernized to "Fetterville." No connection with slavery; Fetter is the name of a local family. At Blue Ball avoid all turnings; keep straight on up the hill; the road is improving here and there in patches; and what a picturesque landscape from this elevation! The grade, too, seems easier as we near Reidenbach's Postoffice and Hinkletown. That creek we cross through a covered bridge is the Conestoga, which flows by Lancaster. And a pleasant ride takes us to Ephrata, the historic old place which we must revisit some day.

LINCOLN AND CLAY.

And now for a down-grade run to Lincoln (so named after our martyr-President), and thence to Weidmanville Postoffice and Clay. Some of our Pennsylvania maps at present in the market are so thoroughly up to date that, should you look for Clay, you would still find it designated as Durlach. Durlach was the name of its German founder, but it has long been changed to Clay in honor of Henry Clay. And an old settlement it is. The owner of the cigar factory over the way (Lancaster is a great tobacco county) informs us that the local inn stood where it is now when there were but three houses in Lancaster city.

THE CONESTOGA WAGON ROAD.

Half a mile beyond the hotel, keep straight up the hill; and two and a half miles farther, at Brickerville, avoid turning left towards Lititz or right towards Sheffertown. This used to be the famous Conestoga Wagon Road. The advent of the steam engine put an end to enormous traffic along here, and the general appearance of the road would suggest that no effort has been made since then to keep it in repair. We regret it the more as we are approaching Cornwall Mountain. At the foot of it, two miles from Brickerville Hotel, bear to the right (no signpost); and for the same reason, beware you bear to the left at the first fork beyond the next creek – Hammer Creek.

And now for a long, unbroken climb up the mountain and a more pleasant run down the other side into Lebanon county, past Overlook (a wooden shed doing duty for a railroad station, the first we have seen since we left Ephrata), and on across the railroad track to South Cornwall and its mines.

Here goes the railroad track on your right, keep to the left alongside of it, turn sharp to the right after passing under the bridge, and at a sign-post indicating "Bismarck 1 ½ m." bear to the right. The Bismarck fork would be the straighter road, but the pike round by Lebanon is beyond comparison with it, even though longer.

We pass by Cornwall Station, glide through Midway, and think it almost a pity to reach Lebanon so quickly. As we enter it bear to the right, and at the end of Cumberland street we turn left.

From this point westward the itinerary to Harrisburg is the same, of course, as that outlined in the preceding (Reading-Harrisburg) route.

A.E.