

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

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Cycle Route 31 (1897-1898 series)

Harrisburg to Lewistown, En Route to Pittsburg (A Continuation of Trips Nos. 30 and 28).

Harrisburg was known originally as Harris' Ferry, and the best fording place across the Susquehanna it was reported to be. Then, for a time, it was called Louisburg, in honor of King Louis of France, by the same settlers who christened the county "Dauphin" in respect for his son.

Old John Harris' story is a well-known one. He was a Yorkshire man in needy circumstances who came to this country shortly after William Penn. The first employment he obtained was at clearing the woods and grubbing the streets in Philadelphia; then he started to trade with the Indians, penetrated by degrees as far as this river, and the log cabin he built for himself here in 1705 proved the nucleus of a city containing at present some forty thousand inhabitants.

Don't pass by his tomb, here on L among the trees on the river bank, without a glance.

There are hotels galore for you in Harrisburg, of course, if you propose to make a stay; if, on the contrary, you are simply passing through and the inner man calls for his due, without delay turn R from Front street into Chestnut just for two blocks. On South Second street you can get a substantial meal at a moderate price at any hour, after which you return here to the river side.

ALONG THE SUSQUEHANNA.

We proceed along Front street, past Market street, with the old-fashioned covered bridge spanning the river in front of it; (and it will be as well if we begin reckoning a new mileage from this spot); past Walnut street, with its more modern bridge, and State street, on the summit of which nothing is to be seen at the present date but the wreck of the old Capitol.

Most of these street names are suggestive of our own city. We, too, have a Front street in Philadelphia, the commercial value of which is not to be belittled; would it could compare in natural beauty to its namesake in Harrisburg, and borrow some of the charms of those woodclad mountains on both banks of the Susquehanna!

TRUTH'S HARD STRUGGLE.

The bigoted Britisher who wrote "North America" in 1862, and who was so blinded by his insular prejudice that in the two houses of the Pennsylvania Legislature he was unable to see any more than "one gentleman (a Senator) who looked like a Quaker, and even he was a very untidy Quaker," spoke in addition as follows:

"Nothing can be much uglier than the State House at Harrisburg, but it commands a magnificent view of one of the valleys into which the Allegheny Mountain is broken. Harrisburg is immediately under the range, probably at its finest point, and the railway running west from the town to Pittsburg, Cincinnati, and Chicago, passes right over the chain. The line has been magnificently engineered, and the scenery is

very grand. I went over the Alleghenies in mid-winter, when they were covered with snow, but even when so seen they were very fine."

Doubtless Truth had a severe struggle to wrench the above admission from Anthony Trollope; as for me I feel but too sorry that the scope and limits of these roadside jottings, as well as my lack of descriptive powers, forbid my attempting to do justice to the glorious roll that nature keeps unfolding almost without interruption along our road to Pittsburg; let me record this expression of my regret, incidentally right here, and let it stand for the whole remainder of the trip.

EN ROUTE AGAIN.

Front street shows marked improvemens this year; we follow it straight out and into Fort Hunter road; at the tollgate (2 $\frac{3}{4}$ m.) we pay two cents, and receive a ticket, which we eventually keep as a memento of our passage, for no one asks us to deliver it further on, and this level crushed stone is such a luxury after our ride from Lancaster that we don't feel like stopping unnecessarily to relieve ourselves of our toll voucher.

We cover that 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ m. to the Susquehanna Hotel at Coxville in a twinkle, and there we get our first good view of the gap made by the Susquehanna through the Blue Mountain here at Rockville (5 $\frac{3}{4}$ m.)

You may have ridden to the Delaware Water Gap this season. This is the same range that you saw out through by the Delaware up in Monroe county.

Don't you want to ask such of your friends as rush off to Europe every summer to spend their vacation and their money, if they saw many such sights as these abroad? I fear many of them would not be in a position to answer the question, anyway, for, in order to be able to compare any two things a man must be acquainted with both of them; see? And there are relatively so few American tourists who know America!

This fine bridge over the river belongs to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company; yonder town in the centre of that pretty picture on the other bank is Marysville. The mountain beyond it is Cove Mountain, and the triangular depression between the latter and Peter's Mountain has long been known as The Cove.

A VOTE OF THANKS!

At Hecks, or Hecktown (7 m.), we cross the canal and turn sharp L.

This narrow way, flanked by the railroad embankment on one side and the canal on the other, used to be the despair of travelers awheel through this section. Our thanks are due to our cycling brethren in Harrisburg for the comforts we now enjoy all the way into Dauphin. They evidently are of opinion that the only way to do a thing is to do it; and so, without waiting for State or municipal aid, or any possible assistance they might have received some day from the L. A. W., they got up among themselves a road improvement club, each member of which subscribes a small sum per month towards that object; they obtained donations from their fellow-citizens and neighbors; and here you have the result of their efforts. Three cheers for the wheelmen of Harrisburg!

DAUPHIN BOROUGH.

Those lonely stone piles across the river need not excite your curiosity. They are part of a bridge that was taken down some fourteen years ago.

Beware of that fork opposite the Hotel Reliance in Dauphin (8 ½ m.), and be sure you keep L.; the branch R up the hill would take you to Halifax.

“From Hell, Hull, or Halifax,
O Lord, deliver us,”

is said to have been the daily prayer of a certain class of foot travelers through England at one time. The thing doesn't fit here; our Pennsylvania Halifax is all right, and old Fort Halifax, erected up there 140 years ago, never had anything to do with the harboring of tramps; going there would take you out of the way, that's all.

A couple of miles out, our road wends away from the river, by way of making a short cut across the nose of Peter's Mountain; it's a steep kind of short cut; but the road (clay, of course) is not bad.

Half way up the ascent, take care to bear R. and presently we go down the other side of the mountain (beware of the ledges of rock lying across your way) to the railroad by the riverside at Speeceville flag station (12 ½ m.).

REED TOWNSHIP.

A notable township is the one we have just entered. It owns just half a hundred voters and the last census credited it with 267 inhabitants. You will in vain look within its boundaries for a minister, a Sunday school, a lawyer or a justice of the peace, for industrial works of any kind or for a place where intoxicating liquors can be had; on the other hand, if you were to search the records of the criminal court for the past twenty-five years you would find exactly one single case from this township.

A GLANCE ACROSS THE RIVER.

Three-quarters of a mile farther we cross the railroad and follow the canal once more. To enjoy comfortably the view of hustling Duncannon, at the mouth of Shearman's Creek, on the opposite bank of the Susquehanna, I fear a dismount is necessary, yet like many another, it will repay you.

The spur of mountain above Duncannon is "Profile Rock." If you have time you may possibly detect in its outline some resemblance to the human face. As to Shearman's, or Sherman's Creek, it has no association with our modern military history. An old-time Indian trader of that name was drowned in it, and the whole valley became known as Shearman's, or Sherman's Valley.

CLARK'S FERRY.

That covered bridge ahead of us across the Susquehanna is our immediate destination; the open bridge that seems to be a continuation of it westward crosses the Juniata.

This is the spot where the two noble rivers mingle their waters, and here at Clark's Ferry (15 m.) is the tiny hamlet that has succeeded the old-time Indian "Queenashawakee." At the solitary grocery store here on R., you may get ginger ale or a fruit to quench your thirst; and now

“Come up into the hills! The men of old,
They of undaunted wills,
Grew jubilant of heart, and strong, and bold,
On the enduring hills!”

“Have we had no ‘hills’ yet?” You may ask; well, yes, a kind of hills; but the poet meant “mountains,” you know; and it is only from this point westward that our acquaintance with them will really start.

We turn sharp L into the bridge and at the other end of it (1/2 a mile distant) we pay five cents for the use of it. Right there, at the toll-house on Duncan’s Island, we have a choice of two roads to take us to Millerstown.

TO MILLERSTOWN VIA BUFFALO.

I have been over both, and for two years past have patronized the southerly one exclusively, the roadbed being so much better than that of the other; still if you prefer a little sandy road and sidepath riding, a la New Jersey style, to hill-climbing, and are willing to add a couple of miles to your total mileage in order to have a somewhat more level ride, bear R after disbursing your nickel; and do your best for two miles through the alluvial sand of this island.

Then cross the canal, turn R, and a welcome path brings you to New Buffalo – a poor place to stop at (in spite of its pretentious name) if you be tired or hungry, although I managed to get a good night’s rest in that little hamlet once upon a time.

I must say I had no lady companion on that occasion, and I need not add that, so far as possible, tourists awheel should so plan their daily travel as to make sure to be in a town by nightfall. Hotels in small villages are often mentioned as landmarks in these trips of mind for no other purpose than to let the reader know that they are there, in case of such an emergency as above suggested.

At the entrance into New Buffalo take care you turn sharp L over a little bridge and ½ a mile farther, going up a stiff hill, bear L.

You may not find many people about, to set you right if you neglect these instructions; the whole of this township (Watts township), had but few more inhabitants than Reed at the last census, and its neighbor, Howe, had even humbler pretensions; and yet all these settlements are of a respectable age; New Buffalo was laid out by Jacob Baughman in 1800, and Liverpool; higher up the river, is but seven years its junior.

Our road now varies from good to fair. Two and a half miles from New Buffalo, turn R, then L, then R again along a private road which is an improvement on the public one, down breakneck descents and up steep climbs until we strike the Juniata.

Here the roadbed is excellent and the scenery charming. Nine miles from the before-mentioned Buffalo our road leaves the river and is not so good as it turns R uphill round a farm, but after one short mile we see the last of this mountain and are joined from L near a sign with the inscription “Harrisburg, 28 m.” by the Newport road to be described presently.

Let me repeat, in conclusion, that I have not been on this Buffalo route for two years.

TO MILLERSTOWN VIA NEWPORT.

The improvements we found along this route, this season, amply justified the preference we showed it.

To follow it, we turn sharp L at the tollhouse above named (15 ½ m.), ride over the canal bridge (with tiny Benvenue postoffice beneath it, by the water’s edge), then across the Juniata on the open bridge

that we saw from a distance awhile ago, then again across the tracks at Juniata bridge station, and we strike the extreme end of High street, Duncannon (this part of it used to be Petersburg).

Do not turn L into it, but go straight on up the more rugged-looking road by the side of that store L with the sign on the wall "Newport, 10m.," bearing R a short distance above.

That red shale (and we shall find a considerable amount of it on this trip), must be very bad after rain; in dry weather it is O. K. (Don't forget looking back when you reach the summit of this first hill in Perry county 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles.)

Our road is now good or fair with few exceptions. Human habitations here also, are few and far between; we must pay attention to our turnings.

Nineteen and a half miles out, bear L following the sign "Bloomfield, 5 m."

Half a mile farther, be careful to turn sharp R (straight on would bring you to said Bloomfield); and now we climb Dick's Hill and run down the other side for a change.

It was mid-November when I reached this point last year, and a new experience awaited me here and elsewhere which I enjoyed greatly having never been through this section so late in the season. The roads through these woods were covered with a thick carpet of well packed leaves, and riding over it was indeed a pleasure.

This time the foliage still basked over our heads in the sunshine of the balmiest October imaginable, and we gladly forgave the softness of the leaves beneath our wheels in exchange for the myriad-colored kaleidoscope with which they dazzled us on the trees as we went along.

When our cyclometers register 23 m. we have to turn R again, and somehow after another mile's meandering if we don't take another sharp turn R, we'll be bound for that ubiquitous Bloomfield once more. How is this for contouring one ridge, zigzagging along the flank of another and riding (or walking) straight up the side of a third? Excellent practice for future stages of our trip.

And now for a long down grade all the way to Little Buffalo Creek and L into Newport (26 $\frac{1}{2}$ m.)

Market street is the second you come to; turn R into it and straight out past a couple of hotels R and L across the Juniata.

A busy little spot is Newport, with its 1500 inhabitants, and a jealous rival of Bloomfield, the county seat.

Half a mile from the river we take L fork marked "Millerstown, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ m.," (R to Liverpool), and exactly one mile farther we meet the new Buffalo road, with the sign "Harrisburg 28 m.," to which a reference was made above. This distance must be understood to be reckoned from the city limit, not from our starting point, corner of Market and Front streets.

A truly magnificent landscape awaits us from the summit of our next climb, half a mile farther; then we go down to the river again, cautiously, if you please, for our riding since we fell into this Buffalo road has lost much of its comfort and safety.

IN SIGHT OF TUSCARORA.

When we reach those mills by the side of Cocolamus Creek we turn L over it, and in a few moments we strike Millerstown (33 m.).

Those mills, by the way, had nothing to do with the name “Millers” town; this little place was laid out by a certain David Miller in 1780; it now has some 600 inhabitants; its tannery is about its only industry. What think you of its location?

The smaller ridge on our left is the Raccoon; this turn L at the X near Ward’s Hotel would bring you down the Raccoon Valley to Ickesburg; the turn R to Liverpool.

The giant R and L ahead of us is the Tuscarora Mountain. We skirt up and down its flood-cloven side and bid good-bye to Perry county, our first acquaintance west of the Susquehanna.

GOOD-BYE, PERRY COUNTY.

Oliver Perry, as everybody knows, was the hero of Lake Erie, whose concise report of his victory penciled to General Harrison on the back of an old letter is part of our history: “We have met the enemy and they are ours. Two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop.”

And J. G. Percival’s lines were once almost equally familiar:

“Who can tell what deeds were done
When Britain’s cross, on yonder wave
Sunk ‘neath Columbia’s dazzling sun
And met in Erie’s flood its grave?
Who tell the triumphs of that day
When smiling at the cannon’s roar,
Our hero, ‘mid the bloody fray,
Conquered on Erie’s echoing shore?”

TO MIFFLIN.

Keep straight on at the first fork you meet in Juniata county, near a furnace; the turn R would bring you back eastward.

At Thompsontown (38 ½ m.) three roads: Sharp R to McAllister, the other two to Mifflin; one through Van Wert, the other bearing L, the latter is the better one; we take it and quickly rush through Locust Run, Centre and Mexico (45 ½ m.).

Did you ever read about the “Grasshopper War,” of long ago – a terrible conflict between two Indian tribes originally due to a quarrel between children about grasshoppers? This district was the scene of it.

This little Mexico was laid out in 1804. Was not that about the time when Aaron Burr tried to stir up a revolution in Mexico and was foiled in his attempt?

Glad we didn’t go round by Van Wert; this little pike is fine! Presently we strike more of that red clay on reaching Mt. Pleasant, but they are improving it; and it’s only in question of a mile, anyway, before we get into Mifflintown, or Mifflin (49 m.).

Mifflin, by the way, is not in Mifflin county, but in Juniata county, of which it is the seat -- a fact that will not appear so strange if we bear in mind that Juniata county was cut out of Mifflin not so very many years ago.

Both the town and the county were named from our fellow-citizen General Thomas Mifflin, president of the Supreme Executive Council of the State in 1788, and was subsequently Governor for nine years.

THE BEAUTIFUL NARROWS.

It has been usual to advise cyclists to take the train from Mifflin to Lewistown, there being no road worthy of the name between the two towns, and the canal towpath having been left unrepaired since the time of the Johnstown flood, and the suggestion was made to us on this very trip, by a country resident not one hundred miles east of Mifflin.

What a treat we would have missed had we followed his well-meant but out-of-date recommendation!

The unspeakable stretch of loose stones and protruding ledges of rocks that was heretofore the only wagonway between Mifflin and Lewistown, has been transformed almost entirely into a smooth stone road; on my several previous trips I had never come across but one buggy in this wilderness, and its owner was leading his horse by the head, evidently for the same reason that I was carrying mine on my shoulder at the time we met. Now the road is alive every Sunday with pleasure teams from each of the terminal towns, and the wild grandeur of the Narrows, is so universally appreciated that there is some talk of widening the present roadway at the first favorable opportunity -- this last phraseology being a euphemism for a cruder allusion to available "cold cash."

The lack of this unsentimental commodity is the cause that the Mifflin county end of the road has not been modernized yet, at the present writing. Such as it is, however, the Juniata Narrows now possess every charm that can attract the lover of nature awheel, and no drawback that could keep him way.

From Jacob's Hotel in Mifflin, to the National Hotel, at Lewistown, is 13 miles; call it 62 miles from Harrisburg to Lewistown via Clark's Ferry and Newport.

A.E.