

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

Philadelphia Inquirer Nov. 7, 1897, p. 36

Cycle Route 32 (1897-1898 series)

Lewistown to Altoona en Route to Pittsburg (a continuation of Nos. 31, 30 and 28)

“Nowhere in the wide, wide world may such magnificent scenery be gazed upon as encompasses the valley wherein the National Guard of Pennsylvania will encamp during the month of July,” said a writer in The Inquirer of May 31, 1896. “Towering high towards the heavens, forest-clothed hills of stupendous magnitude, jeweled with great black boulders, mark the boundary, on either side of the course of the beautiful blue Juniata as it winds its way, in serpentine curves, for mile upon mile through this surpassingly superb country. And in its very centre nestles Lewistown, the Mecca for this summer of our State’s soldiers.”

The map of our Trip No. 31, and the present one give the reader a bird’s-eye view of the meanderings of the Juniata; it were futile to attempt, by a mere description, to make him realize the actual magnificence of the Juniata scenery as viewed by the wayfarer awheel – for, as a matter of course, the railroad car passenger does not see one half of the beauties on which we freely gaze from the summit of every mountain, from the brink of every glen, from the bosom of every vale.

No wonder this section was such a favorite with the red man. Did you ever hear the song of Alfarata, the Indian girl?

“Wild roved an Indian girl,
Bright Alfarata:
Where rapid sweep thy waters,
Blue Juniata.

Swift as an antelope
Through the forest going,
Loose were her jetty locks
In wavy tresses flowing.

“Fleeting years have borne away
The voice of Alfarata:
Still sweeps the river on,
Blue Juniata.”

And we, too, must be moving on again, though in opposite direction to the romantic stream this time.

OUT OF LEWISTOWN.

The Scotch-Irish pioneers who first settled Mifflin county would not forgive me if I left Lewistown without mentioning that when it was laid out, just 105 years ago, it was named in memory of Lewis, the largest of the Hebrides Islands, away on the northwest of Scotland.

Both here and in a subsequent part of the journey, it had been my intention to strike away from the beaten track on this occasion and seek new and better paths for the benefit of my readers. Right here, I had proposed to follow the Juniata in its course between Blue Ridge and Jack's Mountains, and reach Huntingdon via McVeytown, Newton Hamilton and Mill Creek (see map), but from all accounts the wagon roads through that valley are in a wretched condition; I stuck to my old favorite, the Kishacoquillas Valley, once more, and I advise my readers to do the same.

We, therefore, follow the main street out (starting our mileage from the corner of the National Hotel and Coleman House), and now we face the most tortuous portion of our trip. Range after range stands in mighty splendor across the traveler's path, and puny man must needs make the best of his way around the giants or over their most accessible limbs.

ALONG KISHACOQUILLAS CREEK.

This creek on our left is the Kish-, Kishi-, or Kisha-coquillas (the latter being the spelling of the postal authorities). It commemorates a Shawanese chief of that name, who lived here and befriended the first white settlers hereabouts.

Just outside the town is Mount Rock. Three miles beyond it is Burnham with the Standard Steel Works and the Logan Iron and Steel Company's plant.

The famous Mingo chief, Logan, the "Henry Clay of the Indians," lived yonder on "Logan's Spring" till 1771.

We pass Yeagertown (4 m.); our road, unusually level thus far, becomes more rolling, and, in close company with the creek, we soon enter the deep ravine through which it crosses Jack's Mountain.

The fuller title of this long range used to be Jack Armstrong's Mountain; its huge length lies across three counties, Huntingdon, Mifflin and Snyder.

The Mann Edge Tool Factory, here in this gorge, turns out one thousand axes per day, and here is Reedsville, formerly Brown's Mill (6 m.)

A LOVELY VALLEY.

At the end of the village we bear L., going up a steep hill (R to Milroy), and turning southwest, we enter the beautiful Kishacoquillas Valley, the whole length of which we are going to travel between Jack's Mountain on one side and Standing Stone Mountain on the other. We pass by Kishacoquillas postoffice (13 m.), and this good stone road takes us up and down into Belleville, a little place not undeserving of its pretty name, especially if viewed from the summit of the hill beyond it, and containing, we are told, ninety-five houses, a hotel, a drug store, a general store, etc.

The road surface is not so good through White Hall or Menno (18 m.), although it is being stoned right there.

It is not much better at present date, to Allenville (22 m.), where the Valley House, a tiny temperance hotel, offers you its hospitality. A couple of miles farther things grow from bad to worse through Roxboro and through Airy Dale hamlet (27 m.); then, as if to help us to climb up the mountain, the roadway becomes good again, and we rush down, down, the other side of it (never lose control of your wheels on such inclines as this) until we come to a T crossing 31 m. from start.

A BIT OF HENDERSON TOWNSHIP.

This is Mill Creek, at the mouth of the stream that gave it this name; the L turn, marked "Lewistown 32 m." is the end of the McVeytown road that I alluded to above; the R turn is labeled "Huntingdon 5 m."

The road is fair on the whole, though roughish in spots, decidedly tortuous as it winds around those weird mountain heads and proportionately picturesque.

Notice the first distant view we get of Huntingdon, at that turning R, 3 m. from Mill Creek; is it not worth painting?

The section we are now running across is the base of Henderson township (so-called after General Andrew Henderson, of the Revolutionary Army); another long descent, requiring caution, takes us down to the railroad track, and we presently enter Huntingdon (38 m.).

HUNTINGON, "STANDING STONE."

When the first white settlers came to this spot in the first half of the last century, they found a stone, some fourteen feet high, erected here by the Indians and covered with their hieroglyphics; and the place, the creek and the mountain toward the east soon became known as "Standing Stone." Nor was it till Provost W. Smith, of the University of Pennsylvania, laid out the town in 1767, that he first named it "Huntingdon," in grateful acknowledgment of the donations made to our university by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (England).

See that quaint stone standing on L at the intersection of Third and Penn streets? It was erected here as a memento of Huntingdon's early days, when the centennial of its incorporation as a borough was celebrated, twelve months ago.

By the way, the first mail route opened to this town was inaugurated exactly 100 years ago (1797), and the thought of it reminds me once more of those Americans who will keep on comparing our 100-year old roads with the highways of Great Britain, laid out 2,000 (two thousand) years ago by Julius Caesar's soldiers. The comparison would be laughable, if it were not positively painful.

At the last corner that we passed (Second and Penn streets) stood the "Fort Standing Stone" of the Revolutionary period; the imposing court house on R stands on the site of the house occupied by David R. Porter when he was elected Governor of our Commonwealth; the first court house erected in 1798, stood here on Third street; but in truth time-honored Huntingdon is not to be thus merely glanced at from our saddles; let us put up our horses at the Leister House or any one of the several hotels here and visit the place as it deserves.

OFF AGAIN.

After which we keep straight through the town, cross the Juniata and turn sharp R on the other bank.

This is Smithfield, practically a suburb of Huntingdon, and this route is the one followed by the first stage line established between Harrisburg and Alexandria, our next destination, in 1808. One trip per week was then considered a creditable performance.

A long time after (1830), when trips were made daily, they were divided in two sections, with Huntingdon as the midway town, where the exchange of mail and passengers was made. It took two

days to come from our city to Huntingdon, and one and a half from Huntingdon to Pittsburg. What ever Anglomaniacs may say about American roads, American horses must have been splendid anyway!

At the end of Smithfield, keep R; the turn L would take you to McConnellstown. By the way, the turnpike from McConnellstown to Waynesburg, in Franklin county, and its continuation southward, used to be the great highway between this section and Maryland.

This extensive group of buildings L is the Pennsylvania Industrial Reformatory, where youths are sent upon their first conviction for a criminal offense by the courts of the State. That uninviting perpendicular road in front of us is to take us over Warrior's Ridge.

RIDGE AFTER RIDGE.

The traditions of Warrior's Ridge go back to the times of the red man, as you will readily guess; but Porter township, in which this portion of it lies, honors the memory of one of our own warriors, General Andrew Porter, of the Revolution, and talking of him reminds me that his son, Governor D. R. Porter (to whom I alluded above) although proudly claimed by Huntingdon as one of her citizens, was born near Norristown; honor to whom honor is due.

What a grand view of Huntingdon and its cluster of ridges we now have from this elevation. I took what I considered a "beauty" snapshot of it, this last trip, and brought home a "beauty" film as dark as Erebus and as unwashable as the proverbial Moor.

N. B. – Don't expose your kodak to the noonday sun.

Our climb to the summit of Warrior's Ridge, rewarded as it is by more successful photos of its "Pulpit rocks," is decidedly laborious: even walking is made toilsome by the sandy nature of the soil; but, for a descent, simply gorgeous in its wildness, commend me to the other slope down to the snake-like Frankstown branch of the Juniata.

It's all ridable, too, although the long down grade tells on the wrists and the ankles of the unseasoned rider, of course; indeed, it might be designated F. G. to the bridge at the foot of the mountain, and thence G to Alexandra (46 m.), a small borough in a valley noted for its fertility.

MORE ZIGZAGGING.

The next giant lying across our path is Tussey's Mountain, not a knob or a ridge, but one long continuous range; our map gives but a poor idea of its length. With glorious views on either side and a road from F to G, we cut across it. The spot where the river has hollowed its way through the mountain has been denominated "Water Street"; what more natural?

Here, opposite Water Street Hotel, do not turn R. although the sign says "Tyrone 10 m.;" that road was very poor (to my knowledge). Now it has the name of being untravelable. Bear L as far as Shafersville, the little hamlet into the hollow of that wild gorge into which we run. There turn sharp R, up the flank of the mountain and down again, and 2 m. from Water street you strike a crossing, where you are joined from R by the road that I refrained you from taking at the hotel. What think you of its appearance?

Straight on we would go to "Spruce Creek 2 m.;" let us take the L turn marked "Arch Spring 4 m.; Tyrone City 9 m.; Altoona 18 m."

The first acquaintance we presently make with Blair county roads is not prepossessing; they are stony and rough and mountainous at that; yet ridable with care, at their worst.

John Blair, after whom the county was named, lived yonder near Hollidaysburg, southwest from where we are now. He was a public-spirited old-timer, and was spoken of as the "Aristides" of the county.

AN IMPORTANT BIFURCATION.

As we ride down grade, about 50 ½ m. from start, do you see that wood-clad hollow yonder on R? It is the site of the well-known Union Furnace. I draw your attention to it thus early as a landmark that you may not miss a turning point about a mile ahead, at which two routes to Altoona present themselves to you.

Until this year I have been in the habit of keeping straight through to Arch Spring and on to Altoona along the road shown on the map by a dotted line. Last season I described it, in part, as follows:

TO ALTOONA THROUGH BRUSH MOUNTAIN.

Arch Spring (56 m.) proclaims to the stranger the "swallows," as they are called, with which this vicinity abounds. They are abrupt pits, which suddenly "swallow" a stream, and, after conveying it under ground for some distance, return it again to the surface. One of the most remarkable swallows occurred right here; and a rude arch of stone which had been erected over it caused the place to be designated "Arch Spring."

"Sinking Valley" postoffice, a short distance ahead toward Davidsboro, tells the same story.

Take a note of your mileage at Arch Spring Church; sign posts are conspicuous by their absence hereabouts; and telegraph or telephone posts have a happy knack of making a beeline out of sight across all our zigzags whenever they can.

About a mile beyond this church bear L; 1 ¼ miles farther bear R (the telegraph poles are in sight, though not actually along the road itself; follow their direction); and another 1 ¼ miles from this spot again turn L at St. John's Lutheran Church.

Two lonely postoffices, Culp (58 m.), and Bushman (64 m.), are almost the only signs of active civilization we meet until from the latter place a fair road, with four miles of a continuous descent, brings us to the foot of the western branch of Brush Mountain.

Altoona is within sight; another couple of miles and we are in the centre of the town (70 m.).

TO ALTOONA VIA BIRMINGHAM AND TYRONE.

This year, at the spot alluded to above 51 ½ m. from Lewistown, I turn R in the direction of the two wires that separate here from the larger bunch which go on toward Arch Spring.

The road is poor and rocky to Union Furnace railroad station (52 m.) over the bridge and L along the foot of the mountain and through all those quarries on to Birmingham (55 ½ m.); but from this point it is a pleasure to wheel to Ironville (it is built on an iron foundation; what else could you call it?) and on through the gap by Bald Eagle Ridge into Tyrone (59 m.).

TYRONE.

Thoughts here come to one's mind of the Irish chieftain of olden days Eoghan (Owen), the son of "Niall of the Nine Hostages," of him who ruled over the district subsequently known as Tir-Eoghan, Tir-Owen, and ultimately Tyrone. Who would have told him that the name of his mountain realm in Erin would one day be transplanted on a Western continent still to be discovered?

His fellow countrymen formed no inconsiderable portion of the hardy miners who worked this region for lead at the time of our Revolutionary struggle. A leisurely ramble through the wilds of these mountains would well repay the patriot desirous to form an idea of the hardships that were endured during that struggle.

THE LAST LAP.

We follow Tenth street out, pass under railroad bridge and turn L.

A good level road now spoils us, and at the sight of the sudden change ahead we are tempted to turn R at that solitary schoolhouse (63 m.) and wander to Tipton.

We keep straight on, however, and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile beyond school turn sharp L thro covered bridge (no sign post).

Antisville is the name of this next hamlet (66 m.). When our cyclometers register 66 $\frac{1}{2}$ m. a sign on R invites us to "Altoona 7 m.," but some friendly cyclists advise us to keep away from that road and keep on for $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile longer.

There, opposite a flour mill, at the upper end of Bellwood (a borough that we barely touch) we turn sharp L, and a fair road takes us to Altoona, of which more hereafter.

A.E.