

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

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Cycle Route No. 36 (1897 - 1898 series)

Philadelphia to West Chester: The West Chester Pike and its Possible Connections for Round Trips

The West Chester pike is the most direct, but, up to the present date, the most wretched road to West Chester. For one-half of the distance the old pike has been modernized and affords, besides a pleasant run to Newtown Square, opportunities for short round trips, by connections with the other popular highways, right and left of it; its second half, however, should not be attempted awheel, especially at this time of year.

My customary desire to see things for myself took me right through to the end of it a few days ago, when the various kinds of clay, red, yellow and green, of which the roadbed consists, had been thoroughly soaked by a couple of days' rain, and then solidified by a good hard frost. Take my word for it, kind reader, the Lancaster pike route to West Chester (to be outlined by and by) would be worth taking if it made even a longer detour than it does; keep to it for the time being, and until the long-proposed extension of the trolley line to the capital of Delaware county has materialized.

As you know, the transformation of the eastern half of the pike dates only from the advent of the trolley; it seems but yesterday when the very mention of the West Chester pike in connection with cycling would cast a gloom on any trip projected along its course.

First of all, it was the continuation of Market street; and who could contemplate with anything short of agony a ride over the abominable stones of that thoroughfare. One fine day, however, Market street awoke and found itself asphalted at least on one side, from Thirty-second street out; then the pike was repaired as far as Newtown Square; now who knows what next year may have in store for us?

OUT OF TOWN.

Come and see what we can enjoy of it at present. If we start from the Public Buildings we can go out Chestnut or Walnut, up Thirty-third and out Market; or if we start from uptown we can follow Spring Garden street all the way out to Forty-second and strike Market street there.

That inclosure R between Forty-second and Forty-ninth streets, is the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane, with its 111 acres of pleasure grounds and cultivated land.

It is often called Kirkbride's Hospital, after the noble-hearted Pennsylvanian who labored so hard for its foundation, Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride. He was in charge of a wing of the Pennsylvania Hospital exclusively devoted to the treatment of the insane (the first instance of its kind in this country, by the way), and while there he raised a sum of \$355,000 for the erection of a hospital where those unfortunates alone should be cared for, and where the two sexes should be separated. My elder readers may remember his death, fourteen years ago; he was a native of Morrisville in Bucks County.

At Sixty-third street, where the asphalt comes to an end, we are five miles from the start; we cross Cobb's Creek at the Millbourn Mills and ride into Delaware county.

Did you ever hear that the first twisting mill erected on this continent was located right here, by a weaver named Sam Sellers, away back in 1682?

ON THE PIKE.

On top of this winding hillock, see those gray stone Gothic buildings standing on their own grounds L? They are the Burd Orphan Asylum (a description of which you may have seen in The Inquirer some four years ago – June 11, 1893). It is an institution for the education and training of orphan girls of the better class founded by Elizabeth H. Burd, widow of Edward Shippen Burd, and opening here in 1863. This philanthropic lady had started the nucleus of this institution in 1856 in two houses on Sansom street, at the back of her own mansion, which stood then at the southwest corner of Ninth and Chestnut streets. There she had gathered around her twelve fatherless little girls, and when she died, in 1860, she bequeathed \$500,000 for the foundation and endowment of this institution.

A SHORT ROUND TRIP.

At toll-house No. 1 (5 ½ m.) we purchase for 9 cents the right to use this pike to its termination. Here the turn L would take you westward to Arlington Cemetery or southward to the Baltimore pike at Fernwood (see Trip No. 24), whence you could push on still farther to Paschalville and return home by the Darby road (see Trip No. 4) if you wanted a 14-mile round trip.

Tollhouse No. 2 is but one-half a mile ahead; notice turn L to Media, which also falls into a road to Lansdowne to be alluded to anon.

FLOWER ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY.

Let not this good hard road take you along so rapidly but you give a glance at the handsome Astronomical Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania on our right, one-half a mile further. Its location is excellent, and when it is completed it will be a credit to R. W. Flower, the donor of this land, and to his beneficiaries.

Even now you will find here, housed in a building of its own, an equatorial telescope of 18-inch aperture, set up just twelve months ago this October, and used for the observation of double stars and comets. You may have seen the glass of it exhibited at the World's Fair by a Pennsylvanian, Mr. Brashear, of Allegheny.

In the meridian building are to be seen a 4" zenith telescope in constant use for the determination of the variations of latitude, a 4" meridian arch for time and star co-ordinate observations, a universal micrometer transit instrument, a chronograph, a self-winding astronomical clock; and, if I stop my enumeration right here, don't you think the list is a pretty fair one, seeing that the construction of this observatory was begun barely two years ago by "slow" Philadelphians?

Readers of these roadside chitchats, you may have wondered what drove me suddenly into this awfully learned description; now you know it. Dear, old "slow" Philadelphia!

LLANERCH.

Pretty Llanerch greets us about 8 miles from our starting point. "Llanerch" looks and sounds Welsh, does it not? Indeed, I doubt if there be another constituent in Welsh names of places as frequent as "llan."

One idle day I amused myself scanning the lists of the parishes, townships, etc., of England and Wales, and counted up over 600 names beginning with this word for a prefix. In the large majority of cases it denoted a church.

There were a dozen Llandewi (Church of David), of course, and a good score of Llanfair (Church of Mary), and half a hundred Llanfihangel (Church of the Angel); yet the original meaning of "llan" is "place," "ground," "land;" and "llanerch" means "an open place in a wood," "an empty spot."

If you saw this particular spot some five years ago you must have been struck with the appropriateness of the designation "Llanerch;" but the "empty place" is pretty well filled now, and with specimens of the most up-to-date residential architecture at that. It would have taken half a century to build up such a town as this in the Old World!

ANOTHER SHORT ROUND TRIP.

Would you care to make a round trip home from this point via Darby? The latter is just 5 m. off.

Take that turning L at the toll-house and be careful when you cross the railroad tracks going down this first hill. Then you cut across State road, run up a sharp hill to Arlington Cemetery R and the Drexel School L, past the Garret road and Marshall road (we shall probably see them again another time), across the Baltimore pike at Lansdowne, down beneath old shade trees by the Lansdown Station, and on among residential estates, some of which (as Mr. Bayley's and Mr. Cook's) are of uncommon magnificence, until you reach the Buttonwood Hotel at Darby.

MANOA.

A few minutes' pedaling takes us to old Haverford, now officially ticketed "Manoa Postoffice," within nine miles from our start.

Manoa? Manoa? Let me see. Why was not Manoa the chief city of the world-famed El Dorado, the walls and roofs of which were said to be made of gold? For a couple of hundred years every adventurer, down to and including Sir Walter Raleigh, toiled and moiled, both dreaming and waking in search of that undiscoverable Moana; here it is at our own gates, on the West Chester pike.

How many of us still set out for unknown lands in quest of what they might readily find at home!

See that turn R, by the Eagle Hotel? For quite a time this was the favorite way (and well-nigh the only way) to strike this locality from town; and if I mistake not, the Quaker City Wheelmen were the first to patronize it in a body.

Under the present improved condition of the pike, a pleasant round trip can be made by coming here as we have just done (and returning by this road R which strikes the Lancaster pike at Ardmore.

ADELE AND BROOMALL.

A long winding descent brings us to Darby Creek, at Adele Postoffice (9 3/4 m.). Adele? My darling mother's name! You should have seen me jump off my saddle when I first spied the inscription on this new postoffice and inquire from a resident how it got christened thus. "I guess I can tell you all about it," was his reply, "seeing that I was the proposer of the name myself. It's the name of the daughter of Congressman Jack Robinson, and he is the man who got us our postoffice."

Here a turn R goes to Cooperstown.

We climb up out of the valley. This next turn R is the Radnor road, which goes through old Radnor P. O. (now Ithan) to the Lancaster pike, whence we might wheel home, as per Trips Nos. 7 and 8.

This little town (11 ½ m.) is Broomall. It used to be the Drove Tavern until 1868, when it became a postoffice and took the name of the late eminent lawyer John M. Broomall, who was then Congressman from the Seventh district.

At Broomall X another turn R to Cooperstown and, on L, Springfield road, by which you can go to Clifton on the Baltimore pike and further to Collingdale on the Darby road (see Trips No. 2 and 4).

We pass the last toll-gate for the present (12 ½ m.) up another long hill (L to Howelville, 6 m., and to the Media road 1 m.), and have a fine view going down; our course is clear, we need not be afraid to look about us. At the foot R is Bryn Mawr avenue, and we climb up into Newtown Square.

OLD NEWTOWN SQUARE.

In the course of the last year, The Inquirer had an interesting notice of the old-time hotel on our right, -- Pratt's House, as it was formerly called, -- and its associations with the early days of our painter, Benjamin West (of whom we spoke in our Trip No. 24.).

You were there then told how the elder West moved into the hotel when Benjamin was a mere infant, and how "when he was 7 years old he pulled enough hair out of the family cat's tail to manufacture for himself a paint brush, with which he used to daub around on the walls with the red and yellow earths which the friendly Indians would give him."

The town, however, goes considerably farther back than the hotel, for this so-called "New Town" is all but four years as old as Philadelphia. It had been in existence for 90 years at the time of the Revolution; and did you hear how its few defenseless inhabitants suffered at the hands of the British in 1777? They were on the high road to the city and of course they were levied upon accordingly. "My pen can't describe there "Barbarity and Cruelty," wrote General James Potter, "nor can you conseve the waste and Destruction that attend there futsteps every where they go."

By the way, few of our old-time heroes knew how to spell, but I guess they knew how to fight, uphill at that.

Here at the hotel crossing (13 ½ m.) L to Media, R to Berwyn and St. Davids's Church, straight on to West Chester.

GOOD-BYE, PIKE!

As I said at starting, the pike practically ends here for us, at the present date; if I describe its course beyond this point, it is solely in the hope of better things to come.

Notice the bifurcation, three-quarters of a mile out. The branch R (no signpost) goes to White Horse and Cloud (old Rocky Hill): the left turn, marked "West Chester, 10 m." is ours, of course.

See that woodland, as we make our way (carefully if you please) down down to that covered bridge over Crum creek?

Round about it our best hopes are centered; you wonder why; well, I was told last year that the Traction Company had purchased some forty acres of that Castle Rock estate; and you don't imagine they are going to let those \$20,000 lie idle a day longer than they can help, do you?

PAST CASTLE ROCK ESTATE.

By the way, round about that same Castle Rock estate centered the interest of some of the most blood-curdling tales in connection with the highway robberies of our Revolutionary period.

There was a cave on that estate, the haunt of many an American Claude Duval, and in particular of a certain outlaw chief named Fitzpatrick, whose crimes were said to be unparalleled save perhaps by those of his accomplice, Dougherty, the hostler at Pratt's House, at New Town. Fitzpatrick's ultimate betrayal and punishment were told in The Inquirer article referred to above. "He was finally betrayed by a woman, with whom he had fallen in love. She used to wander around doing occasional work at the tavern, where she met a man who tried to induce her to leave her outlaw master and lead a better life. Her benefactor was finally waylaid and robbed by Fitzpatrick. Her pleadings to induce the robber to give back the money were rudely repulsed and as a means of revenge she led the village constables to his den. He was shortly afterward hanged."

Up the several sections of this long hill we pedal to Edgmont (16 $\frac{3}{4}$ m.). Here, a good long road R (I am told) to Sugartown and Malvern; L to Chester, 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ m.; one-half mile further, L to Valley road, for Howelville.

INTO CHESTER COUNTY.

A mile beyond Edgmont we climb up to Penn Hotel.

At the first X we meet in Chester county which we have just entered, the turn L is the Valley road above mentioned; the R is another avenue to Sugartown.

Up and down we run to Ridley creek; keep straight on at the next X, and don't be tempted by that better looking road out L, it would lead you some miles south of West Chester.

We now get a little green marl to vary the color of our roadway, but its roughness does not vary a bit, as we pass by the once widely known Willistown branch of the Chester creek (19 $\frac{1}{4}$ m.), and travel to Willistown on the east branch of Chester Creek (21 m).

The new reservoir you notice on R at the bridge is for the water supply of West Chester; this turn L goes to Westtown School, 1 m.; R to State road 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ m.

Just one more mile of up and down brings us to a point where the Rocky Hill road converges from R with our own, and a short distance farther, a ridable roadway presents itself to us.

We so eagerly avail ourselves of it that we almost pass by the Gentlemen's Driving Club of West Chester on L, and a turning L to Westtown and another R to the Matlack Homestead and Fern Hill and Green Hill without noticing them.

In a few moments we strike another fork; the road meeting our own from R is the Paoli route to which I shall refer presently.

The bare walls of an old stone house stood for years in the angle of this fork and they were a familiar landmark to many wayfarers, their disappearance seems worthy of mention.

WEST CHESTER.

And now, right before us, lies West Chester (24 ½ m.), formerly known as The Turk's Head, the name of the cross road tavern here.

Why "West" Chester? Well, you see, Chester county originally went all the way to the Delaware River, and Chester was its capital. In 1789, however, Delaware county was cut out of Chester county, and the capital of the latter was named 'West" Chester to distinguish it from the more ancient town.

It had been made a borough in the previous year, and by the first year of the present century it had gathered a population of exactly 374; it now has over 8000 inhabitants.

At a time when the connection of West Chester with our city by means of electric cars seems but a question of time, it sounds quaint to be told how, sixty years ago, one line of mail stages passed daily through the borough between Philadelphia and Lancaster; and another mail went through three times a week, on its way from our city to Baltimore. They had a local service, too; two daily lines of stages ran from West Chester to Philadelphia along the pike (don't I pity those poor horses!); and once a day the mail was carried on horseback between this borough and Downingtown, and once a week to Wilmington, as also to Chester and to Norristown.

Who can tell what the chronicler will have to jot down, sixty years hence.

HOW TO GET THERE NOW.

The only practicable cycleway to West Chester at present is indicated on our little map as well as the West Chester pike.

Pending a more detailed description, on some future occasion, follow the Lancaster pike out (as in Trips 7, 8, and 20) as far as Paoli Station.

Take, not the turn L opposite the Station, but the next one (on L also) beyond Paoli Inn; and keep straight on at the various crossings you meet; you will find the distance to West Chester to be somewhat more than 29 miles, as compared with 24 miles by the West Chester pike.

A.E.