Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

Philadelphia Inquirer June 24, 1897, p. 5

Cycle Route No. 11 (1897-98 Series.)

Asbury Park to Trenton

N.B. – For brevity sake, R is used in these Trips Awheel for “right” or “on the right,” L for “left” or “on the left,” and X for “crossing” or “crossroads.”

There are two ways by which the Trenton-bound cyclist can make his way from Asbury Park to Freehold – one, the longer by three miles and the better in dry weather, via Eatontown and Colt’s Neck; the other, shorter, and (in my mind) preferable during or immediately after rain, via Farmingdale.

I humbly confess my utter inability at times, and my disinclination always, to ride a bicycle through a thick coating of red paint; and red shale when thoroughly soaked can be compared to nothing else, while a gravel road under the same condition can be ridden with relative safety. Indeed, on this very trip I was caught on the heights above Hamilton by a terrific thunderstorm, and yet was able to pursue my journey as soon as the rain stopped; in a red clay district I should have had to walk six miles to the nearest village or to stay over night at some farm by the roadside; but I anticipate.

TO FREEHOLD VIA EATONTOWN.

Should you think well of going via Long Branch and Eatontown (I indicate on the map a slightly more direct road to Eatontown, which is not at all so good, go up Main street to Sixth, to Grand avenue, to Seventh and L into the new magnificent stone road, “Main avenue,” which will take you through elegant Allenhurst, past Elbegon Station into Norwood avenue, and so on to the Long Branch postoffice on Broadway (6 ½ m.).

This delightful coastwise ride we shall take again more leisurely in the course of another trip from New Brunswick and Keyport, which I prepared at the same time as the present, three days ago.

Here at the postoffice turn sharp L and prepare yourself for one of the worst stretches of red clay I have ever encountered on a wet day. It is but 3 ½ miles to Eatontown, of course; that’s a consolation. At the Metropolitan Hotel turn sharp R., and watch for a signpost L ¼ mile farther, directing you to “Freehold, 12 m.”

These 12 miles I have not traveled lately; local wheelman with whom this is the favorite route between Asbury Park and Freehold told me it was partly gravel and partly clay, and on the whole O.K.

You go straight on to Tinton Falls; it was originally Tinturn Falls; the first settlers who went there came from Tinturn in Monmouthshire, England. Out of the village you follow the road in its zigzag over Hock Hockson Brook, beyond which you bear L or you to go Leedsville.
Colt’s Neck awaits you 17 miles from start. This locality was known first as “Call’s Neck” after an early resident, Mr. Call; and nothing else but perversity of human nature caused this designation to be twisted in to “Colt’s Neck.”

And now, if the weather be favorable, you may finish the balance of these 22 miles before we cover the 19 miles of the Farmingdale route; for I propose we try the latter to-day. My Asbury Park informants, while recommending their favorite, excited my curiosity by the admission that they had no recent knowledge of this other itinerary. I do like to see things for myself.

TO FREEHOLD VIA FARMINGDALE.

We ride southward down Main street, watch for Corlies avenue R., and turn sharp into it.

What a contract between that ugly sand track L and the pretty name of the locality to which it leads, “Glendola!”

This other turn R, further on, goes to Centreville and Wayside.

Three miles out bear L, of course, down to that bridge that spans the ravine, and up, on the other side of it. Quite a rolling road this; its bed is improved, and, in any case, we have good path. The narrowness of the latter does not always leave you at liberty to look at the country around; the breeze, however, we can enjoy, and is it not laden, right here, with the scent to the laburnums, and of the thousands of flowers in the fields on either side of us?

As we strike Hamilton M. E. wooden church (4 m.) note turn R to Green Grove, but keep straight on and cling to this lovely path as you go down the hill, lest perchance you should fall into the L to Manasquan (7 miles distant).

At Hamilton postoffice, a little farther, bear L; the R branch goes to Tinton Falls.

And here comes a barn (Long Barn it is called locally), which was until now a painful landmark; instead of the roughish bed of gravel which we have had little difficulty in following hither, a stretch of deep sand used to be the only avenue to the crossroad by this barn; this welcome improvement will be followed by others, we are told.

Right here (6 ½ m.) another turn R to Tinton Falls, and straight on to Coburgh; we turn sharp L, and ½ m. farther take the R branch at the fork. For the next mile the path is our best friend, and here we are at the hamlet of Patricktown (8 ¼ m.) formerly Bridgeton, whence a good path or a good road will take us to Farmingdale, right in front of the Squankum Tribe’s wigwam (10 ¼ m).

“Farmingdale” is a somewhat misleading name, for the manufacturer of powder and explosives is (and was to a greater extent once) its chief business. It is charmingly located, however, and we might do worse than come here some day and make this town the centre of a few rambles awheel through the Monmouth woods to the shore and back again.
Should you wish to make a stay here, the village hotel is a great favorite with wheelmen; if you turn sharp L here you will find it on the right-hand corner of the street at the railroad crossing.

If we must hustle away, on the contrary, turn R opposite the said wigwam. Freehold, the signpost says, is 5 m. away.

That other poor post, at the bifurcation ¼ m. farther, has lost its head. Take care you bear L.

What should we do without this sidpath when this roadbed is soaked with rain as it is to-day (June 21)?

See this tavern sign, “Our House” (13 m.)? This is Fairfield (or Aldena postoffice). We leave that turn to Lakewood on L and pass on.

ALL ALIKE AT A DISTANCE.

I had two little adventures right here the last time I took this trip. At quite a distance ahead I descried three ladies coming towards me awheel. The path was much too narrow to permit of our passing each other; they were on the wrong side of the road, I was on the right; still the sand on the roadway was so loose and deep that the thought of insisting on my conventional right did not even cross my mind; a Tartar would have given way under the circumstences. However, the very wretchedness of the road made me hug the path until I came within a few yards of the fair trio, when all four of us, as if moved by one spring, made a sudden swerve off the path and stood facing each other, ankle-deep in the sand. I felt so thoroughly ashamed that my first exclamation was: “Ladies, what on earth did you take me for?” “That's all right! We know better now,” said the leader of the party, with a reassuring smile, “but, you see, at a distance, men look so much alike!”

A few minutes alter another cyclist appeared ahead of me on that wider path going into the village of Turkey; this time it was a dear little tot, not more than ten years old, and she made for the roadway when at least fifty yards from me. I called out to her that there was plenty of room for both of us on the path. “Oh, I didn’t get off for you!” was the swift reply; “but I saw lots of broken glass there a while ago; I wonder how many punctures you’ll get!” And her merry little chuckle rang in my ear for several miles.

A GOOD ROAD HERE.

Why old “Blue Ball” was changed to “Turkey” is more than I could tell you. There is the old Blue Ball Inn on R (15 ½ m.); it has been closed up for quite a time, and looks as though it felt its disgrace, poor thing.

Another turn L to Lakewood, right here opposite George Hall’s store and bicycle shop.

And now for 3 ½ m. of good gravel road. Half a mile beyond the defunct Blue Ball Inn notice a fork. The turn L would bring you to Trenton via Smithburg, Clarksburg, Allentown and the White Horse. When I described that route in these columns last July, it was anything but good, save between Allentown and Trenton, and I have not heard that is has been improved since that date.
FREEHOLD.

We bear R and spin away to Freehold (19 m.). Do you know what an important part this locality played in the history of Presbyterianism in this country? Free Hill, a couple of miles out, was the cradle of the American Presbyterian Church. There is nothing left now of the original Scots Church in this town – the first in America – but yonder, at Tennent (see map) you could see another tiny Presbyterian Church, that has remained absolutely intact since the days of the Revolution. There stands the same pulpit from which many a stirring appeal was made in 1776; there stand the same high-backed pews of long ago, and on those pews may yet be discerned the blood stains of the wounded of both armies, who were conveyed there from the Monmouth battlefield, close by.

And, by the way, the next Sunday 119 years ago (the 27th of June was Saturday in 1778) active preparations were being made in this section we are now traversing for the important encounter that took place the following day. You know all about the battle of Monmouth, and the treachery of General Charles Lee, and the bravery of the Irish woman, “Sergeant Molly,” and the heroic death of the British General Monckton, whose tombstone is yet shown in the burial ground of the Freehold Meeting-house, and the valor displayed by Washington and Wayne and Greene and Lafayette.

This place deserves a special visit, like so many others.

South street, which ushers us into Freehold, is crossed T fashion by Main street. Here we are met from R by such of our friends as may have selected the Eatontown route. A few doors from this corner is the American Hotel; don’t forget your route coupon.

Here opposite the town hall, if you make no stay in Freehold, turn L into West Main street as far as the Freehold Baptist Church (1/2 m. distant); there wheel sharp R into Manalapan avenue, and renew acquaintance with an untrustworthy friend yclept “red clay,” one that you can depend on, when all is bright and the goose honks high, and which will turn against you when you are most in need of help, in such a rainy season as the present, for instance.

NOT IN “THIS” PART.

In answer to an inquiry I made as I rode by this first toll-gate, I was told with a look of almost indignant resentment that “there is no toll on any road in ‘this’ part of the country – not for wheels!” I felt like apologizing to the lady. At the next toll-gate I simply jotted a turn R to Matawan and one L to Smithburg on my note book, but took good care not to give myself away again as a benighted Pennsylvanian accustomed to pay toll for the privilege of improving the roads with his wheel.

He should be a blind man who could pass by the Halfway-Way House, Manalapan (26 m.) without seeing it.

If you want to talk “good roads,” drop in there; the League of America Wheelmen can’t board of a more enthusiastic member than Landlord Davison.
He reckons his place as being 22 miles to Trenton, 24 to Long Branch, and 24 to Asbury Park; that’s near enough to call it the Half-Way House; and he has hit upon the plan of giving you these distances on the back of his card – a handy memento to carry with you.

Apropos of good roads, commend me to this turn R., by the Half-Way House, to Englishtown. It is made of iron ore, is as clean one hour after a heavy shower as if not a drop had fallen, and is likely to last without any repairs for an indefinite period of time.

THAT STRETCH OF HIGHTOWN.

Our road is far from being so good; yet do not complain until we strike a mill (1/2 m. ahead), and turn around it, first L and immediately R. The next 5 ½ miles into Hightstown are indeed toilsome. The roadway is practically closed to us, and the path in places here and here barely deserves the mark F on our coupon. Hightstown has long enjoyed an unenviable reputation for this unnamable road; is there no glimmer of hope on the horizon yet?

We pass various turnings L into Perrineville and to Etra, R to Jamesburg and Red Tavern, and as we strike the town (32 m.) we wind L, then R, and turn L into the main street opposite Lantz’s Hotel.

At the bifurcation ¼ m up the hill, take the R branch; the L goes to Allentown, and this sharp turn R a few yards farther lead to Princeton.

As soon as we can do so, we turn on to the path, and away we go, past the cemetery, and on to Windsor (36 m.) with comparative ease under normal conditions.

A GRAND FINISH.

Here we were in the habit of going straight on to Newtown, and thence through Hamilton Square to Mercerville (6 ¾ m. of path riding).

We have an alternative now. If you will put up with a couple of miles’ roughish riding, you shall be rewarded for it.

At the Windsor Hotel we turn sharp R across the railroad track, strike Edinburg at the hotel (38 ¼ m.), and there turn L on the smoothest of new macadam road (straight on we would go to Dutch Neck and R to Cranbury).

This beautiful roadbed, which at the present date goes no farther than Edinburg on its way to Cranbury, is in truth a “dream” for 4 ½ m. to Mercerville (42 ¾ m.). There a good road or a good path (bear R at toll-house) takes us to the Trenton Fair Grounds (44 ¼ m.), and, just beyond it, into Greenwood avenue, than which a more lovely driveway could be found with difficulty either in or out of Trenton.

One and three-quarters m. from the fair grounds note Chambers street on L (we shall refer to it at some future date); turn R into Jackson street, L into Market street, and at the intersection of the latter with Warren street (a convenient point for us Philadelphians), we have covered a fraction of over 48 miles from the centre of Asbury Park.