Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There
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Cycle Route No. 20 (1897-98 series)

The Lancaster Pike to Downingtown. With a Digression to the Paoli Monument

Had the fates entrusted me with any jurisdiction over that particular class, the repentant sinner could always have relied on a kind word from me.

This, by way of introduction to the good word I have to say anent the Lancaster pike, or a portion of it. The poor old thing (it has seen winters -- roads reckon their age by winters, you know) has realized the error of its ways; it is now, even at this late day, showing signs of improvements; and weak and intermittent as these are, I wish to proclaim them from the housetop, that all who run may hear.

Of course I do not refer to the suburban part of the pike, that we might well style “Lancaster Boulevard,” and which we all have ridden and praised, but its rural extension through Chester and Lancaster counties, on to the capital city of the latter.

THE LANCASTER PIKE BEYOND BERWYN.
We have traveled it as far as Berwyn (18 m.) in Our Trip Awheel No. 8 to Valley Forge.

To-day we take care to pass by the bridge at the railroad station (over which we then climbed on our way to Cassatt’s Hill) and not to turn R until we reach the next bridge, a flat one on the summit of the hill. On the other side of it we wheel sharp L and a delightfully smooth stretch lies before us.

It is not so many years since the road’s surface was so rough and rocky that I turned about face, right here, one day, and went back home rather than wreck my lovely spring-forked Victor, which I then considered the ne plus ultra of the cycle builder’s art.

Look at it now! In a moment we near Daylesford Station, an unimportant spot that would not attract our attention, were it not for the sharp turn we make L under and R beyond its bridge.

Here, up to a year ago, we had to be contented with a narrow and uncertain path, full of treacherous breaks and gutters, by the roadside. The telfording of the pike has now been completed all the way to Green Tree Station.

PAOLI AND VICINITY.
A mile ahead of Daylesford we strike Paoli and the last of our toll gates for this trip. “Paoli” sounds Italian, does it not? They talk Italian in Corsica.

This inn at the corner of the station road is the successor of the old-time Paoli Tavern, which gave its name to the surrounding district. On its sign was a representation of Pasquale de Paoli, a Corsican patriot much better known here in our Revolutionary times than now, who spent his life in unsuccessful efforts to save his country from foreign oppression, and died in exile in London, England, in the early years of the present century.
A few whirls of your wheel beyond Paoli Inn (not at the corner of the inn itself) notice a branching off L (20 m.); it leads to West Chester via Goshenville, and is the favorite road to West Chester from Philadelphia, pending the improving of the direct West Chester pike.

After we pass a crossing ½ m. farther (R to the old historic Swedesford road, L to the State road) we get a glimpse of the eastern extremity of the Chester Valley; and another ½ m. ahead an L.A.W. fingerboard pointing to a precipitous descent R under a railroad bridge, tells us that the Lancaster pike continues its course in that direction and that Glen Loch (not to be confounded with Grenloch, N. J.) is 5 m. away.

GREEN TREE.

At this point (22 ½ m.) it used to be a question with us whether to reach Downingtown by the pike or by the Indian King road and Boot road (see map). The latter are mud roads that are very much in the same primitive condition now as they were when the “Indian King” and the “Boot” Taverns first opened their doors to the old-time travelers. In wet weather they are unyclable; a mule would have thought certain portions of them positively untravellable when I gave a peep at them last week. On the other hand, rough and hard-bottomed as the pike is, it is being improved in patches, and is much the better of the two in my mind.

A DETOUR TO THE PAOLI MONUMENT.

There is a historic spot, fraught with blood-curdling reminiscences, just a little way up along the Indian King route. Would you care to make a little detour from where we are and pay a visit to it? I mean the parade ground on which stands the Paoli Monument.

If you do, keep straight ahead (we shall return here to Green Tree by and by) and push on to Malvern.

Malvern reminds you of “Little Mac,” does it? If it does not, ask one of our G. A. R. men to tell you about that July day in 1862, when the last battle of the Seven Days’ Fight was fought on Malvern Hill, away in Virginia. A tough day it was, too, for McClellan and his men from 10 o’clock in the morning till 9 o’clock at night. They won it, all the same.

PAOLI PARADE GROUND.

Now, right opposite Malvern Station, turn sharp to the left, up a short street just the length of a square; at the top of it, opposite a cemetery, turn to the right into a mud road, and half a mile further halt at a wooden gate in a fence on the left side of the way and enter the field.

See yonder monument? Make your way to it, or to them, for there are really two.

One, a quadrilateral block of marble, was erected by the Republican Artillerists of Chester county in 1817. It bears the marks of all-destroying time, and probably also of the vandalism of over-zealous patriots. The inscriptions upon it are partly obliterated, but they have been copied literatim on the more recent monument erected by “the citizens of Chester and Delaware counties” in 1877.

The main inscription reads:

PAOLI.
HERE REPOSE THE REMAINS
OF FIFTY-THREE
AMERICAN SOLDIERS
WHO WERE THE VICTIMS OF
COLD-BLOODED CRUELTY
IN THE WELL-KNOWN
MASSACRE AT THE PAOLI
WHILE UNDER THE COMMAND
OF
GENERAL ANTHONY WAYNE,
AN OFFICER
WHOSE MILITARY CONDUCT,
BRAVERY AND HUMANITY
WERE EQUALLY CONSPICUOUS
THROUGHOUT THE
REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

Two old-time cannons guard the little enclosure where the slaughtered band sleep their last sleep.

And this is the spot, or hereabouts, where that episode was enacted which horrified historians have branded as the “Massacre of Paoli.”

On the 16th of September, 1777, the two contending armies had met at the Warren Tavern (see map), and Wayne had been assigned to the post of honor, as on previous occasions. A deluge of rain, however, put an end to the fight; and the ammunition of our poorly equipped troops being rendered useless by the water, they had to retreat to Parker’s Ferry to renew their supply.

Howe, on the contrary, continued to linger around the Warren Tavern, and on the 22d, Wayne being dispatched to watch his movements, pitched his camp in this vicinity.

He had been here but a few hours when he ascertained that the British contemplated an attack on his little band that very night. His numbers were not sufficient to withstand the attack; he, therefore, gave instructions to move way the artillery and attirail, both of which were saved from injury or loss; but unfortunately, owing to the negligence of Colonel Humphon, second in command, a corps of infantry was surprised by the foe, and 150 perished miserably. Gray’s mercenary troops had been ordered to show no quarter to the “dirty rebels,” and they carried out their injunctions with a barbarity usually unknown in civilized warfare.

Who will say that the Paoli parade ground is not worth a visit?

And now we go back to Green Tree, take a dive (cautiously, if you please) under the bridge, turn L beyond it, and now we view the pike in its transformation stage.

A NOTED HILL.

The long hill we presently descend, the too well-known Malvern Hill, offered to the traveler last week its usual bed of loose stones and broken rocks. I was told, however, that the contract for its repair had been given out, and I hastened to announce it in Tuesday’s Inquirer.

If the day has come when Malvern Hill is to be made practicable, then, indeed, we may have hopes for the Lancaster pike.

This is one of the South Hills, between which and the North Hills, lies the beautiful Chester Valley, with its 50,000 acres of choicest lands.
THE LOVELY CHESTER VALLEY.

If you have occasion to dismount at the bend of the road, half way down the hill, seize the opportunity to gaze at the fascinating landscape before you.

On our way to Lancaster we travel the whole length of the valley, and if you keep your eyes open you will not be surprised to hear that, even in our forefathers’ time, it was considered a farmer’s paradise. In a newspaper of the year 1729 Benjamin Franklin related the advice given by a Chester county farmer to his son, on presenting him with a piece of land:

“My son,” he said, “I give thee now a valuable parcel of land. I assure thee I have found a considerable quantity of gold digging there. Thee mayst do the same, but thee must carefully observe this: Never to dig more than plow-deep.”

This is not all, either; for, if you observe the great number of stone houses along our roads, it will remind you that a fertile soil is not the only natural resource that Chester county can fall back upon. No inconsiderable portion of the marble used in some of our city’s largest edifices has been fetched from Chester county quarries, and that crushed limestone with which the pike is being mended comes from the beds that underlie this section for miles around.

EN ROUTE AGAIN.

At the foot of the hill turn R under bridge and L immediately after (straight on would bring you to Phoenixville via Devault, Oldham, etc).

That next turn R (23 ¼ m.) is the old-time Conestoga turnpike, the cradle of the primitive Conestoga wagons, that you read about in your histories: the post says it leads to “Morgantown, 16 m.;” it would be interesting to try the old road with a nineteenth century bicycle; to-day we keep straight ahead.

Frazer is the first little place we come to, then Glen Loch (27 ¼ m.). The road is not as good as the country is charming, yet a great deal of the former corduroy style has disappeared.

And this hamlet, with the diminutive church on L is Ship; yonder railroad station is Ship road; all this a reminder of the Ship tavern of times agone.

Taverns were numerous along our original highways, just as they are beginning to boom again, thanks to the advent of the modern bicycle, and they were the natural landmarks by which distances were reckoned, of course.

AN OLD-TIME ITINERARY.

Thus it was that an almanac published in the year of grace, 1766, described the itinerary to be followed by travelers between Philadelphia and Lancaster in this way:

“Philadelphia to Schuylkill, 2 m.; Black Horse, 4 m.; Prince of Wales, 1 m.; Buck, 1 m.; Sorrel Horse, 1 m.; Plough, 1 m.; Unicorn, 3 m.; Blue Ball, 4 m.; Admiral Warren, 3 m.; White Horse, 3 m.; Downing’s, 7 m.; The Ship, 2 m.; ‘The Wagon, 6 m.; Miller’s, 6 m.; Douglass’, 3 m.; The Hat, 4 m.; Duke of Cumberland, 3 m.; Red Lion, 3 m.; Conestoga Creek, 4 m.; Lancaster Court House, 2 m.

And then we come to Exton (28 ¼ m.). with the first of several turns R to Lionville, that we shall see as we go along.

Another mile ahead is Whitford. Do you like fresh milk, and country milk at that? Surely you must get a sniff as we pass those clean farms, that never tickles your olfactory nerves in our city by the Schuylkill.
Less than two miles now take us to a toll gate that we pass by unmolested, and we enter Lancaster avenue in the borough of Downington.

DOWNINGTON.

Yes sir; a borough it has been since 1859, and the last census allowed it nearly 2000 inhabitants. It was the first post-office ever established in Chester county (in 1798), but that’s nothing; it stood here long before this old pike was made. As far back as 1718 a small settlement had formed around Thomas Moore’s mill, right there on the Brandywine, and it was known naturally as Milltown; later on most of the land passed into the hands of Thomas Downing, one of the early settlers, and the name was changed to Downing’s Town, or simply Downing’s, although the neighborhood in general was frequently referred to as “The Ship,” the name of a tavern now used as a farm a couple of miles west of the town on the way to Coastesville, and duly entered in the almanac list of distances above given.

At the main cross road, by the Swan Hotel (a little over 32 m. from P. B.) if you are curious to return home by the Boot road, turn L over the railroad tracks and L again beyond them; should you wish to go to Lancaster, keep straight out the Main street, but if you can conveniently do so, postpone your trip a little while, and you will give me the pleasure of going with you.

A.E.