

Wheeling Through Europe

By Winfred Ernest Garrison

About Bicycle Touring

To the able-bodied man or woman who is considering whether or not to go on a bicycle tour for a summer vacation, my advice is, "Go." The pleasure of travel, freed from the necessity of consulting and conforming to time-tables and schedules prepared without regard to your individual convenience; the delicious sensation of constantly having a free ride without the moral obliquity involved in beating your way on the railroad; the out-door life of a camp, freed from the possible monotony of remaining in one spot, however lovely; a means of locomotion at once swift, easy and independent; exercise and rest mingled in whatever proportions may suit your changing fancy; an unceasing series of exhilarating incidents and mild adventures; an unrivaled opportunity for seeing the picturesque in nature and observing the life of the people out of the beaten path of travel—these are some of the charms of a well-conducted bicycle tour.

About Bicycle Touring

Over and above all these, and more satisfying, perhaps, than all of them to the mind of the man who delights in activity and finds his keenest pleasure in doing things, is the sense of mastery and accomplishment which comes with the consciousness that you are doing it all yourself. When you have wheeled from the Atlantic to Lake Michigan or from the Upper Mississippi to the Gulf (and after all it is not much of a feat), you will feel that the territory covered is your own. Have you not conquered it? Have you not, in the power of your own might, overcome all the obstacles which it had to offer to your progress? There is in the process that which satisfies the desire of the heart to be doing something, in recreation as well as in business.

If one cared to enter at length into the philosophy of bicycling, it might easily be possible on this basis to construct an apology for the much-abused scorcher, and to show that, however objectionable he may be as a member of society, he is not altogether so irrational a creature as is sometimes supposed. Of course he is a selfish creature, imperiling others for his own pleasure. Of course he sees nothing but his front wheel and hears nothing but the hum of his tires and the click of his chain. Of course he is a public nuisance. But on one truth he has a firm grip and he appreciates it, though he overworks it and thereby brings it into disrepute, as many another good truth has

About Bicycle Touring

been brought into disrepute by being overworked. The truth which he exhibits to the exclusion of all others is this: that the keenest pleasure and the best recreation are to be found, not in seeing or hearing, but in doing.

But enough of the odious scorcher. I have no desire to lose your favor and shut your ears to what I have to say by championing his unpopular cause. The best proof, after all, of the superiority of active over passive pleasures will be found not in a wild, muscle-wearing and heart-straining ride of a hundred and fifty miles in a day, but in a decent and moderate bicycle tour at a reasonable pace through an interesting country.

But perhaps my initial recommendation to “go” was too general. People cannot all take the same sort of vacation, any more than they can eat the same sort of food or wear clothes cut from the same pattern. A man’s vacation must be made to fit him, just like his coat. Some, by reason of physical peculiarities, cannot find ready-made clothes to fit them. For others no ready-made vacation will do. A little round of sight-seeing among other sight-seers, a few weeks at a resort, a trip around the well-worn circle of European travel—these are well enough in their way, but they are like ready-made clothes which may or may not fit you. Look through the lot, and if none of them will do, then mount your trusty wheel and ride away as free as the summer breeze to make for yourself, according

About Bicycle Touring

to your own fancy, a holiday which will fit you like a glove and will be a free expression of your heart's desire in the matter of vacations. Plan it all out beforehand, or plan it as you go, or don't plan it at all. It makes little difference which you do. The beauty of it is that you can do as you please.

But don't forget that you are out to enjoy everything, sunshine and shower, down hill and up, smooth road and rough. You will find them all in the course of your trip, if it be a week long or more, and if you are going to allow a sudden shower, a punctured tire or a few miles of sandy road to make you unhappy, then by all means stay at home and spend your vacation weeks swinging in a hammock or playing croquet. If you can be happy only when physically comfortable, then do not risk a bicycle trip, for there will be many hours when there would be more actual comfort in the aforesaid hammock than in pushing a wheel through the sand of a country road or ploughing through the mud in the premature dusk of a rainy day to reach a gloomy inn before it is absolutely dark. If you don't habitually and constitutionally enjoy everything, then stay at home. At any rate don't, please don't, go on a bicycle tour and then blame me if you fail to have a good time.

If, on the basis of these representations, you are persuaded that it is worth your while, you are hereby invited to join (in spirit if not in body) a select party of two for a nine weeks' bicycle tour in

About Bicycle Touring

England, Scotland and Wales. Certainly no country possesses in a larger degree than Great Britain the characteristics of good roads, picturesque and varied scenery and abundance of points of interest within comparatively short distance. The home of our ancestors is therefore exceptionally well adapted for such a trip as that which we propose to make. At least so it seems now. We will know more of it by the end of the summer than we do now, when we have not yet set foot upon the land, but are straining our eyes to catch the first glimpse of the green coast of Ireland.

At Sea, 20 June, 1898

Wheeling Through Europe by Winfred Ernest Garrison

(St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1900).

Edited by Keith Watkins, January 2011. Rights to this transcription copyright © 2011 Keith Watkins