

RIDE NO. 15 ROUTE OF THE STAGE COACHES

Mileage = 40

Elevation Gain = 2,463

Category = Moderate

In 1799, the New York State Legislature passed an act authorizing the establishment of a private company to build a road from Lansingburgh through Cambridge and Salem to Granville, with a spur from Salem to Rupert, Vermont. The company was permitted to charge tolls until it had recovered the cost of building and maintaining the road, plus a return of 14% on investment, at which time the road was to be ceded to the State. Thus, the Northern Turnpike Company came into existence, continuing until 1850, when the turnpike became publicly-owned. Many miles of present-day State, County, Town and local highway follow the route of the old Turnpike, some with names such as Stage Road, Turnpike Road and Shunpike, the latter used to avoid paying tolls.

This bicycle ride through Rensselaer and Washington Counties follows many of the roads that were part of the Turnpike. Some relics of the old road remain and can be seen along the ride. A number of milestones still stand at various points, showing the distance to Lansingburgh. One of them reading:

TURNPIKE
TO
LANFINGBURGH
23 MILES

is on the east side of Turnpike Road, just north of the junction with Owl Kill Road, eight-tenths of a mile past cue sheet line 15. Look carefully on the right; it may be hidden by weeds. Incidentally, in the 17- and 1800s, the letter S was made to look like an F, accounting for the apparently mistaken spelling on the milestone. Across Turnpike Road from the milestone, and some 100 feet south, there is a historic marker showing the location of the Checkered House Tavern. The original log structure, later sheathed in clapboards, was built in 1765 and destroyed by fire in 1907. It was a stop for the stage coaches on the Turnpike. It had been painted in a checker design, an English tradition for identifying taverns. It was used as a field headquarters by Lt. Col. Baum, the German commander of a contingent of soldiers detached from Gen. Burgoyne's British army near Saratoga to capture military supplies in Bennington. Baum's forces were defeated at Walloomsac, NY in the "Battle of Bennington" and he was killed. The Tavern then became a field hospital for Colonial troops.

Continuing north on Turnpike Road, in another eight-tenths of a mile, on the left, you'll see a brick house, still occupied, with a wheel design in the bricks above the front door to identify it as the home of the local Turnpike agent. Not far beyond, there's a State historic marker at the Old Turnpike Grave Yard where 40 Revolutionary soldiers are buried. In another three-quarters of a mile, you'll pass the Cambridge Village line (cue sheet line 16), where there's another historic marker to shown where Baum's forces traveled on their way to defeat.

The Cambridge Stewart's Shop is noted on line 18 in case you'd like a rest stop. If you'd prefer to keep going, turn left instead of right at line 17, continue six-tenths of a mile and pick up the routing at line 20.

Most of the return ride does not follow the old Turnpike because I wanted to make this a loop ride. However, we return to what I believe was the route of the Turnpike at line 31 in Johnsonville and follow it through the hamlet of Tomhannock to line 35, where the ride turns right on CR 115 to go around the north end of Tomhannock Reservoir. There was no reservoir when the Turnpike existed, only Tomhannock Creek, which the Turnpike crossed on a bridge as it made its way toward Melrose and, eventually, its final destination, Lansingburgh.

Aside from its historic interest, this ride provides beautiful scenery and an ample workout, with 2,463 feet of elevation gain in 40 miles.

Driving to the starting point: refer to a Rensselaer County map. Turn off SR 40 onto CR 117 in Melrose. Follow CR 117 to north end of Tomhannock Reservoir and park in one of the informal "pull-offs" used by fisher people.

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ROUTE OF THE STAGE COACHES

START: FISHERMEN'S PULL-OFF AT NW CORNER OF TOMHANNOCK RESERVOIR

1	GO EAST ON CR 117	401 ft. msl	-	-
2	BR ON CR 115 (CR 117 GOES L)	423'	0.3	0.3
3	L ON CR 110	454'	1.5	1.8
4	BR ON OTTER CREEK RD.	427'	0.6	2.4
5	STRAIGHT ON CR 111	511'	2.7	5.1
6	BR ON LONG WOODS RD. (CR 111 GOES L)	552'	0.2	5.3
7	L AT END ON CR 109	709'	2.7	8.0
8	JOIN CR 103	540'	0.8	8.8
9	BL ON CR 104 (CLAY HILL RD.)	537'	0.2	9.0
10	L ON UM NEW RD.	703'	1.2	10.2
11	R AT END ON UM TATE RD.	750'	1.3	11.5
12	L ON UM EAGLE BRIDGE RD.	679'	0.5	12.0
13	BR ON RT. 67 IN EAGLE BRIDGE	430'	1.5	13.5
14	L ON TURNPIKE RD.	445'	0.8	14.3
15	R AT END (STILL) ON TPKE. RD.	517'	2.2	16.5

16	BECOMES S.UNION ST. IN CAMBRIDGE	490'	2.6	19.1
17	R ON MAIN ST.	491'	0.7	19.8
18	REACH STEWART'S ON R	505'	0.5	20.3
19	BACKTRACK WEST ON MAIN ST.		-	-
20	L ON CR 59	518'	1.1	21.4
21	L ON KING ST.	525'	0.3	21.7
22	PASS WRIGHT RD. - R	739'	2.5	24.2
23	PASS BELLE RD. - R	654'	1.6	25.8
24	BR AT END ON KING RD.(OAK HILL RD. - L)	610'	0.8	26.6
25	CURVE L (DICKENSEN RD. -R)	497'	0.6	27.2
26	R AT END ON CR 59	371'	0.4	27.6
27	L ON MORRIS RD.	478'	0.9	28.5
28	L ON SOUTH RD (BECOMES SCHWENINGER RD)	526'	0.8	29.3
29	L ON CR 114 (MASTER ST.)	457'	2.0	31.3
30	L ON CR 111	446'	1.6	32.9
31	R ON CR 111 / RT.67	383'	0.7	33.6
32	L ON CR 111	383'	0.1	33.7
33	R ON CR 113	458'	0.6	34.3
34	BR ON CR 110 IN TOMHANNOCK	427'	3.2	37.5
35	R AT END ON CR 115	447'	0.6	38.1
36	REACH STARTING POINT	401'	1.8	39.9