



'Camden Cyclist' Newsletter: August/September 2000

News for cyclists from the Camden Cycling Campaign (LCC), London.

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2000 Campaign Diary & Events Listings

Newsletter editor: Paul Gannon

Cycling on Hampstead Heath

The issue of cycling on Hampstead Heath has been back in the news recently. A few score cyclists have been warned by Heath police for breaking by-laws against cycling except on a handful of unconnected paths. And local pressure groups, such as the Heath & Hampstead Society, have called for tougher action against cyclists on no-cycling paths.

The furore reached its heights when the leader column of Ham & High opposed any new cycle paths being provided on the Heath because the "cycling fraternity" had failed to control the bad behaviour of a few errant cyclists. Women are excused, it seems.

But, seriously, there is without doubt a problem with a small number of inconsiderate cyclists, and a bigger one with generally poor cycling standards. CCC tries to improve standards by promoting cycle training and has warmly encouraged efforts by Camden Council to provide basic training. One of the unfortunate side effects of discouraging cycling in the past has been the loss of training opportunities for young people. Cycling is wrongly seen as simple rather than as complex a skill as car driving. Little wonder then that youngsters get in the saddle and have no sense of responsibility or understanding of cycling. The only skill many people recognise about cycling is handling motor traffic. But cycling is also about dealing with pedestrians and crucially - with other cyclists.

The situation will only get worse if youngsters cannot use parks to begin the first lessons of cycling - not just the balancing skill but the care they must give to other users, especially children, pedestrians, animals and other young cyclists. This is the foundation for later skill of responsible cycling.

It simply isn't reasonable to suggest that on an open space the size of Hampstead Heath, there isn't room to provide a minimal set of routes that provide youngsters with a safe place to take the first lessons of the many they will need to become responsible, safe and skilful teenage and adult cyclists.

This is the central weakness of the Ham & High's editorial line - it betrays a lack of understanding of what is involved in training responsible cyclists and how important it is to start that training at a young age. Making training more difficult won't help.

At a later age, people will want to cycle to Hampstead Heath to use its facilities - the tennis courts, the swimming ponds, the band-stand, the glorious woods, or its country-like corners. It makes sense for

London as a whole to encourage people to cycle to their leisure activities - such as the Heath. But with the present cycle routes, which don't allow someone, say, to cycle on the Heath from Highgate to Golders Hill, or Parliament Hill to Kenwood, this objective is thwarted. You are expected to circumnavigate the Heath's 800 acres rather than use its paths to access it. This won't encourage cycling.

Indeed, this policy creates one of the problems about which there are complaints - people cycling on no-cycling paths. A recent letter in the Camden New Journal came from a mother and child, on a cycling school run, who were prevented from cycling on such a path by a police van which drove out of the shrubbery and then drove in front of the pair to prevent them cycling. That is madness.

If there was a proper network of a few interconnected routes that allowed cyclists to cross the Heath or to access its facilities, then police time could be devoted to dealing with cyclists who break the speed limit, cycle without consideration for pedestrians, or cycle off the paths. Instead, at the moment, police resources are being squandered on preventing sensible cyclists trying to make sense of a senseless network.

The route south of Parliament Hill to Nassington Road simply cuts across the the lower end of the Heath and allows no connection with the other path from the Highgate ponds to Yeats Grove and Jack Straws. Similarly the cycle path cutting across West Heath cannot link up with the main Heath because cycling is not allowed on any paths on Sandy Heath.

We have to hope that the City of London (which runs the Heath) and Camden Council, both of whom have progressive attitudes to cycling, see sense in working together to improve the present situation.

The wide vehicle road from the lido (complete with speed humps as it can be used by motor vehicles but not cyclists!) could be linked to the Parliament Hill/Nassington Road path, which in turn could be linked with the Highgate ponds/Yeats Grove/Jack Straws track using Tanza Road (to avoid the narrow path on a steep hill on the Heath itself) and a short southwards extension of the latter track.

CCC has already suggested to Camden Council that it should make the pavement on Spaniards Road between Jack Straws and Spaniards End a trial shared pedestrian/cyclist path as it is very lightly used. This could link with the raised path across Sandy Heath, known as Rotten Row, to North End. At present this is no-cycling path although it is a wide vehicle track. This would provide a link to the track across West Heath and Golders Hill.

This would create a sensible and practical network of routes that allowed someone to cycle to close to any part of the Heath to enjoy its facilities, and allow youngsters a sensible length route to learn a bit about cycling - largely using present vehicle tracks.

The present 'not-joined-up' set of paths unfortunately encourages people to disregard no-cycling signs and mixes up otherwise responsible cyclists with those who careen downhill, churning up soil and with little care for pedestrians.

CCC makes strenuous efforts to counter bad and dangerous cycling. However, the fact that bad and dangerous cycling exists, is not a good reason to refuse to provide responsible cyclists with proper facilities. In most other European countries cyclists are allowed to a sensible network of paths in open spaces such as the Heath. There is no good reason for that to be denied to cyclists in London.

It is incumbent on everyone to play a part in making cycling possible without causing fear and loathing among pedestrians. As individual cyclists we must ensure that we set a good example to others and encourage better cycling among those we know and can influence. And as a cyclists' organisation CCC must contribute its skill and experience to encourage cyclists to take a responsible attitude. But local authorities must play also their part too, by providing proper facilities in and around places such as the Heath. A sensible policy, to replace the present messy one, is now long overdue.

You can help by writing to your local councillor, the City of London, or local newspapers. Write to The Chairman, Hampstead Heath Management Committee, The Guildhall, London EC2P 2EJ.

CCC News

RCS hits the Trail

The Royal College Street cycle track is to be the subject of a research project by the Transport Research Laboratory. A questionnaire will be handed out (though it is unclear whether it will be to cyclists, pedestrians, bus users, vehicle drivers or all) and TRL staff will video the track in operation including the junctions.

CCC will continue to press Camden Council for an effective solution to the problem created by rat-run routes on Plender St and Pratt St and the consequently fast and dangerous way vehicles approach the junctions.

Remember to report any accidents or near misses to CCC and Camden Council.

E-mail news service

If you are on email, make sure you join the existing 60 subscribers to CCC's free news service which gives you local news updates, the chance to comment on traffic schemes in Camden, plus the opportunity to join in our on-line debates. For more information: paulgasson@greengas.u-net.com

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!!

CCC needs volunteers who can help with a variety of tasks such as stuffing our newsletter into envelopes, writing letters to the local newspapers, taking part in traffic counts, or simply putting forward your views on what cyclists need in London. The tasks can be as simple as you like and you need only spare an hour a month. If you think you might be able to help please contact Jane Boardman to see if there is anything you can do: telephone 020 7794 9708.

CCC Members Evenings

2nd Monday every month from 7.30pm. Next two: Mon 14th August & 11th September

Find out what has been going on, and what's coming up for cyclists in and around Camden, and have your say. Format starts with a 20 minute news briefing, then 1/2 hour discussion on any urgent issues, a debate on a topic agreed by those present, before degenerating into pure chit chat. There is also an option of a move to the pub to wind up proceedings.

Meet at the Castlehaven Community Centre, Hawley Road, NW1 Secure indoor cycle parking.

Map of where the Centre is (next to Camden market): <http://www.greengas.u-net.com/CCCdiary.html#CastlehavenCCMap>

For more info: call Jane 020-7794-9708 or Paul at paulgasson@greengas.u-net.com.



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