



**THE BIRKENHEAD HISTORICAL
SOCIETY INC.
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NEWSLETTER JULY/AUGUST 2014

OPENING THE BIRKDALE CYCLE TRACK 23 March 1903

The Birkdale cycle track, the first in the North Island, was opened on Saturday. The event was arranged by the Birkdale Cycle Club and was held under the auspices of the Auckland Cycle Club, the Auckland Cycle Roads League, and a full hundred of their members, whose wheels went over on board the p.s. Eagle at 2 o'clock. Mr Witheford's picturesque residence at Northcote, the scene of many a festive gathering, was the rendezvous; and here the stream of cyclists dismounted and laid their steeds on the lawn. The entrance to the Mayoral grounds was spanned by an archway of greenery, suspended from which was Mr Witheford's own bicycle. The balcony was made pretty with Chinese lanterns. The local wheelmen attended in large numbers, and "Calliope," as Mr Witheford's residence is aptly named, became the scene of a marvelous assemblage of wheels and wheelmen. There were Auckland citizens of some repute among them, scorers with records, fair ladies. There were white bikes and red bikes; bikes with freewheel, midget bikes for midget riders, and bicycles made for two. To crown all, the Northcote Band spread music in the air.

Mr Witheford, as Mayor of Birkenhead (of which Birkdale is a part), has heartily encouraged the construction of the cycle track, and it is a great measure to the friendly attitude of the Borough Council that the courage and success of the Birkdale club's undertaking was due. The visitors were given the "run of the house," and refreshments were plentiful. Both inside and on the verandah dainty little tables were set out with tempting fare. Sandwiches and cakes, custards in cups, blancmange on artistic afternoon tea plates, cups of tea, and wineglasses (harbingers of good) were all in waiting; and dishes of fruit were placed about

in convenient spots. Mrs Witheford and her lady friends were unremittingly attentive.

It was nearly 4 o'clock when farewell was said to "Calliope," and a move was made for the track. The track was struck at Highbury corner, a spot one mile from the Birkenhead Wharf, and a here a large crowd was gathered from the district and suburbs of Birkenhead. The track consists of a narrow streak of ash laid on a strip of the roadside which had been cleaned, ploughed, formed and hardened under direction of the Birkdale Cycle club. It stretches for three miles into the heart of Birkdale, and affords a good afternoons's spin for lovers of the wheel through a pleasant land. It is proposed in due time to extend the track to Birkdale Wharf, where there is a pleasant but little known beach. When this is accomplished the spin to the Birkdale Beach via Birkenhead is likely to become a favorite outing.

Addressing the large company, Mr Witheford remarked upon the rapidity with which the bicycle had taken its place among the necessities of modern life, and proceeded to point out that if everybody lived in the city alongside of their work they would not want bicycles. It was because of the strong desire which now existed to live in some of the beautiful suburbs that the great value of the bicycle was so universally felt. The tendency of the age was to secure land away from the crowded cities, plant orchards and gardens, keep poultry, and thus establish an industry which, when their days of the factory or the office was over, would afford them the independence in their old age. After attending to the scenic beauties of Birkenhead and Birkdale, His Worship spoke of the generosity with which the Auckland farms had subscribed towards the cost of laying down the cycle track, with thanks to the perseverance of Mr Brooks (the Chairman), Mr Bolton (Secretary), Messrs J. S. Levesque and T Shepherd (the local Works Committee), and others of the local club, was now an accomplished fact. Mr Witheford spoke of the rapid growth of the Birkdale Club up to its present strength of its members, and in conclusion appealed to the owners of cattle and horses to respect the moral rights of the cyclists to the track and not to needlessly destroy it.

Cheers were then given for the subscribers and the visiting cyclists.

Mr Brooks (Chairman) said the local men fully realised the imperfections of the track, but they looked forward to the time when it would be superseded by an asphalted track, which the Auckland friends might be tempted to use frequently. Cheers were then given for Mr J. S. Levesque for valuable work done in connection with the track, and Mr and Mrs Witheford also received a big ovation.

The opening ceremony was performed by Mrs Witheford, who with a pair of scissors snipped the blue tape which was stretched across the track and declared the track well and truly opened.

Mr Choyce, chairman of the Auckland Cycle Roads League, delivered a short speech in reference to the Cycle Bill which for the last three years, he said, they had been trying to pass into law. The members of the league recognised that Mr Witheford had great energy and influence, and they hoped that he would shortly take the Bill in hand. The members who had previously had charge of the Bill had now gone to represent one of the suburbs, and while they did not wish to do anything discourteous, they considered it right that the senior member for the club should take the matter in hand.

Mr Witheford in reply, expressed his entire approval of the measure, but added that he did not wish to do anything that would appear discourteous to Mr Fowlds from whom he had always received the most friendly treatment. He would, however, do everything he possibly could do to help the Bill forward when it came before the House.

Bicycles were then mounted, and with a lady leading and bells tingling, the whole body of some 300 cyclist set off in the direction of Birkdale. The friends at the Birkdale end met them with a supply of fruit, and another social spell was indulged in. The visitors returned home in sections reaching Auckland between 6 and 7 o'clock.

(Auckland Star 1903)



B G Sharp Shield

COMING EVENTS

Bus Trip to Auckland War Memorial Museum

19 July 2014

Leaves Verrans Corner 10am, down Birkdale Road, leaving Birkenhead Museum 10.30.

There are some amazing things happening at the Museum so don't miss out.

It is free entry to the Museum if you have your rates notice with you.

Cost \$10

Whats on at the Museum

Exhibitions

Wildlife Photographer of the year

Dinosaur Footprints – a story of discovery

Entangled Islands

Still Life: inside the Antarctic huts of Scott and Shackleton

16 August Speaker

Speaker Brian Potter

September

Heritage Month

October

To be confirmed

November Christmas Party

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