

Getting Out of Gates Head (On a Bicycle)

By Jim Scott

Revised August 2015

Introduction

If you're a Gates Head adult with a bicycle, you might choose to take your bike elsewhere to ride. You might stick it on a bike rack or in your vehicle, and take it to a bike-friendly area. But suppose you just want to be able to hop on your bike and ride around the immediate area, on friendly neighborhood streets. Suppose also that you want to avoid riding on heavily-traveled streets or roads. You might think you're constrained to Gates Head and the adjoining neighborhood, Candlewood. To go anywhere else requires you to go out onto Pemberton Road, a heavily-traveled two-lane state route with no shoulders. That's no place to ride a bicycle, right?

But wait! What about that southbound right-turn lane that runs along the west side of Pemberton from north of Gates Head almost down to Pemberton Elementary School? If you could use that lane, you could connect to other nearby neighborhoods. In particular, you could go across Pemberton onto Donora Drive, into Pinedale Farms; that's a large neighborhood with many streets to explore. It's also a gateway to the Great Beyond.

This is my informal guide to biking in the Gates Head area. It's based on my own personal biases:

- I don't want to transport my bike. I want to start pedaling at the end of my driveway.
- I'm willing to *walk* my bike short distances for the sake of safety or convenience.
- I want to ride only on residential streets or other roads with little traffic and some form of shoulder outside the traffic lane. Where necessary, I'm willing to ride short distances on a heavily-trafficked road if there's a shoulder, or even (reluctantly) a lightly-trafficked road with no shoulder.

It's likely that you don't share all of those biases with me. Nevertheless, you may find something useful here for your own biking style.

Now let's see where that Pemberton turn lane will take us! But first, a cautionary note.

Safety Considerations

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying it's safe to ride a bicycle on Pemberton. Far from it! There are many things that can go wrong. What's more, riding *northbound* in the southbound turn lane is, as I understand it, technically illegal. Be that as it may, if you're going to ride your bike northbound on the parts of Pemberton we're talking about, you might have to choose between illegal or suicidal. If you've ever driven (your car) up Pemberton from Quioccasin and found yourself behind a bicyclist who had absolutely no shoulder to retreat to, you know what I mean.

Nevertheless, if you're going to ride up and down Pemberton in that turn lane, there are guidelines to reduce the risk.

The first guideline is that you should come to a complete stop (yes, with your foot on the ground) before going out onto Pemberton. For example, suppose you want to go to Pinedale Farms. To minimize your distance on Pemberton, you go via Coachlite Drive through Candlewood, and down

Chatterleigh Drive to Pemberton. If you then turn right onto the Pemberton turn lane without stopping, it's very difficult to determine whether there's a car coming southbound on Pemberton. You may think, "So what? I'm only going into the turn lane." But the driver of the car won't be able to tell whether you're going into the turn lane or into the traffic lane. That driver might slam on brakes or swerve, and neither of those is going to work to your benefit. So come to a stop, then inch your way out onto the turn lane when no southbound cars are coming.

A second guideline is that it will often be safer to walk your bike across Pemberton, rather than to ride it across. As a pedestrian, you'll find it much easier to judge the vehicular traffic, particularly the traffic coming up behind you. For example, if you come out of Chatterleigh and head south to Donora and Pinedale Farms, you'll have only half a block in which to assess not only the traffic coming toward you, but also the traffic coming from behind you. Even with a rearview mirror (don't go out without one), it's hard to be sure that there's no one behind you. Don't forget that Chatterleigh is at the crest of the hill, so you can only see but so far behind you. If you've missed something, tragedy could come as you edge into the southbound lane of traffic.

Guideline number three: The Pemberton right-turn lane might not get a lot of traffic, but it does get *some* traffic. If you're southbound in that lane and a car comes up behind you, intending to turn right, just stay over as far as you can to the right. If you get to the next intersection before the car, stop and let it go past. But if you're *northbound* in the southbound turn lane and a car comes toward you in that lane, you might want to just pull all the way over to the curb and stop until the car goes by. Be especially cautious as you approach the top of the hill, because a car coming toward you in that lane might not see you soon enough to get past you safely.

That's enough about safety before we get on to the fun stuff. Just don't ever come back to me and tell me that you thought it was safe because I said so. I'm telling you that it's all dangerous. Life is dangerous. You can reduce your risks by using your judgment. What risks you choose to take are up to you. And don't ever say that I said one way was safer than another way. What do I know? Am I a safety engineer? Have I done controlled studies? One final point: You might take a risk and get away with it. But if you take that same risk every week or every day, sooner or later your luck will run out.

Candlewood

With that behind us, let's go explore! We'll start close to home, by taking Coachlite Drive to Candlewood.

Everybody in Gates Head knows Candlewood. It's pretty much a straight road, although there's a crook where Chatterleigh Drive takes a curve and Peppertree Drive continues west from there. There's also a little loop near Pemberton, called Chatterleigh Court.

There's actually an extra bit of Peppertree on the other side of Gaskins Road, but you can't get there from here, thanks to a high wooden fence that continues unbroken up past Gates Head.

Springtree

Next south of Candlewood is Springtree, with its entrance where Pine Shadow Drive meets Pemberton. From Gates Head, take Coachlite Drive into Candlewood, turn left, and go to the entrance at Chatterleigh Drive and Pemberton Road. Stop, then ease your way onto the southbound

Pemberton turn lane. Stay in the turn lane until you get to the "Springtree" sign, and turn right onto Pine Shadow.

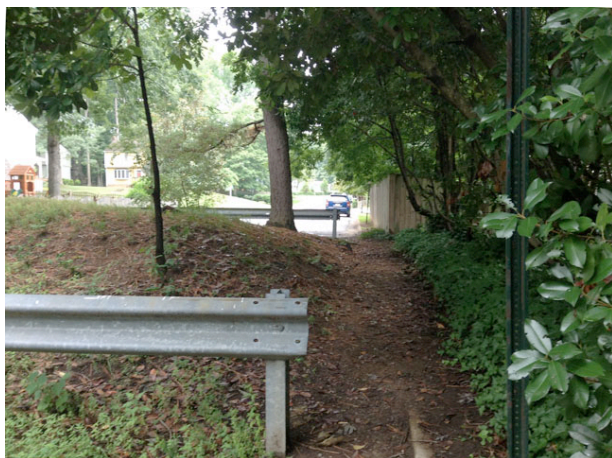
Besides Pine Shadow, the other main road in Springtree is Heather Spring Drive, which intersects with Pine Shadow at two locations. There are also three cul-de-sacs. The farthest one in, Melissie Court, extends north from Heather Spring; it used to connect to Candlewood via an unofficial pedestrian/bike path, until someone built a house there.

As with Candlewood, there's no cut-through to Gaskins. In fact, Springtree doesn't even get close to Gaskins.

Pemberton West (and Rainbrook)

There's one more neighborhood south of Gates Head, and that's Pemberton West, just south of Springtree. Getting there is the same as going to Springtree, except that you continue farther south in the turn lane, and turn right at the "Pemberton West" sign onto Della Drive.

Pemberton West consists of Della Drive and Tracy Court, which ties in to Della at two points. If you continue west on Della for a short distance, you'll come to a guardrail barrier that seems to say in no uncertain terms "no car shall pass this point". Beyond that guardrail is a little hill, or berm, and beyond that is another guardrail facing the other way. You can easily walk your bike past all of this, and by doing so you'll enter the Rainbrook neighborhood, which has its entrance at Gaskins and Della. Rainbrook consist of Della Drive, Rainbrook Drive, and five cul-de-sacs.



(Left) The walkway past the Della Drive barrier. (Right) The entrance to Rainbrook, where Della comes out on Gaskins.

A Route to Deep Run Park (Maybe)

Traversing the Della Drive barrier is a way to get through to Gaskins Road. As my neighbor Jerry Jolley points out, from here you can get to Deep Run Park. But to do that, you have to ride some distance north on Gaskins. Gaskins is two lanes each way, with curbs and grass but no sidewalks at this point. You'd be riding with the big boys. If you decide to do that, I suggest you stop at the intersection of Gaskins and Ridgefield Parkway and walk your bike across both streets, using the crosswalks.

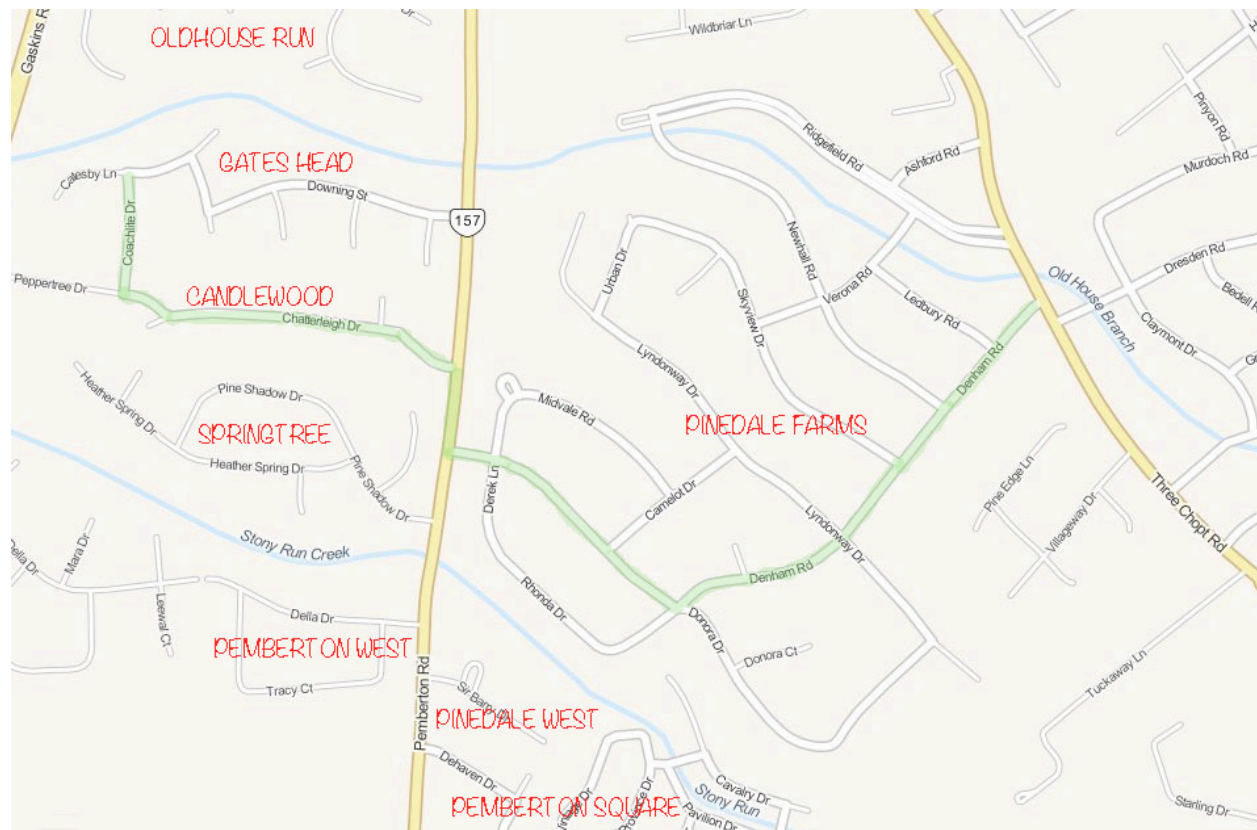
Is there any other way to get to Gaskins from Gates Head? The west end of Gates Head, like that of Candlewood, is separated from Gaskins by a high fence. On the other hand, Oldhouse Run, the neighborhood just north of Gates Head, has pedestrian access to Gaskins. But to bike from Gates Head to Oldhouse Run, you have to navigate a part of Pemberton that has no shoulders. To do that, ride from Gates Head to Oldhouse Run along the dirt path that runs along the west edge of Pemberton. It's not pleasant, but it's doable. You'll probably want to walk your bike part of the way, especially near the end.

Once you're in Oldhouse Run, turn right on Hitchin Drive, then left on January Drive, and go to where it comes to a T at Boardman Lane. This is where you can walk across Gaskins, using the crosswalks. From here there's a wide asphalt sidewalk on the north side of Ridgfield Parkway. Unfortunately, it's riddled with bumps caused by roots that have worked their way under the asphalt. Once you get to the park entrance, there's no end of great places to go on your bike.

Incidentally, Boardman Lane also takes you to Rockstone, the next neighborhood north of Oldhouse Run.

Pinedale Farms

Now let's go eastward, across Pemberton to Pinedale Farms.



Route from Gates Head to Three Chopt, through Pinedale Farms

Go through Candlewood as before, stop, and take the turn lane south on Pemberton. Ride down half a block, then stop opposite Donora Drive and the entrance to Pinedale Farms. Walk your bike across, then hop on and ride east on Donora. Take the third left onto Denham Road. Ride on up the hill, stopping before you get to Three Chopt. The next-to-last intersection before Three Chopt is

Newhall Road. Just on the east side of this intersection is a small dairy farm. If you're lucky, you'll see real cows grazing!

If you head back home from this point, it will be downhill or level almost all the way. But Pinedale Farms has many side streets; eventually you must explore them all.

If you take Ledbury and turn right on Verona Road, or if you go all the way down Newhall Road, you'll come to Ridgefield Road (no connection with Ridgefield Parkway). It has a water channel down the middle, with guardrails on both sides. The stream running through the channel is Oldhouse Branch (or Old House Branch), the same stream that runs between Gates Head and the Oldhouse Run neighborhood.



(Left) Ridgefield Road as seen from Newhall Road. (Right) Looking east on Ridgefield Road.

There are two places to get from one side of Ridgefield Road to the other: one is at Newhall Road (pictured above, left) and one is at Ashford Road, which is the only connecting road on the north side of Ridgefield.

If you look left from Newhall and Ridgefield, you'll see that Ridgefield comes to a dead end at a thick woods. If you could follow the stream through the woods, you'd find Pemberton Road, very near the Gates Head entrance.



The dead end at the west end of Ridgefield Road.



The dead end at the east end of Lyndonway Drive.

As you approach the end of the road, you'll see a pathway on the left, past a white lattice fence.



The Secret Passage.

Walk your bike through, and you'll come to a one-lane road. This and the road it connects with are technically private roads. This means that the roads are maintained by the home owners, not by the county. There is no "No Trespassing" sign at this point, but there are some at other locations along the road it connects to. Use your judgment. My *feeling* is that it's okay to ride on the roadways as long as you're not creating mischief.

Continue to walk your bike at least a short distance past the first driveway on the right; the dogs there are probably not dangerous, but they can be a nuisance.



(Left) The one-lane road past the Secret Passage. (Right) The one-lane road meets Tuckaway Lane.

Some maps call this one-lane road an extension of Lyndonway Drive. Others call it Tuckaway Road, or a part of Tuckaway Lane. On many maps, it doesn't exist at all. Ride down it about a block, and you'll come to the *real* Tuckaway Lane. As you approach this intersection, you'll find a small bamboo forest on your right. Turn right and you'll soon come to a dead end at Tuckaway Daycare. Turn around and go north on Tuckaway Lane, stopping before you get to Three Chopt. At this point, you're just west of the Walgreens at Parham and Three Chopt.

As you ride north on Tuckaway Lane toward Three Chopt, the Tuckahoe Library and the Post Office will be on your right. But don't think you can get to them from here; there's a fence between Tuckaway Lane and both facilities.



(Left) Going north on Tuckaway Lane, toward Three Chopt. (Right) The fence behind the library.

To return home, go back south on Tuckaway Lane, and turn right onto the little one-lane road leading back to the Secret Passage, Lyndonway Drive, and Pinedale Farms.

You may also want to go a bit beyond where Tuckaway Lane ends at Three Chopt. You can get to Walgreen's easily by riding a short distance on the sidewalk. The sidewalk has ramps, so you don't even need to get off your bike. If you're a scofflaw, you can even get to the post office and library by cutting through the post office's back parking lot (going at your own risk past any number of "Do

Not Enter" signs), walking across a short grass area to the front parking lot of the post office. From there, getting to the library is a piece of cake.



(Left) Heading west on the one-lane road. (Right) The Secret Passage, on the way home.

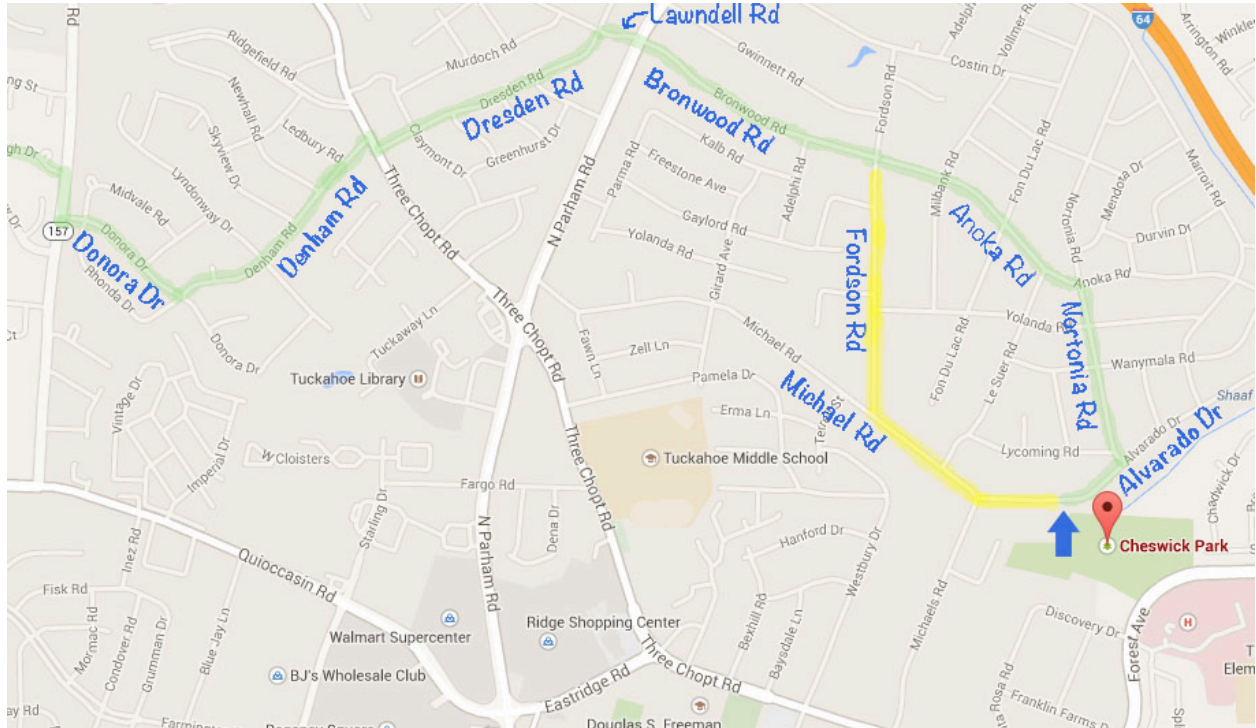
Beyond Three Chopt and Parham

To go even farther afield, the best bet is to go to the end of Denham and *walk* your bike across Three Chopt to Dresden Road. (If there was ever a place to get off and walk your bike, this is it!) To get to Cheswick Park, for example, you can use a route suggested by my neighbor Charles Johnston, indicated in green on the map below. Continue north on Dresden, turn right onto Lawndell Road, and cross Parham. Lawndell becomes Bronwood Road, which becomes Anoka Road. Turn right on Nortonia Road, then right on Alvarado Drive. When Alvarado curves to the right, you'll see a back entrance to Cheswick Park on your left. The one-way distance from Gates Head is about three miles.



Back entrance to Cheswick Park, on Alvarado Drive.

The Bronwood / Anoka portion of this route is a two-lane road with a double-yellow line down the middle, and with not much shoulder in some places. However, traffic is light. You can shorten this portion by turning sooner, onto Fordson Road instead of Nortonia, as indicated in yellow on the map. Then bear left on Michael Road, and left on Alvarado. The park entrance will be on your right.



Route to Cheswick Park. Big blue arrow marks park rear entrance. Yellow is alternative route.

If, instead of heading to Cheswick Park, you turn left from Dresden onto Lawndell Road, you can explore the vast neighborhoods north of Three Chopt, bounded by Parham, Pemberton, and I-64. This includes Jackson Davis Elementary School and the Chestnut Oaks Recreation Association.

Conclusion

I hope you've learned something you can use from reading this little guide. Even if you're a more daring bicyclist than I, and are willing to ride in traffic, perhaps you've discovered some quieter areas that you'd like to explore.