Cycling promotion - the lessons of history
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Introduction
Some countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, are noticeably better at ‘doing’ cycling than others, such as Australia or the United Kingdom. By comparison, the former are better supplied with cycling infrastructure such as cyclepaths and cycle parking. Technological determinists believe that the presence of cyclepaths is responsible for the high levels of cycling in the Netherlands and Germany. This paper tests this hypothesis using historical data regarding the growth of cycling in the Australian island state of Tasmania (then a British colony) in the nineteenth century.

Methods and Sources
There are no statistics for the levels of cycling in nineteenth century Tasmania, nor a definitive history of cycling for this part of Australia. Therefore, an estimate of the extent of cycling in the colony was gauged by noting the publicity it achieved.

The data for this study were drawn primarily from the digitized versions of Australian periodicals in Trove, the National Library of Australia’s public database of literary resources. No personal writing of any magnitude regarding cycling in Tasmania was sighted, apart from one account of a cycle tour around the colony in 1897. This may have been written specifically as a publicity piece.

The main data were supplemented by information from original government records, books and other periodicals in public institutions, and findings by the author and local historians. The information in periodicals included articles, advertisements, cartoons and official announcements.

Due to resource constraints, the analysis did not include the consideration of economic factors, on either a colony wide or a personal scale.

Conclusions were drawn using qualitative techniques and textual analysis.

Findings
Starting from the early periods of cycling in Tasmania, information in the public domain includes:

• details of individual cyclists. At first, cyclists’ mere existence was of interest. As time progressed, more impressive feats such as cycling between Launceston and Hobart were noted. Eventually such a ride became too mainstream to be newsworthy and publicity tended to concentrate on, for example, race results. Cycling feats from mainland Australia (such as transcontinental rides) and overseas were still of interest in the 1890s.
• details of bodies who had a commercial interest in cycling. These developed in quantity and variety over time. At least one builder advertised velocipedes for sale in 1869, but by the mid-1890s there were, inter alia, a cycling school, multiple cycle agencies and suppliers of accessories and clothing. Some non-cycling businesses began to include cyclists in their target markets, including the railways, publishers of tourist guidebooks and photographic studios. All these bodies had an interest in promoting cycling.

Discussions
Textual analysis showed that there were two periods in the nineteenth century (the year 1869 and the decade of the 1890s) that showed clear signs of public infatuation with cycling: locally, in the other Australian colonies and overseas. Evidence suggests that public interest in cycling was not as high during the 1870s and 1880s. Examination of contemporary writing suggests:

• widespread (although not universal) positivity towards cycling;
• a nascent culture (represented by, inter alia, promoters staging races, cyclists organizing into clubs, and tourists to the colony cycling as part of their visit);
• vehicles improving over time (becoming faster to ride; and after the period of ordinaries, easier to ride, safer and suitable for women in their normal clothing).

This paved the way for cycling in Tasmania in the succeeding centuries.

It is clear that many factors contributed to the promotion of cycling in Tasmania in the nineteenth century. The limited mention of physical infrastructure (a controversial bicycle racing track on a cricket ground, towards the end of the study period) suggests that it played no part in the growth of cycling in nineteenth century Tasmania.

References

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