

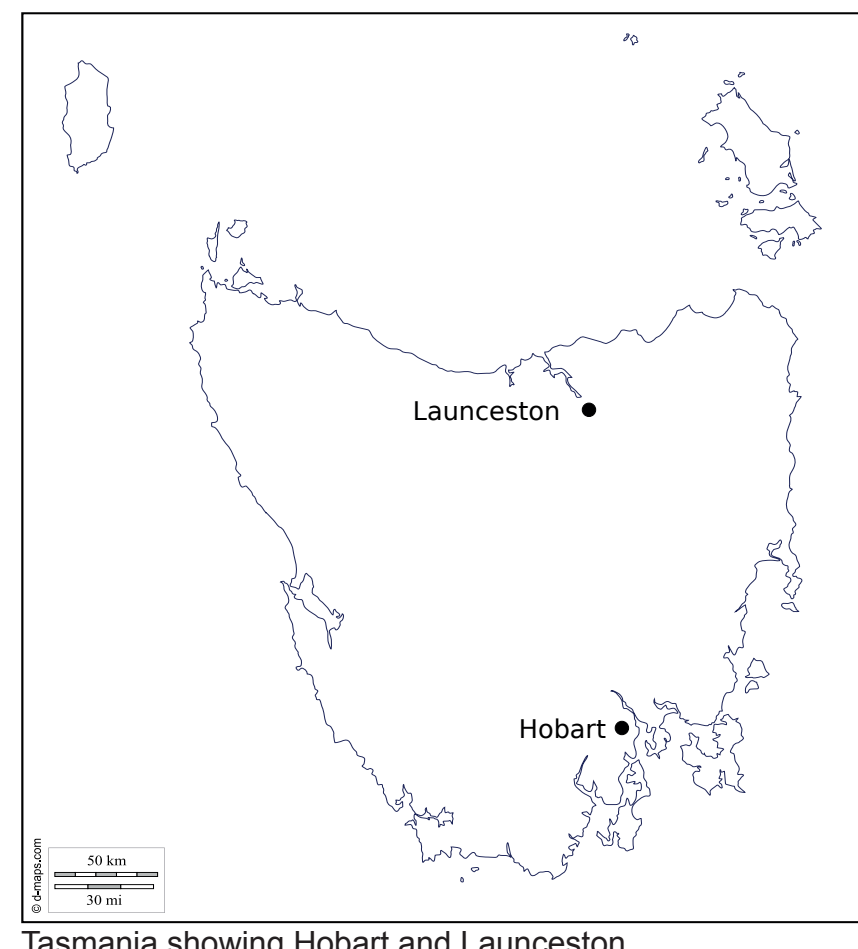
# Cycling promotion - the lessons of history

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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

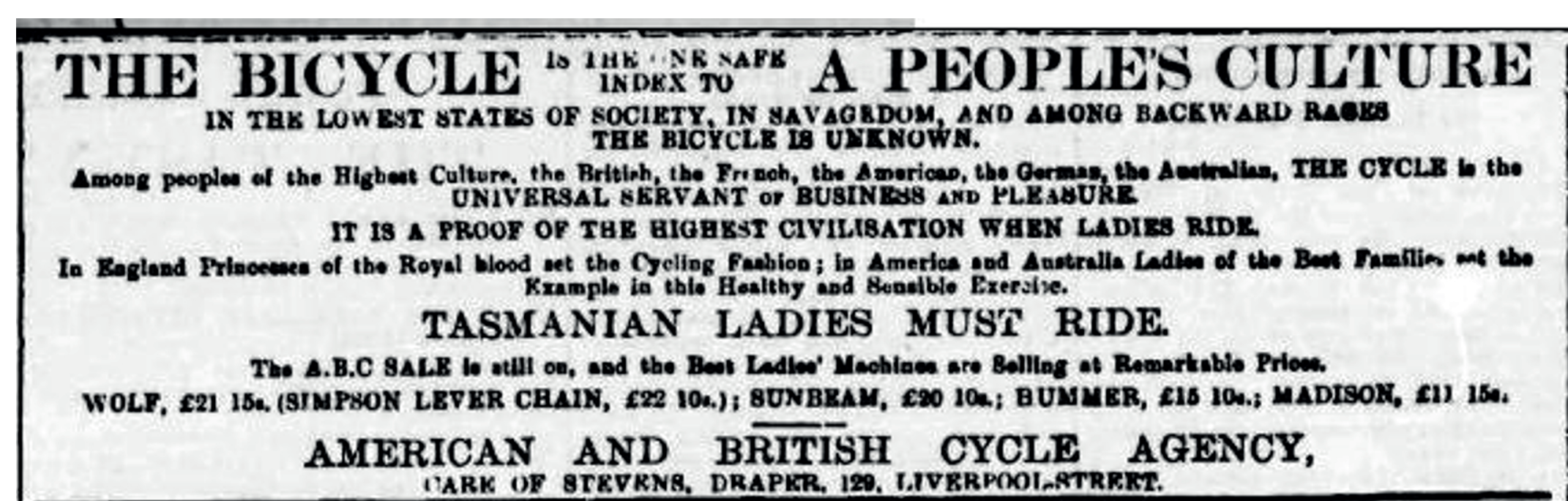
There are no statistics for the levels of cycling in nineteenth century Tasmania, nor a definitive history of cycling for this part of Australia. Therefore, an estimate of the extent of cycling in the colony was gauged by noting the publicity it achieved.

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.



## Discussion

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

Fitzgerald, J., 1980. *The bicycle and the bush: Man and machine in rural Australia*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press  
Sharples, R., 2017. Early cycling in Tasmania: dandies in Van Diemen's Land. *The Boneshaker*, 22 (204) and ff.  
Smethurst, P., 2015. *The Bicycle - Towards a Global History*, Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Contemporary graphics, down the page:

- 1: Cartoon of James Ogilvie, who raced the boneshaker he had built, 1878 - <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page25181204>
  - 2: *Through Tasmania on a Bicycle*, (n.d. - first edition published 1897) - State Library of Tasmania
  - 3: Advertisement - "Tasmanian ladies must ride", 1897 - <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article9400474>
  - 4: Formation of the Tasmanian Bicycle Club, 1880 - <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article8991422>
- Map: Tasmania. Base Map source [http://www.d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=64385&lang=en](http://www.d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=64385&lang=en)

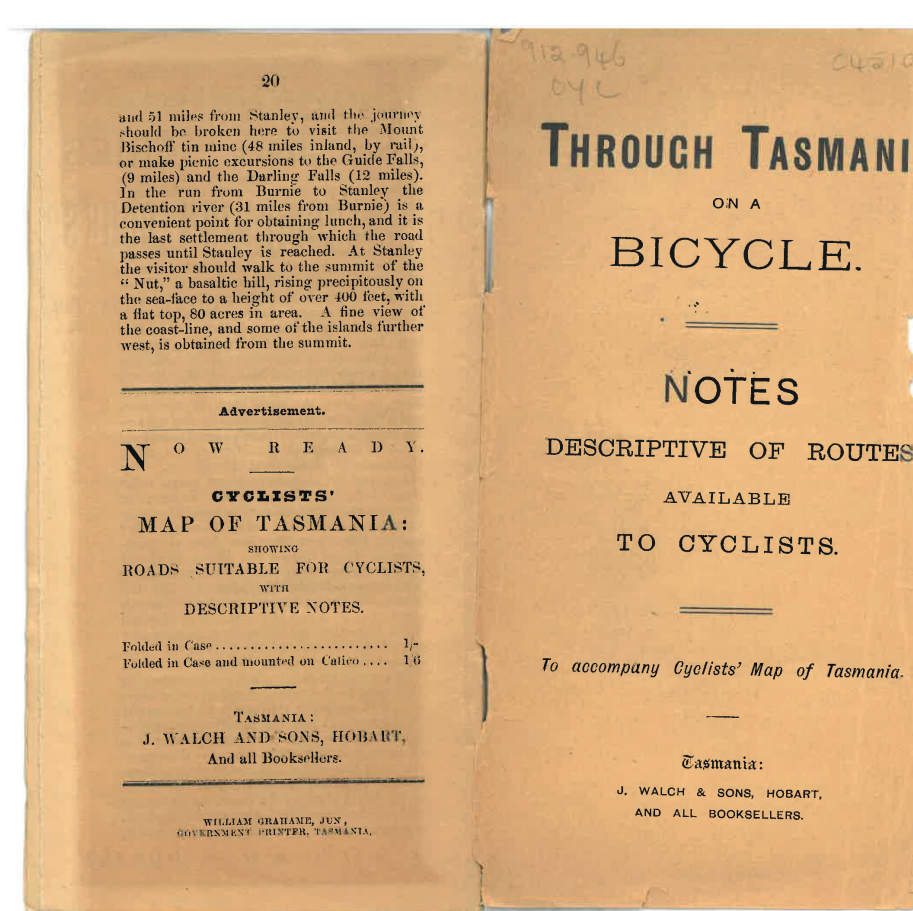
## Acknowledgements

John Huff for poster production and valuable discussions  
The State Library of Tasmania for help with gathering data

## 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. Positive descriptions of cycling were a way of promoting it.
- *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.
- *published materials*, which told the public who was cycling, who was providing goods and services for cyclists, the benefits of cycling and how to make the most of it. The sources of information included newspapers, other private enterprise and the colonial government;
- *expressions of public attitudes*, which tell us how cycling was perceived. This was principally in the form of newspaper articles, opinion columns and letters to the editor. There was continuing interest in cycling throughout the period, which was generally positive. Harassment of cyclists was rare but nevertheless existed, as the reward notice from the Marmion Cycling Club shows. The enthusiasm for the involvement of women in cycling may in some cases have had an economic basis.



As the number of cyclists grew, it is possible to see:

- *a need for legal enactments*, to provide the framework by which cycling could be incorporated into the community with minimal problems. This included rules for the use of the road, and for carriage of cycles by train, to supplement existing customs regulations for the import and export of cycles;
- *the provision of organized cycling*, in the form of cycle clubs and cycle racing. Organized races were initially part of programmes of mixed sporting events open to the public. Towards the end of the century, they were usually arranged by cycling clubs, who also organized recreational rides and social events. When women started cycling, the clubs became a place where young men could find female company, as well as a pleasurable activity and congenial male companionship.

**BICYCLE CLUB.**—At a meeting held at the Criterion Hotel last evening, a new club, to be called "The Tasmanian Bicycle Club," was formed. Mr. C. H. Elliott was elected president, Mr. H. Chapman captain, Mr. G. Hinsby vice-captain, Mr. H. Cato treasurer, and Mr. L. Walker secretary. The following were appointed a committee:—Messrs. A. Giblin, C. Allport, and A. Sharland, with the secretary and treasurer. It was decided that, with a few alterations, the rules of the Melbourne Bicycle Club should be adopted. The first meeting will take place at Walsh's corner on Saturday, January 8.

