

# Route marking

by Dan Henry

Photos by Terry Pardue

There are many ways of leading  
But I find so many fail,  
For hardly have you started  
Than the head has lost its tail.  
Then holding up the fast ones  
At every roadway turn,  
Awaiting for the laggards  
Spoils the fun, so many learn.  
It is a first essential  
That your pace in any way  
Be not the slightest factor  
In one's enjoyment of the day.  
A route that has been scouted  
Each turn marked bright and clear,  
Is the pattern most successful  
I have found o'er many a year.  
It works for any number  
And there's very little cost,  
For a brush, and paint, and bottle  
Not a soul will e'er get lost.  
It also aids all traffic  
When in groups of but a few,  
A car can pass with ease  
No problem getting through.  
But a line of many cyclists  
As far as sees the eye,  
Holds up the flow of traffic  
Not a single car gets by.  
Try marking your next outing  
I am sure your club will say,  
The marked route is the answer  
Makes for all a happy day.  
Whether fast, or slow, or laggard  
You'll find others by your side,  
Yes! The marked route way of leading  
Gives to all—a carefree ride.

—Dan Henry

Have you ever been on a bike ride over a course that has been well marked with directional arrows, painted on the road? During such a ride you don't need to worry about getting lost. Many of us are physically unprepared or lack the time to do the additional mileage required by errors in navigation on long rides. In hilly country, a wrong turn by a weak cyclist might become serious. When it is raining or windy, handling a map becomes difficult or impossible. Additional problems exist for those who use reading glasses.

Route markers are always at work, failsafe, cannot be lost or misplaced, and are available at precisely the moment of need, all without effort. Your pace, cadence, and thoughts remain undisturbed.



Dan Henry using his preferred arrow-painting technique. With paint in the water bottle and the brush carried in a clip, it becomes a one-handed job—no need to even park the bike. Use the bottle's nozzle to spread the paint in the approximate pattern desired, then finish off with the brush. Rough paint is shown to the right, and the finished job on the left.

## Ever since birth—free at last

Finding one's way has been a never ending and worrisome chore since birth. The story of our lives has been an ever expanding tour from here to there. First around the crib, then a playpen, and later the house, the yard, the block we live in and on and on, until we know the town. After adolescence we continue to places throughout the world and now even into space. All this has entailed a continuing reference and concern about where we are, directions to take, and destinations ahead. Dealing with charts, maps, and instructions continues endlessly till death.

On a marked bike route, you're free of all this for the day. Free to really have fun, relax and enjoy the passing scene. The work has all been done by the ride organizers. Although a good map and directions should be a part of your equipment, they can be tucked away and used only should the need arise. Route marking adds a substantial element of excellence to any serious bike rides.

## Where it all started

Way back in the 1940s and 1950s, the New York Chapter of the American Youth Hostels conducted charter bicycle trains from New York City out into the countryside for a day of cycling on quiet country roads on the eastern end of Long Island or the Cornwall & Kent areas of Connecticut.



Another arrowing method, without ever getting out of the car. Pull off the shoulder of the road to the right, so that when you open the driver's door you're in the right spot for an arrow.

We'd take three or four baggage cars for bikes and about ten passenger cars for cyclists.

On some of these early outings I served

on the route planning committee. There were riders of every age, ethnic background, and ability, with every sort of bicycle you can imagine. We soon learned that maps, route descriptions, and sheep-herding techniques proved to be inadequate to lead or guide this group that sometimes approached a thousand riders.

Because of necessity, route markers were devised. This approach was successful in guiding the riders over the course and back to the train, for an on-schedule return to New York City. Not a single leader or guide was required.

Although very crude symbols or characters were used initially, the system of painting distinctive arrows on the road surface at points of directional decision was an immediate and overwhelming success.

Representatives from bike clubs throughout the New York area observed how helpful these road markers were, and the practice proliferated rapidly. Eventually their use reached the regional bike rallies and finally the National Rally of the L.A.W. Clubs from around the country took to the new technology, devised innovative symbols that identified with their club rides, and found novel ways of painting the marks upon the road surface. One club used a massive stamp on a broom handle. With the stamp saturated with paint they could stomp their way around the course, doing the job from an open side door of a VW van.



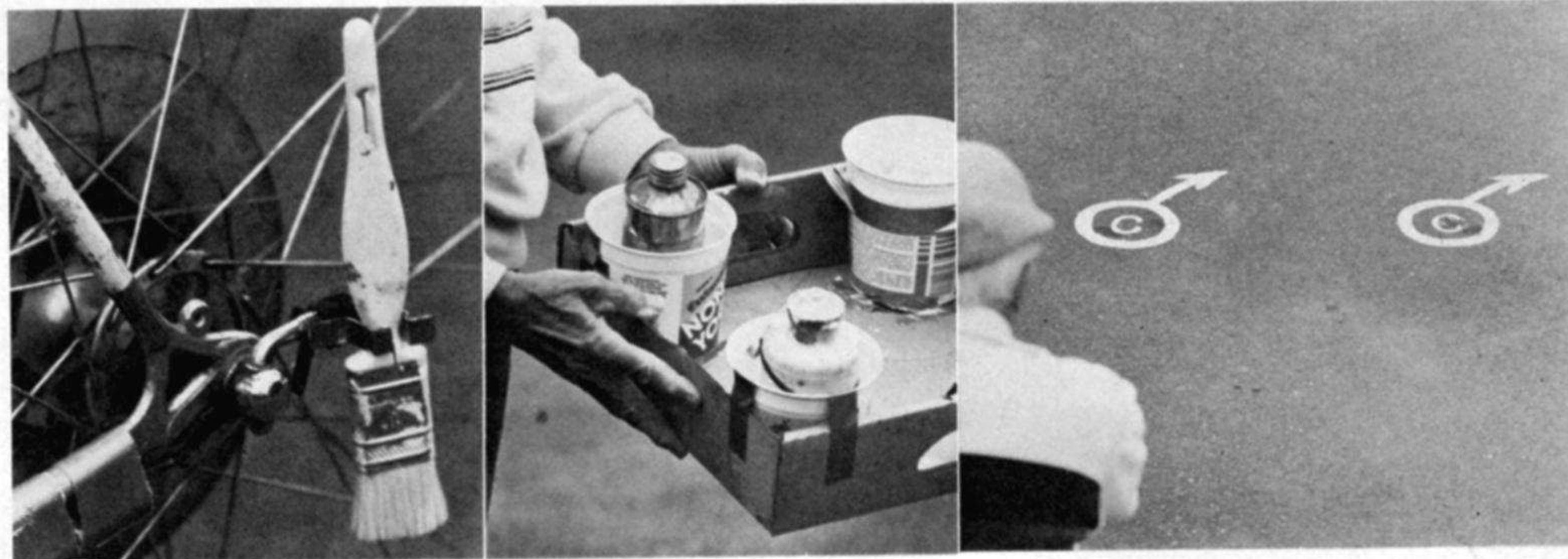
A few sample markers from which you might choose. The ring with an arrow attached is a good all around symbol for it allows you to add numbers, letters or a logo in the center for more specific identity. The modified Lung Association logo is used in California for some of their Bike Treks. The plain rectangular arrow is widely used in New England by commercial bicycle touring companies. The rectangular arrow lends itself well to color coding. With one stencil and many colors you can do an inordinate number of rides that overlap and converge without confusion.

### A simple approach is best

All that you need to get started is a gallon of traffic paint, an old water bottle or two, and a one inch paint brush. Traffic

paint is available at most paint and hardware stores. Have them mix it thoroughly on their vibration machine. Without opening the paint can, I poke two holes, one on each side of the lid, and pour the paint into the water bottle through the lowermost hole. The second hole serves as an air vent, permitting the paint to flow freely. This is a clean way of doing it and an entire gallon of paint can be consumed without ever opening the can.

Usually two bottles of paint will be enough to do a day's ride of 50 to 100 miles. The nature of the road pattern and



(Left) Carry your paint brush in a clip fastened to the rear quick-release lever; you can snap it in and out with one hand. (Center) Via car, carry your supplies in a box on the front seat. Dan tapes empty cans or yogurt containers in each corner, to hold everything securely and neatly. (Right) The finished arrows, as viewed from the handlebars. In this case, we are on a Century ride (C) and a right turn is indicated. How can you miss?

the symbol used will determine how much paint is required. Traffic paint comes in white and yellow only. For additional colors I recommend the brilliant and exotic spray paints.

When I do the job by bicycle, I carry the brush in a clip fastened to the quick release lever of the rear hub on the left side (see photo). The clip is the kind used to hold tools at a work bench. It can be fastened by wrapping a strong rubber band around and around both the clip and the quick release lever arm. With the paint in the water bottle and the brush in the clip you are ready for business. Set yourself up to do everything one-handed, so you won't have to park the bike. (Any paint lingering on the brush after each use drips to the ground as you pedal along.)

### When to do the job

Timing is very important. If you do it immediately before the event, the markers will be in their most brilliant state. One of my best jobs was done very early, on the very morning of the ride. About 2 a.m. I drove the 70 miles to where the ride was to assemble. At about 4 a.m., in lingering darkness, I commenced the painting of the route. This particular ride was 65 miles in length and I arrived back at the assembly point in time to eat breakfast with the group, then join them in the ride starting at 9:30 a.m.

Not all ride chairmen care to arise at such an early hour, but in this case the early procedure was time efficient—it

avoided making several journeys to the scene. One drawback to late hour painting is that should the roads be wet, the paint will not stick. Then *you* are stuck.

Painting is best done during the week prior to the event. This allows ample time to do it by bike, my favorite method and by far the best of all choices. (One of your most important considerations is to attract the least attention possible.)

### Stencil or freehand

I prefer painting freehand with a one inch brush. Bristles on a brush that's one

inch wide are about two inches long. I find cutting them off to a one inch length works much better, giving considerably greater control. (This cutting operation is not as easy as it sounds. Especially good and sharp scissors, such as chicken bone scissors with a serrated edge on the blade, or tin snips should be used. Cutting bristles in a straight line is quite a challenge—have fun.)

Spray paints are thin and lack the durability of traffic paints, and spray heads tend to clog up and interrupt the operation. Take along a few extra spray heads just in case.

If you use stencils, expect a bit of a mess as they are hard to handle after a few uses.

No matter what method you use, your work should last the better part of a full season on lightly-traveled roads. On routes that are maintained for regular club rides, I have found that doing the job each spring is usually adequate, with an occasional mid-season freshening up or replacement of obscured or missing markers.

### Marker identification

Use a character or color that makes your markers easy to identify. In New England, the great number of clubs and commercial bicycle touring services using marked routes could cause confusion, but this is not the case. Many of their routes overlap or converge at common intersections. I have observed numerous arrows at some intersections, all of which

were made with the same stencil, but in brilliant, different colors. It is my guess that the tour directors merely tell their riders to follow a certain color that day.

The Lung Association has used the logo of their very association on rides in California. They merely add an arrow head at the top of their logo, aimed in the desired direction, using a stencil with spray paint. Their logo is especially eye-catching.

The Cardiac Cyclists Club of California incorporated a heart painted within the circle of their marker to help direct more than two thousand participants over their Solvang Century Run in 1985. Simple and direct, it proved to be an excellent choice.

It is the contrast between the black road surface and the edges of the paint that give excellent visibility. For instance, with an open circle versus a solid one, you will

find the ring more effective because of an additional edge of paint at the inside of the band of paint.

In the late fall, keep in mind that your markers must compete with the exotic colors of fallen leaves scattered all about. During this season, though brief it is, your markers are somewhat compromised.

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## A brush with the law

The Velonauts of West Hazelton, Pa. scheduled their fifth annual (and last) Coal Cracker Century (CCC) for July 17, 1983. One week earlier, the club's vice president Gary Wisemiller painted the road markings for the first half of the route, the same basic figure-eight route we had used each year.

Gary finished the painting by freshening up the markings at the stop/lunch/finish, Angela Park, on Pennsylvania Route 309, where a state trooper emerged from an unmarked car and approached him. The policeman detained Gary at the scene for 20 minutes, could find no law he had broken, and let him go.

Two weeks later Gary received a non-traffic citation in the mail charging him with violation of Pa. crime code 6503-A, "Posting advertisements on the property of another." The fine was \$300 plus \$48.50 court costs.

The club lawyer, Bruce Miller, contacted the state trooper and asked him to drop the charges. He wouldn't. Bruce contacted the barracks sergeant, who declined to interfere. A hearing convened on November 22.

At the hearing, the trooper described the events leading up to the arrest. He provided 8 x 5 glossy photos of the road markings Gary had painted, and he brought with him the assistant district traffic engineer from the Pa. Department of Transportation (PennDOT). The PennDOT official testified that Gary had not been issued a permit to paint on the road, that such permits were issued only to municipalities and only for specific markings made with approved materials.

Bruce's defense rested on three points. First, the wording on the citation did not match the specific wording in the criminal code, so it was the wrong charge. Specifically, the citation read, "Subject using white paint painted numbers, letters, words and symbols on the outside, northbound lane of PA 309." The trooper conceded that the citation and statute wordings didn't match, and that Gary's markings weren't advertising.

Second, Bruce argued that the trooper did not prove that Gary did not have a permit. The trooper conceded he hadn't checked for a permit until after issuing the citation, and the PennDOT official said that, while a permit request would have crossed his desk, he did not conduct a search for a permit. The trooper did note that, at the scene, Gary had told him he didn't have a permit.

Third, Bruce asked for dismissal on the grounds of Diminimis Infraction, which, in Section 18-312 of the Pa. Criminal Statutes, allows the court to dismiss if it finds "the conduct of the defendant: (1) was within customary license or tolerance, neither expressly negative by the person whose interest was infringed nor inconsistent with the purpose of the law defining the offense; (2) did not actually cause or threaten the harm or evil sought to be prevented by the law . . . ; (3) presents such other extenuations that it cannot reasonably be regarded as envisaged by the General Assembly or other authority in forbidding the offense."

Both the trooper and the PennDOT official conceded that they had never received any complaints about these or any other markings anywhere in the state, nor had they ever heard of any property or physical damage occurring as a result of the markings, nor in fact had either of them ever even noticed these or any other markings on any roads until this incident. The case was dismissed on grounds of Diminimis Infraction.

The PennDOT official, when asked afterwards, said that to change the law would require passage of a congressional bill, and not simply a PennDOT change in regulations. While this would be the only legal way, it would be difficult. He added that since PennDOT and police generally look the other way once they learn that the painting is for a club-sponsored event, "the best way to do it is just do it."

Two years later the law has not been changed, the CCC has not been revived,

and many of the miscreant markings have not faded from the road.

*Mark M. Guydish*

The Folks on Spokes of Homewood, Ill. experienced a similar incident just prior to their 1985 Easter ride. Robert Sherman was driving his station wagon with the tailgate down and three teenage volunteers hopped out now and then to stencil the arrows. A patrolman in the town of St. Johns, Ind. called the girls over to tell them that they couldn't paint on public roads, and that it was a traffic hazard. Since the ride's lunch stop was in the city's park, these directional arrows were needed. The club president had received official permission to paint the arrows, so he finished the job the morning of the ride.

### What's the law?

The National Advisory Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices discussed this issue at a meeting in the mid-70's. According to former committee member Ed Kearney, the consensus was that such road markings are similar to posted notices for company picnics or garage sales. "They decided that these are not prohibited, and that they're not a problem." Consequently, home-made directional signs are not mentioned in the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways*, the Federal Highway Administration's specification book.

So before you head out to arrow your route, think up a good story (Dan offers some suggestions). 1. Be inconspicuous; if you do get nailed, be pleasant and mild-mannered; 2. try to look and act innocent; 3. stress the safety value of the markings (they keep riders from getting lost or stranded; they eliminate unnecessary turns and traffic maneuvers).

*— Karen Missavage*

## CLUB HANDBOOK

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### Placement of markers

I recommend markers in pairs about three feet apart (see photo). A pair catches the eye much better than a single lonely marker, and in pairs it is less likely to be confused with isolated marks put down by utility companies for their workers. There is added security in numbers here. I place them where the majority of cyclists are likely to be riding. Cyclists watch the road surface immediately before their wheel; with this focus of attention, the arrows won't be missed.

With an advance pair down, I then place another pair just before the actual turn. Immediately after the turn, when I feel the rider is stable and secure, I place a single marker with the mileage (indicating the distance to the next turn) in the center. That way, riders can relax, knowing when to be alert again for the next turn. For a short distance—a few hundred feet, a block or two, or even a small fraction of a mile I use zero (0). This tells the riders to remain alert.

Try to visualize yourself cycling the route for the first time, and place markings in keeping with speeds that are likely. Space your markers earlier or later, depending upon whether you are climbing or descending. On fast descents, earlier and greater alerts are required.

If there is some hazard that is likely to surprise some of the riders, I often give appropriate printed warnings between a pair of the logos being used. *Slow, very slow, 180 degree turn, gravel, etc.*, are words that could prevent an accident.

### Getting permission

In over thirty years of route marking, in many areas across the country, I have never asked anybody for permission to place painted markers on the road. I have had very few encounters with the law or private citizens. I have never been arrested, but I admit to having to use innovative tactics to avoid such problems.

For instance, I once placed a set of markers adjacent to a police station where patrol cars were constantly coming and going, and a desk officer had a windowed view of the street. I computed the flow of traffic and timing of a traffic signal on the corner. I waited for a suitable car or truck to come along and stop for the red light. With this obscuring mass standing between the spot I wished to paint and the police station, I would quickly do my thing, then when the light turned green mount up and cycle away.

I have had a motorcycle police officer confront me, brush in hand and a fresh wet route marker between my feet. After my story, his response was, "be careful and don't get hurt," then went on his way. In yet another confrontation the officer said, "I don't care what you are doing or why you are doing it," then proceeded to

instruct me on how to do it more safely.

To ask permission, and get it, would be like asking someone else to take a responsibility that should rest with me. Any subsequent citizen complaints would then fall upon the granting officer. To me, this would be unfair. And asking permission and being refused creates a dilemma.

Always have a plausible or "good cause" story ready for any officer that confronts you, like, "we are coming by here this week end with some boy scouts on a bike hike. These markers guide them and keep them off the busy main streets and highways."

Another story that is well received, "The Heart Association (or Lung Association) is having a Bike Trek to raise funds and these markers guide the bikers along their way."

### Expect the unusual

If a route is marked a long time before the event, double-check the continuity and quality of the markers shortly before the ride. You might find that the highway department has resurfaced the road and covered over some of your markers. Local citizens, not knowing the purpose of your markers, may obliterate them with black spray paint.

Try to visualize parking and traffic situations that are likely the day of the ride. Place your markers so that their purpose will be fulfilled.

Be careful not to make errors in your painting. The few errors that you do make can be "erased" with flat black spray paint. On occasion when routes are changed from year to year, black paint expedites erasures and alterations. I never go out on a job without my eraser.

From all this, it might appear that route marking is an unpleasant thing to be doing. To the contrary, I have found it to be a wonderful personal adventure. Most of us enjoy finding those quiet roads where you can escape and the bicycle is truly in its element. What pleasure it is to return and show to others this jewel that you have discovered. For sure, a sharing without equal.

In summary: when you start using this system for special events, you will find cyclists delighted by it. Your pleasure in staging rides will take a quantum leap forward. Everybody in your club will be free to participate in the ride, as no leaders are required. If you cater food stops at commercial facilities along the way, nobody in the club will have to work on the day of the event. Just ride and have fun.



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## New shop supporting members

Andersen Cycle & Key Shop  
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