

The MILEPOST

Mon Yough Trail Council's Yough River Trail Newsletter

December 2015

Volume 24, Issue 2

Always find time for the things that make you feel happy to be alive!

- Anonymous

Reflections from the Boston Visitor Center 2015

By Marei Burnfield

If you've been considering a volunteer opportunity with the MYTC, staffing our visitor center a few hours a month provides a perfect setting to meet many friendly and interesting trail tourists from all over the globe!



Volunteers Linda and Terry Vota and 'Max' at the Visitor Center

While staffing the center during the 2015 trail season, I've had the pleasure of interacting with a delightful and diverse group of wonderful folks! What I've learned firsthand this past season is that each and every carefully planned journey along the GAP is unique and special. How would I know? I've asked, listened, and photographed as many visitors as possible while staffing the center on weekends.



Biking for Haiti

How exciting that Robbie Cameron and Nikki Wells traveled from New Zealand in June to experience the Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C. bike trip? In September, it was heartwarming to meet four young men from Dalton, Ohio who were Biking for Haiti, a 900 mile round trip fundraiser to benefit Redeemed Vocational School in Quest, Haiti. Also in September, I was inspired by 64 year old Ed Seajack Arnold from Arizona as he walked and pushed his 3 wheeled cart along the trail from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C., arriving safely on October 27, 2015. In October, I had the pleasure of meeting Alexander Hall and Thaddeus Meyer from Virginia who were running an amazing 343 miles in seven days to honor 343 firefighters killed in 9/11 and to raise funds for the I Will Foundation. These are just a handful of the remarkable people that have crossed my path this season as a result of the volunteer opportunity at the visitor center! I am fortunate to have been a very tiny part of their journeys and I am grateful they took the time to share their stories with me.

I hope to have the opportunity to meet you in 2016.

Trail News from the President's Computer Desk



I cannot believe that 7 months have gone by since I wrote my first letter as president. Welcome again to all our new members who are receiving this newsletter for the first time and thanks to all our long time members who have supported this trail organization for so many years. Without all of you this nonprofit trail council would cease to exist and of course we are always looking for more volunteers.

Any of you who have been walking or riding this year have probably seen a gray haired man with a pony tail cleaning out the drainage ditches along the trail. To those who took the time to stop and say thank you for my efforts I found your kind words to be quite heartening. To those who went away with a membership brochure and filled it out and are now a new member, thank you.

One day while working on the trail I had a thought as to how great it would be if we could recruit 20 members who would be willing to give back to the trail one day a month for the year. Just one day a month for 4 hours or so. For our group this would be a doubling of the number of members who now work on the trail. We could maybe even get a little ahead of all of the maintenance work that needs to be taken care of.

Right now there are about 20 folks who come out to work on keeping the trail in the shape that everyone expects it to be. To be quite blunt we are falling behind. Our drainage ditches are slowly filling with debris and water is flowing over the trail in spots. We have trees that have fallen and it sometimes takes weeks to trim them back completely off the trail area. We maintain 15 miles of trail from the 15th street Bridge in McKeesport to the Westmorland county line. That's 15 miles of trail with just 20 people. At times it gets a little over whelming. So, if you really love using the trail, then please consider helping your organization by coming out and lending a hand for just four or five hours a month. If you are interested in helping out then please give me a call any time at 724-747-5894. I can fill you in as to what is involved in maintaining your trail. We meet at our maintenance building located on Locust Grove Road in Greenock on Saturdays from 8:00 AM to 12:00PM.



Clearing a Slide



Clean Ditch

As I am writing this, the contractor we have hired is in the process of clearing 8 slide areas and some of the drainage ditches between Sutersville and Smithdale. This will remove the swamp areas next to the trail and the spots where there is water running across the trail. Yet as great as this is, it is only .8 of a mile of trail. We estimate that we have at least 4 miles of trail that slides and ditches need to be taken care of as soon as possible. We are working on getting more grant monies to correct these problems.

Hoping to hear from you or see you on a Saturday!

*Rich Kundman
President MYTC
724-258-2690*

PAWC Volunteers Spend Day on Trail

By Tim Banfield



On Friday, September 25, seven volunteers from Pennsylvania American Water Company out of their Operations Center in Elizabeth lent a hand to Mon/Yough Trail Council by assisting with a maintenance project on the trail.

American Water designated the month of September as AmerICANs in Action! Month. It is designed to encourage American Water employees to lead and manage team-based volunteer projects in their local communities during the month of September. Marei Burnfield, who serves on MYTC's Board of Directors and works for Pennsylvania American Water Company coordinated the day's activities with MYTC's Trail Maintenance Committee members.

Volunteers that participated from the water company were Conor Murphy, Kris Derry, Brad Ebert, Kevin Kotch, Mike Sostaric, and Jason Smith. They spent the day on an area of the trail near Buena Vista where water was starting to flow onto the trail from backed up drains. MYTC has made an initiative in 2015 to improve drainage along the trail and open up clogged ditches and drains. The crew made use of MYTC's backhoe and chipper to clear out overgrowth and fallen trees from the ditches and then open up a couple of clogged drain pipes.

MYTC really appreciates the effort put forth by the group of volunteers in assisting with this important maintenance needed on the trail. Thank you to Pennsylvania American Water Company for the AmerICANs in Action! Month program.

Boston Light-Up Night

By Bill Hall

Actually, it's the Boston Trailhead, and, Light-Up Night is every night. Thanks to a generous grant from the Trail Town Program, we were able to have lights installed at the trailhead.

The purpose of the lights is to provide dusk-to-dawn illumination of the trail facilities and parking area in order to discourage vandalism and to improve security for trail users. An experienced electrical contractor recommended this could be achieved using four 400 watt (equivalent) LED lights mounted on two existing utility poles located near either end of the trailhead.

To accomplish that meant installing underground conduit to extend electrical service to one of the poles, then mounting two lights and a dusk-to-dawn sensor switch on each pole. Once mounted, the lights were easily directed to achieve the goal of illuminating the entire trailhead.

The lights are guaranteed by the manufacturer to last ten years; and, each has been fitted with an impact resistant lens to prevent rock damage, etc. The operating cost for each light is that of a standard 150 watt light bulb; the Mon/Yough Trail Council will absorb that cost in its operating budget.

We extend our thanks to the contractor, Darrell Byers Electric for an excellent job, and, to the Trail Town Program for making this project possible.

SKY FERRIES OVER THE YOUGH

By Bob Cupp

When I first heard the term "sky ferry", I thought it was in reference to a new amusement park ride at Kennywood. Little did I know, sky ferries served a much more practical purpose, having nothing to do with amusement. Sky ferries, which were actually cable cars, provided a method to cross the Youghiogheny River twelve months a year. Boats or ferries could not be used when the river was frozen, filled with ice flows, when the current was too swift or the water level was too low.

Sky ferries provided reliable transportation for the miners and residents who depended on them to cross the Yough to their jobs in the mines, or to obtain goods and services, which were only available on the other side of the river. Coal was often hauled this way from mine mouth to tipples to railroad cars. The old saying "where there's a will, there's a way" seems to perfectly describe how sky ferries came into existence.

A typical sky ferry was a square box, which held two or three people. A vertical wheel was mounted in a tower on each side of the river with an endless cable slung between. A car was hung from the lower cable and was moved back and forth across the river by a person cranking a handle. In later years, some sky ferries were powered by a stationary steam engine.



*Greenock Sky Ferry with Alpsville in the background
(Courtesy of the Elizabeth Township Historical Society)*

Renner's Ferry, located at the upper end of Suterville, toward Gratztown, was the last operating sky ferry between Boston and Smithdale. Conrad Renner, at one time, operated a ferry boat, hauling miners across the river to work in the Ocean Mine A at Smithdale for a fare of five cents each way. On May 9, 1892, Renner's Ferry was incorporated by the state legislature and a sky ferry was installed, using wire cables strung across the river. It was about 700 feet long. Stipulations were made that Renner could not build his sky ferry within 3,000 feet of any other ferry or bridge over the river.

This ferry was powered by steam until about 1912 when the town got electricity. While the brewery at Suterville was in operation from 1899 until 1919, free transportation was provided on the ferry, courtesy of the brewery, upon purchase of a small keg or case of beer.

The Scott Haven Sky Ferry traveled between Scott Haven on the Westmoreland County side of the Yough and Industry, also known as Frank, in Allegheny County. A hand-operated sky ferry, built and operated by Irwin Malisee, who also owned the Stringtown general store, ran between Shaner and Stringtown. It was not unusual for a sky ferry to have mechanical problems. For example, in 1911, while two men were riding over the river on the Shaner Sky Ferry, the wheel broke. Hearing the men yelling, Mrs. Maude Stewart (on the Shaner side) ran to the river and pulled them the rest of the way over.

The most famous sky ferry over the Yough was built in Greenock by Edward F. Cloman and William H. Heath around 1900. It ran on an endless cable, stretching approximately 450 feet across the Youghiogheny River and dropping within fifty feet of the water at its lowest point. There were simple controls at each side of the river and

notched winches could be locked to prevent them from revolving in the wrong direction. Upon boarding, a passenger removed the locking pawl on his station. The car would flash down the sagging cable by gravity. At the midway point, when it lost momentum, the passenger took over and cranked his way toward the opposite bank. When first built, locks were placed on the winches and keys were sold to the people using it. Thereafter, anytime repairs were made, the locks were changed and new keys sold to finance the cost.

The ferry provided transportation across the Yough for the miners who worked in the Osceola Coal Mine across the river, but lived on the Greenock side. It was also used by people tending to business at Osceola, Alpsville or Coulter (also known as Coulters or Coulterville), as well as train passengers on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. An ice gorge broke loose in 1907 and destroyed the ferry, but it was rebuilt and continued in operation until 1927.

Several factors contributed to the demise of the sky ferries. Completion of the Pittsburgh, McKeesport & Youghiogheny Railroad on the west side of the river eliminated the need to transport coal across the river to be loaded on B & O Railroad cars. Bridges constructed at McKeesport, Boston, Suterville and West Newton enabled people to cross the river and travel by rail to reach their destinations. Finally, the decline of the coal industry in the valley diminished the need for transportation to the mines on the other side of the river.

Although the sky ferries no longer glide above the Yough, their place in history will always be remembered. There's a time for everything; their time had passed. Now, if you want to see anything like a sky ferry, you'll have to go to an amusement park.

References:

- 1) **Golden Memories of Coulter, Alpsville and Osceola, By the Coulter Book Committee**
- 2) **Between Two Rivers, Published by the Elizabeth Township Historical Society**
- 3) **Greensburg Tribune-Review Vignettes, By Robert B. Van Atta
Strand Magazine, October 1901 Edition**

The 2nd Annual J. Terrence Farrell Memorial Bike Ride

By Christine Farrell Zacharia

As the leaves don their vibrant hues and autumn casts a chill along the trail, the McKeesport Hospital Foundation, the Lions District 14-B along with the Mon/Yough Trail Council hosted the second annual J. Terrence Farrell Memorial Bike Ride. The event took place on the Youghiogheny River Trail, September 26, 2015.

The ride was a great success with both an increased number of participants and sponsors. The ride began at 8:30 am under the Boston Bridge. The riders had the option of a 7 ½ mile ride to the Dravo Cemetery or the 20 miles to Smithton Beach. At noon, the riders assembled at the Frew Pavilion for a celebratory lunch. In conclusion, family and friends gathered at Mr. Farrell's memorial bench for a brief prayer to remember his life and charitable work.

Attorney Farrell, a cycling enthusiast and long-time Lion, initially created the excursion to raise money for the McKeesport Lion's Club. The inaugural "Bike for Sight" took place on the Yough Trail 17 years ago, always on the last Saturday of September. Each year the event's proceeds were distributed to local organizations. Mr. Farrell arranged for the purchase of reflective vests for the McKeesport Police Department as well as underwater cameras for the McKeesport Fire Department.

Mr. Farrell had said, "this bike ride could be a very successful event." He measured the event's success, not only by the number of dollars collected by the generous sponsors, but also by the number of cyclists participating. The more participants, the larger the event, the greater the success.



Fast forward 16 years, 1 year after Attorney Farrell's passing, Belinda O'Keson and Christine Farrell Zacharia, (wife and daughter) opted to resume his contribution to the McKeesport community and preserve his legacy. Last year, endowments were made, in Mr. Farrell's name, to Operation Warm (McKeesport Fire Fighters), Friends of the Riverfront, McKeesport Regional History and Heritage Center, Carnegie Free Library of McKeesport, the Mon/Yough Trail Council and the Lions, Mon-River Fleet for "back to school" framing.

The family would like to grow this event, meet new faces and continue to support local charities and organizations. Next year, the ride will take place on Saturday, September 24, 2016. Come meet us on the trail!

Dead Man's Hollow: Cool Spirit Trail

Courtesy of Allegheny Land Trust "Vistas" Newsletter

Author: Keri Rouse

Many of us enjoy the natural areas in our communities by venturing through awe-inspiring forests alongside winding creeks and carpets of wildflowers, but few consider the artistry behind the trails that guide us to these scenic vistas. The Emerald Trail Corps, a program of the Mount Washington CDC, completed the first mile of what is planned to ultimately be a 10-mile network of shared-use, sustainable trails at Dead Man's Hollow conservation area. Members of the trail crew packed tools to spend three weeks this past July completing the first half of the Cool Spirit Trail.



While one goal is to build trails that highlight the property's unique features and are fun for visitors to hike and ride, it's crucial to build trails that will last. To do this, building a trail that sheds water is key. Water erosion is generally the most destructive force impacting trails. Trail building is as much a skill as it is an art form with a dash of detective work. Crewmembers look to the contour of a hillside and visualize where a trail might be carved out and interpret the way organic matter collected on a trail edge tells of how water is behaving on the path. Rerouted and

closed sections of Cool Spirit were eroded as a result of water flowing along the trail and gaining enough speed to lift away dirt and cut deep cracks into the tread. Drainage dips interspersed along the new sections of trail create high and low points that direct water off the trail.

With one mile of trail completed, staff and volunteers can now work to maintain the section completed by the crew and encourage native trees and wildflowers to grow on the closed stretches of trail. But the work doesn't end there. With a slowly growing arsenal of trail tools for staff and volunteer use, ALT has been out with groups to repair unsustainable areas so that neighbors and visitors can enjoy the journey just as much as the destination. Contact ALT if you would like to be a part of expanding and improving DMH's trail system.

For more information, e-mail Keri at krouse@allegHENYlandtrust.org

We Are Being Watched

By Dan Piesik, Story Teller

Ride the trail lately? You may not be aware, but you are being watched; as a matter of fact your movement and presence is scrutinized each time you are on the Yough Trail. The eyes are always on us. From high on the top of the hillsides to the bank of the Youghiogheny, always peering and always observing we are in view.

No it is not the N.S.A., Secret Service, F.B.I or C.I.A. It is not the Pennsylvania State Police, Allegheny County Police, or even local police of whom we are familiar. Detectives are not focusing binoculars and as far as we know, space aliens have not been seen looking our way with those bulging eyes.

Checking our every move are deer, squirrels, opossum, ground hogs, chipmonks, field mice, and birds of many varieties. Hawks and an occasional eagle see us from high above along with crows and doves. Many robins, cardinals, Baltimore Orioles, blue jays, and blue heron make the list of scores of birds to be seen.

On the other hand one might consider the occasional trail monitor checking to make sure everyone is safe and having a marvelous time. They are not spies, only interested dedicated volunteers out there to help. Their ride entails

making sure riders are safe; making sure that riders and visitors have the necessary materials and knowledge in case of a breakdown or other emergency. They are there to see that the trail is clear of fallen trees and branches or irregularities on the trail surface. The trail monitor volunteer is there to suggest places of interest, local business that provide food, over-night, or other needs and desires.

So you are being watched, but in a friendly and helpful and rewarding way on the "Treasure", the Yough River Trail.



Please welcome our newest members:

Beverly Dellinger - York, PA

James Grech - Bethel Park, PA

Tim Kerestes - North Huntingdon, PA

Jackie Kusenko - Plum, PA

Bill Larson - McKeesport, PA

Janice S. McEvoy - Pittsburgh, PA

Anthony Novosel - Munhall, PA

Linda Pepo - Dover, PA

Ken Simmons - North Huntingdon, PA

Phil Sullivan - Irwin, PA

James Travitz - South Park, PA

Shan Wega - McKeesport, PA

Sharon K. Wirtz, VMD - Pittsburgh, PA

Paul Zacarella - Plum, PA

We also wish to again extend a sincere thank you to the members who have generously renewed their membership for the 2015 season. Your continued support is appreciated!

***Marei Burnfield*, Membership Chair**

Council Directory

Mission Statement

In 1991, the Mon/Yough Trail Council (MYTC) was founded to promote the rail corridor conversion to public access trails along the Youghiogheny River. Today, MYTC remains a non-profit, 501(c)3, all volunteer Pennsylvania corporation dedicated to sustaining trail maintenance and operations in order to encourage multi-purpose recreational use.

2015 Officers

President

Rich Kundman

Vice President

John Eisenbarth

Treasurer

Linda Hippard

Secretary

Mary Reid

Directors

2013 – 2015

John Eisenbarth

Rich Kundman

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Linda Hippard

Larry Meinen

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Cathy Bartley

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Judy Marshall

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2015 – 2017

Marei Burnfield

Don Coleman

Charlie Smith

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Meetings

You are welcome to attend informative monthly meetings, held 6:30 pm, the second Thursday of each month at the Greenock Fire Hall, Elizabeth Township.

Contact us:

MYTC

P.O. Box 14

McKeesport, PA 15135

www.TheBostonTrail.com

Membership Application

Yes, I want to be a member of the
Mon Yough Trail Council

Membership Level	Contribution
------------------	--------------

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General | \$20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associate | \$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate | \$250 |

Please check here if renewal

In addition, I would like to contribute
\$_____ to the MYTC.

Please print:

Name _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Email _____

Age ____ Occupation _____

Signature _____

Required

___ I would like to be contacted to volunteer.

___ I would like to receive a membership card.

Please make checks payable to and
mail to:

MYTC Membership

P.O. Box 14

McKeesport, PA 15135



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Mon Yough Trail Council
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*Mon Yough Trail Council's
Yough River Trail Newsletter*

*The following businesses have generously supported the Mon/Yough Trail Council..
Please show them your thanks by patronizing their businesses.*

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