



TRAILS TO TRY: Western Maryland Rail Trail

By Cindy Rowe

While the Lower Trail is a wonderful trail and probably the home trail of most members of RTTCPA, there are lots of great trails within reasonable driving distance just waiting to be explored. The Western Maryland Rail Trail which conveniently parallels the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal offers several options for day trips from the Altoona area. Ride option number one begins in Hancock, Maryland and is a 26-mile round trip to the western end of the trail in Pearre. To get to Hancock, take I-99 south to Route 30 east; follow Route 30 to Breezewood and take I-70 east to Exit 3. At the bottom of the exit, turn right and proceed .6 miles and make a left turn into the WMRT/Park & Ride lot. This lot offers free all-day parking. Take the paved ramp down to the rail trail and head west (right.) You will be entering the trail just east of MP 10 which is near the middle of the 23-mile asphalt trail. Heading west, you will quickly pass through the town of Hancock between MP 10 and MP 11. There are picnic tables and benches on the trail here and you will see a watered section of the C & O Canal to your left. The C & O Canal Bike Shop (www.candobicycle.com) is just off the trail on the left; they rent bikes if you prefer to leave yours at home. There are parking lots in this area, but one is metered and the other is a free lot on the canal which fills up early on weekends, which is why it is better to park at the Park & Ride Trail lot where you started.

After passing through Hancock, you will head into a wooded area for a few miles, and then emerge into an open field where you will have a good view of the cliffs of West Virginia on your left. Continuing west, near MP 14 the trail passes through the first of several beautiful rock cuts. Also near MP 14, you will see a tall red brick smokestack, part of the remains of the former Round Top Cement Company which operated on the canal. If you opt for a return trip on the canal, you will also be able to see the remains of the cement company's kilns which lie under the roadbed of the rail trail. Leaving the smokestack behind, you head deeper into the woods and may spot a variety of wildlife. Deer, snakes, wild turkeys and the occasional bear inhabit the area. There are also a few historical markers along the trail identifying what was in the area when trains, not bikes, followed the route. There are a few road crossings (you will rarely see a car) and the occasional house, but this part of the WMRT goes through a remote area and there is no parking or access until you reach the end of the trail in Pearre. At Pearre, there is a large parking

lot and some portable toilets but no picnic tables and just one bench. You can turn around here and head back to Hancock via the WMRT or you can ride past the parking lot, turn left and take the canal back to Hancock. If you choose the canal option, the first thing you will see is the Lock 56 lock house. As you pedal back to Hancock, you will pass locks 55, 54 and 53 as well as the ruins of Dam # 6 which is near Lock 55. As previously mentioned, you will have a better view of the Round Top Cement Mill which ceased operation in 1909. Follow the canal east from Pearre (MP 136) back to MP 124 in Hancock; cross over the canal on the iron truss bridge and reconnect with the WMRT. Turn right and follow the WMRT .7 mile back to the Park & Ride lot. Of course, you could ride west on the canal and return to Hancock on the rail trail, if you prefer, since the trail is paved and the canal is a slightly rougher ride. Next time we'll highlight the eastern section of the WMRT between Hancock and Big Pool. Enjoy your ride!

A PINE CREEK RAIL TRAIL UPDATE:

Article and Photo's by Bob Richers

On the Saturday of Labor Day weekend my wife Sue and I decided to head to the Pine Creek Rail Trail for our weekend ride. The weather forecast called for rain every day after that so it was now or never.

The trip up Interstate 99, past the Penn State football traffic to I-80 then 220 to Jersey Shore and then north on Route 44 was uneventful. Our destination was the Blackwell Trailhead for a ride up the most scenic section of the trail. When we left Route 44 and continued on 414 we noticed a truck detour sign. Now Route 414 is a pretty good road up to Cedar Run but after that it needs some major work. There are areas when it climbs the ridges that it resembles a goat trail, except even the goats are afraid to use it. The road at best is 1½ lanes. The guard rails (where they still exist!) are old wooden posts with metal cable. Rock ledges protrude out of the mountain side onto the road. The pavement is uneven and only receives an occasional tar and chip treatment.

Now some of us have grown weary with the bridge work that has been occurring along the Lower Trail over the past three years and will be continuing over the next two years, but this work pales to what we were about to encounter. When we came to the last ridge before the Rattlesnake Ridge trailhead the highway detoured right onto the Pine Creek Rail Trail! Auto traffic and bikers were going both directions for several

miles along the trail. We decided that this mileage should count on our yearly list.

We arrived at Blackwell and used the last available parking space. The ride north to Darling Run was a bit on the warm and humid side. I reminded Sue that the wind chill factor from biking makes it cooler but she remains dubious. Fortunately we carried along enough water because all the hand pumps along that end of the trail were inoperative.

One mile south of Tiadaghton Campground we encountered an immature Red Tail Hawk standing at the edge of the trail. Sue is the photographer of the family so we stopped for some pictures, many as close as 10 ft. As we stood there a family of four bikers heading south



joined us. A young boy with this group noticed a bear in a tree 25 yards behind us.



Now nature forms some strange partnerships. Perhaps the hawk was to stop the riders as the bear that was obviously “smarter than

the average bear” was to scurry down the tree and steal our picnic baskets. And just think when this bear’s mom drove him off earlier in the summer she thought he wouldn’t make much of himself! On the other hand maybe the bear was wondering if the hawk would be tastier than berries. Perhaps the hawk was “so hungry that he could eat a bear!” We can only guess.

Anyway, this was a Labor Day trip we won’t soon forget....highway traffic detoured onto the rail trail, wildlife up-close and a great ride. Hope everyone gets out to enjoy a ride this fall before the weather turns to winter.

TREE OF THE MONTH: BLACK GUM

By Dave Despot



Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) is a medium to large tree, native to the eastern United States. The native range includes the area from Maine, south to Florida, and west to Michigan and Texas.

Trees of this species grow at a moderate rate, are generally long lived, prefer moist to wet sites, but are adaptable to upland and drier areas. Black gum trees are one of the first trees to develop fall color, with leaves often beginning to turn brilliant glossy red in late August in central Pennsylvania.

Leaves are alternate, simple, oval shaped (2 to 4 in. wide by 4 to 6 in long), and entire, with wavy margins. Leaf color is dark green and shiny on the upper surface; pale green and hairy on the underside. Small greenish flowers develop in the spring and are an excellent source of nectar for bees. Fruit are blue, egg shaped, up to ½ inch long, borne in clusters of 2 or 3, and are a preferred source of food for birds and other wildlife.

Bark is gray to black and develops deep vertical fissures with age. Branches grow in a horizontal to slightly drooping habit. Black gum trees grow in a strongly excurrent form (the tendency to grow with a single central stem). The wood of black gum has a unique interlocking grain pattern which makes it highly resistant to splitting. This characteristic makes the wood very difficult to split for firewood and prone to twisting as it dries. I see references suggesting that the wood is used for docks and wharves.

Black gum is one of my favorite trees. I grew up in a neighborhood with a black gum tree across the street in the neighbor’s yard. It is still growing there. Black gum trees can be found in parks, commercial landscapes, yards, fencerows, and forests. It is a great time of year to identify trees of this species because of the brilliant red fall color. Look for one on your next trip to the outdoors.

WILDFLOWER WATCH: SUNFLOWER

By Bob Richers

Sunflowers are one of nature’s great pick-me-ups. Whenever I see a field of sunflowers or a cut display at a farmers market they lighten my spirit; they seem to smile at us!



Sunflowers originated in South America but today they are found all over the world. The domesticated plant was spread by native populations to Mexico around 2600BC and into the Tennessee Valley by 2400BC. The plant was introduced to Spain in the early 16th century. Today the Sunflower can be found worldwide. It is the national flower of Peru, Russia and Ukraine.

The Sunflower has become an important food source. The seed can be roasted and salted and sold as a snack food. It can be processed into a peanut butter substitute. When mixed with other grains, bread can be produced. And let’s not forget the tones of sunflower seeds used in birdseed. I prefer the shelled hearts because the seed with hulls create a mess and result in unwanted plants growing below my feeding station. The leaves can be used for silage and the stems contain a fiber that can be used to produce paper. Sunflower oil can be used for cooking. It will produce butter and even is found in biodiesel fuel.

The Sunflower has created a trend in the world of baseball where most players have put down tobacco, in favor of a mouth full of seeds. The really good users can fill one cheek with whole seeds; shell them with their front teeth and save the shells in the other cheek for later disposal. By the looks of the Pittsburgh Pirates dugout, the floor must be the favored disposal spot!

UPCOMING EVENTS:

October 22, Saturday: Summit to Muleshoe on the 6 To 10 Trail - Please meet at 10:00 at the summit level visitor center back parking lot. Those that wish to shuttle can do so. The hike will head downhill. This trail can be very challenging. Long pants and sturdy shoes are recommended. Extremely wet

conditions will force a re-schedule. Hiking down, rather than up, gives people the option to turn back if the trail is too steep. The upper part is a nice shorter hike with interesting flora/vegetation. (There's also plenty to see at the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site.) At Muleshoe, we will conclude the hike, but there is a short trail at the side of Hollidaysburg Reservoir which could be of interest. Ruby Becker will be leading this hike. For more info contact <http://facebook.com/rjb312> or Deb Tencer at naturehikergal@gmail.com

October 30, Sunday: Frank Campion Memorial Hike - Helena Kotala will lead this 6-mile downhill hike on the Bell's Gap Rail Trail. This hike honors Sgt. Francis Campion of Hollidaysburg who died in a military training accident this past summer, and who hiked with us on this trail last fall. An article about this trail can be read at <http://pennsylvania.sierraclub.org/moshannon/OTT/OTT10-03BellsGapTr.htm>. A map of the trail is at http://barts.homestead.com/Rail_Trail_Map_Base_2.pdf. Meet at noon at the Bell's Gap Rail Trail Roots Trailhead. There will be a shuttle. Contact Helena Kotala at 215-3675 or hdk5018@psu.edu for more information.

October 30th Sunday: The Run/Walktoberfest 5K
The Mutual Benefit Group Relay for Life team will be holding a 5K run/walk on Sunday, October 30 at the Alfarata Rails to Trails trailhead near Alexandria, PA. Registration will begin at 1 p.m. and the race will begin at 2 p.m. An awards ceremony will follow the race. There will also be plenty of door prizes donated by local businesses!

The pre-registration fee is \$15 per person through October 11. Registrations received after October 11 will increase the fee to \$18 per person. T-shirts are guaranteed to those who pre-register. To obtain a registration form and/or more information, please contact Danielle by phone at 814-643-3000, or by email at dtrauser@mutualbenefitgroup.com. Proceeds earned will benefit the American Cancer Society.

November 26, Saturday: Post-Thanksgiving Hike - Dr. Stan Kotala will lead a 6-mile hike along the Lower Trail from Mt. Etna to Williamsburg. Meet at the Lower Trail Williamsburg Trailhead at noon. See a map at http://www.rttcpa.org/Brochure_Side_2_Post_Printing_Corrections.pdf there will be a shuttle. Contact Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840 ccwiba@keyconn.net for more information.

Monday December 5th: Holiday Gathering
On Monday December 5th at 7 PM Rails to Trails will be having the annual Holiday Gathering at the Hoss's Corporate Office Conference Room. This year's guest speaker will be Dave Hurst, noted newspaper columnist and trail advocate. Holiday cookies and light refreshments will be served.

December 17, Saturday: Holiday Hike around the Lake - Dr. Stan Kotala will lead a 6-mile hike around Canoe Lake. Meet at the Canoe Creek State Park beach pavilion at noon. Contact Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840; ccwiba@keyconn.net for more information.

If you'd like to schedule an event or if you have questions

about an event, please call Stan Kotala, Rails to Trails Event Coordinator at 814-946-8840 or email at ccwiba@keyconn.net

QUESTION ON GRANTS

Over the past several weeks, I have received questions from people wondering why Rails to Trails is spending money to design the bridge re-decking at Mt. Etna rather than just re-decking the bridge without a design and spending the money on resurfacing the trail. In 2010, Rails to Trails applied for two grants to repair the washout at Waterstreet, repair two collapsed drainage culverts and re-deck one of our large bridges. We were fortunate and were awarded the grants. When receiving grants, one must use the funds for what they were intended. We must also abide by the grantor's guidelines. These two grants require that design work must be done and submitted before funds may be expended for the repair. Thus we would lose all funds if we were to use any of the money for a different project. We are aware that the trail is narrowing in some spots, and soft in others. We will continue to watch for other grants we can apply for and can afford. The Rails to Trails Board does have the best interest of the Lower Trail as a top priority.

CINNAMON ROLLS!!!!

Help out the Bells Gap Rail Trail, they are selling cinnamon rolls, which are delicious, cost is only \$13.00 for 1/2 dozen. They can be frozen and when company drops in or for a quick delicious breakfast, just pop them in the microwave and you have a warm bun ready for the creamy icing that comes with them. You can order them through the Bellwood Library, 742-8234. Order by November 3rd; delivery will be November 10th.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: (____)-_____

E-mail _____

_____ New Membership _____ Renewal

_____ Individual	\$15.00
_____ Family	\$20.00
_____ Supporting	\$50.00
_____ Group	\$75.00

I am interested in:

_____ Horses	_____ Hiking
_____ Heritage	_____ Bicycling
_____ Nature Study	_____ Jogging
_____ Other	_____

I would like to help by volunteering for:

Make checks payable to:

Rails-to-Trails of Central PA Inc.
PO Box 592, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648
(814)-832-2400
www.rttcpa.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Tuesday October 11th

Saturday October 22

Sunday October 30th

Sunday October 30th

November 8th

Monday December 5th

Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station

Summit to Muleshoe Hike: 10AM meet at Allegheny Portage Visitor Center Parking Lot

Frank Campion Memorial Hike on the Bells Gap Trail

5k/Walk Octoberfest to benefit Rely for Life; Registration at 1 PM 5K & Walk begin at 2PM at the Alfarata Trailhead.

Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM at the First United Methodist Church in Hollidaysburg.

Holiday Gathering 7 PM at the Hoss's Corporate Office Conference Room, (rear entrance)

More details on all events on pages 2 & 3 of the *Trekker*

All are invited to the monthly meetings.

KEEP YOUR ADDRESS CURRENT

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Rails-to-Trails of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.

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