



Volume 17 Issue 5

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

September/October 2012

SOMEONE'S WATCHING YOU



Many Lower Trail users have been spotting a number of Bald Eagles along the trail. This photo was taken by Jeff Wingate the first week of September. Not only have a number of mature eagles been spotted, but several young ones as well. You can tell the difference in that the younger eagles will still have a brown head. Once mature, their heads are white. So keep your eyes open because most likely one of these magnificent birds will be watching you on the trail.

FEASIBILITY STUDY:

In May of 2009, Rails to Trails hired Keller Engineers of Hollidaysburg to conduct the Lower Trail Gap Feasibility Study in an effort to develop the expansion of the existing 17 mile Lower Trail from the Flowing Spring Trailhead through Canal Basin Park to the eastern terminus of the National Park Service's Six-Through-Ten Trail. A great amount of work was done to identify all land owners, research deeds, inventory natural features, conduct wildlife analysis, identify environmental hazards, intersection and access points, and auxiliary facilities, prepare cost estimates and mapping, and arrange public meetings. The study was completed and sent to DCNR, (who provided the grant funds for this study), for review and comments. We are now ready for the final phase of the process. This requires your help.

You can be involved: A final public meeting on the study will be held on Tuesday evening, September 18th at 6:30 at the Hollidaysburg Borough Building. Parking is available on-street or in the Borough's parking lot. Once you enter the building, just follow the Lower Trail Feasibility Study signs.

Keller Engineers will present the final draft of the study. Please put this date on your calendar and plan to attend.

MEMORIES FROM THE PAST:

By Rick Hess

“Not So Fond” Memories: Phil Hofmann, a frequent trail rider who drives all the way from Milroy, Pennsylvania to use our beautiful trail, recently gave us some pictures he took in 2004. For those of you who used the trail back then, we're sure these pictures don't need any explanation.



However, for those who weren't around at that time, the pictures show some of the damage to the trail caused by hurricane Ivan. As you can see in these pictures, the flooding caused by Ivan washed out significant portions of the trail from Williamsburg to Alfarata. The extent of the damage was horrendous. In some areas the gorge left after the waters receded was several feet deep.



But, thanks to the generosity of Grannas Bros., Dean Lower, and others together with a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), we were able to repair and improve the trail surface in a few months. The section near Williamsburg was paved for the first time.

But, this is still an ongoing project. Although it has been 8 years since Ivan, we are still working to repair some of the collateral damage. After many requests, we've obtained grants from DCNR and



PennDOT that include funds to repair damage to the flood protection wall near Water Street. We expect to award a contract for that work in the coming year.

(Thanks to Phil Hofmann for the pictures of September 2004)

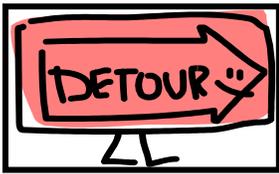
FUTURE PROJECTS:

We are pleased to announce that we have been awarded \$98,000 in Federal Transportation Alternatives Funding to help pay for restoring the flood protection wall at Water Street in Huntingdon County. We want to thank the Morris Township Supervisors for agreeing to sponsor our application after the new federal Transportation Act made non-profit organizations ineligible to apply for these funds. Because the Township agreed to help, our application was reviewed and approved.

In Blair County, the Catharine Township Supervisors came to our rescue on a similar situation and agreed to sponsor our application. As a result of their help, we've been awarded \$75,000 to re-deck another of our aging bridges.

We are very grateful to both Catharine and Morris Townships for their full support of the Lower Trail. If it were not for their very quick response and support of the trail projects we would have been out of luck.

CONSTRUCTION UPDATES:



Cottle's Asphalt Maintenance Inc. of Everett has begun the re-decking of the bridge near Mt. Etna. An on-road detour is now in place and will remain until work is completed. We are sorry

for any inconvenience this may cause, but we are very excited to have this bridge re-decked. It will be a great improvement to the trail and eliminate future maintenance costs. Meanwhile, Pepple's Excavating of New Enterprise has completed the reconstruction and clearing of two drainage culverts just east of Williamsburg.

TREE OF THE MONTH: AMERICAN HORNBEAM

By Dave Despot



The American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), often called ironwood or musclewood, is widely distributed in eastern North America. Its range covers much of the area from Nova Scotia to Minnesota and south to Florida and Texas. Many other species of hornbeam are distributed in temperate regions around the world, with the majority native to China. Common hornbeam

(*Carpinus betulus*) is native to Europe.

American Hornbeam has alternate, simple, oblong, doubly serrate leaves that have a smooth upper surface with an

underside that can be either smooth or hairy. The leaves resemble beech, but the species does not belong to the beech family; rather it is a member of the hazel family (*Corylaceae*). The twigs are reddish brown with a tough consistency. Mature bark is dark bluish gray and smooth. Stems are typically adorned with spiral fluting, giving the appearance of a human arm with tensed muscles – hence the name musclewood. Seeds appear as nutlets borne at the base of leafy bracts which are arranged to form a conelike structure that can be 3 or 4 inches long.

The wood is dense and hard. Charcoal produced from hornbeam trees is said to burn hot enough to smelt iron. Carpenters tools become quickly dull when working with hornbeam wood, resulting in the common name ironwood. This wood is extremely useful when making parts that must be resistant to wear such as axles for wagons, cogs for windmills and waterwheels, and screws for cider presses. Yokes for farm animals were also built from hornbeam wood.

The essence of hornbeam clears blocked or stagnant energies and enhances clarity of purpose. The symbolism of the tree is guardianship. Hornbeam trees once grew around (and were said to protect) sacred groves north of the Alps.

WILDFLOWER WATCH: PRICKLY PEAR

By Bob Richers



While visiting relatives in the Huston, Texas area over Christmas break in 2006, I had the opportunity to explore the surrounding ranchland. The ranch had an abundance of wildlife mixed in with the ranging

livestock. While riding an ATV, the Longhorn steers would glare at you but when approached, would suddenly bolt away. The late Texas Dove season had just started and I had never before seen so many birds afield. I encountered Spanish Moss hanging from mesquite trees but what really caught my eye was the scattering of Prickly Pear.

I returned home with a dozen pads cut from the plants and much to my delight, most of them took root in large flower pots filled with Miracle Grow. As the plants grew over the years, I've been able to cut more pads to start additional plants. They seem to do best when brought in and rested over the winter.

The east coast is home to a Prickly Pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) that is smaller and hardier than its Texas cousin (*Opuntia radinesguei*). I've encountered these plants growing while biking at Presque Isle State Park near Erie PA and on Assateague Island in Maryland. They grow best in sandy or rocky sites away from the competition of most other native species.

Like all true cactus species, Prickly Pears are only native to the western hemisphere. But they can now be found all over the world. An innocent introduction led to an ecological

disaster in Australia. During the peak of the invasion, plants reached a height of 20' and spread at an incredible rate of 1,000,000 acres a year. Mechanical and chemical treatments failed to check the tide and only the introduction of a South American moth whose larvae fed on the plant worked.

Our local Prickly Pear produce yellow flowers that appear in late spring. These blossoms are 2" to 3" wide and are quite appealing. The mature cactus pads are armed with two kinds of spines. One is a large fixed spine and the other is a smaller hair like devil called glochid. Trust me on this; these nasty little spines seem to magically find skin even if you are wearing leather gloves.

There are over 36 different sub-species of the plant. Some of the species have edible pads when mature and produce fruit from the flowers. Cactus figs of one type are used to make candies, jellies and even alcoholic beverages. If you have a barren section in your yard or garden, give Prickly Pear a try, you might be pleasantly surprised.

VOLUNTEERS:

We have had a strange summer. It was very hot and dry, but when it rained, it poured and came with wind. In the last issue of the Trail Trekker, we spoke of our volunteers, the Huntingdon Correctional Facility and Ernest Ebersole being kept busy with downed trees. In the past two months, the chainsaws have still been busy. We had another very large "widow maker" tree hung-up across the trail near Covedale. While you could bike or even drive under it, it had the potential to fall at any time and hurt someone. The tree was too large and dangerous for our volunteers and we again owe a great thank you to **Ernest Ebersole, owner of Lofty Heights Logging and Tree Trimming** of Hollidaysburg. He donated his time and equipment to safely remove this dangerous tree. Throughout the years, Rails to Trails of Central Pa Inc. has benefitted from very generous businesses that donated their professional service to the trail. When trees that we could not handle have needed cutting, Ernest Ebersole and Fred Bennetti of Bennetti Tree Service have come to the rescue. When the trail was badly damaged, **Grannas Brothers** repaired it. **Ward Trucking** has donated to the trail in times of vandalism and needed repairs. And don't forget the delicious food donated by **Holland Brothers and Hoss's** for every spring gathering. Throughout the year, **Martins** and **Sheetz** have supported student volunteers and events on the trail. We hope that when you need something done around your home you remember these businesses.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

Saturday October 20th, Fall Foliage Hike on the Lower Trail. Meet at 1 PM at the Mt. Etna Trailhead. We will hike 6 miles on this rail trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River. Trip leader will be Alice Kotala, for more information call 946-8840

Sunday October 28th, The Francis Campion Memorial Hike Meet at 1 PM at the Roots Trailhead of the Bell's Gap Trail. This 6 mile downhill hike honors Juniata Valley Audubon Society member Staff Sgt. Francis Campion who

died in a military training accident in 2011, and who hiked with us on this trail many times. Trip leader is Stan Kotala, for more information call 946-8840 or email ccwiba@keyconn.net

Sunday, October 28th, 5k Run/Walk beginning at the Alfarata Trailhead to benefit Relay for Life. For more information contact Danielle Peachey at dpeachey@mutualbenefitgroup.com

Saturday November 24th: Post Thanksgiving Hike on the Lower Trail. Meet at 1 PM at the Alfarata Trailhead. We will hike about 6 miles along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River. Trip leader is Alice Kotala, for more information call 946-8840.

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

*****JOHN HEALY MEMORIAL RACE: Correction**

CORRECTION: In the last *Trail Trekker*, I omitted two of the sponsors of the race: **Martin Oil and Labor Specialties, Inc. were major sponsors of the race as well as Highmark, Keller Engineers and Hoss's.** Without the help and support of these companies, the race would not be the success it has been. We greatly appreciate their support and dedication to our organization and the race.

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, September 11th

Tuesday, October 9th

Saturday, October 20th

Sunday October 28th

Sunday October 28th

Monthly Board Meeting 7 PM at the Grannas Station

Monthly Board Meeting 7 PM at the Grannas Station

Fall Foliage Hike on the Lower Trail 1 PM beginning at the Mt. Etna Trailhead

Francis Campion Memorial Hike on the Bells Gap Trail, 1 PM at the Roots Trailhead

5K Run/Walk, beginning at the Alfarata Trailhead benefiting Relay for Life.

More details on all events on page 3 of the *Trekker* and on our Web site at www.RTTCPA.org

All are invited to the monthly meetings.

KEEP YOUR ADDRESS CURRENT

This newsletter is mailed 3rd Class Bulk Mail. The Post Office will not forward 3rd Class Bulk Mail. If anything about your address changes, Route Number, Street Numbers, or Zip code, the Trail Trekker will not be forwarded to you. Please keep Rails-to-Trails informed of any address changes by using a post office change of address card or dropping us a note at the following address. Remember, if your mailing address is Highlighted, your membership is about to expire. Please renew quickly and continue to support Rails-to-Trails. Thank You!

Rails-to-Trails of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.

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