



Volume 22 Issue 1

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

January February 2017

PLANNING TRAIL RIDES FAR AND NEAR

TRAVELING IN THE WINTER...DON'T FORGET TO VISIT THE TRAILS: THE GEN. JAMES A. VAN FLEET FLORIDA STATE TRAIL.

By Bob Richers

In March of 2016 my wife Sue and I vacationed in Florida to watch the Pirates in Spring Training and ride some of the local rail trails. This helped shorten our bucket list.

We used the car train from Lorton, VA to Sanford, FL for our trip down and drove home a week later. By checking train prices on multiple weekends, we saved almost 50% on the price of a ticket. Sue always wanted to take a train ride, but the next time we ride we will use a sleeper car. Sixteen hours in a train seat, although comfortable and reclining, was a bit much.

One down side of the week that we chose was there were only 2 Pirate home games scheduled at Bradenton, FL, although we could have gone to some of the away games which were at fields within the area. On the plus side, we had more time to ride our bikes and visit the beach.

The rail trails that we rode were the Pinellas, Upper Tampa Bay, Seminole-Wekiva and General James A. Van Fleet. Everywhere we drove, we noticed paved walking/biking trails. Since Florida is a flat state, many of the urban trails had quite a few stop signs or crossings lights at the road crossings. The Pinellas Trail also had many elevated crossings over the busier roadways.

The one exception for crossings was the Gen. James A. Van fleet Trail. This 29 mile rail trail has less than 6 road crossings and after a slight turn near mile 5, it was completely straight. After riding 79 trails in 8 states, I admit that this trail is one of my favorites. The fauna, wildlife and birds spotted, or in many situations heard, were better than anywhere else.

The trail started at Polk City just off Route 4 and headed north for several miles past cattle ranches. It then entered a section where wet-lands bordered both sides. Near mile marker 10, we crossed the boundary into Green Swamp, which is one of Florida's protected wildlife areas. We talked to a ranger on patrol and I told her that she had the greatest job in the country!

Our week of travel was rainless and the temperatures were in the high 70's. A daily 10 mph breeze made riding very comfortable. We encountered dozens of Gopher Tortoises and alligators, including a 6' and 7' "tree shaker", (large alligator), basking in the sun on the side of the trail. For some reason, every bridge that we crossed was posted "attention alligators, no swimming!" We also encountered a Pigmy Rattlesnake coiled on the trail.

The trees beside the trail were full of unseen birds singing a welcome to spring song. Egrets were too numerous to count and a pair of 10" Green Parakeets were squawking at a passing crow. At one rest stop, I spied a hovering Swallow-Tailed Kite, my first ever.

I should have purchased a guide book on southern trees and plants because most were new to me. Early wild flowers were blooming and I did recognize some of them. The palms and ferns were magnificent! There was a sign identifying the Long-Needle Pines and I also saw some oaks. Spanish Moss was abundant along the trail. At that time of the year, the insects were not a problem but most of the homes have screened-in porches so late in the summer they must get intense.

I ordered a Southeast Rails to Trails guide book which arrived the week before we left home. It listed 19 Florida Rail Trails along with trails from 7 other southern states. We also downloaded a guide book on Florida's paved and off-road trails from a Florida visitor's web site. Last summer, the Rails to Trails Conservancy came out with a new guide book, which I now have, listing 29 Florida Rail Trails and 23 additional multiuse trails.

The problem with these guide books is although they give directions to trail heads, an address or GPS coordinates would greatly help those folks from out of the area who, like me, depend on their auto's GPS unit.

THE SEPTEMBER 11TH NATIONAL MEMORIAL TRAIL:

The September 11th National Memorial Trail is being built as a tribute to those who gave their all in America's single worst terrorist attack. The trail will connect the three memorials commemorating the tragic events that occurred at the Pentagon, Flight 93 crash site near Shanksville, Pa. and the World Trade Center. The establishment of a biking, hiking and driving trail will provide a 1,300 mile physical linkage connecting the three sites.

Many Rail Trails help in making up the linkage of the 911 Trail. Locally, the Lower Trail is proud to be part of this memorial trail. The Great Allegheny Passage Trail and the 6 thru 10 Trail are also included in the connectors to and from the Flight 93 Memorial. Once in DC, the Pentagon Memorial Trail Circuit is a series of cycling and walking trails highlighting area monuments reflecting on America's history of freedom and perseverance.

For more information on the September 11th National Memorial Trail, visit www.911trail.org or write PO box 6986 Woodbridge, Virginia 22195.

TRAILS CLOSER HOME:

The Trans Allegheny Trails are a series of trails located on the eastern and western sides of the Allegheny Mountains. They include: 6 to 10, Apollo's Kiski Riverfront, Bells Gap, Blairsville Riverfront, Ghost Town, and Hoodlebug Trails, Jim Mayer Riverswalk, Lower, Path of the Flood, Roaring Run, Staple Bend Tunnel, West Penn and Westmoreland Heritage Trails. These are all trails close to home. Visiting these trails will allow you to follow old tow paths, see iron furnaces, go through the oldest railroad tunnel in America, follow the path of a historic flood and so much more. It is so worth the time to go and enjoy all of these trails. If you would like more information please visit www.transalleghenytrails.com.

TREE OF THE MONTH: EASTERN HEMLOCK

By Dave Despot

Eastern hemlock (*Tusga canadensis*) is a shade-tolerant, native evergreen tree uniquely capable of living a long life and reaching large size. It is the state tree of Pennsylvania. One of the oldest recorded eastern hemlock specimens (at least 554 years old,) is found near Tionesta, Pa. while the tallest in the Northeast is named Seneca hemlock, found in Cook Forest (12ft circumference at breast height x 145.4ft high). The native range is from Maine south to Georgia and west to Wisconsin with the largest concentration of hemlock trees residing in New England and down the Appalachian mountains into Alabama and Georgia.



Needles are typically ¼ inch long, flattened, and two ranked. The top of the needles are shiny yellow green, the underside is a dull green with two distinct stomatal lines. Stomata are the pores that allow gas exchange between the interior of the leaf and the atmosphere, a process necessary for photosynthesis. Needle margins have tiny teeth and the tips of the needles often have a small notch. Cones are relatively small (about ¾ inch long) and short stalked with smooth margins on the scales. Bark is scaly on young trees becoming deeply furrowed with age. A drooping terminal leader is common on hemlock trees, a characteristic not seen on most other conifers. Eastern hemlock trees grow best in cool moist environments.

Eastern hemlock trees have been under attack from the hemlock woolly adelgid for a number of years. This insect pest was introduced into the Eastern United States from Japan in the early 1950's. An adelgid uses piercing sucking mouth parts to withdraw stored nutrients from hemlock needles. This pest has now been found in at least 19 states. Current control



measures consist of insecticides and biological controls. For the most part, insecticides are too expensive to be useful beyond ornamental plantings and high value trees. A number of predatory insects are being studied to see if any might be useful to keep the hemlock woolly adelgid in check and allow the hemlock to regain its foothold as an important part of the forest environment.

WILDFLOWER WATCH: RHODODENDRON:

By Bob Richers



We are truly blessed in Central PA to have native Rhododendron growing in our mountain forests.

This ever-green shrub is found growing alongside many freestone creek valleys and far up to the mountain tops. One good example is the Tipton Run Valley up to the Jamesville Pike.

Rhododendron is sometimes confused with our state flower, Mountain Laurel. Rhododendron has leaves up to 8", twice as long as laurel and are deeper green in color. The mature plants grow taller, up to 30', with larger branches. Both shrubs can be found growing together. Mountain laurel has smaller off-white with pinkish tone flowers and blooms slightly earlier. Rhododendron blooms in late June or early July according to the plant's elevation. It is larger and has 5 anthers per flower with mostly white blossoms. The flowers are quite abundant and the areas where numerous groves are found appear to be covered with a light snow. Slow down for a moment and enjoy the splendor of this natural scenery.

Rhododendron has a worldwide presence between latitudes 80 degrees north and 20 degrees south. It is a member of the heath family which contains 1,024 species. Azaleas make up two of the subgenera of Rhododendron family. All members of the laurel-rhododendron-azalea group of plants are considered potentially toxic. From a species that grows in Greece and Turkey there are reports that eating honey produced from the plant's flowers resulted in hallucinogenic and laxative effects and even death!

The Rhododendron used in landscaping are usually non-native hybrids used to establish brighter colors like red or purples. These plants flower earlier in the spring and remain leaved all year. As a protection from cold, the leaves will curl in during cold spells. They also have a waxy coating which gives protection from freezing rain. The root system will spread out and create additional plants and low hanging branches, when covered with peat or mulch, will sprout roots also forming new plants. Leaves drop off the plant and are replaced during the

warmer seasons. I don't notice them until the autumn raking season begins.

To enjoy the splendor of Rhododendron in blossom this summer, plan a late June ride on the Great Allegheny Passage from Rockwood to Confluence.

RAFFLE TIME AGAIN:

You should have received your fifteen raffle tickets with this newsletter. If you did not, please let us know. This year's prizes:

- 1st Prize:** \$200.00 Gift Certificate from Spokes-N-Skis
- 2nd Prize:** .1 night stay in Fairfield Farm B&B Guest Cabin, Spruce Creek.
- 3rd Prize:** \$100.00 Gift Certificate from Hoss's
- 4th Prize:** \$100.00 Gift Certificate from Field and Stream
- 5th Prize:** \$100.00 Sheetz Convenience Store Gift Certificate
- 6th Prize:** \$100.00 Brush Mountain Running & Outdoors, Inc. Gift Certificate
- 7th / 8th Prize:** Rothrock Outfitters..1 day kayak rental, 1 complete bike tune-up
- 9th / 10th Prize:** Gift Certificates from Black Dog Café, \$25.00 each.
- 11th / 12th Prize:**.Gift Certificates from Allegheny Creamery & Crepes, \$25.00 each.

The prizes were provided this year by: **Spokes-N-Skis, Fairfield Farm B & B, Hoss's, Field and Stream, Rothrock Outfitters and Black Dog Café and Allegheny Creamery and Crepes.** In the upcoming newsletters, we will tell you more about the businesses that are so generously supporting us. We greatly appreciate their support and we hope, as you shop throughout the year, that you remember to support those businesses that support Rails to Trails. The drawing will once again take place during the Spring Gathering. Mark your calendar for Sunday, May 7th.

The raffle is our major fund raiser, which provides a large percentage of our annual operating budget. It is also a way for you to renew your membership. By returning your ticket stubs and money, you extend your membership by one year. This applies to all memberships, even if yours does not expire until January, 2018 for example. By selling the tickets, your expiration date would move to January, 2019. Or, if you do not wish to extend your membership, you may use the ticket sales to give a membership to someone else as a gift.

We understand that not all individuals feel comfortable participating in raffles, let alone fund raisers. If you do not wish to receive tickets, please let us know. If you did receive tickets and do not wish to participate, please accept our apology. You may either return the tickets or destroy them.

We are certainly grateful for every individual's support, either by renewing your membership as it expires, or by participating in this fund raiser. Tickets again this year are \$2.00 apiece. Ticket stubs and checks may be mailed to Rails-to-Trails, PO Box 592, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact Vickie Brua at

vicbrua@atlanticbb.net or Jennifer Barefoot at 814-695-8521, e-mail at rjsunbrook@verizon.net. Thank you!

HOLIDAY GATHERING:

A great THANK YOU to Janice Dauber. Janice was our guest speaker at the December Holiday Gathering. Janice shared her cycling cross country adventure with us. She is definitely a wonderful inspiration to all of us. Challenging ourselves to not just dream of our great adventure, but to go out and live it. Thank you for sharing with us and inspiring us.

We would like to thank all who came out and ate at Hoss's before the gathering. You help make the Hoss's Community Fund raiser a success.

ELECTION RESULTS:

Elections were held at the January meeting. Board members re-elected for a three year term were: Fred Ciocca, Sarah Gonsman, Karl King, Joe Lansberry, and Bruce Sheeh. Thank you to these individuals for volunteering their time and energies for three more years. Following the election of Board members, elections were held for the 2017 officers. Elected President: Ed Donahoe; Vice President: Karl King; Secretary: Mary Emeigh; Treasurer: Sarah Gonsman and Sec/Treasurer: Jennifer Barefoot. For a full list of board members visit our website: rttcpa.org.

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
www.rttcpa.org



RAILS-TO-TRAILS, INC.
OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA
P.O. Box 592
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Altoona, PA 16601
PERMIT NO. 66

Or Current Resident

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Tuesday March 14th
Sunday March 26th
Tuesday April 11th
Sunday May 7th

Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM Grannas Station
3 PM 5k Race Williamsburg Trailhead. Benefiting Healing Patch in Altoona.
Monthly Board Meeting 7 PM Grannas Station
1 PM Spring Gathering and Raffle Drawing, Mt. Etna Trailhead

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

With many people using the trail, we must all remember we do not have eyes in the back of our heads. No one likes to be startled so if you are riding your bike and are approaching a slower rider, walkers or horseback riders, PLEASE give notice. All that needs to be said is: "passing on your left," or just "coming up behind you."

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 address below.

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.
Post Office Box 592
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648-0592
814-317-9728

www.rttcpa.org