



Volume 26 Issue 1

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

January 2021

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Let us all hope for a more normal, happy and healthy 2021!

Looking back at 2020, it certainly was a year none of us will soon forget. but wish we could in many respects. Covid-19 has impacted every one of us in more ways that just mask wearing and social distancing. The Lower Trail. like all of the outdoor recreation areas. also was and still is impacted by Covid-19. Our programs and gatherings were canceled in 2020, our restroom facilities were closed for a period of time and most all 5k events that were held on the trail in the past were canceled. Financially, Rails to Trails was impacted. Memberships were down, our vandalized donation boxes were out of commission for part of the summer and due to the impact of Covid-19, with people being laid off, or worse yet, losing their jobs, people (rightfully so) did not have any funds to spare.

Not all was negative. The trail saw record usage. People were encouraged to get outside. Our parking lots were full and the trail was used heavily. Our exceptional volunteers worked just like they have in all the years past keeping the trail looking great! Even though we saw a decline in membership, we did have members that were able to donate graciously. Also, thank you to Keith's Trucking for the custom metal fabrication in making new donation boxes at cost, which was covered by several members who donated the funds to cover that expense. And thanks to members/volunteers, Bruce Sheehe, painter, and Adam Grow and Ed Donahoe, installers, the donation boxes are back in-service.

Many non-profit organizations have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the pandemic. Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc. knows from what history has shown us over the past 30 years to always "look at the glass as half full and not half empty". Through legal battles, flooding and severe storms that shut the trail down, our membership and dedicated volunteers have always kept the trail growing and kept it one of the best trails in the eastern United States.

As we head into 2021, it is our hope that our membership will again continue to grow, more people or organizations

step up to volunteer along the trail, and we can finally open the section of trail into Canoe Creek State Park and continue to try and expand the trail into Hollidaysburg. We are still waiting to see if we can plan a Spring Gathering and a Summer Series of Programs. We will keep you updated.

2020 SUMMERTIME RAIL TO TRAILS OBSERVATIONS

By: Bob Richers

With the limitations caused by the Corona Virus this riding season I would like to detail what my wife Sue and I have observed during the summer of 2020:

Hand Sanitizer: To those trails that have installed and maintained hand sanitizer stations in their comfort stations this summer, we appreciate the additional protection afforded.

H&BT Rail Trail - Route 26 near the Riddelsburg trail head was closed due to a massive rockslide requiring a detour. Trail access was at the far end of the trail north of the Shuster bypass just off of route 36. On our last visit, route 26 had reopened to one-way traffic controlled by a system of traffic lights.

The Hoodle Bug Trail: It was years since we visited this trail due to the rough condition of the recycled pavement used for the trail surface. Most of the rougher sections have been repaired and the trail was extended into the IUP campus.

The West Penn Trail: The last bridge on the eastern end of the Conemaugh Dam has suffered major erosion to the trail surface due to the accumulation of debris in the bridge openings resulting in water flowing over the structure when the dam flood gates are closed.

The Western Maryland Rail trail and C&O Canal at Hancock MD: The C&O parking lot and boat access has been blocked off all summer. The rest station in Hancock was closed all spring, but is now open as are the porta potties at the trailheads, which were never closed. The original section from Hancock east on the Western Maryland Rail Trail has root humps running under the blacktop up to 3" or

more. The C&O trail that goes east from Hancock is actually the better ride!

The Great Allegheny Passage: While riding the trail from Rockwood to Confluence, the lady manning the Rockwood visitor's station mentioned that funding is in place for a Garrett to Flight 93 trail extension. The first 1.25 mile stretch from Garrett is complete.

Flight 93 Memorial: The Tower of Voices has only installed 10 of the 40 wind chimes and additional tuning is under study. While disappointing, this sounds like a federal project to me! The wildflower meadow is still a work in progress, especially with this year's drought conditions, but beehives have been added to increase flower pollination. The area looks like it would make a bodacious bluebird box trail. The walkway from the visitor's center to the memorial plaza is a limestone dust trail, but the 1st half of the trail is covered with Canada Goose droppings.

The Ghost Town Trail Raxis Extension: The trail is going to be extended on a spur that will end at Duman Lake Park. Hopefully, the final tie into the trail at Ebensburg will happen soon which will create a loop to and from Ebensburg. One pleasant addition is the new porta potty located at the far end of the Raxis extension.

The Lower Trail / Mid State Trail: We encountered a young couple hiking toward Alfarata just below Mount Etna. We mentioned our two shelters, which they were aware of, but they were heading for a spring 3 miles past Alfarata for the night. Our section of the trail is known as the "dry stretch" There is water everywhere but nothing to drink! At 8 pounds per gallon of water you can only carry so much. Too bad water fountains or faucets are not available at the trailheads at Williamsburg and Alfarata. A grant to install a hand pump at Mount Etna would also be a real plus.

Spring Creek Canyon / PSU Arboretum: We try to visit both of these Center County sights in a single visit. Spring Creek Canyon is a bit less than 5 miles in length ending at the Spring Creek Trout Hatchery. The trail surface has eroded in places and is more suited for mountain bikes with good suspension.

The Penn State Arboretum is always a welcome trip and it even helped me identify a throat beard flower that I spotted earlier in the summer. There is currently a 2-acre addition under construction. The theme for this new track will be plants that attract songbirds. It should open in 2021.

Pine Creek IPA Grand Canyon: We decided to beat the crowds for the 4th of July weekend by riding on the 3rd. It did not work! There were lots of folks riding and the trailheads were full. We rode from the Rattle Snake trailhead to Ansonia. The limestone dust trail had recently been treated with weed killer which helps lengthen the

lifetime of the surface. On the ride up, we noticed numerous dead trees, mostly ash and an occasional elm, bordering the highway. PennDOT needs to get proactive and take these trees down soon before they fall and cause traffic interruptions or worse.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP/FUND RAISER:

In next month's newsletter, we hope to have the raffle tickets to mail out for our Annual Fund Raiser. As members are aware, the raffle is our major fund raiser, providing a large percentage of our annual operating budget. It is also a way for you to renew your membership. This year, we are sorry to say there will not be as many prizes. This is a result of the pandemic. Many businesses have been affected, restaurants were closed down which has, in-turn, caused them to have to cut back or eliminate their ability to donate, which we understand. We hope that you understand but will still support this fund raiser. More information will be in the upcoming newsletter.

WILDFLOWER WATCH: BUTTER AND EGGS

By Bob Richers

Butter and Eggs is a European snap dragon import. In the great plain states, it is often listed as invasive, but not so in Pennsylvania. Some of the other names that this attractive weed goes by are bride weed, butter haycocks, bunny mouths, bunny haycocks, calfs snout, false flax, flaw weed, fluellen, gall weed, gallwort, North American ramsted, wild snapdragon, wild tobacco, yellow rod, and toadflax. It makes you wonder if the folks who name wildflowers have too much time on their hands!



This perennial plant stands 1 to 2 feet tall. It is widespread in lawns, roadsides, in dunes, and in cultivated acreage. Partial sunlight to full sun in well-drained soil works best for this flower. Cut flowers will make a long-lasting bouquet.

The flower is similar to those of snap dragons. It blooms from June beyond the early frosts in October. It has spike-like raceme 3 to 6 inches long with 1/2 to 1 inch flowers. Each flower is divided with two lobes on the upper bloom and the lower lip with 3 and a spur. The lips and spur are yellow with an orange palate projecting from the center. The spur will open by pinching the flower, but pollination requires stronger insects like the bee or bumble bee that can push open the spur.

The toothless leaves are 1/8 to 1/6 inches wide by up to 2 inches long. They have pointed ends with no leaf stocks. Their attachment is alternate but grows tightly on the stem. The leaves and stems are hairless. Sweet gale and mouse

moths will feed on the general plant as well as toadflax and satyr bugs.

Butter and eggs was used in folk medicine as a laxative and diurectic. Other uses were for jaundice, dropsy, and enteritis with drowsiness. Leaf tea and an ointment made from the flowers were used for treating skin diseases and piles. It was confirmed to have diuretic and fever-reducing properties.

We can find a scattering of this wild flower along some of the fence rows on the Lower Trail, but the open fields in Canoe Creek State Park offers more frequent sightings.

TREE OF THE MONTH: NORWAY MAPLE

By Dave Despot

Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) is a medium sized tree, native to continental Europe, which has become widely established across the United States. In Europe, it is an important timber tree, reaching 100 feet in height. Here in the United States, this species is generally considered a medium sized tree with primarily landscape value. By some standards, Norway maple is considered an invasive species. My experience here in central Pennsylvania has seen Norway maple escape cultivation into suburban vacant lots and isolated forest edges.



Norway maple leaves have 5 to 7 sharp pointed lobes and resemble sugar maple leaves, but fortunately there is an easy way to tell the difference. Norway maple has milky sap which can be extracted from the broken leaf petioles. Sugar maple sap is clear. Norway maple leaves have a dark green upper surface and a somewhat paler green underside. Trees of this species hold their leaves at least several weeks longer than the native maples. Fall color is generally yellow.

Twigs are stout, smooth, shiny, olive brown to green in color, with leaf scars that meet at a sharp point. In the second year, twigs lose their luster and become grayer in color. Mature bark is dark brown to black and has distinct vertical texture with interconnected ridges. This is very different from the native maples and is an excellent identification characteristic. Winter buds are 1/4 to 3/8 of an inch long, rounded with plump, lustrous, fleshy scales that are green in the fall, developing a reddish color as winter affects them. In contrast, sugar maple has thin, gray-brown scales on sharp pointed buds that change little as winter progresses.

There are numerous cultivars of Norway maple, many of which have red leaves that are very popular as landscape

trees. Michael Dirr, in Manual of Woody Landscape Plants (1983 edition) lists 24 cultivars. 'Crimson King' is one of the older cultivars that are commonly planted. Unless the cultivar of a tree is documented at the time of planting, it is difficult to identify the specific cultivar by observation alone.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Due to the COVID-19 VIRUS THERE WILL BE NO MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS. MEETINGS ARE BEING HELD THROUGH ZOOM MEETINGS.

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