



Volume 26 Issue 5

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

September/October 2021

RIBBON CUTTING AND OPENING



October 22, 2021

Sorry for the short notice. Hope this newsletter is out in time. DCNR has announced the formal Ribbon Cutting for the connector of the Lower Trail into Canoe Creek State Park for. Friday October 22nd at 1:30P.M.

This has been a long anticipated event, connecting the Lower Trail to Canoe Creek State Park. One can say it has been the plan since 1989 when Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc. was just organized and had purchased the original eleven miles of trail.

One of the original nine founding members of Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc. was Terry Wentz. Terry was the Park Superintendent of Canoe Creek State Park. He was a great outdoors advocate and loved his park while seeing the great future of rail trails. He always hoped/planned that the Lower Trail would connect to Canoe Creek State Park. For these and more reasons we are n to name this section the "Terry Wentz Connector".

We hope you will join us on October 22nd for the opening of the connection of the Lower Trail and Canoe Creek State Park. Photos and more will follow in the next newsletter.

SOMETHING NEW: BIKE WORK STATION



We would like to THANK Dave and Jan Andrews for their donation of the newly installed Bike Work Station at the Flowing Spring Trailhead.

If you have been to other trails you may have seen, or even used, one of these work stations or ones like it. This is a great addition to the trail and is here for our trail users

if they find the need for a quick repair or adjustment.

Once again it shows how great our members and trail are. The Lower Trail is owned/operated/and **MAINTAINED** completely by **VOLUNTEERS**. Dave and Jan are prime examples of this.

As you ride or walk along our trail, everything you see: the mowing of the grass, the pavilions, benches, tables, shelters, cut-up downed trees, plantings, removal of invasive plants; this list goes on and on, is all done by **VOLUNTEERS**. Our trail would not be the trail it is without them.

Speaking of Volunteer Projects:

This past month we got a very nice thank you that we want to pass along.

"I just wanted to let the volunteers and supporters of the Lower Trail know how convenient and appreciated the Adirondack shelters are.

I utilized the shelter at Alfarata Station on the second night of a 19 day bike trip loop, from my home near Greensburg, PA to NYC to Albany, NY, the Erie Canal across NY to Buffalo/Niagara Falls and back home.

Having a shelter to retreat to in inclement weather is much appreciated on a longer bike tour. Having the 'Little Library' near the shelter is also a nice touch.

I wish the Ghost Town Trail would add some camping or shelter options. Taking the Ghost Town trail to Ebensburg, over the mountain, down through Horseshoe Curve, through Altoona and Hollidaysburg was a great way to start my trip.

One small suggestion I have is to equip the shelters with a broom so that debris can be removed.

Thanks for efforts on the trail."

Jeff Lange

WEST CREEK RECREATIONAL TRAIL

By Bob Richers

In the fall/winter of 2004 I was working on an electrical project at a glass plant in Port Allegheny, PA near the New York border. On my trips home, while traveling thru Emporium on route 120 toward Saint Mary's, I noticed an old rail line that was in the process of having the rails and ties removed. With wishful thinking I hoped for a new rail trail, but being in the heart of ATV country, I didn't think it would happen.

Earlier this month my new Rail-Trails of PA guide book arrived. While looking at the PA state map of trails I noticed a new trail going west from Saint Mary's! Could it be? It showed a 19.5 mile crushed stone trail going into Emporium. The trail information mentioned a 600 foot drop from Saint Mary's to Emporium and recommended starting at the downhill end.

My wife, Sue, and I decided to try the trail out on that next Saturday. That was in early September. We stopped at the Sheetz store when picking up Route 120 east in Saint Mary's. The unfortunate fact for these northern trails is there are no trailside restrooms, so we take advantage of every Sheetz! When we entered downtown Emporium, we turned onto a side street and parked beside another Sheetz. Right behind it was the trail and a shelter with 2 picnic tables. It would be an ideal spot for dinner at the end of our ride.

The trail at that end was fairly urban and paralleled Route 120 on the right and West Creek, a meandering stocked trout stream, open for year-round fishing on the left. There was also nature and industrial signage at that end. Quite a number of ponds and marshes bordered the trail. There was some grass encroachment along the trail edge, and it is narrow which limited riding side by side. The trail crossed Route 120 about 7 miles out.

We were surprised to only encounter 1 other rider on the first half of the trail. Maybe there was a rattle snake roundup in the area! Our ride began in early afternoon and the sky was clear with temperatures in the low 70's. There was a nice breeze blowing out of the west but not much shade at the Emporium end.

The trail was more rustic after mile 7 with several trail head parking areas, but no directional signage to help locate them. We saw a dozen or so riders on the trail at the Saint Mary's end. The trail gained almost 500 feet in the last 6 miles, so a start at the mile 7 road crossing would make the climb easier with fresher legs. The trail surface seemed wider and fresher along PA Game Lands No. 293, so I concluded that that was the final stage to be developed.

The Western PA Conservatory purchased the old rail line and numerous parties were involved with developing the trail. One partner is the Snow Mobile Association. We have visited numerous trails in 8 states, but this was our first trail with 15MPH snow mobile signs posted! Whatever works! It was a nice ride.

The wildlife sightings were great along the trail. We spotted Great Blue Herons, King Fishers, numerous wood ducks and white-tailed deer. Going home we followed Route 120 east to Driftwood and Route 555 west back through to Penfield. Along the way we spotted a bull elk eating apples beside a house and near Benezette had a sow bear with her three cubs scurry across the road. Needless to say it was a wonderful day!

Directions: Go to cameroncountychamber.org/trails

WILD FLOWER WATCH: SPOTTED KNAPWEED

By Bob Richers

From June thru August, it seems like Spotted Knapweed is



everywhere and the truth is; IT IS! This plant is listed as an invasive species in Pennsylvania. Knapweed really shouldn't be successful in our state since we have more rainfall than it can

thrive on. It has carved out an existence in roadsides, waste places, railroad beds, over-grazed pastures, on basic or neutral soils and even on old, backfilled strip mines. These are all areas that have quick drying soils.

Spotted Knapweed looks like a small thistle but is actually a member of the sunflower family. This plant is native of Central Europe east to Central Russia, Caucasia, and Western Siberia, and is even invasive there! It is a highly branched, wiry-stemmed plant with 4 to 8 inch leaves. The leaves are smaller at the top of the 2 to 3 foot plant.

The Lavender 1 inch disk flower is surrounded with soft hairs. Flower heads are solitary or in clusters of two or three on the branch ends, ovate to oblong. The involucre bracts of the flower head are imbricate, widest and yellow-green at the base with black margins and a fringe of spines. There are 20 to 30 purple to pink flowers per flower head.

Infestation of knapweed will lead to a decline in biodiversity and can choke out native species. This degradation can lead to surface runoff erosion. Chemical and mechanical eradication methods show limited success when major infestations occur. Complete removal of the entire plant will also work but only if small numbers of knapweed are present.

There is a biological control that seems to work best. The introduction of two species of weevil; the seed head weevil, and the root-minting weevil are recommended. Homeowners can purchase weevils online. but from what I remember about old country songs, you probably do not want weevils in your cotton field!



Knapweed has adequate nutritional quality during the growing season that grazing animals, mainly sheep and goats and some wildlife, can make use of it. On the plus side of the ledger, beekeepers value the flowers of this plant because of the flavorful honey produced from its nectar.

TREE OF THE MONTH: THE BUCKEYES

By Dave Despot



In the last newsletter, I wrote about horse chestnut, a member of the *Aesculus* genus. This time, we will take a look at several buckeyes, other members of the same genus. In general, buckeyes, like horse chestnuts, have palmately compound

leaves, large pith, and fruit borne in thick, leathery pods containing shiny brown seeds.

Ohio buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) is a small to medium sized tree with a height of 20 to 40 feet and a similar spread. The leaves are palmately compound with 5 leaflets (rarely 7). Leaflets are 4 to 6 inches long. Twigs are stout, smooth, and gray in color, with large, greenish pith. Buds are oval in shape, brown, and are not sticky to the touch. The leaves and twigs of Ohio buckeye can be distinguished from other buckeyes by the foul odor they produce when crushed. One of the common names of this species is stinking buckeye. The fruit is a thick pod covered with prickles or spikes usually containing a single nut.

Yellow buckeye (*Aesculus octandra*) is a medium to large tree often obtaining a height of 40 to 60 feet with a somewhat narrow crown. It is often called sweet or large buckeye. Buds are similar to Ohio buckeye: brown in color, not gummy to the touch and oval in shape. Twigs are firm, smooth, and contain large green pith. Nuts are borne in leathery husks with a yellow-brown color and a smooth surface, containing 2 shiny brown nuts. Mature bark has a gray-brown color with low ridges and furrows and thin scales on the ridges. No foul odor is produced when twigs, leaves, and twigs are bruised. There are numerous mature yellow buckeyes in Hollidaysburg growing as street trees. As a review, the horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) has buds similar to buckeye; however they are sticky to the touch. If you squeeze a bud between your thumb and

forefinger it is hard to let go. Horse chestnut also has palmately compound leaves, but they usually have 7 leaflets compared to buckeyes which normally have 5. No foul odor is produced from plant parts when they are crushed. Nuts are enclosed in a spiny capsule.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS HAVE RESUMED

October 22nd
November 9th

Official opening of the Underpass into Canoe Creek State Park
Board Meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station

KEEP YOUR ADDRESS CURRENT

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Rails-to-Trails of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.
Post Office Box 592
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648-0592
814-317-9728
www.rttcpa.org