LETTER FROM THE PREZ

WHO IS THE ATA AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, but the trail movement that became the Allegheny Trail Alliance is a quarter century old. In 1975, the first 17 miles of abandoned railroad were purchased for Ohiopyle State Park by visionaries at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. The first nine miles of trail were opened at Ohiopyle in 1986.

People from all over the region mobbed the new trail and the idea of rail trails spread like wildfire.

A string of trail groups formed in the late 1980s and early '90s and the dream of a continuous trail from Pittsburgh to Washington DC began to take shape.

Each trail group tackled its own acquisition issues, trail building, membership development, volunteer management and governance.

The easy sections were built first, but there loomed enormous challenges that were beyond the capabilities of a single group to handle.

Big Savage Tunnel comes to mind. It's in Somerset County, which is not a wealthy area and very rural. How could they take on this restoration, which will cost millions of dollars, alone? And without the tunnel, the link to DC would effectively be cut off.

A single strong voice was needed to speak for all the trails. The Allegheny Trail Alliance was born.

By design, the ATA manages the "joint ventures" among the trail groups, primarily major fund-raising and market-

New Trail Treasure Opens at Ohiopyle
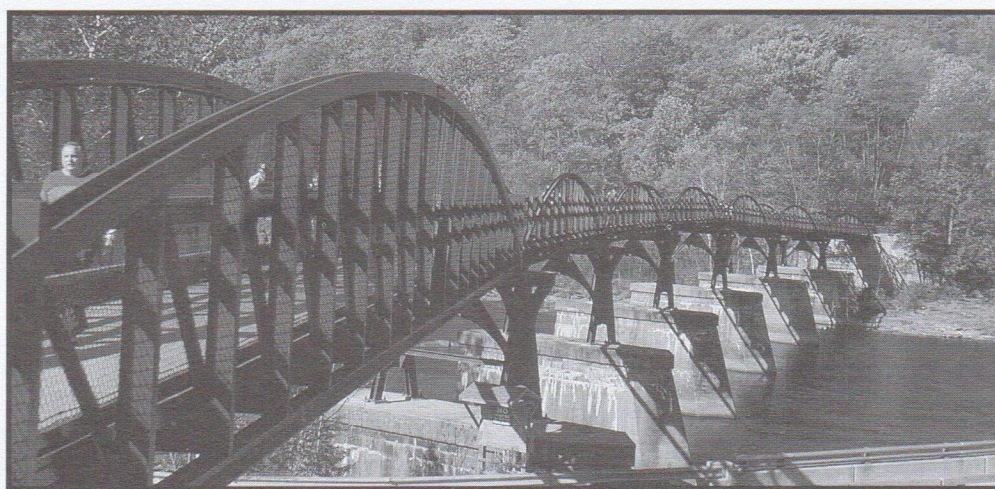
For the record, the new Ohiopyle bridge is a seven-span bowstring truss, it's 621 feet long, it's made of weathering steel to blend in with the surrounding landscape and it officially opened on October 29, 1999 with speeches and a ribbon cutting led by Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary John Oliver.

And there's quite a story behind it.

For years, Ohiopyle visitors were greeted by the rusty old amputated hulk that was the railroad bridge across the Yough. It's not that the DER (now the DCNR) didn't want to get rid of it - they did - they tried to scrap it, but the old steel beams had a negative value. The scrapper wanted $155,000 to haul them away.

They even tried to blow it up, or at least get Hollywood to do it for them. Ads were taken out in the *Wall Street Journal* making the bridge available to moviemakers to destroy. A Japanese film crew even came to check it out, but apparently it wasn't right for Godzilla to stomp – it was too close to the village.

So it sat. Clearances were too low for highway traffic, so PennDOT took out two spans when they rebuilt Route 381. Two pedestrian walkways were included in the new highway bridge design and everybody involved figured that would be sufficient to handle the little foot traffic that crossed over to Ferncliff.

Then in 1990, the first downstream section of the trail was finished from Ferncliff to Bruner Run access area. Foot and bike traffic took a leap, then absolutely mushroomed when the trail was finished to South Connellsville in 1993.

What really brought things to a head, though, was the formation of the **Allegheny Trail Alliance,** says Ed Deaton of DCNR, "with the **ATA** pulling all the links together, we had to put a new bridge in."

A new bridge was less expensive than trying to fix up the old one, Deaton explained.

NEW MAPS! CHECK OUT WWW.ATATRAIL.ORG

ALLEGHENY TRAIL ALLIANCE

RAD GIVES TRAILS $ QUARTER MILLION

The Regional Assets District (RAD) in Allegheny County, PA, has awarded $250,000 to trails for 2000. Four **ATA** trails: **Montour, Three Rivers, Steel Valley and Yough River North** will benefit as well as the Harmony Trail in the North Hills. This year's grant is two and a half times more than last year's.

RAD is the agency that administers Allegheny County's 1% sales tax and oversees the funding of many of the Pittsburgh area's public facilities.

"This is an affirmation of our growing trail system as an important local and regional asset," said ATA board member Jim Linaberger, who led the **ATA's** presentation to the RAD board.

Along the Information Trailway

New Maps, Address, New Trail Web Pages

Our ATA website **www.atatrail.org** has been updated with new maps and trailside information. Our new email address is **ata@atatrail.org**. Drop us a line – we love to hear from you.

And while you're in visiting us, click on the new **Allegheny Highlands Trail of Maryland** and **Montour Trail** sites. Both offer new pictures and up to date information.

We "exemplify excellence"

PLANNERS CITE ATA

At its annual awards ceremony on November 2 at Seven Springs, the Pennsylvania Planning Association recognized the **ATA** as "exemplifying excellence." As a bi-state, multi-county, public/private coalition, the **ATA** was awarded the Outstanding Planning Award for a Special Community Initiative. President Linda Boxx accepted the award with several fellow trail advocates in attendance, including **ATA** board member Hank Parke and the Ghost Town Trail's Laurie Lafontaine.

MONTOUR TRAIL

Turnpike Builds Trail With Road

The PA Turnpike Commission has completed a .8 mile section of new connector highway between Gill Hall and Snowden Roads in Jefferson Borough that includes a section of the **Montour Trail** as a component. The trail was built alongside the roadway, is paved with asphalt and grade separated from the road. The road/trail was built as a bypass to make way for the Mon-Fayette Expressway.

Glass Hill Road bridge opened on Sept. 25 in Cecil Township, Washington County. Completion of the bridge, which was redecked with volunteer labor, effectively opens up another .6 miles in the Cecil section for walking, running and mountain biking.

Congratulations are also in order to the 800 members of the all-volunteer **Montour Trail Council** on their Tenth Anniversary.

YOUR WIND FARM STAYS ON MY MINE

Trail users crossing the Salisbury Viaduct will be treated to a new sight this spring. Over the winter, the strip mined hills above the trail will have sprouted windmills. Eight of the giant machines, each 200 feet high with blades 95 feet long, will produce electricity for Green Mountain Power of Vermont. This will be the first wind-based power plant in Pennsylvania. Once seen, we'll bet you can't seem to forget it.

CONNECTIONS

Pumpkins on the Panhandle

An unusual nighttime Halloween-style trail opening took place when the **Montour's** Panhandle Trail opened two miles on Oct. 29, beginning at Walker's Mill in Collier Township, Allegheny County. About 500 guests enjoyed the sight of a trail lit by jack-o-lanterns every 20 feet or so.

Current surface of this section of the Panhandle is "roto mill," which is the reclaimed surface of asphalt highways. This will be covered by the usual crushed limestone surface in the spring.

Up The Allegheny

Three Rivers Heritage Trail is getting a new 1.5-mile extension up the Allegheny River from Washington's Landing to Millvale. The new trail is part of Millvale's parks master plan which will redevelop an old railroad yard.

Frostburg Studies Loop

Frostburg, Maryland has completed a study for a connector to the **Allegheny Highlands Trail of Maryland**. The three-mile loop will join the **AHT**, the Frostburg depot and the Frostburg State University campus. It will be part of Frostburg's growing network of bike routes. No date is set for construction.

WHAT IS THE ATA?

ing. The ATA doesn't own or operate the individual sections of trail -- that will remain a local concern.

The **ATA** is a virtual non-profit organization. What that means is we have no staff, rely on volunteers and contract for services that we can't handle internally. No dues are required to belong, just goodwill and the ability to work within a give and take relationship of sister trail organizations.

The **ATA** is a great example of the whole being greater that the sum of the parts and what can be accomplished when groups truly work together for that greater good.

It's been a great quarter century for trails. With 120 miles of our 204-mile system completed, the final connection gets closer and closer.
                                              Linda McKenna Boxx

YOUGH RIVER NORTH

Mayor keeps promise
McKeesport to Boston Bridge a Done Deal

McKeesport's Mayor Joe Bendel has come through on his promise to complete the trail up the east side of the Yough River. "You now have a level ride from McKees Point Park to the Boston Bridge," said Bendel, "I know this because I rode it myself. I pedaled from the Point to Woody's (a tavern in Versailles near the bridge), had a beer and pedaled back."
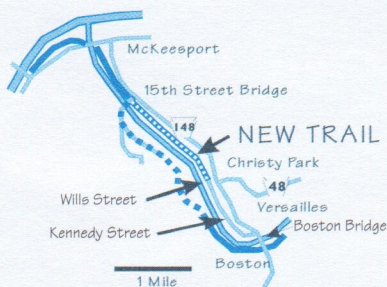
The new 1.5-mile paved section runs from the 15th Street Bridge to Wills Street (see map), where it uses side streets through Versailles (pronounced ver-SALES) to Boston Bridge where it joins

Bendel

the Yough River Trail North (YRTN). Negotiations are underway to extend the trail to avoid most street riding in Versailles.

Fencing, signage, landscaping and improved access are still needed, but people are already using it. McKeesport Special Projects Coordinator Jody Swenderman said, "we had some great weather in November and were able to get the paving done early." McKeesport city crews did the work.

The city owns several parcels of riverfront

McKeesport
15th Street Bridge
148
NEW TRAIL
Christy Park
48
Wills Street
Versailles
Kennedy Street
Boston Bridge
Boston
1 Mile

property. Plans call for these to be developed into parks and strung together by the trail. Improved river access for fishing and boating are part of the plan.

This project represents Bendel's last big project in office; his term expires in January. Under his administration, McKees Point Park was developed and a section of the YRTN was built from the Point to the 15th Street Bridge.

He retains his seat on the McKeesport Planning Commission and has become a board member of the Regional Trail Corporation.

From Bovines to Bicyclists
Dairy Farming Family Opens Trailside B&B

The Sanner family welcomes guests at the Rockwood Trail House. From left: April, Lynn, Debbie (holding Portter Bank, 2 mo.), Amy and Darcy. Not shown is daughter Cristy, Portter's mother.

Images of the old television show "Petticoat Junction" immediately come to mind here: A quaint little inn by the railroad tracks, a porch swing, a rose trellis, colorful characters coming and going, a pleasant woman with gorgeous daughters running the place.

Okay, turn off the TV in your head. It's not Hooterville, it's Rockwood. The railroad's gone. There are four daughters instead of three and none of them have "Jo" for a middle name. It's not the Shady Rest, it's the Rockwood Trail House, but a pleasant woman – Debbie Sanner - will run it with her husband Lynn. One of the daughters, Darcy (Darcy Jo?) will help with the management.

The Sanners are Rockwood natives and dairy farmers. They've been married ever since high school, farm 500 acres outside of town and milk 90 head of Holsteins.

So how do you get from dairy farming to running a bed & breakfast?

"It was Memorial Day '97. I just looked around and said 'there's got to be a better way,'" Lynn remembers, "we can't get help and we work 7 days a week." That's when Debbie said, "I think we ought to buy that house in Rockwood." So they bought it.

The "house in Rockwood" predates the railroad. It was built sometime between 1899 and 1902. It was a store under two owners – the

TWO MORE NEW ACCOMMODATIONS are going into business in Somerset County because of the trail. In Meyersdale, right across the street from the newly-renovated railroad station, the Clapper family are starting up a 5-room B&B. Current plans call for it to open next summer. It will feature some dazzling original woodwork.

In Markleton, the old Casselman Lodge is in the process of renovation. It's that big rustic-looking building across the river from the trail head.

first baked bread for the railroad construction gangs – and somewhere along the line one of the owners lost it in a card game. It became a rental property and was "trashed." Sanners were originally going to do a paint-up-clean-up, but "the more we were here, the more we wanted to make it better."

It took three years, but make it better they did. There are five bedrooms, each with its own bath; a new commercial-grade kitchen and airy common spaces. Debbie's dad did a lot of the decorative woodwork, turning stairway spindles from old barn wood.

With an opening due in February, the Rockwood Trail House will be off and running in the fine tradition of the Shady Rest.

Now, if they could just get Mr. Sembower from over at the trail head to play the part of Uncle Joe....

WE NEED YOU!

In this issue of the **ATA TRAIL NEWS** you've read about the wonderful growth that's taking place on our trail network.

You too can help us grow by joining one (or more) of the following trail groups:

SEND ME INFORMATION ON:

❏ **Friends of the Riverfront** (Three Rivers Heritage Trail)

❏ **Montour Trail Council** (Montour Trail)

❏ **Steel Valley Trail Council** (Steel Valley Trail)

❏ **Regional Trail Corporation** (Yough River Trail)

❏ **Somerset Rails to Trails** (Allegheny Highlands Trail in PA)

❏ **Allegheny Highlands Trail of MD**

❏ I want to help build the **Pittsburgh to Cumberland Trail**. My **tax-deductible** donation of _____ is enclosed. (Please make checks payable to RTC/ATA). We'll send a copy of Linking Up to anyone donating $10 or more.

Name _____

Address_____

_____

✂ **Clip and send to:**

Allegheny Trail Alliance
419 College Avenue
Greensburg, PA 15601

OHIOPYLE BRIDGE

The old steel was in pretty bad shape, painted with toxic lead paint and the beams would have to be raised to make the clearance over the highway. "It just didn't work."

"We wanted to free up the view down the river, so we wanted to make the bridge as light and airy as possible. It took a lot of work, but George Schodowsky (see box) is an excellent technical designer. We ended up with the lightest design possible."

## THEY EVEN TRIED TO BLOW UP THE OLD BRIDGE

Doug Hoehn, Superintendent of Ohiopyle State Park, said there were no real problems in building the bridge, even though construction took place during the park's busiest season. "Even the drought worked to our advantage," related Hoehn, "the low water never bothered the causeway we had to build."

Hoehn said comments on the bridge have been "nothing but positive."

George Schodowski, Bridge Designer

It was one of the proudest moments in George Schodowski's career. John Oliver, the Secretary of DCNR, recognized him at the opening ceremony as the man who did the engineering for the bridge, complimented him on the great job he had done and added that George had just retired from DCNR.

After the speeches, George greeted some old friends and co-workers, then walked haltingly over to the bridge. Today was the first time he had seen it and one couldn't help but notice the pride in his eyes.
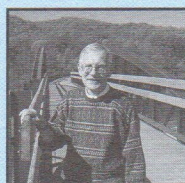
George had engineered other trail bridges for the department, but this was his favorite.

"This is probably the only time I'll get to see it," he said with a bit of a sigh, "I live over in the eastern part of the state and I don't travel much any more." The reason he doesn't travel much is that George has ALS. ALS is Lou Gehrig's Disease.

So when you ride or walk over this beautiful new bridge, stop and admire its graceful lines, take in the new view of the river and the mountains, and give a thought to the people who went out of their way to make this one a masterpiece.

And remember George Schodowski. John Oliver was right. George did a great job.