

# trailNEWS

WORKING TO CONNECT PITTSBURGH TO WASHINGTON, D.C.—THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS, NOT OVER THEM

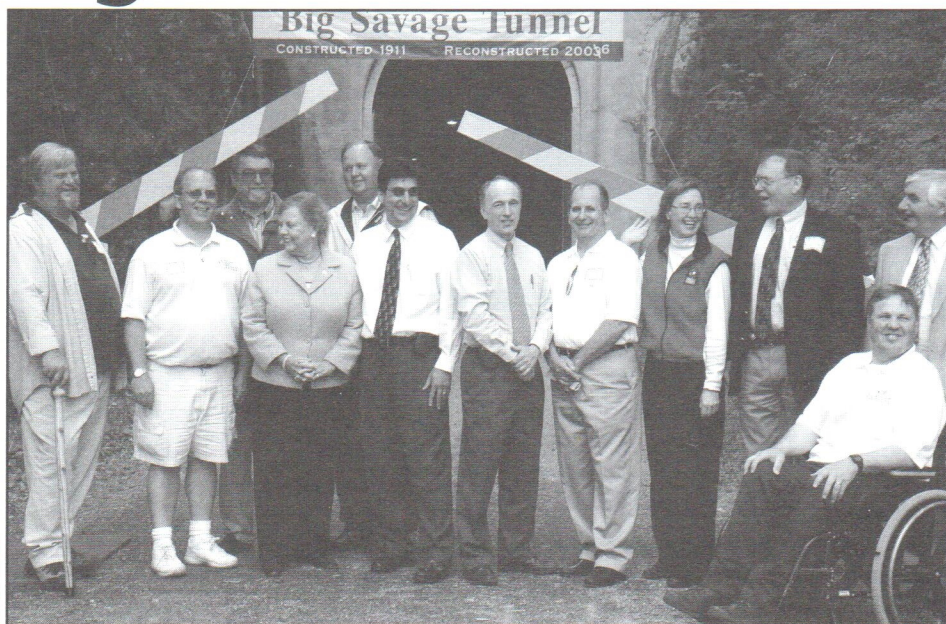
NEWSLETTER OF THE GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE

and member organizations of the Allegheny Trail Alliance

Volume 6, Number 1

Summer 2006

## Light at the End of the Tunnel



### *Big Savage Tunnel Officially Opened, Meyersdale Scene of Grand Celebration*

by Paul G. Wiegman

The Great Allegheny Passage connected Pennsylvania and Maryland this spring with back-to-back ceremonies on Memorial Day weekend.

Big Savage Tunnel was officially dedicated on May 26th, and the next day the trail was officially opened from Meyersdale, PA to the Mason – Dixon line.

The Big Savage dedication was held at the south (east) portal of the 3,300-foot long tunnel. Cyclists, elected officials, and other individuals who had been associated with the enormous task of rehabilitating the tunnel participated.

Hank Parke, President of the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association and long time activist in building the Passage in Somerset County, introduced James Marker, Chairman of the Somerset County Board of Commissioners who noted the Passage was not only a valuable asset to the county, but also a source of pride for its residents.

(continued on page 3)

Opening the Big Savage Tunnel in grand style are, from the left: Rolland Rhodomoyer, construction manager; Hank Parke, president, Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association; Rep. Robert Bastian, PA legislator; Secretary Audrey E. Scott, MD Department of Planning; Brad Cober, Somerset County Commissioner; Secretary Michael DiBerardinis, PA DCNR; Larry Williamson, DCNR Deputy Secretary; Dan Accurti, PennDOT; Linda Boxx, ATA president; Rep. Richard Geist, PA legislator; James Marker, Somerset County Commissioner; James Eppley, PA DCNR chief engineer.

### **TRAIL STATUS**

## Work Progresses toward Cumberland

It won't be long now.

The much-anticipated link to the C&O Canal Towpath and Washington D.C. should be completed before the end of the year, and 2007 is shaping up as a world-class season.

Construction began in May on the last section of trail in Maryland and continues on schedule. The connection to Cumberland is expected in early December.

Note that no new portions of the trail will be opened until the entire final section is finished. The section from Woodcock Hollow east to Cash (see Trail Status, Page 2)



Brush Tunnel work is now complete. The Passage runs adjacent to the tracks of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad.

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## TRAIL STATUS *(continued from Page 1)*

### One continuous trail from McKeesport to Georgetown soon

*(continued from Page 1)*

Valley Road (about four miles) is complete. This includes the work on the Brush Tunnel.

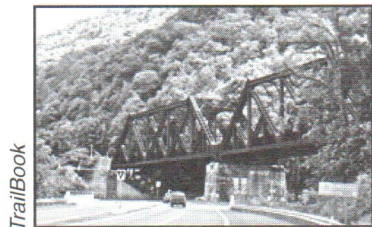
At press time, work is nearing completion on the decking of the Route 40 Bridge in the Narrows.

Trail work continues on the section from Cash Valley to the Route 40 Bridge. Completion is expected by the end of September.

All remaining portions of the trail should be complete by early December.

***To emphasize: The Trail from Woodcock Hollow into Cumberland will remain closed until this entire trail section is complete.***

Frostburg is already seeing an influx of trail users both in the town and on the trail. The 16-mile Frostburg-to-Meyersdale ride has become a popular one, through the Borden Tunnel, crossing the Mason-Dixon Line, marked by big yellow bollards, through the Big Savage Tunnel, crossing the Continental Divide at the culvert, and over the Keystone Viaduct to Meyersdale where a dramatic increase in trail traffic has also been happily noted.



Rt. 40 Bridge

#### Somerset County, PA

The Bollman Bridge has been lifted, and preparations have begun for its placement over Scratch Hill Road. (See story on Page 6.) A short detour across Scratch Hill Road is open and marked.

#### Ohiopyle State Park

The Ohiopyle High Bridge project is complete: old metal cross members, supporting the ties and decking, along with metal bearings, at the concrete metal superstructure interface, were replaced during a seven-month project.

A large culvert project, approximately two miles downriver of Bruner Run take-out, was rehabilitated and is nearing completion. Estimated completion time is mid-August.

Trail resurfacing is under way. New stone has been put down between the low bridge and the high bridge.

The trail may be temporarily blocked for short periods of time on weekdays during the park's trail resurfacing project. Cyclists and pedestrians will be able to get around equipment but cyclists should walk their bikes when doing so.

#### Allegheny County, PA

The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh (URA) publicly opened bids for the Hot Metal Bridge on June 6,

2006. The low bidder's, Braman Construction, bid price was considerably higher than the engineer's estimate. The URA, their designer, and the construction manager determined that the cost differential was largely due to material cost increases, fuel increases, and risk associated with working on a hundred year old historic railroad structure.

The URA, in conjunction with the City of Pittsburgh, worked diligently last month to find additional federal and

#### Passage on the Airwaves

The Passage has become something of a media darling this year.

Pittsburgh's public television station WQED featured the Big Savage Tunnel in an "On Q" segment. The Emmy-winning production team of David Solomon and Paul Ruggieri followed the tunnel's restoration project for three years.

Air times can be found at:

<http://www.wqed.org/tv/pm/specials/savage.shtml>

Mark Nootbaar of Pittsburgh's NPR station WDUQ-FM rode the trail from Georgetown to Pittsburgh in June, reporting each morning and evening for a week, interviewing people on the way. His reports, plus in-depth pieces, can be heard by going to [www.wduq.org](http://www.wduq.org) and clicking on the bicycle wheel and "On the Beaten Path: Pedaling Pittsburgh and Beyond." ■

state funding. The key to the entire funding arrangement is the ATA's work with PennDOT designating the entire Great Allegheny Passage as one project, allowing other ATA projects such as Big Savage Tunnel to serve as the local match.

The URA has submitted all documentation to PennDOT and is awaiting authorization to award the contract. The URA anticipates construction starting late this summer.

#### Montour Trail

"For the first time since the flood in 2004, we have a trail that's back together from Mile Zero to Mile Eight," Dennis Pfeiffer, trail council president, recently told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Work will begin in August on an all-volunteer effort to build 1.65 miles of new trail connecting the Cecil and Peters sections. The new section should be ready for use next summer. Once completed, the trail would be uninterrupted for about 35 miles from Robinson to Library.

The first three miles in Moon and Robinson have been resurfaced.

A picnic pavilion was erected in a one-day carpentry blitz in April near the Mile Zero trailhead. A team of 25 apprentices led by instructor Ricky Okraszewski completed the job in little more than 24 hours.

A series of four bat boxes or "bat hotels" are being installed as part of an Eagle Scout project. The shelters are helpful to trail users because bats love to eat insects.

Bonuses for joggers: A new water fountain near Mile Three has been installed by the Robinson Municipal Authority, a side benefit of the utility's work to install a new waterline.

New mile markers have been erected and were measured for accuracy with a surveyor's wheel. ■



TrailBook

## From here we can see all the way to Cumberland



TrailBook

From near the south portal of Big Savage Tunnel, the Narrows is visible against the mist.

*(continued from Page 1)*

Secretary Michael DiBerardinis of the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources was the featured speaker. DCNR helped financially and with engineering expertise in the reconstruction of the tunnel. The original structure was finished in 1911 and used by the Western Maryland Railway until the mid-1970s. Once the structure was abandoned, the extreme weather conditions on Big Savage Mountain quickly took their toll and roof collapse, plugged drains, and overall deterioration created major reconstruction problems. However, the resolve of a few people was never broken, and the \$12 million renovation was completed.

Other speakers included Secretary Audrey E. Scott, Maryland Department of Planning, who praised the completion since the Passage was now officially connected to Maryland, just a mile to the east. ATA president Linda McKenna Boxx graciously



acknowledged the many people that helped with the project, especially Richard Geist of the PA House of Representatives. Brett Hollern, Trail Coordinator for Somerset County detailed the reconstruction and singled out construction superintendent Rolland Rhodomoyr and DCNR chief engineer James Eppley for performing near-miracles.

Rolland Rhodomoyr (closeup, with sunglasses), construction manager, and James Eppley (in tie), DCNR chief engineer, were cited for accomplishing the nearly-impossible.

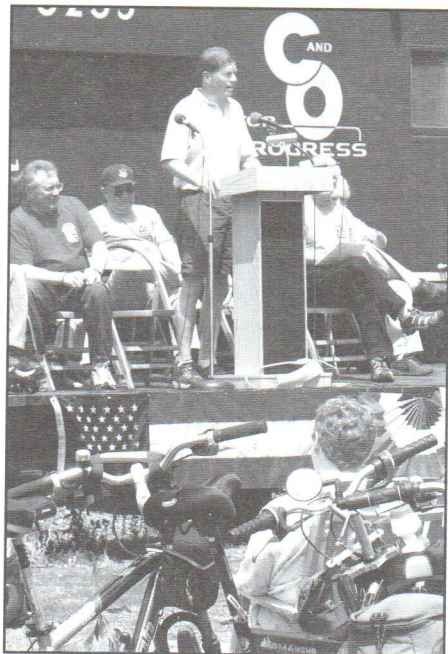
With a toot of a wooden trail whistle and applause from the more than 150 onlookers, railroad crossing gates were raised and the first riders ventured into the golden light of the Big Savage Tunnel. A significant link in the



TrailBook

Well-wishers gathered on Big Savage Mountain May 26th to take part in the official opening of the 3,300-foot tunnel.





John Oliver calls it "world class."



Somerset County Commissioner James Marker leads the way in Meyersdale.

## Riders from Pittsburgh to D.C. join in celebration

150 miles of flat-out gorgeous Great Allegheny Passage was open.

The celebration continued, and on Saturday more than 350 cyclists, elected officials, and other distinguished guests gathered at the restored Western Maryland Railway station in Meyersdale, Pennsylvania to commemorate the completion of the Passage in Somerset County, finally.

Dennis Stahl, vice-president of the Somerset County Rails to Trails Association, and Paul Wiegman, board member of the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association, introduced a variety of speakers including John C. Oliver, former



Maynard honored.

Secretary of DCNR, and former President of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. John has a long history of involvement with the Great Allegheny Passage including riding in 1975 on the last passenger train to travel the line, transferring the first property to Ohiopyle State Park in 1978, and active involvement as DCNR secretary in the building of the trail and the rehabilitation of structures in Somerset County. Larry Adams,

former Park Superintendent of Ohiopyle State Park, reminisced about building the first portion of the trail in 1986, and Dave Mankamy, former Somerset County Commissioner, talked about

his role in getting the corridor in the hands of the Somerset County Parks and Recreation Board.

A highlight of the afternoon was the presentation to Maynard Sembower, long-time trail volunteer from Rockwood, PA, of a sign officially naming the building at the Rockwood Trailhead the Sembower Visitor Center. The crowd welcomed the surprise announcement with loud applause.

Riders from Pittsburgh and Washington, DC and from many trail towns in between, each in a distinctively colored T-shirt indicating their starting point, lined up behind the same railroad crossing gates used the day before and to a lively selection from the Berlin Fife and Drum Corps.

The gates were raised, and cyclists rolled east on the newest section of the Great Allegheny Passage. ■



More than 350 trail lovers converged on Meyersdale to mark the crossing of the Mason-Dixon Line.



## LETTER FROM THE PREZ

For 10 years, Teeter Associates, a management consulting firm in Greensburg, has been the headquarters for ATA, providing back office and project management. They absorbed our operations, and we are grateful for their invaluable help in incubating the ATA.

With marketing the trail a high priority, we have made the planned transition to working more closely with our tourism promotional agency, Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau. They will now be answering our hotline and distributing our information.

Many of our inquiries were directed to helping people plan for a trip, which is the heart of the mission of LHVB. Marrying the recreational resource of

our trail with their broader message about the region makes great sense.

And I'd like to welcome Jeff O'Brien as our newsletter editor. He is the publisher of *TrailBook*, knows the trail, the people, the towns. His award-winning background in writing, editing, and photography make him a natural.

Our newly formatted website went live a few months ago. We are still working out the bugs, finding typo's, making it as user-friendly as we can. Poke around and give us your comments: [www.atatrail.org](http://www.atatrail.org)

Summer is a wonderful time to enjoy the trail and to introduce a friend to the great scenery, easy exercise, fresh air, and other happy trail users.

—Linda McKenna Boxx

## PASSAGES

## Trail Magic

Good things bring out the good in people. The Great Allegheny Passage does that. Acts of consideration, generosity and grace are commonplace, almost ordinary. Call it "Trail Magic."

Trail Magic is what happens when you get a flat, or find yourself wondering how far to the next watering hole -- someone always comes along with an answer or a patch kit. Discuss the need for a primitive campground, and the next person you meet could be an Eagle Scout leader looking for a project. Wish for a video of the trail experience, and don't be surprised when that group stopped on the bridge is a professional videographer with his family. It happens.

This force for good is not limited to the Passage, for as we get closer to connecting with the C&O Canal, we discover the magic extends all the way to D.C.

"Mile 0" in Georgetown is a place of arrivals and departures. The granite marker where Rock Creek dumps into the Potomac has become a sort of totem. Spend an hour there beside the Thompson Boat House and within sight of the Watergate Hotel, and meet the people beginning or ending their treks. They touch "0" as they pass, either brimming with excitement for what lies ahead, or overtaken by a satisfied exhaustion with a destination reached, a goal achieved.

Trail Magic is what you feel when you're on it, be it the Passage or the Towpath. And you needn't have walked or ridden 350 miles to know it. Stand, for example, at the south portal of the Big Savage Tunnel and look across the misty ridges into Maryland and the Narrows. If you're lucky, the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad will run up the valley as you watch, unseen except for its steam and smoke marking the Passage from Cumberland to Frostburg, all of it before you in the valleys.

Fourteenth Century mystic Catherine of Siena said, "All the way to heaven is heaven." And while we can't see quite that far from here, I'd say it is that all the way to Cumberland, at least.

—Jeff O'Brien

**JOIN A TRAIL GROUP**

HELP COMPLETE THE CONNECTION

**\$25 for one year**

*We invite you to become a trail group member and volunteer.*

**\$25 for one year.**

Includes trail group newsletter, ATA newsletter,  
and Great Allegheny Passage donor tag.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

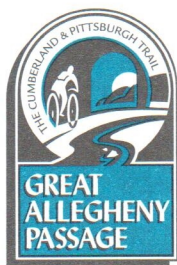
Enclosed please find my \$25 check or money order made out to ATA/RTC

for my membership in the \_\_\_\_\_

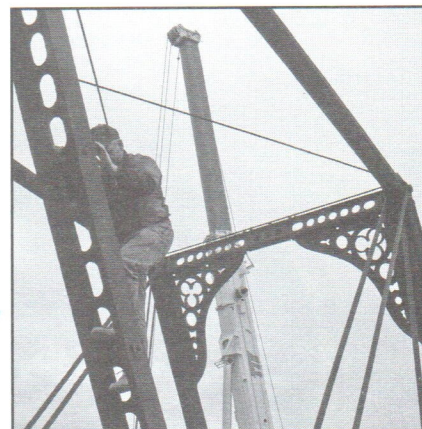
(please fill in your choice: see map above)

Please mail to ATA, P.O. Box 501, Latrobe, PA 15650





*Point of Arrivals  
and Departures  
in Georgetown:  
See Page 5*



*Rare Bridge Saved  
For the Passage:  
See Below.*

ATA Trail News

Summer 2006

## Historic Bollman Bridge lifted near Meyersdale

The Bollman Bridge near Meyersdale was lifted on May 10 in preparation for it's final placement over Scratch Hill Road as part of the Great Allegheny Passage.

Lycoming Supply, of Williamsport, PA, removed all non-structural elements to reduce the bridge's weight, and then lifted the bridge with a 350-ton crane, swung it about 100 feet, and set it down in an adjacent field.

Efforts to save the bridge began in 2002. Originally on the B&O in Bedford County, it had been at its present location

since about 1910.

Manufactured in 1871, the bridge is a rare, perhaps one-of-a-kind, American cast and wrought iron metal truss bridge, fabricated and designed by one of the most significant bridge engineers of the mid-nineteenth century. It has miraculously survived as an over-bridge, over the railroad.

Wendell Bollman (1811-1884), a self-taught engineer and one of the first employees of the B&O, patented the first iron truss bridge in the United States in 1852, at a time when the only practical bridge materials were stone and wood. His first bridge replaced a wooden covered bridge across the Potomac River at Harper's Ferry. ■

### ATA Trail News © Summer 2006

Trail News is published two times a year by the Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA). The ATA is a coalition of the seven trail-building organizations whose purpose is to assure the construction, maintenance and use of the multiple purpose, non-motorized trail from Pittsburgh, PA to Cumberland, MD where it will join the C & O Canal Towpath to Washington, DC. To subscribe or unsubscribe, contact ATA:

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[www.atatrail.org](http://www.atatrail.org)



The Bollman Bridge is lifted and swung into an adjacent field.