

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

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Passage Connects to Towpath

*Cumberland Event Opens
Western Maryland Section,
Link to Washington, D.C.*

by Paul g. Wiegman

Two world-class trails have joined. Cyclists, trail builders, and politicians gathered in Cumberland, MD on December 14 for the official opening of nine miles of new trail at the eastern end of the Great Allegheny Passage. The event linked the 132 miles of completed Passage, continuous all the way to McKeesport, PA, to the terminus of the 184.5-mile Towpath of the C&O Canal National Historical Park with its origin in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Speeches were made, the traditional banner cut, and handshakes exchanged, all in the shadow of the restored Western Maryland Railway (WM) station. It reminded many longtime rail-trail supporters of the enormous effort leading up to this moment.

In May of 1975 the last passenger train on the soon-to-be-abandoned WM Railway corridor rolled past that same station. The passengers had just experienced the grandeur of the Allegheny Mountains and its wild rivers. They heard

(Please see "The Great," Page 2)



Maryland dignitaries officially open the completed Maryland section of the Passage connecting to the C&O Canal Towpath. From left: James Stakem, president of the Allegheny County Board of Commissioners, Robert Flanagan, Secretary of Maryland Department of Transportation, Cumberland Mayor Lee Fiedler; U. S. Senators Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski; Congressman Roscoe Bartlett, and Maryland State Senator George Edwards.

Pittsburgh Goal: To The Point in 2008

Finishing the Great Allegheny Passage has become a priority for Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh.

With the connection in December to the Towpath of the C&O Canal National Historical Park in Cumberland, MD, the Passage and the Towpath now form a world-class, unbroken, nearly-level, multi-use trail from McKeesport, PA to Washington, D.C. -- more than 315 miles long. Only nine miles remain to be built to reach Point State Park and the forks of the Ohio.

In 2008, Pittsburgh will celebrate its 250th anniversary. The Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD), which is spearheading efforts to celebrate this anniversary, has adopted the completion of the Great Allegheny Passage as a signature project.

"There's only nine miles to go to connect Pittsburgh and Point State Park to Washington, D.C.," said Allegheny County

(Please see "Final Nine," Page 2)



Dan Onorato

*"Only nine miles to go,
and they're all
in my county."*

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U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski speaks at Passage Mile 0 where it joins the C&O Canal Towpath in Cumberland to form 315 miles of continuous trail.

The Great Allegheny Passage: A Trail Like No Other

(continued from Page 1)

a plan to convert the rails into trails, a novel idea at the time. Excitement for the plan was high, but the reality of bridges, tunnels, and construction in remote locations was daunting.

By 1978, only the corridor in Ohiopyle State Park, PA was in public hands. Eight years later 9.5 miles of trail opened from Ramcat Hollow to Ohiopyle. Those first miles sparked renewed enthusiasm for the original vision. Last spring, 31 years after that last train ride, the trail in Somerset County, PA and the Big Savage Tunnel were declared officially open. And in December the vision to connect to D.C. became a reality.

The opening of this vital link means there is now a continuous, non-motorized

corridor from Washington, D.C. to McKeesport, PA--316.5 miles of nearly-level, flat-out gorgeous trail.

For the trail towns, the combined Towpath and Passage create economic opportunity for their communities. Trail users need restaurants, accommodations, and entertainment, as well as equipment and repair facilities.

Travelers can cross the Eastern Continental Divide, leaving Chesapeake Bay waterways behind and moving into land that drains into the Gulf of Mexico. They cross the Mason-Dixon Line in the process and travel through the cool length of the Big Savage Tunnel. They can move through water gaps carved over centuries in the Allegheny Mountains, covered with maturing forests and filled with the rush of

white water against rock.

Beyond the mountains lie verdant valleys of the Appalachian Plateau where the industrial heart of the United States beat for a century. Finally, the trail will reach Pittsburgh and the forks of the Ohio, gateway to the west. From the Chesapeake to the Ohio: a realization of George Washington's grand idea of connecting the two.

When the last nine miles are completed to Pittsburgh, the trail will be unique in the world. The combination of mountains, rivers, history, exercise, nature, trail towns, and good companionship, all anchored at each end by a major American metropolis, will be a breathtaking achievement.

From any vantage point, this is a destination like no other.

Final Nine Miles of Passage Proving Most Challenging

(continued from Page 1)

Chief Executive Dan Onorato. "And they're all in my county!"

Onorato's comments were made at a joint groundbreaking ceremony last October for South Shore Riverfront

Park and the conversion of the Hot Metal Bridge to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians as part of the Great Allegheny Passage.

Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, at the same event, cited the completion of the Passage as a "signature project of Pittsburgh 250."

"This will be a tremendous addition to the city," Ravenstahl said. "It will improve the region's quality of life and have direct economic benefits."

The entire trail system of the Passage is complete with the exception of nine crucial miles connecting McKeesport to Pittsburgh. This final segment is proving to be

the most challenging segment because there is not an intact corridor available for trail development. Instead, partners are working with multiple corporate and municipal property owners to create a corridor for the trail. This portion of trail, known as the Steel Valley Trail, snakes through the Monongahela Valley, which is the home of several former steel mill sites.

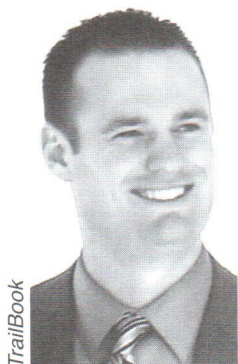
As part of a partnership with the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, the Allegheny Trail Alliance is working with many of

the major corporations in Pittsburgh to involve them in the development of this trail. Corporate expertise is proving to be invaluable in determining and developing the final trail alignment.

The ATA is proud to be working with the Steel Valley Trail Council, Regional Trail Corporation, Allegheny County, local municipalities and the Allegheny Conference.

The Allegheny Conference is planning several major events to celebrate the anniversary. Many of them will celebrate the completion of our trail. For more information about Pittsburgh's 250th Anniversary please visit www.imaginepittsburgh.com.

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Mayor Ravenstahl Declares Passage a 'signature project' of Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary.

TRAIL STATUS

Steel Valley Improving Montour Connection

Allegheny County, PA

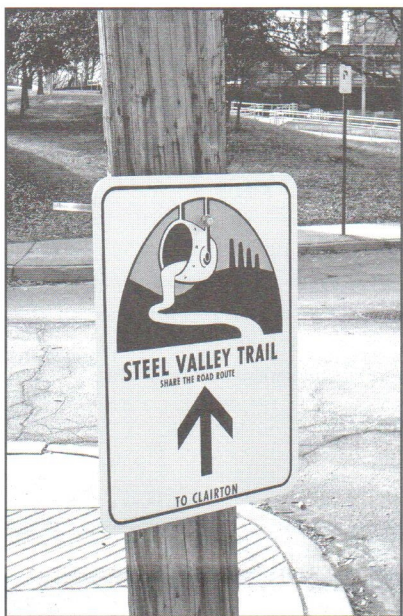
Trail users have long complained about the connection between the Montour Trail in Clairton and the Youghiogheny River Trail in McKeesport. The Steel Valley Trail Council (SVTC), with generous support from the Allegheny Regional Asset District (ARAD), is addressing these concerns and improving this trail connection.

One of the issues with this connection is that it follows existing roadways with signs marking the alignment. With the support of the ARAD, the SVTC is installing new signs that more clearly mark the trail alignment.

The new signs now have an arrow and a label pointing trail users in the direction of either McKeesport or Clairton. There are also many more signs in place now to better guide trail users.

A second part of this project was resurfacing an off-road portion of the trail in Glassport.

The SVTC would like to thank the ARAD, local municipalities and our adjoining trail groups for support on this project.



New signs will help.

The wood decking of the Low Bridge at the Train Station was sealed this past fall, and the High Bridge decking will be sealed this spring.

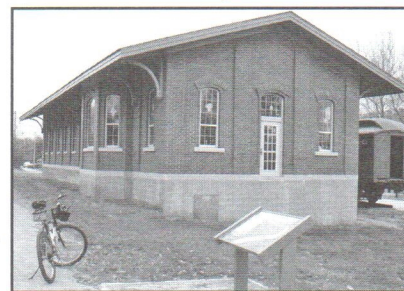
Station to Become Visitors' Center Westmoreland County, PA

The Regional Trail Corporation is working to complete construction of the interior of the West Newton Station. Bids were opened in mid-December and were within the budget. Work on the station is expected to begin in February with completion of the project sometime in June.

When complete, the station complex will serve as a visitors center, office space for the RTC, an environmental education center, and include a meeting space/multi-purpose room for trail groups and functions.

Information on the trail and surrounding communities and attractions will be available, as will restrooms. It is hoped a kiosk in the station will be available to charge cell phones, check e-mail and go online for trail information, all with the thru-biker/hiker in mind.

Watch for information on the Grand Opening this summer!



West Newton Station to be Visitors' Center.

Resurfacing to Begin near Station Ohiopyle State Park, PA

Aggregate is stocked at Ferncliff parking, and as soon as maintenance employees return from their winter layoff, resurfacing will begin from the train station Visitor Center toward Ramcat.

The trail was resurfaced from Confluence to about a mile past Ramcat last year, as was a section from the High Bridge to about two miles upriver from Bruner Run.

The large culvert structure approximately 1.5 miles downriver from Bruner Run was replaced this past year, and the joint vehicle and trail bridge over Ramcat Run is scheduled for replacement in October.



Ohiopyle High Bridge decking to be sealed.

Pinkerton Bypass Regraded Somerset County, PA

The 1.45-mile bypass around the Pinkerton Horn has been regraded and is in the best condition ever. (See picture, Page 4.)

This "shoofly" follows the Casselman River and was built as a bypass for the nearby B&O Tunnel (still in use) after it burned in 1879. The shoofly is used today by the Great Allegheny Passage to

bypass the Pinkerton Tunnel (built by Western Maryland Railway) which fell into disrepair and is unsafe for use.

The much-anticipated placement of the Bollman Bridge continues to be just that. The bridge will be disassembled into two pieces, transported to Meyersdale, reassembled, and moved from the station down the trail to the bridge site at Scratch Hill later this year.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Towns along the Great Allegheny Passage will now get assistance to take advantage of tourism coming in by bicycle. ATA has partnered with The Progress Fund to develop an economic development-based "Trail Town Initiative" and welcome Cathy McCollom.

Cathy comes to us from Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation from her position as chief program officer and brings over 25 years of experience in heritage tourism and economic development to this new initiative. In her previous role as marketing director for Station Square, she launched an international tourism program that helped make Station Square the number one tourist attraction in Southwestern PA. She has helped redevelop central business districts throughout Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, including in Homestead, Wilkinsburg, East Liberty and South Side.



Cathy McCollom

Regional Director of the Trail Town Initiative

As regional director of the Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town Initiative, Cathy will work with entrepreneurs and business groups to expand or open new businesses serving trail users and other tourists to the region and help market the trail as a world-class tourism destination. The initial focus of the Initiative will be in Confluence, Connellsville, Meyersdale, Ohiopyle, Rockwood and West Newton.

Administered through Somerset County, the Trail Town Initiative will capitalize on this opportunity by partnering with Federal, State and local officials, and civic and business leaders.

The regional director post was funded by grants from five Pittsburgh area foundations along with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. Cathy began her new position on Jan. 2, 2007, and has an office in The Progress Fund's headquarters in Greensburg.

—Linda McKenna Boxx



Pinkerton Horn Bypass regraded. (See Page 3.)

TrailBook

Montour Closing the Gap

By Ned Williams

Closing the largest unbuilt gap in the middle of the Montour Trail has begun.

The two-mile stretch in Peters and Cecil townships is the longest unbuilt stretch on the whole Montour. Members and supporters broke ground last fall at a ceremony at St. Petersburg Center in Peters. Keynote speaker Congressman Tim Murphy spoke of the importance of the Montour Trail to the people of the region. Murphy had taken the lead in securing over \$2 million in federal funds for the project, and presented a check for the final portion.

Montour's own volunteer construction crews also got some well-deserved lime-light. They have committed themselves to build all of the trail sections which lay in between the bridges. This enormous undertaking involves nearly two miles which was heavily overgrown, strewn with three decades of debris, and blocked by a large landslide. They have been working since



Ned Williams

From the left: Mark Imgrund, Tim Murphy, Jay French, Mark Campion, Mike Silvestri, and J. Bracken Burns.

July, explained Montour vice president Mark Imgrund, who thanked Peters Township for their assistance. Project co-manager Gil McGurl and Imgrund had secured PA DCNR funding to enable the volunteer trail building work to proceed.

President Dennis Pfeiffer thanked the Daily brothers of Burgh's Pizza and Wings in Bridgeville, who have donated \$100,000 to the Trail. Peters Township manager Mike Silvestri, Washington County commissioner J. Bracken Burns, and Matt Campion, speaking for PA Sen. John Pippy, congratulated Montour's vision and persistence, and pledged their support.

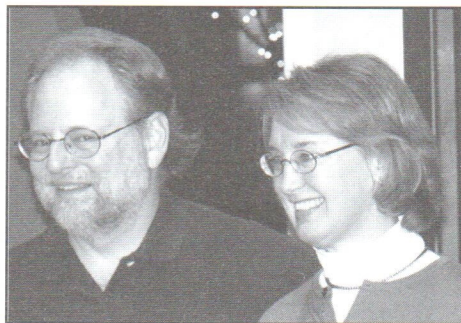
ATA Wins Pacesetter Award

The nation's largest bicycling organization has honored the Allegheny Trail Alliance with its inaugural Pacesetter of the Year Award.

The 43,000-member Adventure Cycling Association praised ATA President Linda McKenna Boxx for providing leadership to build and maintain the Great Allegheny Passage.


The association said Ms. Boxx's "extraordinary efforts" helped to create "a showcase recreation corridor used by hundreds of thousands of people a year."

With scenes from the Passage projected as a backdrop, John Schubert, an editor with *Adventure Cyclist*, presented the award to Ms. Boxx. REI played host to the event at their store in Pittsburgh's Southside Works on the evening of December 14. It was a big day for the Passage, the connection to the C&O Canal Towpath in Cumberland, MD having been officially opened that afternoon. Such big days have been closer together of late.



John Schubert, technical editor of *Adventure Cyclist*, with ATA President Linda Boxx at the ceremony recognizing the efforts and accomplishments of the Allegheny Trail Alliance.

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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

PASSAGES

The Zen of the Passage

Most of us have a favorite section of trail. We do if we use it often.

For me it is a 10-mile stretch through the Casselman gorge between Markleton and Harnedsville. Mostly shaded in summer, I like to ride it in the leafless months, taking in the shapes of the hills and the turns of the river.

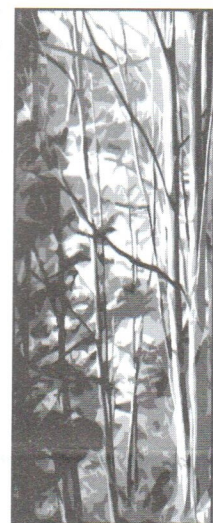
I know where ramps will grow in April and where bloodroot will bloom in May. I know where wild turkeys sometimes roost and where the deer feed. I know where I can hear the river speak, and where the sun sets, and which miles will be rideable without a lamp when the moon is full. Bare trees and mild, early winter evenings are just right for that. Between Markleton and Harnedsville I have "trail wisdom."

So strong is my attachment I think of the trail as a live thing, no less alive than the river it parallels. I care for its well-being. And how much like a river it is: linear, flowing, connecting point to point, town to town, the communities along it depending upon those upstream to protect its natural beauty and health. The difference is, on the Passage, we're all downstream, for the trail flows both ways.

We have become a linear community. What happens in one place acts on the next, in both directions, each live thing affecting, and affected by, the other. We can control its banks, its margins, make them what we want them to be, or not. But as for the trail itself, we need each other, each of us tending to the close-at-hand, doing our part.

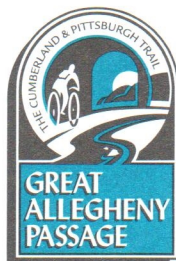
It feels like a privilege.

—Jeff O'Brien, editor



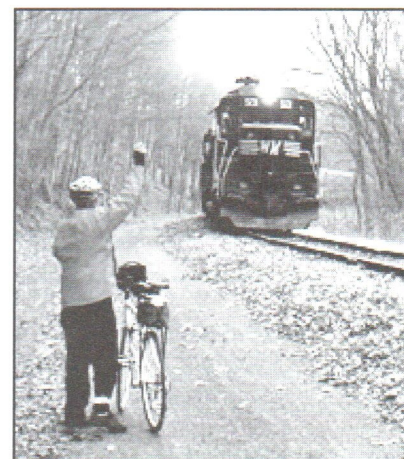
Winter aspect.

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Near Mile 1 on the Passage with The Narrows in the distance.

**Link to Cumberland
and C&O Canal
Towpath Opens in
Western Maryland:
*See Page 1***



Near Mile 5 on the Passage.

ATA Trail News

Summer 2006

500 to Ride from D.C. to Pittsburgh on Greenway Sojourn

To recognize 20 years of passionate dedication and hard work on the Great Allegheny Passage, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's sixth annual Greenway Sojourn, June 23-30, will lead 500 cyclists on a "Grand Opening Ride."

Starting in the nation's capital, Sojourn riders will pedal the scenic 184.5-mile Towpath of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park to Cumberland. The route then continues 150 miles to Pittsburgh on the gently graded, scenic Great Allegheny Passage

with its stunning structures, tunnels, bridges and welcoming trail towns.

"Combined, these two trails create the longest multi-purpose trail in the country," says Tom Sexton, director of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's (RTC) Northeast Regional Office. "What really make it stand out, besides its length, are the ser-

vices found immediately adjacent to the corridor. It will be a great destination."

The Sojourn will include overnight camping along the route, with heritage stops. To learn more and to register for the ride of a lifetime, visit the ATA website at www.atatrail.org and click on the Greenway Sojourn link.

ATA Trail News © Winter 2006-07

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:

Phone: 888-ATA-BIKE

atamail@atatrail.org
www.atatrail.org



Crossing the Salisbury Viaduct, volunteers Dr. Paul Simpson and his wife Jude, on their tandem, lead in a November reconnaissance ride as part of the preparation for the national Rails-to-Trails Sojourn from Washington, D.C. to Pittsburgh June 23-30.