

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 8, Number 1

Winter 2007-08

Hot Metal Bridge Opens



Long-Awaited Link to South Side Instant Sensation

Call it a parade.

Close to a thousand celebrants gathered on a sunny November day at the north end of the newly rehabilitated Hot Metal Bridge in Pittsburgh for the opening of a key link in the completion of the Great Allegheny Passage to Pittsburgh's Point.

Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato, and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation District 11 Executive Dan Cessna cut the ribbon to officially open the new bike-pedestrian bridge, unleashing a steady stream of cyclists, pedestrians, in-line skaters, and at least one scooter enthusiast headed for the Southside in a procession that continued for longer than 15 minutes.

Their short journey began on the Second Avenue side, near the Pittsburgh Technology Center. At the north end of the black steel bridge, which extends 1,052 feet over the Monongahela River, a new truss bridge crosses over busy Second

(Please see "Hot Metal," Page 2)

Big Savage Tunnel Closed for Winter

Big Savage Tunnel was sealed on December 18. The tunnel is closed each winter to protect against damage from freezing. The tunnel will be reopened next spring near the beginning of April, depending on the weather.

Appreciative users christened the Hot Metal Bridge in a procession lasting longer than 15 minutes.

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TOP: Walking the Hot Metal Bridge on its official opening are, from the left beginning with the man in the hat: Damion Soffer (Soffer Development Company), PA Rep. Dan Frankel, Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato, Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, ATA President Linda McKenna Boxx, Mike Langley, CEO, Allegheny Conference on Community Development. **RIGHT:** Cyclists on the Hot Metal Bridge take in what will be the first view of downtown Pittsburgh after 330 miles of non-motorized trail from Washington, D.C. **BELOW:** Some have suggested the bridge be referred to as "pedal-estrian."

Hot Metal Bridge a Hit

(continued from Page 1)

Avenue. Both bridges have 14-foot-wide concrete decks. The rehabbed Hot Metal Bridge parallels its industrial twin that was converted in 2000 into a two-lane bridge for cars and trucks. At one time, the former railroad bridges carried molten iron in ladle cars from Jones and Laughlin's Eliza and Soho blast furnaces on the Oakland side of the Monongahela River to the steel processing mills on the South Side. Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority has been working on the \$11.6 million project since 2003. ATA provided early funding to get the project



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started: \$750,000 from private foundation grants for design, engineering and removal of a span. Most of the construction money came from federal enhancement and state transportation funds. ATA and Friends of the Riverfront shifted nearly \$1 million of their enhancement funding to the URA project. There was still a shortfall, and ATA provided \$650,000 from its federal transportation high priority project funding. The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources supplied \$931,000.

Mr. Onorato described the Great Allegheny Passage as "one of the most scenic, user-friendly, and accessible trails in the world. Completing the trail is a signature project of the Pittsburgh 250 celebration in 2008. It will be a great asset to our region for tourism and economic development."



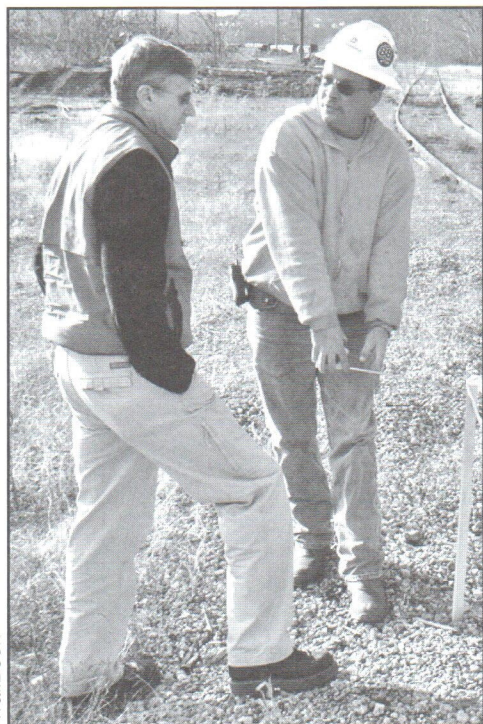
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Grading begins along the Monongahela River in McKeesport in what was once the National Tube Works of U.S. Steel. The

Work Begins in McKeesport as I

Finishing the last nine miles of the Great Allegheny Passage through the Monongahela Valley in time for a celebratory ride this coming fall is a "signature project" of



Trail Coordinator Jack Paulik (left) and Roger "Bucky" Walker, P.J. Dick/Trumbull construction foreman, discuss trail grading.

Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary celebration. And the heat is on.

With the October 2008 deadline looming, partners in "Pittsburgh 250" have stepped forward to fast-track construction.

Several private foundations provided significant funding that is allowing engineering and construction and other related work to move ahead.

This spring the Colcom Foundation provided \$1 million to jump start an active fund-raising campaign that included \$1 million from DCNR, \$500,000 from The Heinz Endowments, \$1.5 million from Richard King Mellon Foundation, \$250,000 each from the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and the Benedum Foundation, and several others. More is needed, but there was enough to begin.

Cliff Rowe, CEO of PJ Dick/Trumbull Corporation and Bob Luffy, CEO of American Bridge Company, are leading the charge. Construction is underway on 0.7 miles in RIDC McKeesport and a 1.0-mile section in Duquesne from the Riverton Bridge to Grant Avenue.

U. S. Steel coke gas pipeline was acquired last year, and this 1.9-mile segment will be under construction soon. The trail

along this section will be built on the service road for the former coke gas line which snaked along the hillside between Kennywood and the Monongahela River.

Plans are shaping up for a celebratory ride from Washington, D.C. to Pittsburgh in October 2008 on the completed Passage.

This phase of construction is to include all work such as; clearing, grubbing, grading, cleaning existing drainage ditches, and



The Passage will cross the Riverton Bridge over t

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ail will cross the river on the Riverton Bridge visible in the background in front of the lighter Duquesne-McKeesport Bridge.

Passage Heads for Home Stretch

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installing sub-base material. Final paving, fencing and signage will progress as weather permits.

As most of us are all too well aware, the final nine miles of trail, or what has come to be called "The Gaps in the GAP," present huge challenges, mostly due to a

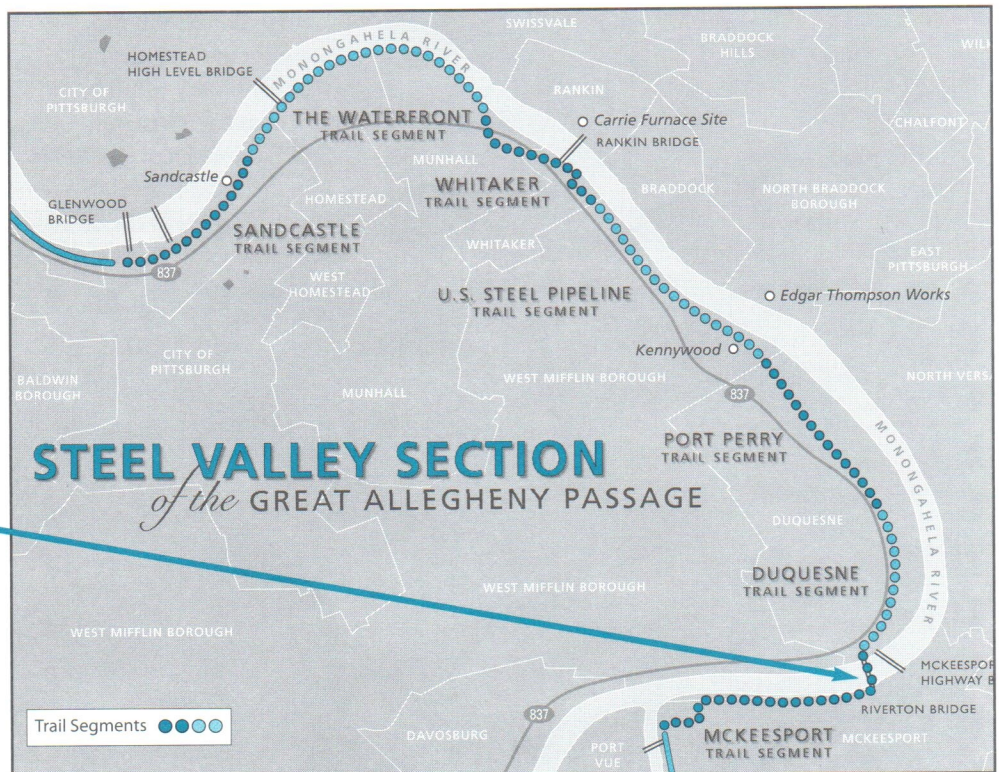
lack of abandoned rail corridor and the existence of many working rail lines and industrial activity. An awareness of the value of the Passage as an economic,

recreational, and environmental resource continues to grow. More people are stepping forward every day to make the Pittsburgh-to-D.C. trail a reality. (Please see the donation form on Page 5.) As *National Geographic*

Adventure put it last fall, the experience of the combined 335-mile, non-motorized, mostly-level, trail is "an American Classic in the making." And the making is almost done. The world awaits.



Monongahela between McKeesport and Duquesne.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The thousand bike and trail supporters that showed up for the much-anticipated opening of the Hot Metal Bridge caught a glimpse of the future of Pittsburgh.

In what Mayor Luke Ravenstahl called the biggest media event of his administration, he stated that trails were helping to make Pittsburgh a youth-friendly and environmentally sustainable city and symbolic of Pittsburgh's economic revival.

Now that several neighborhoods are connected to downtown Pittsburgh and a critical link in the Passage has been completed, Pittsburgh and the region will change in many ways.

Recently ranked ninth on the list of the nation's most walkable cities (and that was before the November opening of the Hot Metal Bridge), Pittsburgh will soon be connected to the Number

One most walkable city, Washington, D.C. Bike commuting and bike-based tourism will grow, and our "rust belt" cities and towns will become "chain ring" towns.

The excitement shared by the huge crowd on this trail event day was almost overpowering. There was a strong sense of optimism, accomplishment, and expectation about finishing the last nine-mile gap.

Building this trail has taken the efforts of many, and support by our local foundations was important from the very start, more than 20 years ago. Their commitment to the trail has been tremendous, understanding that they are investing in something that is helping to transform the region. More funding is needed -- we are not finished asking -- but the momentum is there to help us make it to the finish line.

—Linda McKenna Boxx



Snowshoeing near Markleton in February

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PASSAGES

A Sparer Passage

Snow blows up behind us as we break through deep powder. The river tosses green in the valley, and we hear it, its steep, snowy banks blue with shadow, ice flowing aqua in the fastest current, dividing again and again around snow-capped stones.

We love the sparseness of winter on the Great Allegheny Passage, especially in the mountains, the simplicity of color and form, the lines of the hills in the bare woods, the black trees against the pale sky, the sunlight refracting in the crystal-laden gusts.

We are not the first on the trail after the storm, for we see the tracks of deer headed east like us, and here where turkeys crossed (this is Upper Turkeyfoot Township, after all). The leaves of wild rhododendron are curled from the cold, but we are in full bloom from exercise in the open air.

"Be blown on by all winds," Thoreau wrote. Good advice, especially along the Passage. We stop and listen. We hear wind and water. We hear our own pulse.

A train on the other side of the river whistles in the frozen gorge, and our hearts quicken.

—Jeff O'Brien, editor

Thanks, Ed Talone, for the trail sign collection in West Newton

Nearly 100 trail signs from across North America now hang in the newly opened West Newton Visitor's Center thanks to the generosity of the American Hiking Society's Ed Talone.

The signs are part of an extensive collection of discarded or replaced trail markers gathered by Ed while hiking more than 45,000 miles all



Ed Talone

over the U.S. He has been a cheerleader for the Great Allegheny Passage since he first experienced it in 1995.

Also donated to the Regional Trail Corporation are a small library of trail guides, maps, reports and patches that, with the signs, give an inspiring impression of a hiker's world to the new conference room. Thanks, Ed!

HELP CLOSE THE GAPS IN THE GAP

Any amount welcome!

Name: _____

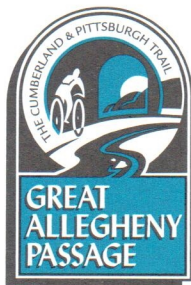
Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

Please make check payable to ATA/RTC
and mail to:

ATA, P.O. Box 501, Latrobe, PA 15650



Work begins in McKeesport on closing "the gaps in the GAP."

Construction Begins on Steel Valley Section: *See Pages 3, 4*

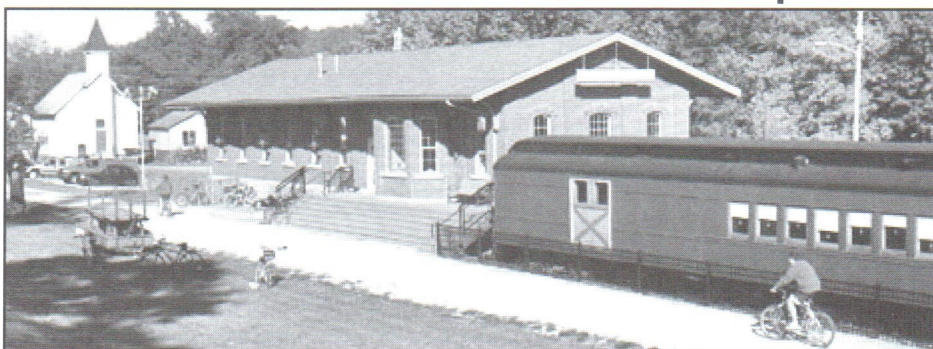
ATA Trail News

Winter 2007-08

West Newton Station Welcome Center Open

The West Newton Station is open and welcoming visitors on the Great Allegheny Passage. The new structure resembles the old Pennsylvania and Lake Erie Railroad Station devastated by fire four decades ago; its design came directly from blueprints left behind by the P&LE.

The station will serve as a visitors center for trail users and as headquarters for Regional Trail Corporation, the nonprofit group that sponsored the development of the Youghiogheny River Trail, now part of the Passage. Cathy McCollom, regional director of Trail Town Initiative, says that with the West Newton facility, visitor centers are now available about every 45 miles. The \$750,000 structure is staffed part time by volunteer Betsy



ATA Trail News © Winter 2007-08

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 joins the C & O Canal Towpath to Washington, DC. To subscribe or unsubscribe, contact ATA:

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www.atatrail.org

Mandarino -- nothing like a real person to make a visitor center come to life! Rockwood has the venerable Maynard Sembower, and now West Newton has Betsy, an avid cyclist who loves the trail. After she puts her children on the bus, she heads to the station to volunteer for a few hours each day.

Maynard, by the way, turned 99 on Christmas Eve!

Volunteer Betsy Mandarino, left, greets trail users at the West Newton Visitor's Center, a newly rebuilt train station at Mile 113.6 along the Great Allegheny Passage.

