

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Paul G. Wiegman:** I'm with Doug Hoehn. Now, I'll just say Doug Hoehn. Doug Hoehn, you were the...
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, I was the Park Manager here at Ohiopyle from the fall of 1989 until 2004 when I retired.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. And, that sets us up. We already talked to Larry Adams on one of the interviews and you followed- well, actually you didn't follow exactly Larry but very close after Larry.
- Doug Hoehn:** Yeah, Larry was only gone for a short time – a couple weeks when we moved in.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, when you came here to Ohiopyle State Park, how much trail was there?
- Doug Hoehn:** The trail had been built by Larry from Ohiopyle to the Turkeyfoot Run Gun Club near Confluence.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** He had also done the work from Ohiopyle across the High Bridge.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, the High Bridge had been reconstructed as a bike trail bridge.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What year was that?
- Doug Hoehn:** 1989.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That was 1989. So, in 1989- now, when you say it went to the Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club, was that right there at Ramcat Hollow?
- Doug Hoehn:** Actually, it was beyond Ramcat Hollow about another mile or so. The trail crossed... I'm not sure, I believe its Ramcat Hollow Road.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It's Ramcat Hollow Road, right.
- Doug Hoehn:** But, in two places and then it stopped when it got to the Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. Right before the hill that goes- right before the George Washington interpretive sign.
- Doug Hoehn:** Right. The old Western Maryland grade crossed the road again at that point.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** And actually, Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club had constructed part of their structures on the old railroad grade so we needed to find an alternative route to get from there to Confluence. At that point, people were just riding on the road.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** From Confluence?
- Doug Hoehn:** That last, maybe, mile.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay. Tell me a little bit- tell me that story about what had to happen to get the trail into Confluence?
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, we had- the Commonwealth had the Western Maryland grade or at least part of it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club had footage along the Youghiogheny River.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, a swap had to be negotiated.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, of course, that took legislation to happen.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, and it actually took- because it was state land being given up?
- Doug Hoehn:** That's correct.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Was it acre for acre? Did you get...
- Doug Hoehn:** I don't really recall that is was acre for acre because I didn't actually handle that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

Doug Hoehn: That was handled by Ed Deaton in our Harrisburg office.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay, okay.

Doug Hoehn: Those negotiations.

Paul G. Wiegman: And then, once that happened, now you had a trail that went all the way to the pedestrian bridge at 281.

Doug Hoehn: That's correct. During that same time period, PennDOT was developing plans to build a new 281 crossing across the Youghiogheny River.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Doug Hoehn: And, as a part of that whole plan, the bike trail was then routed up under the new 281 bridge and on to connect with the trail in Somerset County.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay. And, that was around- that was in the '90s then? Sometime in the 90s?

Doug Hoehn: Actually, it was probably the late 90s or...

Paul G. Wiegman: That that took place?

Doug Hoehn: Yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, you're the one that connected at Confluence? Got it right into Confluence.

Doug Hoehn: I guess I'd have to say that. I'm the one with a lot of help from other people.

Paul G. Wiegman: From other people. Was the Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club- were they interested in doing that or...

Doug Hoehn: Oh, they were very helpful.

Paul G. Wiegman: They were very helpful. Okay.

Doug Hoehn: Oh, yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: That's a part of the story that I wasn't aware of but that's good to fill in.

Doug Hoehn: Yes.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

Paul G. Wiegman: Let's go the other direction. Now, you had a trail that ended at the High Bridge. I can remember coming down here one day looking for one of the rare plants at Double Hydraulic and riding a bicycle from the end of the High Bridge down to Sugar Run Falls on the- before the trail was there and it wasn't very pleasant.

[Chuckle]

Doug Hoehn: It was still ballast. We had a Pennsylvania Conservation Corps crew and crew leader here at that time and he was actually- they were actually involved in building the trail from the High Bridge towards Bruner Run.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Doug Hoehn: The park, at that time, only owned property, maybe, another quarter of a mile past Bruner Run and Bruner Run being where the rafters take their boats out of the river.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Doug Hoehn: So, that crew was involved in extending the trail and they were working on leveling the ballast and so on when I got here in 1989.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Okay.

Doug Hoehn: And so, it was in that next year that they worked on completing the trail beyond Bruner Run that half a mile to what was then the park boundary.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, that opened up in, say, 1990 or 1991 to Bruner Run?

Doug Hoehn: That's correct.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Did they use the same equipment that Larry had built?

Doug Hoehn: Pretty much, yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** Larry had gotten a couple pieces of equipment that helped and one piece was called a tiger drag – it helped smooth the ballast.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Uh-huh.
- Doug Hoehn:** But, a lot of it was manual labor with the young men of the Conservation Corps.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** How many people were on that crew?
- Doug Hoehn:** Normally, I think it was eight if they had a full crew.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Wow, and they worked all summer or worked all season?
- Doug Hoehn:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah. And, that had to be some pretty hard work.
- Doug Hoehn:** Oh, yes. They were, you know, places there were old railroad ties that had to be disposed of and just a lot of grunt-type...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** ...get dirty type work.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Get dirty-type work. What- okay, now, we've got a trail from Confluence to Bruner Run. What transpired then to take us...
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, then we had a bit of a snag. There was a lot of negotiations that had to take place in order to acquire the property from the existing boundary just north of Bruner Run to Connellsville.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, there were some difficult negotiations in that time period and some things happened that made trail construction tougher. Those things were worked through with, you know, the help of people in Harrisburg but there was a junkyard near Connellsville, Dunbar area that posed a problem. A lot of junk cars.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** And, as I recall, pigs under the bridges and things like that. Not too inviting for the trail but in the long run, you know, all those obstacles were overcome.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, you added two more bridges?
- Doug Hoehn:** Actually, I added- yes, well, two more railroad bridges.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's what I mean. Two more railroad bridges. The bridge over Dunbar Creek and I'm trying to think- and then the Bowest.
- Doug Hoehn:** There was- the other bridge crossed what was basically a junkyard.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** Yeah, and the creek also.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, you oversaw all of that. Was that construction done by park people or was that...
- Doug Hoehn:** Actually, that construction was done under a contract by a contractor.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. Then there must have been some real- a lot of negotiations to get from the railroad yard into Connellsville itself. Well, where does the park...
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, let's back up just a little bit.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** There was a major problem at the Texas Eastern cut.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, yes.
- Doug Hoehn:** Where Texas Eastern put a pipeline through.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** We were in the process of acquiring the bike trail and then next thing we know, I show up there one morning and it's gone. They had- Texas Eastern had come through there and took the whole trail out.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Took the whole...

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** And, put our, you know, what railroad grade- they took the whole railroad grade out and put the pipeline in.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** And then, it took a good bit of negotiations with Texas Eastern and, as I recall, our senator got involved from Dunbar and eventually Texas Eastern put the railroad grade back which involved a considerable expense because they had to build retaining walls and so on to support that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** To support that trail there?
- Doug Hoehn:** The trail. So, that was another problem. And then, when we did finally get an agreement to acquire the Western Maryland railroad grade from a coal company – Curry Coal...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** ...we had some problems with timbering that took place at the last minute.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, just made a real mess of the railroad grade.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Really?
- Doug Hoehn:** Taking the timber out, leaving the tops lay every which way. And so, we had to go through a major expense than when we finally did take it over to correct the problems that were caused by the timbering.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** And then finally, we were able to get back to building trail under a contract.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that's what extended it to- that extends it now, the bridges at Bowest and at Dunbar Creek.
- Doug Hoehn:** Right. Actually, we got up to right behind- well, it took- we had to get some help from the people at Philadelphia Electric- not Philadelphia. Allegheny Power.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Allegheny Power, right.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** Allegheny Power, I'm on the wrong end of the state.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** Who have a building and the trail goes right behind their building and so we had to have some work there with their fence and so on to make enough room for the trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that's where it goes in? Actually into Connellsville.
- Doug Hoehn:** Then we come into Connellsville and that's where we end. And then, the city takes over, I guess.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I understand that the only land that had to be actually taken by eminent domain was the Curry land property. Is that- was that taken by eminent domain?
- Doug Hoehn:** Yes, it was.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah. Yeah, and that's the only piece in the whole length of the trail?
- Doug Hoehn:** Yeah, it was a real struggle to come up with a price.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah. Yeah, it was a very difficult- and that was the Conservancy – Western Pennsylvania Conservancy – worked on that project in conjunction with the state. Is that correct?
- Doug Hoehn:** That's my understanding, my recollection, yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Which then ends up being the last piece that the Conservancy deals within the whole length of the trail.
- Doug Hoehn:** I expect that that's probably true.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, has any unusual things happened during the Conservation Corps working on the trail? I mean...
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, I really can't say that anything unusual. I mean, every day was an adventure. I mean, you're dealing with young people and so on. But, I think the most unusual things were those, you know, things like the Texas Eastern surprise.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** And, you know, having to deal with a somewhat flamboyant owner of the junkyard down in Dunbar.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** In Dunbar.
- Doug Hoehn:** Mr. Kimmel was an interesting individual to deal with.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Is that where we see the school buses now?
- Doug Hoehn:** The school buses and about anything else you could imagine.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** But, actually, he was not overly cooperative.
- [Chuckle]
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's a good way to put it.
- Doug Hoehn:** To put it kindly.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's a good way to leave it in this historical document.
- Doug Hoehn:** There's an awful lot of people that, by that time, had seen the years of positive use on the trail and were pro-trail but not Mr. Kimmel.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Not Mr. Kimmel, yeah. And, that really means- once you made it to Connellsville, that was the completion on that end of the dream back in 1975 of going from Connellsville to Cumberland on the trail. I mean, that was an important, important link because that was the end of the Western Maryland there in Connellsville.
- Doug Hoehn:** Right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, you were, you said as we were talking a little bit before, you were the first park superintendent on the ATA board?
- Doug Hoehn:** I believe that I was, yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, okay. And, the ATA was brought together to...
- Doug Hoehn:** To promote- build and promote the- well, what eventually ended up being named The Great Allegheny Passage.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

Paul G. Wiegman: The Great Allegheny Passage, okay. And, that was- were you at the summit? At the ATA summit or the group, the meeting that was held at Seven Springs or Hidden Valley? The trail summit?

Doug Hoehn: I went to so many meetings over the years- 15 years that I served as Park Manager here that I could very well have been at that meeting. I went to meetings at Seven Springs, I don't know if it's the meeting you're referring to or not.

Paul G. Wiegman: Very well could.

Doug Hoehn: But, I was to a lot of them. I sat through meetings dealing with the struggle to try and come up with a name that was satisfactory from the beginning, you know, when we first started talking about naming it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Do you remember some of those names? I know Spine...

Doug Hoehn: Well, I remember that- yeah, basically it was the lowlanders versus the highlanders, I think, you know. Whether you should include, you know, the word "Allegheny" or not. And, whether it should be highlands or, you know. There were pros and cons for lots of different names but, so...

Paul G. Wiegman: Are you happy with The Great Allegheny Passage?

[Chuckle]

Doug Hoehn: Sure, I am. I was there when it was birthed.

Paul G. Wiegman: When it was born.

Doug Hoehn: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: One of the most significant structures is the low bridge at Ohiopyle, right here, just outside. We're in the train station at Ohiopyle. Tell me about building that because I know you and I both were involved in that one.

Doug Hoehn: Yeah. Well, it was- there were some problems associated with the construction of the bridge from the standpoint of ecological problems with rare plants.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** Or at least the habitat- potential habitat for those plants. And, you know, in the end, we made every accommodation we could to try and ensure that that habitat was protected. You know, it involved building the causeways to work from and so on. And, in the end, you know, quite frankly, I was in favor of, personally, of keeping the old bridge.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, just retrofitting it like we did- like the High Bridge had been done.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** However, I do think that the right decision was made in the end because what this bridge that's here now did that leaving the old bridge didn't do is open up the vista. When you're coming into town from the north coming south on 381.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** This new bridge you can see under the bridge, you see much more of the river and the river landscape. Then the old bridge had such high girders it blocked a lot of that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It was a massive bridge.
- Doug Hoehn:** I believe, you know, from the perspective of the view of coming into the park and so on it's a positive. From a historical aspect, it's probably a negative.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Was the idea of actually, well, filling in the- the span that was missing happened back in 1975. As soon as the Western Maryland abandoned, PennDOT took that span out of there because I guess trucks couldn't get under it. And, coming to- the big trucks couldn't get into Ohiopyle. Was the plan from the very beginning to replace that span at some point for the trail?
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, it was going to have to- that link was going to have to be made.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** Across that- how it was going to be done was still being looked at but it- there would have been a way to do it. But, it would have taken a little bit of engineering, I'm sure.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Tell me about the building that we're in right now. This is actually the Western Maryland Station?
- Doug Hoehn:** This is the Western Maryland Station, you can hear the train in the background.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, and it was restored when you were here as a supervisor or superintendent of the park?
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, actually Larry had done some restoration work on the train station.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, there were some plans to use a portion of the train station as bike rental. And, what I did is I leased part of the building to Laurel Highlands Tourist Promotion Agency.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, it's a very active tourist promotion location in the Laurel Highlands. And, that's where we're sitting now is in the waiting room of the Western Maryland Station.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** This was the waiting room?
- Doug Hoehn:** Right. And, this is where Allegheny- the Laurel Highlands Tourist Promotion Agency has their visitor services.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Their visitor services are here.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, of course, from the standpoint of a park manager which I was then, to have them here answering people's questions and helping people that are coming to the state park not just to the Laurel Highlands but to Ohiopyle State Park was a real plus. The park office is located a couple miles out of town.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, the people don't go to the park office as much as they come here when they're looking for information.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Paul G. Wiegman:** I think a lot of people think this is the park office.
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, probably a lot of them do. And, that's fine. But, they do promote the whole Laurel Highlands not just the Ohiopyle State Park.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, since you've retired, you've been back in the station here on Saturdays, Sundays?
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, just this past season, the Laurel Highlands Tourist Promotion people have asked me to help out on weekends, busy times. Mainly because I knew the answers to a lot of the questions. And, I know my way around Ohiopyle and the local area and so, hopefully, I can tell people that, you know, Fern Cliff is a great place to take a hike.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** The waterslides is a great place to enjoy watersports – sliding on that scenic area and then, of course, I know a lot about the whitewater boating that goes on here, too.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, you enjoy doing that?
- Doug Hoehn:** Absolutely.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What questions do you get most about The Great Allegheny Passage?
- Doug Hoehn:** Well, a lot of people don't realize the scope of the project. You know, it's a bike trail to them. They just want to know whether if they go to the right which way- is that going to be Confluence or Connellsville?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** But, you know, increasingly though now that the trail is done to Cumberland, you have people that are really looking to pedal longer distances.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** They're looking for where they might stay. You know, where they might eat and so on along the way. So, it's becoming more of an overnight adventure, I think.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** For bicyclists. So, we're getting a lot more questions along those lines. You know, there are some guidebooks and maps that are very popular with people.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Doug Hoehn:** Probably what most people come here to the train station for though is the restroom.
- [Chuckle]
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, you always need- there's not a lot of good, clean restrooms or clean restrooms like this one along the trail, yeah. So, it- we hear so often – I hear so often, the increase in the use of The Great Allegheny Passage. That it's, you know, that visitor use is up. Do you- have you seen it during your tenure as both park superintendent and working here?
- Doug Hoehn:** Yeah, absolutely. When I came in 1989, the demographics of this park were, you know, it had a clientele of probably people under 40.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** Average age. Mainly because of the whitewater boating.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Doug Hoehn:** Our campground was mostly groups – whitewater boating and young groups. And so, it was probably the noisiest campground in the state. We had more alcohol problems than most state parks because people were coming as groups and they were here to party.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** They were risking their life on the Youghiogheny the next day.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** That type of thing. But, what we've seen with the bike trail is an influx of seniors...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, really?

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

- Doug Hoehn:** ...of families with kids and that's changed the whole demographics of the park. Not just the trail but the campground and all the other facilities because now the campground, if you go to the campground you find big, you know, motor homes with your seniors and so on.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** Back when I came, probably 90% of the people camping there were in tents because of their age category...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** ...as much as anything. And, that's all changed. And with that, changed the demand placed on us as park managers. We had to have bigger sites, more electricity, more facilities that accommodate families and seniors.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** And so, building the trail changed a lot of things. You know, parking became a massive problem for a number of years.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Massive, yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** And, still is.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It still is.
- Doug Hoehn:** And so, yes, the bike trail just made- turned this park, it's demographics, completely around.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Have you seen a change in Ohiopyle, the town of Ohiopyle because of it?
- Doug Hoehn:** Ohiopyle is slow to change as a borough.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Doug Hoehn:** However, I believe that the people have become very accepting of the trail and they see the positive aspects of the trail just like they do up and down its length. In fact, that's what I felt all along was one of the state's, the park's major roles in this trail development from Pittsburgh to Cumberland was to make sure that this first section was successful.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, okay.

Doug Hoehn: That we didn't have crime. That we didn't have a lot of negative publicity associated with the trail.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Doug Hoehn: Because if that would have happened, there, you know, perhaps other sections wouldn't have been built.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Doug Hoehn: And, the success that we've had here in Ohio pyle has helped, I believe, the success with the rest of the trail. And, their success has helped us in taking some of the pressure off of the, you know, the trail here. Now, we aren't just a destination that you come to and go from, you can go somewhere else and come here by bicycle.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Doug Hoehn: So...

Paul G. Wiegman: What's your favorite part of the trail?

Doug Hoehn: Right here.

[Chuckle]

I do, I really think that with the bridges right here close, Fern Cliff Peninsula with the access right off of the trail to the Peninsula, of, you know, the Falls, the main park area here – you know, I'm partial.

Paul G. Wiegman: I know you are.

Doug Hoehn: So...

Paul G. Wiegman: Very good. Thank you.

Doug Hoehn: You bet.

Paul G. Wiegman: I enjoyed it.

[End 29:53.7]

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VIDEO INTERVIEW – DOUG HOEHN

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