Matthew Craig: Well, at this time I would introduce this gentleman on our radio

show, I'd always said, "Paul Wiegman, our esteemed

naturalist." But, now he wants me to add, Ambassador for the

Natural History for the Laurel Highlands.

Paul G. Wiegman: For natural history, not just ambassador. Ambassador for

Natural History of the Laurel Highlands.

Matthew Craig: I love that.

Paul G. Wiegman: I do, too.

Matthew Craig: Well, Paul, we've been traveling around, talking to a lot of

people about The Great Allegheny Passage.

Paul G. Wiegman: We sure have.

Matthew Craig: And so, now, it's nice that we get to sit down and talk about

your part of the story because you were a very significant part of this, and also that you were there at such landmark times.

So, let's travel back to the beginning...

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Matthew Craig:1975 – and tell us about...

Paul G. Wiegman: My hair has to turn black.

[Chuckle]

Matthew Craig: Yeah, well, by the magic of – TV.

Paul G. Wiegman: By the magic of...

Matthew Craig: That would be great.

Paul G. Wiegman: That would be.

Matthew Craig: I'm waiting to see you.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, it would fill in, too.

Matthew Craig: Yeah, I want to see. Do we have a special effects button?

[Laughter]

What was significant about the train ride in 1975?

Paul G. Wiegman: The train ride – well, let's go through the train ride. It began at

the old B&O station in Pittsburgh.

Matthew Craig: Okay.

Paul G. Wiegman: It was a two-car train – it was an engine and two cars. One of

the cars was a restored Western Maryland train passenger car. And, the other was a modern Amtrak dome car. And, we started out early in the morning in the B&O Station and

followed the Monongahela River and followed the

Youghiogheny River to Bowest Yards. Because the whole

reason for this train ride was to introduce the media,

conservationists, state park people, state officials, municipal officials from the region, on a vision that Josh Whetzel had. Josh Whetzel was the president of the Conservancy, at that

time.

Matthew Craig: Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

Paul G. Wiegman: Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. And, he arranged this

train ride. And, he wanted to show off his vision of a longdistance trail – at that time, from Connellsville, Pennsylvania

to Cumberland, Maryland.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: He had been approached by the Western Maryland Railroad,

who owned the right-of-way. The railroad was being

abandoned. And, came to the Conservancy – he'd gone to a number of other organizations and they said, "No, no, we're not interested." They came to Josh and the Conservancy, and Josh was the Conservancy at that time – said, "That's a great

idea. That's a phenomenal idea." So, this train ride...

Matthew Craig: So, did that pretty much green-light this project then...

Paul G. Wiegman: That green-lighted the project.

Matthew Craig: ... when he sits there and says, "This is it. Let's do it."

Paul G. Wiegman: And, Josh had been – and he mentions this in his interview –

that he, living in Washington – he had walked the C&O Canal with his wife. And, it was a place to relax and talk about things. And, he recognized the value of long-distance trails and the

value of just walking trails with no traffic other than maybe some bicycles and people walking. It green-lighted it. He said, "This is it." But, the other thing was the scenery of the trail. And, that's what the Western Maryland Railroad people also were highlighting. They saw the beauty of this trail from Cumberland, along the Casselman River, along the gorge of the Yough River, to Connellsville, and they said, "This is just too beautiful just to sell off and not be used. The public should have access to this pathway through the Allegheny Mountains.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, the train was put together and we trundled on out,

steamed on out, to Connellsville, PA at Bowest Yards. And, that was the ending point for the Western Maryland Railroad. And, at that point, Josh and some of the other members of the Conservancy presented a press conference to the people that were on the train. I guess there were about 60 or 70 people...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...and said, "Here's our idea. We're going to start here at

Bowest Yards, and we're going to go to Cumberland, Maryland. And, we're going to build a biking/hiking trail to follow this pathway, enjoy this pathway. See what you think and let us know." So, we moved out of Bowest Yards and we came along the Western Maryland from Connellsville to the

Ohiopyle – the High Bridge at Ohiopyle.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was an interesting part of the trip because we stopped

and everybody got off the train – everybody that wanted to – walked across the High Bridge and then stood at the other end and waited for the train to come across. Because this was the last passenger train to be running on the Western Maryland Railroad. So, it was a historic train. And, people wanted to see it crossing the High Bridge as one of the high points of the trip. So, we all did that, and we walked across, and the train came

across.

Matthew Craig: And, you took a photograph?

Paul G. Wiegman: And, I took some photographs of that. And, I took photographs

of the people that were on the train and still have those

photographs, and cherish them greatly.

Matthew Craig: Well, you know, through the magic of editing, we're going to

squeeze in those photos so people can see what we're talking about because they really are lovely photos. And, I think very

evocative of that moment in time.

Paul G. Wiegman: The people watching the train coming across and that historic

moment. At that point, we had to get off the Western Maryland because from Ohiopyle to Confluence, one bridge span had already been taken out – actually two bridge spans. The

trackage was already being lifted because of the

abandonment. So, we got onto the other side of the river on

the B&O and went to Confluence. And, of course, it's

gorgeous. I mean, it was just a gorgeous ride.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, at that time, the scenery was even more expansive than

now because the trees hadn't grown in. The railroad was very

careful about maintaining.

Matthew Craig: Oh, yes, yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, it was open and you could see the river and you could see

the mountains. Actually, we're recording this on the right-of-

way of the Western Maryland Railroad.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm. Right here? The trail running right here?

Paul G. Wiegman: It went right through here. This was one of the- there were

some sidings in this area. We went on to Confluence. People were excited. People just loved it. They were in the cars, they were watching the scenery go by. And, there was just a lot of

excitement.

Matthew Craig: And so, they must have felt like they had been part of

something significant if this announcement was made on this

trip.

Paul G. Wiegman: They felt they were part of something significant. They were

very privileged to be on the trip. And, they also just were

caught up in the vision...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...and realized that this had to be something that went into the

public hands. And, that was the whole point. This long path needed to go into the public hands. The train ride went to Confluence and we had lunch on one of the sidings. And, at Confluence we went back onto the Western Maryland and then traveled on eastward, going through the Pinkerton

Tunnel, going over the Pinkerton bridges. And again, that part of the trail – the Somerset County part of the then-Western Maryland was even as scenic as the rest of it. Because crossing these large railroad structures and through the

tunnels...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...we went through Meyersdale. And, along the way, we saw

people that knew that the train was coming through and

stopped and were photographing the train because it was the last train. And, I'll mention an interesting story about that. But, then through the Big Savage Tunnel, and then, finally, on down into Cumberland. And actually, we went all the way to

Hancock. The train went all the way which was interesting because it passed through a number of the tunnels along the Potomac. And hopefully, someday in the future, that part of

the trail – the right-of-way – will become trail.

Matthew Craig: Oh, that'd be great.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. It would extend it. Got off at Hancock, and hopped a

bus, and went back to Pittsburgh. People were excited.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: People just said, "This is wonderful. Let's start." At the end of

the train ride, I would expect people were just going to run

back and start building trail.

Matthew Craig: So, let's start then, with this. And, you get back and there's

this great excitement. What are the results then, that carried

through from this train ride?

Paul G. Wiegman: The results were that both Josh Whetzel...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman:and John, then, really went to work.

Matthew Craig: John Oliver?

Paul G. Wiegman: John Oliver – really went to work. And Tony Suppa, who we've

talked to, was the real estate guru at the Conservancy at the time. And, now came the details. Everybody loved what we were doing. It was the details of making sure that the real estate was all up and up – that the railroad owned what they

said they owned, and all those little details.

Matthew Craig: Well, you know the old saying, "It's either God or the devil is in

the details."

Paul G. Wiegman: Is in the details.

Matthew Craig: So, you've got to work through all the details.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that's what had to start. And, the biggest negotiation, at

that point, was who's going to own this?

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was the point of the train ride, to show people that it's

beautiful, but also to get them excited to the point that we

could find an owner for this trail.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: Well, a portion of it went through Ohiopyle State Park – from

Bruner Run to almost Confluence was in Ohiopyle State Park. So, that was kind of a given – but, extending onward, beyond into Somerset County, onto the state line. So, Josh and John really started working. You said I was a significant part – I

really wasn't.

Matthew Craig: Well, maybe significant witness is a better way.

Paul G. Wiegman: I was a significant witness to this whole thing.

Matthew Craig: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Quite frankly, at that point, the large project started to dwindle

because, quite frankly, the state was not interested.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: The State Park was interested in the land within Ohiopyle

State Park, but it didn't want anything to do with the land

outside of Ohiopyle State Park.

Matthew Craig: So, it's the refusal to call.

Paul G. Wiegman: Several reasons – and they were good reasons at the time.

First of all, there were large structures – two bridges over the Casselman near Confluence, two bridges over the Casselman and the Pinkerton Tunnel, the Big Savage Tunnel – 3,000 feet long, the Keystone Viaduct. A law in Pennsylvania says if you abandon a bridge – after a certain period of time, and it's fairly short – it's only like one or two years – you need to tear it

down.

Matthew Craig: Mmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: If it's not there, you need to tear it down. The Keystone

Viaduct had some piers that limited Glade City Road. And, PennDOT wanted those piers out of the way. So, there were some tough points at that point. And, the state was worried, of course, about the maintenance – the long-term maintenance

of these large structures. And, they became hesitant.

Matthew Craig: And, they are large structures.

Paul G. Wiegman: These are huge structures.

Matthew Craig: These are big things and so I imagine the expense for the

upkeep of these things would be significant.

Paul G. Wiegman: Exactly, exactly. They were okay with the High Bridge in

Ohiopyle because it was there. But, the ones in Somerset County... The other thing that came into play was the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail from Ohiopyle State Park to Johnstown was only a few years old. And, that was the first long, linear

park – a corridor kind of park – that the state had experience with. And, it's tough to have an office at one point, but 40 miles north is part of your park and 40 miles south is part of your park, and your maintenance crews have to go out to all these places.

Matthew Craig: Right, right.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, they weren't having a good experience with that. So, that

combination of the long-term protection of these big structures, and the possibility of another agency within the state coming in and saying, "Your trail's not built, tear them down," and the

expense of tearing them down...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...was daunting. It was daunting to both the state, and it was

daunting to the Conservancy. Because the Conservancy was willing to take those whole land – the whole corridor – but didn't want to hold it too long, because if they held it too long, they may have to tear down the bridges. And, that expense

would bankrupt the Conservancy.

Matthew Craig: Wow.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, quite frankly, it happened quickly that the whole idea of

Connellsville to Cumberland shortened down to Ohiopyle State Park within months, although John and Josh did

everything they could. They looked into leasing the land to a right-of-way for gas lines, for oil lines – long-distance oil lines, for long-distance electrical lines. They talked to Columbia Gas. They talked to power companies. They talked to everybody they could. They even had the attorneys for the Conservancy look very carefully at that law about tearing down the bridges. And, of course, the attorneys were a bit conservative, and they said, "Yeah, the law's there. The state could make you tear

them down." So, fairly quickly it narrowed down to just Ohiopyle State Park. And, Dr. Marie Scoddard was the

Secretary of DER – I guess it was at that time – and just said,

"No. We only want Ohiopyle."

Matthew Craig: Just Ohiopyle.

Paul G. Wiegman: Just Ohiopyle State Park.

Matthew Craig: So, really, they saw – this is a place we can start this and see

how well it goes. Or, was there just some sense that this is all

it's going to be?

Paul G. Wiegman: No. Actually, they didn't share the vision of a long-distance

bike trail. This was 1975 and, really, a lot of them were like,

"Somebody's going to ride a bike?"

Matthew Craig: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: "I mean, bicycles – they're for little kids, we're not... And, they

would ride it long distances? That's a crazy idea." So, there wasn't even a strong feeling for a bike trail. All they were concerned about – all the state was concerned about – that they owned this right-of-way within Ohiopyle State Park so that

there was no other thing happening...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...that somebody else would come along and buy it and do

something with it right in the middle – in the heart of the park.

Matthew Craig: So, it's the Conservancy – find some way to protect this

piece?

Paul G. Wiegman: Right. So, they said to the Conservancy, "Go back to Western

Maryland Railroad Company, negotiate a different deal." And, that's what the Conservancy did. And, I don't know how much Josh was disappointed about it. I'm sure he was because he had the vision of the whole trail. I mean, he felt very strongly

about it.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, in the '70s – I guess it was just maybe a few months, or

maybe a year and a half afterwards – the sale went through. The Western Maryland Railroad sold from Ramcat Hollow to

Bruner Run and the state owned the right-of-way.

Matthew Craig: So, now we're going to jump ahead a little bit to when the trail

starts really going. So, between 1978 and 1986, what's the

process that's playing out?

Paul G. Wiegman: 1978 – there was a dedication on Ferncliff.

Matthew Craig: Okay.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, we got a railroad sign and the deed was handed over.

> There was a little crowd of people. We may have some photographs of even that in the background. And, it went to

the state.

Matthew Craig: Okay.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, at that point, Larry Adams was the superintendent of

> Ohiopyle State Park, and he was happy to have it. And, we walked around and looked at the trail. And, everybody said, "Yeah, it's good. It's in the state's hands now." But, Larry had that same vision. But, being a state park superintendent, he had to keep it in the back of his head. Larry - he had the vision. So, now Larry had it in his park. And, the state in

> Harrisburg was saying, "Good, it's in." They weren't interested

in bike trails. Larry was.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, Larry cobbled together – and we've talked to Larry...

Matthew Craig: And, cobble is the correct word.

Paul G. Wiegman: Cobble is...

[Laughter]

...he built this. He built this piece of equipment and he, in each budget, would put a little extra limestone aside, and a little extra what they call "fines," which is the crushed limestone. And, he'd put it somewhere that nobody could see it, and pile it up. And, he started at the Ramcat Hollow end and each year he would build a little bit of trail. And, the reason he started at Ramcat is because in Ohiopyle there was some opposition to a bike trail. There was some fear on the part of Ralph

McCarty, who we talked to...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...and some others that this may take away from the rafting...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman:and upset the solitude of the Middle Yough. So, Larry started

it out there. And, he built a little bit and a little bit. And soon, in 1986, here's a trail – this bike trail that goes from Ramcat

Hollow to Ohiopyle.

Matthew Craig: And, it's a lovely ride.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, it opens up, and it's a lovely ride. It's the trail that you see

behind us – people going by. And, people started using it.

People discovered it.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm. And, the fears were ill-founded, as well, because it

didn't take away from any of those things.

Paul G. Wiegman: No.

Matthew Craig: It just enhanced everything.

Paul G. Wiegman: It enhanced everything. It brought more people into the park.

But, it was a lovely ride – 9 miles to Ramcat Hollow, 18-mile

roundtrip.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: Just a lovely little ride. People started using it. I remember

being on it with my daughter and a friend. And, it was just great. And, a lot of other people said that. And, once they started saying that, they started getting in touch with

Harrisburg and saying...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: "What a great job you guys did. Wonderful idea. Let's build

more." So, suddenly, what was not a good idea back in 1975 seemed to be a pretty good idea. And, that credit goes to

Larry.

Matthew Craig: A lot of these – you know, the "show me, don't tell me" kind of

aspect. Because he was able to clearly demonstrate the old

saying, "If you build it, they will come."

Paul G. Wiegman: Exactly.

Matthew Craig: If we have this thing here...

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, exactly.

Matthew Craig: ...people will not only utilize it but really appreciate...

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Matthew Craig: ...that they can utilize it.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, it drew people to Ohiopyle State Park.

Matthew Craig: Now, our story moves to Doug Hoehn...

Paul G. Wiegman: Doug Hoehn. Doug Hoehn.

Matthew Craig: Let me say it again. Our story moves to Doug Hoehn.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Matthew Craig: Tell us about Doug Hoehn. Who was Doug Hoehn?

Paul G. Wiegman: Well, Doug Hoehn was the next superintendent to come –

actually, there was one in between – but, he was the next superintendent to come to Ohiopyle State Park. And he, then, was given a trail that went from Ramcat Hollow to Ohiopyle but went beyond. Larry had finished the bridge onto – the High Bridge. So, people could cross the High Bridge, but the trail ended at the other side. And, you just turned around and came back. Because the High Bridge was really – it's a spectacular view. And, people are attracted to it. So, Doug came along, and people were saying, "Let's go further." At that point, there was an access built for the rafting of the Lower Yough to

Bruner Run.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, it was just natural to extend the trail to Bruner Run, with

the idea that maybe people could ride down there and then use the rafting busses to come back through Ohiopyle, or ride back. It was also realized that at Ramcat was kind of away from it. And, the trail was extended to into Confluence, PA.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: Because it kind of wanted to anchor it in a town. So now, you

had two trail towns as the anchor – Confluence and Ohiopyle. Then you went down to Bruner Run, and, of course, at that point, people said, "Well, Connellsville is only seven miles

away."

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: "And, what better place to have another town anchor where

people can come to the town and ride between these trail

towns?

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, Doug was in that period that they did some negotiations to

get the trail where it is in Confluence – they had to trade some land – and, to extend it onto Connellsville. And, that pushed it

even further.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So now, you had it an even longer trail. And, all this time,

more, and more people using it and saying, "This is

great. It's a wonderful trail."

Matthew Craig: Well, it's interesting, you know, having a chance to talk to you

about this in full is that, as we're discussing this thing that is a bike trail, it really is about the people who came to make this thing happen. And, the fact that there was this shared vision

that kept being built upon...

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Matthew Craig: ...brings us to this next man, who does a very significant job in

Somerset County – Hank Parke.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yes. Hank Parke.

Matthew Craig: Hank Parke is one of those persons that sits there and says, "I

think I can move this forward." Tell us, what did Hank Parke

do?

Paul G. Wiegman: Well, we've moved into the '90s now. And, a lot of things start

happening in the '90s. If we look back a little bit and set some

dates - 75 was the vision...

Matthew Craig: And, the train ride?

Paul G. Wiegman: And, the train ride. '78 was the sale to the state. So, that

happened fairly quickly. Eh, it took almost ten years for them

to get that first trail built.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm. Right.

Paul G. Wiegman: '86. But, then the momentum starts going. In the '90s, then,

Hank Parke, and other people in Somerset County are seeing

this trail being used. Confluence is getting business and

starting to gain some notoriety as a trail town. And, Hank sits back and says, "Well, this right-of-way goes 40 miles through Somerset County all the way to the state line. Why don't we have a trail?" And, he followed that up. The Somerset County

Rails-To-Trails Association is born. And, they start their

negotiations with the- by then, they're dealing with either the C&O or the CSX, because by then, that land that the Western Maryland owned – there's no more Western Maryland. It went

to the B&O. Then the B&O becomes the C&O, and then the

C&O becomes the CSX and all these alphabetic...

Matthew Craig: Talk about alphabet soup...

Paul G. Wiegman:soup. So, they begin negotiating for what is left of the right-

of-way. And, most of the right-of-way, at that point, is still in

the hands of the railroad.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: There are some pieces that were sold off for various reasons.

And, there is a little bit of railroad traffic still happening around Rockwood because of coal mines, and so forth. But, Hank started off and Hank just got a group of people together, they bought the trail, and they went out with shovels, and they

started building trail.

[Chuckle]

Matthew Craig: Well, he's got a real can-do spirit, then.

Paul G. Wiegman: It was a real can-do spirit. And, they built their first trail from

Rockwood to around the Pinkerton Tunnel...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...because there's no bridges in there.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm. Right.

Paul G. Wiegman: These bridges – these structures – keep coming up all the way

through the history of this thing.

Matthew Craig: Yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, interestingly enough, here we are almost 20 years...

Matthew Craig: [mumble, mumble] years.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. I'm trying to think of the...

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Here we are, almost 20 years later, and nobody in the state

has made anybody tear down the bridges. So, that fear of the

bridges having to be removed...

Matthew Craig: Oh, that never come out to play.

Paul G. Wiegman: That never came out. That never was to play.

Matthew Craig: Oh, no kidding.

Paul G. Wiegman: In fact, there's still a bridge now – we're in 2007 – that CSX

owns, and it still is up.

Matthew Craig: So, there you go – the beauties of bureaucracy. They never

got around to it.

Paul G. Wiegman: They never got around to it. So, the fear there of the bridges

having to be torn down was unfounded. And, the problem with the maintenance of the bridge was a bit unfounded. Because when the Western Maryland was being built, it was steam engines – 1911, 1912. And, steam engine technology was just really taking off. So, the engineers for the Western Maryland figure, "Okay, steam engines are going to get bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and bigger. So, we need bridges not only to handle what we have but to handle even larger steam

engines."

Matthew Craig: Oh.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, they built them big and strong. So, the bridges are

designed for multi-ton locomotives and we bikers aren't quite

as multi-tonned yet. But, we're getting there.

[Laughter]

Matthew Craig: Boy, I'm avoiding all sorts of comments I could make. It's a

good thing.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, I know. So, Hank starts off and gets a group of people

together. And, one of the problems that came up – Hank had a promise – at least he thought he had a promise of once they made the negotiations and came up with a sale price, there'd

be somebody right there to pay the check.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: Turns out that person wasn't there; that organization wasn't

there. And, Hank talks about that a little bit. And, Hank

suddenly has a deal made for several million dollars to buy the right-of-way and he starts going through his pockets and he

comes up with 75 cents.

Matthew Craig: Whoops. Whoops.

Paul G. Wiegman: And fortunately, Dave Mankameyer, who we talked to, was a

Somerset County Commissioner, and he came in and saved the day, and said, "Somerset County will own this." And, Somerset County bought the land. The Somerset County Rails-To-Trails Association built the trail and raised all the money to build the trail. But, it was the Somerset County commissioners that formed the Somerset County Parks and Recreation and owned the trail, and still own it to this day.

Matthew Craig: That leads us into the RTC, the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, the RTC is the Regional Trails Council.

Matthew Craig: All right. So, that leads us to the Regional Trails Council.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right. And, we have to come back a little bit because what's

happening on the southern end – the Somerset County end...

And, I'm pointing that way, because Somerset County, it is

that way.

Matthew Craig: It is. If you're there, if you turn around from your television,

you'll...

Paul G. Wiegman: You can see Somerset County. We're in Fayette County right

[Laughter]

While that's all happening in Somerset County – of course, the trail's to Connellsville. And, people in Pittsburgh are saying, "How are we going to get out there to ride our bikes? Do we have to drive? Can we do something?" Well, in the '90s, the connection from Pittsburgh to Connellsville suddenly becomes

available as the P&LE - the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie

Railroad...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...abandons that branch of their railroad. The first idea was an

interesting one. There were some people in Connellsville that said, "Well, let's buy that – the whole railroad. Leave the tracks in, and we'll run railcars - we'll run a train out - an excursion train. You can put your bike on a train, come to Connellsville, ride the trail, come back and ride back to Pittsburgh. Which

was a pretty clever idea.

Matthew Craig: That's actually – it is a good idea.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, then, there were some studies done by the National

Parks Service, and so forth. And, they said, "Why don't we just

build a trail?"

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: I mean, people were riding now 40, 50, 60 miles – why not just

> build a trail that goes from Connellsville to Pittsburgh?" The RTC, the Regional Trail Council - Corporation - we've got that

> on tape somewhere – gets involved. That's where Larry Ridenour comes in. There's a coalition between Allegheny County, Westmoreland County, and Fayette County that forms

this organization. They get together. They get together trail

groups along the way. And ultimately, purchase that right-of-

way of the P&LE Railroad.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And now, the vision that Josh Whetzel has in '75 is even

expanded further.

Matthew Craig: Wow.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, it goes from Connellsville to Pittsburgh. And, this is the

reason, right now, at that point – and you still, as you ride the trail, still, today – although it's beginning to change – some

places you ride the Yough Trail...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman:and some places you ride the Yough North Trail, and some

places you ride the Allegheny Highlands Trail.

Matthew Craig: There's been no consistent name for this whole big piece.

Paul G. Wiegman: There was no consistent name. It was all of these different

trails building at different times. But now, suddenly, the

linkages are starting to happen, and we're starting to get one

large trail.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, RTC, Larry Ridenour, and we talked to Jack Paulik in

Westmoreland County.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: They just jumped on the bandwagon and started building trail.

Again, this is all taking place in the '90s. So, this is when it's really happening. And, they started building trail and took the vision right into Pittsburgh. So, RTC gets it going along with

the member groups.

Matthew Craig: Now, the other piece that sort of comes in around this time is a

significant amount of resources to take care of those big pieces that we've been talking about because some of those bridges and things were starting to get a little dilapidated.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yep.

Matthew Craig: And, we think about the amount of resources that it took to

shore up those pieces – how did that story happen?

Paul G. Wiegman: This whole project – and maybe I should explain this at this

point - the project that we've been doing is to build a history -

an auditory and visual history – of The Great Allegheny

Passage.

Matthew Craig: The one name.

Paul G. Wiegman: The one name. And, I was asked by Linda Boxx and the ATA

- the Allegheny Trail Alliance - to put these things together. It's a project that we've talked to the key people. And so, what we're doing is putting all these people together to get some of those histories that we have. What was the question now that

you asked about?

Matthew Craig: How that we were able to pull together the significant amount

of resources – money – to be able to fix these large, large infrastructure pieces that had come under some ruin.

Paul G. Wiegman: When you look at the first part of the trail Larry built from

Confluence to Ohiopyle – no bridges.

Matthew Craig: No bridges.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, there were some drainage things, but he could use park

people. And, he put it in the park budget for the limestone, and

so forth. And, the High Bridge at Ohiopyle – he used park money to do that. So, it's state money. When Hank Parke builds his first section of trail in Somerset County, he goes from Rockwood to the Pinkerton Low Bridge – stops at the bridge – because it's just trail. And, it's essentially excavating, putting limestone on it, and choking it with vines. So, it's fairly inexpensive and they could raise that money. It wasn't a lot of money that was needed. But, once we get beyond that – once

we start to talk about the bridges at Pinkerton...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...once we start to talk about the Salisbury Viaduct, once we

start Keystone Viaduct – then there had to be much larger

amounts of money available. And, it was in the '90s that the RTC was formed as a conduit for some of this money on the north end. The Somerset County Rails-To-Trails Association was a conduit for some of the money. And, that's when the organizations began to tap federal money in what's called ISTEA. It's transportation money.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: They began to tap state budgets – actually getting trail

building – it was the Ridge administration at the time – and getting money in the budgets there for trail building. So, there was significant need to not just go out to a local foundation but to really tap some of the larger sources of money. And, that's where you began to see – as I say – ISTEA money, federal transportation money coming in, grants – big grants from corporations, big grants from big foundations. And, with it, brought more – I'm not going to say red tape – but more stringent regulations on building of the trail and of the building of the bridges, and so forth. Engineering firms had to be brought in. And, we're starting to talk about millions of dollars being spent instead of just thousands of dollars. And, of course, that then, kind of climaxes with the Big Savage

Tunnel.

Matthew Craig: Oh, absolutely.

Paul G. Wiegman: The Big Savage Tunnel begins with – it's completely

collapsed. I mean, it's filled with water. The two ends have collapsed. And now, it's time to open it up because without that link – without that 3000 feet, the trail isn't really a long-distance trail. I mean, just go out and stop. And, that's where the Allegheny Trail Alliance and Linda Boxx, another star of this whole thing, comes into play. The Allegheny Trail Alliance is formed of the various trail groups coming together and working together on various projects, starting to link trails, starting to share ideas, starting to share funding. There's an interesting story that Linc Van Sickle told where they were working on the Salisbury Viaduct and were short some money. But, some of the work being done on the northern end – they had some extra money – so they gave their half a million dollars to Linc to pay for the rest of the Salisbury Viaduct.

Matthew Craig: Oh, wow.

Paul G. Wiegman: The Big Savage Tunnel begins at \$8 million to refurbish it. The

next thing you know, they find some problems, and it's up to \$9 million and the whole thing comes to an end. They say,

"We don't have enough money."

Matthew Craig: Wow.

Paul G. Wiegman: Linda and others go out and find a little bit more. They talk to

state representatives, they talk to federal representatives. A little bit more money comes in. "Oh, we can keep the project going." "Oh," the next day, "we just found another problem. It's going to cost \$10 million." The Big Savage Tunnel started and stooped, and started and stopped

many times.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, finally it was finished. And, it popped out at \$12 million.

Matthew Craig: \$12 million.

Paul G. Wiegman: \$12 million to do it. But, it's done and it's worth every penny of

it – judging from the popularity of it. So, we went from a kind of

can-do and do-on-our-own beginning of this trail to a, "We

need a lot of help from the federal kind of people.

Matthew Craig: Yeah, because it's just so big. And, the Big Savage Tunnel

really is the link then into Maryland.

Paul G. Wiegman: The link into Maryland, and can I say weigh into the whole

idea – we've talked of Pennsylvania the whole time.

Matthew Craig: Thank you, Paul.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, this goes back to Josh also. I can remember- I reviewed

a lot of the documents, particularly with the Conservancy. I went through all the Conservancy documents, I went through all of the minutes – board minutes – of the RTC, of the ATA,

and of SCRTA now, which was...

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: "I make a motion to..." and "I second that motion." But, it was

interesting to see the starts and the stops. But, at this point,

now... Where was I?

[Chuckle]

Matthew Craig: Going into Maryland.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, going into Maryland – all of this is happening in

Pennsylvania. And, back with Josh – he, right away, knew that the Western Maryland wanted Connellsville to Cumberland – Cumberland, Maryland. That's what they wanted. And he, right off the bat, knew, "I know I can't get my board of directors to actually say, 'Yes, we'll buy something in Maryland." But, he never let onto the Western Maryland people. But, there was this section in Maryland. Well, what was happening in Somerset County – Bill Atkinson, who we talked to at the station at Frostburg – looked at the thing and said, "Wait a minute, they're only going to Mason-Dixon Line. What about

us? We need to have something to Cumberland."

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, he, right away, started talking with the CSX people and

Allegany County, Maryland, took up the project. Bill is an employee of the county. They took up the project and they started – in the '90s – started building trail in Maryland. And,

they began, actually, from Frostburg to the state line...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...so there the connection was made. And, then the next

section was from Frostburg to Woodcock Hollow, and then, of

course, in December of 2006, just under a year ago, they ended in – they finished to Cumberland. And, what's

significant about that, of course, is not only now is Josh's vision and dream of a trail from Connellsville to Cumberland completed, but it gets added to in the north end by Larry

And, it ends up connected with the C&O Canal from the state line to Cumberland, which was never expected back in '75.

Ridenour and all of those good people there, into Pittsburgh.

And, it connects with the C&O Canal which goes to

Washington, which was the canal that Josh used to walk on

and kind of gave him that feeling that this was a great idea

from the very, very beginning.

Matthew Craig: It's interesting to just how much of a star Josh is in this whole

story.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Matthew Craig: But, it's also how very humble he is about the role that he

played.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. He showed that in the interview that we talked with him.

I have the utmost respect for Josh, both working for him as an employee and as a colleague, and particularly, not only the vision of this trail but of the vision of some of the other – of

course, parks in Western Pennsylvania. He's very

instrumental in Ohiopyle State Park, in Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail – just a man that has given so much to us here in

Western Pennsylvania. He's a great person.

Matthew Craig: Who are the other stars then? You've mentioned throughout –

let's recap. Who are the stars of this project?

Paul G. Wiegman: Well, the standard line, of course, is going to be everybody

was a star because there's so many. I mean, all the volunteers that built trail and helped. But, that's the cliché, but it is true. There's just been so many, many, people that have helped

with this. But, put Josh as the beginning.

Matthew Craig: The first person to see...

Paul G. Wiegman: To see the vision. To have that vision is Josh. And then, of

course, Larry Adams. He was the one that put trail on the ground. The vision was in Josh's mind, but Larry was the person that actually put down limestone and put down a

surface that people could ride.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, he did it, actually, with probably a little bit of, not

antagonism, but there was some – Confluence rafters didn't want it and the state – people in Harrisburg – weren't totally

interested in it.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, he did it, and he did it in his own way. Larry's kind of

quiet, soft-spoken person, but he's one of the real stars of the thing. And then, of course, once that's in, there's Hank Parke.

Matthew Craig: Hank Parke, making it happen.

Paul G. Wiegman: Making it happen. Just going out and... And Hank, not only did

he make it happen from all the negotiations, and so forth, but Hank made it happen – he was just right there on the trail –

building trail.

Matthew Craig: Mmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: I mean, he was out on those days building trail.

And then, of course, you move to Larry Ridenour in the north and seeing that the connection to Pittsburgh not only would be valuable, but I think was essential. I think Larry realized to get anybody using it, you had to connect it to the big city. And, he's certainly one of the stars there. From there, of course, Linda – Linda Boxx has done so much for it. It was interesting to look through – and I believe this is correct. We've had a little bit of – we're not quite sure on this. her first board meeting – she was a member of the board of directors of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Her first board meeting was the board meeting that voted to transfer the Western Maryland Railroad land in Ohiopyle Park to the state.

Matthew Craig: Oh, I see.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: So, I don't know if she realizes it at that point, that a key

significance.

Matthew Craig: I love when things happen like that.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, it isn't until years later that she actually gets involved in

the RTC and creating the nonprofit to handle the P&LE

Railroad and the northern part of the trail. And then, she helps with the summit. There's a trail summit that was put together in one of the resorts in Somerset County, to say, "Let's bring

all these groups together. Let's talk about a long-distance trail." And, she became the president of that Allegheny Trail Alliance – that summit meeting became the Allegheny Trail Alliance – and she became the president the second year it was in operation, and still is the president today.

Matthew Craig: Oh.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, was just absolutely tireless in raising the money needed

to do some of the really big projects and continues... What I've always admired Linda's work in here- but it was last year, I was on the trail up by the Big Savage Tunnel. And, my wife and I rode through. And, there at the other end of the tunnel is Linda. And, she's out there, handing out brochures, and talking to people, and asking them questions. Not only was

she working in Washington and in Harrisburg...

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman:and with a lot of people that were able to just really supply

the funds available, but she is right there on the trail.

Matthew Craig: Wow.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, whenever there's a meeting, Linda's around, so Linda,

certainly, is one of the stars. One star that we talked to – also

another star that we talked to is Maynard.

Matthew Craig: Maynard, I love Maynard.

Paul G. Wiegman: Maynard Sembower...

Matthew Craig: He was there when they laid the original railroad track lines

down.

Paul G. Wiegman: He was there when the first train ran on The Great Allegheny

Passage.

Matthew Craig: The tracks.

Paul G. Wiegman: He was there on the last train for Western Maryland Railroad.

He was there on the first bicycle when the first bicycle rode

from Rockwood to the Pinkerton Tunnel.

Matthew Craig: And, he's only 42.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Double it, even more than double that.

Matthew Craig: Yeah, he's in his 90s.

Paul G. Wiegman: I think he's 98 this year in December.

Matthew Craig: Ninety-eight – God bless him.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, he is beloved. I mean, I read the blogs of people that

have ridden the trail. And, people will go to Rockwood just to

talk to Maynard.

Matthew Craig: Yeah. He's like the ambassador for the trail there.

Paul G. Wiegman: He is the trail ambassador. He is just a wonderful, wonderful

person. So, he's absolutely a star in my book. And then, of

course, Bill Atkinson in Maryland...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...who saw this all headed to the Mason-Dixon Line and said,

"Wait a minute, we're going to get in on it." So, that's my all-

star team.

Matthew Craig: It's interesting thinking about Josh Whetzel and John Oliver,

and just this group coming through here, and then all the

pieces that had to play out for this to happen...

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Matthew Craig: ...it's really a very extraordinary story.

Paul G. Wiegman: Several times somebody has said all the stars aligned.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, they did. In the '90s, when the big funds were needed –

when the big money was needed, it was very fortunate that we

had a governor in Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge, who was

interested in biking. John Oliver, now, who began with Josh Whetzel, became the President of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy – was the person that handed over the deed here in Ohiopyle in 1978. Now, in the '90s, is the Secretary of

DCNR. And, DCNR is being asked to help build trail.

Matthew Craig: The Department of Conservation and National Resources.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, there's John – so John moves right into the position that

he can help...

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...through the Department of Conservation and Natural

Resources.

Matthew Craig: Lovely.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, the stars did align and...

Matthew Craig: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...and then some of the legislators at that time who were very

much interested in biking, and were able to supply some of the portion Harrisburg to get some of the funds available. And

then, of course, in the '90s, when the ATA is working,

everybody says, "Well, we need a trail name. You know, this is

not just nine trails or something like that, it's one trail.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: It's more than the nine trails." And, that's where The Great

Allegheny Passage came. And, I'd have to look at my notes,

but I think it took, like, four years.

[Laughter]

Matthew Craig: To find the right name?

Paul G. Wiegman: To find the right name.

Matthew Craig: Oh, it's a great name.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, it's a great name, it's a wonderful name.

Matthew Craig: The Great Alleghany Passage.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, it went through the Spine Line and all kinds of names.

[Chuckle]

And, it finally became some name...

Matthew Craig: The Ensor [? 0:51:23.0] Trail.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, the Ensor Trail.

[Laughter]

Matthew Craig: No, it didn't become the Ensor Trail. It's a joke.

Paul G. Wiegman: Well, a lot of times it was the Pittsburgh to Cumberland. And

then, somebody said, "Well, what if we go further?" And finally, it became The Great Allegheny Passage, which is a good

name.

Matthew Craig: Yeah, I vote for that name. And, there's been some economic

developments, as well, for the trail towns. So, it's not just the fact that it's a great recreational resource, but it's bringing

money into these towns.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, it has been just a godsend for many of the small towns

because places like Confluence and Rockwood, Meyersdale,

West Newton... Actually, the trail towns are West Newton,

Connellsville, Ohiopyle – I'm going north to south – Confluence, Rockwood, Meyersdale, Frostburg, and

Cumberland.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, we have people now that are riding the whole thing –

taking a week or two to do it. They need services.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: They need food. They need lodging. The B&Bs are beginning

to form. Restaurants are opening up. I think in Somerset County, we counted something like 40 businesses have

started centered around the trail.

Matthew Craig: Oh, that's great.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, now that's it open – at this very point it's open from

McKeesport to Cumberland – 100-some miles, 140-some miles. And then, of course, they get on the C&O Canal and go another 180 miles to Georgetown. And, many, many people are doing that whole trip – the 300-and-some mile trip and

they need services.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: Plus, the person who comes down for a beautiful fall weekend

like this and they need services. And, there we go – the trail towns are building. So, it has been a great economic boom to these towns and just absolutely is the future of many of them.

Matthew Craig: Now, why has this been a significant journey for you?

Paul G. Wiegman: It's an interesting question because I had a great time on the

railroad. I just - I love railroads. And, that, back in '75, that

was my thought. "Boy, I get a train ride."

[Laughter]

This is cool. And, I get to photograph it and so I did that. And then, it was interesting to watch what would happen with the Conservancy in the Ohiopyle deal, but then I kind of got away from it. You know, it wasn't on my radar screen very much.

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: In the '80s, we'd come down with the kids and we'd ride the

trail on occasions. But, it wasn't, again, on my radar screen greatly at that time. But then, once I left the Conservancy I began to ride more. And, we came down and did a lot of riding and found Confluence. And then said, "This would be a great

place to have a home" ...

Matthew Craig: Hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...and got home, and said, "Well, now I'm here and riding the

trail a lot, I'd really like to get more involved in it." So, it has become one of my real loves – just riding the trail – just spending an afternoon just slowly riding through and seeing the wildlife and the natural history is cathartic – or whatever

that word is. It's just great. It's my meditation.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, then being able to help with – I'm on the board of SCRTA

now – and being able to help in the details – and on the board of the ATA. Details – it's very rewarding. Let me do that one

little story I forgot about with the train.

Matthew Craig: Oh, please do – on the High Bridge?

Paul G. Wiegman: No, not at the High Bridge.

Matthew Craig: Oh.

Paul G. Wiegman: We're going along on the train and every so often you'd look

out, and you'd look out, and here's a little blue Volkswagen – Super Beetle – guys pile out – like the clowns all coming out of the little car at the circus. Click, click, click, click. They had found out about the train ride – these were railroad buffs – click, click, click. And, you'd go to the next crossing – click –

it's the same guys...

Matthew Craig: Oh.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...in the little blue beetle. And, you'd go along, along,

along and come to a crossing, and there they are again. And, they had planned out a route to photograph this train at the

key spots.

Matthew Craig: On its last trip?

Paul G. Wiegman: On this last trip. We got to Ohiopyle, and there they are and

the train is on the other side – and they're all set. We're getting the E-shot. This is cover of *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*,

New York Times - whatever it is.

Matthew Craig: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: The train stops and everybody gets off and walks across, and

everybody has a camera with them. "Oh, everybody's gonna

get it."

[Chuckle]

Matthew Craig: There goes my exclusive.

Paul G. Wiegman: Blow the exclusive. But, they were good about it. We kept on

and we hit them at Confluence, we hit them at Frostburg, we

went on. It turns out that one of the people in that blue

Volkswagen is Bill Metzger.

Matthew Craig: Bill Metzger, who's written a beautiful book about The Great

Allegheny Passage.

Paul G. Wiegman: Who is a train buff and moves to Confluence because the train

is here – or the trail is here – meets his wife on the trail, gets

married on the trail, and writes a book about the trail.

Matthew Craig: It's quite a romantic story.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, it really is. It was kind of a neat story. I never knew Bill

> until I moved to Confluence and met him. And, we started talking about the blue Volkswagen. He said, "Oh, yeah, I know

the..." He was one of the people in the blue Volkswagen.

Matthew Craig: Going like the circus clowns climbing out...

Paul G. Wiegman: Climbing out of it – yeah.

Matthew Craig: Well, as you look back on the ups and down and all the twists

> and turns you took on this trail, what is your overview? What kind of vision, now, do you have, looking back over the whole

story as it's told?

Paul G. Wiegman: I think when I look back on it, it's interesting how it evolved

> from, really, almost a do-it-yourself, handyman kind of thing and then expanded out to a very large, federally funded, and now nationally and internationally recognized. It just amazes me that this thing – this trail that Josh saw and Larry saw as important – and kind of started on their own and almost tinkering with – becomes, now, an international destination.

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, how many times do we, in our lifetime, and with

> interactions with other people think about and have visions about these things and start tinkering with little things, and

then, maybe, get discouraged and stop?

Matthew Craig: Right.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, if we didn't, it may become the same thing.

Matthew Craig: That's a good lesson.

Yeah. It really is a good lesson. I mean, all of those people Paul G. Wiegman:

could have been- certainly, I think of Hank Parke. He could

have said, "Oh, the heck with it. I can't get the money. CSX – keep it." Or, they could have, at some point said, on the Big

Savage, "Well, we just can't do it."

Matthew Craig: Mm-hmm. It's a very big job and it's just too big for our

resources.

Paul G. Wiegman: It's too big. And, there's so many ups and downs that I see in

the research that I've done and all the people that I've talked

to that that could happen, and it didn't.

Matthew Craig: But, it all comes back to the vision on the High Bridge, saying,

"Oh, this could go..."

Paul G. Wiegman: Yep. Yeah, it really comes back to that now. That train coming

across there. And, now you see bikers coming across there.

Matthew Craig: Yeah, pretty remarkable.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, pretty remarkable.

Matthew Craig: Well, it's been wonderful being on this journey with you Paul,

and having a chance...

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, it's been great to have you on, too.

Matthew Craig: ...to talk to all these people and get this story. And, I think

we've been able to create a beautiful living history...

Paul G. Wiegman: I hope so.

Matthew Craig: ...of The Great Allegheny Passage.

Paul G. Wiegman: I hope so. I hope so. And, I hope people come down here, and

ride it, and enjoy it.

Matthew Craig: And, when you see Paul, our esteemed naturalist, make sure

you say, "Hello, Paul."

[Chuckle]

[End 01:00:55.3]

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