



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Marking 33 Years

Volume 33 Issue 1

January-February 2022

Accelion Pittsburgh Volunteers Make an Impact by Deb Esia

Accelion, an advertising and marketing company, represents companies and promotes their products and services. They have offices in New Jersey, New York, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Their social mission is to strengthen communities where they live, work and play. On October 13, six volunteers from Accelion Pittsburgh worked alongside Fort Cherry Friends volunteers to clean up the trail corridor from the southern end of the McDonald viaduct to Penny Lane. Although it was Accelion's first-time volunteering on the trail, the team quickly adjusted to the tasks at hand. They cut and cleared tree falls, pruned invasive vines, and mowed the trail corridor. A truckload of firewood was stacked for future distribution to trail campsites. Their efforts not only enhanced the trail's appearance but improved trail safety by improving the sight line to the viaduct approach. The Accelion Pittsburgh team included: (right)Morgan Haibach, Marissa McDole, Justin Jaworski, Corey Culton, Mike Sikorski, and Maggie Manuel. Thank you Accelion Pittsburgh and to Patricia Friedsam for recruiting another great group of volunteers!



South Park Update by Dave Oyler

Most sections of the Montour Trail take longer to construct than initially expected. That's especially true of the trail through South Park Township. Much of the railroad right of way through the township was either sold off before the Trail Council was founded in 1989 or never belonged to the railroad. And the Montour Railroad never actually reached the eastern border of South Park Township. Construction of most of the trail in the township has either required the purchase of property or acquisition of easements. The trail route through the township is roughly 5.2 miles in length and in 2008 there were 2.1 miles of completed Montour Trail in the township. At the end of 2021, after 14 years of construction efforts, there are now roughly 4.1 miles of completed trail, with 1.1 miles left to construct.

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The asphalt paved ramp from the lower trail level looking west toward the Summit Drive Bridge. Photo taken 1/3/2022, after the safety fence was installed.

The good news is that the right of way is available for 0.7 mile of that 1.1 mile and two funded projects are underway to construct that trail. In addition, the Trail Council signed a construction contract in November to complete the trail section between Summit Drive and Wood Street (Phase 34C), a distance of 0.5 miles. Although it was too late in the construction season to complete the trail section, the contractor was able to prepare a steep 500-foot ramp from the Summit Drive Bridge for asphalt paving, have a paving contractor pave the ramp and have a fencing contractor install safety fence on the ramp. The prime contractor also stone lined the ditch on the side of the ramp with #3 stone to prevent stormwater erosion.

For all practical purposes almost 0.2 mile of the Phase 34C construction is nearly complete. There should also be no obstacles in the spring of 2022 to complete of the rest of the trail section. The remaining 0.2 mile of that 0.7 mile, between Wood Street and Stewart Road (Phase 35), has proven to be far more complicated than ever anticipated when the project began. The biggest problem has been obtaining a Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP) from PennDOT for the trail crossing of Stewart Road. **Continues on Page 4**

Visit the Montour Trail Web Site at:
www.montourtrail.org
To converse go to:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43518292159>



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All Trail-Letter correspondence should be addressed to:

newsletter@montourtrail.org

All other business related trail correspondence should be addressed:

MTCOffice@montourtrail.org

Other Trail Contact information:

<https://montourtrail.org/contact-us/>

We are going digital, if paper correspondence is necessary:

MONTOUR TRAIL COUNCIL

Suite #3 2nd Floor
304 Hickman Street
Bridgeville, PA 15017

PHONE NUMBER 412-257-3011

NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM

Dennis Sims, managing editor

Mark Imgrund

Dennis Pfeiffer

The Pre Sez Volunteering Is Good For You

Even before the bane of COVID, 60% of Americans reported feeling lonely. 25% of those over 65 are socially isolated. But a [recent article](#) in the New York Times identifies a simple and beneficial remedy – volunteering.

Benefits of volunteering are not just emotional. A study by the Corporation for National and Community Service found that volunteering offers significant health benefits, including greater longevity, higher functional ability, and lower rates of depression. Another study showed such activities can buffer the negative physical effects of stress.

And there's more good news. AARP found that more than 85% of volunteers felt their lives had been improved by their contributions. The physical and psychological benefit of volunteering are clear.

These benefits extend to our dedicated Montour Trail volunteers, who regularly have the opportunity to talk to trail users. Our maintenance crews in their bright orange or yellow t-shirts often attract encouragement and positive conversation from passing users. Our "lumberjacks" clearing trees after storms are always thankfully greeted. Most of the users will be local residents who walk, run, or bike the Montour regularly, but we also are often regaled by cyclists telling us about their cross-country journeys.

Any mention of volunteering in casual conversation is likely to elicit a response like "Oh, thank you! I love the Montour Trail!" Just last week, I told a new acquaintance about my involvement, and he replied, "I love that trail. It helped me recover from my back surgery." In addition to feedback from trail users, members of our Friends Groups, committees, and board have formed lifelong friendships among themselves. Many of the trail's founders are still active after 33 years. Our annual dinner and volunteer Christmas party are always festive events. Board meetings are always followed by a social hour. The Friends Groups and committees forge lots of close personal relationships.

Opportunities for volunteering are diverse. We have committees and groups for engineering & construction, technology, membership, community outreach, fund raising, trail security, and more, so we need people with all sorts of skills and interests. If you're more interested with working with your hands, or machinery, you might enjoy being part of a Friends Group.

Yes, you can provide valuable services to the Montour Trail and its users, while also reaping the benefits of social interaction, physical exercise, and mental engagement for yourself. A true win-win!

Care to join us? Drop an email to volunteer@montourtrail.org.

Deb Thompson

New York Times: An Overlooked Cure for Loneliness, <https://nyti.ms/33T6Zpj>, 12/21/2021.

Scheduled events for this year:

Saturday, June 4 at 8:30 a.m. The JR Taylor Memorial 5k and Walk

Saturday, September 24 at 6:30 a.m., The 2022 Tour the Montour.

Friends' Meetings and Work Parties

MTC Board Meeting:

Every third Monday of the month - 6:00 p.m. at 304 Hickman St., Suite 3, Bridgeville, PA. Turn right off of the Bridgeville exit of I-79. Turn left at the next light, go straight at next light and make left turn onto Hickman St. just after the Post Office. Call the Montour Trail Office for more information or to get on the agenda.

Airport Area Friends: (MP 0 to MP 12.6 and the 6.3 mile Airport Connector) The Airport Area Friends of the Trail meet every second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Forest Grove Fire Hall, 2044 Ewings Mill Road, Robinson Township, PA 15108. New volunteers are always welcomed. Contact Mark Modispacher at 412 266-1544 for more information. Numerous "work parties" are held during the season. Please call 412-262-3748 to lend a hand at the work parties.

Fort Cherry Friends: (MP 12.6 to MP 20.7)

Friends of the Trail meeting: Second Wednesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the McDonald Trail Station, 160 S. McDonald Street, McDonald, PA 15057 (adjacent to the Panhandle Trail). Work and cleanup parties will be scheduled as needed. For more information contact Tim Thomassy, 724-926-4617 or Chuck Hughey, 724-926-9436.

Cecil Friends: (MP 22.0 to MP 28.5)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. From May-August, meetings are held at the Kurnick Access area along the trail off Cecil Henderson Road; other months (with the exception of November and December) meet at the MTC Offices. Work and cleanup parties are scheduled as needed. Call 412-496-4308 for more information, or email densimwx@comcast.net

Peters Township Friends: (MP 28.5 to 30.4, Library Jct to near MP 35 and part of the Bethel Branch)

Friends of the Trail Meeting, first non-holiday Monday of the month at Peters Township Community Recreation

Center and varying locations during warmer weather at 7:00 p.m. Work and cleanup parties on the first Friday and third Saturday of every month at 8:30 a.m. For more information, please call Jim Robbins at 724-941-6132 For monthly meetings contact Wayne Pfrimmer at 724-747-9766 or by email at waynepfrimmer@gmail.com

Bethel Park Friends: (The 2.75 mile Bethel Branch and a short piece of main line trail around MP 35). Friends of the Trail meeting, every first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Bethel Park Municipal Building Caucus Room behind the Council Chambers. Anyone interested in the Bethel Park Trail segment is encouraged to come. Work and cleanup party, every second and fourth Saturday of the month - 8:30 a.m. Call Bill Capp at 412-833-5928 for location and information.

South Hills Friends: (MP 35.4 to 46.6)

Meeting second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at South Park Township Community Room or the Township Library located at the Township Building at 2675 Brownsville Road, South Park, 15129. Work and cleanup parties on the second Saturday of the month. For more information, contact David Oyler at 412-831-9288, davidoyler1950@gmail.com, or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, mckeownp@comcast.net

The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

For more information send email to mrhs@montourrr.com.

The Westland Friends: (MP 21.0 to 21.9, and Westland Branch)

Standard meeting schedule is third Thursday of the month at 1:30 PM at MTC Office in Bridgeville. During Pandemic, meetings have been moved outside to Galatit trailhead pavilion. For more information contact Dave Hajnik at 412-498-3854 (text enabled) or dave@theneonweb.com

Note: Some of these meetings are still being held virtually these days due to the pandemic. Please contact the appropriate individual to verify physical or on-line meeting specifics!

Remember When

30 years ago, 1992: MTC holds meeting to plan trail construction in Cecil.

25 years ago, 1997: Two-one hundred foot truss bridges were obtained by Dave Wright from Wheeling-Pitt Steel at Monesson

20 years ago, 2002: Final surfacing to the trail in the vicinity of Route 22 was being completed.

15 years ago, 2007: Bethel Friends complete their storage shed.

10 years ago, 2012: Trail realignment is underway in the Southview Area to allow the construction of the railroad to Westland to serve the MarkWest Gas Plant

5 years ago, 2017: The Montour Trail is named the state Trail of the Year by DCNR

South Park Update Continues from Page 1

The sight distance of the crossing is too short to meet the PennDOT requirements and South Park Township will not allow trail construction without the permit. Increasing the sight distance will require excavation along Stewart Road to remove a protruding hillside, but the earth that limits the sight distance is on neighboring property. It has taken almost a full year to negotiate an easement to allow removal of the earth limiting the sight distance. And before that work can begin the Trail Council needs a Township grading permit and PennDOT approval to work along Stewart Road. Both of those are slowly moving through the bureaucracy and mounds of paperwork. Once those permits are signed the Trail Council can finally excavate hundreds of cubic yards of pesky hillside, install a wall, increase the sight distance and apply for the HOP. Once we have the HOP, we can finally get back to letting a contract for construction of the Phase 35 trail. Sometimes while fighting these alligators, it's easy to forget that we started to drain the swamp.

This is the third year in a row I've written on South Park trail construction and the third year that I've predicted the outcome of the year's construction efforts. So far, I have a dismal record. In 2020 I predicted that two projects would be completed and the third might be completed. Instead, Phase 8F was completed, an easy guess since the construction project was underway at the beginning of the year, and Phases 34C and 35 did not even get as far as letting contracts. In 2021 I predicted that Phase 34C would be completed and Phase 35 was uncertain. Neither was completed, although the Phase 34C construction contract was let and construction was started.

This year I predict that since the Phase 34C contract is in place, Phase 34C should be completed. That's a pretty safe bet, given that construction should resume as soon as spring arrives. Once again, I have to predict that Phase 35 completion is uncertain, although it is more likely than in previous years. The amount of actual construction work involved in the two projects is modest, but the HOP excavation work and administrative issues are still significant and could very possibly prevent completion of Phase 35 in 2022. Stay tuned for my 2023 predictions.

Amazon Smile



A reminder to those who order from Amazon, that Amazon Smile is the same company. However, Amazon Smile donates to a charity (of which the Montour Trail is counted as one). It does not cost you a cent more. The Trail has received confirmation from Amazon that because of orders on Amazon Smile that Amazon has donate \$1600 to the Montour Trail.

So please order from Amazon Smile (same inventory, same cost) so that Amazon donates a portion of your order to the Trail. The Trail thanks you.

Processes Under Construction; Operational Transitions in the Queue

As we begin 2022, there are at least four notable operational challenges the Trail Council will be taking on simultaneously. These are: (1) moving to a modern Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for more efficiently managing communications with our memberships; (2) making the sometimes bumpy transition from an all-volunteer organization to one that is "only" 96%+ volunteer; (3) planning for a Spring move to an office space that better serves our long-term needs; and (4) assisting our new volunteer Finance leadership in enhancing our fiscal processes. Most of these changes should be invisible to you, our members, but some may require a bit of patience and understanding on your part. We thank you in advance for that.

As this issue goes to press, we have already shut down our old MS Access membership database, which has served us well since the early 2000's when volunteer Dave Hajnik developed it. It has become a bit long in the tooth. We've identified NeonCRM as our new cloud-based CRM system to take its place. NeoCRM is specifically designed for nonprofit organizations like MTC and it promises significant benefits and improvements, and we have already begun the process of data migration and implementing workflows and we expect future benefits and improvements, but ask your patience if some MTC services are temporarily delayed while we make the transition. If you happen to be knowledgeable in the NeonCRM platform, or have the skills to learn it quickly, we encourage you to share your time and skills in the MTC making the most of this transition. **Send an email to volunteer@montourtrail.org if this describes you.**

Another article in this Trail Letter touches on our new part-time Business Operations Support Manager and the operational improvements we hope to see from Sarah joining the MTC. Before May, we also hope to find a suitable office space that will serve the MTC's needs for years to come, and will be dealing with all the normal headaches anyone experiences with a physical move. If you would like to help us plan, or make this physical move, please **send an email to volunteer@montourtrail.org**. Lastly, if you have talents/skills that we can use in the finance area as we make continuous improvements in that arena, please contact us at the same volunteer email address.

Hollow Oak Bridge



Hollow Oak's bridge at Montour Run will connect to the Montour Trail near Hassam Road. A more in-depth story will be in the next issue. (Picture by Phillip Torrez)

Transitions By Mark Imgrund and Phillip Torrez

Most of you know we hired our first MTC employee, Sarah Fetterman, into a part-time business operations position that began in October. Although some of you have met or talked with Sarah, we would like this to be her official welcome.

Sarah lives in Bethel Park with her husband and their twin children, and is a 2011 Pitt graduate with an MS in Library and Information Science. She also works part time at the Upper St. Clair library as a reference librarian. Sarah and her family love the Trail, and true to her librarian roots, before her job interview with us she read virtually everything about the MTC on our website.

Broadly, Sarah's responsibilities as our Business Operations Support Manager are to ensure that the Montour Trail Council's business operations are managed and carried out effectively, especially as we transition in early 2022 to a new software system that will replace our legacy membership database and provide opportunities beyond what our current system can do. In her role she will be interacting and working with a number of our volunteers who work on the important, but mostly behind-the-scenes membership, donation and financial processes of the MTC.

Sarah is still learning the ropes of the organization and how it "ticks", of course, with help from many of you, most notably Phyllis McChesney, who has been instrumental in helping Sarah come up to speed. Phyllis, as many of you know, has "almost single-handedly" been the glue that has kept the MTC running for well over a decade, with ever-increasing workloads. It is our hope that having Sarah join us will ease some volunteer workload and enhance the coordination necessary to keep our business operations running smoothly. It is important for all of us to recognize that even with the part-time hours that Sarah's position provides, our operations committee projects that over 95% of MTC's day-to-day work will still be carried out by volunteers.

As the Montour Trail Council moves to a new phase in its development, we would like to publicly recognize and extend gratitude to Phyllis McChesney for her myriad contributions to the council and the trail.

Phyllis brought to the Montour Trail Council her experience managing an office staff of a nonprofit organization, says Ned Williams, past-president and current director of the MTC who's been involved with the trail since 1999, and has worked with Phyllis for years.

Montour Railroad History Room and Layout by Bryan Seip

The Montour Railroad Historical Society operates and maintains the Montour History Room in the Venetia Community Center. Artifacts collected from the Montour right-of-way, memorabilia, pictures, and displays are presented to educate the public about the history of the Montour Trail's namesake and original builder, the Montour Railroad.

Also on site, the DARE Model Railroad Club has built an operating HO scale model depicting the Montour Railroad. The club also runs seven other model layouts in O, HO, G and American Flyer scales.



p.m. and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to Noon.

MRHS is also responsible for the installation of over 30 interpretive signs along the Montour Trail, depicting the historical significance of many locations. More signs are planned and will be installed in the future.

The Venetia Community Center is located at 800 Venetia Road, Venetia, PA 15367. The History Room and Club layouts are open on Wednesdays from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00

The council opened its office in Bridgeville in 2001, and Phyllis got involved in its day-to-day activities as a very committed volunteer, staffing the office and answering phone calls, taking care of the mail, replying to inquiries as they came in, paying bills and handling the finances, and assuming other administrative tasks such as keeping track of memberships and renewals.

Now, the Trail Council has committees that are responsible for carrying out the work of the trail, but Phyllis was involved in much of this work prior to that, Williams says. She has also worked with local municipalities, police and other agencies and services, elected officials, and various county and state representatives, he says.

"She has gained a great deal of knowledge about the trail because she had to answer hundreds and hundreds of questions all the time for many years," says Williams.

Phyllis also was elected to the MTC board of directors and served non-consecutive terms as board secretary; he notes.

"On an annual basis, she has put in far more hours than any other volunteer," Williams says. "She's really put in a tremendous amount of hours into the Montour, a tremendous amount of effort and energy into the trail, too."

He adds, "... She has really given selflessly of her time and energy and did the best job that could possibly be done in face of the increasing complexity and scope of the trail."

With the membership software migration, our search for new office space (and probable move), and ongoing enhancements to our financial processes with our new finance committee leadership, we have a lot of early 2022 operational challenges, and we'll need all the assistance/understanding we can muster during these transitions to be successful.

MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

A Brief History of the Montour Railroad

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The following is a brief history of the original builder and namesake of the trail's right-of-way, the Montour Railroad.

The Montour Railroad Company was organized on September 10, 1877, to construct and operate a railroad from the banks of the Ohio River in Coraopolis about five miles to Guy's Mills. The Imperial Coal Company and its officers owned all the Montour's capital stock.

Imperial Coal's first mine was the Dickson Mine, located at Cliff Mine station, with shipments commencing in June 1879. The railroad was then extended to Imperial and beyond to the Partridge Mine in Santiago. Shop facilities were built at Imperial to service the locomotives.

In October 1879, a connection was established in Coraopolis with the newly opened Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad which supplied a transfer to the Pittsburgh market. Passenger and mail service was started along the Montour main line.

The Pittsburgh Coal Company was formed in 1899 for the purpose of acquiring many of the independent coal companies in the area. These acquisitions included the Imperial Coal Company and its subsidiary, the Montour Railroad. Pittsburgh Coal built a large yard and shop facility along Montour Run in Coraopolis in 1900 and the small shops at Imperial were subsequently abandoned.

By 1913, the coal company had determined that additional coal mines were needed to supply its customers and an extension of the Montour Railroad was built, reaching West Mifflin in 1914. New mines were opened along the route and interchange points were established with five major railroads. With additional and heavier trains, more powerful steam locomotives were purchased to handle the increased traffic.

Several branches were constructed to reach new coal mines. The Library Branch reached Montour Mine #10 during 1918 and ten years later was extended to meet the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in Snowden. The Muse Branch was built in 1921 to service National Mine #3. The Midland Spur ran to Morris Mine in 1922 and was later extended to Westland in 1928. During the 1920's, several realignment projects were undertaken to improve the original railroad main line section, eliminating several sharp curves and other problem areas.

Declining ridership and aging equipment needing replacement forced a business decision to end passenger service in 1927.



The first locomotive on the Montour Railroad was lettered "Cliff Mine". AlcoAlco Historic Photos.

Pittsburgh Coal built the large Champion Preparation Plant on the Allegheny/Washington County border in 1928. Raw mine coal was sent to Champion for cleaning, sorting, and sizing before shipment to its final consumers. Three or four Montour crews worked shifts at Champion and nearby Boggs Yard seven days a week to keep the coal flowing.

The Montour prospered during the 1930's and '40's, reaching its peak during World War II. In 1946, the Pittsburgh Coal Company merged with Consolidated Coal and sold the Montour Railroad operation to the Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie railroads as equal partners. Diesel power came to the Montour in 1950 and all steam locomotives were retired by 1953.

During the 1970's, the coal market was declining, and Montour revenues fell. The Pennsylvania Railroad's successor, Conrail, sold its half share of the Montour to the P&LE in 1976.

Consolidating operations to stay solvent, the P&LE began abandonment of several sections of the Montour in the mid-1970's. The east end of the railroad was severed at Mifflin Junction and Longview, eliminating interchanges with two railroads. Another section from Thompsonville Siding in Peters Township to Brightwood in Bethel Park, including the Library Branch and its idled Montour #10 mine, was abandoned in 1980.

During the summer of 1980, Montour Mine #4 in Peters Township suffered a catastrophic failure of a barrier along one boundary of the mine which flooded the mine. Pittsburgh Consolidated Coal sealed #4, never to be re-opened. Ten miles of track between Mine #4 and Gilmore Junction, including the Muse Branch, were officially abandoned in 1982.

Coal shipments from the Westland Mine and operation of the Champion Preparation Plant both ceased in 1983 and the railroad was idled. The final Montour train crew was called on duty November 1, 1984, to remove remaining cars and equipment from the Montour Junction shops and yard.

The final chapter of the Montour Railroad came in 1985 when the remaining 26 miles from Montour Junction to Westland were petitioned for abandonment. The Interstate Commerce Commission officially approved the abandonment of the Montour Railroad effective May 22, 1986, ending over a century of operation.

You can contact the Montour Railroad Historical Society through Facebook by searching for the Montour Railroad Historical Society. There are currently 425 members from across the country. There is a wealth of information about the Montour Railroad at this location and you can pose questions of its membership, from whom you are sure to get an answer. There is also much information at <http://www.montourrr.com>

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Welcome New Members

The Montour Trail Council welcomes these new members and thanks them for their support. We would also like to thank all our members who have recently renewed their membership and to remind all that a growing membership is one of the criteria foundations look for when we apply for grants. Not all new members have been entered as of print deadline and will be listed in the next issue of the newsletter.

New Members

Barry & Susan L.	Malori Asman
Maureen & James T.	Beynon
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Jonathan	Bilec
Glenn	Blahut
Michael	Bompiani
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John	Brocks
Mark H.	Browell
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	Heather Wechter
	Weirick
	Shelby Wherry

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Vida	Knavish
Kelli	Komer
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Larry	Kutzer
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The Neil Foundation	Lehnert
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Robert	Purdy
Steve Ross & Joseph & Barbara	Shelley Scherer
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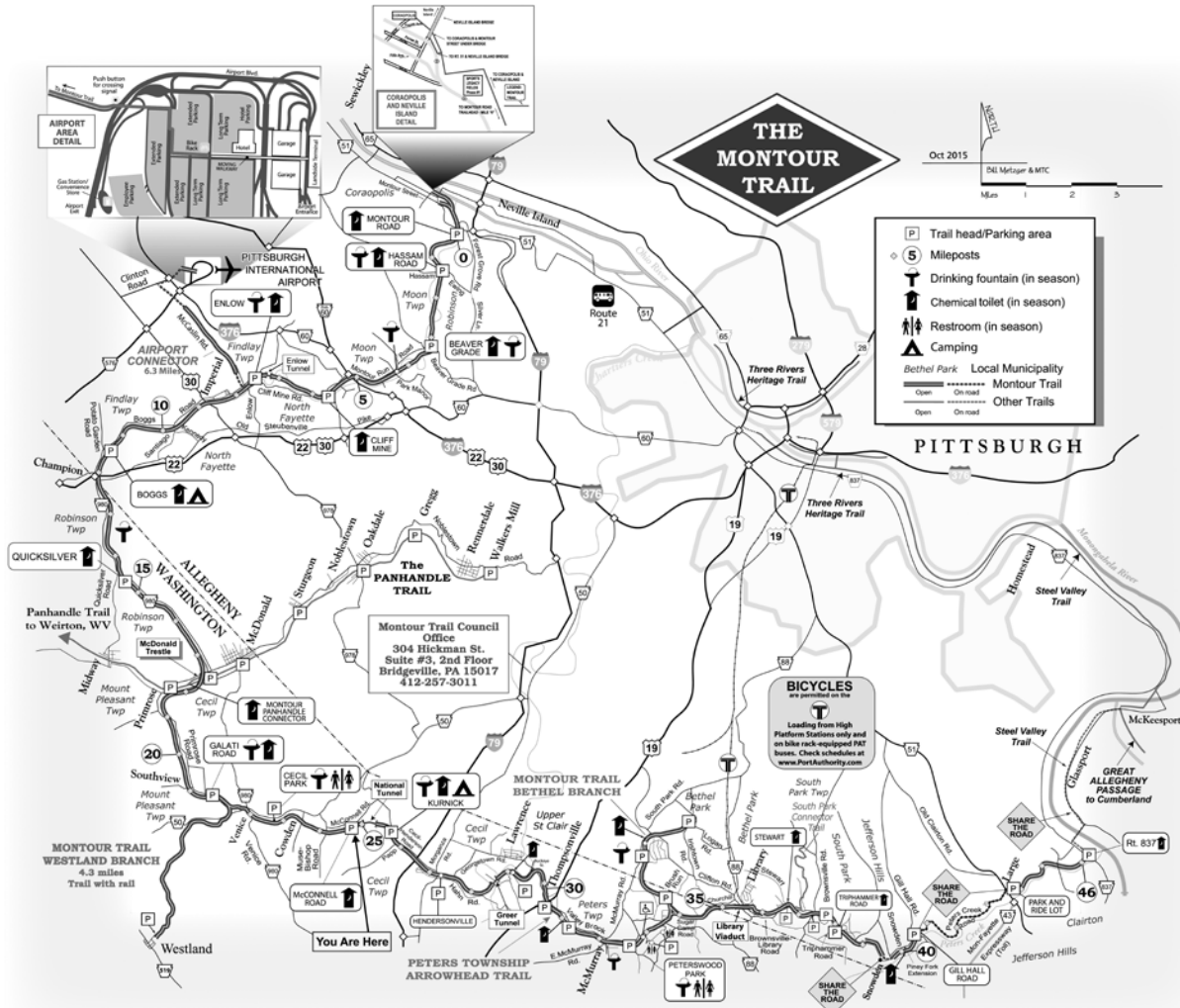


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