



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

# MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Volume 23 Issue 2

March-April 2012

## The Great Westland Coupler Caper Story and photos by Dennis Sims



Over the winter, members of the Montour Railroad Historical Society have been walking along the Westland right-of-way looking for artifacts from the railroad's days of operation. This is what the group has come to call Mon-touring. One of these Mon-tours discovered a coupler lying at the base of a fill. Bryan Seip, the MRHS President organized a work party to go and recover it. Dennis Sims asked a project manager for The Lane Construction Corporation if they could assist by lifting the thing up to the level where loading on to a truck would be easier. Lane Construction is the contractor doing the earth work for the new railroad.

move it to a safe location. It was a last minute request.

So, several members met up on a cold, snowy and blustery March afternoon to get it. Upon arrival at its last known location, it was nowhere to be found. Lane had worked in the area recently and we wondered- did they bury it, or did somebody decide to use it for beer money, or did Lane oblige and



*Carter Roth, Bryan Seip and Ned Williams admire their find.*

The group continued its tour down to the future yard area, and eventually past the construction office trailers to get back on the road. Lo and behold there it was; a yellow marker pointing to it next to a construction trailer (upper left). With strong backs, it was lifted in to the back of Carter Roth's truck and then transported safely to the X-1 (above right). Another Mon-tour was scheduled for St. Pats Day weekend, so look for a report in the next newsletter on what they find.

Thanks to Charlie Ames from Lane for making the recovery of the MTR artifact simpler. Now, if we can just figure out which coal hopper it came from.

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Visit the Montour Trail Web  
Site at:

[www.montourtrail.org](http://www.montourtrail.org)

To Converse, join the Yahoo  
Group at:

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/  
Montour-Trail/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Montour-Trail/)



## The Burgh 10K/5K Reaches an Even Dozen

This year marks the 12<sup>th</sup> Burgh 10K and 5K Run and 2 Mile Family Fun Walk and the event returns to its more familiar April date. As always, the event takes place at Cecil Park and benefits the Montour Trail as well as parks and recreation in Cecil and South Fayette Townships and Bridgeville Borough. The event has raised over \$200,00 during its 11 year history. The date for this year's event is Sunday, April 22 with the first race, the 5K, starting at 9:15

a.m. followed by the 10K at 10:00 a.m. Runners can participate in both events if they wish. For a more leisurely way of supporting these organizations, you can participate in the 2 mile family walk. All events are out and back from Cecil Park. Following the event, join everyone for great food and drink for which the event has become famous. For more information and to register for the event and to have a chance for a 32 inch LCD TV from Bridgeville Appliance go to:  
[www.montourtrail.org/events/displayevent.asp?id=1](http://www.montourtrail.org/events/displayevent.asp?id=1)



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## The Prez Sez

Montour Trail's connector to the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport opened wide on the first day of Spring. It's a whole new season now, in so many ways, and we're excited to have you join us in watching it bloom. The news of the opening event itself will be in the next newsletter. But the story of what the connector represents to the people of this region is much greater than can be told in a single event.

It starts with the vision of a fairly level pathway leading from Pittsburgh to the nation's capital, enabling motor-free travel through some of the most beautiful areas of this part of the country. Seventeen years ago the Allegheny Trail Alliance was formed to bring this vision into reality. The Montour Trail Council was invited to join, because Montour was the one who could deliver the connection to the airport, a key piece of the original vision.

That was a real leap of faith, because nearly the whole length of the Montour would have to be finished for it to serve as a viable connection from the airport to what would later become known as the Great Allegheny Passage. So ATA really waded in and provided significant financial and technical assistance, which enabled Montour to aggressively start constructing some lengthy and difficult sections of trail. Now, after many years of diligent effort, we are down to just a few structures and a few sections of trail which remain yet to complete.

Getting official approval to get a connecting trail into the airport proper was not easy with the security concerns that loom large these days. Much work was done by Montour and by bicycle travel advocates, which slowly wore down resistance and gained increasing goodwill. The six-mile route finally settled upon is partially on public roads, but mostly on airport roads closed to the public, on which we have been granted permission to travel as guests. This has only happened with the active cooperation of Allegheny County Regional Asset District (ARAD) which provided the funding and special thanks to the Pittsburgh International Airport Authority for their help. Trail users will need to exhibit ongoing cooperation by staying on the designated path.

We well recognize that the opening of the Airport Connector increases the urgency for Montour to complete its remaining missing bridges and trail sections. Your Board of Directors continues to work closely with its Engineering and Construction Committee to set itself anew to the work of closing these gaps in the Montour Trail system. They've really stepped up, and deserve your support.

Working together, what we've done is to visibly increase the quality of life for those of us living in the region. Pittsburgh can now take its place among big cities that have a direct connection between their airport and regional trail system, and that's a pretty big deal. The possibility to take a healthy, outdoor car-free vacation in Southwestern Pennsylvania is now prominently on the table for anyone in this country or around the world. We'll soon see them here in greater numbers, and we couldn't be more pleased to have the welcome mat out and freshly swept. Montour is grateful to all who brought this about, and honored to have become a focal point of an international attraction.

*Ned Williams*

## Parking Advisory

Note: Due to the construction at Hendersonville, we are asking trail users to not park in the east parking lot behind the company store. Please use the parking lot at Hendersonville Park next to the ballfield and the McPherson picnic shelter.

## 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 Ned at 724-225-9856 for more information or to get on the agenda.

### Cecil Friends:

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](mailto:densimwx@comcast.net)

### Airport Area Friends:

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, Coraopolis, PA 15108. Anyone from the Airport Area is encouraged to attend. Contact Phyllis McChesney at 412 264-6303 for more information. A "work party" is held the second Saturday of the month and more are scheduled when working on special projects. Please call 412 262-3748 to lend a hand.

### Bethel Park Friends:

Friends of the Trail meeting, every first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Bethel Park Municipal Building 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 Bob O'Connell at 412-833-6259 for location and information.

### South Hills Friends:

Meeting second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at South Park Township Community Room, located behind the Township Building at 2675 Brownsville Road, South Park, 15129. Work and cleanup parties scheduled and advertised as needed. For more information, contact David Oyler at 412-831-9288, [davidoyler@verizon.net](mailto:davidoyler@verizon.net), or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, [mckeownp@comcast.net](mailto:mckeownp@comcast.net)

### Fort Cherry Friends:

Friends of the Trail Meeting, second Wednesday of the month at McDonald Borough Building, Council chambers at 7:00 p.m. Work and cleanup parties, scheduled as needed. For more information, contact Ray Johnston at 724-356-2621.

### Peters Township Friends:

Friends of the Trail Meeting, first non-holiday Monday of the month at Peters Township Parks and Recreation Center at 7:00 p.m. For more information on work and cleanup parties, please contact Jim Robbins at 724-941-6132, or for monthly meetings, Mark Imgrund at 724-941-6351 or by e-mail at [markimgrund@comcast.net](mailto:markimgrund@comcast.net).

### The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

The newest Friends group. For more information send email to [mrhs@montourrr.com](mailto:mrhs@montourrr.com).

## Checking the Mileage



Dave Wright checks the placement of mile marker 1 on the Airport Connector which just had its official opening on March 20. (Photo by Tim Killmeyer)

## The JR Taylor Memorial Bridge 5K Race and Walk, the Lucky 7



*A scene from last year's run.*

The Friends of the Montour Trail in Bethel Park have announced that they are holding their 7<sup>th</sup> annual JR Taylor Memorial Bridge 5K Race/Walk on Saturday June 2, 2012. The race will start on the Bethel Branch of the Montour Trail near the Washington Elementary School on Clifton Road behind Al's Café. Parking is available in the rear parking lot of Al's Café next to the school. This year the finish line will be set to highlight the recently completed JR Taylor Memorial Bridge across Clifton Road. As in prior years, approximately 300 runners and walkers are expected to participate in the event. Applications are available at the trail heads and online at [www.runhigh.com](http://www.runhigh.com). The fee is \$18 through May 18 and \$20 thereafter. All participants registered by May 18 will be guaranteed a fine running t-shirt. The proceeds from the race will be used by the Friends to maintain and upgrade the trail and promote the continuing extension of the trail in the community and neighboring communities. Plan to attend and help us celebrate the completion of the bridge on National Trail day, June 2.



## A Construction Update Pictorial (photos by Dennis Sims and Bryan Seip)



October looking east across Morganza Road



March looking east across Morganza Road.



Southview Road Bridge just before removal



March looking at the Southview Road Bridge



Bebout Road before removal.



Just after the steel was placed.





October looking west across Georgetown Road



March looking west across Georgetown Road



Looking west at George Jct at Southview in October



March looking west at George Jct.



October looking east at Johnston Road



March looking east at Johnston Road

## MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

**Westland Branch: In the Beginning (Bob Ciminel ©2012)**

Once again our continuing story of the Montour Railroad takes us back to the Westland Branch. Thanks to a serendipitous encounter between Gene P. Schaeffer, former Montour dispatcher and unofficial official photographer, and Ms. Jean Ferris, current owner of the Hutchinson Farm, through which the new Westland Branch was built in 1927. Ms. Ferris has a collection of photographs taken by Mrs. Esther (Hettie) Cowden Hutchinson, wife of John S. Hutchinson, that she shared with Gene in the hope that today's generation could learn about the early history of the Westland Branch, which is currently being rebuilt by natural gas producer Mark West LLC.

The Westland Branch had an inauspicious beginning as the Midland Spur. In 1922, the Montour Railroad, by then a subsidiary of the huge Pittsburgh Coal Company, installed a switch on its main track near Southview and created Gilmore Junction to service the Gilmore Coal Company's Morris mine on the other side of Route 50 (Millers Run Road).

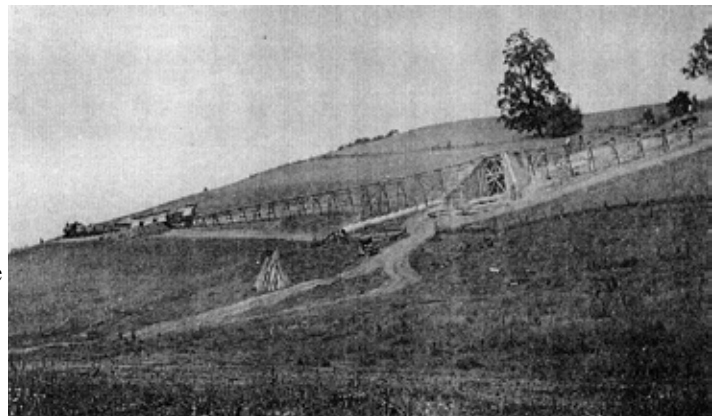
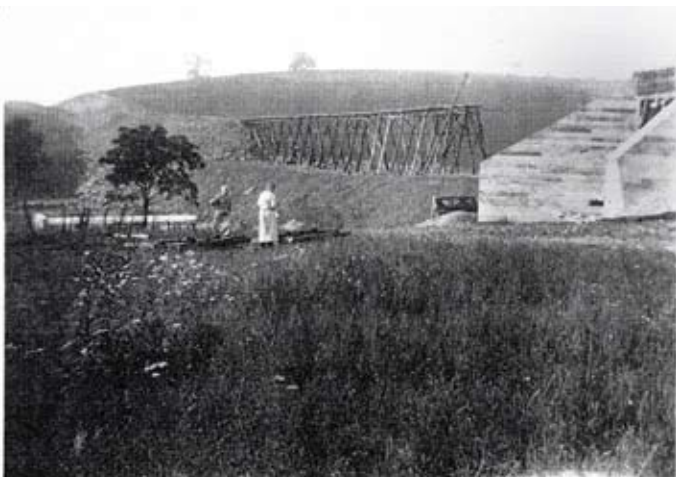
By 1927, Pittsburgh Coal had driven the face and butt entries of its Midland No. 1 and 2 mines at Palanka, located on the east bank of Plum Creek above Houston, 2.5 miles northwest to the Westland Dome, and opened the new Midland No. 3 mine on the west side of Route 519. The new Westland Branch would allow the coal company to ship coal on its own railroad, the Montour, and stop shipping on the Pennsylvania Railroad's Palanka and Westland Branches. As the Montour began extending the Midland Spur to Westland, its passage through the Hutchinson farm was documented by Mrs. Hutchinson with her fixed-focus box camera, in all probability a Kodak Autographic Junior built between 1914 and 1927.



These are just a few of the photos taken by Hettie, but exemplify her more than passing interest in the goings-on at her farm. The first photo (left) shows a John Casey Construction Company steam shovel digging a cut and filling a train of side-dump cars pulled by a pair of saddle tank locomotives.

After the train of side-dump cars was loaded, it was hauled to the Hutchinson farm where it was used to create a high fill to keep the grade as level as possible. Note the flimsy looking temporary trestle used for the dump train. The timber was left in place and buried under the fill. (Below)

Esther (Hettie) Cowden Hutchinson was born on February 16, 1865 and passed on September 12, 1952 at age 87, and probably watched thousands of tons of coal moving on the branch she photographed in 1927. This photograph, (below) taken in August, 21, 1927, shows Hettie and possibly a Ms. Blanche Cummins Prevost observing the construction trestle and new concrete abutments.



The entire collection of Hettie's photographs will soon be accessible on the [montourrr.com](http://montourrr.com) web site thanks to Ms. Ferris, Gene Schaeffer, and Ken Caine. For readers who use Facebook, there is a Facebook group on the Montour Railroad that contains many photographs and other historical information. The group is growing and new content is added almost every day.

*Bob Ciminel is the founder of the Montour Railroad Yahoo group [http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour\\_rr/](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/) There are currently 302 members from across the country. You are encouraged to join. 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.*



## 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.*

### New Members

Shirley Hinchey  
Bill Madden  
Neal Mortensen  
Rich Pastors  
Mark Place  
Janet Quigg  
Ann Winkelstein

### Benefactors

Jack Peth  
Melissa Polito - In Honor of her Father , John Miller

### Leaders

Shelly & Don Fink  
Daniel W. McKenna  
Mark J. Smith

Donation received in memory of George Gerben made by :  
William & Jean Supan

## Cecil Friends of the Montour Trail



The Cecil Friends of the Montour Trail will once again present the Tails for Trails 5K fun dog walk on the first Saturday in June. June 2 also celebrates National Trails Day, a day to get out and celebrate the many trails that have been constructed across the Nation. The theme for this year's event is America's largest Trailgating Party.

Our part of this party begins at 8:30 a.m. at the Kurnick (National) Trailhead on Cecil Henderson Road. The walk barks-off at 9:00 a.m. The out-and-back walk takes the participants through the National Tunnel, which will have it permanent lighting installed by the event. Thanks to the Washington County Tourism Promotion Agency and proceeds from the Dog Walk for footing the cost of this badly needed improvement.

When the walkers return to the start there will be refreshments, including the world famous Frank Ludwin hot dogs charbroiled to perfection. We expect to have several vendors on hand to discuss canine related items and participants can take part in a Chinese Auction that promises to have lots of interesting items. Proceeds fund improvements to the National Tunnel and other portions of the Cecil Section of the Montour Trail.

You can register for the event by picking up a registration form that are available on the trail and at select locations around Cecil Twp. Registration forms are also available on line at:  
[www.montourtrail.org/events/displayevent.asp?id=2](http://www.montourtrail.org/events/displayevent.asp?id=2)

## I want to help complete the Montour Trail!

### I want to join the Montour Trail Council at this level:

<input type="checkbox"/> Student/Senior	\$15
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$35
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Leader's Circle	\$500+

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