



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

# MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Volume 27 Issue 2

March-April 2016

## The National Tunnel Reopens by Dennis Sims

The National Tunnel reopened on March 9 after a nearly 3-month closure to protect it from the elements. The tunnel is very drippy and the cold air flowing through the tunnel would cause a considerable buildup of ice, making transit of the tunnel nearly impossible and dangerous, as well as damaging to the structure. In December 2015 volunteers constructed and installed doors to block the flow of air through the tunnel (See last month's trail letter for more info on the experiment).

During the closure, temperature sensors were placed in the tunnel about 150 feet from each portal to monitor the air temperature. An infrared thermometer was used on occasion to check surface temperatures of the floor and tunnel liner.

The final result showed the experiment was an overwhelming success. The temperature held steady between 45° and 48° during the closure on both sensors and there was no ice formation. Granted, this winter was not nearly as cold as the past two winters, but there were several cold spells that would have contributed to considerable ice build-up.

There are plans to repeat this procedure next winter, but with a doorway that will retain the air temperature in the tunnel and allow trail users to transit the tunnel.



Volunteers tidy up at the west portal after removing the door. A John Kozak Photo.

## Trail Construction along Piney Fork Road by Dave Oyler

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Trail users riding along Piney Fork Road in South Park Township (MP39.1 to MP39.5) may have noticed an unused tree-covered bench of land beside the road, looking like an ideal



Volunteer Rick Blum taking down a large cherry tree with help from Mark Blum and the E45 excavator.

candidate for conversion to an off-road trail. Montour Trail volunteers have long noted and been working to add that bench, a section of abandoned right of way of the Peters Creek Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad, into the Montour Trail. The right of way was abandoned by the early 1960's and eventually became South Park Township property. In 2014 after several years of work by the Montour Trail Council, the property was donated to the MTC by the Township. Even before the deed for the property, including a parcel purchased by the MTC from a local real estate developer was recorded, the MTC applied for a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for construction of the trail and a parking area. A grant was awarded in late 2014 and the MTC was officially notified of the grant contract in a letter in late September 2015.

Almost immediately volunteers began to clear the trees and brush from the right of way, the first step in actual trail construction. The first tree clearing efforts began on October 6, 2015. Work began in earnest on October 31 when 22 volunteers worked a total of 74 hours over nearly 1,000 feet of the right of way. Through the end of 2015, volunteers had donated 133 hours, worth \$2,800 toward the MTC's required match for a portion of the grant, and cleared or partly cleared over 1,200 feet of the 2,100 foot trail right of way. **continues on Page 4**

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

or

<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Montour-Trail/info> or



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## The Prez Sez - An Early Spring Start

Cold weather has wound down surprisingly quickly, bringing on those warmer days. Again, we discover there is no better place to go out and enjoy an early Spring than on the Montour Trail.

This winter was particularly mild inside the National Tunnel in Cecil, which thanks to its wooden enclosures never got below 45°. For the first time in its 102-year history, there was no ice in the tunnel at all. Upon forecast guidance from Montour meteorologist (and your newsletter editor) Dennis Sims, a crew of volunteers took down the panels and re-opened the tunnel on March 9, the earliest it has been open and ice-free since the trail's beginning. We couldn't be happier to give you all an extra month and a half in which to come out and play. An early Spring to remember, for sure!

This will be the first full season for trail users to enjoy sailing high above the roads at Valley Brook and Venice, as both of these new trail bridges opened late last fall. The central section of Montour's main line through Washington County is now completely finished. Elimination of the road crossings offers a much higher quality of trail experience, which will bring a lot more people out to enjoy. Everyone will be walking or running longer, riding further, and exploring sections they had not tried before. We are all very, very fortunate that so many stars were aligned to enable these structures to get put into place for all of us to use. And of course the signature Library Viaduct is open for you as well, offering a spectacular crossing over Route 88, Piney Fork Creek, and the T line. We hope to be able to report in a couple of months that trail construction of the next section, leading to Pleasant Street, has commenced. When it gets done later this year, there will be a big ribbon cutting for both the Viaduct and trail. Stay tuned.

Coming up in June is a trailside membership drive, spearheaded by Dave Borrebach and Pat Friedsam of the Membership Committee. We want to make it easy for anyone to become a part of it all, with a Montour membership. And for those with just a little bit of time, volunteering for the trail can yield a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment unmatched elsewhere. So, tell your friends to be talking with the membership folks who will be set up at various trailheads in the early summer.

With early warm days and new things to see, the trail has already seen heavy use throughout. Early work sessions have taken care of spring cleanup and smoothing of the surface, but there's always lots to do, so consider helping out. Call one of the Friends of the Trail groups listed on the next page, or call or email the trail office. We have a pretty active Facebook presence, too, so it's easy for anyone to get in touch.

The spring race, now the National Tunnel 10K and 5K, will take place on Sunday, April 24 in Cecil Park. We plan to offer pretty much the same high quality trail race that has drawn thousands of runners over many years. The Trail Council wishes to sincerely thank Frank, Tom, and Dan Daily of Burgh's Pizza and Wings, and their associates and employees, for creating this event and then managing it for an astounding fifteen year run. Their hard work and exceptional generosity have been of great benefit to both the Montour Trail and to the running community, and we are happy to be able to carry the race into the future, in honor of what the Daily brothers have accomplished.

The 0.8-mile extension of the Montour Trail into Coraopolis will be going into construction shortly. First up, to be built by a contractor, is the farthest section, ending the trail right at (of all places) Montour Street. Much of the rest is hoped to be built by volunteers, so you will be hearing lots more about it soon. Also this year, our newest trailside camping facility should be finished. It's located just inside Jefferson Hills Boro, near Snowden Road. And this is just the beginning. It's amazing what can happen, when you get off to an early start. Let's all enjoy the fruitful season ahead!

**Ned Williams**

The Montour Trail Council is an all-volunteer organization founded in 1989 to convert the abandoned Montour Railroad right of way and the abandoned Peters Creek Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad into a 55 mile recreational trail for non-motorized activity regardless of physical ability or financial wherewithal.

## 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 Phyllis McChesney at 412-264-6303 for more information. Numerous Saturday "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 7:00 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 20.7 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 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@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 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: (MP 35.4 to 46.3)

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, or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, mckeownp@comcast.net

### The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

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

## J. R. Taylor 5K returns to Bethel Park

After a one-year break, the J. R. Taylor Memorial 5K race and 2-mile walk will return to the Montour Trail in Bethel Park, starting at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 4.

This speedy run starts just south of the J. R. Taylor Bridge, turns around before the ramp to Brush Run Road in Peters, and then crosses the bridge to the finish. Walkers will go in the other direction, enjoying the shaded northernmost mile to Logan Road and then returning to the start. Parking is available at Washington Elementary School off Clifton Road or in the adjacent Al's Cafe parking lot.

Registration is just \$20 by mail (plus a \$2.50 processing fee if registering online) until May 24. Sign up through the events calendar on the Montour Trail website or at [runsignup.com](http://runsignup.com).

## Stay tuned for results!

	<p><b>Montour Trail Council User Survey 2016</b></p> <p>Web survey powered by SurveyMonkey.com. Create your own online survey now with SurveyMonkey's expert certified FREE templates.</p> <p><a href="http://SURVEYMONKEY.COM">SURVEYMONKEY.COM</a></p>
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Over 1000 Montour Trail users have participated to date in the 2016 Montour Trail survey, providing valuable data that we'll use to guide the annual planning process. We're currently analyzing results, and will roll them out to the MTC Board and Friends groups in the late April and early May. We'll summarize key results in the next newsletter.

A question was asked recently regarding how many active members are there in the Montour Trail Council. The upcoming membership drive intends on increasing this number.

Current Active Members in the Montour Trail Council:

# 1190



## Trail Construction continues from page 1

This February, volunteers began work on an access ramp to the railroad bench (which is blocked at both ends) for construction vehicles and on February 20, 24 volunteers donated 112 hours of their time to the clearing effort. The accompanying photos show 17 of the volunteers on a pizza break during the February work party and volunteers directing the fall of a large cherry tree with a little help from a small excavator. On February 18 through 20, volunteer Mark Blum donated the use of his mini excavator to put in the rock construction entrance and help with tree and stump removal.

Through March 3, volunteers have donated 337 hours which is worth \$7,200, and 19 hours of equipment time worth \$665, and have nearly completed cutting down the trees and brush over 1,600 feet of the right of way.

The next planned steps are a March work party to begin chipping the tree branches and logs not suitable for firewood to create room for further work. Later work parties will begin removing stumps and railroad ties and surveys will be performed to allow trail design.

The MTC is currently preparing a Request for Proposals for an engineering firm to design the trail bridge to be constructed over Piney Fork Creek, design retaining walls and drainage structures, design the trail and to prepare applications for construction approvals from South Park Township, DEP and the Allegheny County Conservation District. The engineering firm will also be responsible for preparing construction bid packages. Although the MTC hopes to have volunteers perform much of the trail construction, some work will require contractors.

The MTC hopes to have the trail design, permits and bid packages ready to begin construction in the spring of 2017, although the two trail construction projects between the Library Viaduct and Stewart Road, also in South Park Township, have priority and may necessitate the postponement of the Piney Fork work.



*Volunteers taking a pizza break during the February 20 work party. From left to right kneeling are Eric Kosmach, Tony Knaus, Keith Simpson, Lew Wright, Pete Merther (in Trail Volunteer shirt), and at far right, Dennis Pfeiffer. Middle row kneeling, left to right, Wesley Attwood and Gary Molinaro. Standing left to right, Al Sammel, Dave Maxwell, Paul Everson, Bruce O'Neill, Christie O'Neill, Joe Veltri, Ken Lesk, Dave Boger and Tom George (sitting). Not shown in the photo, Guy Brown, Michael Brown, Bruce Barron, Ed Bickar, Mark Blum (operating the E45 excavator), Ned Williams (directing traffic) and photographer Dave Oyler.*

## Getting Acquainted with Montour Run

by Bill Macek, Montour Run Watershed Association



Montour Trail users have a variety of natural and man-made features to enjoy as they travel its 46 miles of mainline trail, such as railroad tunnels, bridges and breathtaking viaducts. Not to be outdone, Montour Run offers a tranquil backdrop to the lower 10.5 miles of the trail nearest Milepost 0. Some of its history and characteristics may surprise you.

What Montour Run is NOT, is an urbanized, chemical-and-sewage-tainted stream. On the contrary, it is populated, through much of its course, with a rich variety of fish and wild life including crayfish and beneficial insect larvae. Trout stocked by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and the Forest Grove Sportsmen Association provide countless hours of fishing opportunities from Coraopolis to MP 5. Game fish species include rainbow and brown trout, smallmouth bass and walleye. Other recreational opportunities in Montour Run include swimming and hiking along its banks.

Montour Run was not always so alive. Its headwater areas in Findlay and North Fayette Townships experienced substantial underground and surface coal mining beginning in the late 1800's. The underground mines, unfortunately, filled with water in the years after mining ceased. This abandoned mine drainage (AMD), tainted with iron and aluminum from the coal seam, began to escape to the surface and drain into Montour Run tributaries. Acidity and metal sedimentation created conditions in which small invertebrates and minnows could not thrive and become food for larger species.

The Montour Run Watershed Association (MRWA) was incorporated in the year 2000 as a 501(c)(3) organization, in order to help restore the health of the stream. Its purpose is to improve water quality within the 36-square-mile **continues on page 5**

## Photo Contest Big News!

The next MTC bi-monthly photo contest will be held specifically to find a quality Montour Trail photograph to grace the cover of the 2016 edition of the Montour Trail Map and Guide brochure. In addition to the usual prize of thousands of pennies worth of Montour Trail paraphernalia, the winner will also receive a year's free membership to the Montour Trail Council as well as bragging rights of having you get the photo credit on the over 8000 brochures produced with your trail image on the cover!

Here are the details:

- Submit your photo in the usual fashion by going to the Montour Trail homepage and clicking the Enter The Contest link.
- It would be best (but not "entirely" necessary) that the image is in a vertical format and can be cropped to the cover size of 1050 x 2550 pixels (remember: the cover will be 3.5" wide x 8.5" high).
- The picture should be a minimum 2.6 megabyte file size, but you should submit the image in the largest file size available. If your email program suggests that it can reduce the size of your photo, decline the suggestion.
- The trail itself MUST be included in the image.
- Extra credit will be given for pictures with people using the trail. If bicyclists are shown, they must be wearing helmets.
- For our own purposes, please include where the picture was taken.
- Any year, any season. Deadline is April 17.

To enter your photograph go to [www.montourtrail.org](http://www.montourtrail.org)



## Getting Acquainted continued from page 4

watershed that encompasses parts of Findlay, North Fayette, Moon and Robinson Townships, along with Coraopolis Borough. Pittsburgh International Airport property comprises nearly one-third of the watershed. What is a watershed? It is an area of land where all of the water that drains from it goes to the same place. In this case, the "place" is Montour Run.

MRWA has taken significant strides toward improving the water quality of the watershed through stream bank stabilization and construction of four passive AMD treatment systems. These systems are generally located in the upper reaches of the watershed in Findlay Township, two of which are on Pittsburgh International Airport property. A fifth project to be located in North Fayette township is in the works near MP 6.2.

MRWA's AMD projects treat affected water by exposing it to direct contact with limestone and other alkaline materials, and through aeration. One of our projects increases aeration through the use of a trompe, which is a water-powered air compressor, commonly used before the advent of the electric-powered compressor. Over \$1 million in grant funding has been raised for these projects, with the result that nearly 10 miles of stream have seen water quality improvement. The Pittsburgh International Airport's switch in the type of plane de-icing compound it uses was a critical step in reducing toxic ammonia levels in the stream. The airport also invested in new de-icing pads to limit drainage of the reformulated de-icing fluid into McClaren's Run, a major tributary entering Montour Run at MP 5.1.

The Montour Run Watershed Association welcomes new members to help protect Montour Run. We take a non-political, common-sense approach to finding effective solutions to water quality problems. We get results. Please visit our website at [www.MRWA.INFO](http://www.MRWA.INFO) for a membership application form. Contributions are tax deductible in accordance with the Internal Revenue Code.

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## This Month's Winner (left) is:

**Trail Ecstasy by Chuck Husa  
Taken between Peters and Cecil  
on February 20, 2016**

## MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

**Cliff Mine / Dickson Mine****By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society**

The Imperial Coal Company opened their first coal mine in June 1879, shipping the coal on its newly built company railroad, the Montour Railroad. The Montour carried the coal to a barge loading facility located seven miles away on the Ohio River in Coraopolis. After a connection was made in Coraopolis with the newly constructed Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad later that year, outbound coal shipments were handled by the P&LE.

The history of that first mine and its various names is a bit confusing. The mine was located near the village of Guy's Mills at Cliff Mine station on the railroad (Trail mile 6). The mine had two entrances, one called Cliff at the village of Beechcliff and the other a short distance to the west was called Dickson. At its start-up in 1878, the mine was called Cliff Mine. By 1881, it was referred to as Beechcliff Mine, after the local village. Around 1890, it was back to Cliff Mine, but by 1898, Beechcliff was again in vogue.

In 1899, the Pittsburgh Coal Company was formed for the purpose of buying and consolidating about 75 coal mining companies located in southwestern Pennsylvania. The Imperial Coal Company was one of the properties acquired, including its subsidiary company, the Montour Railroad. At this time, the mine became known as the Dickson Mine, named after the second entrance way where the coal was sent out of the mine and down an inclined plane to the tippie. This name remained for the final 31 years of operation.



*Dickson Mine tippie looking west toward Imperial, circa 1915, MP6. Montour Run flows along the left side of the tracks. Photo from Pennsylvania State Archives, courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer.*

abutted the Carnegie Coal Company's Oakdale Mine.

The Pittsburgh Seam averaged 68 inches of coal where the mine was located, so miners could actually work standing upright instead of being stooped over or on their knees as happened in thinner coal seams. When the workings were begun in the late 1800's, the coal was being mined "up dip" and water naturally drained to the north out of the mine and into Montour Run. After passing beneath Steubenville Pike, the coal seam dipped to the southwest and water collected in the back of the mine, creating what the miners called "swamps" as they had to work with their feet in wet ground. Eventually, a drain was dug at the southern end of the mine to allow the water to run into one of the streams on the south side of the hill.

The Dickson Mine was the first to ship coal on the Montour Railroad, doing so for about 50 years until the mine was closed around 1930.

Thanks to Bob Ciminell and Gene Schaeffer, who provided much of the information on this subject.

The mine was a drift mine, meaning that the coal seam came directly to the surface of the hillside and thus the entries into the mine went directly into the coal seam without the need of a vertical shaft entry. The mine entrances were part way up the hillside above Montour Run, while the tippie and railroad sidings were located along the creek at the base of the hill. The tippie was built just to the west of the current parking lot on Cliff Mine Road at trail mile 6. It included picking tables and screening and cleaning equipment to process the coal before being loaded into the railroad hoppers for shipment. Coal shipments averaged 800 to 1,000 tons daily.

The coal was brought down the hillside from the mine entrance to the tippie on an inclined plane several hundred feet long. There was no bony dump near the tippie or railroad site because the slate and rock were dumped up on the hillside beside the mine entrances, near where subdivisions and apartments now stand.

Dickson was a large mine and extended underneath Steubenville Pike to the southwest and southeast of the entrances until it reached the boundary line where it



*The first locomotive on the Montour Railroad was number 2, built in 1879 and lettered "Cliff Mine". The railroad hauled coal from the mine to Coraopolis. Alco Historic Photos, courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer.*

You can contact the Montour Railroad Yahoo group at [http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour\\_rr/](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/) There are currently 352 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. There is also much information at <http://www.montourrr.com>



## 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

Wally Edsall  
Stephen Edsall  
Elizabeth Ehr  
Robyn Francis  
Shawn Heltman  
Jane Matucheski  
Julia McAvoy  
Bill Mitchell  
Ray Techman  
James Travitz  
Raymond Walton

### Benefactors

Dennis F. Carlin  
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Janet & Gordon Jackson

### Leaders

Thomas Levine  
Jay & Judy Shock & Family  
Richard R. Wilson

A donation received in memory of Marshall Fausold  
made by Sharon Newman.

A donation received in honor of Jeff & Laura Siefer  
made by Carolyn & Roy Yarrington

## New Patrol Volunteer

Jesse Forquer welcomes another Volunteer Trail Patrol. Her



name is Laurel Dagnon, and she lives in Robinson Township, Allegheny County. Laurel is retired from Slippery Rock University, where she was the Director of Programing for the Center of Student Involvement and Leadership. She also has expressed an interest in volunteering in other ways she could help the organization.

## 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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