



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

# MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

*Celebrating 31 Years*

Volume 31 Issue 3

May-June 2020

## Covid-19 Leads to Cancellation and Postponements of Trail Events

### A letter to our loyal users of the Montour Trail and the cyclists of the Tour the Montour

After careful consideration and much deliberation, the unanimous decision by the Tour the Montour Planning Committee is to cancel the actual ride of the 18th Annual Tour the Montour in September of 2020. This is a disappointment to all of us as well as to many of our cyclists. We, however, feel this is the only responsible choice.

These are unprecedented times. The economic impact of the global pandemic is visible even now, and we do not want to burden our sponsors at this time. Many riders will not be able to participate because of the loss of their jobs and income source. We do hope that all will support the businesses that have supported us in the past - as soon as it is safe to do so again.

For 17 years the Tour the Montour has been a signature fundraising event for the Trail. Despite the cancellation of the actual ride, we are considering a virtual ride complete with t-shirts. Stay tuned this summer for details.

The Montour Trail Council is very proud that the Trail has remained open and has been there during this crisis for all to use. Consider making a donation, and, if you are not already a member, join us to help the Trail remain the great asset it is. See [Montourtrail.org](http://Montourtrail.org) for info on becoming a member and/or donating. The Trail has been there for you during this unbelievable time, so please be there for the Trail.

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We hope you continue to enjoy the Trail. Remember socially distancing-outside as well as inside. Be safe, be healthy.

Sincerely,

The Tour the Montour Planning Committee

At the Peters Friends Group online meeting, the decision was made to cancel the TTW (Twilight Trail Walk) scheduled for this July. Because of the Pandemic, it is very unlikely that groups this size would be allowed or advisable in that time frame. We have not ruled out a Fall event on a smaller scale should conditions for social gatherings improve significantly by that time.

The JR Taylor 5K in Bethel Park and the National Tunnel 10K, 5K and 2 mile walk have also been put on hold.

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



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## The Prez Sez Break on Through

Well, we have been getting through the pandemic for a few months now. I hope that all of you and your families and friends are well, and will continue so. We are fortunate that most of us have, or have access to, the needed essentials to keep our lives going, albeit with much creativeness, patience, and caution. Beyond ourselves, though, life is possible largely due to a host of people working behind the scenes, not only in medicine and public safety, but those who labor diligently to assure continuity of our food supply, uninterrupted utilities, and other parts of the vast and complex supply chain that keep us going. In these times we've come to feel much more appreciation for all these "first line" folks, echoing in our hearts the public celebrations expressing thanks to them.

But we know something beyond all that: the great importance of healthy outdoor recreation to the overall well-being of a person – or a society. Keeping parks and trails open was, and is, the obvious thing to do in support of the public's health. As you recall, back in March the criteria allowing businesses to be open was that they supply "life sustaining" products or services. The past two months has shown that the trails are "life sustaining" in the largest sense, not only in the opinion of us as trail operators but to virtually all public entities calling the shots and issuing public pronouncements. They all recommended outdoor exercise as a counterbalance to the long hours spent inside. And people did come out onto the trails in unprecedented numbers, as we have seen. The trails are set to come out of this thing looking like a wise and highly valued investment in societal-scale wellness.

All of you folks reading this have a strong belief in the value of outdoor activities. That's why we choose to spend so much of our time and energy in support of the Montour Trail. Across the board, - in trail maintenance, construction, planning, recruiting members and volunteers, strengthening the organization, fundraising, and administering the whole enterprise – we work pretty hard to present a fine trail facility to the public. It's especially clear in these times that all of you are the front line workers in keeping the trail viable, bolstering the public's well being. We are volunteers, but are as life sustaining as the first line workers who get the headlines. As your president, I am most grateful to all of you for sticking with it, even in the midst of all the other things we have to be concerned with just now.

Volunteer crews have been at work all along the trail, starting with springtime cleanup and initial mowing. Substantial drainage improvements were made in Cecil, the Airport area, and especially along the Montour-Panhandle connector. A new truck was purchased to facilitate better trail re-surfacing. New trail construction has resumed at Piney Fork in late May, *continues on page 3*

### THE MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

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#### MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

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## 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 "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 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 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 Bob O'Connell at 412-833-6259 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.

## Prez Sez Continues from Page 2

starting with a new trail bridge set over that creek. Other new trail sections will be starting or re-starting construction this summer. Even the Turnpike has helped, completing a beautiful arch culvert and newly re-built trail stretch near Route 980. Please see the rest of this newsletter for more details.

Not as visible to our trail travelers, but even more significant are the myriad efforts made by the Friends groups and the committees to discuss the issues, decide the priorities, and outline the best courses of action to keep the trail healthy and growing. It's remarkable what can be achieved with a large group of dedicated and capable people, who unite for a common purpose and persist for thirty plus years. Namely, the very Montour Trail that you see in all its beauty today, and more so the Montour of ten and twenty years hence.

Right now is the time to be planning for after all this is over. Everything worthwhile takes time to develop, so this is the time to get started. We'll keep our eyes open for new opportunities. We can get new members and donors. We can find new people to help run the trail. We can make new connections with organizations and entities that will be strong partners in the future. This time, right now in the very throes of the pandemic, is a great opportunity to think big, reach out, and make important new initiatives that will determine the course of the Montour Trail for decades to come. Let's take a deep breath, go out there, and see what we can find.

Be well!

*Ned Williams*

## The Peters Creek Stone – A Mystery along the Montour Trail

by Leonard Marraccini, Vice President of Peters Creek Historical Society

The late 1800s was a busy period in transportation development along the Monongahela River. The Pittsburgh, Virginia and Charleston Railway was built along the west bank of the Monongahela River with a terminus at Monongahela City in 1873.



THE PETERS CREEK STONE—From a Photograph by Aitken.

One of the reasons for the railway was to transport coal to Pittsburgh. During 1893-1894 the Pittsburgh, Virginia, and Charleston Railway extended a branch line from Clairton west along the Peters Creek. This line was known as the Peters Creek Branch line. In February 1894 word came in to the Monongahela office of the P,V, and C Railway that a landslide had blocked a section of the Peters Creek Branch line. Mr. Harry Bailey and a work crew were assigned to clear the blockage. The work train left Monongahela, proceeded north to Clairton, then onto the Branch line. As they were clearing the blockage, they found a partially buried

carved stone. When uncovered the stone measured approximately 5 feet high, 2 feet wide, and 11 inches thick. After clearing the line, they brought the carved stone back to Monongahela, and gave it to Mr. Isaac Yohe, a local historian, for study. The April 24, 1894 issue of the Monongahela Daily Republican newspaper devoted a full length article to this find, along with a sketch. (above left)

Word of this uniquely carved stone, called the Peters Creek Stone, spread and attracted many visitors to Monongahela. Over the years, the carved stone changed possession a number of times. In Monongahela it went from Mr. Isaac Yohe, to Mr. Vernon Hazzard, to Dr. Leroy Hoon. In 1934 Dr. Hoon donated the carved stone to the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh. The stone resided at the museum for a number of years. Then in 1951 the stone was loaned to the Washington County Historical Society, located in Washington, PA. where it resides today in the Madelaine Garden, behind the LeMoyné House.

Unfortunately when the stone was moved from one location to another in Monongahela, the bottom portion of the stone broke off, and has not been recovered. Also, over the years, the elements have worn away some of the finely carved details. (below) Numerous theories regarding Peters Creek Stone's origin and purpose have come to light over the years. These include the Celeron Expedition, the Frontenac treasure,



a Templar stone, and a tombstone. To date the stone's mystery continues unsolved. People walking along the Montour Trail have no idea that near the Mile 45 ½ marker, between Large and Clairton, was where the Peters Creek Stone was uncovered

from a landslide in 1894.

## This Issue's Photo Winner

This image was made near mile 17.5 near where they are erecting girders for the Beltway bridge that takes it over the Robinson Run Valley which contains the Montour Trail, the Panhandle Trail and the Connector Trail as well Noblestown Road and Jones Avenue. Thought it was neat the way the piers were lined up and the day was beautiful. I walked my bike thru the area.

Sent in by Trail monitor Linda Francis



Looking to the rear of the winning image you would see the steel has been erected and is extending westward from Mount Pleasant/Cecil Township to Robinson Township. The steel has been erected out to the Panhandle Trail.

## A "New Tunnel" for the Trail

A tunnel will be open by the time you read this on the Trail just west of the McDonald Viaduct. The tunnel will take the trail under the connector road being constructed between Fort Cherry Road and PA 980 that will have an interchange with the Beltway. The photo courtesy of Jesse Forquer.



## Thank you Bill Capp

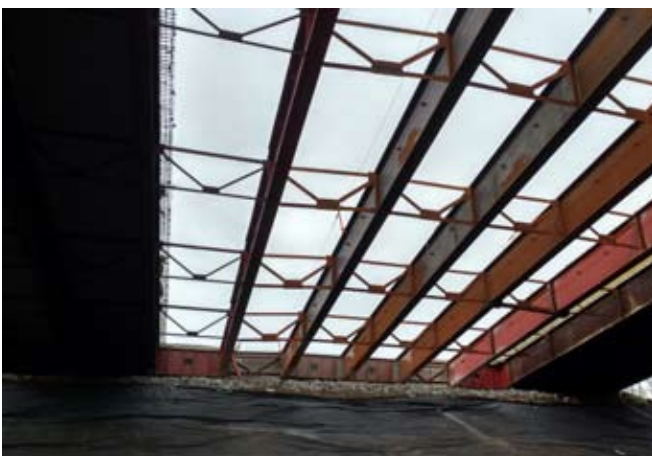
Bill Capp (left, in picture below) has been leading the way for trail maintenance and started the 2020 season on the Cecil section. Joining him were Joe Hodge holding the rake and Cliff Snitzky operating the John Deere tractor (not in photo Dave Jackel). Drainage ditches were cleared to prepare for resurfacing this summer after the ramps from the McConnell Trails Development are paved.

Once they were done in Cecil, they moved to the Panhandle Connector Trail to correct drainage issues occurring there..



## A Wider Bridge Over the Trail at the 79 Crossing

The bridge carrying I-79 across the Trail and Cecil Henderson Road is getting some attention during this Beltway construction project. An additional lane is being added to the bridge spans for north and southbound traffic. This is being accomplished by building a bridge between the existing spans. The steel has been erected. The west embankment adjacent to the trail will be covered with stone by the time you read this.



## MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

## Trackside Telephones

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

As traffic on the Montour Railroad increased in the early 1900's, a method for the train crews to contact the dispatcher at Montour Junction while they were working out on the main line was needed. Written orders picked up at the dispatcher's office at the beginning of a shift would often become outdated before a train finished its run, as other trains were also working on the single track main line. The telegraph system then in use for communications had a limited number of receiving locations.



*A railroad telephone booth sits beside the west switch at North Star Junction.*

Thus, a telephone system was installed, with phones at strategic locations on the main line. This system enabled the train conductor to contact the dispatcher to clear his train for travel on various sections of the railroad. The telephone system originated in 1903 when the Pittsburgh Coal Company created the Montour Telephone Company and installed telephone lines to connect its coal mines with its headquarters building in downtown Pittsburgh. It was a simple matter to piggyback the railroad's telephone system onto the network.

During the 1914 expansion of the railroad to West Mifflin, the telephone system was expanded along the main and subsequent branch lines as they were built. The system eventually covered the 50-plus miles of the Montour Railroad.

When a train crew was working off of the main line at a mine or on a branch track, the conductor could use the telephone when he needed to contact the dispatcher for a train order giving permission to re-enter the main line.

The 1940 Montour Railroad Employee Timetable lists 48 telephones installed between Montour Junction and Mifflin Junction. The major sidings had telephones at each end, and additional telephones were installed at junctions, as well as the agent manned stations at Imperial, Champion, Southview and Library.

At some locations there were no sidings, junctions or stations for several miles and thus no telephones along the main line. If a problem occurred with a train in those areas prior to radio communications, the conductor might have to walk quite a distance to the nearest telephone booth to report the problem to the dispatcher.

The original telephones were located in boxes mounted on the telephone/telegraph poles that were installed along the railroad. These telephones were eventually reinstalled in telephone booths to protect them (and the users) from inclement weather. The telephone booths were built either on site or in the Carpentry Shop at Montour Junction and were maintained by the Bridge & Building Department.

A pair of wires ran from the nearest telephone pole through the rear wall of the telephone booth to a double-fused knife switch. The fuses protected the telephone from current surges caused by lightning strikes hitting the wires along the railroad. Each telephone booth contained a set of dry cell batteries for power and a small magneto (generator) for the ringer. A door equipped with a standard Montour switch lock was used to keep unauthorized people from using the telephones.

Closing the knife switch activated the phone on the system. Using the hand crank, a series of long and short rings (ring code) signaled the party being called. For example, the ring code for the Dispatcher at Montour Junction was different than the code for the Yard Master at Champion or the agent at Library.

Radio communications came into use in the early 1970's eliminating the need for the trackside telephones. However, the "crank phones" were still in use at Montour Junction into the 1980's, when the railroad discontinued operations. They were used to communicate between floors in the office building and with the Engine House, Car Shops, Champion Yard Office and the foreman's office at the Champion Preparation Plant, giving those locations an independent intercom system.

Thanks to Bob Ciminel for research and information included in this topic. More info can be found at [montourrr.com](http://montourrr.com).



*An authentic replica of a Montour Railroad telephone booth was built from photographs and memories by ex-Montour employee Tim Sposato and the folks at the Age of Steam Roundhouse in Sugar Creek, OH.*

*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>*



## I want to support the Montour Trail Council!

### Membership Level

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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.*

### New Members

C Cubed Technologies LLC  
 Ian Felts  
 Nick Fischietto  
 Connor Fox  
 Mike Gentile  
 Al Gerstel  
 Lisa Greci  
 Michael Hale  
 Jill Holloway  
 Jonathan Janoski  
 Ken Joseph  
 Donald Knight  
 Robert Leggat  
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 Mark & Tina Imgrund  
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### Leaders

Richard J. & Martha Munsch  
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### In Memory of Richard Matthews by

Claire Vatz  
 Judith Tabolt Matthews  
 Robert Camarena  
 Lisa & John Edelman  
 Scott & Marilyn McFerren  
 John & Cindy Tabolt

### In Memory of Paul Katrencik

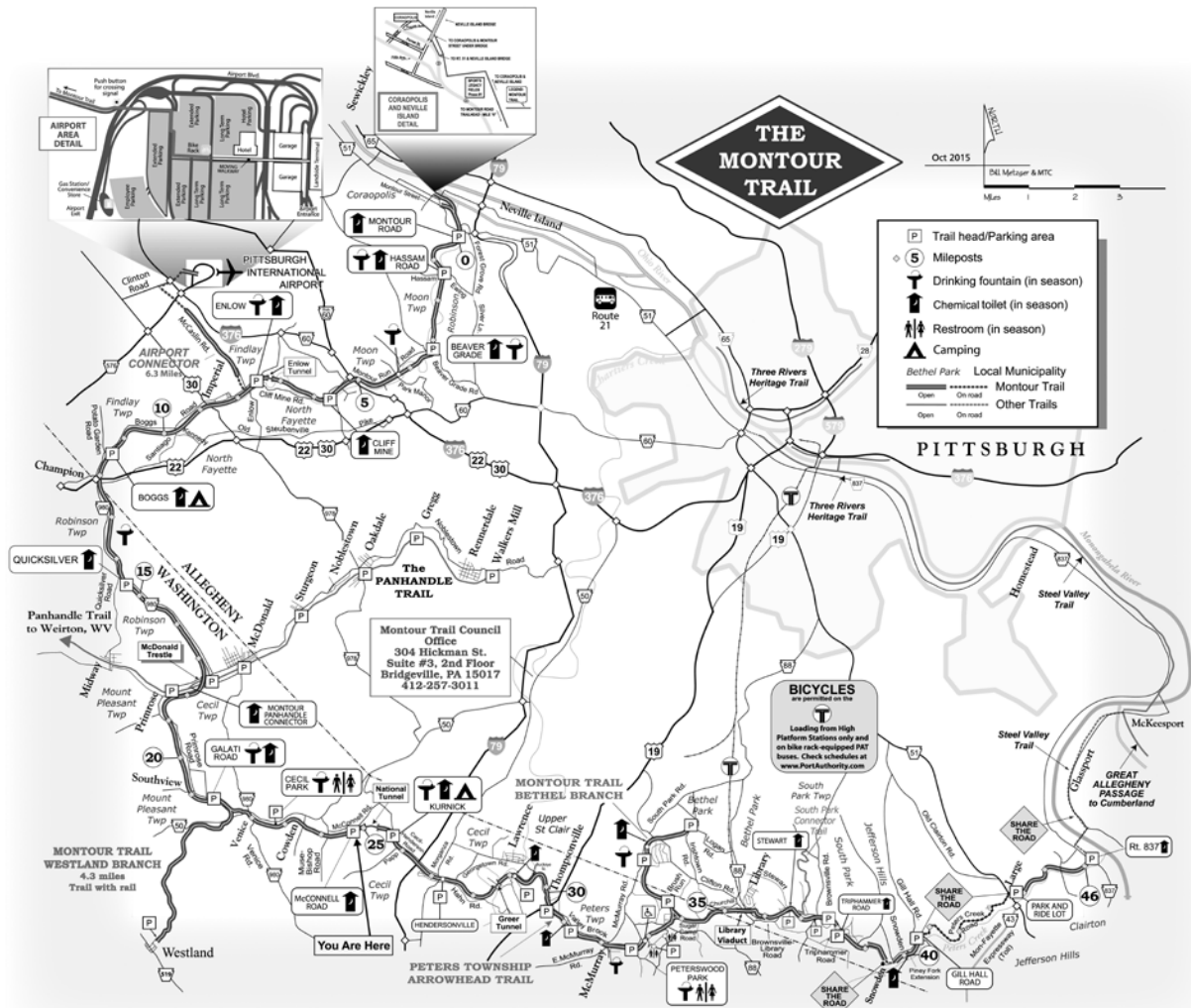
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