



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Celebrating 32 Years

Volume 32 Issue 3

May-June 2021

Blessing the Bicycles

“A Blessing of the Bicycles” was held near Mile 0 on May 1 in conjunction with the Airport Area Friends of the Montour Trail and Archangel Gabriel Parish”. Tim Killmeyer conducted the service from the back of the Airport Friends Dump Truck on a spectacular Saturday morning.



Trail Users Weigh-In On The Montour

A detailed analysis of Montour Trail users’ contemporary opinions of the trail is available on the trail’s website. Between Jan. 19-Feb. 10, 2021, users filled out an online 33-question survey that asked about their trail use, trail etiquette, trail comparisons, improvement priorities, trail-related spending, Montour Trail Council communications and membership (financial support of the trail), and demographics. It was the third such user survey conducted by the Montour Trail Council -- all of which have been analyzed by John Dorman, a longtime MTC volunteer. An important aspect of the survey is that its findings help shape the Trail Council’s strategic plan, which is formulated every three years. MTC Vice President Phillip Torrez recently reviewed the highlights of the survey with Mr. Dorman.

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[The survey is here: <https://montourtrail.org/wpSupport/news/2021/2021MTCSurveyReport.pdf>]

The survey received a robust 1,015 responses. What do you make of that?

JD: I believe that this is an excellent response rate – and consistent with our prior two surveys. I think that it shows that people not only “use” the trail, but they care about it and are engaged in making it better.

What percentage of the respondents were members of the Trail Council?

About 73% of respondents indicated that they have contributed to the trail in the past year. The prior two surveys were both around 50%, so membership has increased significantly over the past few years.

The MTC, of course, wanted to know: what can we do better? What are the primary suggestions raised in the survey?

Users provided input on improvement priorities, with trailhead signage indicating amenities and businesses in the area, year-round restrooms, and parking topping the list. The MTC will use these data – along with details by user groups and trail segments – in its planning process this year to help target investments and projects for the future. There were also inputs on opportunities to improve trail condition in certain areas and other such suggestions. Of course, users also commented on trail etiquette with most comments/complaints targeting a handful of bad behaviors by other users. (Interestingly, over 90% of users indicate that they personally almost always follow the rules, but only 34% of OTHER users do.) I believe that the opportunity for the MTC – and all of us as trail users – is to continue to follow the rules, and communicate the importance of safety and etiquette on the trail, to make it a positive experience for everyone.

In analyzing the results, were there any surprises? Something you didn’t bank on?
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Visit the Montour Trail Web Site at:
www.montourtrail.org
To converse go to:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43518292159>



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THE MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Is published every other month January through December.

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The Prez Asks: What is a Volunteer?

We all know, I hope, that the Montour Trail Council is an all-volunteer organization. But what does this really mean? Who are these enigmatic “volunteers”?

You’ve probably seen many of them along the Trail, mowing grass, trimming brush, picking up litter, fixing ruts, and lumber jacking fallen trees, usually in their bright orange t-shirts. These folks are mostly members of the MTC Friends Groups. Care of the Trail is divided up among seven Friends Groups: Airport Area, Fort Cherry, Cecil, Bethel Park, Peters Township, Westland, and South Park. In addition to their maintenance activities, the Friends also handle relationships with trail neighbors and local government, conduct their own fundraising activities, manage Scout projects, and more. The Montour Railroad Historical Society is also a Friends Group that installs historic markers along the Trail and offers other features of historic interest.

But there are many other, less visible (less glamorous?) tasks necessary to keep the organization running smoothly. There are memberships to be tracked, newsletters to be published, events to be planned, sponsors to be lined up, new trail to be engineered, finances to be managed. To handle these tasks, the MTC has a number of committees. The Engineering and Construction Committee oversees construction activities and contractors, and handles the associated funding, permitting, and other details. The Operations Committee coordinates policies and procedures. The Membership and Community Outreach Committee coordinates publicity, routes new volunteers, plans the annual Tour the Montour, and more. The Friends Group Enhancement and Engagement Committee coordinates the Friends Groups. The Real Estate Committee reviews property acquisitions and tracks our complex network of property holdings and easements. The Finance Committee manages our money. The Technology Committee keeps our website and databases running. There are also committees to handle the office, newsletter, and trail patrol. And, of course, there is a Board of Directors.

So, you see that maintaining the Trail requires a lot of people with a wide variety of skills. We need people who work with their hands (and their backs), but also volunteers who can write, manage people, plan, enter data, and knock on doors. We even need people to scan old documents into our cloud document management system. So, no matter who you are, you can probably do something that we need done.

I was once talking with a friend about his plan to volunteer with his local trail after retiring, and he said, “It’s a trail. How much work can it be?” And I chuckled.

If you’d like to get involved, drop an email to volunteer@montourtrail.org.

Deb Thompson

Tentative schedule of Trail Events

Twilight Trail walk in Peters Twp: Friday, July 30 at St. Petersburg Center is cancelled

JR Taylor Run. Saturday, September 11

Great News! At this time the Tour the Montour is back on the schedule as an actual event. The date for the 19th Annual Tour the Montour is September 25, 2021. Please “Save the Date “! And watch for our great raffles.

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

Remember when..... (these tidbits taken from past newsletters)

30 Years Ago: June 8, the Western Pennsylvania Wheelman lead a ride that closely follows the trail from Coraopolis to Clairton and returns to Coraopolis via roads paralleling the Monongahela River. Total distance is about 75 miles.

25 Years Ago: South Park Township Planning Commission gives final approval for a trail between Stewart Road and Triphammer Road.

20 Years Ago: Robinson Township Public Works places new surface on Trail from 1.4 to 4.1

15 Years Ago: 75 Deloitte and Touche Volunteers Help Spruce Up Trail in the Airport area.

10 Years Ago: The Cliff Mine Road parking area was closed for several weeks for reconstruction while Steubenville Pike-Enlow Road was reconstructed.

5 Years Ago: We are happy to report that we have an agreement in principle with the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County (RAAC), who now owns the Montour Junction property, for a long term trail easement for the Coraopolis Connector. In addition, an agreement was reached with the RAAC to allow a contractor to start construction of a 190 foot section at Montour Street in Coraopolis

Bluebird House Project Still Remains After 14 Years

By Beth and Bill Broderick, Former Adult Leaders, Boy Scouts of America, Troop 148, Crafton, PA

James Broderick completed his Eagle Scout Project in the summer of 2007 by building and installing 24 bluebird boxes along the Montour Trail. James was a long-time member of Troop 148, Crafton, PA, led by Karl Ellenberger and Denny Stelzner. When deciding on an Eagle Scout project, he wanted to do something that would last and be useful for at least 5 years. In coordination with and approved by Mr. Dennis Sims of the Montour Trail Council, James opted to build the bluebird boxes. Since bluebirds are known to eat up to 2,000 insects per day, attracting more bluebirds to the trail seemed like a good way to make the Montour Trail, less insect free and more enjoyable for the community. Mr. Sims reviewed the details of the project and assisted with selecting the appropriate locations for the boxes to ensure they were ideally spaced and oriented to maximize attraction of bluebirds. Each box was mounted on a PVC pipe (painted hunter green) to ensure no trees were damaged in the process of installing the boxes.

Once the project was approved, James was required to solicit donations for all project materials, as required by BSA guidelines. Gift cards for the materials were graciously donated by 84 Lumber, Busy Beaver and Home Depot. James and his dad were then able to purchase the exact materials they needed. They cut enough wood to make 25 bluebird house kits. Each bluebird box was kitted for a Boy Scout and a parent to build at a Troop meeting. He then enlisted the help of several scouts and parents to install the boxes on sections of the Montour Trail from approximately the intersection of Cecil-Henderson Road and Morganza Road, Cecil, PA to the Ridgewood Home Plan, off Route 50, Cecil, PA. 24 of the bluebird boxes were installed in July 2007. The 25th was kept by James as memento of the Project. Editor's note: Frank Ludwin augured the holes to place the posts.

The project far exceeded its goal of lasting five years. After 14 years, 15 of the original 24 boxes remain. A few were vandalized and others went missing for various reasons. James' parents maintain the remaining boxes each spring including clean-outs, waterproofing, replacing rotted wood and painting the poles.

In our estimation, approximately 500 - 800 eggs have been hatched in the boxes over the last 14 years. This number is a combination of bluebird eggs and wren eggs. Wrens often take over bluebird nests. You can tell the difference between bluebird nests and wren nests: Bluebirds build nests with mosses and grasses. Wrens build nests with sticks and twigs. You'll often see the layers of building materials in the nests. The boxes have even hosted a few squirrels over the cold winter months.

Pictures here:

https://www.flickr.com/go/the_brodericks/4Q33dn

Scouts interested in completing their Golden Award or Eagle Award should contact the Scout Project Coordinator at scouts@montourtrail.org

We need a diesel mechanic to help work on a 1964 Cummins engine on a Galion road grader. This would be a volunteer position. Please reply at volunteer@montourtrail.org.

Trail Survey continues from page 1

Overall, the respondents were very positive about the trail, which is not a surprise. The one thing that did surprise me – given the current global pandemic – is how few people even mentioned Covid or social distancing or mask use related to the trail. I guess that the trail truly was a healthy “escape” for most users.

This is the third survey of trail-users, you've analyzed each one. What, if any, are major changes between these surveys?

The surveys have been designed to have a lot of “overlap” in the questions so that we can track changes over time. Some things that haven't changed are the overall number of responses (that has been good for all three surveys), basic patterns of trail use and most common activities (biking, walking, jogging and dog-walking – in that order). What has changed is the number of people indicating that they support the trail financially, and the number of people that understand the cost of managing the trail. There has also been a slight, but noticeable shift in age demographics among respondents – with fewer respondents under 45 participating in the current survey. Looking ahead, perhaps adding more activities that appeal to younger users (running/jogging events, for example), might help address this change.

What effect, if any, did the Covid pandemic have on trail use as reported by respondents?

As with most things, the impact was varied. About 30% of users indicated that they used the trail more or much more than last year. About 40% indicated that it didn't have much impact, and the balance indicated that they used it less. Looking at it a different way, people that tended to use the trail frequently (weekly or more often) typically increased their usage, while those using less frequently tended to decrease their usage. This decrease may be related to some users being more reluctant than normal to travel any distance to get to the trail. However, total visits by respondents increased compared with last year based on their responses.

The Montour Trail Council has a web site and a bimonthly newsletter and contributes to a Facebook group for trail enthusiasts. How do respondents get news or try to keep up with what's happening with the trail?

Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that they rely on the electronic version of the newsletter for trail information. Facebook, the MontourTrail.org website and word of mouth are the next three most mentioned ways to keep up. There is a bit of a demographic component to this: Facebook and word of mouth decline with age group and are replaced predominantly by the electronic and printed newsletter. When asked how satisfied they are with the newsletter, nearly 75% said they are “very satisfied” and no respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied.

Trails such as the Montour are often cited as drivers of economic activity, that is, people who visit trails spend money that can benefit businesses on or near the trail. What is the case with the Montour?

Almost 60% of respondents indicated that they made at least some purchases in support of their use of the trail. As you might expect, bikers and joggers were the most likely user groups to make trail-related purchases, and the estimated average outlay was about \$114 *continues on page 5*

Trail Survey continues from page 4

– up nearly 75% compared to the prior survey. Some of this increased spending is almost undoubtedly Covid-related, since outdoor activities like trail use were among the few activities available over the past year.

I am not sure many trails actually engage in a survey like this. Why do you think it's important that the Montour Trail Council do this?

I believe that having timely input from a broad cross-section of users is important to making good decisions and exercising good stewardship of this trail resource. These surveys give insights into the users priorities for trail improvements, feedback on trail conditions and communications, and information on patterns of trail usage. The MTC can use this valuable information to plan investments for the trail, plan activities, enhance outreach to users, and manage trail operations and maintenance. The surveys are also valuable when talking to organizations that provide funding for the trail because survey results help link project funding requests to the stated needs and preferences of trail users.

Many calls went out to encourage participation in the survey. What generated the most responses?

Actually, people did not need a lot of prodding to respond to the survey. It was posted on the MTC website and Montour Trail Enthusiasts Facebook Group and many people responded as soon as it became available. However, the biggest response occurred when an email announcing the survey was sent out to the MTC contact list, and a smaller spike in responses occurred when a second email announced that the survey would be closing shortly.

Bottom line - how do users feel about the Montour?

As already discussed, respondents remain very positive about the trail, and generally prefer it to other regional trails. We know because we asked them, and they rate the Montour higher on average than each of the other eight listed trails. Respondents are also very complimentary of the MTC and the volunteers who maintain the trail. While there are complaints, like the etiquette issues already mentioned, users appreciate the trail and recognize that they are fortunate to have such a resource so close at hand.

Counting the Bikes



Don Thobaben and Leann Chaney (SPC) fasten down the counter cables near Hendersonville as the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission begins a 4-week count of cyclists. A counter has also been placed at Scott Road. Random manual counts will be conducted to corroborate the automatic counter numbers.

Cecil Resurfacing

The Bill Capp Construction crew has been busy this past month resurfacing the trail in Cecil from the MP 24, Muse Bishop Bridge to the Venice Flyover (MP 22). First stage was Cowden Road to 980 where the stockpile of limestone was located. Rain set the crew back a week at the start of May.



New Sign

Dave Hajnik, the leader of the Westland Friends, finishes installation of a new directional sign to the Montour Trail at Southview Road and Route 50. The old sign had seen better days having been constructed by Mister Williams in the fading twilight the night before the Tour the Montour in 2004. The route of the Tour had to be changed due to the extensive flood damage along Montour Run. The ride would have turned around at Galati Road, but it would turn at Hendersonville this day having started at Boggs.



MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

Tool Houses

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society



The tool house at Gilmore Junction is seen in this 1981 view. The doors on the left side gave a motorcar stored inside access to the main line track. Tim Sposato photo

While traveling the Montour Trail at several locations, you pass a concrete slab with rails imbedded in it next to the trail. These were the foundations for tool sheds – listed as tool houses on railroad track charts – which were used by the railroad section gangs. The slabs supported a 12 foot by 16 foot steel shed. The rails allowed a motorcar or hand cart to be wheeled in and out of the shed.

The Montour Railroad employed several track section gangs, each having a section of track where they were responsible for maintenance. A similar method is still in use today by the Friends of the Trail groups, as each local group of volunteers maintains a section of trail and have their own buildings or sheds to store mowers, trimmers and tools needed for those never-ending tasks.

Tool houses were spaced along the main line to give the track gangs easy access to work their various sections of the railroad, holding materials and tools used by the workers. Spike kegs, tie plates, joiner bars and bolts, along with track tools were stored in the sheds. Most had a pot-bellied stove as the houses were used as a shelter for the track gangs year-round. A gasoline powered motorcar was also stored and used by the gang to carry the men, materials and tools to a work site. A pushcart pulled by the motor car might be used as well. The pushcart, new ties and rail sections were usually stored outside the tool house.

The houses were made up of sheet steel panels that had interlocking tabs with steel wedges that held them together. They were basically 4-foot panels that formed the walls, some including windows or doors for access. They could be disassembled and moved if necessary, when a section of track was added or abandoned. A few of the houses were made of wood and had either wood or cinder floors instead of a concrete slab. These types typically did not have a motorcar inside and were of various sizes. The sheds were secured by a standard Montour switch lock.

One of the easiest slabs to find is at Gilmore Junction in Cecil Township at trail mile 21.5, which has an open shelter installed on the slab. It is adjacent to the Southview Road crossing where the Westland Branch, with its active railroad line, diverges from the main trail.

There was a tool house at Montour Junction that was used until the end of railroad operations. Others were listed on track charts and a concrete slab may still be found at several of those sites. These were located at: Imperial (trail mile 8), McAdams (mile 15), Gilmore Junction (mile 21.5), Cowden (mile 23.5), Georgetown (mile 27.2), Thompsonville (mile 31) and McMurray (mile 32.5). Champion (mile 12.7) and Library Viaduct (mile 37) had wooden sheds, but no visible remains can be seen at these sites.

A few of the tool houses were repurposed when the railroad ceased operations in the 1980's. The Montour Junction and Cowden houses were acquired and moved to the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum, where they were combined to make a storage shed that was used for 30 more years. The McMurray house was moved to an adjacent property where it was used as a horse stable and then as a storage shed. These houses were acquired several years ago by the Age of Steam Roundhouse, which combined reusable parts of the three to restore a complete Montour tool house for use and display on the Roundhouse property.

In the later years of railroad operations, the motorcars and the tool houses themselves were phased out of use as track gangs used hi-rail vehicles which could be driven on roads as well as rails to access work sites on the railroad.



A concrete slab with rails embedded shows the former location of a tool house at trail mile 15. Bryan Seip photo.

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!



Become a member now!

Go to MontourTrail.org/help-us/join or scan the Q-R code with a smartphone



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Annual Membership Level

- Leader's Circle \$500 +
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- Sustaining.....\$100 - \$249
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- Individual \$25
- Student/Senior..... \$15

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Montour Trail Council
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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

- Victoria Barrett
- James W. Boyd
- Ken Carson
- Shirley Christie
- Gerald J. Comis
- Ian Conner
- Patrick Cunningham
- Lee Ann Draud
- Denis Newman Griffis
- Dave Gruska
- Patricia Haden
- Denny Haggerty
- Susan & Michael Hopf
- William Huber
- Robert Johannes
- Craig Jolley
- Jeffrey Klinefelter
- Dennis Lawton
- David Lloyd
- Jill Methven
- Kenneth Miller
- Janice Miller
- Progressive Mobility & Medical
- Knit Monster Jen
- Christine O'Leary
- Leigh Ann Paich
- Andrew R. Parker
- Dean Pregel
- Jamie Richardson
- John Riley
- Craig Robbins Family

- Eileen & Gary Roth
- Bruce Sakson
- Joshua Scanlon
- Kenneth Thompson
- Shanna Weagle
- WRRYFree, LLC
- Benefactors**
- Martha Long Bagdes
- Dick & Annette Bryant
- Michael F. Colligan
- John Graham
- Donna Hoffman & Richard Dum
- Grant & Laura Lindner
- Kristen Matheny
- Donald Mysliwicz
- Andrew R. Parker
- William & Mary Ann Rose
- Mark J. Smith
- Geoffrey Tolley

Leaders

- James W. Boyd
- John & Rosa Dorman
- Maryann Hoffman
- Thomas Levine
- Jennifer & Gary Milavec
- Kenneth Miller
- Richard J. & Martha Munsch
- Joshua Scanlon
- Jay & Judy Shock & Family
- Rob & Sharon Ward

In Memory of Richard R. Wilson

- Donation received from John & Linda Vuono
- Donation received from Patricia Lowe
- Donation received from Judith Thomas
- Donation received from Janice Teller
- Donation received from Cathy Hesselman
- Donation received from Nancy Langston
- Donation received from Ruth Foltz
- Donation received from Cathy Stechschulte
- Donation received from Nancy O'Dell Swanson

Food Bank reminder.

Food Bank donations will be collected :

- June 5. Piney Fork West trailhead , South Park
- June 19. Washington Elementary trailhead, Bethel Park

Please bring nonperishables. Food, hygiene products welcomed. Please- no glass.
 Help the Greater Pittsburgh Community and Greater Washington County Food Banks. This is a nondenominational event!
 Please help your communities - help your neighbors who are in need!

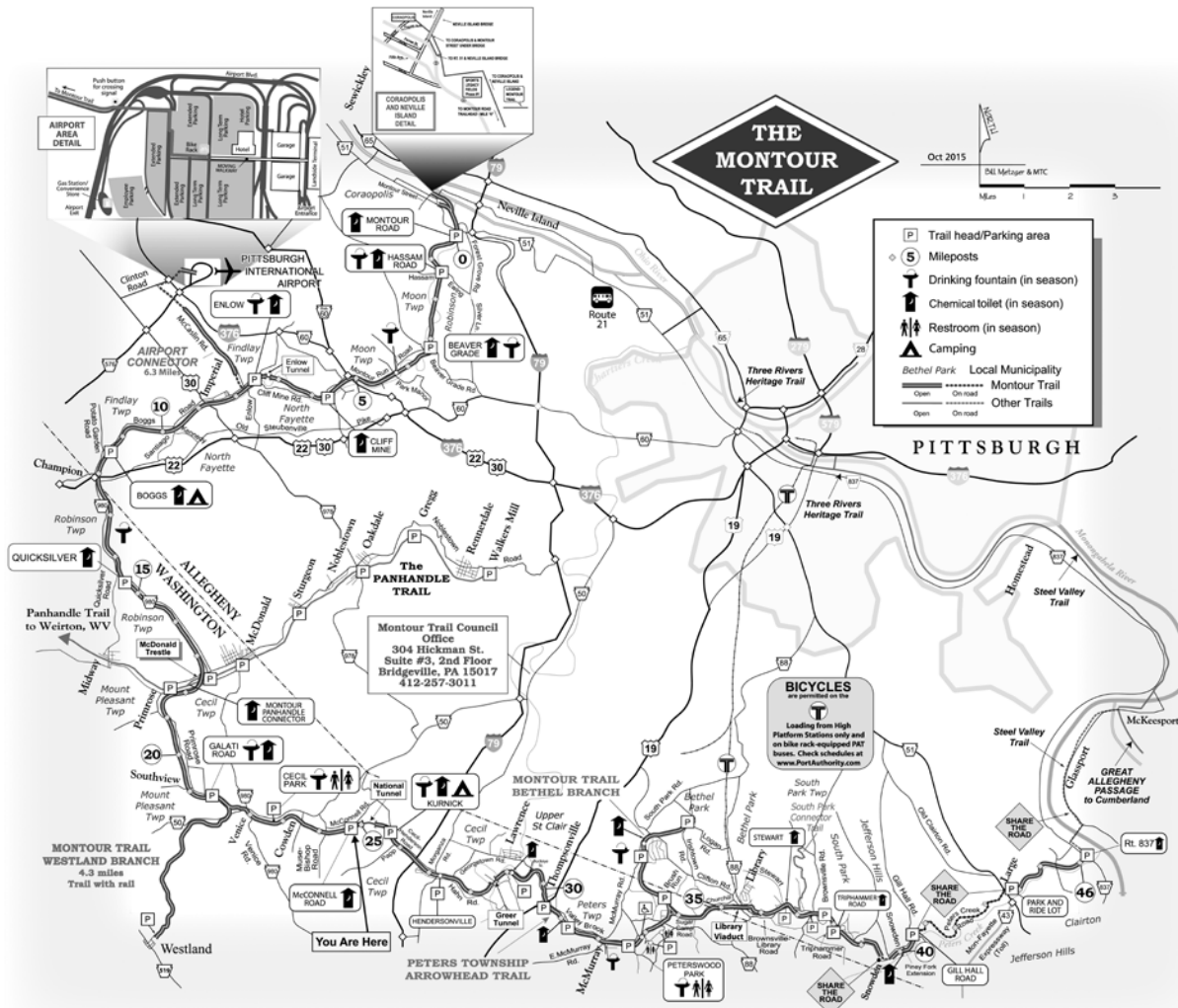


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