



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

The 2017 Pennsylvania Trail of the Year

Volume 29 Issue 3

May-June 2018

The Originals: Dick Wilson



Beginning with this issue and leading up to the Montour Trail Council's 30th anniversary in fall 2019, we will feature key contributors to the Montour Trail's success who date back to the beginning of the organization.

Like most major trail projects, the Montour Trail could not be what it is today without a good lawyer. Happily, we've had one from the very beginning.

Long before he became a rails-to-trails lawyer, Dick Wilson was a railroad lawyer. As an attorney for the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad, he handled matters related to interstate commerce, including abandonment of rail lines.

In 1983, Congress passed rail banking provisions intended to preserve established rail corridors for possible future use. When Wilson heard about an effort to turn a CSX railroad line in Somerset County into a recreational trail, he tracked down the project leader, Hank Parke, and offered his assistance.

"My primary motivation for getting involved," Wilson explained, "was that these rail lines would make great recreational trails, especially because many of them ran for miles along scenic waterways, and it would be a waste of a valuable transportation resource to let these rights of way evaporate by reverting to their prior owners."

Wilson's offer was invaluable, because often considerable technical skill is needed to sort out the various ownership issues involved. Whether the railroad actually owned its right of way or only had an easement can make a big difference in the strategy needed to turn the abandoned line into an uninterrupted trail.

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

or

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

That Somerset County project was ultimately successful—in fact, it is now part of the Great Allegheny Passage from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C.

When the founders-to-be of the Montour Trail Council were still in their planning stages, one of them, Bill Metzger, heard about Wilson's work in Somerset County and contacted him. Since the Montour Railroad had been a subsidiary of the P&LE, Wilson, who by then had joined the Pittsburgh law firm of Vuono and Gray but maintained close personal contacts at the P&LE, was an ideal find. ***Continues on page 3***

2018 User Survey Results

In February 2018 over 975 respondents provided their thoughts in the 2018 Montour Trail User survey. This was the second survey of this type, the first having been conducted in 2016.

As in 2016, the survey was led by Montour Trail Council member and volunteer John Dorman. John reviewed results with the Montour Trail Council Board of Directors at the April meeting.

Respondents were scattered over 134 zip codes, and just over 60% are male.

Biking was reported as the most common activity on the trail, followed by jogging/ running, walking, and dog walking. Over 85% of respondents reported that they use the trail for two or more different activities.

In addition to responses to 31 different questions, we also received over 1000 comments on improvements, trail comparisons, and other topics.

There were four key findings from the survey:

Trail Maintenance and Surface Condition—maintenance ratings were essentially unchanged from 2016. Runners see the Montour Trail's crushed limestone surface as a benefit; ***continues on page 5***



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Prez says:

Hello Montour Trail Council members, friends, users and supporters of the Montour Trail. We are very appreciative of your support of the Montour Trail system. We hope your enjoyment of the trail equates to our enjoyment of building and maintaining this 62-mile system as a unique community treasure.

Well the following is rather farfetched, but here it goes. I read once that Albert Einstein would at times absorb many aspects of a problem and sleep on it. His mind would organize the solution during his sleep and have the answer in the morning. Well I tried this last night in contemplating an article for this newsletter. Well in the morning I had no ready-made article, but I did have a dream that there where five of us MTC volunteers riding in a vehicle on Lacock Street on the Pittsburgh North Shore. (Why Lacock Street I don't know.) When I said this street would be our future shared trail, all where extremely disappointed. Not much for an article, but sometimes we forget how fortunate Western PA is to have an off road dedicated Right of Way for the Montour Trail.

Well back to the real world. We have good news relative the MTC's Western Corridor garage in North Fayette Township near trail mile 5.9. On Wednesday May 9th the engineering plans were finalized with C. B. Structures. Our next step is that Dave Wright will submit paperwork to North Fayette Township to request a building permit. Hopefully, construction can begin in late Summer. In the future this facility will be an ideal location to stage ongoing maintenance and repair equipment for the first third of the trail.

Speaking of maintenance, our seven friend's groups continue to do a fantastic job in maintaining the Montour's 62 miles. Please if you are looking to help, look at the friend's groups contact information in this newsletter. They always welcome new fresh faces. Also, a special welcome to our newest Westland Friends Group.

As part of an MTC organizational assessment feedback the board has put a small committee together that will meet with and listen to each friends group. From the results we hope to identify improvements to help the individual Friends groups. I plan to attend each one of the Friends meetings with the committee representative.

The Montour Trail Council structure with a central board and now seven friend's groups has worked extremely well over these 29 years. After the meetings described above, we hope that the MTC Board / Friends structure will be enhanced for the next 29 years.

In wrapping up, it's finally nice to have some great weather for our beloved trail riding, running and walking. I hope you are enjoying it.

Dennis Pfeiffer

President

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 Wednesday 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 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 on the first 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.

Westland Friends: (Westland Branch)

Meeting is second Thursday of the month at 11:00 AM at Paneras Restaurant in Bridgeville located on Route 50. Work and cleanup parties meet at the Galati Trailhead on Southview Road and will be announced. For more information contact Doug Ettinger at 412-302-1993 or dougettinger@verizon.net.

Look Where We Have Been!

Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber of Commerce Breakfast Briefing
Airport Corridor Transportation Association Group Meeting
Laurel Highlands Boy Scouts of America (BSA) Leadership Training Program

Allegheny Trail Alliance Board Meeting
REI Trail Summit

Pittsburgh Business Exchange "Great Gathering V"

Friendship Village Employee Volunteer Fair

Eaton Employee Volunteer Fair

Peters Township Parks and Recreation Board Meeting

Peters Township Council Meeting (can be seen on Peters Twp Community TV)

Girl Scouts "Going Green"

We would like to make this list a bimonthly list, so if anyone has been to any meeting or event on behalf of the Trail, please let us know.

The Tour the Montour

The raffle tickets for the Tour are now available. Look for sellers along the trail and at trail events. There will be three separate raffles. The drawings will be at the Tour on September 22.

Tandem Connection has donated a hybrid Fuji bike.

7 Springs has donated a 2 night 2 person stay at the resort.

Pro Bikes has donated a Specialized disc break bike, a Specialized Align Helmet, a shirt, a bottle and bottle basket.

Ticket will be \$5.00 apiece or 3 for \$10.00. Mix or match.

Registration is now open for the Tour the Montour. Goto <https://www.bikereg.com/38559>

See you on the Trail!

Dick Wilson continued from Page 1

In the Montour's case, potential reversion to previous owners was not the problem, since the rail line was completely fee-owned (i.e., the railroad had actually purchased the land). Thus, the title to the right of way was secure and no rail banking was needed. Instead, the challenge was to purchase the right of way from the railroad company and place it under the control of either county government or a nonprofit entity.

As the Council became established and gained public support, the dream began to appear achievable. But one pillar of bureaucracy posed a major threat: the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, which had jurisdiction over abandoned rail rights of way. The PUC wanted to remove any structures that it deemed to be affecting road crossings—which included all the bridges along today's Montour Trail.

When Allegheny County agreed to take secondary responsibility for the bridges in its territory, the PUC relented there, but it ruled that all the grade-separated crossings in Washington County must be removed. Wilson saved the day by authoring a successful appeal to Commonwealth Court, demonstrating procedural defects in the PUC decision, and the court remanded the matter back to the PUC for a rehearing.

"Then, instead of trying to litigate our way through the case, we made contact with PENNDOT legal staff, who were more receptive than the PUC," Wilson explained. He worked with the two agencies to establish an evaluation process that allowed most of the bridge structures to remain.

As the process continued, the Council's impressive trail-building progress strengthened Wilson's negotiating position. Initially, the PUC had felt comfortable with a county government taking responsibility for abandoned railroad bridges but didn't trust a brand-new nonprofit organization. By the late 1990s, it had become apparent that the Council, with its dedicated commitment to trail development, was getting things done even faster than Allegheny County. As a result, the PUC now treated the Council as a credible entity.

Wilson has continued to serve the Council throughout its history, participating in several hundred legal agreements. "When you operate a recreational trail," he said, "you have a 50-mile strip of property 40 feet wide, with all different kinds of uses and ownership arrangements, and everything is in a document of some type. I spend most of my legal effort on document preparation and review, making sure that whatever documents the Council signs are in its best interest and that it is equipped to fulfill what it is committing to."

He has also assisted trail projects all over Pennsylvania, including the Great Allegheny Passage and the Buffalo Valley Rail Trail from Lewisburg to Mifflinburg in central Pennsylvania. Currently, Wilson is involved with projects in Chester and Cambria Counties.

Wilson has worked as a sole practitioner since 2005. He maintains an office in Ebensburg, Cambria County, but does much of his work out of his home in Oakmont. He frequently enjoys trail hikes with Lea, his wife of 25 years.

Regarding his 30 years with the Montour Trail Council, Wilson says, "I would call this easily the most enjoyable and valuable public service project I've done in my professional career. Besides, I've never worked with a more congenial group of people."

Riding Across Country and Bicycle Infrastructure Along the Way

Part 2 - Days 2-4 by Dino Angelici

Within a few miles on Day Three, we entered Valley Forge National Park. Besides all the history, the park contains a number of pedestrian pathways, bike-able roadways, and trails. The Schuylkill River Trail passes through the park and can take an ambitious rider all the way into the heart of Philadelphia. Shortly after having left the park, we rode on the Chester Valley Trail, to Paoli. The trail was developed on the former Chester Valley Railroad, which was a branch of the Reading that carried livestock, produce, and dairy to market.

Continuing west, we rode through several towns on the Western portion of an area called the Main Line. Eventually, we entered Lancaster County, where a chance conversation with a highway construction worker produced directions to some fantastic backroads in the heart of Amish Country. The heat and humidity had subsided, the sky was a brilliant shade of blue, and we enjoyed a wonderful afternoon of riding. Our destination for the evening was a hotel in Downtown Lancaster City. After getting cleaned up, we had a great time walking around Lancaster. Quite a few people were out, enjoying the late Summer evening. There were about 30 pianos, scattered about downtown, for use by whomever was so moved. Occasionally, someone would sit down and start playing, proficiently and to the enjoyment of anyone nearby. Lancaster is also a bike-friendly city.

Pennsylvania Route 462, aka the Lincoln Highway, is a popular biking road and was part of our route for the beginning of Day Four. The road passes from Lancaster, through some small towns and the agricultural lands in between. The terrain is mostly gentle, scenic, and the shoulders are wide. At Columbia, the road crosses the Susquehanna River on the Columbia-Wrightsville



Bridge. Before crossing, the 14-mile long Northwest River Trail runs along the Eastern Shore of the Susquehanna, and is a nice side trip, where remnants of the Pennsylvania canal can be seen. A short distance to the South, there is a high

bluff that provides a nice perspective of the area.

We continued on PA-462 through York, Pennsylvania. The road through the city is laid out as two one-way streets, separated by a median with houses and business. The whole way through town, the road is designated as a bike route with signs and "sharrows". We had no trouble from the motorists, most of whom seem familiar with and respectful of the arrangement. At roughly the corner of Philadelphia and Pershing, the York County Trail begins. It runs South for about 20 miles, to the Maryland Line. There, it connects with the North Central Trail, which continues to the outskirts of Baltimore. We didn't ride the trail on this trip but some of our group members have ridden it in the past and it comes well recommended.

The latter portion of Day Four required riding on PA Route 234 and some beautiful backroads before eventually reaching our destination for the evening, in Gettysburg.

Earth Day Activities in the Airport Area by Phyllis McChesney

A big thank you goes out to the employees of the Allegheny County Airport Authority who volunteered their time for Earth Day activities in the Airport Area. Fifteen employees arrived early in the morning at the Old Beaver Grade Road trail head to work on multiple projects. One group dismantled a deteriorating planter box, removing all shrubs and landscape timbers, and constructed a new planter



box in its place. The usual grass cutting and trimming was done along the trail. Another group of employees worked on two trailside planter boxes doing spring clean-up and planting flower bulbs. The bulbs chosen are known to attract hummingbirds and butterflies so it should be a colorful entrance to the trail when they are in bloom. Our thanks to Kevin Gurchak, Vice-President of Sustainability and Natural Resources for coordinating the day with the Airport Friends and Christina Cassotis, CEO of the Allegheny County Airport Authority and their great employees!

The second Earth Day activity was the installation of a trailside bulletin board (left) front of the Forest Grove Sportsmen Association (FGSA) at Mile 2. This was an Eagle Scout Project of Justin Scarsellone of BSA Troop 301, Holy Trinity, Robinson Twp. What makes this bulletin board special it will be shared by both FGSA and the Montour Trail Council. The two sided board will allow both organizations easy access to post happenings on their organization. Justin's Grand Total Service hours for this project was 117 hours to see his project through to completion. What an



awesome job! Thank you, Justin !

Survey Results continues from page 1

bikers say the paved surfaces of other trails is an advantage. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents rated trail maintenance as excellent or good.

Trail Etiquette—a set of etiquette questions were added for the 2018 survey. Most users, 96%, indicated they know the correct etiquette of staying right on the trail, whether walking, running, or biking.

However, 16% indicated that they violate passing rules, most commonly by not warning others before passing. Analysis of comments reinforced the opportunity for improved performance in this area.

Improvement Priorities—Water fountains, year-round toilets, and signage (both on trail and directions to trailheads) were the top four priorities. The same rankings appeared regardless of activity on the trail, or the trail segments used.

Communications and Outreach—52% of respondents indicate they are contributing members of the Montour Trail Council, up from 46% two years ago. 71% of the 2018 respondents were aware that the trail is developed and maintained by the Montour Trail Council, an increase of 14% over the 2016 survey.

Reflecting on the survey, John said. "It is always good to get direct input from users. The trail is an important resource for the region, and having nearly one thousand users weigh in on how well it is being managed and what can be done to continue to improve is an indication that people care about it and want to help make it better."

Results will be used to assist the MTC Board in focusing improvement efforts in 2018 and in the development of the 2019-2021 strategic plan.



Participants of this year's National Tunnel 10K and 5K relax on the lawn at the shelter while winners are announced. To see the list of participants and their placement, goto

<https://www.smileymiles.com/2018Results.html>

and cursor down to National Tunnel 10k and National Tunnel 5k.

MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

Morris Mine**By Bryan Seip – Montour Railroad Historical Society**

Trail traffic on the Westland Branch has been increasing in the past few years. One of the sights first encountered along the branch, after crossing Route 50, is the large pile of mine refuse across the creek from the trail. Along with the adjacent Weavertown supply lot, this was the site of the Morris Mine.



The Gilmore Coal Mining Company was incorporated in 1920 by Mr. S. A. Gilmore, Mr. C. Ebershuger and Mr. E. I. Morris, for whom the mine was named. The Morris Mine was built in 1922 on property leased from Mrs. Anna Burgan who owned a large tract of coal land in the vicinity.

Morris Mine (left) was described in detail in a 1922 article in Coal Industry magazine:

"The Pittsburgh coal seam underlies the whole of the property, and a number of bore holes have shown the coal to be a uniform thickness of five and one-half to six feet and fairly free of impurities. As in other parts of the field there is little pitch to the vein. The roof is slate and an occasional vein of clay tends to make a somewhat bad top.

At this point the coal lies at a depth of approximately 140 feet, necessitating shaft mining. The hoisting shaft is 130 feet in depth, two compartments, and concreted throughout its depth. The air shaft is located a short distance from the hoisting shaft, an exhaust fan being located at the mouth of the former. In addition, a slope shaft is provided for the use of men and material. This is likewise concreted, and lies at an angle of 25 degrees, being 525 feet in length.

The arrangement at the bottom of the hoisting shaft is simple. A double track for loaded cars leads to the shaft, the empties being taken off on the other side. A motor takes the cars back to the working faces in an entry around the shaft.

With this arrangement the hoisting capacity is three cars every 70 seconds, which will be more than sufficient to take care of the mine's output. The cars used hold approximately three tons each.

The entire plant is designed and guaranteed to operate making three sizes of coal at the rate of 325 tons per hour."

The coal company also built housing for employees and miners near-by, including a company store. Some of those houses are still standing along Route. 50. The single houses on the north side of the road was "Bosses Row" where company supervisors lived. On the south side of Route. 50 were several streets of houses for the miner's families. Most of the miner's houses were single family homes, as opposed to the typical duplex houses built at other mine patches in the area.

The Montour Railroad built a 2,200 foot spur from a point named Gilmore Junction, along Southview Road, to reach the new mine. This spur was later extended to reach another mine at Westland.

The Morris Mine tipple included three loading tracks for different sizes of coal produced by the mine. The sizes were known as Nut, Egg, and Slack (or Run-Of-Mine) indicating their relative size. The mine used its own sorting and cleaning tables to prepare the coal for shipment by rail cars. Slate and refuse from the cleaning process was loaded into a tramway at the tipple and dumped on the hillside across the creek, creating the large pile still evident today.

Morris Mine went through a stormy history of closures, sales and bankruptcies by several companies attempting to mine the coal. By the 1970's, production had significantly declined and the mine was closed. However, the abandoned tipple buildings remained in place until 1982.

Morris tipple was dynamited on November 16, 1982 using plastic explosives. It took three separate attempts, as both the first and second tries made loud bangs and knocked a ton of dust loose, but did not bring down the tipple. A third attempt actually made the tipple lean to one side, but not totally collapse. A steel cable pulled by a bulldozer finally knocked the life out of the old rusted hulk and down it came. The shaft was filled and sealed.

Thanks go to Bob Ciminell for supplying much of the information in this article. Visit montourrr.com for more.

You can contact the Montour Railroad Yahoo group at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/ There are currently 355 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>



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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

Harry & Arlene Buntin
 Karen Chronister
 Michael & Debbie Gin
 Maureen Hart
 Maryann Hasis
 Alan Hough
 Barbara Inskipt
 Steven Johnson
 Kenneth E. Jones
 Paul Katrencik
 Sibyl McNulty
 Doug Stark
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 Keith Varadi
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David Beringer
 Dick & Annette Bryant
 Nancy Chauvet
 Gigi Gerben
 Roger Hindenlang & Susan Uram
 John & Eileen Kennon
 Donald Mysliwicz
 Rolf Otterness

Leader

Francis Feld

In Memory of George Gerben by Gigi Gerben



Pat Friesdam ran into these anglers along Montour Run at the start of trout season. George Ferrill & Dan Falcipni were accessing their favorite fishing hole by travelling on the Montour Trail.



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Join Us! Become a member of the Montour Trail Council!

As an all-volunteer organization that receives no tax-based funding for trail operations and maintenance, we rely on your generosity in supporting the trail. Membership contributions pay for operating and maintenance expenses. Just a small sample:

- Cracked limestone for resurfacing (\$11,000 per mile for materials)
- Other materials for trail maintenance (\$10,000/year)
- Fuel for mowing tractors (\$1,400/year)
- Horticulture (\$15,000/year)

The physical trail is a reflection of the people who love it, support it and care for it. Joining the Montour Trail Council helps to support a great community resource.

We need you!
JOIN THE MONTOUR TRAIL COUNCIL
(An all-volunteer organization)

Just fill out the form on the other side or join at www.MontourTrail.org

Multiple your impact by submitting a matching gift request to your employer. You only designate the Montour Trail Council as United Way Contributor. Grants apply to USAs.

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For more map details, see www.MontourTrail.org