



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

# MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

*Celebrating 31 Years*

Volume 31 Issue 6

November-December 2020

## Piney Fork Road Project Complete by Tom Prezel

The Piney Fork Project in South Park Township is complete adding another 0.4 mile to the main line of the Montour Trail.



The trail site is on the original Pennsylvania RR right-of-way that was abandoned in the late 1950s. South Park Township had eventually acquired the railroad property. South Park Township agreed to donate the property to the MTC in 2010. After much legal and surveying work, the property transfer was finalized in 2014.

MTC applied for a grant from PA DCNR for design and construction of the project in April of 2014; it was awarded to MTC later that year. Grant beginning date was April 21, 2015. Some early work to clear the property was performed by volunteers in 2016. Engineering work by Mackin Engineering was performed in 2016-2019 to design the trail, obtain the necessary permits, and put the project out to bid for construction.

Construction work was started by MSB Excavating, LLC on October 16, 2019. The concrete pedestals for the bridge were poured, and a wall near the bridge was completed before the winter shutdown on December 4, 2019. After the winter and Covid-19 shutdowns, construction work resumed on May 18, 2020.

### Inside this issue:

Piney Fork Road Project	1
The Prez Sez	2
Friends Groups	3
Annual Meeting, Tour the Montour Wrap-Up	4
Equitrans-Midstream in Cecil, National Tunnel Winterized	5
Montour Railroad: Jewell Siding	6
New Members	7
<b>Trail Map</b>	<b>8</b>

The bridge was delivered and installed on its pedestals on May 19, 2020. Bridge back walls were then formed up, and concrete was poured on May 26. The 0.4-mile long trail, supporting walls, and drainage systems were constructed from June through August 2020. The short asphalt sections were laid on August 27 and 30 (above left). The trail was limestone surfaced, with some volunteer help, on September 4.

All fencing and signs were completed by a subcontractor on September 9. After dressing the edges and ditches of the trail, seeding and mulching was applied on September 17 and the Trail was opened for the public to use and enjoy.

A soft opening of the trail section was held on October 28, 2020 with a limited group of invitees because of Covid-19 concerns (see above right). The following organizations were given special thanks for their contributions to the project by the Project Manager, Tom Prezel: South Park Township – donation of property, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – grant, MSB Excavating, LLC – construction, Mackin Engineering – engineering design and support, Montour Trail Council Volunteers – early work and construction support, and ARAD and REI – supporting grants



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: Getting Ahead

Well, we have finished up a colorful Fall season, and are headed into Winter, the least favorite time for many people. But of course we can take heart, knowing that in a few months winter will fade into a bright and warm Spring. Similarly, it is good to keep in mind that at some point we will come out of the season of this present pandemic, and into something of a new world. We have the opportunity to lend some shape to how a part of that world will look. How can Montour best position itself to serve the needs of its people in that new world?

In its essence, what the Montour Trail really consists of is a lot of people moving forward. The trail itself is there to provide the physical means for them to do so. Most of us like to travel; at the moment we can make do with short journeys. One might choose a certain destination, say a particular trailhead or landmark, and have expectations as to what familiarities will be there. But the wonder of the trail is that there are always new things to see and experience both along the way and at the turning point. Even more unexpected and delightful are the fellow travelers that one meets. The trail is all about how it makes people feel as they get out there in motion. Driven by the very nature of its people, the Montour Trail in its essence looks forward, to the future.

It's always been that way- the guiding principle that got us here. Where there were ugly stretches of weeds and trash, some could see the possibility of a clean pathway, and they worked long and hard to open it up. Through thickets of heavy scrub, chock full of thorns and poison ivy, a place to freely walk could be seen, and so it has taken place. By looking ahead to serve our trail users, long disused railroad trestles and other structures were transformed into new pedestrian viaducts. And where there were busy roads to cross, Montour always saw the future of carrying our travelers over those roads, making it come to pass in many places so far.

For each person who sets out on the trail, new destinations await, even in familiar locations. It's all in the willingness to take that step forward, the beginnings of that journey into times ahead. This holds not only for Montour Trail travelers, but for everyone who engages in the trail. Volunteers take great joy in revealing new beauty when they widen the trail, clean up the landscapes, and make it a better experience for our users. This year we have seen their mark, in those striking improvements that were made in each of several sections.

Our trail communities, also looking to the future, want more residents; and they are taking steps to provide incentives for people to build homes and live there. Cecil, Peters, Robinson and South Park townships in particular are cognizant of the demand for recreational amenities, and have included the Montour in their municipal comprehensive planning efforts. Washington County is beginning the process of updating their venerable 2005 comprehensive plan, and will be including the Montour, Panhandle and other area trails in the new plan.

The Montour Trail Council itself, as we have seen, also draws direction and strength from a commitment to its ongoing strategic planning process. In a little under a year – late 2021 – we'll be meeting (hopefully in person!) to hammer out Montour's 2022-24 update to its strategic plan. That will be a particularly good time, just as we're starting to see about getting our footing in the post-pandemic world. We'll be able to look forward with unclouded vision, and set the elements in place for building the best possible Montour Trail for all.

Along with all of you, I strongly anticipate us coming out of this current mess. It'll be like waking up on a sunny morning after the storm. With little doubt, there will be a lot of work to do to clean it all up. **Continues on page 3.**

### THE MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

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All Trail-letter correspondence should be addressed to:

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Dennis Pfeiffer

## 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 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 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.

### 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](mailto: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!**

## The Prez Sez Continues from Page 2

Not that this year everyone in Montour has not been working hard; 2020 was one of the most productive and fruitful years ever, from a number of standpoints. One of which is to recognize that, in the middle of the pandemic and everything else, to not forget that a part of the work of today is to plan for tomorrow. I can tell you, with much appreciation for those working on the aspects of planning, that the Montour organization has not forgotten.

Thank you all for your commitment and determination for the Montour Trail. Enjoy your upcoming Holidays!

**Ned Williams**

## Tour the Montour Raffle Winners

The Seven Springs 2 Nights 2 people get-away with breakfast was won by Dave Borrebach.

Aero Tech Designs kindly donated a Pittsburgh jersey, bike pants, socks, hat and gloves. Edward Hauck was the lucky winner.

There were three \$100.00 gift certificates donated by SweetWater Bikes in Ambridge. Mike Oswalt, Gary Seech and Brian Henry will enjoy these.

# Seasons Greetings



## Nothing Around Here Happens in a Vacuum: The Tour the Montour Saga

The Tour the Montour Committee began planning for the 2020 18<sup>th</sup> annual event last February. Yes, it truly takes that long to plan the Tour, our signature event that raises funds for Trail maintenance. We started to seek new and returning sponsors. We set the date and started to create the annual T-shirt design. March came in like a lion, bringing the pandemic and “self-quarantining” with it.

The planning committee switched to Zoom meetings, which worked well for the objectives we needed to accomplish. At that time, we did not think that the Tour, scheduled for September, would be affected. However, in late spring the realization that the pandemic was not to be short-lived became painfully apparent. We regretfully cancelled the actual Tour. The Committee entertained and accepted the idea of a virtual Tour. The t-shirt design reflected the unusual 2020 environment

In the meantime, so many new users discovered the Trail, and usage went way up. Our wonderful volunteers stepped up their care of the Trail. The Membership and Community Outreach Committee commissioned new member-recruitment signs, which emphasized that the Council is all-volunteer organization and encouraged users to become members or donate. The website was updated to address this.



Registration for the virtual Tour was entirely on line. We were unsure if people would learn about it. Amazingly, we had 25 people sign up at first. But the number kept increasing all the way to 270 registrations! So many people wanted to support the Montour Trail that provided outside recreation in a dark time.

We are grateful to our sponsors who have continued to support us even in these strange times. We thank FedEx, Advanced Orthopaedics and

Rehabilitation, Pittsburgh International Airport, Eaton, Bob and Patsy Brown, IntegraCare, Skeptic Distillery, Range Resources. Davan, and MarkWest. We have also received support from AeroTech Designs, Allegheny Health Network, Franklin Heights Medical Association, Highmark BC/BS, MCC International, Seven Springs, Sweetwater Bikes and UBS Financial Services

We thank all of you for your virtual rides and continuing support. We are so happy to welcome new and renewing members. We all hope the 19th Annual Tour the Montour will return to its normal venue and practices. It is planned for September 25, 2021. See you there!

## 2020 Annual Meeting: What a Year!

By Fran Hensler

The MTC annual meeting was a virtual event, with a quorum+ of members participating by Zoom. Not as much fun as an in-person social gathering, but checked off the to-do list, just the same. Major business consisted of announcing those nominees elected to the Board for 2021–23: second consecutive term for Mark Modispacher, David Oyler and Tom Prezel; first term for Fran Hensler, Dave Jackel and Julian Wolfe. Our financial position remains strong, and membership revenue may reach \$100,000 for the first time ever, an incredible milestone.

To call 2020 unprecedented doesn't get at the disruption, determination and discovery we've undergone since being hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Fortunately, state-wide stay-at-home orders allowed outdoor activity, which encouraged a record number of new people to use the Montour Trail ... which led to lots of new MTC members and families (abetted by trailhead signs that encouraged users to support the organization). We took measures to keep Trail



President Ned Williams gives his state of the trail address via Zoom.

staging signature events virtually — including Tour the Montour.

Friends group volunteers never faltered, continuing their demanding schedule of regular maintenance and trailside improvements. The unusually high foot/wheel traffic forced the Trail resurfacing crew into action in Cecil, Peters Township and Fort Cherry. A half-mile of new mainline trail was installed in South Park Township, which reduced the Trail gap; a new bridge was completed across Piney Fork Creek; remediation work was started to repair two threatening water-scour areas; and behind-the-scenes work was accomplished to build two missing links: one through the South Park mini-storage facility and the other across the eastern end of Summit Station, scheduled for completion by the end of 2021. The mile-zero extension into Coraopolis is under way. Work on the western corridor garage's interior is almost complete. Despite the hurdles that the pandemic threw our way, it was a busy season!

The popularity of the Montour Trail as an important amenity/selling point is that two residential developments, Summit Station in South Park Township and McConnell Trails in Cecil, are off to a strong start. Looking ahead, our biggest challenge is the major gap posed by Route 51 in Jefferson Hills. We are looking at both short- and long-term solutions. Other challenges include finding volunteers, addressing a plethora of maintenance issues, raising funding and community support, mentoring future leaders, and managing the whole of the Montour Trail Council as effectively and fruitfully as possible into the future.

users as safe as possible, urging social distancing via trailside signs and the website, closing then re-opening portable toilets with a doubled-up sanitation schedule, and postponing or

## Equitrans Midstream Gives Back to the Trail by Dennis Sims



The Cecil Friends were contacted by Beth Zak of Equitrans Midstream located in Southpointe in late August about a volunteer day on the Trail. The employees have been working from home and were looking for a day out. Many of the workers are frequent trail users and getting outside helping the CFOMT would be great for morale. So, on Wednesday, September 23, about 30 employees armed with the necessary tools showed up at the Kurnick trailhead ready to work. The workers were divided up into three groups. One group led by Adele Karabinos cleaned up the Tandem Connection area, a second group led by Julian Wolfe improved the sight distance at Ridgewood Drive and Cowden Road. The remainder of the group led by Mary Ellen McKenna and Dennis Sims

tidied up the Kurnick area by doing weeding, staining the furniture and trimming low hanging branches among other things. They worked for about two hours performing the much needed work. We thank them for their service and they plan on returning in the spring.

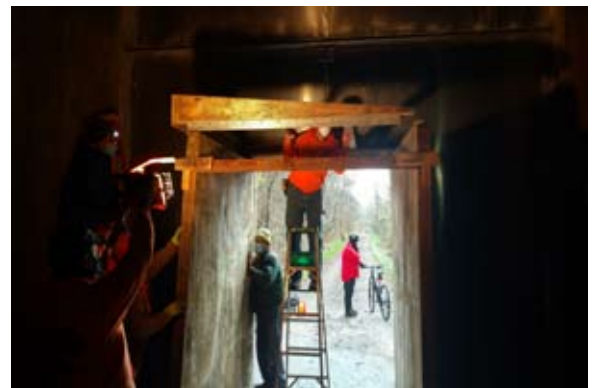


## The National Tunnel Gets Winter-proofed by Dennis Sims

While the weather was good, volunteers closed the doors and installed the vestibules at the National Tunnel on Thursday, November 19.. The vestibules allow the tunnel to remain available for transit during the winter months. The two sets of vinyl strips in the vestibules keep the relative natural warmth from the ground inside the tunnel deterring the formation of ice. Temperatures have remained in the 40s even on the coldest day when temps have fallen below zero.

The doors will reopen, probably in late March when the danger of sustained cold is past. Please dismount from your bike when you enter the tunnel and be careful of trail users who may be exiting the tunnel.

Here are some scenes from this year's work party closing the east portal. There were six volunteers performing the work. The procedure is the same for the west portal. Bill Capp and his construction party performed the work. It takes about 2 hours to perform the work at each portal.





## MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

### Jewell Siding by Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The coal hauled by the Montour Railroad was known as black diamonds, but there was also another jewel on the railroad. Jewell Siding ran along the main line in the area on either side of Clifton Road near Al's Café in Bethel Park.

Built during the 1914 Mifflin Extension project, the siding was named for a local landowner, N. Jewell, whose property was bisected by the railroad. The double-ended siding ran for 4,100 feet and could hold 82 cars. The west end switch was near the present Limestone Drive, behind the Vision Center office. The siding crossed over Clifton Road (listed as Jewell Road on some old maps) and ended at the east switch, across from the current site of George Washington School. The bridge over Clifton Road was actually two separate spans placed side-by-side, one carrying the main line and the other the siding track.



In the 1950's, the west end of the siding was removed, including the rails across the bridge, although the bridge span itself was left in place. The east end became a 1,000 foot spur that could hold 20 cars, with a steel bumper post installed near Clifton Road.

Crossing the Clifton Road bridge in 1975, the bumper on Jewell Siding can be seen ahead on the right. The bare bridge span for the original siding is to the right of the train. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

In earlier days, across from the bumper post location was a short commercial spur that ran along what is now the parking lot at Al's Café and Rite Aid. This was an open "team track", where a wagon with a team of horses or a truck could be backed up to a rail car to unload merchandise.

At the end of 1980, railroad operations ended in this area and the rails were removed a few years later, although the steel bridge spans were left in place.

In 1989, Clifton Road was realigned to improve the intersection with McMurray Road. The two bridge spans and the east side concrete abutment were removed. The west side abutment was left in place as a gas line and utilities ran underground at its base.

When the Montour Trail was constructed on the old railroad right-of-way, the trail led down ramps to an at-grade crossing of Clifton Road. In September, 2011, the new 210 foot J. R. Taylor Memorial Bridge was constructed by Century Steel Erectors to carry the trail over Clifton Road.

Tim Sposato grew up in the area, watching and riding Montour trains as a teenager in the early '70's. He hired on with the railroad after his high school graduation and shares some thoughts of Jewell.

*Jewell Siding and Al's Café. Like bread & butter, they fit together well. The nights of waiting for the eastbound train in an old automobile behind Al's, watching the patrons coming out at closing time, was always entertaining. This helped pass the time as we waited for "our train" to arrive. Al's was more of a local type lounge in the 1970's & 80's. Many Montour men made stops here for the great fish sandwiches and beverages.*

*We loved hearing the train laboring upgrade around 2:00am. There was the thrill of seeing the headlight illuminate the light fog or the tree tops long before we saw the source. By this time we had made our way to the switch, our lanterns lit. It helped that we had also called the dispatcher earlier, asking if a Coal Run had been called for the Mifflin Turn. If the reply was "yes" we would inform him that we would check the switch to ensure it was lined for the train's movement. To this day, I believe the dispatcher would casually mention this to the train crew, thus allowing the "flag stop" to occur.*



This 1981 view towards the old Al's Café was taken from the Jewell Siding bridge span. Tim Sposato photo.

*The accompanying picture was taken in 1981, just a few years before the rails were removed. The old farm house is seen where the parking lot is now. The old garage that housed the auto we hid in was to the right, out of the frame. Today a small portion of the top of the west end abutment is visible as the road slices its way past the old bridge location. It's nice to stand on this abutment and remember the view pictured here, remembering the happy times.....*

**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!

### Annual Membership Level

- ☐ Leader's Circle \$500+  
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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.

### Members

Mike Allen  
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 Jim Bandi  
 Virginia Barnicoat  
 Barbara Baur  
 Andrew Berger  
 Boris Birmaher  
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 Stephen Colodny  
 Debra Conn  
 Lynda Connolly  
 Lori Cooley  
 Douglas Corwin  
 Samuel Costa  
 George & Kathleen Daniels  
 Andrea Defail  
 Angela DiBart  
 Ed & Rose Dorsey  
 Stephen Drozda  
 Gretchen Eckert  
 John Eskay  
 Roger Fausold  
 Dave & Kathy Freiss  
 Christine Frund  
 Gerry Gaetjens  
 Patrick Gallagher  
 Greg Garbinsky  
 Loretta Glomb  
 David Hamilton  
 Stephanie Harris  
 Richard Heckman  
 Dave Held  
 Tom Hoffman  
 Catherine Hornak  
 Subramanya Hoysala  
 William Hunt

Bratislave Janjic  
 Joan & Ralph Johnston  
 Don Johnston  
 Doreen Karas  
 Sean Kateeb  
 Henry Keller  
 Daniel Kelly  
 Lois Kelly  
 Leo Kennedy  
 James Kuschill  
 Mike Ladue  
 Mark & Ginny Lamison  
 Dawn Lesick  
 Amy Lewandowski  
 Louis Lignelli  
 Jerome Lingenfelter  
 Linda Lingenfelter  
 Jason Livingston  
 Gayle Lockaton  
 Yvonne Lucas  
 Maria Lusk  
 James Luther  
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### Leaders

Daniel Aloe  
 Tim Baker  
 Renee DeMay  
 William Hunt

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 In memory of Noel Letterio from the Auxiliary to the Retired  
 State Police Association of Pennsylvania  
 In memory of Rick Matthews from Jan Sylanski  
 In honor of our mother Padmavathi Banavara from Subramanya  
 Hoysala and family  
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