



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

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September-October 2015

The ½ Marathon and 5K Report by Dave Borrebach

The 20th Annual UPMC UrgentCare Montour Trail half-marathon and 5K race attracted 489 runners on September 12.

The course started in the Mall of Robinson parking lot, and followed Park Manor Blvd. down the hill where it turned west onto the trail. Once on the trail, runners followed an out and back course with the finish line on the trail near Park Manor Blvd.

½ Marathon top finishers:

James Gordish, Pittsburgh, 1:17:06
Bonnie Smerk, Ellwood City, 1:32:39

5K top finishers:

Matt Durbin, Coraopolis, 17:07
Deanna Skvarla, Imperial, 23:38

A complete list of finishers is available at:

<http://www.runhigh.com/2015RESULTS/R091215AA.html>

Thanks go to presenting sponsor UPMC UrgentCare, the Mall at Robinson, Dick's Sporting Goods, Chick-Fil-A, and Vitamin Shoppe. Student Transportation of America provided shuttle bus service and ferried runners back up to the start area. A herd of 3 Chick-fil-A cows (Mom, Dad & Junior) saw runners off at the start of the race and helped escort them back after the finish

MTC Board Member Jan Carey organized the race. She worked tirelessly to pull together a complex event that mobilized a cast of over 50 volunteers and over 40 police and EMS staff—this was the 20th year that Robinson EMS supported the race.

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Visit the Montour Trail Web Site at:
www.montourtrail.org

To converse, join the Yahoo Group at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Montour-Trail/info> or

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43518292159>

For the second year Joe Stabile volunteered as Race Director. Joe cheerfully took care of all of the technical components, from runner registration, race timing, and medals and awards.

The 20th annual edition of the ½ Marathon & 5K race was a big success, and remains as one of the top fundraisers for the Montour Trail.



Top: First overall finisher in the 1/2 marathon James Gordish congratulated by Paula Kelly, Practice Manager at UPMC UrgentCare Middle: Paula congratulates Bonnie Smerk, top women's ½ marathon runner. Bottom: Race Director Joe Stabile, Race Organizer Jan Carey, & MTC Board member Eric Chipps. Left: the Race's herd of Chick-fil-A cows



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Thoughts and Thanks on the Trail

I hope that all of you were able to enjoy our somewhat compressed summer. After the near-daily rains finally ended in July, the heart of the summer season seemed to fly by rapidly. When the Labor Day holiday arrived, it felt premature. On balance, we did at last have a lot of nice weather, bringing much activity out on the trail.

I got out on my bike for a Sunday afternoon trail ride on Labor Day weekend, just wanting to relax by motion, as so many of our trail folks do. Right off the bat, in Hendersonville, there was a guy cross-country skiing down the trail, and at a pretty good clip. Now, there's something that you wouldn't expect! His 'skis' were short, wheeled, and worked quite well on the limestone surface. Very different from in-line skates, they certainly enable a different way to enjoy the trail and they are a good way to train for the winter.

Heading east, the wooded sections of the trail in the Chartiers Creek valley were particularly beautiful. Late summer flowers poked out of the still-full leaf cover keeping its green just before the golds and browns of autumn start to emerge. Despite the heat of the afternoon, a number of walkers and bicyclists were out enjoying it all. One couple at the Chartiers Creek overlook commented on how scenic the creek valley was despite the low water from the recent scarcity of rain.

Throughout this section, a number of interpretive signs have been newly erected by the Montour Railroad Historical Society. They continue to do a fine job of placing the Montour corridor in its historical perspective, telling us how and why the thing is here at all. Pause a moment and read! Many thanks go to the MRHS folks for their research and work on the signs.

Further on, I still could not cross the oh-so-close Valley Brook #2 Bridge. By the time you read this, though, you may be able to, as its completion is imminent; the ribbon cutting is scheduled for Saturday, October 3rd. The present road detour will be something that we all will be very, very glad to put behind us. Plus, the opening of VB #2 will enable the re-opening of VB #1, giving our trail users something of a two-fer, for which Mark Imgrund and his team are to be commended for their many years of work to bring these two bridges to fruition.



"gravity hill" tourist attractions that seem downhill both ways.

It was a great delight to ride the rebuilt trail section leading down to the Library Viaduct. The crew of volunteers led by Bill Capp and John Kozak (left) had persevered through that rainy June, and worked around the surprising water line repair. The trail surface crowning their efforts was so smooth that I scarcely had to pedal; somehow, on the return trip it was an easy ride as well. Reminded me of those 1950's

Riding across it as part of a longer trip, the Library Viaduct becomes even more remarkable. The transformation of this structure is something in which Montour can take pride for many decades to come. Again, thanks to the hundreds of people who worked to make this happen, none more than project manager Tom Prezel. **Continues on page 3**

Friends' Meetings and Work Parties

MTC Board Meeting:

Every third Monday of the month - 6:00 p.m. at 304 Hickman St., Suite 3, Bridgeville, PA. Turn right off of the Bridgeville exit of I-79. Turn left at the next light, go straight at next light and make left turn onto Hickman St. just after the Post Office. Call the Montour Trail Office for more information or to get on the agenda.

Airport Area Friends: (MP 0 to MP 12.6 and the 6.3 mile

Airport Connector) The Airport Area Friends of the Trail meet every second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Forest Grove Fire Hall, 2044 Ewings Mill Road, Robinson Township, PA 15108. New volunteers are always welcomed. Contact Phyllis McChesney at 412-264-6303 for more information. Numerous Saturday "work parties" are held during the season. Please call 412-262-3748 to lend a hand at the work parties.

Fort Cherry Friends: (MP 12.6 to MP 20.7)

Friends of the Trail meeting: Second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the McDonald Trail Station, 160 S. McDonald Street, McDonald, PA 15057 (adjacent to the Panhandle Trail). Work and cleanup parties will be scheduled as needed. For more information contact Tim Thomassy, 724-926-4617 or Chuck Hughey, 724-926-9436.

Cecil Friends: (MP 20.7 to MP 28.5)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every fourth Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. From May-August, meetings are held at the Kurnick Access area along the trail off Cecil Henderson Road; other months (with the exception of November and December) meet at the MTC Offices. Work and cleanup parties are scheduled as needed. Call 412-496-4308 for more information, or email densimwx@comcast.net

Peters Township Friends: (MP 28.5 to 30.4, Library Jct to near MP 35 and part of the Bethel Branch)

Friends of the Trail Meeting, first non-holiday Monday of the month at Peters Township Community Recreation Center at 7:00 p.m. For more information on work and cleanup parties, please contact Jim Robbins at 724-941-6132, or for monthly meetings, Mark Imgrund at 724-941-6351 or by e-mail at markimgrund@gmail.com

Bethel Park Friends: (The 2.75 mile Bethel Branch and a short piece of main line trail around MP 35).

Friends of the Trail meeting, every first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Bethel Park Municipal Building Council Chambers. Anyone interested in the Bethel Park Trail segment is encouraged to come. Work and cleanup party, every second and fourth Saturday of the month - 8:30 a.m. Call Bob O'Connell at 412-833-6259 for location and information.

South Hills Friends: (MP 35.4 to 46.3)

Meeting second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at South Park Township Community Room, located behind the Township Building at 2675 Brownsville Road, South Park, 15129. Work and cleanup parties scheduled and advertised as needed. For more information, contact David Oyler at 412-831-9288, davidoyler@verizon.net, or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, mckeownp@comcast.net

The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

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

The Prez Sez continues from page 2

A glimpse into the future was provided at Pleasant Street and at my turnaround point in the Port Authority lot. The Pleasant Street trail section is next up, and is planned to be built this coming year.

Near the big horse farm at the eastern edge of Peters, a young man was riding along with laden panniers and a sleeping pad. Ryan Brown, 29, had done the full loop around the Montour and was heading home to Baldwin. Self-described as "having gotten the cycling bug," he was training for his planned ride from Costa Rica to the southern tip of South America, starting late this fall. A remarkable story; he has already done the ride from northern Canada to Costa Rica.

All of this in a two hour bike ride, and I have only mentioned a few of the highlights. The richness and diversity of even a short walk or ride on the Montour Trail is amazingly refreshing, educational, and just plain fun. I hope you are able to take some time to get out and enjoy the trail, especially with the crisper weather that's coming. Our volunteers have worked all year and they have dressed the trail in fine shape for you.

In late news, MTC's Half Marathon race went well on September 12th. The number of runners was off a bit due to the threat of rain, which was mostly over by start time; conditions were ideal for fast race times. The runners in general enjoyed the event and felt well taken care of. Large numbers of volunteers gave their Saturday to helping out with the many aspects of putting on this involved and complex race. Thanks to them all, but especially to Jan Carey, who had chaired the event and organized its many details over the months leading up the race day. A great job to her, and to all!

Have a great Fall season.

Ned Williams

Congratulations to Ryan Eckenrode for his winning submission to the MTC Photo Contest: "Hidden Rainforest Temple???"

Because of the number of excellent submissions this time around it was one of the most difficult choices the judges have had to make. See all the submissions and judge for yourself at www.montourtrail.org and click on "view the entries." The contest is now open for YOUR photo to be entered.



Can We Stop Knotweed? By John Shaver

What is Knotweed? Knotweed is one of the most invasive plants in the state of Pennsylvania and many other regions of the United States. How would you recognize knotweed on the trail? At this time of the year, Knotweed is growing tall along the sides of the trail and in many instances is leaning towards the trail and narrowing the path. In most instances, it is now eight to ten feet tall and currently has clusters of white flowers.



While it is attractive at this time of year, the real issues with knotweed are the fact that it spreads rapidly and becomes so dense that most other native plants are forced out. In the spring, it is not uncommon for knotweed to grow several feet per week. Another characteristic that makes it difficult to eliminate knotweed is the fact that, like Canadian thistle, each small piece of the roots that remain in, or on the ground where you have tried to eliminate it becomes a new plant. This makes it virtually impossible to even dig it out.

We have tried several methods to eradicate knotweed along the trail including several limited experiments to test the effectiveness of chemicals. We also cut it down with various forms of mowers and weed cutters. Unfortunately, knotweed always comes back.

This year a unique experiment was undertaken along the trail near Hassam Road in the airport area section of the trail. We planted pumpkins along the edge of a very large patch of knotweed. This experiment was prompted by an article in the Post-Gazette indicating that a garden center on the North Side of Pittsburgh had thrown whole pumpkins in to a mulch area in the fall and found that plants sprouting from the seeds the following spring showed some success in controlling knotweed.

Our initial effort was to collect whole pumpkins after Halloween and place them along the trail. While this provided a nice seasonal effect along the trail, an issue remained of how to ensure germination. In order to avoid germination issues, we purchased seed and started our pumpkin plants in a greenhouse.

Shortly after the last frost in May, five mounds of pumpkin seedlings were strategically planted along the side of a large healthy patch of knotweed. Most of these clusters of plants grew "out of control" in the very wet June which we all experienced. Some of the "runners" were approaching fifteen to twenty feet long and the leaves were twelve inches across. Strangely enough, the knotweed was not growing up through the pumpkin patch and the pumpkin vines were growing up through and pulling down the knotweed. As an added benefit, we had pumpkins growing everywhere. In fact, one pumpkin was growing three feet above the ground and ultimately pulled a knotweed plant down.

Meet the Newest Montour Trail Patrol Members



Sean Daniels is a Lieutenant with the Mt. Lebanon Fire Department.



Meet Brad Albert, yet another one of our newest Patrols. Brad is a competitive runner from Bethel Park. He competed in the Burgh's Pizza & Wing Pub 10K Run this year and finished in first place in age group 45 to 49.

If you are interested in joining our Patrol group, contact our Director of Trail Security, Jesse Forquer via email at jjorquer@comcast.net.

At this point in mid-July, there was no question that the pumpkins had stopped or slowed the encroachment of the knotweed. Unfortunately, only two rains occurred in the next six weeks and the drought had a severe impact on the pumpkin patch. While a large number of the vines have wilted and died, the knotweed has still not advanced.

What have we learned? We have learned that under controlled conditions the pumpkins can definitely slow the encroachment of knotweed. We have also learned that the growth of pumpkin vines and foliage is very sensitive to the amount of natural moisture available to the plants. We also learned that if all else fails, we can always sell pumpkins.

Montour Trail Main Line Extension to Coraopolis & Neville Island- Phase 30 By Dennis Pfeiffer

On April 9th, 2015, a meeting was held with the director of the Allegheny County Economic Development (ACED) Department and other staff, Allegheny County Public Works and DCNR. At that meeting, we received the good news from ACED director Bob Hurley, that they had received DEP approval for the Sports Legacy development project and the adjacent Montour Trail. Thus ACED can now continue their development of the Sports Legacy Phase One on the Montour Junction site, which will include three soccer fields. Bob also gave us the notice to proceed with starting the extension of the main line of the Montour Trail through the site, which was the Montour Railroad's home and maintenance hub.

Since 1991, when the MTC bought 38 miles of the old Montour Railroad right of way (ROW), the MTC has always desired to have the Montour Trail Main line start at the Montour Railroad mile "0", which was near the Neville Island bridge. Unfortunately, the MTC could not afford or did not want the entire 78 acre Montour Junction site. Over the years Allegheny County Public Works engineer and MTC volunteer Dave Wright is to be commended for his persistence in preparing plans and communicating to the railroad, to the Sports Legacy Foundation and finally to ACED of the MTC's desire for this Montour Trail main line project.



Before cleanup

On Friday, June 19, the Airport Area Friends of the Montour Trail commenced work on the Phase 30 main line extension. This first phase included removing brush and grubbing the potential ROW enough to get vehicles through the site, a 30 yard dumpster was filled to the brim with all of the trash removed and finally millings were brought in to remove ponds of water and cover up numerous muddy areas. The trash removal and grubbing occurred on the 19th and 20th. The Airport Area Friends are to be commended on performing this ugly, dirty, muddy volunteer work. On June 22 & 23, 80 tons of millings were brought in and placed.

On Wednesday, July 9, the engineering firm WEC was selected by an E&C subcommittee to design two retaining walls and survey the proposed trail. One retaining wall is needed adjacent to RT. 51 near the bridge for the Neville Island connection. The other



After cleanup

wall is needed adjacent to the railroad tracks to extend the trail to Montour Street in Coraopolis.

After the design is complete, WEC will prepare the documents for contractors to bid on the construction for the two retaining walls. The trail building will more than likely be conducted by MTC volunteers and their array of heavy duty equipment. Thanks again to all who helped in this first phase!



Airport Area Friends

Trail Asphalt Re-Paving and Patching - Bres-Lube Site

At 6:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 1, the trail was closed between mile 0.2 and 0.4. For the closure we used the barriers and trail closed signs that the Bres-Lube folks donated to us last year.

T. A. Robinson Paving Company, who is owned by Tom Robinson (trail neighbor at the former Montour #4 mine at MP 30), proceeded to mill out the small sections needing patching, squared them off with a jack hammer, applied a binder coating and then re-asphalted the patch areas. There also were two long sections of 280 feet and 40 feet where an additional two inches of asphalt was added. In the areas where the old and new asphalt met, they milled at a high to low slant for about ten feet to provide a smooth transition. The process went very well and they performed the work that was agreed upon. The trail was opened at 6:00 a.m. on Sunday morning.

A base course and wearing course was also placed on a portion of the adjacent Montour Road. About 180 feet of split rail fencing was installed between the stream and the trail.

MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

The Venice Bridge at Rt. 50**By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society**

Another major bridge nears completion on the Montour Trail. This one flies over Routes 50 & 980 at Venice, trail mile 22.1. At 377 feet, it becomes the third longest on the trail. This new bridge also includes one span from the original Montour Railroad Bridge at this location.

The original Venice Bridge was built over a century ago by the American Bridge Company in 1913. It was made up of three spans. A 60 foot deck plate girder spanned Millers Run creek, then a 40-foot deck plate girder crossed over the parking area next to an adjacent building known to many as "Muck's Lunch". The third span was a 90-foot through plate girder section over Rt. 50. The deck plate girder spans had timbers and rails laid openly across the top of their main girders, while the through plate span had its decking and rails supported between its girders.



A westbound Montour coal train crosses the bridge in 1980. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

Route 980 came down the hill on the south & west side of the railroad to Route 50, jogged east under the bridge for a hundred feet and then turned north toward McDonald. This offset intersection was eliminated by the new alignment of the Routes 50 & 980 intersection.

At 190 total feet, the Venice bridge was the fourth longest on the Montour Railroad. The west abutment, pier and span remain in their original locations, repurposed for use on the new bridge. Another pier at the side of Route 50 and the east abutment, which sat about where the new "T" shaped supporting pier is now located, were removed.

Montour Railroad traffic hauled loads in both directions over this bridge. Green (unprocessed) coal loads from Montour mines to the east at Muse, Hendersonville, Hills and Library travelled westbound to the Champion Processing Plant near Imperial. Processed coal from Champion returned eastbound to several interchange points for final shipment with other railroads. Empty hoppers mostly flowed eastbound to the mines. Non-coal freight went in both directions to and from many businesses in the area.

Montour Railroad operations ended over this section of track at the close of 1980. The Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad, the Montour's parent company, applied for abandonment of ten miles of railroad from Gilmore Junction to Thompsonville (in Peters Township) in 1982. Portions of the main line and the Muse Branch to the east were then used to store surplus box cars for several years. In the winter of 1984, the last train passed over the Venice Bridge when the P&LE removed those stored cars. By 1986, the main rails had been removed from the bridge.



Seen in 1993, the bridge sat idle after abandonment of the Montour Railroad. Donald McCarty photo

road.

PennDOT's recent realignment of the roadway intersection includes the new bridge to carry trail traffic over the roadways, increasing safety by eliminating the grade crossing. New piers and abutments were poured to support the "new" bridge, but its historic heart is its century old predecessor, still carrying Montour traffic over Millers Run.

You can contact the Montour Railroad Yahoo group at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/ There are currently 345 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>



PennDOT removed two spans of the bridge in October 2001 to eliminate truck clearance restrictions. Gene P. Schaeffer photo

The bridge sat idle for over 15 years, but the restricted overhead clearance caused problems with truck traffic on Route 50. Trucks striking the bridge became a common occurrence. Thus, PennDOT had two of the three spans removed in October 2001 to clear the roadway problems. The east abutment and one pier were also razed and the railroad fill regraded to provide better traffic safety sightlines at the Rt. 980 intersection.

During this period, the Montour Trail was a dead end at the west end of the bridge, as there was no way to get from the bridge height over Millers Run down to ground level, necessitating an on-road trail detour along Southview Road and Route 50. In 2009, the Trail Council undertook a project to eliminate the on-road portion by installing a set of wooden steps from the remaining bridge span down to ground level, using an at-grade crossing of Route. 50 to a regraded trail ramp on the opposite side of the

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

Barbara Billman
Chris & Sharon Cardiges
Charles Dinan
Bob Drew
Steve Emery & Maureen Hurley
James Fisher
Robert & Ann Fronduti
George Geyer & Dana Doyle
James Horne
Joel Hough
Richard LoPresti
Susan McKinnis
Lou Nellas
Mary Jane Peglow
Mark Pittman
Diana Repack
Karen Anne Riley
Jim Starr
Martin Zihar

Benefactors

Bernard Halpin
Charles & Joan Marstiller
Dave & Veronica Mattson
Art McSorley
Jim & Brenda Quasey
Jacques Rhodes
John & Mary Jo Wasco

Leaders

William Benter
Janet McKinney
Jim Starr

In Memory of Jerry Gerardi

by Caron, Jack & Richard Springer
by Ellen & Leo Carlin

In Memory of Justin Broglie

by Mr. & Mrs. Leslie Broglie

Interpretive Signs Installed by Bryan Seip



Two new historical interpretive signs have recently been installed along the trail by the Montour Railroad Historical Society.

The first was installed at the Galati Road trailhead near Southview, at trail

The interpretive sign at Montour #2 overlooks an original mine building. Dennis Sims photo

mile 21.3. One of the deck plate girders from the Montour Railroad's original bridge at near-by Southview Road is displayed at the trailhead and this sign explains the history of that bridge as well as the Montour's railroad bridge over Galati Road.

The second sign was erected at trail mile 23.1 in Cecil Township, at the location of the former Montour #2 Mine. The site near Cowden Road includes a century old mine building, now being used by the Miller Centrifugal Casting Company.

MRHS has several other signs denoting the history of the railroad planned for installation along the Montour Trail this fall.

I want to help complete the Montour Trail!

I want to join the Montour Trail Council at this level:

<input type="checkbox"/> Student/Senior	\$15
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Valley Brook Bridge #2 (left) construction progress as of 9/14/15. Construction should be nearly complete as you are reading this Trail Letter. The Ribbon Cutting was scheduled for October 3.



The 980/50 Flyover (right) construction progress as of 9/18/15. Crews are constructing the east approach fill which is similar to the Westland Branch fills. The deck pour is underway this day. Completion is expected in November.