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MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Marking 33 Years

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How One Tunnel Repair Became Two

By Wayne Pfrimmer and Nick Koman

The Greer Tunnel was bored in 1913; the concrete liner added in 1922; the portal facades were added even later. Railroad usage ended in 1980 and it was abandoned for many years until the Montour Trail Council became its guardian, opening it and the 3 nearby bridges to Trail users in the late 2000s. It is now one of the trail's most scenic areas.

The Greer tunnel ceiling has been deteriorating since 1922 when the concrete ceiling cracked, a result of many winters freeze-thaw cycles. It gradually began to drop mud, rocks and pieces of concrete onto the trail surface. The Peters Friends group removed this debris every year, especially in the spring. Several years ago, volunteers placed scaffolding with a wooden "roof" beneath the deteriorating section to safeguard walkers, runners and bikers.

The Original Plan

After studying ways to repair the Greer tunnel ceiling, MTC decided to install 120 feet of steel arches and a lining material in-between to stabilize the existing concrete structure — a system used on other trails to rehabilitate old tunnels. The target date for construction was the summer of 2023, using funds received from a Local Share Account grant. These repairs are expected to improve trail-user safety as well support the tunnel for the next 50 years. But the law of gravity had other ideas. While conducting a site survey to fine-tune the repair plan, engineers discovered that the tunnel's east portal

façade was cracked for its full length, pulling away from the tunnel while being pushed by the hillside behind it. Even more concerning was that the crack was located at the intersection of the back of the wall and the tunnel. The large mass of concrete was no longer helping the head wall's cracked top portion support the hill's loose earth and rock forcing against it. There were

horizontal 10-inch cracks in front of the headwall long the front face (the most highly stressed area), which greatly reduced the capacity of the unreinforced concrete. Calculations showed it was an unsafe situation. MTC closed the Greer tunnel immediately.

The Plan, Part 2

Trail volunteers spent a day putting up barriers only to have them torn apart in the middle of the night by someone who, sadly, saw the need to continue on his journey (probably on an illegal ATV). A day later, stronger barriers appeared along with more warning signs. Walkers and runners who favor the Peters Township section of the trail were quick to notice the closure at MM 28.5; they simply turned around and went back home. After all, this is a popular, picturesque section. But bikers from towns all along the trail, hoping to get in lots of miles, found out the hard way that they couldn't finish what they planned. They soon all learned that road detour alternatives were hilly, highly trafficked and dangerous. Before any work could begin on tunnel ceiling repairs, volunteers, engineers and contractors acted to stabilize the portal. Bill Armstrong with WEC Engineers, who had been working on the tunnel lining plans, discovered the issue with the east Portal.

Working with MTC, he agreed to design and deliver plans for a temporary fix until the permanent lining could be installed. The plan was to drill six 4" holes through the portal face into the structural rock behind, going as deep as necessary to reach component

The tunnel lining project begins in late summer. During the three to four months of construction, we may need to close the tunnel to traffic. Whatever you do as you wander the trail, don't breach the construction fencing or go into the tunnel when it's closed.



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To converse go to:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43518292159>



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A Long Growing Season

Greetings, Montour Trail folks. It's been an interesting Spring; late cold, then suddenly everything bloomed and the woods went green overnight. Our trail users have responded accordingly, and are out there in droves, taking it all in. We are so happy to see the trail busy again! The volunteers throughout the MTC organization have bloomed as well, and they are hard at work in an astounding variety of ways to manage the trail and to improve it greatly.

Having outgrown our old office in Bridgeville, MTC has moved to new headquarters a few miles south, in Upper St Clair. Many thanks to Deb Thompson, Dave Hajnik, and many others who led the team to take care of numerous issues and details to implement the move. They organized a nice open house event on Saturday, April 29.

In late March a crack was discovered in the eastern portal of Greer Tunnel, forcing a trail closure. The prompt and robust response from the trail leaders, Cecil and Peters Friends groups, MT's volunteer maintenance crew, and a quickly assembled team of engineers and professionals worked together to design and install an emergency fix, getting the trail back open in mid-May. The permanent portal fix and re-lining of the eastern half of the tunnel is a long-planned major project that will start late this summer, under the guidance of project manager Nick Koman. The project is anticipated to be very expensive, so even though MT received an LSA grant, we are doing a separate fundraiser to help out with the costs and to raise awareness.

Montour's volunteer Trail Maintenance crew, anchored by Bill Capp, Dave Jackel and a host of others, has been working hard to repair drainage and re-surface the trail in the South Park area. They will then be active in Peters and Cecil before moving on to a major drainage and surfacing project in the Airport area. It's these guys who create that firm smooth surface which, simply put, is the trail experience, be it step by step, or at each spin of the bike tire. All of the rest of us volunteers, and our trail users, should thank these guys, and strive to remain appreciative of the level of dedication and consistency that they devote to their work.

In a nod to our beginnings, Montour's three-decade partnership with Cecil Township continues to bear fruit. The initial phase of Cecil's project of the connector to Southpointe is finished, and by the time you read this will be nearing a ribbon cutting ceremony. We are grateful to a cadre of Montour folks (going back to Frank Ludwin), to Cecil township leadership, and to the Southpointe business community, especially Crown Castle, for all pulling together on this one. Future phases will extend the connecting trail along Reserve Drive and Klinger Road.

In South Park Township beyond the Library Viaduct, project manager Dave Oyler has adroitly managed the beautiful new trail through Summit Station to its completion. Immediately adjacent, across Wood Street, is the last gap in that area, the long-awaited trail section across the mini storage property to connect with existing trail at Stewart Road. Now clearing final administrative hurdles, this project is planned go into construction later this year. Partial funding has been obtained by a grant from PA DCNR, matched by in-kind and MTC funds.

In addition to those people mentioned above, your Montour Trail Friends Groups, the many Committees, and your Board of Directors are working both harder and smarter than ever in a determined effort to make the Montour as healthy and strong as it can be. We all, of course, have lots of other things going on in our lives. Nevertheless, these Montour people devote big chunks of their time and talents to ensure that the Montour Trail will remain highly maintained and the organization vibrant well into the future, a lavishly crafted gift to the children and grandchildren of the region. May they retain a strong love for health, recreation, and the outdoors! **Continue on page 3.**

Friends' Meetings and Work Parties

MTC Board Meeting:

Every third Monday of the month - 6:00 p.m. at 2589 Boyce Plaza Road, Suite 4 Upper St. Clair. Turn at the traffic signal on Boyce Road between the railroad and the creel 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 MTC Western Corridor Garage, 450 Cliff Mine Road, North Fayette 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 6:30 p.m. The meetings are held at the Kurnick Access area along the trail off Cecil Henderson Road. 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, the first non-holiday Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at various locations depending on weather and time of year.. Work and clean-up parties on

the first Friday and third Saturday of every month at 8:30 am. For more information on meetings or work parties please email us at petersfriends@montourtrail.org

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. Since the 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

Remember When

2018: 5 years ago: Construction to begin on the Airport Area garage.

2013: 10 years ago: Montour Railroad Historical Society marks the 100th anniversary of the Montour Railroad through northern Washington County.

2008: 15 years ago: Mingo Creek Construction begins construction of Phase 16, Chartiers Creek to Valley Brook Road in Peters Township with a fall opening planned.

2003: 20 years ago: Brush Run Road segment is opened, connecting Bethel Park with Peters .

1998: 25 years ago: Bethel Park begins to clear the right-of-way for their trail section.

1993: 30 years : Seven volunteers planted 400 Colorado Spruce seedlings along the Cecil Section.

The Prez Sez continues from Page 2

It's an honor to serve as your MT president in the interim while the next wave of leadership readies. There's so much going on (see the remaining sections of this fine newsletter) that I need a LOT of help. Fortunately Montour folks have been extraordinarily generous with their time and well-focused efforts, and more volunteers are becoming interested in taking on a variety of tasks. I cannot thank you all nearly enough for caring so much.

Best of Springtime to You All!

Ned Williams

Find it on the MTC website!

When the website crashed last August, we didn't just lose a significant way to communicate with you. We lost a lot of text as well – so the website “refresh” involved a lot of rewrites. But enough about us!

Statistics show that most people come to our website to view the maps.

But there is also up-to-date information about:

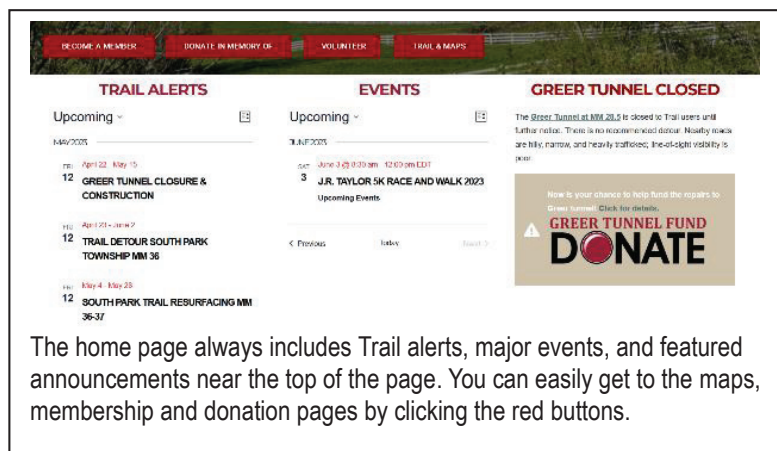
- Amenities
- Trailheads
- Safety & Etiquette
- Branches, connectors and linking trails
- The MTC *Trail-Letter*
- Frequently asked questions
- Events
- Blog

Yes, a blog. A recent post tells the tale of one outdoorsperson who rode the Trail years ago, not realizing what it takes to keep a trail vibrant, and now volunteers to help keep the trail “as well-maintained, accessible, and beautiful as it is.” You can find “This Video ... wow” and others at <https://montourtrail.org/blog-page/>.

If you wish to submit a blog – or submit an idea for the website – send it to webcontent@montourtrail.org for consideration!



The website template is more flexible, so the information you need is easier to find. If you can't find what you're looking for in the navigation, use the search function.



The home page always includes Trail alerts, major events, and featured announcements near the top of the page. You can easily get to the maps, membership and donation pages by clicking the red buttons.

Clear the Greer

Shortly after the Greer tunnel closed, the idea of a grass-roots fundraiser took root. The goal is steep -- \$350,000 – because that is the shortfall between the total cost of the project and the \$250,000 grant we received to make emergency repairs and fix the tunnel ceiling. Your donations go directly toward this effort.

The Clear the Greer campaign will last at least through September. Any amount that you are able to contribute is appreciated.

Upcoming events

On varying Saturdays, look for members of the Trail Patrol to be at area bike shops explaining the rules and etiquette of Montour Trail users through mid-summer,

Saturday, September 23 is the Tour the Montour

Sunday, November 5 is the annual dinner and meeting to be held at Southpointe.

Tour the Montour: Get ready to roll

New for this year, cyclists participating in the 2023 Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour are offered incentives when they become a Tour fundraiser and getting donations from friends and family. Awards including a customized “Fundraising Champion” baseball hat and a customized bike jersey will be given to recognize those riders achieving fundraising tiers.



If you ride with friends or family who are also Tour fundraisers, why not band together as a fundraising team? Top individuals and teams will be recognized and honored as our guests at the Montour Trail Council’s annual dinner in November.

Fundraisers can get creative in thinking of ways to support the trail, such as asking family and friends for support based on dollars per mile ridden or hosting a party or an event (think out-of-the-box!) and having guests contribute.

The Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour is the signature annual fundraiser for the Montour Trail. Funds raised by the Tour – a non-competitive, family fun bike ride – go toward maintenance and stewardship of the trail.

This year marks the Tour’s 21st year -- it rolls, rain or shine, on Saturday, Sept. 23, starting at mile zero in Coraopolis. Parking will be available at the AHN Montour Junction Sports Complex, which is adjacent to mile zero.

Tour participants can select a distance 12 miles or less; 15-24 miles; 44 miles; or 62 miles (a metric century). The rides are out-and-back on the trail, and the routes include rest stops with snacks and beverages. On-trail rider support will be provided by the Montour Trail Patrol/Trail Ambassadors.

Registration for the Tour the Montour includes lunch, and early registrants will get a colorful event t-shirt. While the cost of many things have increased, this year’s Tour registration has dropped.

Adults (age 12 and up) will be \$45, with a \$5 discount for Montour Trail Council members, and registration for a child (with no t-shirt) will be \$10 if the adult registering him or her is a MTC member. If the adult registering the child is not a member, the cost will be \$12.50 (with no t-shirt). After August 31, registration increases \$5 per adult and \$2.50 per child.

The Tour will have a host of super raffle prizes and basket chance items that can be viewed at the lunch site, which will be the Forest Grove Sportsmen’s Club (near mile marker 1.5).

Raffle prizes include a Liv electric bicycle (donated by SweetWater Bikes, Ambridge); a hybrid bike (donated by Tandem Connection, Hendersonville); a cycling kit gift certificate (\$250 value, donated by AeroTech Designs, Coraopolis); a \$500 gift card from Pro Bike+Run (Pittsburgh); and a Yakima two-bike tray hitch rack (\$249 value, donated by U-Haul of North Hills).

Raffle tickets will be available this summer at various sites along the Montour, and at packet pick-up and on the day of the Tour. They will also be available online at time of registration.

To learn more about fundraising for the Tour and for Tour registration, please see the 2023 Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour website: <https://montourtrail.org/tour-2023/>

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Save the Date! Annual Meeting in Southpointe Nov. 5

The Montour Trail Council will hold its annual dinner meeting at the Loft Conference Center in Southpointe on Sunday, Nov. 5. We selected the Southpointe location in recognition of the recently opened Southpointe Connector Trail.

Our keynote speaker is Jeff Kotula, the president of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Promotion Agency. Jeff and his team were instrumental in planning and funding the Southpointe Connector as well as supporting and promoting trails all across Washington County. He will focus his remarks on strategies to promote outdoor and recreational tourism and its economic impact on the region.

We will begin with a cash bar from 5 pm to 6 pm followed by a hot buffet dinner from 6 pm to 7 pm. The business meeting and keynote address will run from 7 pm to 8 pm.

The meeting is a great opportunity to make and renew friendships with wonderful supporters of the Montour Trail! Plan to join us!

Correction: Insurance Review Opportunity

We used the wrong email address last edition in our article seeking volunteers to help the Montour Trail Council with our insurance function. If you’d like to volunteer, please email us at volunteer@MontourTrail.org.

MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

The Champion Preparation Plant

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The heart of Montour Railroad operations was the Champion Preparation Plant, which was located at the intersection of Routes 22 & 980 near Imperial, at trail mile 12. The plant was dismantled years ago and nothing remains on the site. It is now mostly an empty field and it is hard to recognize that this valley was once filled with large buildings, conveyor systems and railroad tracks.

Built by the Pittsburgh Coal Company in 1928, raw coal (called green coal or stop-off coal) from their various mines was shipped to this large facility for cleaning, sorting and processing. Different customers would require different sizes and forms of processed coal. The processed coal was reloaded into hopper cars for shipping to its final destinations, which included power plants, large industries, and overseas shipments.



A view of Champion, looking south from the Rt. 22 overpass. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

Inside the plant's buildings the coal went through screening, sorting, and crushing equipment to prepare it for customer orders. At open picking tables, men would hand-pick rock, slate and impurities out of the coal. Washers and large rotary driers were used to clean the coal. A system of conveyor belts moved the coal to different areas of the plant, which could produce 13,000 tons of processed coal each day.

Trains of green coal were brought into the plant and shoved up a hill to the rotary dumper. The dumper would flip an entire hopper car upside down, unloading its coal in a few seconds. A conveyor carried the green coal past a large electromagnet, which would pull metal pieces out of the coal. Roof bolts, mine car coupler links and pins, tools, etc., which fell into the coal loads at the mines, could damage the Champion processing equipment.

In the winter, coal loads might freeze inside the open hopper cars and additional work was needed to unload it. Heaters were used on the cars to thaw the coal and allow dumping. At times the coal would be unloaded into piles on the ground so it would not freeze in the hoppers. Frozen loads would take the hoppers out of revenue service.

The Montour assigned train crews as necessary to service the plant. Three yard crews were kept busy each day switching Champion from 7:30 am to 10:00 pm. Empty hoppers in shuttle service were returned to the mines and never left the Montour. Cars from other railroads were taken to the Champion tipple tracks for loading processed coal and then shipped offline to the coal's final customers. Unit trains of 75 cars or more were loaded several times a week and shipped to large customers. The yardmaster kept track of which cars were to be used for different customers on the various railroads receiving outbound shipments and a company agent processed the appropriate billing forms. The Montour built a yard office housing the yardmaster, company agent, and a crew lounge near the edge of the complex to handle the railroad's needs. The Montour delivered the processed coal to the Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh & Lake Erie, Union and B&O Railroads at various interchange points along its main line.



A picking table, where workers hand-picked impurities out of green coal.

John Collier photo in 1942.

Another facility called Disco was part of the Champion complex and was serviced by Champion yard crews. Disco (distilled coal) was a processed coal similar to charcoal briquettes that burned without smoke, using coal as its base instead of wood. Disco fell out of favor in the 1960's as natural gas became prominent for home heating. This part of the Champion plant was then closed and sometimes used to store excess coal that was needed to keep Champion working.

With a declining coal market and its aging equipment in need of a complete overhaul, Champion was closed in 1983 and dismantled a few years later.

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 Montour Trail Council!

Become a member now!

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



NAME _____

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EMAIL _____



ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

☐ Leader's Circle \$500+

☐ Benefactor \$350 - \$499

☐ Sustaining \$100 - \$249

☐ Supporting \$50 - \$99

☐ Family \$35

☐ Individual \$25

☐ Student/Senior \$15

Additional donation \$ _____

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2589 Boyce Plaza Rd., Suite 4
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MTC Use Only

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Date _____

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

Mark Andresky	Bill Madden
Jocelyne Arnott	Arthur Mang
Martin Bacik	Joshua McFall
John Blackburn	Jeff McNeil
Doug Clark	Sibyl Mose
Angela DeThomas	Daniel Paine
John Elion	Jennifer Pardini
Daniel J. Fix	Robert Pfaffmann
Charles Holmes	Mary Ann Rose
Oscar Huber	Karen Roudybush
Wesley Kanawalsky	John Shervey
Brian Karlovich	Andy Widdowson

Benefactor

Stephen Bowles
Mark Cappello
Michael F. Colligan
Joseph Grimes
Mindy Houser
Martha Long Bagdes
Mary Anne E. Simon
Sharon Yeager

Leader's Circle

Mary Ann Rose
Jay Shock

In honor

Josh Cordle
Linda Cordle
Marie Kuchera
Michelle Bluman

In memory

James A. Escovitz
Darlene Knapp
Ed Kuna
Carroll Boyce

Note:

The next edition of the newsletter will contain the annual report. Submissions will be due July 18.

Thank you.

