Steel Erected over Valleybrook Road
Picture and story by Troy Bogdan

On Thursday, February 14, 2008 (Valentines Day), a monumental event took place along the Montour Trail over Valleybrook Road in West Peters. Originally scheduled for Tuesday the 12th, a heavy snowstorm delayed the event by two days, and fortunately the weather cooperated by providing a beautiful sunny day, and it was a great day for both the construction crews and all of the Montour Trail supporters who showed up to watch the project.

Three steel beams were put into place over the road, replacing the missing span of the railroad bridge that used to be in its place. The new beams will support the deck of the new trail bridge. This bridge will provide a connection for the Trail between Kamps Cut and the Boyce Transfer track at the former National #4 mine.

Closing Montour’s Biggest Gap by Ned Williams

Divide and Conquer. The strategy was so simple that it almost seemed to suggest itself.

Faced with the almost insurmountable hurdle of seven missing bridges, all in a short stretch near the Peters-Cecil border, it turned out that the best plan of attack was to start with the three in the middle.

Over the last decade, Montour Trail builders had made progress in leaps. The trail is continuous west of Venice in Cecil. On the Peters’ Arrowhead section, usage has greatly picked up as the trail was extended into Bethel Park and nearly to South Park. But the couple of unbuilt miles in west Peters, with all those bridges, had remained elusive.

The notoriously difficult terrain of Western Pennsylvania really forced our hand. Of the remaining on-road detours between finished sections of the Montour Trail, this one, between Route 19 and Hendersonville, was by far the worst. Steep hills, nonexistent shoulders and heavy traffic combined to form a divide so daunting that our trail users just could not navigate it. We wondered: What if we completed the middle three bridges, those over Chartiers Creek, the Pittsburgh and Ohio Central Railroad, and Valleybrook Road? That would eliminate nearly all of the on-road detour, and give our users a level and particularly scenic pathway around the hills.

Congressman Tim Murphy, at the Muse Bishop opening ceremonies in October 2005, announced $1.8 million in federal funding for the Montour Trail. The three bridges now being constructed are using the first portion of those funds. Mingo Creek Construction, of Eighty Four, Pa., won the contract for just over $1 million. Engineering and design of the bridge project is by Mackin Engineering, of Findlay Township in continues on page 4
The Prez Sez

Lots on Our Plate in 2008

We’re two months into the year and despite the winter weather, things have been happening. Our construction project in west Peters Township is a bit ahead of schedule as evidenced by the photo and story on the front page, and the gears of engineering & planning are in motion to begin or continue projects elsewhere. As promised in my last column, I want to use this newsletter issue to outline key elements of the Montour Trail Council’s 2008 plan.

In addition to trail maintenance and building plans, which I’ll save for last, the MTC’s 2008 plan contains tasks, goals and initiatives in several areas, including financial, organizational, and operational aspects of running our trail. Although lacking the “sizzle” of actual trail building, some of them are worth describing here. To start with, we once again have a key volunteer position vacant in the membership area due to a key volunteer’s “real job” relocation, and that has raised some challenges for our Membership, Volunteer, and Donor Committee members, who are rising to the challenge as a team. We hope all of you can bear with us a bit while we work through these issues to meet our goals in the membership arena.

We’ve initiated an ad hoc Strategic Funding Committee, whose members have begun wrestling with the important question of how the council should approach funding for the significant remaining trail sections and bridges that will remain to be built after our currently secured grant monies run out. Another goal would have the trail council’s Bridgeville office improved and upgraded to help us better conduct business there. Another 2008 ad hoc committee will likely be proposing some suggested changes to the MTC Bylaws at our annual meeting later this year, changes that have been accumulating over the last several years.

Although many of you may not know this, the part of the Panhandle Trail in Allegheny County is part of our management agreement with the county, for historical reasons too lengthy to describe here. In practical terms, the real management is being done by other organizations much more focused on the Panhandle Trail. We will be exploring a legal transfer of responsibility during 2008 to mirror the de facto responsibility as it exists today.

Moving on to the plans directly related to trail on the ground, we have a goal to develop a directional signage plan for all road bypasses of the remaining unopened sections of the trail, and be in a position to install them before the height of the 2009 trail use season. We expect to have trail construction activities in west Peters Twp. complete enough before the end of the year to hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony opening this 1.8-mile section of trail. The expected continues on page 4
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 Mark at 724-941-6351 for more information or to get on the agenda.

Cecil Friends:
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 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

Airport Area Friends
Friends of the Trail meeting, the Wednesday before the second Saturday of the month at 7:00 p.m., at the Forest Grove Fire Department. Anyone from the communities of Moon, Robinson, North Fayette, and Findlay is encouraged to attend. Call 412-859-3020 for more information.
Work and cleanup party, every second Saturday of the month - 9:00 a.m. Call 412-262-3748 for more information and location.

Bethel Park Friends:
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. For Clifton Road Bridge Committee meetings, contact Peter Kohnke at 412-854-1835 for more information.
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 of the Trail
Meeting second Wednesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the Jefferson Hills Borough Building. 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

Fort Cherry Friends:
Friends of the Trail Meeting, second Wednesday of the month at McDonald Borough Bldg., Council chambers at 7:00 p.m. Work and cleanup parties, scheduled as needed. For more information, contact Ray Johnston at 724-356-2621.

Peters Township Friends:
Friends of the Trail Meeting, first non-holiday Monday of the month at Peters Township Parks and 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@comcast.net.

Trail Dust from the Editor’s Desktop

I want to personally thank Bob Ciminel for the historical contributions he has been writing and providing for the Newsletter. Bob grew up nearby in Crafton and has a strong interest in railroading and his father worked in the mines that provided the commodity for the railroads to deliver. Bob is the moderator of two Yahoo groups that are close to the Montour Trail, the Montour Railroad Historical Society as it’s titled and the PRR Panhandle Division. I highly recommend you check these forums out and join the discussion about railroad history and the mines and corporations that these railroads served. Bob currently resides in the suburbs of Atlanta and still comes back to visit and when he does visit you might just find him exploring these areas with some of the members. The MRHS is at: http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/prr_panhandle_pa/ and the Panhandle discussions are found at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr.

There is plenty of information in the files and photo sections of these groups that may answer any questions you have while you use the trails that evolved from these railroads after their abandonment. If you cannot find your answers here, you may want to head over to Ken Caine’s web site (www.montourrr.com) that is dedicated to the Montour Railroad. On his site you can view pictures of the past and present right-of-way as well as read interviews of past employees. There are also pictures of Montour equipment and several of the structures along the railroad. Some of this equipment and railroad memorabilia still exists in the homes of the members of this group and now, some members of this group are beginning to look for a permanent home for this collection. At this point I turn the column over to Stan Sattinger:

For almost two years of Trail-Letter issues, Bob Ciminel, moderator of the Montour Railroad Yahoo group or MRHS, has been contributing articles on the hows, whats, and whys of operations on the now-defunct Montour Railroad -- the Montour Trail’s reason for being. Some of Bob’s cohorts in the Yahoo group have long envisioned historic relics from the railroad preserved, protected, and available for viewing by the public.

The Yahoo group would now like to get started on an endeavor that could end up showcasing artifacts of the railroad and possibly even a scale model layout in a suitable place. Preservation efforts would begin with small, outdoors trail-side projects such as sign and signal tower restorations, subject to approval by the MTC Board of Directors.

The Yahoo group members are pleased to invite members of the Montour Trail Council to join with them in this undertaking. If you have a general interest in railroad history or would just like to be involved in preserving the story of the Montour Railroad, you are asked to email Bill Crane at billiam56@yahoo.com. Bill would like you to describe any equipment and/or capabilities (welding, painting, sandblasting, etc.) that you would be able to bring to this effort. All will be invited to a meeting in late April or May to generate plans for initial projects to actively preserve the Montour Railroad.
Closing Montour’s Biggest Gap continued from page 1

Allegeny County. The trail sections in between the bridges are being built by volunteers, using PA DCNR funds, local contributions, and in-kind services.

By opening these three bridges, and completing the trail sections that lay in between, the Montour Trail takes a huge leap toward becoming a truly connected, integrated trail system. Longer distance recreational travel, commuting, and through touring will finally become possible. Best of all, the large and well established trail-using communities of Peters eastward and Cecil westward, long walled off from each other, will at last be able to flow freely.

Connecting the dots across this big gap has been the focus of a lot of Montour Trail Council people for years. There are far too many to list, but volunteer bridge project manager Ed Taylor and his crew continue to do fine work. On the interwoven volunteer trail building, project manager Gil McGurl, along with Mark Imgrund, Frank Ludwin, Bill Capp, John Kozak and many others, are working to wrest a beautiful trail from the abandoned Montour right-of-way.

Steel was set for Valleybrook Bridge #3 on Valentines Day, a full month ahead of schedule, unheard of in the trail business. Work is proceeding there and on the bridge over the Pittsburgh and Ohio Central Railroad, with Chartiers Creek Bridge to follow. All three should be done by mid July, but the volunteer work to build adjacent trail will continue well into this fall, and possibly the following spring.

Thus it was truly a momentous occasion when we set those girders for Valleybrook Bridge #3. That gap in the air over Valleybrook Road became, in that moment, a striking symbol of the larger trail gap girders for Valleybrook Bridge #3. That gap in the air over Valleybrook thus it was truly a momentous occasion when we set those girders for Valleybrook Bridge #3. That gap in the air over Valleybrook Trail became, in that moment, a striking symbol of the larger trail gap that will at last be able to flow freely.

We’ve allocated $25,000 of our operating budget for general trail maintenance under the direction of our Engineering and Construction Committee, applied for grant monies that will help us to pave the National Tunnel with Cecil Township’s assistance, and recently received a $90,000 DCNR grant for major trail drainage and resurfacing work in the MP 9 to MP 17 area. The latter project we don’t expect to be in a position to start until later this year, or early next year. A $30,000 DCED grant is funding a road crossing safety improvement project on Cliff Mine Rd. in Findlay Twp.

Although gaining all the needed approvals may prevent this from happening in 2008, we have a goal to open an on-road Airport Connector Trail to Moon-Clinton Rd., and add it to our on-line trail map. This wouldn’t complete our connection with the airport, but would take us much of the way. There is pre-construction engineering and planning work going on for the Clifton Rd. Bridge in Bethel Park and similar efforts taking place for the Library Viaduct in South Park Township. However, our biggest 2008 thrust in South Park Township trail construction will be to make significant headway constructing the Piney Fork Bridge, primarily because we are at risk of losing over $100,000 of our funding for this project if we are unable to use those monies in 2008. Suffice it to say that this goal is a major focus of a team put together to ensure we do everything in our power to make it happen.

Concluding on a more upbeat note, the MTC recently met with DCNR and PENNDOT representatives regarding the launch of our Phase 19 project, which includes the construction of the missing bridges over Morganza and Georgetown Roads. With our recently awarded $173,400 DCNR grant awarded for final design of these two bridges, and estimated federal transportation grant monies remaining after the completion of west Peters construction, we have been given a green light to begin final engineering work on this project. We expect to get final design work underway this year, with a possibility of the project going to bid in 2009.

Whew! I’ve just scratched the surface of many of these projects, and I’m tired just writing about all this good stuff. We certainly have a busy year ahead of us. If you want to help some of these things happen more quickly, we are always looking for new volunteers!

Passing on your left,

Mark

Looking for a gift for a friend or a loved one? Then visit the Montour Trail Store at http://www.montourtrail.org/store/store.html or while you are out visiting your favorite stores, stop by Imagine Threads at 501 Valleybrook Rd. Ste 104 in McMurray to see the Montour Trail items in person.
Party on the Trail

The Bethel Park Friends will host its annual Party on the Trail and JR Taylor Memorial 5K Run on Saturday, June 8, 2008.

The race begins on the Peters Township side of the trail by Clifton Road with a turnaround near Brush Run Road. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. at the Washington School Parking Lot. The race will begin at 8:30 a.m. Contact Phil Ehrman, Race Director, at pehrman@corporateairllc.com for more information.

The Party on the Trail is an event designed to encourage residents and friends to come out and use the trail. Participants will receive lunch and have an opportunity to win prizes donated by local businesses and individuals. A balloon artist will be available from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and other activities are planned. Registration will begin at 9:30 a.m. in the Washington School parking lot. Contact Leigh Ann Sobzack, the 2008 Party Planner, glenn-leigh@worldnet.att.net for additional information.

Burgh’s 10K & 2 Mile Walk Needs YOU!

It is spring time, the maple sap is running and we Trail geeks need to get off our winter’s couch. The 8th Edition of Burgh’s fabulous event comes up Sunday, April 20 at Cecil Park, Cecil Pa.

Over the past seven years, Burgh’s Pizza & Wing Pub has raised over $126,000 to benefit the Montour Trail. This year (dare we say) the objective is to add $30,000 more to help ‘Trail’. So, you need exercise and the Trail needs your help!

First timers- you will love the Trail, the friendly competition and the party ambiance as Burgh’s hosts provide comfort food and beverages for all participants.

The 10K Run: We invite you veterans of this event to run for fun again this year. There were 280 finishers last year- let’s go for 400 this year! Start by sending out a challenge to your family and friends to join you. Remember, too, there are serious cash prizes.

The Two Mile Walk: Everyone can truly benefit themselves and help out the Trail in this event. What better way to enjoy a springtime stroll. Organize your scout groups, church and neighborhood friends to add to the fun. Wouldn’t 200 participants be a blast here?

Enroll Now: Register online, at www.montourtrail.org, click “Events” and select “Burgh’s 10K Run” or fill out the entry form on the back of this newsletter.

Tails for the Trail IV

The Cecil Friends of the Montour Trail are hosting the fourth Tails for the Trail IV Fun Walk to be held on National Trails Day, Saturday, June 7, 2008 between 9:00 a.m. and Noon with the barking off at 9:30 a.m. The Walk begins at the Kurnick (National) Access area along Cecil Henderson Road in Cecil Township and will take place between Kurnicks and the Muse-Bishop Bridge. Registration will open at 9:00 a.m.

This year’s National Trails Day theme is “Join Us on the Trail” and what is not a better way to experience the outdoors than with your four-legged friend joining you.

All licensed and vaccinated dogs are welcome to attend with their owners on a leash. Each participant is limited to two dogs for the event. Register before May 15 and the fee is $10.00 per dog, $14.00 for two dogs and after May 15 to the event date, registration will be $12.00 per dog. All proceeds from the event go towards restoring the National Tunnel in Cecil Township. Each dog will get a neckerchief (guaranteed if registered by May 15) and the owner will receive valuable pet information.

Refreshments will be available for both the four legged and two-legged participants. There will be representatives from several animal-related organizations in attendance. You will also be able to have a photo of your pet taken and then have it placed on items such as t-shirts, mugs, etc. There will be fantastic door prizes and a 50-50 raffle.

So leash up Fido or FiFi and bring him or her down to the Trail and have a good time raising money to support the rehabilitation of the National Tunnel. For more information or if you would like to be a sponsor, please call 412-445-0185 or go to the Montour Trail website at www.montourtrail.org/events/tailswalk.html where you can register for the event.

Twilight Trail Walk

On Friday July 25 2008 from 8:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., The Friends of the Montour Trail in Peters Township will be hosting the sixth Twilight Trail Walk along Arrowhead Trail. Plans are in progress and more details will be available in the next newsletter and you can click on the events link at www.montourtrail.org for updated information as the event nears.

If it is raining, the walk will be rescheduled to Saturday July 26 at the same time.

Contact sueheadley@comcast.net, or markimgrund@comcast.net for additional information, or if you would like to help with this fun event. All proceeds will benefit the construction and maintenance of the Montour Trail in Peters Township.
Passenger Service on the Montour Railroad

The Montour Railroad operated passenger trains for almost 50 years, from 1879 until 1927. Passenger trains ran between Pittsburgh and Montour Junction on Pittsburgh & Lake Erie rails and between Montour Junction and Mifflin Junction on Montour rails. The Montour also operated passenger trains between Groveton and Moon Run on its Pittsburgh & Moon Run subsidiary. Montour passengers could make connections with passenger trains on the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railway main line at McDonald and Primrose, and with the PCC & St. L’s Chartiers Branch to Canonsburg and Washington at Hills near Mayview. Connections also were made with the Wabash & Pittsburgh Terminal Railroad at George, near Venice; the Pittsburgh & Washington streetcar line at Thompsonville; and the Pittsburgh & Charleroi streetcar line at Summit Park. There was also a connection with the West Side Belt Railroad at Longview Junction.

Although it could boast of excellent passenger connections with other railroads running in and out of Pittsburgh, the Montour was built and operated as a coal-hauling railroad. The 27 coal mines along the Montour’s tracks provide ample evidence that coal, not passengers, was the reason for the railroad’s existence.

In 1879, there were only two coal mines (Cliff and Montour) operating on the Montour’s route, not nearly enough to justify the railroad’s existence. However, money could be made moving the mail, milk, and passengers, and the Montour right-of-way was rife with farms. In April of 1915, the Montour Railroad interchanged over 9,500 cans of milk with the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railway at Montour Junction. The dairy farmers who shipped that milk were billed 7.5 cents per can, bringing the Montour’s income from milk alone to over $700. As for passenger revenue, between July 1915 and July 1916, the Montour carried 111,000 passengers, and, in 1914, earned $16,000, or over 68% of its reported income from passenger service.

The railroad hauled a lot of coal too. The Cliff and Montour mines each loaded about 500 tons a day, but coal revenue was “funny money.” The Pittsburgh Coal Company owned the mines and the railroad. The coal company billed the customers for the coal at the mines and then the coal company’s railroad billed them again for shipping the coal to Montour Junction because the Montour, although a subsidiary of the coal company, was operated as a separate entity.

In our last article we discussed how the Montour kept its coal trains from running into one another by using the train order system. All freight trains were run as “Extras,” meaning they were not listed on the railroad’s timetable and could not enter the main track except under the written authorization of the Dispatcher. Passenger trains were a different matter; they were listed in the timetable. So now we’ve added another complication. We have freight trains running in each direction under the authority of train orders and passenger trains running in each direction under the authority of the timetable. Who has precedence?

The timetable method of operation had a few simple rules to govern train movements. First, an “extra” train was always inferior to a “regular” train listed in the railroad’s timetable. Similarly, second class trains were inferior to first class trains, and trains moving westward were inferior to trains of the same classification moving eastward. Another simple rule was that a train could not leave its initial station (the first station on its schedule) unless all superior trains had already left or arrived at that station. Once it was out on the main track, an inferior train had to be clear of the main track at the time a superior train was scheduled to leave the next station behind it. For example, if a train of empty coal cars was heading east toward Cliff Mine, it would have to be in the siding at Cliff Mine when Train 3 departed Lotus at its scheduled time of 8:23 a.m. If our coal train was approaching Cliff Mine when Train 4 left Imperial at its scheduled time of 6:10 a.m., those coal cars would have to be in the siding by 6:15 to ensure they would not be on the main track at No. 4’s scheduled arrival time of 6:21 a.m. Now the key to making all this work was the inviolable rule that no train listed on the timetable could leave any station earlier than its scheduled departure time. You could arrive late, but you could never leave early. In 1915, the one-way fare between Montour Junction and Mifflin Junction was $1.65.

Bob Ciminel is the founder of the Montour Railroad Yahoo group [http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/]. There are currently 208 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.
New Members And Benefactors: Our Apologies If We Missed You

We attempted to publish the names of all of the MTC’s newest members and benefactors in this issue, but we may have missed a few of you. A combination of new computers, new versions of MS Windows, unfamiliarity with membership data procedures and changes in personnel has frustrated the efforts of our membership committee to generate complete lists for recognition in this issue. Please accept our apologies if we missed you. Your generosity is certainly appreciated and will be acknowledged as soon as possible!

New Members
McDonald Area Redevelopment Association
Carol Alisesky
Deborah Dye
Steve Frein
Joseph Goodwin
Jon & Juliet Hirsch
Richard Hucko
Nicholas Jarina
Ernest Johnson
Ruth Ann Kascha Troutman
Mike Kozy
Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo
Mike Lloyd
James & Carol Locher
Ken Paolino
Carol Powell
Merryl Samuels
Dave & Ann Schelbe
Nancy Surdoval
Robert Teachout
Timothy & Cheryl Teres
Stephen A Vargo

Benefactors
Paul Everson
Mary Lee & Richard L. Gowell
Janet & Gordon Jackson
Dev Earle Lemster
Oleg Pikhurko
Ronald Piroli
Andrew & Janice Poole
Gwen & Jeff Steigerwalt
Andrew & Ming Tung
Mike & Deanna Warco

Leader’s Circle
Giant Oaks Garden Club
Laura & Gary Graf
Mike Lloyd
Susan Orenstein
John and Janet Swanson
Mary Shaw and Roy Weil

HELP WANTED

The Montour Trail Council is looking for a volunteer with programming experience in MS Access and ASP to assist with the effort in reconstructing the membership database. If you would like to help, contact Deb Thompson (deb@theneonweb.com) or Dave Hajnik (dave@theneonweb.com)

A pro bono attorney to take care of a tax exoneration issue. An adjacent property owner wants to give the Montour Trail Council a small piece of land, and the taxing bodies have agreed to remove it from the tax rolls, but it needs to go thru the step of ‘exoneration’. For more information, contact Peter Kohnke, 724-514-2887.

Deadline for submitting newsletter items for the May-June 2008 issue will be Saturday, May 10, 2008. Thank you!
Burgh’s Pizza & Wing Pub 8th Annual 10K Run

Benefits the Montour Trail

Sunday, April 20, 2008  10:00 a.m.

ENTRY FEES    Adults  Children under 12
10K Fee        $25   $20
2-Mile Walk Fee $25   $10

Make checks payable to:
BP&W 10K Montour Trail
(Please do NOT send cash.)

Mail to:
BP&W 10K Montour Trail
533 Washington Ave.
Bridgeville, PA 15017

Please print
Name: ___________________________________
Address: ___________________________________
City:______________________________________
State, Zip:_________________________________
Age as of April 20, 2008: _____
Sex: M   F

Event: 10K Run    2-Mile Walk

Waiver: In consideration of the acceptance of this entry, I waive for myself, my heirs, and assigns, all rights and claims for damages which I might have against the Burgh’s Pizza & Wing Pub 10K Run for Family, Friends & Fun to be held Sunday, April 20, 2008, Burgh’s Pizza & Wing Pub, The Montour Trail Council, other sponsoring organizations, businesses, or individuals as a result of any and all injuries suffered by me in that event. I attest and verify that I am an amateur and physically fit and have trained sufficiently for this event. I also release any photos that may involve myself.

Signature:
If under 18, parent or guardian must sign below:

Signature of parent or guardian