



## **TRAIL RESURFACING: SHOULD WE PAVE OR SHOULD WE STONE NOW?**

*by Ed Donahoe*

This critically important question and a host of other questions around trail surfaces were discussed at our June public meeting. What is the cost per mile of paving vs. crushed rolled stone? What are the life cycle costs of our various surfaces? Can we upgrade to a better quality crushed stone with a fabric base? Can we anticipate more root heaving on our paved sections and can they be repaired? And what type of surface do our trail users prefer?

It became apparent after the meeting that we need a long range plan before we invest significant funding into our existing trail surfaces as well as any future trail sections. As a result we formed a trail surface committee to investigate sustainable and cost effective trail surfaces. We plan to consult with engineering firms and look at the 'best practices' of other trail systems. The committee consists of Karl King, Ethan Imhoff, Rick Hess and myself. Recommendations will be brought to the board before any final decisions are made.

Our first step was to determine what type of surface our trail users prefer. We conducted a survey in late June and want to thank everyone who responded and provided us with valuable feedback on the trail.

### **Survey Highlights:**

~136 respondents: 86 through the web link that was emailed and 50 through face book.

~Very positive satisfaction rates with our current trail surface but some comments about the root bumps in Williamsburg.

~Packed stone was preferred: (50% preferred packed stone, 29% no preference, only 21% paved).

~Looking at cyclist only: (38% preferred packed stone, 34% paved).

~Looking at members only: (39 % preferred packed stone, 35% paved).

You can view additional results on the survey by going to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-3JFXK9T/> This link will show you just the first 100 survey replies but the results are representative and in line with the full survey results.

### **Membership:**

We also included a membership question and found that only 40 % of respondents were members (this presents us with a great opportunity to increase membership). There were 8% who were not sure of their membership status.

If interested in a membership or membership renewal you can download an application at: <http://www.rttcpa.org/join.shtml> or make it easy on yourself and simply mail a check (\$15 Individual, \$20 Family) to:

**Rails To Trails of Central Pa**  
**PO BOX 592**  
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Please include an email if you want to receive our Trail Trekker Newsletter electronically. If you have in the past included your email address and are not receiving the newsletters or updates electronically it maybe because we have it incorrectly. Please print your email clearly, many times the number 1 may be mistaken for a 'l', which is a small case "L", or an e for a c, v for a u you get what I mean... , so please print clearly. If you would like to get your newsletter via email just email us at [webhost@rttcpa.org](mailto:webhost@rttcpa.org) Your continued support is greatly appreciated and we will keep you apprised of our trail resurfacing findings and plans.

### **VANDALISM:**



We are sad to report that the trail was vandalized the end of July. As you can see by the picture someone or some individuals went to great lengths to pry open the donation box at the Alfarata end of the trail. These boxes are made of very heavy gauge metal so it took major strength or a "jaws of life" like tool to pry this open. We feel sure it was done at night because the trail is too heavily used during the daylight hours. As faithful trail members and trail users, we are asking that you keep your eyes open and report any suspicious activity or individuals. The persons responsible for this theft would definitely be carrying some type of pry tool. There is no way of knowing how much money was stolen. Hopefully it wasn't much due to the fact that the boxes are emptied very frequently.

## WILD FLOWER WATCH: TRUMPET CREEPER

By Bob Richers



On a recent biking outing at 4 Mile run and the Mount Vernon Trail in the Arlington, VA area, we noticed several plants growing which seemed to be invasive. There was a maintenance crew cutting Bamboo along the edge of the trail

and in numerous locations were growths of Trumpet Creeper.

After some research I was surprised to discover that Trumpet Creeper is actually native to the north eastern USA. In some of the other areas of the world that it has been introduced, it sometimes is classified as invasive. We started a creeper on an old grape trellis above a twin swing patio in our yard three years back and it really took off.

Trumpet Creeper goes by other names which include: cow itch vine, hell vine, devils shoestring and hummingbird vine. It is a species of the family Bignoniaceae. It's a high climbing vine (up to 33 feet) and climbs over everything in its path. The plant, with rapid colonization by suckers and tendency to over layer, is useful for erosion control. With that said, ruthless pruning is a must. When you hear the words "feed me Seymour" you probably waited too long!

Creeper has intertwining woody fiber vines. It likes full sun light and is drought resistant. The leaves are opposite, ovate, pinnate, dark green, 3-10 cm long on a 12" axis with a single leaf on the end. The flowers are orange to red with a yellow throat. They are 3 1/2 inches long, waxy and shaped like a trumpet. The plant produces 6 inch seed pods which dry and split releasing numerous brown paper like seeds.

The Trumpet flowers attract Humming Birds and the thick foliage is ideal for nesting birds. Before we added this vine to our yard we rarely had Humming Birds visit our feeder, now when the flowers bloom they stop by daily.

## TREE OF THE MONTH: BLACK CHERRY

By Dave Despot

Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) is a medium to large tree (60 to 80 feet) which grows in almost all states east of the Mississippi River. Cherry, along with plum and peach trees, are representatives of the genus *Prunus*, in the rose family. Trees of these three groups have bark that contains horizontal markings, leaves with narrow bases and single teeth on the margins, and twigs that emit a unique smell when broken. The bitter almond smell associated with cherry can be used to differentiate between species.

Leaves of black cherry are alternate, simple, ovate, and blunt toothed with a distinctive fringe of brown hairs along the midrib on the underside. Buds are small (under 1/4 inch), have pointed scales, and lack hairs. Black cherry trees do not have spur shoots. Fire cherry is the species most likely to be confused with black cherry; however, fire cherry has spur shoots and the undersides of its leaves lack hairs along the midrib. Black cherry bark is smooth on young stems and develops scales with



age, but remains thin. Some people suggest that the mature bark resembles burnt potato chips.

Fruits are berry-like, bitter, and black when mature, ripen in late summer, and are reportedly used for jelly. The common name comes from the color of the ripe fruit. Black cherry trees often grow in association with red and white oak, black walnut, and shagbark hickory trees.

The leaves, twigs, seeds and bark of black cherry contain a substance that can be toxic to livestock. Most livestock poisonings come from eating wilted leaves (wilting apparently increases the concentration of the toxin). The wood is hard, close grained with rich color, and is prized for use in cabinetry and interior trim.

## TIS THE SEASON FOR: SNAKES:

During the months of July, August and September, it is not uncommon to see snakes along the trail or on the trail. There are many different types of snakes you may encounter. Many are small and harmless and are just out sunning themselves or eating bugs. The larger ones are the ones that "scare" people...mainly because they are a long, large slithering reptiles. One thing to note is that snakes do not like encountering humans...we are big and scary to them as well.

Of the two larger snakes you may come across, one would most likely be the Black Rat Snake. These snakes can reach up to 8 feet in length and are black in color, (hence the name). They can have a gray underside and sometimes have white spots along their sides. They are a NON poisonous snake. The males are generally longer. They are wonderful for rodent control, generally eating mainly small rodents, birds, bird eggs, other snakes, and amphibians. They are also excellent tree climbers. The Black rat snakes are oviparous (egg laying) and the females will lay 6 to 24 eggs in mid to late July. In colder climates, such as ours, the female will only reproduce every 2 or 3 years. The male black snake matures at around 7 years of age whereas the female does not reach maturity until around 9 years of age. When the female lays her eggs, they are deposited under logs, in compost, manure or sawdust piles, and in hollow trees. The size of the eggs is determined by the size of the female snake. The eggs take between 37 up to 51 days to hatch. When they hatch, the males will be 13 inches or larger while the females are less than 13 inches. The young will remain near or around their hatching sites for one to two years, using their hatching site to hibernate in during the winter. The mortality rate is quite high for young snakes due to predators such as hawks and other snakes. Also, if their hatching site is not well protected, many freeze during hibernation. If the Black Snake survives and lives out its full life, that could be up to 30 to 40 years. It is worth noting that in general on the Lower Trail, Black Snakes are mainly seen from Williamsburg to Mt. Etna.

The second large snake you may see along the trail is the Timber Rattlesnake.

The timber rattlesnake (*Croatus horridus*) is the largest of the three species of venomous snakes found in Pennsylvania (the

other two venomous species are the northern copperhead and the endangered Massasauga rattlesnake). Adult timber rattlesnakes are typically 36 to 48 inches long, with a small number reaching up to 72 inches in length. Individuals of this species have the distinctively broad, flat, triangularly shaped heads and vertically slit pupils that are characteristics shared by all of the venomous snake species in Pennsylvania. One very distinguishing characteristic of the rattlesnake is the RATTLE at the tail end of the snake. These are a series of “buttons” that the snake will rattle making a “rattling” sound. Their size depends on the age and size of the snake. Timber rattlesnakes are primarily nocturnal. Peak activity is seen during the very dark nights associated with the new moon. Prey of this snake is determined by size and opportunity. Small mammals like mice, moles, chipmunks, gray squirrels, rabbits, and weasels make up most (over 90%) of their diet. Birds (small song birds, grouse, baby turkeys, baby ducks, etc), other reptiles (garter snakes and possibly other rattlesnakes) and amphibians (frogs and toads) make up the remaining ten percent of their probable prey.

The timber rattlesnake differs from the Black Snake in that they are not egg layers. Female rattlesnakes do not reach reproductive maturity until 7 or 8 years of age. They are only capable of reproducing every 3 to 4 years and generally have 6 to 14 young that are about 8 to 10 inches in length at birth. During June, pregnant females, having mated the previous summer, remain at a basking area near their home den through the summer, where optimal thermoregulation conditions help to ensure embryonic development. Around the end of August, pregnant females give birth to live, fully-developed young. The young only stay around the den area for about 10 days and then slither on, but will return to the birthing site for hibernation. The Rattle snake generally hibernates from October to April. Timber rattlesnakes are eaten by a variety of predators including coyotes, foxes, raccoons, opossums, domesticated and feral cats, eagles, hawks, owls, turkeys, black snakes and king snakes. Young snakes, of course, are the most vulnerable to predators. Even though the timber rattlesnake is a protected species, humans remain one of the top reason for their decline in numbers. Whereas the Black Snake is mostly seen from Williamsburg to Mt. Etna, the rattlesnake is most often seen from Mt. Etna to Waterstreet. The general life expectancy for a timber rattlesnake is about 20 years.

The bite of a timber rattlesnake is a medical emergency and requires immediate attention. If you are ever bitten by a timber rattlesnake, though, remain calm. Keep the bitten body part below the level of your heart and immediately seek medical attention. There is a very good chance that no venom was injected into the snake’s warning bite, but any bite must be treated carefully. Look for rattlesnakes before you sit down, reach into, over, or under bushes, logs or rocks. Be aware that rattlesnakes are attracted to certain structures such as a pile of rocks, logs, or boards to hunt for mice and to bask. They may also be found around a shed or equipment. Never attempt to pick up a rattlesnake, even one that appears to be dead. Remember, given the chance, these snakes will retreat and try and get away from you; they are not out to hunt humans. Many people think the reason we see the snakes down by the trail during the “dry months” is that the snakes are “coming down for water,” when

really these are mostly likely the males out in search of a female. Mature males may travel far and wide (up to 6 miles) in an effort to intersect scent trails of receptive females. The rattle snake has a very keen sense of smell and uses it to find a mate, track a scent or find its way back to the den. If you are bitten by a Rattle Snake, seek medical attention right away.

Commonsense will help both humans and snakes to co-exist. If you see a snake, give it a wide berth and do not engage it. It will most likely slither off. It is also a very good idea, as well as a rule of the trail, to **keep your pets on a leash**. Dogs have not read this article and are curious creatures and will engage the snake not giving it a chance to get away.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS:**

We have included in this newsletter the complete **Summer Series Program Schedule**. Please post it on your refrigerator or share it with your friends or post it on your office bulletin board. Plan to attend one, some or all of the series. Last year, the programs were well attended and enjoyed by all. Hope to see you there. If you lose your schedule, you can always find it posted on the website, [www.rttcpa.org](http://www.rttcpa.org)

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sunday August 14 <sup>th</sup>	Summer Program Series: Sketching the World around You, 2 PM Grannas Station
Sunday August 28 <sup>th</sup>	Summer Program Series: Birding by Ear, 2 PM Grannas Station
Sunday September 11 <sup>th</sup>	Summer Program Series, The Story of Williamsburg, 2 PM Grannas Station
Sunday September 11 <sup>th</sup>	Big Brothers/Big Sisters 5k Alfarata Trailhead
Tuesday September 13 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station
Sunday September 25 <sup>th</sup>	Final Sumer Program, Carlim and its Quarry, 2 PM Grannas Station.

**For more details on all events visit our calendar on the Web site at [www.RTTCPA.org](http://www.RTTCPA.org)**

All are invited to the monthly meetings.

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**Remember, if your mailing address is Highlighted, your membership is about to expire. Please renew quickly and continue to support Rails-to-Trails. Thank You!**

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