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Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

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IT'S TIME TO ENHANCE BICYCLING HERE:

*By Dave Hurst, (2016 Hurst Media Works,
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Riverside, CA, and Venice, FL, are two places that have one thing in common: You can go just about anywhere there by bicycle.

Both have mile after mile of dedicated bicycle paths and trails. And both have designated bicycle lanes on almost all of their streets, including the busiest traffic arteries.

With the partial exception of Pittsburgh, which rapidly is developing both bicycle trails and designated lanes, none of our communities have extensive urban trails and lanes that are part of the transportation infrastructure.

The pervasive networks of bicycle paths and lanes that can be found in other communities around the nation aren't found here. Why?

First, our communities are older industrial towns that were built densely to house blue collar workers. Transportation systems were designed to get them to and from the mill and mine gates as quickly as possible.

Traditionally, a majority of adults here worked in physical jobs; work days were long; free time tended to get spent in the home, bar or church. Outdoor activities skewed toward spectator sports, camping, hunting, fishing, gardening or landscaping.

Our terrain is tough. Many of our communities are located in river valleys. Flat areas are limited. There's barely room for roads in some places, and typical shoulders are slender.

Needing rest from physical labor, and faced with hills to climb and little protection from traffic, most people didn't embrace bicycling in the past. So there wasn't much demand for bicycle ways around here.

But a lot of things have been changing. Our more-diversified economy and the computer age are generating jobs that are not physical. Increasing numbers of people are seeking active forms of recreation for both health and social reasons.

Bicycle facilities are improving here. Our rail-trail network is growing and maturing. New mountain-biking trails continually are being developed. And more cyclists are riding on our streets, enabled in part by buses equipped with bicycle racks.

Government officials at all levels – federal, state and local – are being pressured by increasingly organized bicycling and recreation groups to commit more resources to bicycling facilities, to make them safer and to encourage more people to use them.

The federal government's new multi-year transportation program provides \$4 billion in funding for new bicycle trails, paths, lanes and safety improvements. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation increasingly is tuning into the need for a better bicycle infrastructure.

If you are interested in seeing more bicycling opportunities within our region, now is a good time to become more involved. The planning organization for the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset currently is conducting an online survey to gather opinions about what should be done to enhance bicycling here. To participate, visit www.sapdc.org and click on "Somerset County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update." There you will find a link for the survey.

But you don't need to be a resident of Somerset County to participate in the survey. The results will be factored into a 2016 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the region.

Residents of Armstrong, Fayette, Indiana and Westmoreland counties are in another planning area that already has developed new recommendations for enhanced bicycling facilities across the 10-county region.

If you live in this Southwestern region you can also become involved by participating in an "Active Transportation Forum" that meets quarterly. That group's next meeting is May 11 from 10:00 a.m. to noon, in Two Chatham Center, 112 Washington Place in Pittsburgh.

Yes, this is the way government works. But it's the way those bike lanes and trails got developed in Riverside, CA, and Venice, FL – and it's the way it can happen here.

RAFFLE AND SPRING GATHERING: GATHERING AND RAFFLE



Sunday May 1st everyone is invited to the Spring Gathering at the Mt. Etna trail head. We will once again be grilling hamburgers, hotdogs and kielbasa at **1 PM**. We will have the drawing for the raffle at about 2

pm. All we ask is that you bring your favorite salad or side dish to share with others and a drink for yourself. We supply the paper products, silverware and condiments.

This is always a wonderful afternoon event. It is a time for you to meet other trail users as well as trail volunteers and board members. Plan to come out and have a nice relaxing afternoon on the trail. If you hadn't yet sent your tickets in, you may bring them to the gathering. If you cannot come to the gathering, please mail them to: Rails to Trails, PO Box 592, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 with enough time for them to be received at the Post Office by April 29th. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact Vickie Brua at vicbrua@atlanticbb.net or Jennifer Barefoot at 814-695-8521, e-mail at rjsunbrook@verizon.net. Thank you!

A very special thank you is extended to the businesses and organizations that make this raffle and gathering a success. Please remember these businesses and groups when you are purchasing things throughout the year: **Spokes & Skies** of Lakemont; **Holland Brothers Meats** of Duncansville; **Hoss's Steak & Sea House** of Duncansville; **Rothrock Outfitters** of Huntingdon; **Black Dog** of Hollidaysburg and the **Blair Bicycle Club**.

COVE CHALLENGE SERIES:

The John Healy 5K Race will once again be part of a bigger picture this year. The Garver Memorial YMCA has put together a series of races which we will participate in this year.

Six area races throughout the Cove, Williamsburg and Claysburg areas have teamed together to promote wellness awareness in their respective communities and to coordinate races for the health and well-being of their communities.

A committee has been meeting to plan the individual races and to develop a point series system whereby participants in each race can earn points in the overall competition called the Cove Challenge Series.

While the race series is based in southern Blair County, participants from everywhere are encouraged to sign up and participate. The races include a trail run, 5Ks, wellness walks and a triathlon. The race series will be six different events in various locations.

The races include:

1. Nason Hospital 5K Run and Wellness Walk in conjunction with Through, Inc. of East Freedom to be held on Saturday, April 23 at 9 a.m. at East Freedom.
2. A Derby Dash 5K and Wellness Walk sponsored by the Claysburg Education Foundation will be held on Saturday, May 21 at 9 a.m. beginning on Bedford Street at the Claysburg-Kimmel High School.
3. A Cove Biathlon and 5K Run/Wellness Walk will be held on Saturday, May 28 at 8 a.m. beginning at the Morrisons Cove Memorial Park in Martinsburg.
4. The John Healy Memorial 5K will be held on Wednesday, June 15 at 6 p.m. at Williamsburg at the Rails to Trails Park.
5. The Liberty Days 5K Run and Wellness Walk will take place on Saturday, July 16 at 8 a.m. at the Spring Dam in Roaring Spring.

6. The Morrisons Cove Turkey Trot 5K and Wellness Walk will be held on Saturday, Nov. 19 at 9 a.m. at the Martinsburg Park.

People may enter any race individually or any part of the series. For the Cove Series Challenge, points will be assigned to participants for each race based on their performance in each individual race. Also, completion of four-to-six of those races will earn them extra points, and points will be accumulated for the series. There is no fee to enter the series, and people do not have to be part of the series to participate in individual events.

A point system has been developed for the entire series. For those interested in more details on the points structure for this series, or information on any of the races, contact the Garver Memorial YMCA at 224-5101. Information on this will also be in the individual race packets at each race.

TREE OF THE MONTH: SHINGLE OAK

By Dave Despot

Shingle oak (*Quercus imbricaria*) is a medium to large tree (50 to 60 feet) in the red oak group. Its native range is the upper Ohio valley, extending west into Iowa and Arkansas and east into western Pennsylvania and Virginia. Trees of this species prefer well drained, moist sites but are adaptable. Some sources show that shingle oak trees have been planted in nearly all states in the continental United States except the coldest areas in the upper Midwest. Shingle oak bears a few similarities to pin oak: it has an upright growth habit with a strong central leader (excurrent growth) and prefers slightly acidic sites (although shingle oak is not as dependent on acid sites as pin oak).

Leaves are entire (lacking lobes or teeth) and are terminated in a bristle tip (one of the distinguishing characteristics of trees in the red oak group). Mature leaves are 4 to 6 inches long and half as



wide, may have slightly wavy or undulating margins, and begin life with a slight yellow cast turning bright green when fully developed. Fall color is yellow to brown, with leaves often persisting into the winter. The large terminal bud is five sided in

cross section and borne on a brown twig that is smooth to slightly hairy.

It is interesting that the Latin name *imbricaria* refers to overlapping, as in the way shingles on a roof overlap. The common name, shingle oak, comes from the use of this species by pioneers as the raw material for shingles because the wood was durable, and had a fine grain that split readily to produce uniform shingles. A knowledgeable arborist recently told me that one of the reasons shingle oak is so useful for crafting shingles is that older trees of this species often have hollow centers. Once the logs are cut to length, splitting shingles from the wood remaining around the perimeter is simple and efficient. The bark of the tree has been reportedly used for various medicinal uses. This is not a common tree in our forests – I think central Pennsylvania is a little too far east; however you can find shingle oaks planted as street trees, as well as in parks and gardens.

WILD FLOWER WATCH: EASTERN SKUNK CABBAGE:

By Bob Richers

As early spring approaches I look forward to some major emergence of wild flowers along several favorite rail trails. The C&O Canal near Hancock MD has Virginia Blue Bells. The Lower Trail near mile 2 at the Waterstreet end displays large patches of Purple Trillium. Our new neighbor to the south, the Huntingdon and Broad Top Mountain Trail, has large showings of Dutchman's breeches and Buttercup. The Ghost Town Trail, near Vintondale grows large groups of Marsh Marigold and today's subject, Skunk Cabbage.

Skunk Cabbage is one of the earliest flowering wild flowers to emerge after winter ends. And yes, I said flowering! The flowers appear before any leaves and are inside a maroon hood-like bract called a spathe, which surrounds a knob-like structure called the spadix. The spadix is a fleshy spike of many pedal-less flowers. As the 5" spadix continues to grow, the plant produces 20" by 12" distinct green leaves. Crushed leaves give off a whiff of foul odor which explains the plant's name.



The flowers of the cabbage produce a rotting flesh smell which attracts insects for pollination. Note that the Purple Trillium attracts pollinators with a similar foul odor. Most animals avoid Skunk Cabbage because it causes a burning sensation when eaten. The one exception is the black bear which will eat the early spadix which it may confuse for carcasses left in winter snows. It may also help stimulate the bear's digestive tract after hibernation.

Another distinguishing feature of Skunk Cabbage is the ability to emit warmth. Through the use of a process called cellular respiration, emerging cabbage can generate temperatures up to 67 degrees. Plants displaying this thermogenesis help them melt thru the ice and snow in late winter.

The plant has contractile roots which pulls the stem deeper into the mud. It actually grows downward, not upward. Older plants, which some researchers believe are thousands of years old, are nearly impossible to dig out. The seeds are pea sized and will fall into the mud and can spread by floods or animals.

American Indians use the plant as a treatment for coughs and headaches. It was once listed by the 19th Century Pharmacopoeia as the drug "Dracontium". It was used as a treatment for respiratory diseases, nervous disorders, rheumatism and dropsy. The roots are toxic and the leaves cannot be consumed raw. Leaves can be dried and use in soups.

The best way to make a meal using Skunk Cabbage is to wrap a road killed skunk in its leaves, heat in a foil pan on your outdoor grill, and take whatever the neighbors leave behind as they run inside and lock their doors!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

Saturday April 23rd, 5k Run, Benefiting the Juniata Valley Elementary School, Alfarata, email Kelly Richner at krichner@jvdsd.org for more information.

Sunday May 1st. Spring Gathering. 1 PM: Spring Gathering at the Mt. Etna Trailhead. Once again we will be grilling hamburgers, hotdogs and kielbasa; you just bring your favorite salad/covered dish or desert. Then following the lunch, we will draw the winners of this year's raffle. Hope to see you there.

KEEP UP TO DATE:

The trail is being used by more and more organizations to hold special events. There are a number of 5k runs/walks, wildflower hikes, youth bike rides etc., many of which the organizations invite the public to join in. To keep up to date with scheduled events on the trail, please visit our website calendar at www.rttcpa.org/news_calendar.shtml or you can follow us on Facebook at Rails to Trails, Lower Trail. Also, if you are an organization hoping to have an event on the trail, please contact us so that we can make sure there is not a conflicting event at the same date and time. If you contact us, we can post the pertinent information, (location, time, and contact information etc.) on the calendar of events. If you are an organization using the trail for an event, we ask that you also help us out by leaving the trail cleaned up and letting people know that the Lower Trail and Bells Gap Trail are privately owned and supported by their membership. If participants enjoy the trail, please encourage them to pick up a brochure, located in brochure boxes at each of the trailheads, and join our organization.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: (____)-_____

E-mail _____

_____ New Membership _____ Renewal

_____ Individual \$15.00

_____ Family \$20.00

_____ Supporting \$50.00

_____ Group \$75.00

I am interested in:

_____ Horses _____ Hiking

_____ Heritage _____ Bicycling

_____ Nature Study _____ Jogging

_____ Other

I would like to help by volunteering for:

Make checks payable to:

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday April 23rd
Sunday May 1st.
May 10th
May 17th, 18, & 19th

5K run benefiting Juniata Valley Elementary School, Alfarata Trailhead.
Spring Gathering and Raffle Drawing, 1 PM at the Mt. Etna Trailhead.
Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM Grannas Station
Hollidaysburg High School Community Service Days on the Trail

The Summer Series Programs will be announced in the next newsletter

More details on all events on page 3 of the *Trekker* and on our Web site at www.RTTCPA.org
All are invited to the monthly meetings.

KEEP YOUR ADDRESS CURRENT

This newsletter is mailed 3rd Class Bulk Mail. The Post Office will not forward 3rd Class Bulk Mail. If anything about your address changes, Route Number, Street Numbers, or Zip code, the Trail Trekker will not be forwarded to you. Please keep Rails-to-Trails informed of any address changes by using a post office change of address card or dropping us a note at the following address. 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!

Rails-to-Trails of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.
Post Office Box 592
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648-0592
814--832-2400

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