



Volume 22 Issue 4

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

July August 2017

## TRAIL PROGRAM SERIES:

Our Summer Series Programs are off to a little bit of a late start. There are four very interesting and informative programs we hope you will try to attend all. All of the programs will be held at the Grannas Station. They are all scheduled for Sunday afternoons at 2 PM.



On August 27<sup>th</sup> at 2 PM is: Modern Technology Hits the Lower Trail. "Understanding 19<sup>th</sup> century industry and transportation along the Lower Trail just got easier.....FIND OUT HOW." If you have an iphone/smart phone and use apps this program is for you.



On September 17<sup>th</sup> at 2PM is: Progress, Change and Challenges, 1831-1850. "How did the construction of the PA Mainline Canal affect life in Central Pennsylvania? New Jobs, new houses, new people and more.



On October 15<sup>th</sup> is: Stories and Stuff, September is Archeology Month in Pennsylvania. Come celebrate by examining artifacts left behind thousands of years ago. How were they made? What were they used for? What can they tell us?

## WILLIAMSBURG NATIVE GOES GLOBEL ON BIKE

*By Walt Frank*

*Reprinted from August 7<sup>th</sup> Altoona Mirror*



Williamsburg native Ralph Isenberg, 84, now of Scottsdale, Ariz., rides his bike along the Lower Trail near the Williamsburg trailhead. Isenberg, who returns to his hometown each summer to ride, has biked all over the world.

WILLIAMSBURG - A friendly man with a long, white beard wearing a dirty, white Tilley hat is a familiar sight on the Lower Trail during the summer.

"I ride about 29 miles on a typical day. In my younger days, I did the whole trail end to end. I come out everyday weather permitting," said Ralph Isenberg, 84, a Williamsburg native and

now a resident of Scottsdale, Ariz. Twenty-nine miles a day is a lot of miles for many people, but that number pales to the number of bicycle miles Isenberg has racked up since Santa Claus brought him a bicycle in 1994.

Isenberg, who retired in 1995 from the former Garrett AiResearch - now known as Honeywell - estimates he has racked up about 166,000 miles over the years.

After graduating from Williamsburg High School in 1950, Isenberg studied engineering at Penn State for three years and then joined the Air Force and served two years. He then obtained a job at Goodyear Aircraft in Akron, Ohio, when it was making blimps. He worked there for over two years before moving to Arizona in 1958.

"The winter before I moved, we had two weeks when it didn't get above zero. I told my wife (Linda) let's move to somewhere warmer. I didn't have a job when I moved. It was very risky, but I was too dumb to know better," Isenberg said. "I had an application in, they interviewed me and they hired me. I got the job just about the time my money was going to run out."

Isenberg worked for Garrett AiResearch, a manufacturer of turboprop engines and turbochargers, and a pioneer in numerous aerospace technologies, for 35 years.

"I finished my career as a test equipment design engineer. It was a very interesting job in the aerospace industry. They had contracts with NASA. I worked on turbine engines for the two-engine jets. The company had a contract with Taiwan to develop the engine for fighter planes for Taiwan," Isenberg said.

Isenberg said he got into serious bicycling in 1996 when he met Shirl Kinney of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who asked him to ride in the RAGBRAI - The Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa. RAGBRAI is the oldest, largest and longest multiday recreational bicycle touring event in the world. It is held every year. "You ride across Iowa from border to border. It was about 468 miles and took about six days. I did it another time by myself," Isenberg said.

Isenberg and Kinney also biked the Great River Road, which parallels the Mississippi River. "We flew to New Orleans and took off on our bikes to Lake Itasca, Minn. We did it on our own. It took at least four weeks," Isenberg said. It was Kinney who introduced Isenberg to Rick Bauman, a former politician and avid biker. Bauman served in the Oregon House of Representatives in the 1980s. In 1994, he organized Cycle Vietnam, the first large-

scale American bicycle tour of that country, and in 1996, Bauman created Portland Bridge Pedal, a bicycle tour with a route over all 10 Portland bridges that cross the Willamette River.

Bauman and Isenberg teamed up to take bike trips all over the world - Vietnam, Laos, Egypt, Bhutan, South Africa and Myanmar. "Ralph is a sweetheart of a guy. Not only is he a remarkable biker for his age, his sensitivity to the places we visit, his understanding about what it meant to be a visitor always was appreciated. The best way to interact with people is biking, not in a bus or a vehicle. The way you can interact while biking is very special, Bauman said. "He shows up everywhere and is always a delight."

Isenberg fondly remembers his trips with Bauman. "In Vietnam, we started in Hanoi and biked to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). In Egypt, we started at the pyramids and biked under the Suez Canal to Sinai. We stopped at St. Catherine's at the base of Mount Sinai. We went across Israel into Jordan and then back to Israel and Jerusalem," Isenberg recalled. "We rode across the Himalayan Mountains near the northern border of Bhutan. We were riding up and down the foothills of the Himalayas. We also biked in Myanmar. We rode on the original Burma Road used in World War II. The trip across the Himalayas was the most unique." Bauman also remembers the trips he took with Isenberg. "In terms of the most-stunning scenery and interesting culture, it was Bhutan. In terms of cultural diversity and most-fascinating country, it was Myanmar. The most-interesting trip was starting at the base of the pyramids and biking into Jerusalem," Bauman said.

Isenberg also said he has taken several trips across the United States on his bicycle. Isenberg said he originally came home to visit family. His wife died in 1990, and his mother, Helen Royer Isenberg, passed away in 2001. He has a few relatives in the area today in Williamsburg, Huntingdon and Altoona.

He comes back to escape the Arizona summer heat and to enjoy the Lower Trail. "Every place is unique; this trail is very nice. You see deer and turkey, unlimited rabbits and squirrels. It is nice scenery, and there are nice people. I usually come at the end of May or start of June and stay until the first week of September," Isenberg said. Isenberg has made a lot of friends - regulars such as Tom Harvey and Bill Ward - while riding the trail.

Isenberg, who rents an apartment at Country Club Terrace, hopes to return again next summer. "Health permitting and I can get an apartment, I will be back next year. Biking has enabled me to see a lot of the world. I just enjoy being out in the open. It has been a big part of my life ever since Santa Claus brought me a bicycle," Isenberg said.

The Isenberg file

Name: Ralph Isenberg

Age: 84

Position: Retired engineer from aerospace industry

Education: 1950 graduate of Williamsburg High School, studied engineering three years at Penn State

Family: Three children: Mindy Greenfield, in West Palm Beach, Fla; Marc in Sparta, N.J.; and Mike in Millville, Wash.; four grandchildren- and two great-grandchildren.

**Quote: "There are tourists and there are travelers. Travelers say it is not the destination but the journey."**

(It is an honor to see Ralph recognized by the Mirror. Ralph has been a longtime member and supporter of the Lower Trail. Everyone who uses the trail can thank Ralph for the beautiful pavilion at Flowing Springs trail head.)

## **RAIL TRAILS: NEW WAYS TO FEEL THE LOVE**

*By Dave Hurst, 2017 Hurst Media Works*

There's always been a lot to love about the Ghost Town Trail, starting with its catchy name.

Among the Trans Allegheny Trails (TransAlleghenyTrails.com), which cluster along U.S. Route 22 on both sides of the Allegheny Front, the Ghost Town Trail is the longest with a 32-mile main trail, plus a four-mile spur.

It's a historical trail with industrial railroad artifacts, lingering remains of coal tipples and boney (coal refuse) piles, two outstandingly intact iron furnaces, coal mining and coke oven traces, picturesque bridges and informative historical markers; which makes the trail educational as well as recreational.

Then there's the Ghost Town Trail's natural beauty as it runs through the Blacklick Valley, which manages to remain picturesque even while Blacklick Creek flows orange with abandoned-mine drainage. Eastern sections provide overviews of more-pristine North and South branches, and run through both wooded and pastoral settings.

A wide variety of wildflowers trim the trail during specific seasons. Mid-summer may be its best with riotous stands of tiger lilies, bee balm and the all-too-brief rhododendron displays.

For bicyclists and trail runners, the trail offers a bit of challenge, for it climbs the western flank of the Allegheny Front. While certainly not daunting for conditioned cyclists and runners (the elevation change is only 1,000 feet and is gradual), the climbs continue for miles and are used by some athletes for training.

Yes, there's always been a lot to love about the Ghost Town Trail. But changes are underway that offer the potential for even more love.

First, by this fall there will be more trail. The four-mile REXIS Branch, which splits from the main trail near Vintondale, will be extended another eight miles from its current terminus at U.S. Route 422 to North Street in Cardiff.

While initially the new section will require either an out-and-back ride or a shuttle, the trail's owner and developer, the Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority (CCCRA) hopes to continue the new section another 7.5 miles back to the main trail near U.S. Route 219. Once that final section is complete, the Ghost Town Trail will offer the first continuous-loop rail trail in the nation.

Then there's a more-subtle change happening: Art is coming to the Ghost Town Trail.

In one sense, its art is not new. Close to 20 years ago, a project called "AMD and Art" sought to create a wetlands with artistic flourishes along the trail that also would capture the coal heritage of Vintondale.

Unfortunately the wetlands didn't work, as far as removing pollution from adjacent Blacklick Creek. But you can still see a couple of the artistic elements – a black-granite-etched scene of miners, emerging from a portal, and a tiled map showing the Vinton Colliery.

Earlier this year, the CCCRA commissioned artists to paint murals on the first of four pillars that support U.S. 219, under which the Ghost Town Trail passes. The goal is to put murals on all four pillars in the years to come.

Now an Ebensburg-based artist, Dave Huber, has announced plans to display Ghost Town Trail-inspired art along the trail as an "Open Air Art Show." Among his paintings are familiar scenes along the trail.

On July 29, Huber will exhibit his work at the West Street entrance to the Ghost Town Trail during Ebensburg's Homecoming. Then he'll take his art show to the Dillweed Bed and Breakfast, August 12 and 19; and to Vintondale's Homecoming on September 2. All times will be from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

While this column's focus has been on the Ghost Town Trail, most of our region's rail-trails have impressive natural, historical, educational, colorful and recreational attributes that could inspire artists and attract people for a variety of healthful experiences. So it is not surprising that they would be appropriate galleries for open-air art.

Our rail-trails just keep finding new ways for us to feel the love.

### RIVER SAFETY ON THE JUNIATA RIVER:



Thank you to the feedback from Bob Richers article in the last newsletter. We were thanked for the article pointing out how quickly a quiet river can become a potential hazard. Many asked for the website to check out the conditions of water flow on the Juniata

River. That website for the USGS is <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis>. At that website, you will click on Pennsylvania. A map will come up divided by the counties. Click on Blair County. It will then have green dots to locate the rivers that are being monitored (there are only two) then just click on that green dot and that page will give you many options from current flows, maps, etc.

Also, we were asked if we could possibly put together a program/course to teach river/canoeing/kayaking safety. We will try to put together such a program/class for either this fall or next spring. We will keep you posted on this.



**In the meantime please be safe and always wear a life vest.**



I know you may be tired of hearing it but this Trail/Organization would not be what it is today without our very faithful volunteers. Please, please, please consider volunteering your time/skills/talents. You may like the physical work, like mowing, weedwacking, painting, or be more interested in helping out with articles for the newsletter, or in volunteering your time for us to have the Grannas Station open for visitors, or in helping out with events etc.... . You may only have a day, a month or even one day every six months. We would be grateful for any help. If you are interested, please try and come on September 12 at 6 PM to the Grannas Station to find out more about volunteering. This is an hour before our regularly scheduled monthly meeting.

### Notes:

Organizations and programs are always being added to our calendar. Gregg Williams (215.242.0854) or email at [wacmbbook@aol.com](mailto:wacmbbook@aol.com) continues to have great work parties along the trail enhancing the trail's beauty by helping to eliminate many invasive plants while replacing them with non-invasives. Many of his events are planned and happening before the newsletter deadline. Many organizations also have events like 5k races. We try to keep the calendar and facebook page current so: **Please visit our websites calendar at [www.rttcpa.org](http://www.rttcpa.org) for more information on events and programs.**

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

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I would like to help by volunteering for:

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

<b>Sunday August 27th</b>	<b>Modern Technology Hits the Lower Trail</b> , Program 2PM Grannas Station
<b>Tuesday September 12</b>	<b>Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station</b>
<b>Sunday September 10<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>5k Big Brothers Big Sisters, Alexandria Trailhead</b>
<b>Sunday September 17th</b>	<b>Progress, Change and Challenges, 1831 to 1850</b> , Program 2PM Grannas Station
<b>Tuesday October 10th</b>	<b>Monthly Board Meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station</b>
<b>Sunday October 15th</b>	<b>Stories from Stuff</b> , Program 2 PA at the Grannas Station

If you would like more information on the above events please visit our website

### 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!**

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