



Volume 26 Issue 4

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

June/July 2021

THANKS TO THE HOLLIDAYSBURG AREA HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS AND OUR VOLUNTEERS



Thank You,
Thank You,
Thank You!!!!

The Hollidaysburg Seniors returned to the trail again this year to volunteer their time and talents, sweat

and muscles to improve the trail. For over 20 years now, with the exception of last year (due to COVID,) Hollidaysburg Area High School takes 3 days in May for seniors to give back to their community by helping out at places like the Lower Trail, Canoe Creek State Park, Blair YMCA, Mishler Theater, and other non-profits.

This year they worked their “butts” off. Under the guidance of two great Hollidaysburg teachers, Mr. Mike Rawlings and Ms. Sarah Gorman and of course our great trail volunteers: Greg Williams, Adam Grow, Chris Reese, Joe Lansberry and Ed Donahoe, many projects got done. The students broke into groups to work on these projects. Greg Williams, who does an OUTSTANDING job ridding the trail of invasive plants and starting native plants, managed a large group removing Japanese Knot Weed across from Cove Forge and undertaking tree removal opening up light for newly planted shrubs and native trees along several sections of the trail. Student names were placed on the stakes. They also received a wealth of information from Greg. Adam Grow’s crew covered most of the trail, resetting dozens of concrete bench pads and repairing benches and tables. They even retrieved some benches that had been toppled into the river. The other crews worked opening drainage ditches clogged with mud and debris. They also spread a load of stone filling in potholes and smoothing the road into the Flowing Spring Trailhead.



We are very grateful for all that these students do every year!

WILD FLOWER WATCH: FOXGLOVE BEARDTONGUE

By Bob Richers



One of the flashier June wildflowers found in Canoe Creek State Park is foxglove or White Beardtongue. I have not noticed any growing along the Lower Trail, but for the most part open meadows are sparse there.

Beardtongue is a member of the snapdragon family. In North America there are 8 identified species of the white variety. Foxglove is the most widespread. The name of beardtongue is

derived from a tuft of hairs on the stamens.

Penstemon digitalis grows in fields, meadows, wood margins and along railroad tracks; it thrives in full sun locations. The up-right purple stems grow from 3 to 5 feet tall. Numerous flowers extend on a panicle almost 1/3 of the plant’s height. The leaves are up to 5 inches in length, narrow and lanced with a shiny surface.

Flowers are mostly white and open in 5 sections with multiple stamina. They are 1 and a quarter inches long and were originally described as fox-glove-like. Beardtongue in bloom attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. Blossoming begins in late May and lasts thru June. This herbaceous plant tolerates deer browsing.

An easy to grow wildflower it has been hybridized as a garden addition. The Perennial Association chose the Husker Red Beardtongue as their 1996 Perennial Plant of the Year.

As luck would have it, we stumbled upon this flowering perennial at Martin’s Green house last summer and added it to our flower garden. This Beardtongue, which I believe to be a variety of Husker Red, grew 4 feet tall and contains over 24 flowering stems this June. Half of the flowering panicles are white while the remainder has a light purple tint.

RESTROOM ETIQUETTE:



We would like to let all of our trail users know ... **WE TRY**. We contract to have the Porta-Potties and Vault toilets cleaned once a week. We have them pumped when the gauge shows us they

need pumped. This year we even arranged to have all the vault toilet tanks pumped and cleaned right before the 4th of July weekend. The thanks we and our faithful trail users got was someone went into the Alfarata Trailhead vault toilet within 24 hours of it being totally cleaned and made that restroom facility un-usable. This was no accident for the mess that was made was very intentional. We apologize to our faithful members that this occurred. Keeping these restroom facility's up and running is one of our organization's most costly expense each year. We just are not sure how to prevent people from making unsanitary, filthy messes.

TREE OF THE MONTH: COMMON HORSE-CHESTNUT:

By Dave Despot



Many residents of central Pennsylvania are familiar with common horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) as a street tree in urban and suburban neighborhoods. Trees of this species can reach a height of 60 feet with a trunk diameter of up to 2 feet on sites with adequate space for development. Horse-chestnut trees are native to Europe, but have been widely planted in the eastern United States. It is my observation that although these trees produce an abundance of seed, they

have not become naturalized much beyond the sites where they were originally planted.

The leaves are uniquely palmately compound (leaves originate radially from a common center point), with 7 leaflets. Leaflets are up to 6 inches long, broadest above the middle, taper to a gradual point at the base and abruptly come to a point at the tip. Leaflets are toothed on the margins, have smooth surfaces, and are dark green above with lighter undersides. Flowers are white and borne in upright terminal panicles. The fruit are covered with a thick, leathery, spiny husk, which contain up to 3 nuts.

Twigs are stout, with color varying from dull red to gray. Leaf-scars look like inverse triangles with visible bundle-scars. With age, the bark becomes brown and divides into shallow ridges and furrows topped with thin plates. Buds are ovoid, blunt-pointed, dark brown, and covered with sticky resin. If you squeeze a bud with your thumb and forefinger the bud will stick firmly to your fingers. This is a great identification characteristic to differentiate horse-chestnut trees from buckeyes. The buckeye buds look very similar but are not sticky.

In Europe, horse-chestnut wood is prized by woodworkers for its unique color and grain. Legend has it that carrying a nut in your pocket can ward off attacks of rheumatism. It is reported that the name horse-chestnut comes from the fact that cough medicine for horses was made from this species of tree. Horse-chestnuts as well as buckeyes are moderately poisonous to humans and should not be confused with the edible chestnut (*Castanea*).

THE ELECTRIC BIKES ARE HERE!

By Bob Richers

By now everyone riding on our area trails have encountered electric bikes. There are more and more seen every year. Locally Petal Power carries 8 different Trek E bikes in a price range of \$1,500 to \$3,500. There are numerous E-bikes on the market and prices can range from \$200 for a cheap conversion kit to over \$10,000 for a top-of-the-line unit.

6 of the Treks offered locally have assist pedaling to 20 MPH and 2 offer electric assist to 28 MPH. These bikes are classified as **class 1** which means that they only kick in when the bike is being pedaled and stop assisting at the upper MPH limit. If you consider buying an E-bike, do your research and shop around.

Class 2 bikes have an assist mode, but the motor can also be engaged without using the pedals. They are considered a low-speed throttle-assisted bicycle. This may be problematic on trails that may consider them motorized vehicles.

Class 3 bikes are where the electric assists only engage at speeds over 28 MPG. These are speed pedal-assisted electric bicycles.

In Pennsylvania E-Bikes are defined as "pedal cycles with electric assist" so long as the motor is fewer than 750 watts. Has a maximum speed of 20 MPH on level surface when powered by the motor only and weighs no more than 100 pounds. That would include most class 1 & 2 bikes. Other states and some trails have different regulations for these electric bikes so check them out before planning a trip.

E-bikes offer many advantages. Riders with physical limitations can now enjoy cycling. As we age, an assist when climbing hills is more than welcome. Extending ride distances is another benefit. In the larger urban areas, commutes to and from work on E-bikes can save gas expenses and offer some daily exercise.

Batteries vary with different manufacturers. Cheaper units can take up to 6 hours to recharge and last for 500 recharges. Higher quality batteries charge in 2 to 4 hours and can be recharged 1000 times. Batteries can cost from \$300 to \$500. They are removed for charging and, with their cost, consider a battery locking device. A recharge is estimated to cost about 50 cents.

The weight of E-bikes is an important item to consider. Standard bike racks all have weight limits and most E-bikes are heavier than standard bikes. Just by leaving the battery pack out may keep you within your weight limit. Heavy duty bike racks can cost up to \$400. I've seen folks pushing E-bikes up ramps into the bed of a truck. Some other bikes fold up and are placed in a case, but they also seem quite heavy.

The range of E-bikes vary by model and the amount of riding assist needed. Ranges of 20 to 100 miles can be attained. Most bikes have display gages to show battery life and projected range available. E-bikes are similar to standard bicycles.

The biggest issue local trails need to consider is keeping a safe speed limit on the trail. Some trails post speed limits, but common-sense warnings to slow down when encountering congested areas might work. Even riders working out with a good

street cycle should slow down when conditions warrant. If the trail is clear, then by all means increase your speed. Just remember that a rider and bike weighing 225 pounds going 20 MPH can severely damage a child or small pet. In an unsafe situation who is liable??? I don't think we want to go there.

RECYCLE THOSE OLD BIKES

By Bob Richers

Eleven years ago, I upgraded my Trek mountain bike for a Trek hybrid. The wheels were larger and gear ratio was better. We gained a couple miles per hour on our outings. On the rare occasions when I ride on roadways, it was an easier ride.

This spring when cleaning the garage, I noticed my old Trek and cleaned it up and inflated the tires. But what to do with old "orphaned bikes"? I know several people who have similar old ride issues. Try a yard sale and get a couple bucks...is it worth the trouble?

I finally put the unused bike out front with a "free bike, enjoy" sign on it. I was sitting on my front steps installing new string into my weed eater when 4 young teens walked by, the race was on! The quickest kid hopped on the bike and started to ride off. I stated, "You're welcome" and he hollered back his thanks!

Why didn't I do this years ago? I wish that there had been 4 bikes to give away. The following day I saw the young man ride by. He was sitting tall and proud on his new bike. With the lack of in-school learning this pandemic year, too many of our students received little physical education. Hopefully, bike riding will get the kids some much needed exercise. Not every family can afford to buy bikes for their children, so if you have an unused one, why not spread the joy.

TRAIL TOWN MARKET EVERY SATURDAY:



REMINDER that every Saturday in Williamsburg, 9 AM till Noon is the **TRAIL TOWN MARKET**. It's a great place to find farmers' market stuff--(home grown produce), baked goods, and beautiful fresh flowers, as well as organizations selling their wares

ASCENSION DAY: May 13



This is a picture from the Mt. Etna Trailhead on May 13th. A group of Amish converged on the trail for a day of picnicking and fishing.

John Hostetler writes in the *Amish Society* that "Ascension Day is observed as a day of rest or visiting, but on this day, young people or whole families, go out into the woods for picnics and the boys may go fishing." What a better place to picnic and fish than the Lower Trail!

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS HAVE RESUMED

August 10th
September 14th
October 12th

Board meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station
Board meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station
Board meeting, 7 PM at the Grannas Station

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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