Phase II Trail Improvements—Finally!

Rail improvements will finally be coming to the D&H from Herrick Center to Ararat! Two grants are helping to make this project happen: a Federal Transportation Enhancement grant and a Pennsylvania DCNR grant. The construction plans are now under review by our local PA DOT District 4.0 office. Once approved, they will go through the bid process and a Fall 2013 start can be expected if all goes as planned.

The trail improvements will cover about 6.5 miles from SR 374 at Herrick Center to Ararat Road. This section of trail follows the West Branch of the Lackawanna River, and its watershed origins. This is evident by the many lakes and swamps along this section of trail. Prior to trail improvements, the Council will be constructing trail ramps to cross up & over Ararat Road. This was the site of a vehicular bridge that went over the railroad. When the railroad ceased to operate, the bridge was removed and fill was placed on top of the railbed. At present these are steep banks that must be rebuilt with fill to be a 5% grade. Trail improvements will include extensive drainage improvements, regrading and leveling of the trail for positive drainage. The trail will be resurfaced with a specially designed trail mix by Penn State’s Dirt & Gravel Road Center, called ‘trail surface aggregate’ (TSA). Gates and fences will be installed at road crossings along with signage. Improved trail mileage will increase from 10 to 16.5 miles. Watch the news for a ground-breaking and a ribbon-cutting!

The Heritage Explorer Bike Tour and Festival is a fun, non-competitive, family-friendly event that features the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. Hosted by the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National and State Heritage Area (LHV), the Bike Tour travels through 17 municipalities on a combination of rail-trails and neighborhood streets. This amazing effort is due to the cooperation and partnership of community officials, first responders, local residents, Bike Tour sponsors, and volunteers. Last year, more than 450 people of all ages participated in the event!

The Bike Tour offers riders a choice of four out-and-back routes of 5, 11, 22, and 44 miles beginning at Mellow Park in Peckville, Pennsylvania. The Bike Tour also offers the “Blakely Lokie Bike Rally” for young riders 8 years and under. The Rally features fun, interactive activities for the kids that encourage bike safety and good bike handling techniques. The Rail-Trail Council will welcome riders of the 44 mile ‘Union Dale Pusher’ to the trailhead and volunteers are needed for the Union Dale trailhead.
D&H Wyes

Along the 38-mile D&H are two areas next to the railbed known as wyes: the Ararat wye and the Cascade wye. A wye is a triangular junction of railtracks with a switch. Wyes are used for turning railroad equipment such as engines around. It is the equivalent of a three point turn, where a locomotive can turn around and face the direction from which it came. Pushers were used to push trains loaded with coal out of Carbondale up the grade to Ararat Summit. The pushers would ‘wye’ at the Ararat Wye, and return to Carbondale to push the next train.

At present the Ararat Wye is difficult to find as it is grown in. However it is possible to see, as it has a south leg, a north leg and a tail. The Ararat Wye is located on the east side of the D&H just north of the Ararat Road crossing (up & over the road), where the adjacent terrain flattens out.

Easier to find is the Cascade Wye, which is north of Lanesboro, just before the New York State border on the west side (riverside) of the trail. It is named after Cascade Creek which flows under the railbed in the immediate vicinity and empties into the Susquehanna River. The Cascade Wye is on a raised railbed so it’s easy to see. Also, it has been cleared of vegetation by a local boyscout, so it’s an easy walk out to the tail next to the river. Recently, the site has been developed into a primitive campground with a wayfinding sign for through paddlers on the North Branch of the Susquehanna River.

Volunteers Needed—Join Our Team!

April 21-27 is National Volunteer Week celebrating ordinary people doing extraordinary things to improve communities across the nation. It’s the perfect time to recognize that our trail is one of the best examples of a non-profit developing from the grassroots level. It would not exist but for the foresight and loving labor of volunteers. As our trail grows so does its need for volunteers and we need your help! Our D&H Distance Run alone requires a small army of over 100 volunteers. We offer several volunteer opportunities including trail events, trail cleanups and office duties. If you would like to help please email or call our office.

“Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.”

—Unknown
The origins of the rail line from Carbondale to Lanesboro, today's D&H Rail-Trail, lies with the competition between two early northeastern Pennsylvania coal companies, the Delaware and Hudson Canal (D&H) and the Pennsylvania Coal Company (PCC). Both these companies sought to ship their anthracite coal from the Lackawanna Valley to eastern markets. D&H anthracite was transported by a gravity railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale and then by the D&H Canal to Kingston, NY while the PCC shipped its anthracite via a gravity railroad from Pittston to Hawley and then via the D&H Canal. A squabble over rates between the two companies led to the PCC contracting with a rail line built between Lackawaxen and Hawley, completed in December 1863 and then leased to the Erie Railroad. This gave the PCC an all rail route from Hawley to New York City. The D&H was left dependent on a canal route that was unusable during the winter.

The D&H sought to resolve this dilemma by forging its own connection with the Erie Railroad. The Erie’s interest in a rail line into the anthracite region dated from the 1840’s. On November 17, 1863 the D&H Board of Managers designated a committee to call on Erie President Nathaniel Marsh in search of a rail connection that would benefit both companies. The next move in the D&H’s drive for all weather market access came on February 16, 1864 when the board approved the subscription of not more than $100,000 in the stock of the Jefferson Railroad.

Originally chartered in 1851, the Jefferson Railroad charter had lain dormant for over ten years. The name Jefferson was an unusual one for a northeast Pennsylvania railroad. Jefferson County is in western Pennsylvania. The unusual name was the result of the intense competition for rail lines into the anthracite region. When Honesdale interests applied for a charter for a railroad to connect their city with the Erie Railroad they feared opposition from the D&H Canal. Earlier attempts by the Erie to penetrate the region had come to grief by D&H opposition. The name of the proposed railroad was chosen as a ruse to help the charter navigate the political shoals and rapids of the Pennsylvania Legislature. When legislators from Jefferson County examined the proposed charter and realized it had nothing to do with their county they ignored it as did other legislators who believed it had only to do with Jefferson County. The legislature approved it.
The Jefferson Railroad charter lay dormant into the 1860's. At that time some Honesdale businessmen revived the long dormant Jefferson Railroad charter and received approval to alter it so that they could connect to the Erie anywhere along its line and also build a line to Carbondale. They built a locomotive line between the Hawley and the eastern outskirts of Honesdale. The completion of this nine-mile railroad would allow the D&H Canal Company to ship its anthracite coal from Honesdale to Hawley by railroad rather than canal.

By early 1864 the D&H Board of Managers were convinced of the need for a railroad connection north from Carbondale in order to reach western markets with their anthracite. On February 16, 1864 they formed a committee to confer with the already chartered Jefferson Railroad Company to develop a railroad from the Carbondale area to a connection with the Erie Railroad in the vicinity of Lanesboro, Pennsylvania. On July 13, 1868 the rail line between Hawley and Honesdale was completed and on September 2 of that year the D&H Board of Managers entered into a contract with the Erie Railroad to construct a line from Carbondale to Susquehanna.

The terms of this contract included a “favorable provision” for shipping D&H anthracite to Rochester and Buffalo markets. The contract also called for D&H use of the Erie from Honesdale to Weehawken during the winter months, when the canal was closed, to send anthracite to the New York City area. To fulfill its part of the deal the D&H bought $1,500,000 in Boston, Hartford and Erie Railroad bonds at 90% of their par value. Those bonds were apparently of doubtful value since the Erie agreed to guarantee them.

The route of the Jefferson Railroad from Carbondale to the Erie connection had been surveyed by the Northern Coal and Iron Company, a D&H subsidiary. By the late 1860's the D&H was already planning an extension of the Jefferson Railroad north to Ninevah, New York and a link with the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad which was building a line between those two cities. The D&H and the Erie signed a trackage agreement to share the use of the new line on September 2, 1868 and the Jefferson Railroad opened on October 28, 1870.

In 1884 the D&H determined that the Erie was charging an excessive amount of rental for the use of the Jefferson Railroad. The Erie was notified that the trackage agreement would be terminated and the D&H proceeded to survey an independent line north from Carbondale. The threat of an additional line north from the Lackawanna coal fields resulted in the Erie agreeing to a reduced rental rate for use of the Jefferson Railroad.

Peter H. Grant

Sources:


* Delaware and Hudson, Jim Shaughnessy, Berkeley, California, 1967.


Art on the Trail
Rail-Trail Council will hold its second annual “Art on the Trail” day Saturday June 22. In addition to an exhibit of local art, activities will include an interpretive walk, photography classes and a variety of trail side events. Cable’s Deli will offer a delicious chicken barbecue; advanced tickets can be purchased at the deli or our office. Check our website soon for a full list of artisans and activities. Volunteers are needed. Join us for a fun-filled day!

Starrucca Creek Cleanup
April 20 & 21, 8:30 AM: Cleaning up the creek bed along the trail from Brandt to Lanesboro, with Friends of the Starrucca Creek. Meet at the bridge in Lanesboro.

D&H Rail-Trail Cleanup
April 27, 9 AM: Meet at yellow gate off SR 171 north of Forest City.

Endless Mountains Trail Cleanup
May 4, 9 AM: Meet & park at Lathrop Street School. Cleanup trail in Montrose Borough area.

RiverFest
RiverFest is the signature event of the Lackawanna River Corridor Association. On June 1st, paddlers will take to the water and revelers will fill the banks of the Lackawanna River. A day of exercise and fun, RiverFest draws the community outdoors with the Canoe-A-Thon, Regatta, and Duck-A-Thon, as well as music, food and educational displays. Fun for all ages. Details at lrca.org.

6th Annual D&H Distance Run
Sunday, September 8: A half-marathon on the D&H Rail-Trail. Forest City 9 AM start. GetMeRegistered.com

Upcoming Events

(Names of upcoming events and individuals associated with them)

DONATIONS

In Memory of William Connor
Nancy Ross
Joanne & Charles Stetz

In Memory of Carol Frost
Nancy Ross
Lynn & Paul Conrad
Deb & Jack McNamara
Katharine Goodall
Anne & Jack Mason
Jane Yarnoe

In Memory of Richard Gavalis
Nancy Ross

In Celebration of Ethel Breuche’s Birthday
Lynn & Paul Conrad
Deb & Jack McNamara
Kirk & Helen Newsom
Connie Yellig
June & Kenny Yednock
Donna Caputo
Joyce & Stan Wierzbicki
Nancy Ross

RT CALENDAR

APRIL 25
RTC Dinner/Meeting
6/7 PM, Board only

MAY 23
RTC Dinner/Meeting
6/7 PM, Ben Mar, Carbondale

JUNE 27
RTC Dinner/Meeting
6/7 PM, Chet’s Place, Union Dale
William Joseph Connor  
January 8, 2013

It’s with great sadness that we report the loss of one of our long time board members, Bill Connor. Bill and his wife Barbara became Rail Trail members in June of 1994 and were elected to our board in April 2003. Bill enjoyed coming to our monthly dinner meetings and it was with Bill’s helping hand that our quarterly newsletters were prepared for mailing. As we prepare this latest newsletter we will miss his presence and volunteer spirit. Bill will be missed by all who knew him.

Carol Frost  
February 19th, 2013

Long time Rail Trail Council member Carol Frost died peacefully on February 19 at her home in Narberth. Carol was one of our earliest members joining Rail-Trail in October, 1993. Her son Tom is one of our most active board members and has also been a steadfast volunteer for many years. Rail Trail Council would like to send its condolences to the Frost family.

Grant to Redeck Bridge

A PA Recreational Trails grant through PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources was received to redeck one of the bridges just north of Forest City. A poured concrete deck is planned for this summer to replace the wooden deck in disrepair. This may close down this section of trail for a few weeks, so watch out for announcements, trail signage and detours. We are also applying for more funding to redeck two more bridges and hope to hear the end of this year.

Trail Activities

We are in the process of organizing a number of hikes, bike rides, bird and nature walks. For Spring, Summer and Fall trail events please check our website. www.nepa-rail-trails.org

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