The Rail-Trail Council of NE PA will celebrate 25 years as an organization this coming year! The Council was able to jump on board early in an environmental movement that was quickly gaining momentum across the country. Take a newly abandoned railroad corridor and turn it into a public trail. By the early 1980’s, the struggling railroad industry was abandoned 4,000 to 8,000 miles of lines each year. In 1983, a group of walking and biking enthusiasts, railroad history buffs, conservation and park groups, and active-transportation activists began to meet for monthly brown-bags meetings in Washington to mobilize efforts to preserve rail corridors for public use. The national Rails-to-Trails conservancy began in 1986 and focused specifically on this work. Our own Nancy Ross was specifically on this work. Our own Nancy Ross was aware of this movement and when asked by the national council was able to jump on board early in an environmental movement that was quickly gaining momentum across the country. Take a newly abandoned railroad corridor and turn it into a public trail. By the early 1980’s, the struggling railroad industry was abandoned 4,000 to 8,000 miles of lines each year. In 1983, a group of walking and biking enthusiasts, railroad history buffs, conservation and park groups, and active-transportation activists began to meet for monthly brown-bags meetings in Washington to mobilize efforts to preserve rail corridors for public use. The national Rails-to-Trails conservancy began in 1986 and focused specifically on this work. Our own Nancy Ross was aware of this movement and when asked by the National Parks Service to help survey and rate our local abandoned railroads, she readily agreed. The Delaware & Hudson Railbed ended up with the highest marks for trail feasibility: one owner, intact right-of-way, Hudson railbed ended up with the highest marks for trail feasibility: one owner, intact right-of-way, clear title. And the O&W was not far behind in feasibility rating. So early in the 1990’s, Nancy and Phil Pass, Jr. started to meet and gather other local trail enthusiasts. Our plans for a 25th anniversary are in the planning stages, but we hope to incorporate trail events with ‘art on the trail’ and a celebratory get-together sometime in June! Hope you can join us!

Are you a Rail-Trail member yet? See details inside...

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**NO RTC JANUARY MEETING!**

**FEBRUARY 14**
Snowshoe and Cross Country Ski Event

**FEBRUARY 25**
RTC Dinner/Meeting: 6/7 PM RTC Office/Cables Deli
Before biking on the D&H Rail-Trail for the first time, I called the Rail-Trail Council’s office and asked in which direction I should travel. “Go to Forest City and bike north” was the answer. “Why?” I asked. All they said was, “You’ll see!” In order to understand this answer, let’s go back and look at the history of the line and the grades involved in the route.

The rail line between Carbondale and Lanesboro was originally built by the Erie Railroad as its Jefferson Division, although construction was actually financed by the D&H. The Delaware and Hudson retained trackage rights on this mostly double-tracked route. After the D&H purchased “The Jeff” outright from the Erie in 1955, the D&H installed CTC (Centralized Traffic Control) and single-tracked a great portion of the route. CTC is a form of railroad signaling in which a centralized train dispatcher’s office controls railroad switches and train movements.

According to Jim Kilcullen, retired D&H Yardmaster, regardless of single or double-track, the route over Mount Ararat required helper engines in both directions. Pusher crews on the D&H from Wilkes-Barre assisted trains over Yatesville Hill, with its steep 1.48% grade, as far as Carbondale. Crews and power of northbound trains both changed at Carbondale.

The Consoliddations (2-8-0 wheel alignment) which brought the trains up to Carbondale were replaced with the big Challengers (4-6-6-4’s) on the head end. The Challengers then brought the train over the route and went all the way to Oneonta. Challengers and big Mallets (0-8-8-0’s) were also used in pusher service out of Carbondale.

Steam engines were still in service as late as 1952 until enough diesels arrived on the railroad for steam to be retired. The last of the Challengers were built in 1946 and all were scrapped by 1953.

Even when the road was owned by the Erie, it was dispatched by the D&H, originally out of Carbondale. After the D&H purchase in 1955, dispatching was moved to Oneonta and CTC was installed. Dispatchers were eventually moved all the way to Albany. Even after the D&H bought it, Erie retained station rights and every town had a freight station, with Forest City and Thompson being the last in operation. Station agents were all Erie personnel.

The northbound grade increased starting from 1.31% at Carbondale to 1.48% from north of Simpson to Forest City. This was the heaviest main line grade on the railroad, where the “Forest City Kicker” which was used to help trains up this steep grade. Two pushers were often used ahead of the caboose. The pushers would get off at Ararat and one or both would then go down to Lanesboro and return on the southbound push back up Ararat. There was a wye up at Ararat which enabled a pusher to be turned. It was located east of the rails and just north of the overpass which carries Ararat Road over the tracks. The only place the pushers had to run backwards was from Forest City down to Carbondale. More about the “Forest City Kicker” was provided by Mark Walsh in the August 2012 Rail-Trail News.

North of Forest City, the grade to Ararat was 0.79% northbound, rising 950 feet from Carbondale. However, since there was no “top” to Ararat, you were either going up the hill or down on the other side. On the north side of Ararat, the southbound grade upward from Jefferson Junction varied from 1.22% to 1.38%. Grades are expressed as a percentage by the rise in elevation per 100 feet, thus 1% would be a vertical rise of 1 foot per hundred linear feet. Than may not sound like much, unless you are a steam locomotive pulling a heavy string of loaded coal cars behind you…or a bicyclist like me wondering why it was so hard peddling up out of Simpson.

Double track was kept in places where it was needed, particularly from West Carbondale (Simpson) to Forest City because of the steepness of the grade. According to Jim Kilcullen however, reducing the track to a single track from Lanesboro to Melrose may have been a mistake. Problems frequently occurred between Stevens Point and Starrucca as trains stalled due to heavy loads or inadequate power and there was only a single track. Southbounds would stall here even before reaching the summit. Many trains stalled on the northbound grade to Forest City but at least two tracks were available there.

Ararat was difficult at any time of the year, but especially in winter where hardly a year went by without some incident. D&H trained new hires by putting them on trains with different job assignments. One individual, who was seeking to qualify to work as brakeman, was making his first road trip over mountain at night. The train was doing 20-25 mph going over the top and the engineer got everything set up for the descent. After cresting the hill, the train picked up speed to 35 mph going down that side of hill and continued going faster and faster, to which the engineer was heard to utter, “It’s in God’s hands now” to the young brakeman, now frightened out of his wits.

Bert Prohaska

This article was based on content provided in a recorded interview with Jim Kilcullen, retired former D&H Yardmaster and Mike Eggleston, retired D&H employee.
Winter Trail Days Events

Rail-Trail Council’s “Winter Trail Days” offer a variety of events to help chase away the winter blues.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 10 AM
Winter Solstice Celebration

Make the most of the shortest day of the year (a little early), and join us for a Winter Solstice Celebration. The winter solstice occurs exactly when the Earth’s tilt is the furthest away from the sun. In observance of this special day, RTC will host a morning of yoga followed by snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Tiffany Debish, of Studio Be in Forest City, will lead participants through breathing and stretching exercises. Following the yoga session, participants will head to the trail for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Combining these two activities creates a unique way to build strength and reduce stress during the busy holiday season. RTC will offer a short clinic in snowshoe basics and will lend snowshoes (in limited supplies).

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 1 PM
Winter Discovery Walk

Discover what lives in the natural world in winter. Join retired district forester Jim Kessler for a winter walk/snowshoe on the D&H Trail in Union Dale. When the temperature drops and a coating of snow falls along the trail, it’s the perfect time to gather up the warm mittens and enter the woods. In winter, many animals and non-migration birds are constantly searching for food, leaving clues to their activities in plain sight. This 2 hour hike will take us to places on and off the trail where the footprints of a rabbit may mysteriously disappear or a tree may bear the new rub of a deer’s antlers as it marks its territory. The walk will focus on evergreen plants and animal track identification. It’s a perfect outing for children interested in the outdoors.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1 PM
Valentine’s Learn to Cross-Country Ski Day

What better way to spend the day with someone you love than sharing the invigorating experience of cross country skiing or snowshoeing? RTC has a “sweet” deal for you! Join us on February 14th for our first learn to ski day. For those new to winter sports, cross country skiing is easy to learn and fun for all ages. Ski rentals from Chet’s Place can be arranged through the Rail-Trail Office. Limited numbers of snowshoes are available free for loan. Lessons are free and will be taught by PSIA certified cross-country ski instructor. Registration required. Those already comfortable on cross country skis are also invited to join us. After the clinic we head out on the trail for the fun part!

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 10 AM
“Discover the Secrets” of the D&H

Take a trip back in time when mining, processing and transportation of coal fueled the economy of our region. We will meet in the parking lot of Franks’ Place in Simpson. From there we head down to the trail for a walk to our latest interpretative signage installed this fall. The sign tells the story of two bridges which crossed the Lackawanna River and the D&H Trail, connecting to the Northwest Breaker. Along the way we will visit other “secrets” sites and scenic areas. The hike will be approximately two hours and, weather permitting, open to snowshoe or cross country skiing.

All events begin at our office in Union Dale unless otherwise stated. Snowshoes are available for loan in limited quantities. For more information 570-679-9300 or trails@nep.net
Are You a Rail-Trail Member?

We hope you enjoy the December issue of Rail-Trail Council’s newsletter! We thank you for your support, your membership has enabled us to accomplish so much this year.

One of our goals for the New Year is updating our membership data base, but we need your help. Once we had the largest membership base of any Rail Trail organization in Pennsylvania! Over the year’s our membership numbers have declined and we are looking for ways to strengthen our base. If you have not renewed your membership this year please consider doing it now. If there is no date on your newsletter label you are receiving a complimentary copy. Please consider joining or passing your newsletter on to someone who might be interested in RTC. If your address or email information has changed please let us know. If you receive our newsletter by mail perhaps you would like to become a paperless member and receive your newsletter electronically.

If you have a question about your membership renewal date you will find it highlighted in yellow on your mailing label. Members receiving our newsletter electronically will receive reminders by email. A membership renewal form is in the newsletter or you can renew with PayPal by using the link on our website. All contributions are tax deductible.

In addition to membership, RTC offers a number of ways you can support our work to build, maintain and connect trail. Consider volunteering by becoming a Trail-Tender. You will find a detailed brochure with information about our Trail-Tender program on our website. Volunteers can also assist us with trail clean-ups, trail events and trail maintenance.

We wish everyone a wonderful Holiday season and look forward to sharing new accomplishments in 2016.

The Rail-Trail Staff

Membership Renewal Form

Please renew! The date on the mailing label on the reverse indicates when your membership expires.

☐ Lifetime/Founding $500
☐ Patron/Sponsor $250
☐ Club/Organization $100
☐ Family $35
☐ Individual $20
☐ Senior/Student $15

☐ I am available for trail cleanups.
☐ Call me to discuss a corporate donation.
☐ I am interested in finding out more about the “Trail Tender” program.
☐ Send my newsletter electronically (instead of by mail) to: ________________________________
☐ Send me a brochure.

NAME

PHONE NUMBER

STREET ADDRESS

E-MAIL ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

Please update your address here if necessary. Make checks payable to Rail-Trail Council of Northeast PA

P.O. Box 32, Union Dale PA 18470 / Phone: 570-679-9300 / E mail: trails@nep.net
What’s New on the Trails?

We are full-speed ahead with our plans for a series of switchback trails on the D&H in the Buck’s Falls Ravine area in Starrucca. The topographical survey work has begun and plans are to have construction plans and permits ready for a late spring to early summer bid.

Trail improvement plans from Herrick to Ararat are still under review by DEP and PADOT. Hopefully they will be approved and we can expect the project to enter the PADOT bid system and construction to get underway before the end of 2016.

We plan to continue to research, design and install historical interpretational signs along the D&H Trail. We have funding from the Endless Mountains Heritage Region for a Starrucca Viaduct sign. This winter a committee will meet to decide on content and pictures. We also hope to work on signs for the Buck’s Falls Ravine and for Forest City.

If funded, we plan to advertise a ‘request for proposals’ for the development of trail construction plans for the northern end of the D&H, from Stevens Point to the NY border.

We are continuing survey work on the Endless Mountains Trail, especially the Montrose end. Luckily many concrete monuments were found to help indicate boundary lines. We hope to sign some trail easements soon and make some simple improvements to that section of trail.

Union Dale to the Rescue!

The Union Dale Volunteer Fire Department has taken the lead with plans for emergency snow rescue on the trail system. They are in need of donations for the purchase of an enclosed rescue sled that can be used behind a snowmobile for winter rescues and behind an ATV for non-snow rescues. They have received a grant from Constitution to assist in its purchase but need to raise matching funds.

Any questions, please contact Andy Belcher at uniondalefire@gmail.com. Make checks payable to UDVFc memo: rescue sled donation.

The Rail-Trail Council and NEP Sno-Trails are working with area emergency responders and 911 dispatchers on an emergency response plan for the entire snowmobile trail system which includes the D&H and O&W Rail-Trails.

Give the Gift of Membership

This holiday season show your appreciation for the special people in your life while supporting Rail Trail Council of NEPA. Your gift membership will be supporting Rail-Trail Councils work to build, maintain and connect trail which means even more trail for you to enjoy!

Gift Certificate

Rail-Trail Council of NEPA

This Certificate Entitles:
One Year Membership to Rail-Trail Council of NEPA

A year long gift membership includes.....
- Our quarterly newsletter filled with the latest RTC news and updates
- Schedule of our monthly meeting in area restaurants
- Volunteer opportunities, our calendar of special events and
the satisfaction their membership is helping to make the trail a reality!

Rail-Trail Council of NEPA
PO Box 32
Union Dale, PA 18470
570-879-9309
www.nepa-rail-trails.org

Gift Amounts
Family $35
Individual $25
Senior $15
Our new Trail-Tender T-Shirts are in! Now our Trail Tender volunteers will be easy to spot on the D&H and Endless Mountain Trails. Carol Scholl of Carol Scholl Designs helped us develop a new logo for the t-shirts which are available for pickup at our office.

Trail Tenders are ordinary people who volunteer their time to maintain and enhance sections of the D&H and Endless Mountain Trails. If you would like to volunteer give the office a call or attend our next Trail Tender meeting, date to be announced soon.

Please renew! The date on the mailing label below indicates when your membership expires. (No date indicates you are receiving a complimentary copy!)

Rail-Trail Council of Northeast PA
P.O. Box 32
Union Dale PA 18470
trails@nep.net
www.nepa-rail-trails.org

OR CURRENT RESIDENT