

Potomac Trace

Journeys to the places and stories of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail corridor from the Bay to the Allegheny Highlands

Issue No. 2

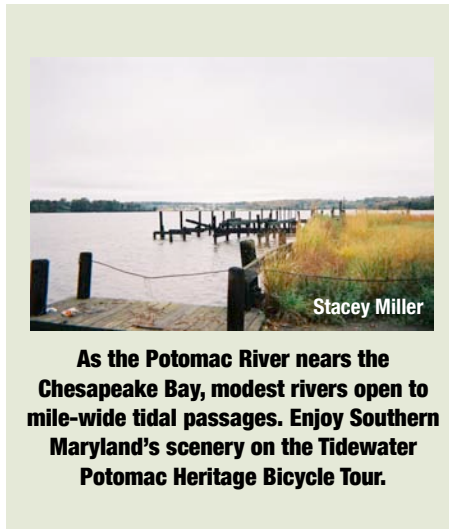
See the PHT this Spring

Two Events: from Point
Lookout to Pittsburgh

If you have about a week in May and one in June, you can travel a good portion of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail corridor by bicycle on trips sponsored by PHT partners. The first will cover the area between Fort Washington Park, south of D.C., and the mouth of the Potomac. The second will begin in Washington, D.C., pass through the Allegheny Mountains, and end in Pittsburgh, Penn.

The journey south, May 13-17, is the Inaugural Tour of the Tidewater Potomac Heritage Bicycle Route. Sponsored by the Oxon Hill Bicycle and Trail Club and the Potomac Heritage Trail Association, the ride goes from Fort Washington to Point Lookout on a portion of Adventure Cycling Association's Tidewater Potomac Heritage Route. The tour begins at 11:30 AM at Fort Washington National Park, with a celebration to recognize designation of the Prince George's County Potomac Heritage On-Road Bicycle Route as a segment of the PHNST. After remarks and refreshments, the tour departs for a 42-mile ride to Bel Alton.

From there, the route travels rural back roads and byways through farmland and



As the Potomac River nears the Chesapeake Bay, modest rivers open to mile-wide tidal passages. Enjoy Southern Maryland's scenery on the Tidewater Potomac Heritage Bicycle Tour.

small towns. The tour averages about 41 miles a day, a fairly leisurely clip even for novice cyclers. The pace leaves plenty of time for stops along the way and for exploring the region at the end of the ride each day. The Tidewater Potomac is where the middle Colonies began. Remarkably, there are long stretches of marsh grasses and brackish streams that seem untouched by the intervening centuries.

The journey north from Washington continues the story of westward expansion. Departing June 11 from Mile 0 of the C&O Canal National Historic Park, the annual Yockatomac Trek is hosted by the Allegheny Trail Alliance. It's a 325-mile, traffic-free trip traveling the length of the towpath and the Great Allegheny Passage,

or "GAP," which was designated a segment of the PHT in 2004.

The itinerary promises 74 historic canal lock structures, passage through three tunnels, scenic vistas and intimate contact with both the Potomac and Youghiogheny rivers. There is even a ride on the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad from Cumberland to Frostburg. But more than the scenery and the sites along the way, the trip offers a rare chance to experience the PHT's continuity, to imagine events of long ago that, once faded, have left these trails to be enjoyed. The trail's gentle grade allows you to take in the surroundings, so your imagination is challenged as much as your muscles.

Nonetheless, you'll be hungry for food and fun each evening. The Yockatomac's veteran trip planners will show the way to local eateries and watering holes, followed by stays at B&B's near the trail.

For both trips, the itineraries make it possible to join the group at any point along the way.



Yockatomac Trek

The Route

A bicycle ride from Washington to Pittsburgh on the C&O Canal Towpath and the Great Allegheny Passage

When

June 11-19

Highlights

Easy riding along the Potomac and Youghiogheny below cliffs and mountains, punctuated with the spectacular views from Mt. Savage Tunnel.

Information

www.atatrail.org



The Allegheny Trail Alliance built a public-private partnership that secured more than \$12 million to restore the Big Savage Tunnel for the Great Allegheny Passage. The tunnel will open when the trail is completed from Cumberland to Meyersdale.

Tidewater Potomac Heritage Tour

The Route

Adventure Cycling's Tidewater Potomac Heritage Route from Fort Washington to Point Lookout.

When

May 13-17

Highlights

Wide vistas of the Potomac and its tributaries, sunsets on the water, quiet back roads through farmland.

Information

www.ohbike.org



Being There

Location

Big Savage Tunnel is in Pennsylvania, 6 miles north of Frostburg, Md., and 12 miles south of Meyersdale, Pa.

While tunnel restoration is complete, it is currently closed for trail construction on both sides. It is hoped the tunnel will open to the public by late summer. Visit the ATA website for updates.

You can see the views from Big Savage now by hiking or biking up the Great Allegheny Passage from the new trailhead in Frostburg, Md.

Can't wait for the official opening to pass through Big Savage? You can see it on The Yockatomac Trek. The ride will pass through the tunnel June 16.

Information

www.atatrail.org or 1-888-282-2453

Western Maryland Tunnels on the PHT

Brush	914'
Borden	957'
Big Savage	3,294'

Big Savage Tunnel

The grandest views along the entire PHT

by Ed Talone

In the early 1900's financier George Gould, dreaming of owning a transcontinental railroad, ordered the expansion of the Western Maryland Railroad to Conneltsville, Pa. Nine tunnels were part of that expansion. By far, the most challenging was through Big Savage Mountain. Tunneling went well until some 600 feet from the western portal workers encountered a river of soft, wet sand. Conventional methods did not stem the flow. Air locks used during construction of New York City subways were brought in, along with "sand hogs," workers who specialized in working in pressurized situations.

After the tunnel's completion, the soft material continued to plague the railroad, requiring constant repairs. Even today, if you look at the water discharge pipe on the east side of the trail, just short of the tunnel on the Maryland side, you will see the same red sands collecting there.

After the railroad was abandoned in 1975, the tunnel continued to deteriorate. Then, in the late 1990's the Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA) pressed efforts to restore it as part of the Allegheny Trail and the Great Allegheny Passage. ATA's efforts garnered assistance from the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, private foundations, corporations and individuals. Work began in early 2002 with extensive rock bolting of the original tunnel liner. Next a new tunnel liner was built with an aggressive drainage system to minimize damage from freeze-and-thaw conditions in the tunnel. Work on the tunnel was completed in late 2003 at a cost of nearly \$12 million.

The finished tunnel is spectacular. The tunnel is 3294 feet long and includes a very slight curve. It looks much as it did in 1911 with the exception of the absence of the "manways" on both sides of the tunnel. These were indents in the walls placed at regular intervals to allow track workers to avoid oncoming trains. They were especially important in this tunnel as it was the only one of the nine that was bored for a single track. The manways were lost when the inner liner was added.

Beyond the tunnel wonderful scenery awaits you regardless of your direction of travel. If you are headed south, a panoramic vista opens up to your left over the sprawling Allegheny Mountains. From here, at an elevation of 2339 feet, the trail descends for more than 21 miles to Cum-

berland, Md., at 625 feet. For northbounders, exiting the tunnel means entering rolling farmland and crossing the Eastern Continental Divide at 2375 feet in about a mile. From here it is a gentle descent all the way to the Forks of the Ohio at Pittsburgh.

The mountain is named for John Savage, a surveyor of the Mayo Expedition in search of the Potomac's headwaters in 1736. The legend is that the party became lost and was forced to winter in the mountains. Savage is said to have offered his life, if needed, to save the others from starvation. After spring's thaw, and with Savage still among them, they named the Savage River for him to honor his selfless act. The name was transferred to Little and Big Savage mountains.

There are currently about 110 rail-trail tunnels nationwide. Big Savage is the fifth longest, and the only long one that had deteriorated badly before being restored. Its presence on the Great Allegheny Passage is truly a miracle--and a tribute to the people who saved it for the trail.



National Trails Day

The first Saturday of June has become a traditional kick-off of the trail event season. There are hikes, rides, paddles, educational activities and volunteer projects. Introduce someone to trails on National Trails Day.

National Trails Day is coordinated nationally by American Hiking Society. Events are being added to their website up to the big day. Visit www.americanhiking.org.

Discover the Potomac Kayak Trip

June 4. Potomac Conservancy and Potomac Paddlesports. A four-hour guided trip of a serene and scenic section of the Potomac River. Professional instructors will teach you how to paddle flatwater kayaks and guides will help you discover the flora and fauna of our Potomac. Catch a glimpse of heron, kingfisher, white-tailed deer, and painted turtles, and see and learn about the many other wild inhabitants of our river ecosystem. Easy paddling for beginners and the entire family! The trip is fully outfitted by Potomac Paddlesports. www.potomacpaddlesports.com, 301.831.0270

Ohio State Park National Trails Day Clean Up

June 4. Park volunteers will gather at 9 AM for a morning of trail work, trash pick-up and general maintenance to prepare for the park's summer season. Contact Gil Gilson, 724-329-8591.

Washington, D.C. Black History National Recreational Trail Walkathon

June 4. The walkathon is the 11th annual event and the largest fund raiser by the Association for the Education and Preser-

vation of African-American History to benefit the Washington, D.C. Black History NRT, the first African-American History trail recognized by the Federal Government. Hikers register in advance and will be provided with pledge sheets to benefit the trail. Hikers will assemble at the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, then travel to sites along the trail. 703-526-6646; afteapooah@hotmail.com

Green Ridge State Forest

June 4. A new trail wayside exhibit will be unveiled at 10 AM, followed by a guided three-mile hike on the scenic Twin Oaks Trail, offering mountain views and a long



stroll in a lovely stream valley. Contact: 301-478-3124; fzumbrun@dnr.state.md.us

Colonial Children's Day Fort Frederick State Park

June 4. Interpretive staff and volunteers of Fort Frederick State Park conduct a day of hands-on 18th Century skills for children. Activities include gardening, candle dipping, and sewing, to name a few. Participants are dressed in 18th Century clothing and lunch is provided. Hours are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event is open to children ages 7 (or completion of 1st grade) to 12. There is a service charge and registration is limited. 301-842-2155; www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/western/ffspecialevents

Alexandria: Collecting Rocks and Fossils

June 4, 2:00-3:30pm. Learn about Alexandria's interesting geology while looking for rocks and fossils in Dora Kelley Nature

Park. A popular and educational program. www.ci.alexandria.va.us/recreation/nature

Prince William Forest Park: Trail Clean-up

June 4. Dress for work and spend the morning helping to maintain trails and perform light duty projects in one of the wildest places in the greater Washington, D.C., area. If you've never visited this gem of a park, this is your chance to spend a few hours working and the rest of the day hiking. 703-221-7181; christopher_derman@nps.gov

Cross-County Trail Hike

June 4. Sponsored by Fairfax Trails and Streams, this 10-mile hike covers many new segments in the northern half of Fairfax County's premier trail project. Fairfax Co. Park Authority will unveil a large new sign there, with a map of the entire CCT. Contact Bill Niedringhaus, 703 244 2476, fairfaxTrails@aol.com.

Algonkian Park to Seneca Park Hike

June 11. Sponsored by Potomac Heritage Trail Association, a hike along a newly-opened section of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, from Algonkian Park to Seneca Park. Option for 2.5 mile or 12 mile distances. Highlights include Lowes Island, Sugarland Run, and the Potomac's scenic rapids known as the Seneca Breaks. Meet at 9am at the Potomac Sportsplex parking lot at the entrance to Algonkian Park. Be one of the first to hike the newly completed section linking Loudoun County with Fairfax County. sadiqi53@aol.com www.potomactrail.org.

Caledon Natural Area, Guided Eagle Tour

June 18. Guided eagle tours take you into Caledon's sensitive shoreline area in a park van. The tour starts in the visitor center with an presentation on the life cycle of the American Bald Eagle. The program covers the eagle's decline to and recovery from the status of an "endangered" species. Tours are Saturdays and Sundays. \$6 per person, children under six are free. 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Meet at the visitor center.

About Potomac Trace

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David Lillard, Editor (304) 876-2860
david_lillard@potomacstories.com
www.potomactrace.org

Scotts Run Nature Preserve

Reaching the Potomac below the falls of Scotts Run, the American Legion Bridge is visible in the downstream distance. It comes as a surprise; by now you've totally forgotten you were hiking in the backyard of 5 million people.

Like dark-eyed juncos and wood thrushes, hikers are drawn to Scotts Run. And amid its 384 acres of tall tulip poplars and chestnut oaks, you're as likely to encounter birdsong as human voices.

The network of primary trails is easy to follow and wide enough for a twosome to amble side-by-side. Intertwining the main trails is a system of slightly more rugged, narrow footpaths. In all, there are several miles of trails.

The most popular feature at Scotts Run is the falls. The fast way to reach them is to follow a gravel lane leading from the north



trailhead lot. With the only steep stretch the short final descent to the river, this is an easy stroll even for a toddler.

A more memorable, and certainly more challenging approach is to follow Scotts Run from above. A narrow footpath leads through a hemlock grove, perhaps the most distinctive natural feature of the preserve. On a warm afternoon of late May, when the thermometer hints of what's to come in July, a walk into the hemlock grove transports you to cooler temperatures—it's as if you began your hike in May and walked right into October.

The temperature change, actually only a couple degrees, is an illustration of the microenvironment created by hemlocks, especially in groves. The effect is the result of the hemlock's deep shade. Writes John Eastman in his *Book of Forest and Thicket*, this is partly due to the dense foliage. It's also due the "blue shade" of conifers, which blocks out light across the spectrum.

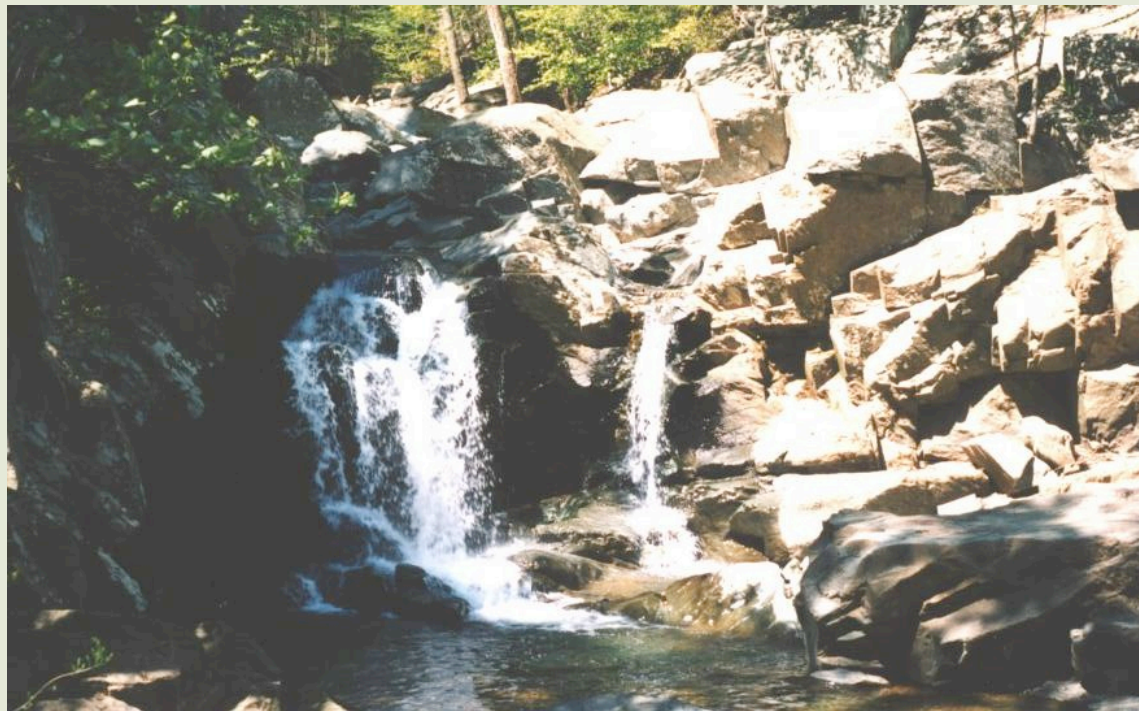
If you can somehow pull yourself away from the hemlock grove, make your way to

the old homesite. All that is left is the chimney, but the clearing offers a quiet place to sit on a log or lie back in the leaves.

The planned route of the Potomac Heritage Trail winds into Scotts Run Nature Preserve just north of the Capital Beltway in Fairfax County. For a leg-stretcher day hike, walk upriver from Theodore Roosevelt Island along the PHT. At the top of the trail, just after crossing under the Beltway, walk up Live Oak Drive, and enter Scotts Run on a side trail near the entrance to the swim club.



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The falls of Scotts Run tumble into the Potomac below a hemlock-covered hillside.