

SUSQUEHANNOCK HIKER

Newsletter of the Susquehannock Trail Club

On Foot in Potter County.....God's Country

PO Box 643, Coudersport, PA 16915 www.stc-hike.org info@stc-hike.org

The purposes of the STC are to build and maintain trails, aid in the conservation of wetlands and wildlife and promote good fellowship through the medium of hiking and nature study.

Winter 2024



Photo by Curt Weinhold

Milky Way meets the Spruce Way

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

By Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

President's Message

Wanda Shirk

Winter trails in Potter County used to be almost inaccessible without skis or snowshoes. Snow depths of two to three feet were common from Thanksgiving till St. Patrick's Day or beyond, and hiking meant "post-holing": having to lift each foot eighteen inches or so only to let it sink in the next drift. In most decades of the last century, I considered winter hiking to be impossible, potentially life-threatening, and perhaps crazy.

I remember once telling someone that the snow was always up to the top of our burn barrel in the '70s. (The city-dweller had to ask, "What's a burn barrel?")

I remember a group of DC-UL (Washington D.C. area "ultra-light") backpackers aborting a weekend hike plan because the post-holing exhausted them.

Climate change in our lifetimes is undeniable.

The *Outdoors Bulletin* of the Appalachian Mountain Club for December 2023 reports that "While all seasons in New England are experiencing increases in their average temperatures, studies by AMC scientists and partners have found that winter is warming at a faster rate than spring, summer, or fall... Since 1917, New England has lost about three weeks of winter... We're seeing an average of 19 fewer days with snow covering the ground and 20 fewer 'frost days' of 32 F or less, which keep the ground cold and maintain snow. Certain states are seeing even more change -- Massachusetts has lost an average of 27 days of snow cover, and Rhode Island and Connecticut have lost more than 30... Snow simply isn't staying on the ground as long."

We have no statistics for Potter County, but my memories would place our increased days of no snow

cover at well over 30. December and January precip is more often rain than snow. Everyone seemed to need or want a snowmobile in decades past. Now, they're hard to sell. They can hardly be used for two weeks in a PoCo winter.

Today, winter hiking is much easier, and it has many advantages over summer on the trails: the brambles and brush have died back, the views across the valley are not obscured by leaves, and less skin is exposed to ticks. In winter, one can add clothing layers. In summer, there's a limit to taking them all off!

On November 2, Tioga County state parks offered a "geology hike" on the Turkey Trail that descends from Leonard Harrison State Park to the Pine Creek Rail Trail. Two geologists provided handouts and fascinating explanations of the rock layers and the millions of years of geologic time that could be seen along the trail. Of the 21 hike participants, including two park officials, twelve were members of the STC. Many of the observations we were able to make were only possible in the time of year when deciduous leaves have dropped, and the vegetation of summer has been curtailed by the hard frosts of fall. Winter hikes offer opportunities to see things that are hidden in late spring, summer, and early fall. Winter opens windows to the earth's "bare bones."

The park staff hopes to offer the hike again in mid-spring, but before "leaf-out." The date may not be available in time for our newsletter deadline, but watch the website or let me know if you are interested.

In the meantime, don't neglect opportunities to take winter hikes in Potter County. The trails are often snow-free and very accessible.

... And when it does snow, savor it!



"Lyman Run vista, with two inches of March 4, 2023 snow."

photo by KTA's Pete Fleszar

Trail Report Fall 2023

By Bill Boyd

This last quarter (Sept., Oct., and Nov.) was an unusually busy one for our crews. It seems like there were more blowdowns during this period - one crew reported clearing 48 of them from one stretch. And 11 of the assigned sections saw quite a bit of work, consisting of lopping, weed-wacking, signs to replace, blazing, all of the usual maintenance. Abe Peachy and his (part-time) crew of 6 did a lot of trail leveling (benching), along with some misc. chores.

A good bit of work was done on the crossover trails, EFT and WBT, along with a few other connecting trails, like the Mt. Brodhead loops, Hopper-House Trail, even the Wil and Betty Ahn Trail. The Sunken Branch shelter received a coat of stain/wood preservative.

Approx. 120 hours were spent building the Ford Hollow shelter. On a sad note, it only took about 20 hours to clean up the site where the Gravel Lick shelter burned. That included Tony Robbins of the KTA bringing his trailer and hauling away the burnt and twisted metal that was the roofing - Tony works for a metal recycling co. Everything else burned completely to the ground. Our volunteers are planning to be much more attentive to fire prevention and suppression going forward. We plan to have buckets to catch rainwater, rakes/shovels to keep the fire-ring area cleared, and some instructions for campers, such as "Fires MUST be in the fire-ring (this one wasn't), they MUST be attended at all times, and they MUST be completely out before leaving, or going to bed."

The total hours for this quarter are 935, with Sept. accounting for 535 of those hours - I think that may be a record for a month. Our total hours through Nov. are 2693, which is much higher than our average - we're beginning to think that our volunteers like to be "Out There."



Photo by Curt Weinhold

Trail Maintainers for 2023

From register box at Mile – 0

To Thompson Rd. - 2.76 - Curt & Penny Weinhold
Lyman Run Rd. - 3.91 - Joe & Barb Allis
Sunken Br. Rd. - 4.22 - Doug & Jane Wetherbee
Rt. 44 - 2.84 - Jeff Raisch
Short Run Rd. - 5.74 - Mark & Denise Kelly
Hungry Hollow Rd. - 4.00 - Tim Kain
Ole Bull S.P. - 7.13 - John & Jan Halter
12 - Mile Rd.(1st) - 4.06 - Jack Buckwalter
12 - Mile Rd. (2nd) - 6.51 - Charles Kern
Greenlick Rd. - 3.57 - Jay Stuckey
Shephard Rd. - 5.96 - Jim Petit
Cross Fork - 3.22 - John Zimmer
The "Pool" - 4.70 - Craig Warner
McConnell Rd. - 5.2 - Chris Bell
East Fork Rd. - 4.35 - Gary & Alice Buchanan
Haul Rd. @ Old Stove - 3.75 - Wanda Shirk
Wild Boy Rd. - 2.08 - Bob Hayes
Rock Ridge Rd. - Pat Childs
Prouty Lick Rd. - 3.00 - Dave Hajzus
Hockney Junction - 1.24 - Todd Twichell
Rt. 44 - 2.81 - Brian & Julie McCusker
Sunken Br. Rd. - 2.25 - Bill Boyd
Reg. box - 4.37 – Chad Rugh & April Castano

West Br. Crossover Tr. - 5.7 - Joe Nachtwey

East Fork Crossover Tr. - 8.3

EFT Sec #1 - Junc. Rd. - 2.40 - Dave Hajzus

EFT Sec. #2 - East Fork Rd. - 2.50 - **Maintainer Needed**

EFT Sec. #3 - Rock Ridge Rd. - 2.60 - Tod Twichell

ATVs on the STS



Photo by Curt Weinhold

Ed. - ATV tracks on the STS, Ridge Trail, less than a mile from DCNR headquarters at Denton Hill. We're going to need help from the DCNR to deal with this.

Ford Hollow Shelter Construction

By Bill Boyd

After we had built the Scoval Branch shelter in 2016, we got the idea that it would be nice to place more shelters around the 84-mile loop. Our first shelter was built with logs, in keeping with the Adirondack theme, but we decided that was a lot of work and a long drawn-out affair. So, we from then on went with a more common framed-up structure.



Photo by Dave Hajzus

Since then, we were on the lookout for other sites, and we decided that Ford Hollow at Mile-74.5, would be an ideal location. It was in a small hollow with a tiny stream which looked as though it might flow at least a little all year long. So, when 2023 rolled around, we had built six other shelters and the time and place was right for #7.

By the time we got caught up on our regular trail maintenance, it was late August before we could get started on the shelter. We then worked on it as time and weather allowed and finished up in late September into early October. Some of us camped at the site for a couple of nights. Sometimes that is the best part of the project - time to sit by the campfire and unwind - maybe catch up on some tall tales.

This shelter is equipped with a fire-ring, picnic table, a couple of chairs, two built-in bunks, a register book, and miscellaneous items.



Photo by Larry Holtzapple

The crew for this build were Mark Kelly (Altoona), Doug Wetherbee and Larry Holtzapple (Wellsboro), Dave Hajzus and me (Coudersport area). And we must include Denise Kelly as our favorite support person - she sends the greatest lunches and desserts.



Photo by Larry Holtzapple

Gravel Lick Shelter Fire

By Bill Boyd

We were at our November 11th meeting at the Sweden Hill church, when the news started to trickle in. Someone said they had seen on Solomon's Words where there was a fire along McConnell Road, and they had mentioned a "shelter". Well, that got our immediate attention, as our Gravel Lick shelter along the STS is the only structure along McConnell that we knew of. The initial news was that one side of the shelter was affected, so we weren't too alarmed, only thinking that maybe we had some repair work to do.

Beginning on Sunday and in the days after, via phone calls and emails, we learned the rest of the story. It seems that a couple had hiked from Cross Fork through the Hammersley and stopped for the night at Gravel Lick shelter - which is exactly what we had in mind when we placed it there. At each shelter we try to include a small picnic table, some sort of chairs, and a fire-ring. For a fire ring we use a large tractor-trailer rim - these are heavy-duty and large enough to contain a fair sized campfire. This couple noted that the fire-ring was "full" of ashes and decided to place their fire elsewhere (we don't know the exact elsewhere, but apparently it was closer to the shelter). Subsequent photos would show that the ring was nowhere near full, not even half-full.

This shelter is high on the ridge between the Hammersley and the Gravel Lick Trail, with no water source nearby. Some of our volunteers try to keep a few jugs of potable water there for hiker's use - we don't know if there was any water there at this time, but even if there was it probably wouldn't have made a difference. This couple went to bed "thinking" that the fire was out. By the time they awoke one side of the shelter was on fire. They had the presence of mind to call it in, and Austin Vol. Fire Dept. responded with lots of water, and contained the fire to about an acre, but the shelter burned completely to the ground. The campers have sent all of their contact information and are extremely sorry about what happened.

The main takeaway is fires MUST be in the ring, MUST be attended at all times, and MUST be completely out when leaving (or going to bed). A wild-fire puts a lot of people at risk, mainly the firefighters; we must do everything possible to prevent them. We plan to rebuild in the spring - this particular shelter was put up for around \$800 but replacement cost will be more like

\$1,200. (that's dues and donations from our loyal members.)



"Build Back Better"

By Wanda Shirk

Since the first shelters were built the crew has now been adding bunks to our newer shelters. Backpackers like to be off the floor to sit and sleep and to stow their boots and gear under the twin-bed-sized platforms at the sides of a shelter.

Also, in addition to the shelter there's such things as the picnic table, mailbox trail register, and other items we typically provide at shelters such as a broom, bow saw and/or loppers, and even a thermometer. We also plan to post signs stressing fire prevention and to add a shovel to each shelter and perhaps a 5-gallon bucket under the eaves to catch rainwater for fire dousing.

Mowers

By Bill Boyd

Several years ago, I noticed a used rough-cut mower for sale, and having a batch of weedy and brushy real estate around my property, I went and checked it out. The guy demonstrated it, and it looked like something I could use, so I bought it.

This is your typical rough-cut mower, self-propelled, with a 24" heavy-duty blade, 3 forward gears and reverse, good-sized knobby tires, and manual pull-rope starting. After using it some, I thought about our STS and some of the sections which could be mowed, saving a great many hours of weed whacking. So suggesting this to the club, we decided to buy one.

It served us well - and each year we began to find more places where we could use it. In fact it became quite popular with our maintainers. Then we began seeing all of the ads for an upgraded version of trail mower, called the DR. That got our attention, so we purchased one of those. This indeed is a much improved upon version - same idea - a 24" mowing deck and self-propelled, but that's where the similarities end. I guess you could call it a robust version: larger engine, electric start, same 3 gears forward and reverse, electric clutch for the blade, much larger knobby tires, even "power-steering" - (this is accomplished with a hand-brake on each wheel, so it steers dozer-like).

So far we have found very few places where this machine won't go. In fact we are sometimes amazed at the places it will go, and we keep finding more sections of trail that we can now mow. In the meantime one of our members bought his own DR, which he graciously uses on the trail. We have a couple of small trailers at our disposal, or these mowers can be hauled in a pickup truck. We try to always send a two-man/woman crew, so that one person stays about 50' ahead of the mower to watch for and clear any debris. We rigged the mower to carry a chainsaw, as that is frequently needed.

So now that four mowers are available, our thinking is to try to mow the sections at least twice a year, as some grow back in a short time. It leaves nearly a 4' wide mowed path, which hikers like, and makes it safer as far as ticks are concerned. We view it as a win-win. Happy Trails!

TRAILS END

By Lois Morey, Secretary and past Archivist

In this past year of 2023, the STC lost the following members whose passing will be greatly felt for years to come. We pay tribute and remember all these members of the Susquehannock Trail Club and offer our condolences to their families and friends.

Ryan Fairbank, 44, Roulette, PA, passed 1/6/2023. He had suffered a severe spinal injury in 2008; in 2022 was diagnosed with brain cancer. He joined the STC in 2020 and before that last diagnosis was made, Ryan completed a 7-day, 84-mile solo hike of the STS. This should be an inspiration to the rest of us that nothing is impossible if we set our mind and heart to accomplishing a desired goal in our life's journey.

Joseph Boyd, age 82, lifelong resident of Coudersport (Sweden Valley), PA, passed 1/14/2023. Quiet and generous man, willing to lend a helping hand to anyone in need. Retired from PennDOT as County Coordinator in 1998. Seven-year STC member.

Peter Gorda, age 88, of Wellsboro, PA, passed 1/24/2023. STC member for 21 years. Had his own construction business for over 20 years. Loved being outside to experience nature and campfires.

Tom Fitzgerald, age 83, of New Florence, PA and West Clarksville, NY passed away 5/2/2023. He was a Forester for the State of PA (known as Forests & Waters, DER, and then DCNR) for 41 years, retiring in 2005. He will be long remembered as one of the Founding and Charter Members of the Susquehannock Trail System and Club when established in 1967. He was our first club president for two years, vice-president for one, newsletter editor and was on the advisory board having served over 25 years.

Allen Berfield, age 75, Coudersport, PA, passed 8/2/2023. A Vietnam War Veteran. Member of several local small bands over the years, and in recent years played guitar and sang for residents of a local nursing home. Joined STC in 2017, became a Life Member in 2022.

Welcome New Members

Regular Memberships:

- Joy Currier, Genesee, PA
- Karen & Ron Hallett, Coudersport, PA
- John Handwerger, Austin, PA
- Janene McAteer, Ulysses, PA
- Susan & Matt Schenck, Wellsboro, PA
- Alan Seitzinger, Coudersport, PA
- Jeffrey Trought, Bloomsburg, PA

New Circuit Hiker Award Recipients

- 1304 Patrick Dowd, Pittsburgh, PA
- 1305 Timothy Kane "Nikowolf", Hatboro, PA
- 1306 Randall Jacob "Wildboy" Stafford, Felton, DE

Recognizing our Life Members for their contributions

*Ahn, Betty
*Ahn, Wilber
Allis, Joseph
Allis, Barbara
Almeter, Clair
Balliet, Wellis
*Berfield, Allen
*Berger, James
*Bernhardy, Bob
Bernhardy, Helen
Bower, Cindy
*Bowser, James
Boyd, Bill
Castano, April
Childs, Patricia
Cramer, Ben
Douglas, Ray
Eppinger, Frank
Erway, Steve
Fitzgerald, Jayne
*Fitzgerald, Rebecca
*Fitzgerald, Thomas
Graczyk, Ed
Graczyk, Nancy
Hardam, Bill
Heimer, Joanne

Hobbs, Samuel
Hollender, Bruce
Hollender, Ruth
Hribar, Carol
*Hribar, Richard
Huber, Arthur
Huber, Robin
Kemp, Jason
Kemp, Tara
Kemp, Chris
Kemp, Jackson
Kern, Charles
*Knowles, Bob
Langgle, Rob
*Knowles, Bob
*Leete, Tom
Long, Janet
Luft, Lowell
Luft, Barbara
Luthi, David
Luthi, Pammy
*McManus, G. Dawn
Miklic, Michael
Morey, Lois
Meunier, Lorena
Nachtwey, Joseph
Nachtwey, Nancy
Nelson, Alan

Nelson, Georgette
Nelson, Jeff
Nelson, Jo
Oliver, Wilfred
Olney, Joy
Oyen, Rick
Oyen, Carolyn
Peet, Robert
Reed, Allan
Roth, Loren ("Buck")
Roth, Patty
Rugh, Chad
Russel, Allen ("Buzz")
Schenley, Karen
Shannon, Mary
Shirk, Wanda
Singer, David
Twichell, Tod
Weinhold, Curt
Weinhold, Penny
Wimmer, Gene
Wisel, Lee
Yasharian, Glen
Yasharian, Karen
Zimmer, John

*Deceased "Forever Members"

Winter Frolic Dinner / Monthly Meeting

In February we resume the Winter Frolic Dinner after an absence of the event for a couple of years due to COVID.

The dinner and meeting will be held at the Susquehannock Lodge, Saturday, Feb. 10 at 5:00 pm.

The featured speaker will be Mr. Ed McCrea, of Coudersport, President of North American Environmental Education Association. The program will be on his recent trip to Antarctica.

Details and a reservation form are included with the membership renewal form. Remember to get your reservations in early as there is seating for only 50 at the lodge.



Susquehannock Trail Club
PO Box 643
Coudersport PA 16915

2024 Event Schedule

Monthly meetings start at noon with a dish to share meal followed by the club meeting, unless otherwise noted.

Saturday, Feb 10	Monthly Meeting & Winter Frolic Meal at Susquehannock Lodge, followed by meeting <u>Starts at 5:00 pm</u> - see details in the newsletter	Susquehannock Lodge PA Rt 6, Ulysses, PA
Saturday, March 9	Monthly Meeting Dish to share meal followed by meeting.	Sweden Hill Church Intersection of Sweden Hill and Brookland Roads, Coudersport, PA
Saturday, April 13	Monthly Meeting Dish to share meal followed by meeting.	To Be Determined Check the Website
Saturday, May 11	Monthly Meeting Dish to share meal followed by meeting.	To Be Determined Check the Website
Saturday, June 8	Monthly Meeting Dish to share meal followed by meeting.	To Be Determined Check the Website