



Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy

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President's Corner

By Todd Chambers, President

Progress is being made on many fronts within our organization. For years the Harmony Trails Council, the predecessor of the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy, laid the groundwork for the development of the Harmony Trail, from Wall Park in southern McCandless Township to Route 910 in Pine Township. We acquired property and rights-of-way and established connections with local municipalities, the county, the state, a number of foundations, and other funding sources. These past efforts have led to the tangible progress we now see.

With the incorporation of the Rachel Carson, Baker, and Harmony trails to form the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy, a broad network of trails across northern Allegheny County and through Westmoreland, Armstrong, Indiana, Jefferson, Clarion and Forest Counties has come under our stewardship. This is a vast network of hiking opportunities accessing some of the most scenic areas in Western Pennsylvania.

On February 3 we will conduct our second annual winter walk. The unofficial theme of this hike will be "Trail Connections" because it will cover a route that ties the Harmony Trail with the Rachel Carson Trail. We will follow the just-completed Harmony Trail south from Route 910 to the Brooktree Trail,

Trail Events Continue to Grow

By Steve Mentzer

We had 543 participants head out from Harrison Hills Park on June 24, in the tenth annual Rachel Carson Trail Challenge, our 34 mile endurance hike. A total of 409 or 75% finished, with 400 or 74% finishing within the 15 hour 4 minute time limit. This is a record both in terms of number of participants and official finishing rate and is the first year we reached our entry cap of 600. Hundreds of hot dogs and hamburgers were consumed by ravenous finishers at the picnic at the Beaver Shelter in North Park.

On August 26, 29 solo runners and three relay runners took off down the Baker Trail in the second running of the Baker Trail UltraChallenge, our 50 mile ultramarathon. The day was sunny, hot, and humid, which took its toll on eight of the solo runners, forcing them to drop out. In the end, 21 finished along with all three relay teams. The winner, Nathan Echols of

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hike east across Route 19 to the McKinney Woods Trail, and over North Park trails to the beginning of the Rachel Carson Trail, located on the east side of the park. Our past efforts with Pine and McCandless Townships, Allegheny County, the Regional Asset District, the Allegheny Land Trust, the developers of Blue Heron Ridge and the Pittsburgh Foundation have all been instrumental in fostering this hike and the trail connection it celebrates.

As it now stands the adventurous hikers could start at Route 910 in Pine Township and walk along all three of the our trails to Allegheny National Forest in northern Pennsylvania. And from there they could connect with the North Country Trail, which will eventually run from the Dakotas to New England. The vision of a system of interconnected trails is starting to come together.

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Sparta, NJ, finished in 8:13:41, a great time given the conditions.

The UltraChallenge finish line was hosted at a farm outside Smicksburg, where runners could shower, eat sandwiches, pies and other goodies, be entertained by folk music, and relax in the grass. The farm was made freely available to us by its owners, Hisham Youssef and Rebecca Slak, whose generous support enabled us to have a very successful and unique event!

Be sure to visit the web site for a full report on each event, as well as photos from the day. And mark your calendar for next year: the Challenge will take place on June 23, and the UltraChallenge on August 25. Help us preserve and promote Western Pennsylvania trails by either participating or volunteering!

A Walk in the Woods

By Dewaine Beard, Baker Trail Southern Manager

On June 30, eight hikers set out to complete all 140 miles of the Baker Trail in nine days. We began at the northern terminus above Cook Forest and used the campground by the Fire Tower as our base of operations for the first two nights. Several friends and family members joined us during those first few days of hiking through state game lands and beneath the tall hemlocks of Cook Forest.

While we enjoyed the showers, concessions and picnic tables at the campground, mostly we enjoyed not having to carry a full pack that first day. With usable shelters few and far between on the northernmost sections of the Baker, we pushed hard those first days and put in three twenty plus mile days in a row. We camped where we could and negotiated with the rain and mosquitoes with limited success.

The stunning sights along the way made us forget the discomfort of the walk. There was the quiet darkness of the state game lands north of Mill Creek and the fog rising off the pond at Milo Weaver shelter. Then there is the spectacular view of the Plum Creek Valley from the climb up Rich Hill and the morning descent down the other side towards the Keystone Power Plant. We saw the awesome evidence of recent floods around Mahoning Reservoir and the warm glow of the campfire at Crooked Creek Shelter our last night. Even weary campers were able to muster up enthusiasm enough to take a ride on the rope swing over the Allegheny River as we approached the southern terminus. Our squeals of fear and delight from that ride were almost lost in the final ascent up the bluffs above Freeport.

Volunteers Discuss Baker Trail Improvements

By Patty Brunner

On November 11, seventeen volunteers met to exchange ideas on Baker Trail work sites for 2007. The group included some through-hikers that are well aware of difficult trail sections as well as many stewards and volunteers from the North Country Trail, and places such as Clarion, Emlenton, Butler, Mahoning, Cranberry, Yatesboro, and Pittsburgh.

We reviewed the goals that have been accomplished and developed an extensive project list for 2007, many of which are suitable as service projects for Scouts and seniors.

Also in attendance was Walter Tereszkieicz of Apollo, who has been volunteering and building bridges, steps and railings for the trail since the 1960s. Not only does he still have many construction projects, but he also bakes the various fruit pies that welcome the runners at the end of our ultramarathons!

Dewaine Beard, the Southern Trail Manager, has given a lot of time, and boundless energy to the Baker Trail. He reminded the group that people help simply by moving aside fallen limbs

We learned a lot during our week together! We learned how to follow obscure blazes through dark forest, how to pitch our tents in the rain without getting our sleeping bags wet, and how to appreciate the welcome relief of car support at the end of every night (thank you Dee!). The mere sight of that maroon Subaru Outback would raise a cheer among the hikers, no matter how tired and footsore we were.

But most of all we learned how friendly and wonderful the property owners and trail friends are along the Baker. Everywhere we went, people remarked about our adventure and wanted to hear our story. We shared fireworks with a family along Mill Creek. Our grateful and tired band of hikers thanked trail friend Paul Gray for mowing a patch of ground for us to camp on beside Little Sandy creek. We were invited in out of the rain to eat lunch on a porch in McWilliams and found dry, comfortable refuge and abundant hospitality at Creek Bend Campground. Then there was the ice cream and certificates of accomplishment at Milton Loop Campground and the hospitality of the Weaver family. We met Mrs. Amos Duck and made entries in her trail journal which dates back to the 1950's as we rested and ate lunch in her front yard. And we thanked the Howard family who let us camp in their driveway and the Army Corps ranger who assisted us at Crooked Creek.

For those of us who made it the whole way, we can not forget the simple pleasures that brightened our days—dry socks, warm food, cool streams, hot showers, M&Ms, fresh black raspberries, trailside pizza delivery, and friends and family at the finish.

and picking up litter. Where major improvements are needed, Dewaine and Wayne Kocher, the Northern Trail Manager, rely on trail stewards, new and old, and teams of volunteers.

We welcome four new trail stewards, each of which has adopted and committed to maintain a section of the Baker Trail: Doug Turner, Linda Xenophontos, Michael Robertson, and Gail Schlichtkrull, who is also our Treasurer. Thank you all!

Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy Volunteers Win Butler Outdoor Club Award!

At their annual dinner on November 18, the Butler Outdoor Club awarded the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy their **Outstanding Contribution Award** for 2006, in recognition of the efforts of its volunteers toward promoting the outdoors and outdoor activities!

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The board is also undertaking a Strategic Planning effort that will help define our group's direction into the future. Where do we envision the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy 20 years from now? Does our mission address trails alone or do we incorporate the greenways surrounding these trails? Do we continue to undertake new trail challenges? And what is our strategy for acquiring rights-of-way and land to secure our trails viability? These and many more issues are being discussed and we invite input from our

members and all interested parties. Please contact me at toddc@chambersdesignassociates.com with any input, comments or questions you may have.

Thanks for your interest in the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy and please get out and enjoy the miles of trail we offer!

Eagle Scout Projects Improve Trails

By Marian Crossman

Jeremiah German of Troop 171 has an eagle project underway in Wexford. He and his team will make improvements along the half-mile of bike trail built by Allegheny County in 2005. It connects the soccer fields on McKinney Road with Brooker Drive, east of Route 19. This area is North Park's western edge, and reaches the north end of Wexford Plaza. Across Route 19 a short hillside trail at the northwest corner of Brooktree property leads down through woods to the Harmony Trail in the valley.

The scout trail project entails removal and/or contouring of leftover construction materials so native vegetation can naturalize the trailsides. Some invasive plant species will be removed and areas replanted with native types. The project plans have been guided by Park Naturalist Meg Scanlon and members of the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy.

Over the years North Park has had the benefit of many Eagle Scout projects to improve trails and natural habitat. Each effort from scouts and leaders has its own following of families involved who learn the satisfaction of community projects. Among current Eagle Scout projects of Troop 344 in Wexford is a new 150' trail at the Woodland Foundation's Spina Bifida

Camp in Bradford Woods. Troop Leader Mike Ray said quite a number of other projects have been done with the naturalist's guidance in North Park.

In Hampton Township, scout Steve Kapustik of Troop 71 completed a footbridge this fall along the Rachel Carson Trail in the Hampton Nature Reserve. Steve and his crew of scouts have made it easier to stay dry-shod in that section of trail. Important help was provided by Rick Farino of the Hampton Schools Buildings and Grounds.

Steve raised \$400 needed for the bridge materials with donations from Rotary Club, Cleantown CarWash, Hampton School Board, and the company of one of its members. It included a gift card for materials at Home Depot generously given by one of Steve's teachers.

Mark Eyerman, manager of the Rachel Carson Trail, was Steve's guide throughout the project. He said the bridge design is suitable for other sites where stream crossings could be done by volunteers. Contact Mark at bongofury@verizon.net if you wish to be involved with maintenance or construction.

Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy Membership Application/Renewal

We welcome your supporting interest in trails. Join RCTC leaders by volunteering for a role that suits your time and inclinations. There are many ways individuals can help! Make check payable to the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy, P.O. Box 35 Warrendale, PA 15086-0035.

I Am A			<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewing Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Former AYH	Date	Your mailing label notes last RCTC contribution
Annual Dues			<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$250
<i>WHILE THEY LAST - RCTC t-shirt, with your membership of \$25 or more. Circle size: S, M, L, XL</i>							
Name							Age
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City, State, Zip							
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Contact Me For							
<input type="checkbox"/> Rachel Carson Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> Harmony Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> Membership development			
<input type="checkbox"/> Baker Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> Community contacts		<input type="checkbox"/> PR/Publicity			

Volunteers Expand Community Trails

By Marian Crossman

Dr. Jo Welter is very enthusiastic about the trails built on school property in McCandless township. The District has 53 acres of hilly wooded land behind the McKnight Elementary and the North Allegheny Intermediate schools on Cumberland Road. As school principal she has inspired an eager group of students and teachers in making nature trails there. They have extensive use by school classes and there are now several places with benches and study areas. One loop of trail was made wheel-chair accessible this year. Science teacher Gene Modic has been successful getting grants for the construction of school trails. Mr. Modic notes this is the fifth year of a 15-year plan to provide for outdoor education. He began with a grant from the PA Dept of Agriculture. As the popularity of the work grew other backing has been found to advance it.

Fine teamwork has developed among teachers, administrators and supporters from the North Allegheny Schools Foundation. They are often with the students on work days.

Each year students maintain the trails with new wood chips, and keep them clean. This year 150 hemlock trees were planted to add diversity in the hardwood forest. Eagle Scouts have built bridges and other improvements. Nearby residents take advantage of the trails to walk their dogs and get good exercise from the varied terrain.

Dr. Welter likes the idea of more adults using these trails, especially on weekends, and other after-school time. The more they are used the less vandalism occurs.

There are also cross-country trails from the Carson Middle School on the hill beyond. They skirt the playing fields and join the wooded land and nearby neighborhoods. Mr. Roman, a coach at Carson Middle School, said the cross-country routes on school property tend to be footpaths without benefit of improvement. However, junior Mark Zellars has recently added switchbacks to ease the trail grade located below Carson.

Event Calendar

Details and more events on www.rachelcarsontrails.org/events

Friday, December 29: Baker Trail Hike 10AM-2PM

A winter stroll on the Baker Trail. Location and distance TBD. Contact Patty at (724) 325-3224 or pabrunner2@cs.com for details and to sign up. **FREE and open to all!**

Saturday, Feb 3: Winter Outing 10:30AM-4PM

Join us for a 5-6 mile deep winter hike from the Harmony Trail to the Rachel Carson Trail! We'll meet at the Beaver Shelter on Babcock Blvd. in North Park and carpool to the start at the

Harmony Trailhead on Rt. 910. Then we'll follow the Harmony Trail to the Brooktree spur, to the Bluebird Trail, to the Braille Trail, to the North Ridge Trail, and end at the Rachel Carson Trail western trailhead. Moderate difficulty (decent sized hills at Brooktree and going up to the North Ridge, otherwise gently rolling).

Hot tea, cocoa, and treats afterwards. For details and to sign up, contact Mark Eyerman at (412) 492-0375 bongofury@verizon.net or Marian Crossman at (412) 366-3339 dmc@pitt.edu. **FREE and open to all!**

Please check mailing label for record of your contact with the RCTC.

Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy
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Preserving and Promoting
Community Trails in
Western Pennsylvania



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