

COVER STORY

York Heritage Rail Trail
Named Pennsylvania

Trail
OF THE
Year
2015

by Pam Gay
York County Rail Trail Authority Member

Heritage Rail Trail today at Howard Tunnel.

Photo: David Brown

York County's Heritage Rail Trail has often been declared *the happiest place in York County*. The 21-plus-mile rail trail has been growing in popularity proportionate to its growth in miles since its first 1-mile section opened to the public in 1994. The popular rail trail gives individuals and families the ability to spend time outdoors, while getting physically active in a beautiful, fun, relaxing, and historically significant setting.

Creating Happiness

There are key factors that contribute to the sense of happiness while utilizing the Heritage Rail Trail. Rail Trail users enjoy the quiet scenery of farms, fields, and forests during their journey. Wildflowers, bluebirds, and an occasional bald eagle sometimes dot the rail trail's landscape. In the midst of this never-ending beauty, visitors benefit from increased physical activity.

Research has also shown that an increase in physical activity leads to improved mental health, such as combating depression. Many studies have revealed this connection: as the body moves, the mind improves. A sense of well-being – *happiness* – occurs. One does not have to be engaged in marathon activities to enjoy these benefits. In fact, heritage rail trail users come in all shapes and sizes – children, adults and seniors – bicyclists, walkers, runners – from casual to competitive.



A grandmother enjoys the physical benefits of riding the trail while her granddaughters enjoy the outdoor "adventure."

Building the Heritage Rail Trail County Park

York County's

BIG ADVENTURE

Timeline compiled by
Gwen Loose, CPRP
Executive Director
York County Rail Trail Authority

The stage is set...

1972 The ravages of Hurricane Agnes on the rail line and bridges of the once great Northern Central Railway bring to a halt the operations of the Penn Central Railroad.



Hurricane Agnes - Floodwaters of the Codorus Creek, as a result of Hurricane Agnes, destroys many of the bridges along the Northern Central Railway between New Freedom and York, PA.

1973 The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation assumes ownership of the rail line from the Mason Dixon line to York, PA, a distance of approximately 21 miles.



HRT Before - Following the ravages of Hurricane Agnes, one set of tracks is restored and a 'rail-with-trail' vision takes form.

Timeline sidebar continued on next page

New Freedom is the high point along the Heritage Rail Trail, but the increase in grade is very gradual. Where steam-powered trains once had to put on an extra locomotive to complete the trip to New Freedom, walkers barely notice the grade and cyclists may opt to shift a gear on their bicycles. All visitors can engage in exercise at their desired level.

Frequent users of the Heritage Rail Trail begin to form a social community as they meet others from week to week on a regular basis. Walking and running club members also enjoy meeting and completing their activities along the rail trail, and volunteers with the York County Department of Parks & Recreation (managers of the Heritage Rail Trail) offer public sunset 'scrambles' and moonlight rides for cyclists during the spring and summer months. Additionally, there are many non-profit and community groups that utilize the rail trail for their specific fundraising events. Whether beginning a personal, moderate fitness regime or participating in an organized 5K run, every visitor becomes a member of the social community of the Heritage Rail Trail. And joining is fun!



Frequent trail users form a social community as they meet others from week to week on a regular basis. Photo: Michael Serdehely



Photo: Michael Serdehely

TIMELINE

1980 The City of York completes a 1 mile path along the banks of the Codorus Creek appropriately named the Codorus Riverwalk & Bike Way.



1985 The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation completes repairs to flood damaged portions of the Northern Central Rail line from York to the Mason Dixon line. Community leaders and local legislatures, spurred by the efforts of State Representative John Hope Anderson, attend the Grand Re-Opening of the rails.

A vision takes form...

1990 Through an agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, ownership of that portion of the Northern Central Rail line from the Mason Dixon line to Hyde, PA is transferred to the County of York.

The York County Board of Commissioners establishes the York County Rail Trail Authority, the first authority in the state formed for the purpose of developing recreational trails along rail lines and utility corridors. The Authority takes on the task of constructing the county's first rails-with-trails recreational path. Appropriately named the York County Heritage Rail Trail, the path would be constructed in the corridor of the once great Northern Central Railway.

Planning...

It was monumental. Twenty-one miles of railroad corridor, twenty-eight bridges, eleven municipalities, approximately 200 adjacent landowners.

1990 York County Department of Parks and Recreation becomes a full partner in the project with the realization that the recreational path would become the eighth county park.

Building...

1991 Construction begins on the first mile from the Mason Dixon line to New Freedom, PA.

The project is accomplished as an Eagle Scout project with construction assistance from the National Guard. Scouts Jeremy Sykes and Chad Harvey of Boy Scout Troop 37 receive local media attention as they plan for the construction of the first mile of the York County Heritage Rail Trail.

Timeline sidebar continued on facing page



Outdoor art along the rail trail adds interest to any visit. Photo: David Brown

Providing Recreation, Preserving History, Promoting the Economy, and More

The very first newsletter of the York County Rail Trail Authority stated, “[The] Rail Trail’s goal is to preserve and renew a treasured part of York County’s history.” Dubbed “York County’s Big Adventure,” the vision was for the York County Rail Trail “to offer an easily-accessible, scenic recreational area that would provide economic development through tourism and transportation alternatives, enhance the countryside by preserving the environment, and offer health benefits and recreational opportunities to individuals and families for generations to come.” This recreational, historical, and economic vision has come to fruition in the last 25 years.

The Heritage Rail Trail is steeped in Pennsylvania’s railroad history. Travelers pass small towns, villages, and seven structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places – each owing their existence to the Northern Central Railroad that once operated on the historic rails. These include the appropriately named borough of Railroad, as well as Glen Rock, Hanover Junction, Seven Valleys, Glatfelter Station, and Brillhart Station. Historic structures include the Howard Tunnel, New Freedom Train Station, Hanover

Junction Train Station, three stone-arch bridges, and the Seven Valleys Bridge. Not to be overlooked, York City’s Colonial Courthouse and its historic district surround the rail trail’s northern terminus. To the south, the Heritage Rail Trail makes a seamless connection to Maryland’s 21-mile long Torrey C. Brown Trail (formerly the NCR Trail).

More modern structures, in the form of outdoor art, are also installed along the rail trail and add interest to any visit. A parade of three over-sized bicycles appear along the rail trail in Seven Valleys; a clever horse and hiker made of bicycle parts rest on the lawn at Hanover Junction Train Station; and large murals decorate buildings in Glen Rock and New Freedom. York City offers a blend of many forms of outdoor art from whimsical sculptures to murals and monuments commemorating significant events in the city’s history. Interpretive signage along the Heritage Rail Trail introduces visitors to the many stories behind the places and events that form the fabric of this once great railroad corridor. Rail trail travelers often stop off at these structures to pose for photos or learn more about the history of Pennsylvania’s railroads and the various individuals who once frequented the area.

1994, June 4 “Adventure Day”

With the first mile of rail trail complete, a celebration is held in New Freedom, PA. Hundreds of people attended the day-long event, which also kicked off a county-wide Capital Campaign to raise support for the continued development of the rail trail. The goal: \$750,000. These local funds would be used to leverage state and federal grants for the construction of future phases.



Adventure Day celebrates the completion of the first mile. Tim Fulton, chairman on York County Rail Trail Authority left of center with microphone. County Commissioners prepare to cut the ribbon.

1995 Construction begins on Phase 3, from New Freedom, PA to Hanover Junction, PA

MCI, in search for a corridor in which to lay fiber-optic, communications cable, enters into an agreement with the County of York to use a portion of the trail corridor at a cost of approximately \$.5 million. Combined with the overwhelming success of the Capital Campaign, funding is now available to begin construction of the next eight miles.

1995, September 25 Phase 3 Groundbreaking

Louis Appell, Jr. and John Schmidt, members of the Capital Campaign Executive Committee, remove the first shovel of soil to mark the start of Phase 3 construction. Observing on the left is Dan Meckley of the Capital Campaign Executive Committee, and on the right is Commissioner George Trout and the late Commissioner Robert Minnich.



Phase 3 Ground Breaking - With shovels from left, the co-chairs of the Big Adventure Capital Campaign, Louise Appell, Jr. and John Schmidt, break ground for Phase 3 that will develop the rail trail from New Freedom to Hanover Junction Trail Station – a distance of approx. 9 miles.

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New Freedom Fall Festival with Steam into History.

Photo: York County Rail Trail Authority

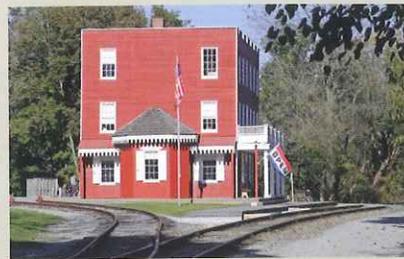
Today a new tourism train, Steam into History, offers a variety of train rides and programs aboard an authentic 1860s steam locomotive. Operating on the rails from New Freedom to Hanover Junction, a distance of ten miles, Steam into History has introduced riding the rails as another way to experience the Heritage Rail Trail and its past history as a rail line that once reached as far north as Sunbury, PA and provided a strategic Civil War link between Washington, D.C. and the Gettysburg Battlefields.

The Heritage Rail Trail has proven to be good for the local economy of the small communities along its path as well as a boon to the county's tourism. A 2012 *User Survey & Economic Impact Study* completed for the York County Department of Parks and Recreation reported approximately 281,000 annual visitations, resulting in a total economic impact in 2012 of over \$4.4 million. With this type of success, it not surprising that the Heritage Rail Trail is growing in length. A Northern Extension to the Heritage Rail Trail is now under development. With a goal of connecting the York County Parks' Administrative Headquarters to the rail trail's northern terminus in York City by following the Codorus Creek and making compatible use of the US Army Corps of Engineers levees, 4.3 miles of the planned 6-mile Northern Extension is now complete. Major improvements to the Heritage Rail Trail are also underway within and to the south of York City, as its downtown area invests in walk-able and bike-able improvements that will elevate York City to the status of a true 'trail town.'

With its rich railroad history, its tunnel and archway structures, its varied mix of city and country scapes, and an active steam engine traversing alongside walkers, runners and bicyclists of all ages, York County's Heritage Rail Trail is truly one of the most unique rail trails in the United States. On behalf of the many volunteers who work tirelessly to develop and promote this rail trail, the elected officials whose support propelled the project into regional significance, and the hundreds of thousands of visitors who have enjoyed all that this rail trail has to offer, we consider it a great honor for the Heritage Rail Trail County Park to be designated Pennsylvania's 2015 Trail of the Year. The continued public interest in the health, recreation, economic and preservation benefits of the rail trail, combined with its ongoing expansions, insures that the Heritage Rail Trail will continue to be "the happiest place in York County" for generations to come. □

Pam was appointed to the Authority in April 2004 to serve as a representative to the York County Board of Commissioners. She was elected to the position of York County Coroner in 2014. Past experiences include serving as a legal nurse consultant with Susquehanna Valley Medical-Legal Consulting and at Wellspan/York Hospital on their Forensic Nursing Team. Her extensive experience in the health/medical field combine with an avid interest in local politics and community issues to provide the expertise required of this liaison position.

1996, June 22 "Tenth Mile Celebration"



Having reached the mid-point of the proposed rail trail, a celebration is held at Hanover Junction Railroad Station. A modern-day Northern Central Railway,

Inc. begins service on the county rails by operating tourist excursion, dinner trains.

1998 Construction begins on Phases 4 & 5 from Hanover Junction, PA to York, PA

The County of York receives over \$1.5 million of state and federal funds to allow construction to begin on the final ten miles of the rail trail. State grants from the Department of Conservation & Natural Resources and federal Transportation Enhancement Act funds insure that construction can be completed in time for the county's 250th anniversary.

1998, December 3 Phase 4 & 5 Groundbreaking

Left to right: Commissioners Reilly and Minnich, York County Parks Director Tom Brant, and Commissioner Glass share the first honorary shovel of soil to mark the start of Phase 4 & 5 construction.

1999, August 28 The Grand Opening

A celebration is held in the City of York at the Colonial Courthouse as part of the 250th anniversary celebration of the founding of the County of York. The ribbon is cut officially opening the Heritage Rail Trail County Park.



Photo: York County Rail Trail Authority

2001 To forever memorialize this county-wide effort, a "Horse and Hiker" sculpture is installed at Hanover Junction Railroad Station. A nearby marker expresses the gratitude of the Rail Trail Authority for the opportunity to make York County's "Big Adventure" a reality.

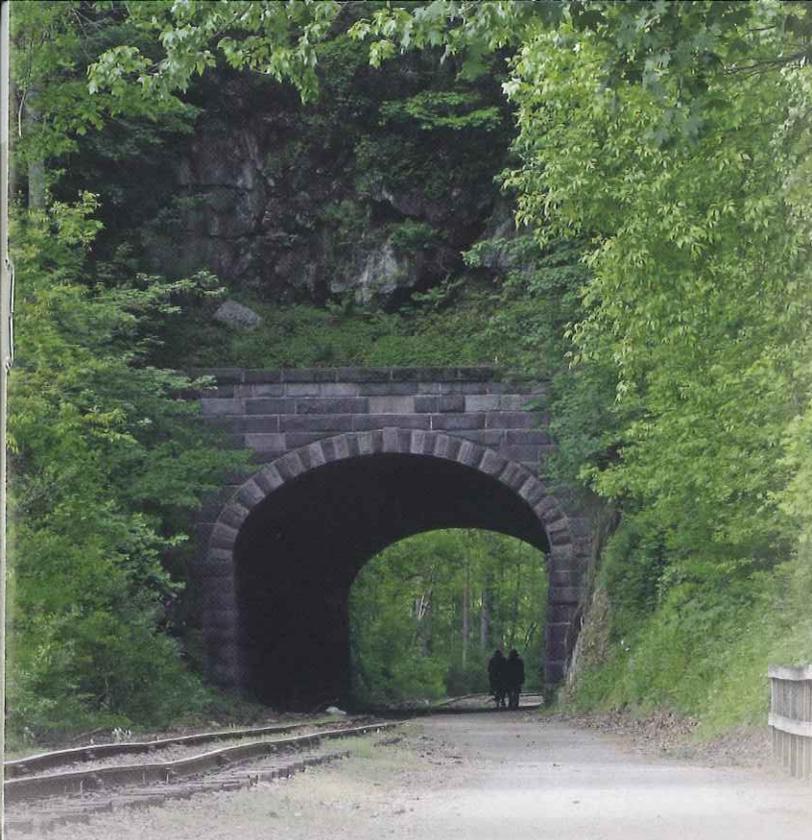
2003 Feasibility study is completed for a Northern Extension to the Heritage Rail Trail, following the Codorus Creek north of the City of York and linking the existing rail trail to the York County Park's headquarters at John Rudy County Park.

2006 Groundbreaking Ceremony is held for Phase 1 of the Northern Extension.

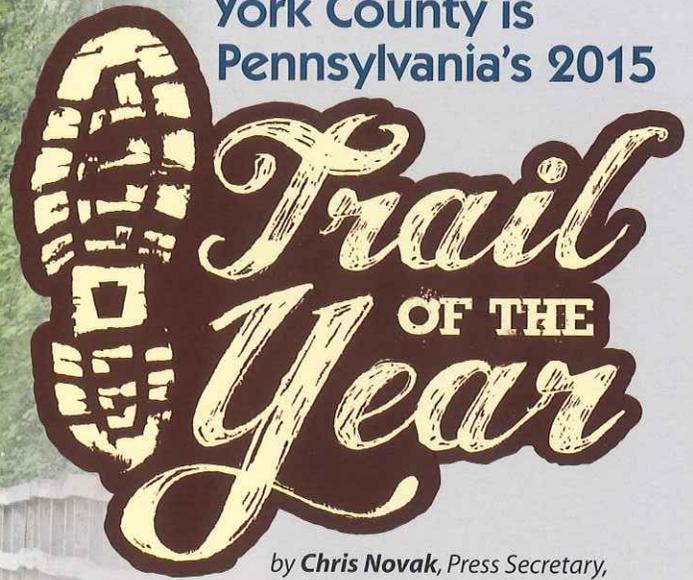
2007, August 20 Phase 1 of the Northern Extension is officially open to the public.

2015, April 22 Phase 2 of the Northern Extension is officially open to the public.

Gwen Loose, CPRP, began as project coordinator for the York County Rail Trail Authority in February 2007, where she oversaw the completion of the Heritage Rail Trail County Park. She is a Certified Parks & Recreation Professional and currently holds the title of Executive Director for the York County Rail Trail Authority.



Heritage Rail Trail in York County is Pennsylvania's 2015



by **Chris Novak**, Press Secretary,
PA Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources

Governor Tom Wolf has announced that Heritage Rail Trail County Park in York County is the 2015 Trail of the Year in Pennsylvania.

"I'm excited that a trail close to my home has received this special designation," Governor Tom Wolf said. "It helps make an important point that trails provide our citizens with nearby opportunities for affordable outdoor exercise, and play an important role in the economic vitality of nearby communities attracting visitors who stay, eat and shop. Congratulations York County!"

This designation is coordinated by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's Pennsylvania Trails Advisory Committee to elevate public awareness of the thousands of miles of trails available for public enjoyment in Pennsylvania.

"Twenty-one fantastic trails were nominated during the second year for this designation," DCNR Acting Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn said. "The Heritage Rail Trail stood out because of its importance to the health and fitness of residents in nearby communities; it's connection to the history of the surrounding area; and as a rare example in Pennsylvania of a rail trail with nearby active rails."

The 21.5-mile Heritage Rail Trail runs from the City of York to the Maryland border and includes seven railroad

structures on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as an operating tourism train along 10-miles of track. The trail has been the catalyst for the formation of local history organizations and community festivals along its length.

The Heritage Rail Trail connects to Maryland's Torrey C. Brown Trail to create more than 43-miles of rail trail. Trail visitation in 2013 exceeded 311,000.

The trail corridor is maintained as a county park by the York County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Carl Knoch, chairman of the York County Rail Trail Authority, developer of the Heritage Rail Trail said, "The Heritage Rail Trail County Park has become one of the County's most cherished assets. It provides a safe venue for thousands of residents and visitors to get out of doors and participate in healthy exercise. It has proven to be an economic engine that has spawned new business formations and business revitalization from New Freedom, through Glen Rock to Seven Valleys and the City of York."

Tammy Klunk, director of York County Department of Parks and Recreation and

manager of the Heritage Rail Trail said, "It's truly an honor for the Heritage Rail Trail to be awarded DCNR's Trail of the Year. We have amazing trails all across Pennsylvania, and to be recognized this year as the best is a great honor."

For more information about the Heritage Rail Trail visit the county at www.yorkcountyparks.org or the York County Rail Trail Authority at www.yorkcountytrails.org.

To honor the Trail of the Year, the advisory committee and DCNR will create a commemorative poster for statewide distribution. Plans also are underway for a grand opening for a second phase of the trail's northern extension with an educational event on Earth Day, April 22.

For more information about the designation visit www.explorePATrails.com and choose the 2015 Trail of the Year slide. Featured on the site are 497 trails covering more than 11,000 miles in Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Trails Advisory Committee includes different types of trail users, builders and advocates, and people with disabilities.

The committee's responsibilities are to advise DCNR on the use of trail funding in Pennsylvania; review and rank trail project applications; and present an annual report to the secretary on trail activities. □