

SUMMER 2011

# Brushwhacker

## A History of the Mid State Trail - The Trail Continues East

by Scott Adams

The year was 1973. The Mid State Trail now extended from the Colerain Picnic Area near Spruce Creek to Poe Paddy State Park, just south of Coburn,



on the banks of Penns Creek. Since its inception in 1969, the trail had a number of reroutes along the way. These reroutes were attempts to move the trail into the

woods, off forest roads, helping to emphasize the "wildness" of the trail.

Also during this time a number of side trails had been blazed. These side trails connected the Mid State Trail to state parks, making it more accessible. Short side trails connected the Mid State Trail to Poe Valley and Penn Roosevelt, with a much larger undertaking producing the Greenwood Spur. This side trail connect Greenwood State Park via Broad Mountain to the Mid State Trail, along the way introducing hikers to the large hemlocks of Alan Seeger.

It was during the fall of 1973 that the Bureau of Forestry contacted the Penn State Outings Club, the builders and maintainers of the MST at this point in time, expressing interest in seeing the trail extended beyond Poe Paddy State Park. The Bureau of Forestry asked the Outing Club to explore a route from Poe Paddy to R.B. Winter State Park.

In March of 1974, Tom Thwaites and four others set off for Ravensburg State Park to explore a route back to Poe Paddy. Somewhere during the course of

the winter a few extra miles were added to the extension plan, now looking to connect Ravensburg as well as R.B. Winter State Park. Over the course of five days the trail was scouted along Betterton Trail on White Deer Ridge, over Interstate I80 on the Tea Spring bridge, across Naked Mountain and through the Hook Natural Area. Maps were poured over and plans began to take shape for continuing the MST east.

From Poe Paddy State Park, the Mid State Trail headed east, following the abandoned Conrail railroad grade. The tunnel under Paddy Mountain was closed when the railroad was abandoned, but it had just been reopened. This allowed the trail to go through Paddy Mountain instead of over it. The Mid State Trail became the first, and so far only, hiking trail in Pennsylvania to tunnel under a mountain rather than climb over it.

The trail followed the railroad grade to Cherry Run, where it turned north, passing through a gap in Paddy Mountain. It would continue up Lyman Run and over Thick Mountain on a trail that was cut with assistance from the Susquehanna University Outing Club. Descending off Thick Mountain, the MST proceeded through Sand Hollow and cut across Sand Mountain to Hairy Johns Picnic Area on PA45. This was completed and opened in 1976.

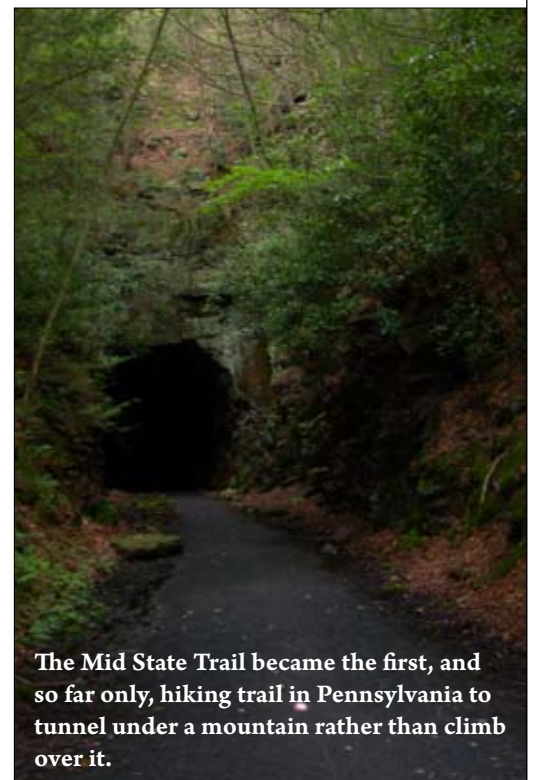
Beyond route PA 45, the Mid State Trail followed Hairy Johns Trail to the top of Winkelblech Mountain and then headed east on Sheesley and Kessler Trails. Trail clearing in this area was assisted by the Bucknell Outing Club. From Pine Ridge, the trail climbed Buck Ridge and then rejoined with Hairy Johns Trail atop Shriener Mountain. Connecting up with Brush Hollow Trail, the MST continued the rest of the way to R.B. Winter State Park. This part of the trail was opened in 1978.

The final section of the extension that was first scouted back in March of

1974 routes the Mid State Trail from R.B. Winter State Park to Ravensburg State Park. The MST would follow Bake Oven ridge east to Sand Mountain Fire Tower, then turning north and crossing Spruce Run Valley and Chestnut Flat. Climbing up and over Naked Mountain, the trail crossed White Deer Creek and Nittany Valley before confronting its first Interstate highway. Serendipitously there was a bridge here, avoiding a dangerous highway crossing or extended reroute.

North of interstate I80 the MST continued across the grain of the landscape. The trail climbed over Tea Knob, Last Ridge, and Brushy Ridge before descending to White Deer Hole. Westward and a climb over Big Mountain, the trail crossed Sand Spring Flat and then ended at Ravensburg State Park.

With the addition of this section, the Mid State Trail extended from Colerain to Ravensburg State Park. As the trail grew it began to feel growing pains. As a result a monumental event was about to happen to the MST. The year was 1982.



The Mid State Trail became the first, and so far only, hiking trail in Pennsylvania to tunnel under a mountain rather than climb over it.

# Memories to Last a Lifetime – My Through-Hike of Pennsylvania’s Mid State Trail

by Dan Styer

What do I remember about hiking the Mid State Trail from Maryland to New York?

I remember standing at a rocky view point in clear air, with a solid cloud bank in the sky above and a solid cloud bank in the valleys below. Only the summits and ridge lines of nearby mountains were visible, hanging between two bands of white.

I remember a rushy, songfull stream full of rocks and pools and waterfalls, decorated with ferns and wildflowers and mosses. After a (soapless) splash bath I sat quietly on a rock to dry, and two deer walked by calmly.

I remember pulling on my long pants for protection while walking through yet another trail section overgrown with briars.

I remember falling asleep in a ferny forest full of flashing fireflies, while a whip-poor-will and a barred owl called alternately.

I remember finding purple-stemmed cliffbreak and blunt-lobed woodsia, two

unusual ferns that I had sought for decades.

I remember a black-throated blue warbler approaching and examining me out of curiosity while I rested.

I remember a carpet of pink wild basil, and covering it another quivering carpet of white butterflies.

I remember surprisingly few mosquitoes, but surprisingly numerous black flies and surprisingly voracious deer flies.

I remember pulling blowdowns out of the section of trail, south of Everett, that I oversee.

I remember walking through a virgin forest of white pine and hemlock, hushed but for bird and stream song.

I remember meeting a cluster of five Amish boys, followed two hundred yards later by a cluster of seven Amish girls.

I remember a group of four youth from inner-city Harrisburg, and their leader who was trying to teach them both that there was a life outside of the inner-city, and that places of beauty existed not only in remote Yosemite and Grand Canyon, but also in central Pennsylvania.

We sat around the campfire talking about hiking, physics, and life.

I remember a father and son team that set out to dayhike the entire Mid State Trail in sections when the son was 12 years old. Health issues interrupted their plans, but they were resuming now, with the son 27 years old.

I remember industrial fracking in Tiadaghton State Forest: coils of wire scattered through the forest; narrow woods roads converted into 50-yard-wide passages; a gas-company ATV parked astride the MST; a noisy, glaring derrick set a few yards from the trail. The contrast between the natural and the industrial would have befit the movie Avatar – at the second fork of Ramsey Run, a forest of silvery-gray tree trunks ran from silvery-gray rocks to a silvery-green canopy, and all of this was enveloped in noise from the highway below, from excavation on all sides, and from helicopters above. I do not know what has been gained through fracking, but what has been lost is beyond valuation.

I remember starting on the Mason-Dixon line at Pennsylvania Route 326 on June 18, 2011, and finishing on the New York/Pennsylvania border at Heffner Hollow Road on July 12th.

I don't think I made the first through-hike of the MST: My analysis of trail registers suggests that Bill Shaffer of Groton, Connecticut accomplished this in October 2008, that Douglas Ryan of Altoona, Pennsylvania did it in September 2009, and that Joe Fennelly (along with his beagle Ms. Jenny) of Cheshire, Connecticut, did it in May 2010. In addition, I suspect that Tom Thwaites had hiked every centimeter of the MST the instant it was completed in June 2008.

Equipment notes: (1) The Mid State Trail is rocky. I was glad that I carried a hammock, and I often slept suspended above rocks or brush that would have



Dan Styer, Mid State Trail through-hiker (left) and Dan from Harrisburg at Libby Run.

prevented any other form of camping. (2) The Mid State Trail is rocky. To save weight on my feet, I wore running shoes. Bad idea. Wear hiking shoes or hiking boots.

In about the year 750, the poet Li Bai wrote "We sit together, the mountain and I, until only the mountain remains," Perhaps Li Bai was able to pull this off, but I have never been able to immerse myself in a mountain simply by sitting. But by treading the mountain's rocks, maintaining its trails, observing its wildlife, drinking of its waters, eating its blueberries, contributing blood to its insects, and sleeping suspended between its trees, I was able to feel myself seep into the mountain until I became a part of it. This doesn't happen immediately. For the first week I constantly said "I stink. I'm dirty. I can't bear the tacky touch of my own body." But then I grew used to it. I didn't mind my odor, or my tackiness. It was part of me. I was part of the mountain. And this is what I remember most: The experience of sleeping every night at a different place, but knowing that I was every night at home on the mountain.

I thank my wife Linda for driving me to the start of my hike and picking me up from the end, and for her constant love and concern. Everett regional trail manager Deb Dunkle invited me into her kitchen to discuss trail maintenance priorities, and gave me a tall glass of iced orange juice. David at the Everett Foodliner gave me a loaf of rye bread, and a clerk at the Avis Home Town Market gave me a discount on two bottles of cold spring water.

I thank the visionaries who had the audacity to dream up the Mid State Trail and then the guts to put it on the ground.

I thank the volunteers who haul rock, clip brush, blaze, locate, and map the trail, who contact landowners, fill out paperwork, and who in general do whatever needs to be done to build the trail and keep it open.

I thank, especially, the private landowners who allow the trail across their property.

I thank the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who have, through their Game Commission and Bureau of Forestry and Bureau of State Parks, assembled a magnificent legacy of public lands. These serve not just the occasional hiker who wants to walk the span of the entire state, but the Amish, the inner-city youth, the family teams; the hunters and the anglers; the loggers, the mill hands, the carpenters, the cabinet-makers, and those who love wood products; those who drink rainwater that fell on the State Forests and those whose land is not flooded because the rainwater fell on State Forests.

Pennsylvanians, I salute you! May you never be held thrall to those who would despoil your magnificent public lands legacy.

*Dan Styer is a Mid State Trail Association life member and the overseer for part of section 2. In his life as a professional physicist, he is author, most recently, of "Relativity for the Questioning Mind".*

**BRUSHWHACKER Summer 2011**, Published by Mid State Trail Association, PO Box 885, Huntingdon, PA 16652. Free to all members and friends of the MSTA. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Mid State Trail Association, PO Box 885, Huntingdon, PA 16652. Copyright 2011 by Mid State Trail Association. All rights reserved.

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#### **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in the Mid State Trail Association runs from January 1st to December 31st. Individual membership dues are \$12 and Family membership dues are \$15. Lifetime membership dues are \$250. Trail overseers are also needed for sections of the trail. Please contact one of the regional managers if you have interest becoming a trail overseer.

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Hiking through the lush ferns that line the Mid State Trail in the Tioga region.

# In The Regions....

## State College Region

by Kevin Busko

The almost forgotten Reeds Gap Spur of the MST will be getting some much needed attention during the weekend of October 7-9, 2011. John Stevens from the Ridge and Valley Outing Club has volunteered to organize a trailcare weekend on the RGS - MST. So far, two Sundays were spent walking the entire

trail to take notes on trail conditions and coming up with a game plan to clear and reblaze the 22.28 km Reeds Gap Spur from Poe Paddy S.P.

to Reeds Gap S.P.. A map of the trail is included on the 307-310 mapset and the 12th edition of the MST guidebook should include the trail description that was not in the 11th edition.

Boy Scout Erik Hoover from the State College area is building and installing several new signposts for his Eagle project. These will be located on the section of the MST between Jo Hays Vista and Big Flat NA.

On April 15, 2011 Kirk Saylor, a section maintainer from the State College area, did a one day Vista to Vista hike from Big Valley Vista to Jo Hays Vista. A distance of about 42 km. He put together a nice 4 part video that can be found on You Tube. Search for Kirk Saylor or Mid State Trail Vista 2 Vista.

## Woolrich Region

by Joe Healey

Since the last newsletter, there was a very destructive windstorm in the region, especially up on Houselander Mountain - lots of blowdowns. If any overseer needs help, please let me know. Speaking of Houselander, gas

wells are all over the place. KTA will have a TrailCare weekend in the Woolrich Region August 12-14. Camping will be at Ravensburg State Park. The crew will be working on a small reroute from Bull Run Road to Ramsey, which was previously OK'd by Forestry. Although the MST goes through Little Pine Creek State Park, it was never blazed there. I spoke to the new Park Manager and he OK'd the blazing. That project will be taken care of. Coming out of Woolrich, the MST goes through a large field up the hill to Big Spring Road. I have a new MST sign and some carsonite posts for blazes in the field as the trail is very hard to follow in that immediate area. These tasks and some clearing up on Houselander will hopefully be completed during the August weekend.

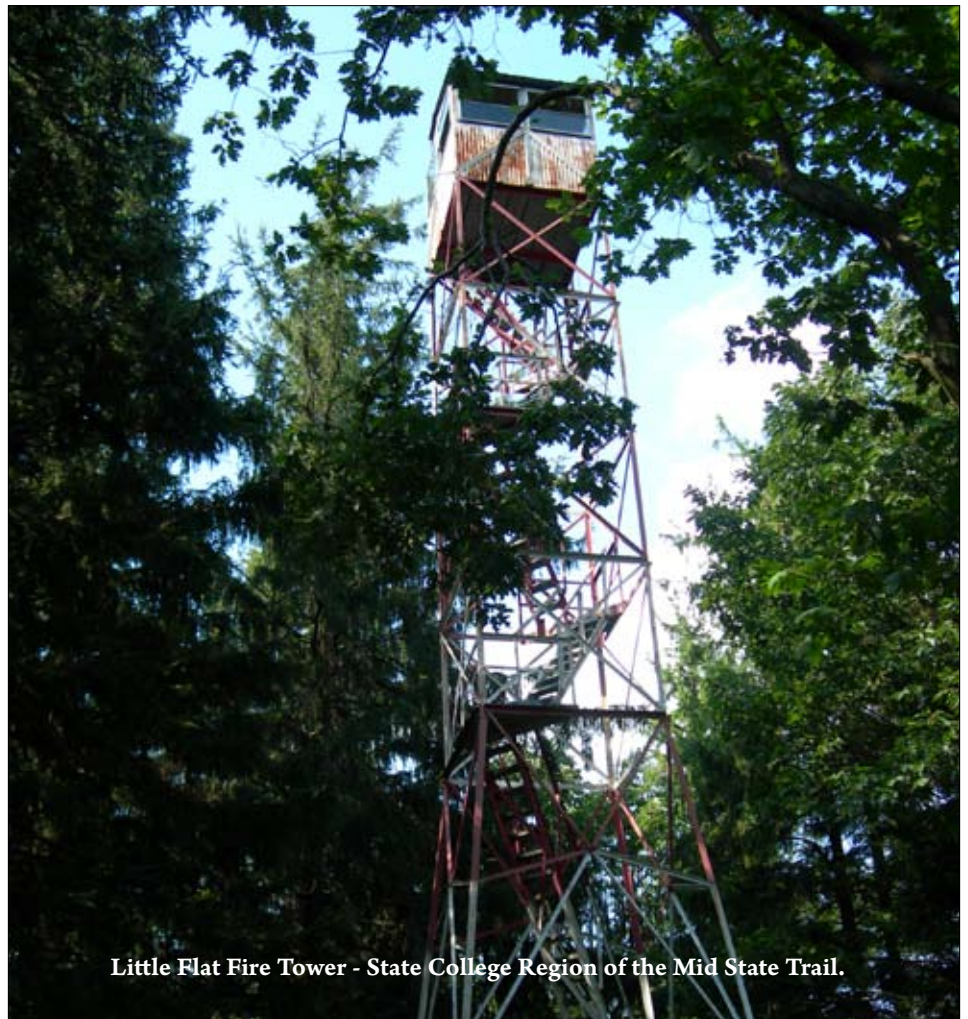
The Great Eastern Trail held its first meeting in Pennsylvania in Woolrich in May. Although I was unable to attend, I did hear that it was a huge success. Thanks to the Woolrich Corp. for allowing the meeting to be held at the Woolrich Lodge, which, by the way, they also hosted. That meeting event will be hard to beat elsewhere.

## Everett Region

by Deb Dunkle

During the week of June 21st to June 26, 16 brave souls came from various areas across the state came together to work the Everett region of the Mid State Trail for the KTA Trail Crew. We pushed to open the trails from the briars and brambles that grew double from the spring rains. Tuesday evening produced a rain storm and everyone hoped that the tents would not leak - they did not so the week started out without wet boots.

The DR trimmer spruced up the



Little Flat Fire Tower - State College Region of the Mid State Trail.

grass trails while the fellows worked the brushcutter and saws. Added work came from loppers and the paint dolls. Various wildlife was sighted during the week, including a female pheasant, many ruffed grouse, large turkeys, a doe with fawns, a bald eagle, great blue herons, and a very large rattlesnake coiled right on the trail!

The Brethren Church ladies provided the hot breakfast and suppers. Stories by Dave and others kept most of us entertained each evening. After smelling a dead something, Woody found it in the pond on Friday. The borough had a backhoe, police, and junior firemen on hand to remove the carcass.

The REI sponsored Great American Backyard Campout had about 40 participants with Indian drumming and buffalo chilli on Saturday. But coming back after Sunday's half day work, munching on your sandwich and watching a wedding-going down at the park . . . priceless.

Jake and Debra sends a hearty thanks to Joe Healey, Bob Boettger, David Walp, Joe Clark, Dave Wittmer, Woody Loudeslager, Diane M Buscarini, Lorraine Healey, Paul Brechbiel, Carl Jaymes, Dennis Ritchey, Harry Felton, Curt Ashenfelter, Barbara Wiemann, Harold Schneider. Landowners in attendance were Joe and Florence Ritchey.

If you are interested in assisting the Everett region maintainers, please contact [dhdunkle@embarqmail.com](mailto:dhdunkle@embarqmail.com)

to sign up for beautiful vistas, wildlife, and rewarding work! Bring yourself and another newbie and trail areas will be given! There may be a fall cleanup in the Everett region so stay tuned. [dhdunkle@embarqmail.com](mailto:dhdunkle@embarqmail.com)

## Tioga Region

by Peter Fleszar

Fifteen folks, from as near as Charleston Township and as far as South Carolina, helped out at some point during the week when the KTA Trail Crew came to Tioga County to work on the Mid State Trail, June 7-12, 2011. The group worked with DCNR employees on addressing some wet spots along the Sand Run Falls trail, ending when DCNR's dump trailer broke - it limped out of the woods with a KTA shovel underneath where one wheel used to be. That was right after our group got hailed on, taking refuge under PA's state tree.

Less eventfully, on Saturday we installed "bug" bridging on private land working with Wellsboro's Asaph Trail Club. The system of oak planks screwed to locust timbers, in addition to providing volunteers with an upper body workout carrying said material into the woods, also served to ameliorate the impacts of hikers' feet on the local native insect population by allowing the bugs to pass harmlessly underneath. Competing

claims that someone didn't understand someone else saying the task was putting in "bog" bridging were cheerfully denied. Special thanks to Tom Bastian who came up early to work out the installation system and to buy the requisite hardware.

We also mowed a lot of the route, cleared and blazed part of an off-road relocation, and installed some trail signs. Recent windstorms that cancelled nearby Blossburg's Coal Festival on Memorial Day weekend also dropped many trees on the ghosts of the abandoned mining town of Landrus - two days of work for the chain saw contingent clearing the MST route.

The hard core who came out this week - only the young fellow from South Carolina had never worked a KTA Crew before - enjoyed the campsite by a pond provided by a local landowner, which someone remarked seemed like Maine with white birches by the shore. KTA's Vice President, Wanda Shirk, again cooked for the Crew. MSTA President, Ed Lawrence, who recently visited the lost portion of the Appalachians in Morocco, relieved Wanda for the weekend and shared his culinary education with the group by creating "Tioga Tagine" on Saturday night.

The group put in 312 hours of hard, quality work, much appreciated by all, and a definite step forward towards the completion of PA's longest and wildest footpath.

## State of the Treasury

by Kirk Bucynski

Account balances as of 6/30/11 are as follows: Money Market Checking Account \$35,485.95 and YCB Savings Account \$101.30.

New memberships, as well as renewals, can now be made online. New membership fees are in place; \$12 for individual, \$15 for family, and \$250 for a lifetime membership.



Installing "bug" bridging with the Wellsboro's Asaph Trail Club.

# The Trail IS Open

By Ed Lawrence

The MSTA has received disturbing reports that security guards from some gas drilling outfits have been confronting people hiking on trails that skirt their operations and telling them they are not allowed on the trail. These security guards are badly and sadly misinformed. In one case hikers were forced off a sanctioned reroute of the MST built around a well pad specifically to avoid this situation. If this should happen to you or someone you know please report it to me (cathyed@nationi.net) so that I can let DCNR and KTA know. The Bureau of Forestry has been quick to respond in contacting the offending gas company and setting them straight. Please do not endanger yourself by arguing with gas company employees, walk away and let DCNR handle the complaint.

# MSTA Membership and Newsletter Mailing Labels

By Scott Adams

First let me start by thanking all our members for their continued support of the Mid State Trail Association. Your membership helps maintain and preserve Pennsylvania's longest and wildest foot path, the Mid State Trail.

At our January 2011 meeting we decided to increase our membership dues. The cost of an MSTA membership had remained the same for over 10 years. This modest increase was put in place as of June 1st. Individual memberships in the MSTA are \$12 and Family memberships are \$15. The cost of a lifetime membership is \$250.

You can find out more about your membership by looking at the newsletter mailing label attached below. On the

label you will see your current address that we have on record. In the lower left hand corner you will see your member number and a letter designation indicating your type of membership: I (individual), F (family) or L (lifetime). In the lower right hand corner you will see the status of your membership. For lifetime members you will see the word LIFE. For individual or family members, you will see a year, such as 2011 or 2012. This indicates that your membership is valid through the end of that year. You may see the letters 'PD' in this location: this means that your membership fees are past due and that this will probably be the last newsletter that you receive.

We will be qualifying our membership list soon, so keep your eyes open for a letter from us asking you to verify your contact information. You will be able to do this by mail as well as on our website. These letters will be mailed later in the year.

www.hike-mst.org

KTA will have a TrailCare weekend in the Woolrich Region August 12-14. Hope to see you there.

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