

The BRUSHWACKER

Winter 2002

THE RARELY REGULAR NEWS PUBLICATION OF THE MID STATE TRAIL ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 167 BOALSBURG, PA 16827

Upcoming meeting: February 4, 2002. See last page for details.



Dues

Jean Aron — Members: **HAVE YOU PAID YOUR DUES?** A red check mark after the paid-to date on your mailing label indicates your MSTA Membership has expired. Please consider renewing your support of “the wildest trail.” Send dues of \$10 per year (individual or family memberships are the same) payable to Mid State Trail Association, P.O. Box 167, Boalsburg, PA 16827.

Amnesty: If you have been delinquent for too long, and cannot afford to pay all back dues, we can let you restart. Just send some dues now.

Overseers: Membership is not required for you hard-working Overseers, but it helps to keep the trail in paint and supplies, and carries the cost of this newsletter which keeps us working together.

Overseers Inventories

Tom Kelliher — As of Dec. 23, Tom Thwaites had only received 32 of the 61 inventories he mailed to Overseers. Please return your inventory forms ASAP.

Ramsey Forest Fire

Tom Thwaites — I visited the Ramsey burn area today. The fire is mostly out along the relocation. I found one stump still smoldering and emptied my canteen on it. When I came back it was still burning. The fire did not reach PA 44 at the trail head east of Ramsey. I found the burn area at the Emanon branch of Ramsey Run. The run was completely dry but there was still some water trickling over the falls. In all I counted 8 chain saw blowdowns or snags that had fallen across the trail. The first and worst is a large white pine that

occupies the side hill footway above the first row of cliffs. It is difficult to get around and it will have to be cut into small pieces to get it out of the trail. The other 7 are just step overs. However I don't think this section has an overseer so it may be a long time before the logs are cut. I found only one pair of blazes that were affected (darkened) by the fire. Live trees do not appear to have been affected by the blaze.

Up on top the laurel has been burned on both sides of the trail but the zillion laurel stubs were unaffected and will continue to trip hikers for years to come. At the white birch grove the east west woods road was bulldozed into a fire brake that failed. Both sides of it were burned. The bulldozer dumped a load of spoil where the MST turns off this road making it very difficult to find this turn. I did not reach the far side of the burn area.

PERSPECTIVE: Can Mid State Trail Survive?

Jean Aron — Knotty problems have plagued the Mid State Trail over the last couple of years, even though some of you may not even be aware if it does not affect your own Section. But since MST is a long-distance trail, its continued existence depends in part on having an uninterrupted corridor. A threat or severance on any part of the Trail is a problem for the whole Trail and a problem for the Association. If you were a thru-hiker relying on our published Maps & Guide, a lost, unblazed kilometer could be a very serious problem.

For example, at least one intractable land owner in the southern section has caused headaches and delays for quite some time now. We finally managed to work around that problem somehow, and published the 10th edition guidebook in May, 2001. And as I write (January, 2002), the long awaited Map 215, actually a double-sided Map 213/215, is finally at the printer. That's the good news.

The bad news is that we are still struggling with problems in the Tiadaghton State Forest, which have been simmering since before early 2000:

1) *Big Problem at Sand Spring Flat.* Above Ravensburg S.P. a piece of MST was first joined as a multi-use, horse path; then it was slated for logging. We have been unable to reach agreement on an acceptable route across Sand Spring Flat from Sand Spring Road to the newly cleared Boundary Trail into the Park. A “severed” MST exists there now. The District Forester, Jeff Prowant, insisted in Sept. 2001, that the MST is considered by the Bureau of Forestry to be on its previous pathway (even though he had previously approved our use of the Boundary Trail as part of a relocation). MSTA President Tom Thwaites wanted to reroute the Trail around the problem area, but was refused permission. A battle of wills has ensued. We are presently not maintaining any route across Sand Spring Flat.

2) *Problem at Oregon Hill.* In the spring of 2001 there was a great deal of correspondence and meetings with DCNR officials from Harrisburg as well as Tiadaghton S.F. (Jeff Prowant again) Their plan was to log a section above Brown’s Fork, one of the nicest remote camping spots along the trail. To get there, they would bring heavy equipment over a piece of MST which was formerly a logging haul road, and also transform a butterfly field into an animal feed plot. None of us liked the idea, least of all Overseer Rich Lange, who waged a campaign against it. Despite all our efforts, the DCNR, from top to bottom, just brushed aside our protests. In this case Tom Thwaites was offered a relocation route for the trail — a hard scramble route — which he refused.

How Serious is the Problem?

Here is a quote from a letter I wrote in April, 2001 to State Forester James Grace:

“As I mentioned to Mr. Gregg, if the Mid State Trail continues to find itself “under assault”; if we are continually fighting to keep our corridor from being chopped up or relocated every other month, and not respected or valued by the Bureau of Forestry anymore; a day

will come when it just will not be worth the struggle. Then most likely the state is going to lose the valuable volunteer work which we have provided. The trail will disappear. We will all be losers.”

Despite their protests to the contrary, I have not seen any real proof from Dr. Grace, Mr. Gregg, or Mr. Prowant that the BoF really respects and values the Mid State Trail, or has any true understanding of it. Now it is up to us all to spread the good word. We all know why we love it. What a great privilege it is to maintain “the wildest trail in the state!” We don’t want to lose it.

Time to Find New Officers

Jean Aron — An election committee should be appointed to look for possible candidates. The next MSTA election is slated for the fall meeting, 2002. Our bylaws call for election of 4 club officers — President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer — to a 2-year term.

President: Tom Thwaites has been President since founding the club in 1982, except for a few years when Jacob Wishard served as President. Tom has indicated a wish to step aside now, provided we can find new leadership.

Perhaps the multi-faceted job should be shared by several people. For example: A President, who presides at meetings and represents the club overall. He/she may appoint or delegate other administrative work to perhaps 3 Regional Trail Bosses who manage the overseers, and an Ombudsman who would meet with agencies and groups to talk through any problems encountered.

Vice President: Lynne Whelden has been doing a good job. We hope we can keep him on. The VP job has been filled in the past 20 years by various people, but Lynne is the only one who has actually had to preside at a meeting when the President was absent.

Secretary: We once had a Secretary who signed papers, wrote letters, and even did the Newsletter. Somehow the job description got muddled, since the membership records were kept by the treasurer, and nobody wanted to take notes at meetings either.

Perhaps we should subdivide this job, too, by appointing a Recording Secretary, a Corresponding

Secretary, and a Newsletter Editor. (We currently have an excellent Editor in Tom Kelliher. Hope he stays on, too.)

Treasurer: Jean Aron has been Treasurer since shortly after the founding. (Her husband, Gert, was actually the first treasurer, who opened the bank account, etc.) Somehow her job evolved from doing a little book keeping, to doing a whole lot of paper (and computer) work. Besides keeping the treasury, she kept club records and history, sometimes did newsletters, and even designed the last brochure. With the 10th Edition Jean has become Sales Manager, and ISBN Contact, too. She has indicated a wish to step aside. We need to start training replacements.

Perhaps this job could be subdivided, too. Appoint a Membership Chair, who would coordinate with the Trail Bosses to keep the database updated; and also look for a Historian, a Sales Manager, and Storage Attic.

Fall Meeting Minutes

Tom Kelliher — The fall meeting of the MSTA was held in the Environmental Center at R. B. Winter State Park on September 10. About 12 people attended.

After discussing a few other alternatives, it was decided to support the Memorandum of Agreement negotiations going on between KTA and BoF. Several KTA representatives met with State Forester Dr. James Grace on Sept. 28 to begin this process. An MoA would clarify the relationship between the organizations, defining rights and responsibilities, and establishing a procedure to handle conflicts and their resolutions.

Tom Thwaites reported that he is now receiving advance reports of logging activity which impacts the trail from BoF. This had been the practice in the past, but had lapsed. The lapse was brought to the attention of Assistant State Forester David Gregg and the Spring KTA meeting and has been acted upon. Tom received reports of activity at Oregon Hill and Sand Spring Flat.

The Sahale Bridge company manufactures suspension bridges for remote locations. This could be the ticket for the Little Juanita crossing. The cost would be in the neighborhood of \$50K if we do it ourselves or \$100K with help from Sahale

Engineering. A Sahale bridge is to be installed at Slate Run on the Black Forest Trail. Money is scarce for hiking bridges and there is no local experience with Sahale. Wait and see how Slate Run turns out. For now, full speed ahead on the Little Juanita ford.

John Stein proposed an Endangered Trails List to draw attention of those hiking trails in Pennsylvania which are in danger of being abandoned. After discussion, we decided to define an endangered trail as one which has been severed by public or private action. As such, the Mid State Trail is endangered. We also decided to propose this list to the KTA at its fall meeting. Tom proposed this at the meeting and the motion passed. John Stein was appointed to study this issue.

Mr. Oravec finally said “No” to our request that we be allowed to use 200 meters of the old township road which crosses his property just outside of Everett. Fortunately, PennDoT said “Yes” to our request to build steps down to US 30 to go around Mr. Oravec’s property. Blazing on the southern extension is progressing toward PA 36.

The relocation at Ramsey went well and is finished. The Little Juanita ford is next.

Jean Aron reported on the budget and informed us that the new guidebook is selling well.

State of the Budget

Tom Kelliher — The MSTA budget stands at \$20,443.34 as of the end of the fourth quarter of 2001. The total loss for the year was \$1,857.02, which can be attributed to the printing costs of the guidebooks (\$5,318.65) during the second quarter. Because of brisk guidebook sales, the gain for the second half of the year was \$1,783.72.

Game Commission Regulations Changes Coming

Tom Kelliher — The Game Commission formed an ad hoc committee a year ago to develop recommendations on how the Commission might better protect its lands from misuse and degradation. John Stein was a committee member. Nine open houses were held to gather public input. The committee developed eleven recommendations, which were released on November 11.

The recommendations of most interest to the hiking community include prohibitions on the following activities: Open fires when the fire index is high, very high, or extreme. Riding a non-motorized vehicle, conveyance, or animal except on roads normally open to public travel or posted, designated routes or while lawfully hunting. Riding a non-motorized vehicle, conveyance, or animal on roads open to foot travel only. Engaging in an organized activity involving twenty-five or more persons, except for hunting.

The wearing of fluorescent orange will be required of non-hunters from September 15 to January 15 and April 15 to May 31, inclusive. A minimum of 250 square inches, front and back combined, must be worn or a fluorescent orange hat. The material must be visible in a 360 degree arc.

The Game Commission does not intend to eliminate activities such as riding horses or mountain bikes, but to limit such uses to maintained roads or routes designated by positive signage. Several considerations will be made before designating a route: compatibility with the management plan for the specific game land, public input from stakeholders, evaluation of potential or real impacts, and review and approval within the local, regional, and Harrisburg levels of the Game Commission.

ATV Trails Legislation

Hugh Downing — Representative Hanna and 27 other members of the Pa. Legislature have introduced House Bill 2161. Under the provisions of this bill, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) would be mandated to "...annually open a minimum of 100 miles of trails or roads in State forest lands to all-terrain vehicles." The bill is very short — it only runs to one page. You can read it at: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/BI/BT/2001/0/HB2161P2896.HTM>

The bill was sent to the Committee on Environmental Resources and Energy on November 19. It is vitally important that you contact your Representatives in the Legislature and tell them that you want them to oppose this bill. You know all the reasons, they're the same ones that you

used when you wrote to support HB 154 last year. That bill passed and it contained some good stuff, but this bill is an effort to get around that bill and to force DCNR into a program which would be disastrous to our state forests.

Distribution of new ATV Plates

HARRISBURG, Oct. 25 — Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary John C. Oliver today announced that DCNR will begin mailing thousands of new all-terrain vehicle (ATV) registration plates to ATV owners beginning next week.

"The new registration plates will help us crack down on illegal ATV riding," Secretary Oliver said. "Visual identification on ATVs will help us reduce instances of riding in unauthorized areas and reckless riding. Our goal is to help protect state parks and forests, wildlife and their habitat, and to assure that other recreational activities in our state parks and forests are not adversely affected."

The General Assembly in June passed changes to the Snowmobile/ATV law requiring all ATV owners, except those using their vehicle solely for farming or business, to register their vehicle with DCNR. All registered ATVs will receive a new registration plate within the next three months.

State Game Lands Maps on the Internet

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania Game Commission has begun to place its popular maps of State Game Lands on its website (<http://www.pgc.state.pa.us>) just in time to accommodate hunters heading out for deer season, which begins statewide on Monday, Nov. 26.

The topographic maps depict contour lines, parking areas, trails, food plots and other features. Bringing them to the website has been a goal of the state's wildlife management agency for some time.

"Placing these State Game Lands maps on the website provides an extremely important service to hunters and trappers," said Game Commission Executive Director Vern Ross. "It gives them the opportunity to view our 1.4 million-acre State Game Lands system in the comfort of their home or office. Picking a place to hunt on State Game Lands just got a whole lot easier!"

“The addition of these maps to our website will help Pennsylvanians become more familiar with the Game Commission’s land holdings, and also will accommodate non-resident hunters who are interested in coming to hunt our state, but aren’t familiar with the outstanding public hunting opportunities we provide.”

Support for the NCT

John Stein — On January 7, 2002 at the regular quarterly SATC board meeting, the ten member board unanimously voted to support the vision of managing the North Country National Scenic Trail primarily for hiking and backpacking.

As a cousin to the Appalachian Trail, the North Country Trail traverses scenic parks, forests and game areas in western Pennsylvania, along its route between eastern New York and central North Dakota. Like the Appalachian Trail, the North Country Trail strives to provide premier hiking and backpacking experiences along its entire length. Other user groups seeking access to the trail, however, have been attacking this vision in attempts to transform the trail into another multi-use opportunity.

In response, hiking and trail organizations from across the country are uniting to endorse the current vision for the North Country Trail, which also is advocated by the National Park Service, the USDA Forest Service, and the North Country Trail Association, the national nonprofit group supporting the trail. The 672 member Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club joined this coalition by supporting the goal of managing the North Country Trail primarily for hiking and backpacking experiences.

While steadfast in their belief that the North Country Trail should offer primarily an outstanding hiking experience, these groups also recognize that following this vision could ultimately displace other users from portions of the trail. To address this problem, the North Country Trail Association is seeking to build relations with other user groups to explore ways to mitigate such impacts.

Revamped RVOC Web Site

Jean Aron — My wish for Christmas was to finally get through with the reconstruction of the Ridge & Valley Outings Club website. When I got a new computer early this month, I didn’t realize how many changes it would entail. It’s a long story, but I couldn’t use the old html editing software anymore, and I was stuck with a big job of starting over with the RVOC page (which was sort of messed up anyway) With the help of my two sons – one of them currently studying web design, the other running a web hosting business– I finally knuckled down enough to learn some basics. Now you can see the results at the totally revamped website: <http://rvoc.centreconnect.org/rvoc.html>.

Black Log Valley Hiking

John Stein — HIKING: May 24, 25, 26, 27, 2002.

Joint club weekend at Harold Baer Rustic Cabin near Willow Hill, PA. Meet Papa Baer (LHC), and enjoy hiking with members of other PA hiking clubs. Cabin space is limited; tenting possible; outhouse, no shower, MUCH GOOD FOOD. Hikes will be many and varied — 5 to 15 miles in Black Log Valley area.

To get details and reserve space which is to be limited: Contact Harold Baer, 551 N Pine St., Lancaster, PA 17603, (717) 394-0298.

Send in Your Articles and Art for the Next Newsletter!

Anything you’d like to appear in the next newsletter can be e-mailed to kelliher@goucher.edu or snail-mailed to Tom Kelliher, 6 Turnmill Ct., Baltimore, MD 21236. Submissions for the next newsletter are due May 1, 2002.

Brushwacker on the Web

This issue and previous issues of the BRUSHWACKER are available in Adobe Acrobat format on the web. Just visit <http://phoenix.goucher.edu/MSTA>. Coming “Real Soon Now” will be an order form for the guidebook and maps and an MSTA membership application form.

February Meeting

The next MSTA meeting will be on February 4 at the Bald Eagle State Forest Headquarters on PA 45 in Laurelton. Lots to discuss!!! A potluck dinner will begin at 6:00 pm, followed by the meeting at 6:45. The Headquarters phone number is (570) 922-3344.

THE MID STATE TRAIL ASSOCIATION WAS FOUNDED IN 1982. OUR BYLAWS STATE:

The purpose of this organization shall be the completion and preservation of the Mid State Hiking Trail System. To this end the MSTA will:

- *Superivse, coordinate, and carry out trail work.*
- *Ensure that maps and guides are available for the hiking public.*
- *Enter into agreements with private landowners and public land managers to provide for the trail.*
- *Take such other actions as may be appropriate to further the purpose of the organization.*

Adopted September 30, 1984

Elections are held every other year at the fall meeting. Current officers, elected for two year term until fall 2002: Tom Thwaites, President; Lynne Whelden, Vice President; Jean Aron, Secretary/Treasurer; Tom Kelliher, Newsletter Editor.

Meetings are held two or three times per year, usually in winter, spring, and fall.

Next meeting: February 4, 2002 at Bald Eagle State Forest Headquarters.

Mid State Trail Association
P.O. Box 167
Boalsburg, PA 16827

