

The path to local trail projects

• **Summer 1986:** Ohiopele State Park opens a nine-mile path to Confluence. Some 60,000 hikers and bikers use it in its first year.

• **January 1987:** Nine counties, including Fayette, join forces to lobby for a federal project to boost tourism. With help from local congressmen John Murtha and Austin Murphy, America's Industrial Heritage Program is born.

• **May 1987:** Greater Connellsville Chamber of Commerce and Laurel Highlands Tourism brainstorm about a "park-to-park" trail that would connect Ohiopele with Connellsville. Connellsville City Council considers a plan to construct a riverfront park along the Youghiogheny; it becomes reality in 1988.

• **November 1987:** The push for local tourism continues. Greater Connellsville Chamber of Commerce hosts members of America's Industrial Heritage Commission, to highlight reasons the local area should be included in the program. Bike trail discussion tops the list of ideas.

• **Spring / Summer 1988:** Trail dreams continue. By August, chamber officials are seeing yet another trail extension: a path that would use former P&LE right-of-way to link Connellsville with McKeesport.

• **October 1988:** Department of Environmental Resources Secretary Arthur Davis pledges state support for the Ohiopele / Connellsville trail, which will wind 19 miles along former Western Maryland right-of-way.

• **November 1988:** Yough River Trail Council is formed, requested by DER to provide volunteer maintenance of the Connellsville / Ohiopele trail.

• **May 1989:** Commonwealth Budget Secretary Michael H. Herschok visits Connellsville to officially release \$500,000 in state funding for the Connellsville / Ohiopele project. Local legislators Rep. Richard Kasunic and Sen. J. William Lincoln are instrumental in lobbying for the funds.

• **August 1989:** Aided by a \$150,000 Pennsylvania Conservation Corps grant, crews begin clearing approximately seven miles of trail toward Connellsville, between Ohiopele Ferncliff Peninsula and Bruner Run.

• **January 1990:** America's Industrial Heritage Project funds a feasibility study to determine whether the Connellsville / McKeesport trail should also include an excursion train. Administered by National Park Service and including input from residents along the three-county trail area, the study ultimately rejects the train idea. But it strongly supports development of the 40-mile trail.

• **May 1990:** Pennsylvania Conservation Corps workers begin construction of seven miles of trail between Ferncliff Peninsula to Bruner Run in Ohiopele State Park. By late summer, the path is open to recreationists.

• **July 1990:** Fayette, Westmoreland and Allegheny counties sign a cooperative agreement to purchase right-of-way for the Connellsville / McKeesport trail from P&LE.

• **August 1990:** Trouble with land acquisitions between Bruner Run and Connellsville make the news, as construction remains stalemated between Bruner Run and Connellsville.

• **February 1991:** Land acquisition problems continue to plague the Connellsville / Ohiopele trail, although there is good funding news: America's Industrial Heritage Project pledges \$250,000 toward construction.

• **Spring 1991:** State legislators promise the "happy trails," forecasting the Connellsville / Ohiopele project will be done by fall 1991.

• **May 1991:** Construction bids are finally opened — but rejected because contractors did not meet specifications.

• **July 1991:** Second-round bids are opened, with Strange Corp. of Harrisville lowest, at \$295,000.

• **August 1991:** Contract award is stymied when Curry Lumber Co., whose property abuts the trail, questions the legality of surveys conducted on the land in relation to the project. Nicholson Lumber Co. files a similar complaint through Fayette Courts.

• **November 1991:** Contracts are finally awarded for the Connellsville / Ohiopele Trail, by Department of General Services, who will oversee construction on behalf of DER. Strange Corp. receives the contract to build approximately 10 miles of trail between Bruner Run and Wheeler Bottom in Dunbar Township. Land acquisition problems are resolved with Curry when the state agrees to conduct a new survey prior to construction. Nicholson's complaint is dismissed by the court.

• **December 1991:** Fayette County Commissioners pledge \$40,000 for purchase of 17 miles of right-of-way on the tri-county project between Connellsville and McKeesport. Another \$10,000 is pledged by Eberly Foundation.

• **February 1992:** Federal money through America's Industrial Heritage Project is pledged for reconstruction of two badly deteriorated railroad bridges at Wheeler Bottom. Engineering work has already been completed. Once bridge renovation is done, the path will be extended to Yough River Park in Connellsville.

• **March 13, 1992:** Ground-breaking ceremonies are finally held for Connellsville / Ohiopele trail. DER Secretary Arthur Davis attends, along with many other state and local officials — especially chamber of commerce members. Construction is finally expected to begin this spring, with Strange Corp. having five months to finish the trail once the project is under way.

• **April 10, 1992:** Right-of-way officially changes from P&LE to Regional Trail Corp., the three-county group overseeing construction of the 40-mile trail between Connellsville and McKeesport. The path will be constructed in phases, the first of which will get under way this summer, officials say.

• **April 24, 1992:** Ground-breaking ceremonies are held for a seven-mile section of trail that will link Rockwood with Markleton in Somerset County. Next year, the path will be extended to Confluence. A Somerset County group is working to extend the path to the Maryland state line. Maryland officials are working to bring the trail from the state line to Cumberland, where it will link with the C&O Canal Towpath, a 187-mile trail leading to Washington, D.C.

• **THE OVERALL PICTURE:** One continuous trail, from Pittsburgh area to the nation's capital! Greater Connellsville Chamber of Commerce is proud to have been a catalyst in this 300-mile achievement.

