



HARMONY TRAILS COUNCIL

P.O. Box 35 Warrendale, PA 15086-0035
www.harmonytrails.org info@harmonytrails.org

New Name, Expanded Mission

By Todd Chambers

Big changes are under way at the Harmony Trails Council. First, two of western Pennsylvania's premier hiking trails, the Rachel Carson Trail and the Baker Trail, are now part of our organization! And second, to better reflect the expansion we are changing our mission to "Preserving and Promoting Community Trails in Western Pennsylvania" and changing our name to the **Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy**. That has a nice ring to it. At least that's what we on the board think, and here's why.

Rachel Carson. Some say she is the mother of the modern environmental movement. It is unquestioned that her book *Silent Spring* was instrumental in promoting the notion of our interconnectedness with our environment and the land that ultimately supports all of us. The Rachel Carson Trail, one of the trails which our organization is now stewarding, passes near Rachel Carson's birthplace in Springdale. To have this connection with her name and the ideas she promoted is an honor. The movement that she helped foster has led to, among other things, the idea of trails and trail development.

Rachel Carson Trail

By Steve Mentzer

For me, the allure of train tracks is their mystique. They're a corridor between distant places, passing along creeks and rivers, through towns and forests. Few people think about them today, and even fewer use them. These pathways are private ... exclusive ... special.

I find a similar mystique with the Rachel Carson Trail, a 34-mile corridor between North Park and Harrison Hills Park, offering rugged, primitive hiking entirely within Allegheny County. Few people have heard of it and even fewer have been on it. But it's there, if you know where to look, ready to take you along creeks and rivers, through towns and forests. Places many people who've lived around Pittsburgh all their lives never knew about, let alone visited.

The trail begins and ends in county parks and passes through one township park, but mostly the trail crosses private property. It was created by American Youth Hostel (AYH) volunteers in the early 1970s and is named because it passes

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Trails. The development of trails and specifically a trail along the route of the old Harmony Short Line, has been the goal of our organization since we started our mission in the early nineties. Now we have the opportunity to expand the breadth of our mission by including the Baker and Rachel Carson trails under our organization's umbrella. These trails offer literally 175 miles of hiking opportunity through our wonderful western Pennsylvania landscape. Our stewardship of these important regional assets will become an integral part of what our organization does. This is not to say that the development of the Harmony Trail system is any less important. We have made

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within a quarter mile of Rachel Carson's birthplace in Springdale (now the Rachel Carson Homestead).

In the 1990s Leo Stember and Jim Ritchie were asked by the AYH to find a way to make the trails self-supporting. Leo came up with the idea for a special event: hike the entire Rachel Carson Trail in one day! Thus, on a warm summer day in 1996 the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge was born. (See related article in this issue.)

The trail continues to exist because of dedicated volunteers. From stewards that adopt sections of it and ensure it's cleared and blazed to work crews that attack problem areas to marshals that help run the Challenge each June, volunteers are the pillars on which everything rests. If you'd like to join in, email rct@rachelcarsontrail.com or call Steve Mentzer at (412) 512-4544.

Baker Trail

By Charlie Brethauer



Shelter on the Baker Trail (Photo by Jim Ritchie)

The Baker Trail is a primitive footpath with backpacking facilities extending 141-miles from its start near Freeport, PA to the Allegheny National Forest near Muzette, PA where it connects with the North Country Trail. It was conceived in the

late 1940s by the American Youth Hostels (AYH) organization who nurtured and maintained it until recently. Harmony Trails Council welcomes the opportunity to continue the AYH's dedicated stewardship of this valuable link in western Pennsylvania's trail system. You may be surprised to know that no organization owns the Baker Trail or has a formal right-of-way. It traverses both public and private lands with the consent of the landowners. Blazing and other maintenance is done by volunteers who adopt sections. Overnight camping is available at nine shelters along the trail.

To order a trail guide book, mail a check for \$10 plus applicable sales tax and \$2 postage payable to the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy, P.O. Box 35, Warrendale, PA 15086. Mark the envelope "Baker Trail Guide".

Rachel Carson Trail Challenge

By Steve Mentzer

Your alarm clock rings. It's 4 AM. But you already knew that because you weren't asleep. In fact, you didn't get much sleep at all this night. You're anxious about what you're planning to do today: hike 34 miles starting before 6 AM, up and down hills, across field and stream, between North Park and Harrison Hills Park on the Rachel Carson Trail hoping to finish before the sunset deadline. You can't relax. There are too many things to think about. The trail. Your gear. Your preparations. The weather. One thing's for certain. To paraphrase the old army slogan, today you'll hike farther before 9 AM than most people will all day (or all month, for that matter).

Since 1996 hundreds of people of all ages from western Pennsylvania and beyond have tested themselves by taking the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge. Some succeed, some fail. Despite cursing the event for days afterwards last year and vowing never to return they come back, trying to do better, trying to finish. The Challenge, as it's called, is an endurance hiking event, not a foot race. The objective is simply to finish or improve on your personal best time.

The entry fee includes water and snacks at four checkpoints, a t-shirt, shuttle bus service, and a cookout. The shuttle bus is available to take participants from North Park to the Harrison Hills Park check-in just before sunrise, and again after 4 PM to take those Challengers who parked at Harrison Hills Park back to their vehicles. The cookout is available at the finish in North Park, from 1 PM until 9 PM.

This year the Challenge takes place on Saturday, June 19. Each year the course alternates direction; this year it starts in Harrison Hills Park and ends in North Park. Registration opens

in April. If you're interested in participating in or volunteering for the Challenge, be sure to attend the May 11th meeting (see the Event Calendar in this issue). Visit the trail web site www.rachelcarsontrail.com to register or for more information.



The Challenge (Photo courtesy of Steve Mentzer)

Harmony Trail Update

By Marian Crossman

Harmony Trail: Blue Heron Ridge

In Pine Township the Blue Heron Ridge plan of homes is designed on land of the former Beyer and Mogielski farms along Route 910. It has a wooded hillside that is viewed from Brooktree Center which will remain mostly undisturbed as its open space. Trails are planned that will reach to the valley and connect to the trolley corridor. A half mile right-of-way from Route 910 will be dedicated to the Harmony Trail and reaches to other valley land of the trails group donated by partners at Brooktree.



Autumn on the Baker Trail (Photo by Jim Ritchie)

Vestal Trail

Columbia Gas will likely replace its ancient service line through Vestal Park. Talks between company engineers and HTC officers concluded that any rebuilding of the line will also grade the Vestal trail. Columbia Gas is doing all engineering and permits needed. We trust the wildlife there at Pine Creek will rebound from the intrusion.

Brooktree Trail

Thanks to the generosity of architect Jack Ross and his partners, the Harmony Trails Council has been given another 4+ acres of the wooded land that is north of their previously deeded Hillside Trail route. It's a serene landscape to find close to busy Route 19. I still remember George Beckman saying on one initial hike there, "I can't see anyone pushing a baby stroller up this." A grassy trail below the Chamber of Commerce building is kept mowed by Wexford volunteer Joe Reljac. It goes beyond the pond and through woods to an old stream crossing.

North Park Connector Trail

The design for a trail from Route 19 (opposite Brooktree) starts at the base of Brooker Drive, and joins an old lane that leads to the soccer fields on McKinney Road. The plan has been submitted to Allegheny County. Approval and construction help by the County is expected this year.



Reflections along the Harmony Corridor (Photo by Peggy Hoburg)

Harmony Trails Council Membership Application/Renewal

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

I Am A <input type="checkbox"/> New Member <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing Member		Date	Your mailing label notes last HTC 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
Name			Age
Street Address			
City, State, Zip			
Telephone	Email Address		Municipality
Contact Me For			
<input type="checkbox"/> Joining board	<input type="checkbox"/> Pruning jagers	<input type="checkbox"/> Planting trees	<input type="checkbox"/> Digging ditches
<input type="checkbox"/> Trail rides/hikes	<input type="checkbox"/> Business liason	<input type="checkbox"/> PR work	<input type="checkbox"/> Political action
		<input type="checkbox"/> Setting pipes	<input type="checkbox"/> Work team food
		<input type="checkbox"/> Fund raising	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing news
			<input type="checkbox"/> Litter patrol
			<input type="checkbox"/> Deed searching

great strides, and continue to do so in putting in place a hiking and biking trail in the heart of the North Hills. Our mission along these lines will continue as strong as ever.

Conservancy. This is defined as “an area designated for the protection of both the land and of its wildlife and their habitat.” The development of new trails and the stewardship of existing trails create linear corridors through our communities. These linear corridors offer recreation, transportation and conservation opportunities that presently exist to a very limited extent in our area. They also offer the opportunity for people and wildlife to move through the landscape at a slower pace that allows the time to appreciate the natural beauty of our region while preserving open space that is important to the overall health of our

communities.

The creation of The Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy is an exciting idea whose time has come. The promotion of trails in general and the greenways and open space that accompany these trails is the mission of our newly named organization. As always the support of our members with both their time and financial resources is vital to the success of our mission. We thank all of you for your support over the years and trust that you share our enthusiasm as we move forward.

If you want to learn more, I encourage you to attend the May 11 meeting (see the Event Calendar in this issue). And remember to look for our new name on future correspondence.

Event Calendar

Saturday, April 17: Baker Trail 101

This hike is an 8-mile hike on the Baker Trail from the Crooked Creek Visitor Center to Cochran’s Mill, near Ford City, PA. Crooked Creek is an Army Corps of Engineers flood control project. Cochran’s Mill is the girlhood home of Nellie Bly (who was really one of the Cochrans). She was the intrepid New York City newspaper reporter who went “around the world in 80 days” at the turn of the 20th century. We’ll stop at her memorial on our car shuttle. We meet in Harmarville at 8 AM and you should return to Pittsburgh around 4 PM. Call Jim for directions and reservations at (412) 828-0210.

Sunday, May 9: Taking care of the Baker Trail

Trails don’t take care of themselves. You can pay your state or federal government thousands of dollars (or even millions) to do it for you, or you can do it yourself with sweat equity. Today we are going to perform “trail maintenance” on the Baker Trail in the Crooked Creek/Ford City area. We’ll meet at 9 AM in Harmarville and return by 5 PM. The tasks are painting blazes (marking the

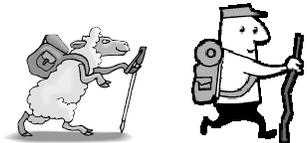
trail), clearing vegetation off the treadway, and trimming back bushes and trees encroaching on the pathway. We’ll divide up the jobs among whoever volunteers. Call Jim for directions and reservations at (412) 828-0210.

Tuesday, May 11: HTC Annual Meeting 7PM-9PM

Learn about the new mission of the Harmony Trails Council and about the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge for both participants and volunteers. Takes place at the Cabin on Ingomar Road in North Park just west of the Babcock Blvd. traffic light. Come at 6 PM with food to enjoy a potluck. Call Marian for details at (412) 366-3339.

Saturday, June 19: Rachel Carson Trail Challenge

The annual, grueling 34-mile endurance hike on the Rachel Carson Trail. Visit www.rachelcarsontrail.com for details.



Harmony Trails Council
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