

A Vision Shared

The Birth of the Allegheny Trail

By Martha Ballman

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Breathtaking views, intriguing historical sites, and abundant wildlife await hikers on the Allegheny Trail, the longest foot-path located primarily in West Virginia. The 330-mile trail runs north-south through the eastern part of the state and into Virginia. Traversing woodlands, streams, farmlands, and county roads, the trail also affords acclaimed camping and fishing opportunities.

Over the past four decades, volunteers have dedicated countless hours to developing the Allegheny Trail. Ultimately, members of the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association (WVSTA), a group founded to promote the trail, literally bushwhacked it from a dream to a reality. Marking its 40th anniversary this month, the WVSTA boasts a proud legacy that began with two men and a shared vision.

Many years ago, Charleston native Nick Lozano, now known as the Father of the Allegheny Trail, backpacked with a group of Explorer Scouts on the Appalachian Trail in the Great Smoky Mountains. Upon his return, Lozano thought, "Why should West Virginia Scouts have to travel to other states to experience the adventure of long-distance backpacking? Why can't we have a trail like the Appalachian Trail running through the Mountain State?"

Hikers along the Allegheny Trail enjoy spectacular views, including this one from Peters Mountain in Monroe County. © Doug Wood

In October 1971, Lozano met Robert Tabor at an Izaak Walton League meeting in Charleston. Tabor had recently moved to the state from Virginia, where he had been a member of the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club. After the meeting, the two men spent two hours talking about trails. Lozano told of his dream to give West Virginians a place to experience long-distance hiking in the state. Tabor's dream was to connect southern West Virginia to the Appalachian Trail.

Flagging a New Trail

The 2,185-mile-long Appalachian Trail runs from Maine to Georgia. And while all of West Virginia is in the Appalachian Mountains, only four miles of the storied trail are in the state, at Harper's Ferry. To Lozano and Tabor, it only made sense that there should be a trail to connect the Appalachian Trail to the beauty, wonder, and wild places of our state.

In June 1972, Lozano and Tabor, with guidance from West Virginia State Parks District Administrator Robert Mathis, headed to Pocahontas County to flag the first portion of the proposed Allegheny Trail between the Boy Scouts of America Buckskin Council's reservation at Dilley's Mill and Seneca State Forest. Lozano tied the first strip of plastic flagging to a shrub branch, then untied it and retied it to his daypack. He told his trail mates, "When the trail is completed, I'll remove this flagging from my pack."

Lozano and Tabor's determination and enthusiasm drew many others to the cause. Eventually, the two met Bruce Bond and Arthur Foley, both avid Appalachian Trail backpackers, and the four began to dream and scheme about how to make the idea take shape.

At the end of 1972, the four men held a public meeting in Charleston they called the West Virginia Scenic Trails Conference, where Tabor unveiled the concept of the Allegheny Trail. Volunteer trail builders were recruited, including several members of the Kanawha Trail Club. Offering their talents to the fledgling WVSTA were Charlie Carlson, then

president of the Kanawha Trail Club; Carolyn Welcker and Shirley Schweizer of Kanawha County; and Nina Damron of Greenbrier County.

The Hard Work Begins

In 1974, the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association was officially incorporated and the dreamers awoke to the reality of the hard work of trail development. Tabor, a WWII veteran who now resides in Culloden, handled most of the politicking involved in building the trail. "He was a real sparkplug," Lozano recalls.

"He developed a close relationship with Robert C. Byrd and for a while had a desk in a corner of Byrd's Charleston office. He used to contact politicians and keep the pot stirred."

Fortunately, earlier dreamers had set the stage for long-distance trails in West Virginia. In the 1960s, during the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, Congress passed several pieces of legislation that boosted outdoor recreation, including laws to establish the National Trails System and fund outdoor recreation at the state level. Marshall College (now Marshall University) began offering classes in outdoor recreation during this exciting period.

Charles Dundas, a Cabell County native, recalls how students at Marshall were encouraged to become involved in statewide outdoor planning efforts. In those early days, students converged at the State Capitol, some canoeing up the Kanawha River, some biking, and some backpacking, to show support for trails development. Public will and political agendas were aligning in favor of a state trails system.

Though the WVSTA's goal was simply to make a path through the woods, the process for attaining it was complicated. There were a number of considerations in determining the physical trail location. Recreational features that best fit the

For 40 years volunteers with the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association have worked to develop the Allegheny Trail through eastern West Virginia. © Dianne Anestis



Traversing woodlands, streams, farmlands, and county roads, the 330-mile Allegheny Trail offers acclaimed hiking, backpacking, camping, and fishing opportunities.

Allegheny Trail concept were explored. Where could backpackers camp? Where are the best views? What are potential water and food resupply points?

30 Miles To Go ...

Then, landowners were contacted for permission to develop the trail on their properties. Meetings were held among WVSTA volunteers and federal and state officials, which resulted in official agreements to develop the trail within their jurisdictions.

The Allegheny Trail was divided into four geographic sections, each with a leader charged with recruiting volunteers and overseeing trail work. Although volunteers were primarily responsible for trail building and maintenance, U.S. Forest Service crews and West Virginia state parks and forests staff members often helped out on portions of government properties traversed by the Allegheny Trail. Originally the work was mostly trail building. Now the built sections require ongoing maintenance.

Longtime trails advocate Doug Wood joined the WVSTA in 1976 and today is the only original Allegheny Trail section coordinator who remains active. In Wood's section of the trail, Section 4, approximately 20 to 30 miles still need to be built to connect two sections already open for hiking. The WVSTA is currently exploring potential routes and encouraging the supervisor of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests to make the Allegheny Trail a priority.

"If those two forests would embrace the cooperative agreement the way that the Monongahela National Forest embraced it in the 1970s, we could have the gap filled in less than five years," Wood says. "The Great Eastern Trail Association is counting on action from those two forests in order to piggyback on the Allegheny Trail for approximately 70 miles. The Great Eastern Trail will run from Florida to Canada and the WVSTA is glad to host it on the Allegheny Trail."

Today, Nick Lozano's and Robert Tabor's dreams have become a reality. The Allegheny Trail now meets the Appalachian Trail in the bottom half of Section 4 at Mile Marker 21.02. The WVSTA can look back on a lengthy history of successes and look ahead to a challenging future.

Lozano, who left the state for a time but recently returned and rejoined the WVSTA, has two trail goals on his bucket list: One is to reenergize the WVSTA membership and the other is to untie that piece of flagging tape that still adorns

his well-worn daypack. He is happy to see the Allegheny trail nearing completion.

"The original trail founders never had a timeline for it," he says. "But it's a shining example of what volunteers can do if they have a vision."

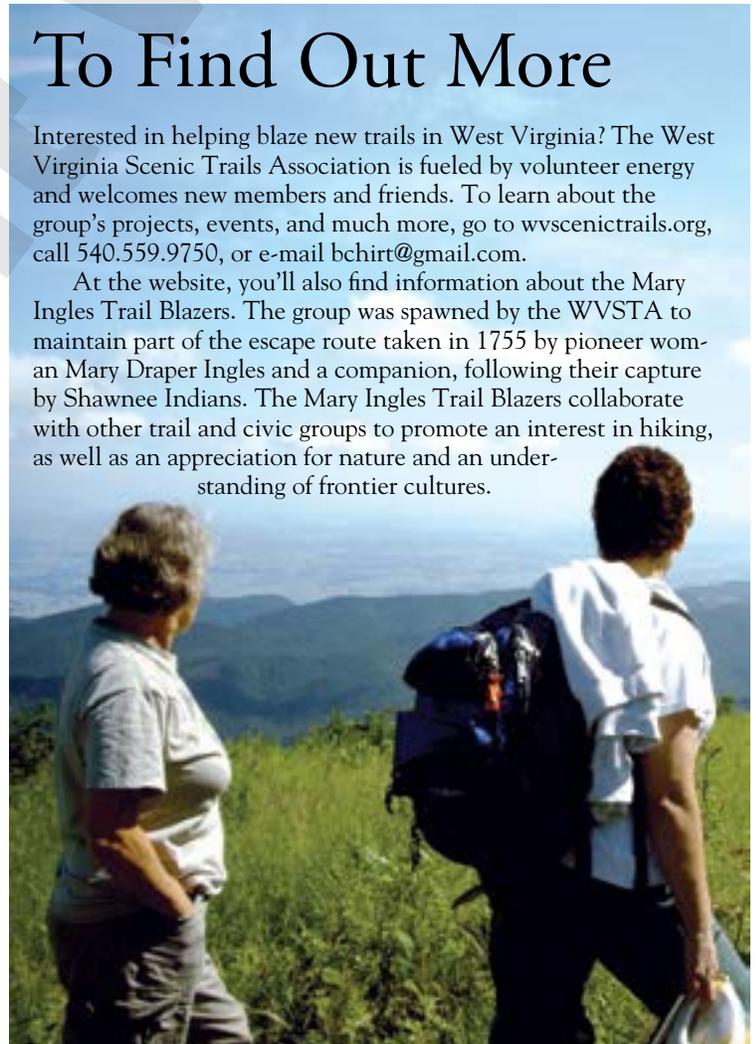
The author would like to thank Doug Wood and Nick Lozano for their assistance with this story.

Martha Ballman of South Charleston is the former director of the West Virginia Trails Coalition and a member of the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association and the Mary Ingles Trail Blazers. She is a West Virginia native and habitual hiker who remains involved in community trail development through the Neighborhoods group in Charleston.

To Find Out More

Interested in helping blaze new trails in West Virginia? The West Virginia Scenic Trails Association is fueled by volunteer energy and welcomes new members and friends. To learn about the group's projects, events, and much more, go to wvscenictrails.org, call 540.559.9750, or e-mail bchirt@gmail.com.

At the website, you'll also find information about the Mary Ingles Trail Blazers. The group was spawned by the WVSTA to maintain part of the escape route taken in 1755 by pioneer woman Mary Draper Ingles and a companion, following their capture by Shawnee Indians. The Mary Ingles Trail Blazers collaborate with other trail and civic groups to promote an interest in hiking, as well as an appreciation for nature and an understanding of frontier cultures.



Hikers on the Allegheny Trail enjoy a view of the Sinks of Monroe from Peters Mountain. © Doug Wood

Allegheny Trail Highlights

By Martha Ballman

The Allegheny Trail's northern terminus is on the Mason-Dixon Line at the Pennsylvania-West Virginia border near Bruceton Mills. From there, it winds its way south until it meets the Appalachian Trail on Peters Mountain at the Virginia-West Virginia border.

Allegheny Trail Section Coordinator Doug Wood recommends the trail for both day hikers and backpackers. "We do not maintain the trail to bike standards and some portions of the trail on private property are closed to biking," he explains.

Below are some high points from each section of the trail. Mile points are from the third edition of the WVSTA's *Hiking Guide to the Allegheny Trail* (see information on how to order below).

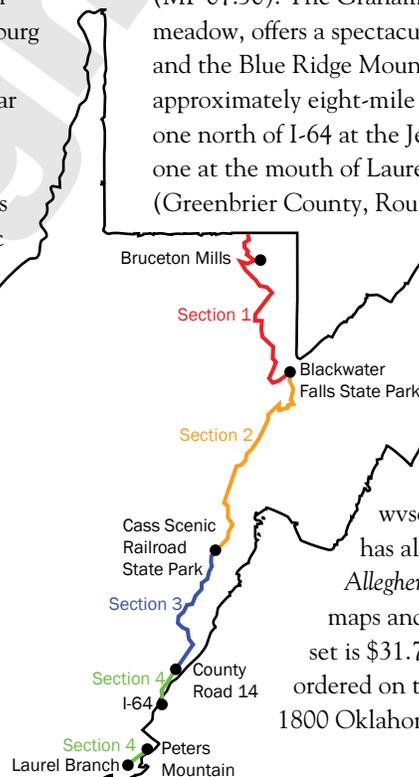
Section 1 starts at the Pennsylvania line and ends at the petting zoo at Blackwater Falls State Park. Hiking this portion of the trail you will find a small overnight shelter that has a spring-fed watercourse running next to it, a restored one-room schoolhouse, and two old graveyards. There are many scenic views, as well as hay meadows where bobolinks perform courtship flights in May. Also in this section is Lantz Ridge Church, a tiny chapel in Mount Olivet that is always open. There is a pipe spring on the right-hand side of Lantz Ridge Road, going south one mile from Rowlsburg and one mile before the small overnight shelter. All water must be treated. This section is accessible by car along Preston County Routes 80 and 84.

Section 2 starts at the petting zoo at Blackwater Falls State Park and ends at the parking lot at Cass Scenic Railroad State Park. Highlights include good fishing for trout and smallmouth bass, numerous nice camping spots, and spectacular scenery along the Glady Fork and its tributaries, especially in autumn. Four trailheads provide access to this portion of the trail: The northernmost trailhead is unmarked (yellow blaze on trees but no signage) and is located at Gladwin along Tucker County Route 26/1. The southernmost trailhead is

north of Glady along Randolph County Route 27. Look for another unmarked trailhead at a crossing of Glady Fork along Randolph County Route 12 between Alpena and Jenningsston. The last one is along U.S. Route 33 at Evenwood.

Section 3 starts at the Cass parking lot and ends in Greenbrier County, where the trail meets County Road 14 (Lake Sherwood Road). Highlights include Beaver Creek Gorge (MPs 34.34 to 36.63). Though isolated and difficult to access, with a very steep ravine, this gorge offers breathtaking views as you descend and ascend. There is also a wonderful camping spot alongside Beaver Creek near the footbridge. The trailhead nearest the footbridge is just north of Watoga State Park along Pocahontas County Route 21/4.

Section 4 is incomplete, although two segments are open for backpacking. The trail is open from the southern terminus of Section 3 to Interstate 64. It breaks here and picks up again at Laurel Branch in Monroe County, ending on Peters Mountain at a junction with the Appalachian Trail. Highlights include Smith Knob of Allegheny Mountain (MP 07.50). The Graham Family Shelter, located next to a meadow, offers a spectacular view of the Shenandoah Valley and the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia. You can take an approximately eight-mile hike from either of two trailheads: one north of I-64 at the Jerrys Run Trail exit in Virginia and one at the mouth of Laurel Run along Lake Sherwood Road (Greenbrier County, Route 14) near Neola, West Virginia.



Note: Before embarking on a hike on the Allegheny Trail, get the latest trail updates from the WVSTA website: wvscenictrails.org. The organization has also published the *Hiking Guide to the Allegheny Trail*, with accompanying trail maps and a wildlife guide. The three-piece set is \$31.75, including shipping, and can be ordered on the website or by mail at WVSTA, 1800 Oklahoma Road, Wheeling, WV 26003.