

# MOUNTAIN HOME

Pennsylvania & the New York Finger Lakes

## FROM STREAM SWEAT

*to*  
Your mile-by-mile  
guide to the Pine  
Creek Rail Trail

**FREE**  
*as the wind*




June 2010

# TRAIL TO HEAVEN

A guide to the beauty, grace, and toilets of the Pine Creek Rail Trail



By David Ira Kagan



**I**f there's a bicycle path in heaven, it's difficult for me to imagine one filled with more glories than the sixty-two-mile-long Pine Creek Rail Trail. From the New York Central Railroad caboose in the parking lot at the southern terminus in Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania, to the Pag-Omar Farms Market at the northern terminus at Stokesdale just above Wellsboro, this body- and mind- and soul-refreshing route offers cyclists a smorgasbord of sensory experiences.

Take along a bicycle bag into which you put, in case of a flat, a spare tube, a patch kit, a mini air pump, a couple of tire levers, and an adjustable wrench. Either know how to repair a flat, or take along written instructions (the process really isn't difficult). You'd also be wise to pack a small first aid kit, including sun block and insect repellent. And carry water, perhaps some energy bars, and a poncho in case of rain. That's about it, except don't forget your camera and some money for the food available at the half-dozen or so establishments located along the way.

The hard-packed gravel trail, although listed as having a two-percent downgrade from north to south, seems quite flat as you are cycling on it in either direction. It's really the wind direction that determines which way the pedaling is easier. Even averaging a cycling speed of only seven or eight miles an hour, you can easily cover the entire trail one way, with reasonable time set aside for rest and food stops, in much less than the daylight hours of some late spring, summer, or early fall day that you will never forget.

Since I live in Torbert Village, only four miles above the southern terminus, I'll narrate what a daytrip from south to north could offer. It's a trip I myself enjoyed twice last year and expect to do at least once again this year.

The parking lot off Railroad Street in Jersey Shore is a spacious, paved one, and the recently built comfort station located there, with its flush toilets, assures you a comfortable start to your day. For those who prefer breakfast before hitting the trail, I recommend the Crest Restaurant on Allegheny Street in Jersey Shore, only a half-mile away.

At the trail parking lot is stone mile-marker L-168. Look for these old New York Central Railroad (NYCRR) mile-markers all along your

journey north (although quite a few, especially once you get above the village of Cedar Run, are, unfortunately, now missing after the removal of the tracks in 1988-89). The "L" stands for Lyons, New York, where this north-south branch of the old railroad met the main east-west line, 168 miles north of Jersey Shore.

Not far along on this wonderful outdoor odyssey, after crossing Railroad Street (be careful of vehicular traffic here) just a few hundred yards from the parking lot, you get to enjoy a short downhill ride, with this sole paved section of the trail then changing into the easy-riding gravel that will scrunch pleasantly under your tires for the next sixty-one miles.

Proceeding on what was the old railroad bridge over four-lane U.S. Route 220, you soon come across mile-marker L-167. Two sights are worth noting in this area. First is a section of the old NYCRR track positioned just off of and parallel to the trail. Second are the unusual vertical rock strata on the east side of the path, providing testimony of mighty geological activity ages ago.

Four miles into your trek, sailing past White Tail parking access and sleepy Torbert Village, after you pass mile-marker L-164, you see the first of four old, steel truss railroad bridges that you'll cross. Stop in the middle to view Gamble Run bubbling into Pine Creek from a west-side mountain hollow.

After cruising past a half-mile-long open field, the next three miles offer you a close-up view of Pine Creek on your right and a mountainside next to you on your left. Just fifty yards past mile-marker 161, in the woods on your left beside two old, tall pine trees, look for the gravestone of Catharine Bonnell, a pioneer baby girl who died back in 1852 at the age of only one.

Then on the right notice the grounds of

We Offer Solutions For  
Substance Abuse Problems



**HARBOR**  
570-724-5272  
7095 Rt 287 Wellsboro, PA

**COUNSELING**

Treatment For Adolescents & Adults  
Individual-Family-Group  
Drug & Alcohol Evaluations  
DUI Services

Accepting Most Major Insurances &  
Medical Assistance

Hours Mon-Fri 8:30-5:00, Evenings  
by appointment

Our Facility Is Located Just One  
Mile From Wellsboro On Route 287  
South, At The End Of Nesmuk Lake



COURTESY: TIOGA COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

**Above:** Konnor (left) and Karli Spencer take a breather along the newest section of the trail between Darling Run and Wellsboro Junction. **Facing Page Top:** Our writer prepares to head north from Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania. **Facing Page Bottom:** Rail Trail map available at the Tioga County Visitors Bureau.

Explore the Arts

Wedding, Housewarming &  
Special Occasion Gifts by Local and Regional Artists

607-535-2571

**Franklin Street Gallery & Gift Shop**

209 N. Franklin St., Watkins Glen, NY



Come on In - We're Just Down the Street

Painting • Photography • Sculpture • Ceramics • Jewelry • Cards  
• MORE •

Camp Kline, a Boy Scout camp from 1920 until the mid-1970s. If you want to take the time, you could walk down to see the two remaining totem poles and other structures. Back up on the trail not far, on a hot day you'll be grateful for the cold water available from the old-fashioned water pump next to the Bonnell Flat comfort station.

Then comes a second beautiful old steel railroad bridge. Looking south from this bridge, you can see the stone wall erected between State Route 44 and Pine Creek by Works Progress Administration workers back in the 1930s.

On the other side of the bridge, as you pass the access parking lot at the village of Ramsey, look to your right to see if you can spot the two alpacas grazing in the fenced-in field across Route 44. And read the plaque at the lot, which informs you of the origin of the village's name.

The next village going just three miles north is Waterville. There you enjoy crossing yet another scenic railroad bridge, this one over Little Pine Creek near where it empties

into Big Pine Creek. At Waterville you have a choice of three eating places—the Pine Creek Valley Lodge, the Waterville Tavern (erected in 1825) and McConnell's (subs and soft ice cream the specialties).

North past the next parking area and mile-marker 156 finds you once again right alongside Pine Creek. Marvel at the very obvious, extensive gnawing activity of beavers around mile-marker 154 just south of the Dry Run comfort station.

Two miles farther on, as you cross the little bridge over Callahan Run (it's labeled) in the village of Jersey Mills, note on your immediate left the post office, which occupies half of a very old house. Serving the small community since 1855, it is currently run weekday mornings by Postmaster Kenneth O. Kelley Jr., the third-great grandson of Pine Creek Valley pioneer Abraham Harris.

Just north of the village of Jersey Mills is a fenced section of trail paralleling State Route 414. The view of a bend in Pine Creek at this point and of the surrounding mountains is gorgeous.

Arriving at the village of Cammal, you could make stops at yet another trailside comfort station (very near where, just this April, I was blessed with the absolutely beautiful sight of a bald eagle soaring quite low over my head), the Cammal General Store, or the Wagon Wheel Restaurant.

North of Cammal come the Ross Run and then the Clark Farm/Utceter Station trail access areas (no comfort stations at either). Between these two is a long, fenced section of the trail paralleling Route 414 again, with another outstanding view of a sweeping turn in Pine Creek, about where Wolf Run enters under the trail from the mountain on the east. Then about a mile past where the fencing ends, Black Walnut Bottom campground—a well-shaded area, with bathrooms and picnic tables—lures bicyclists in for a rest.

Above Black Walnut Bottom about a mile is an old pioneer graveyard just to the left of the rail trail. In this Utceter (also called Old Callahan) Cemetery are the gravestones of perhaps about fifty souls, most of whom died in the mid-1800s, including quite a few young women and children. The exception is that of pioneer John Callahan, who died in 1891 at the age of 100.

Rolling into the village of Slate Run, you have a choice of two establishments for a nice lunch. Wolfe's General Store offers tasty, made-to-order sandwiches, which include a dill pickle on the side. Or a sit-down meal (they have great cheesesteaks) is available across the concrete Pine Creek bridge at the Hotel Manor, where you have your choice of eating inside in a spacious, bug-free dining area, or outside on a wooden terrace overlooking Pine Creek, next to a plaque honoring Pine Creek's first pioneer, Jacob Tomb.

As you cycle north just past the Slate Run access parking lot, note the extensive, weed-overgrown field along the east side of Pine Creek. This was the site of the largest lumber mill in the valley, the James B. Weed and Company hemlock sawmill, which operated during the great lumber era from 1893 to 1910.

Just a couple miles above Slate Run, you reach the Hilborn Fields comfort station. Look out for wildlife here, as I have come across deer (one time about a dozen were out in the field), a porcupine once "guarding" the door of the men's room, and a black bear (walking along the path not far ahead of me, finally bolting down off the trail and crashing through the bushes toward Pine Creek).

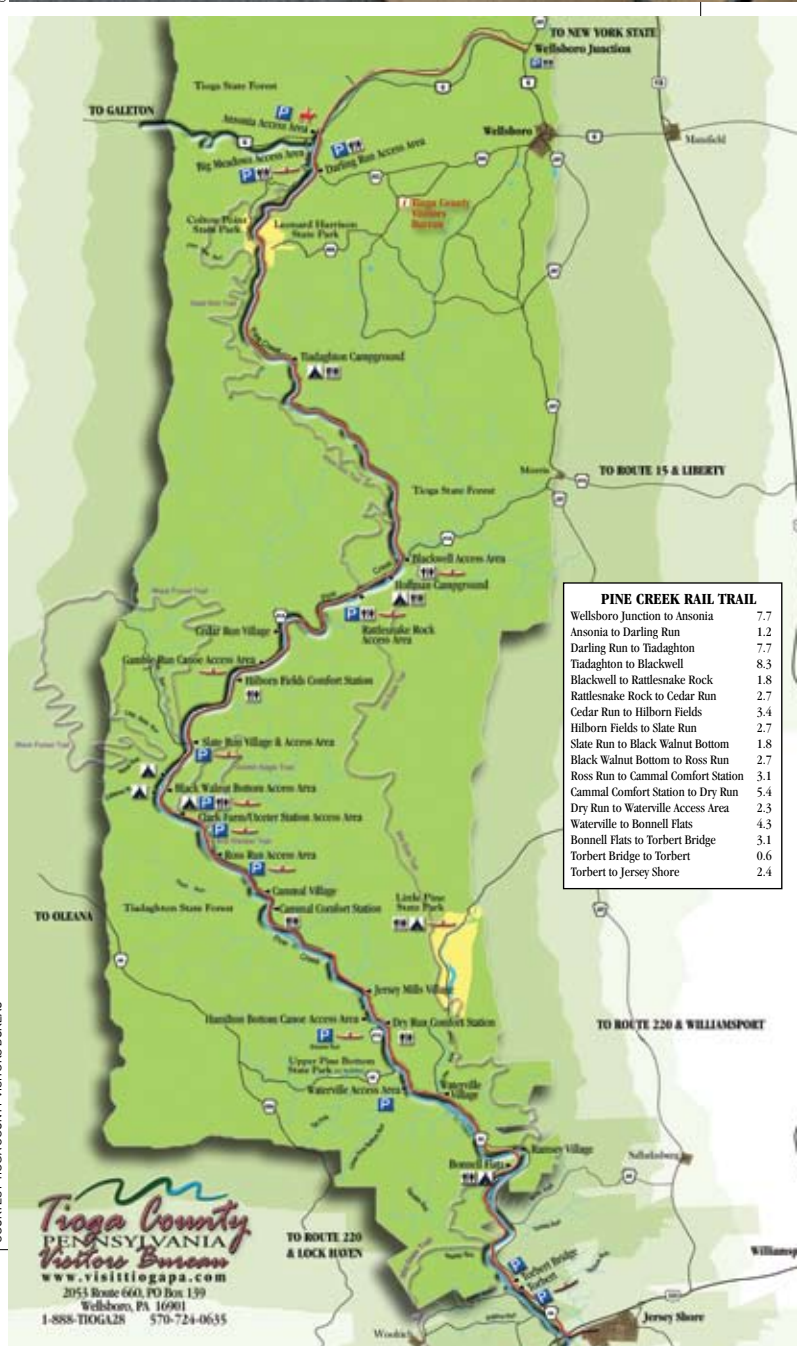
Arriving at Cedar Run Village, approximately thirty miles into your ride (about the halfway point), you don't want to miss out on having a Perry's ice cream cone at the General Store (built circa 1895). It's also worth it to at least take a look inside the Cedar Run Inn directly across the street, an establishment advertising "fine food and lodging since 1891." And you don't want to be hungry when you leave Cedar Run, as your next chance for food along the trail isn't until the northern terminus over thirty miles away.

You'll cross yet another steel truss bridge at the north end of Cedar Run, after passing the sprawling Pettecote Junction Campground. Stop in the middle of this bridge to view a long stretch of Pine Creek to the north.

It's three miles past "the narrows" (look at Route 414 high above on the steep mountainside) to the Rattlesnake Rock access area (I've never seen rattlesnakes there!), then another mile to Hoffman campground, a little-known gem of the trail, well worth the short ride down the dirt side-road. With its picnic tables, shade trees, comfort facility, water pump, and welcoming grassy banks along Pine Creek, this heavenly spot will help soothe any aching muscles you may have.



©BILL CROWELL



COURTESY, TIOGA COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

**Tioga County**  
**PENNSYLVANIA**  
**Visitors Bureau**  
 www.visitiogapa.com  
 2053 Route 660, PO Box 139  
 Wellsboro, PA 16901  
 1-888-TIOGA28 570-724-0655

Another mile north you enter the Village of Blackwell over yet another bridge crossing Pine Creek. Enjoy, for a brief change, the short downhill to Route 414 (comfort station and access parking on the left) and then the 100-yard-long, gradual uphill past the Blackwell Hotel (it's been closed of late), the old Methodist Church, and village houses.

Eight miles of bicycling takes you up to Tiadaghton campground. On your way you may very well come across some rattlesnakes, especially at a large rockslide just a couple miles before the camp. The expansive camping and picnic ground has comfort facilities, a water pump, and a number of picnic tables right down by Pine Creek. With no bank here, you could easily dip your tired feet and legs into its cooling waters.

From Tiadaghton campground north about eight more miles to the Darling Run rest area, you pass through the most impressive section of Pine Creek Gorge. The views of the creek and surrounding mountains here are unsurpassed in beauty. Note the Turkey Path coming down from Leonard Harrison State Park about four miles above Tiadaghton, and,

See *Rail Trail* on page 28

## From Spikes and Rails to Bikes and Hikes

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." When the railroad tracks through the Pine Creek Gorge closed down in October of 1988 after over a century of use, there may have been a path—but certainly no trail.

The Rail Trail Coalition was fixed on changing that. With the help of the National Rail Trail Association, this group of fewer than a dozen fought to pass legislation that would allow for a trail stretching from Wellsboro Junction to Pennsylvania's Jersey Shore. They faced much opposition from the Pine Creek Preservation Association and local residents, however, "who worried that the trail would disturb the character of the land or that they'd end up with too many tourists in their backyard," says Joe Smith, a member of the Rail Trail Coalition.

But after much lobbying, they were able to pass legislation and convince the Advisory Council to begin building what is now known as the Pine Creek Rail Trail. The first phase of the trail from Ansonia to Blackwell opened up in 1996, and since then three more phases have been added, with one more possible phase into Wellsboro expected in the future. "Other than its length, not much has changed since the first phase was built," says Chief Ranger Brian Caldwell from the Tioga District of DCNR. "We've just always tried to keep everything as natural as possible." Emerson would be proud.

~ Nicole Hagan



Southern trail terminus with original New York Central Railroad mile-marker. The "L" references Lyons, New York, a major railroad junction 168 miles north of Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania.

©DAVID IRA KAGEN

# Northern Tier Cultural Alliance's Annual Agricultural Heritage Day

Friday, July 2nd 10:30am until 3pm

Vendors, Displays & Artisan Demonstrations

In and Around the Washington Street Station, 1 Washington Street, Towanda, PA  
Directly behind the Keystone Theater



This ad funded in part by the Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau and the Bradford County Room Tax Fund

# 10th Annual

KETTLE CREEK MUSIC FESTIVAL  
August 12, 13, 14, 15, 2010

 Benefit: Kettle Creek Ambulance Assoc., Inc.   
FOR INFORMATION VISIT: [www.kcmusicfest.com](http://www.kcmusicfest.com)

E-Mail: [kcmusicfest@hughes.net](mailto:kcmusicfest@hughes.net)



*Live Entertainment Daily*  
*As part of Our 10th Anniversary Celebration,*  
*Music will start Thursday Evening Aug. 12th!*  
*With The Hybrid Ice Band*  
*appearing from 7:00-10:00 PM*

**Gates open at 3:00 PM**

**Vendors & Food Available at The Midway**

Tickets Available IN ADVANCE or & Gate

**Quiet Oaks Campground - 88 Quiet Oaks LN**

**Cross Fork, PA 17729 - 1.866.687.4233**

**EVENT WILL BE HELD RAIN OR SHINE**

Rail Trail continued from page 12




Bikers traverse the trail's only arched wooden bridge near town of Asaph, Pennsylvania.

just before the comfort station and access parking, the sign describing the site of the Darling Run Civilian Conservation Corps camp, built back in the 1930s.

One more mile takes you under the U.S. Route 6 bridge at Ansonia. Here, Pine Creek veers off to the west, and you now follow Marsh Creek the final eight miles to the northern terminus. With wheels spinning in a more easterly direction now, you pass the basically one-lane sleepy village of Asaph, cross over a country road on the trail's only arched wooden bridge, cycle past about a mile of wetlands (look for herons, ducks, geese and other wildfowl), and roll by many-colored wildflowers and a long field of corn.

And, finally, up ahead at the end of a long, straight stretch, the trail itself comes to an end at a small dirt parking access with a couple portable toilets. A short jaunt to the left then brings you to a paradisiacal final stop—the Pag-Omar Farms Market—where you can, without guilt, wolf down a sandwich meal at their inside tables and perhaps top the meal off, following my example, with a large, hot fudge Hershey's ice cream sundae, with whipped cream and a maraschino cherry!

Then, after allowing for some digestion and a good rest, you could do as I've done each time I've bicycled the fifty-eight and one-half miles up there from my house. Bicycle back down before dark!

As singing cowboy Roy Rogers might have crooned about this bicycling heaven in the wilds of northcentral Pennsylvania, have said, "Happy rail trails to you..." 

*A resident of the Pine Creek Valley, author and feature writer David Kagan is an outdoor enthusiast and always seems to be biking, hiking, or running somewhere, much to the delight of our readers.*

Make a Reservation for our Candlelight Dinner on Dickens of a Christmas and also New Years Eve!



*Book now for your special Holiday party!*

*Gift certificates available - Great for Christmas gift giving!*

**FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED SINCE 1957**

Your Hosts Chris & Geoff Coffee  
[wersteaks@epix.net](mailto:wersteaks@epix.net)  
[www.thesteakhouse.com](http://www.thesteakhouse.com)  
29 Main Street  
Wellsboro, PA  
570-724-9092

**OPEN MONDAY THRU SATURDAY EVENINGS 5-9**



**SMOKE FREE ATMOSPHERE**