



PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVATION
HERITAGE
PROJECT

Miles Down the Trail:
*How Far We've Travelled Since
the Early Days of Recreation*



Photo credit: Carol Saylor

In the spring, we took a look at how recreation evolved in our nation's history and how Pennsylvania's expansive natural areas gave people opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and learn new activities while discovering the outdoors as a place to play.

Using a "then and now" format, this summer we would like to expand on that theme to illustrate how when it comes to enjoying the outdoors – fashion and equipment might change – but the fun is timeless!

Over Hill and Dale

Backpacking as recreation dates to the early 1900s. While an exact date is difficult to ascertain, a PA historical perspective would be incomplete without a few major developments of note – namely, the invention of the pack board and creation of long distance trails such as those found at – Laurel Ridge, Moraine, Oil Creek and Raccoon Creek state parks. These developments, combined with further innovations in hiking and camping gear, have helped advance backpacking for hikers in Pennsylvania.

Lloyd F. Nelson's 1920 invention of the camping backpack is certainly a benchmark for recreational hiking. As the story goes, in an effort to make his carrying "pack" more comfortable, Nelson fashioned a rigid pack board, which not only gave structure to the backpack, but also made it easier to carry over long hauls. To this day, the design remains relatively the same.

continued on page 2

These young YWCA members biked from Reading to Lancaster



Photo courtesy of the Alpine Club

While Mr. Nelson's invention made backpacks more comfortable, establishing trails in our state parks and forests allow outdoor enthusiasts the chance to explore the roads less taken, as well as those known and cherished, like the Appalachian Trail.

Photo credit: Councilman James Reichenbach



Day hiking has grown in popularity. In fact, walking is the number one form of outdoor recreation.

Diverse and scenic treks such as the Chuck Keiper Trail in the Sproul State Forest offers 90 miles of backpacking, traversing the Burns Run Wild Area, Fish Dam Wild Area, East Branch Swamp Natural Area, and Cranberry Swamp Natural Area.

For the hiking enthusiast who wants a true challenge, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Bureau of Forestry has teamed up with the Keystone Trails Association in recognizing any hiker who completes the entire 798 miles



Photo credit: Mike Matthews

Backpacking on the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail

of the State Forest Hiking Trail system with the coveted *State Forest Trails Award*.

A sign of the times, backpacking today is more streamlined, with light and ultra-light backpacking the current trends. Even with conventional backpacking though, most everything has gotten lighter. These innovations have not only made backpacking easier for pros, but also more attractive to novices.

“Freedom and Self Reliance”

Many people claim credit for inventing the first bicycle. The answer to the question often depends upon the nationality of who you ask; the French claim it was a Frenchman, Scots claim a Scotsman, the English an Englishman, and Americans often claim that it was an American.

If we jump to 1863, the “Bone Shaker” or Velocipede was the first bike prototype to catch the American imagination. Made of stiff materials, straight angles and steel wheels, this bike literally shook the bones of riders over the cobblestone roads of the day.

By 1870, a more commercial version, nicknamed the “high wheeler” enjoyed great popularity among young men of means (they cost an average worker six month's pay), with the hey-day being the decade of the 1880's. By 1878, the first American manufacturer of cycles began with the Columbia Bicycle at the Weed Sewing Machine Company factory in Hartford, CT. The first bicycles were the 60" High Wheelers and sold for \$125.00 when sewing machines sold for \$13.00.

In the 1880's, while the men were risking their necks on the high wheels, ladies, confined to their long skirts and corsets, could take a spin around the park on an adult tricycle. Many mechanical innovations now associated with the automobile were originally invented for tricycles

continued on next page

Cyclists from the early 1900s.



Photo courtesy the collection of Denson Lee Groenendaal

such as rack and pinion steering, the differential, and band brakes.

No review of early cycling is complete without including Susan B. Anthony's thoughts on the subject. In 1896, she said, "let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel. It gives woman a feeling of freedom and self-reliance."

Today you can enjoy hundreds of miles of cycling and mountain bike trails in 11 state forests that maintain 447 miles of designated trails for mountain bicycling and 57 state parks across the Commonwealth, including 60 miles on the Delaware Canal towpath which is also a National Historic Trail. Once trod by mule teams pulling cargo-laden boats along the canal, the towpath is used today by walkers, joggers, bicyclists, cross-country skiers, and bird watchers.

"Everyone must believe in something. I believe I'll go canoeing"

So says Henry David Thoreau. A sentiment shared by the 19th century Scottish explorer, writer, and philanthropist John MacGregor (nicknamed Rob Roy) as he is credited as being the founder of recreational canoeing. He was introduced to canoes and kayaks on a camping trip to Canada and the U.S. in 1858. When he returned to Britain, he constructed his own canoes and used them on waterways in various parts of Britain, Europe, and the Middle East. His book, A Thousand Miles in the Rob Roy Canoe, was extremely popular and started interest in recreational canoeing and kayaking.



replica was made using the techniques and tools that would have been available to the early Native Americans. The Commonwealth's Archaeology Program (CAP) of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has carved three dugout canoes over the past decade.

One of our founding fathers was an early fan of water-sports as well. Benjamin Franklin was known to have been an avid swimmer throughout his life and an advocate for the benefits of the sport. As a result of this passion,

he invented swim fins when he was just 11 years old; they are regarded as his earliest invention.

Our state continued to be an early adopter - the Philadelphia Canoe Club (chartered in 1905) is the third oldest paddling club in the United States. It began as a men's social club situated on the picturesque banks of the Schuylkill River. Early members engaged in all forms of boating including canoeing and power boating. Canoe racing was popular in the early days of the club and a number of members raced on an international level, including Russ McNutt, who competed in the 1936 Olympics held in Berlin.

Today, canoeing and kayaking are an ever popular – and accessible – way to explore the outdoors. Lakes, streams, and rivers are abundant in our state's natural areas; 5,132 miles of rivers and streams in our state forests alone! Any state park that has a lake over 10 acres in size has opportunities for canoeing and flat-water boating. DCNR has a comprehensive list of the place to canoe and kayak and even highlights the particularly scenic canoe/kayak trip routes.

continued on page 4



State parks and forests provide many outdoor recreation programs such as the kayaking program pictured here at Shawnee State Park.

Photo courtesy of: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Photo credit: Tina Moliski

Let's Picnic!

The original definition of the word 'picnic' denoted something like a potluck. One of the earliest accounts of picnicking comes from tales of Robin Hood. He and his Merry Men would informally dine on bread, cheese, and ale under the trees. But picnics also evolved from the tradition of elaborate movable feasts among the wealthy.

American landscape painting in the mid 19th century often included a group of picnickers in the foreground. An early American illustration of the picnic is Thomas Cole's *The Pic-Nic* of 1846. While already an established social

Photo credit: The Brooklyn Museum of Art



Thomas Cole's The Pic-Nic of 1846

event in Europe, these cultural images of picnics as a peaceful group activity popularized the idea of a shared meal in a natural setting.

The popularity of picnics in the 20th century ran parallel with the rise of access to transport systems, from rail to bike and most significantly the motorcar. As well as family and bush walking picnics, there were company picnic days.

And today? From eating your lunch at a wooden table in the parking lot to a quiet snack along a trail to a full on family reunion with 200 relatives - the picnic is alive and well. Pennsylvania's 121 state parks and 2.2 million acres of state forests provide the "where" for families and friends to pack favorite shared dishes, soak in nature, and spend quality time together.

Photo credit: DCNR



Perched on the Camelback Mountain, Big Pocono State Park offers picnic areas and scenic overlooks.

*"the picnic is
alive and well"*



Carol Swavely Derbam shared this photo of her parents, John and Susan Swavely, (in the center) at Pymatuning State Park. To the left are Luther and Carolyn Swavely and to the right are Donna and Jim Swavely.

Fish Jousting Anyone?

And finally, no "then and now" would be complete if we don't mention a couple of "drop offs" to our list of "fun" in the outdoors. When is the last time you went fish jousting? Never? This involved two teams getting on boats and trying to knock each other into the water. Sounds kind of fun, like something you might do at camp right? In ancient Egypt the stakes were high since most joustors couldn't swim. Between drowning and a few accounts of contestants being eaten by crocodiles, perhaps less fun than it sounds.

How about the "kalpe"?

Horse racing and foot racing can be found in many cultures. However, not many have the guts to combine the two. Of course, since the Greeks love running so much they couldn't just ride all eight laps around the hippodrome. At the seventh lap they jumped off their moving horses and ran the last lap on foot while trying to avoid being trampled to death. Hmm... a peaceful paddle on a cool summer morning in Pine Creek sounds good now, doesn't it?

continued on next page

And Now for Something Totally Different

In addition to seeing how some of our favorite activities have evolved over the past couple of centuries, we have some great NEW ways to get outside – have you tried disc golf, geocaching, rock climbing, wind surfing, snow-boarding, and stand up paddle boarding?

You can disc golf in 14 state parks, including the new course at Sam Lewis State Park. For rock climbers, numerous climbing opportunities exist in Ohiopyle, McConnells Mill, and Ralph Stover state parks. There are 20 state parks where you can scuba dive and wind surfing is the latest craze at Moraine. In the winter, bring your snowboard to Blueknob State Park.

For a true 21st century experience, try geocaching. Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with GPS devices. See Penn's Steward Fall 2008. Geocaching is enjoyed by people from all age groups, with a strong sense of community and support for the environment. Our heavy backpack wearing, "Bone Shaker" bike riding great grandparents would LOVE IT!!



Photo credit Melaney Stremmel

Trent S. hits the mark in disc golf at Codorus State Park.

"The swimming area at the "Ore Hole" (a.k.a. Fuller Lake) at Pine Grove Furnace State Park has changed just a bit since this 1950s postcard pic! This is the beach I remember as a kid, when we walked a "goat trail" every day from our cabin... barely visible at the end of the lake, about halfway between the diver and the left edge of the photo. I loved that stone wall, and the two sets of steps leading down into the water. My grandmother and her friends swam around the Ore Hole every afternoon... it was a great "coming of age" moment when I was allowed to accompany them!" (Stu Einstein)



Photo credit: Stu Einstein

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