

Merrill W. Linn
Land and Waterways Conservancy

Rural Routes *in Union County*

Mission

To protect and preserve significant ecological sites in Union, Snyder, upper Northumberland and contiguous counties and to educate the public on conservation issues critical to the health of our environment.

Linking Landscapes



Our brochure is designed to lead the motorist or bicyclist along relatively quiet and scenic roadways to sites of unique beauty and interest within Union County. We hope that your understanding and appreciation of the natural beauty of Union County are enhanced by this publication. The main circuit, approximately 60 miles long, takes about 2 hours to drive at a comfortable pace. These sites and the circuit are identified on the map on the back of this pamphlet.

Enjoy the beautiful valley and ridge landscape as you travel the Buffalo Valley. Pause for awhile at our special sites, several of which lead to more secluded areas and vistas. Reflect on the past. Join us in our effort to protect and preserve this priceless natural heritage for our future.



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Geology/ Union County lies near the geographic center of Pennsylvania in what is known geologically as a Valley and Ridge Physiographic Province. The creation of today's topography began more than 400 million years ago when sediments were deposited in a shallow inland sea that covered this area. Gradually, those sediments were compacted and cemented to produce sandstone, shale, and limestone rock formations.

Approximately 250 million years ago, during a collision of the North American and African tectonic plates, those horizontal sedimentary rocks were folded and uplifted. Differential erosion (shales and limestones weathering faster than sandstones) of that thick, folded rock sequence has created our present valleys and ridges. (see more in waterways section) With elevations to 2,100 feet, our county's impressive southwest to northeast trending ridges are a local manifestation of the 1,500 mile Appalachian Mountain chain. The striking beauty of our smoothly rounded mountains is particularly evident on this east-west route through the county, while viewpoints along many mountain roads offer spectacular views of fertile valleys below.

Forests and Farmland/ Although towns and farmlands occupy much of the valley floor, over half of the county's 204,000 acres, of which 60% is state-owned, remains wooded. Observing the mature hardwood stands that dominate our forestland today, it is difficult to imagine how most of Union County's woodland looked in the early twentieth century.

Logging companies, using the forest as though it were an inexhaustible resource, had denuded most mountainsides of their virgin timber. Nature's resilience is evident in the second growth forest we see now. Modern multiple-use forest management policies ensure long-term product yields and recreational opportunities for our future. State forestlands, state parks, private camping areas, and miles of forest roads and hiking trails provide ample opportunities for those who want to enjoy the splendor of Penn's woods.

Public use maps, which show state forest roads, trails, picnic and camping areas, are available at the Bald Eagle State Forest District headquarters along Route 45 northwest of Laurelton.

Our oak-hickory forests, dominated by stands of mixed oaks, resemble those of the southern half of the state rather than those of the northern tier where American beech, birch, and maple are more abundant. An understory of rhododendron and the smaller-leaved mountain laurel provides a showy display in late spring equalled by spectacular foliage by mid-October.

The land in our valley includes a number of soil associations of high agricultural quality. These excellent soils have formed from glacial till, alluvial material, or weathered sediments from highly folded sedimentary rocks of limestone or calcareous shales. Located in a climatic zone that provides adequate rainfall (averaging 39 in. per year) and a growing season of 160 days, over one-third of Union County's agricultural land meets the United States Department of Agricultural requirements for prime farmland.

Not surprisingly then, agriculture is the number one industry in our county.

The combination of farmland interspersed with forest throughout the county makes for a robust habitat supporting diverse communities of wildlife. Black bear, rattlesnakes, barred owls, ruffed grouse, and wild turkey inhabit the more remote sections of the county. Wood ducks, wood turtles, and raccoons are quite common along wooded waterways. A few beaver families construct their dams and lodges within the county, while white-tailed deer and many other species thrive along the forest edge where woods and farm fields meet.

Waterways/ Lying within the Susquehanna River basin, Union County has an abundance of waterways. In recent geologic time, large ice sheets helped shape our landscape's streams and rivers. Approximately 800,000 years ago they formed large and small ice-dammed lakes in the Susquehanna and its tributaries. Catastrophic floods from these lakes produced pools and riffles that today provide habitat for fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mussels. The floods also deposited coarse gravelly soils that today can't be farmed, leaving forested habitats that serve as important wildlife corridors.

With its sources in the forests of west-central Pennsylvania, the West Branch Susquehanna, which Indians called Otzinachson, forms the eastern boundary of our county. Encompassing a watershed of nearly 4.5 million acres, the average discharge of the river at Lewisburg is 81,000 gallons per second. From there, the river flows south to its confluence with the Susquehanna at Sunbury. The broad, shallow river then continues southward to the Chesapeake Bay, one of the most productive estuaries in the world. Nineteen million gallons of water per minute (50% of the fresh-water entering the bay) flow from the 440-mile long Susquehanna and its 13 million acre drainage basin.

Within our county, four main watersheds feed tributaries of the Susquehanna. Paralleling each other as they flow eastward are the White Deer Hole, White Deer, Buffalo, and Penns creeks. Each provides natural scenic beauty and recreational opportunities for all to enjoy.

Site 1: Limestone Township Pavilion/Penns

Creek has its source in Penn's Cave, Centre County. The creek enters Union County west of Weikert and winds through the county's southern extremes forming its boundary in places. Eventually it enters Snyder County and continues to its confluence with the Susquehanna near Selinsgrove. The Penns Creek watershed encompasses nearly 50,000 acres within Union County and contributes 3,260 gallons of water to the Susquehanna each second. Considered an excellent trout stream in its upper reaches, Penns is a popular fishing stream along its entire 65.7 mile length. Canoers can enjoy easy flatwater sections toward the east or challenge themselves on whitewater sections to the west. Everywhere the scenery is beautiful.

Along Penns Creek, 1 mile west of Route 104, is a small public facility offering sheltered picnic tables and cooking grills. Here, where the water flows at a moderate pace over a rocky bed, is a great place to cast a fishing line, launch a canoe, or watch and listen for waterfowl, herons, kingfishers or an occasional osprey. Tall sycamores shade the north bank; trout lilies, spring beauties, bluebells, and day lilies carpet a neighboring private woodlot. Rising abruptly along the south side of the stream, Penns Creek Mountain (traditionally known as Jacks) is cloaked in evergreen trees and mixed hardwoods towering over an understory of rhododendrons. Abundant blooms of wildflowers and trees are displayed each spring, while brilliant foliage, reflected in the waters of Penns Creek, awaits the autumn visitor. *Follow Quarry Rd. to SR#3004. Turn left and travel for 0.1 mile. Turn right onto SR#3012 and travel for 1.0 mile arriving at the pavilion on your left. To return to the main loop, backtrack or follow the road to the west of the pavilion taking the first or second right turn then left on Red Ridge Rd.*

Site 2: Chimney Rocks/White Mountain Wild Area/

This 3,581 acre tract at the east end of White Mountain near Weikert is bounded on the north by Penns Creek and on the south and east by Weikert Run. Beautiful in any season, numerous trails offer special sights throughout the year. Under a high

closed canopy of tulip poplar and oak, rhododendrons along Weikert Run blossom in late spring. As the trail ascends the eastern slope of White Mountain toward Chimney Rock, early spring hikers will find trailing arbutus and hepatica in bloom. Higher on the mountain, where the canopy becomes more open, huckleberry bushes and mountain laurel grow in profusion. Near the summit stands Chimney Rock. A product of differential erosion, it consists of free-standing sandstone around which the softer shales have been eroded. From here, there are spectacular mountain views framed by contorted boughs and gnarled branches of pines shaped by the elements.

In summer bird populations peak. Birds nesting in treetops are often more easily heard than seen. Listen for the drumming of the pileated woodpecker, the staccato song of the secretive winter wren, and the flute-like song of the wood thrush. One may hear the call of an osprey, or glimpse this magnificent raptor gliding high above Penns Creek in search of prey.

In Weikert, opposite the store, turn left onto White Mtn. Rd. (mountain road). Travel 1.0 mi. to Weikert Run Rd. then turn right. In 0.8 mi. cross Weikert Run to a small pull off on the right. Park. Do not block the gated lane. Follow red blazes eastward along the lane to triple blazes indicating a left turn and ascend the ridge to Chimney Rocks. Approx. 30 minute hike one way. Return option: Continue west from Chimney Rocks following red blazes along the ridge to Devil's Elbow Trail. Turn left to Weikert Run Rd. then left on the road to your vehicle. This entire loop will take about 2.5 hrs. Caution: The trail west of Chimney Rocks is rocky and sometimes difficult to follow. There are no steep grades until the end of Devil's Elbow Trail.*

Site 3: Cherry Run / Looking across Penns Creek at the north face of White Mountain one sees slopes covered by large areas of sandstone blocks. They were formed during the Pleistocene epoch in periglacial regions affected by repeated freeze-thaw cycles which

disintegrated Tuscarora sandstone bedrock and moved the blocks down slope. Similar block field relics of the ice age are visible on many other mountainsides.

On the southern flank of Paddy Mountain, an abandoned railroad bed (part of the Mid-State Trail) parallels the north bank of Penns Creek. Although white oaks and northern red oaks predominate, 100-year-old sycamores or buttonwoods, which escaped the area's extensive lumbering, grow along the creek. Also present are remnants of American chestnut trees, most of which were killed by an introduced fungal blight in the early 1900's.

Due to its origins in the limestone environs of Penns Cave, the creek has an alkaline pH. The creek supports an abundance and a variety of immature insects such as stoneflies, mayflies, and caddis flies. These are a vital link in the food chain for many species of fish, including brown and rainbow trout. Native brook trout inhabit the mouth of Cherry Run, a tributary of Penns Creek.

From the PA fish commission parking lot, one has access to a rail trail leading to an abandoned railroad tunnel 3 mi. west. The trail is open to non-motorized activities; it provides a quiet, level path for hiking, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing. Another trail, following Penns Creek more closely, passes a pond and the fish commission field station. Through this area, the creek is designated as a "catch and release" where people may test their fishing skills on the "big ones."

Travel 3.4 miles west from the village store in Weikert to Cherry Run Road. Continue past this junction (do not turn onto Cherry Run Road) an additional 0.5 miles to the fish commission parking lot. (Note: the last 0.5 mile is a narrow dirt road.) The railroad bed is clearly visible to the right; to get to the field station, walk along the gated road at the west end of the lot.

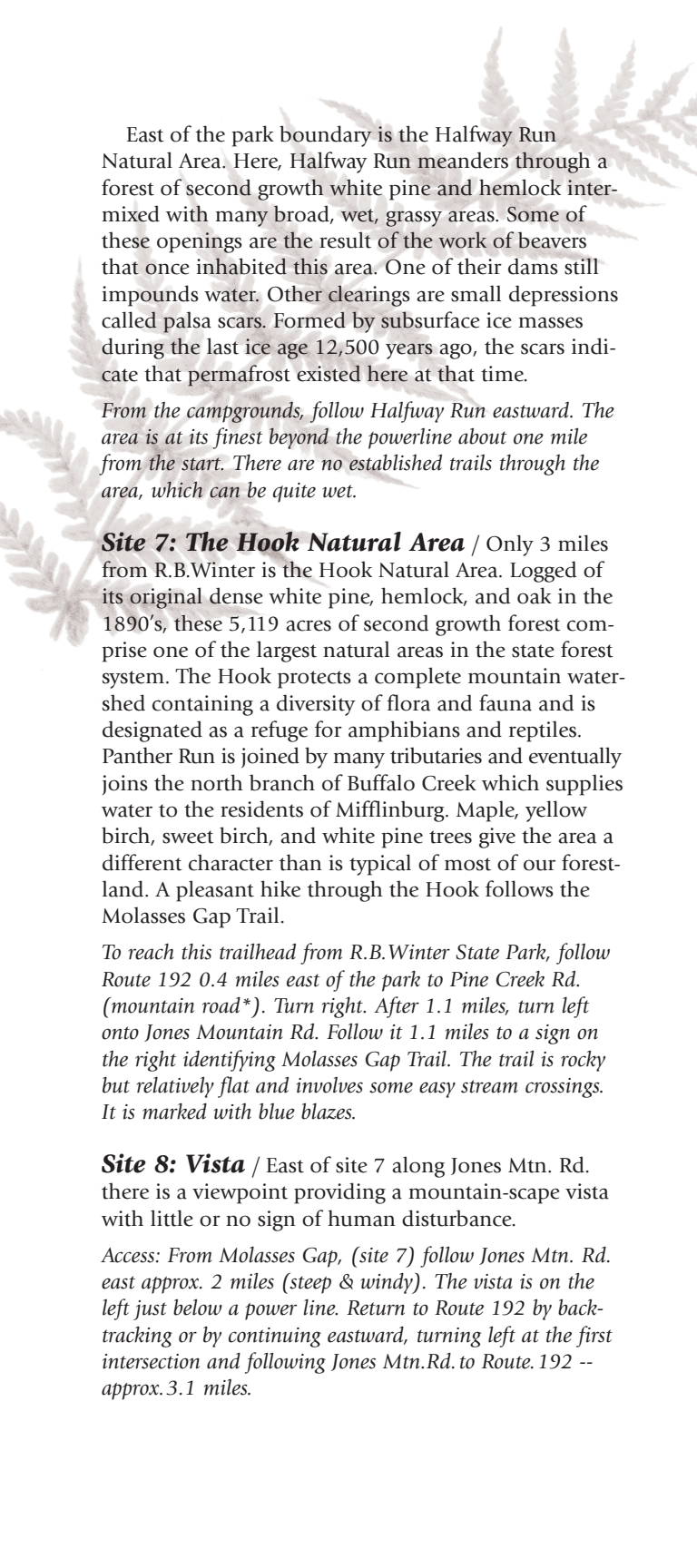
Site 4: Joyce Kilmer Natural Area/ Located on the north slope of Paddy Mountain, Joyce Kilmer is a picturesque and seldom visited site. Comprised of 77 acres, it protects an ancient stand of hemlock and white pine left uncut by loggers due to access problems. *In Laurelton turn left onto SR#235 for 1.6 miles. From SR# 235, follow Route 45 west for 3 miles. Turn left onto Bear Run Road (mountain road*). The trail to the natural area will be on the left and within 0.3 miles of Route 45. This trail is steep and poorly maintained. In .75 miles further west on Route 45 is Hairy Johns picnic area. Ascend the mountain into Centre County. The area is on the right. Follow a trail west of the picnic grounds to several vernal pools. (This site is not indicated on our map.)*

Site 5: Koons' Trail / Within the borough of Mifflinburg, this 28-acre conservation easement preserves a bit of nature in the heart of a growing community. A mix of open fields and riparian woodland bordering Buffalo Creek provides habitats for a variety of plant and animal species. A profusion of spring and early summer wildflowers thrives along the stream just east of the covered bridge. Temporary pools swarm with life including amphibian larva and even shrimp. Songbirds are abundant in the deciduous trees where they nest and probe for seeds and insects to feed their hungry broods. A trail (less than one mile round trip), constructed by Mifflinburg Middle School students and maintained by local volunteers, allows easy access for all to enjoy a seasonal parade of changes within the area. North of the covered bridge, on both sides of North 4th St., visit newly created wetland habitat. The area serves many wetland species of plants and animals and acts as a water filter and groundwater recharge area thus buffering the impact of heavy rains on water quality and levels in Buffalo Creek.

From Green Ridge Rd. turn right (south) onto 4th St. Proceed 0.6 miles passing through the covered bridge. Parking on left; information is available at the kiosk.

Site 6: Raymond B. Winter State Park / Halfway Run Natural Area At 1500 feet (457m), R.B. Winter State Park is more than 1000 feet (305m) higher than the West Branch Susquehanna at Lewisburg. Significantly cooler than the populated valleys, the park's picnic, camping, and swimming areas are a popular refuge for those seeking relief from summer heat. Winter snows linger here, extending the season for cross-country skiers. Within the park are numerous trails including access to the Mid-State Trail.

Be sure to visit the Halfway Run Environmental Education Center. The Conservancy provided major support for the construction and furnishing of this facility. Utilized by park visitors and local school groups, it has allowed park personnel to greatly expand their environmental programs.



East of the park boundary is the Halfway Run Natural Area. Here, Halfway Run meanders through a forest of second growth white pine and hemlock intermixed with many broad, wet, grassy areas. Some of these openings are the result of the work of beavers that once inhabited this area. One of their dams still impounds water. Other clearings are small depressions called palsa scars. Formed by subsurface ice masses during the last ice age 12,500 years ago, the scars indicate that permafrost existed here at that time.

From the campgrounds, follow Halfway Run eastward. The area is at its finest beyond the powerline about one mile from the start. There are no established trails through the area, which can be quite wet.

Site 7: The Hook Natural Area / Only 3 miles from R.B. Winter is the Hook Natural Area. Logged of its original dense white pine, hemlock, and oak in the 1890's, these 5,119 acres of second growth forest comprise one of the largest natural areas in the state forest system. The Hook protects a complete mountain watershed containing a diversity of flora and fauna and is designated as a refuge for amphibians and reptiles. Panther Run is joined by many tributaries and eventually joins the north branch of Buffalo Creek which supplies water to the residents of Mifflinburg. Maple, yellow birch, sweet birch, and white pine trees give the area a different character than is typical of most of our forestland. A pleasant hike through the Hook follows the Molasses Gap Trail.

To reach this trailhead from R.B. Winter State Park, follow Route 192 0.4 miles east of the park to Pine Creek Rd. (mountain road). Turn right. After 1.1 miles, turn left onto Jones Mountain Rd. Follow it 1.1 miles to a sign on the right identifying Molasses Gap Trail. The trail is rocky but relatively flat and involves some easy stream crossings. It is marked with blue blazes.*

Site 8: Vista / East of site 7 along Jones Mtn. Rd. there is a viewpoint providing a mountain-scape vista with little or no sign of human disturbance.

Access: From Molasses Gap, (site 7) follow Jones Mtn. Rd. east approx. 2 miles (steep & windy). The vista is on the left just below a power line. Return to Route 192 by backtracking or by continuing eastward, turning left at the first intersection and following Jones Mtn. Rd. to Route 192 -- approx. 3.1 miles.

Site 9: Dale's Ridge Trail / The ridge rises steeply, nearly 160 feet (49m) above Buffalo Creek in the east-central Buffalo Valley. Crossing the northern part of the ridge, the trail offers a variety of scenic views, geological features, wildflowers, and birds. Habitats include the creek floodplain with majestic sycamores, fields in various stages of ecological succession, and a mature hardwood forest.

Access to the trail is from the parking area along Strawbridge Road on the south side of Buffalo Creek. Specific information concerning the 2 mile loop trail is available at the trailhead.

**Mountain roads may be unsuitable for some vehicles and/or may be closed to traffic at certain times of the year.*

The Merrill W. Linn Land and Waterways Conservancy and our affiliate, the Buffalo Creek Watershed Alliance (BCWA), work with individuals and other organizations to protect important aspects of the natural environments in the Union County area. We strive to ensure that our natural resources of scenic, environmental, and ecological importance are preserved, managed, and monitored for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Through conservation easements, land gifts, and outright purchases, special areas can have permanent protection.



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2017 Revisions and publication of this brochure have been made possible in part by donations from Conservancy cofounder, Jeannette Lasansky, family and friends in memory of Pete Macky, former board member and avid supporter of the Conservancy, and from Bob Linn in memory of his mother, Henrietta.

Main Driving Loop

**Shaded insets below indicate numbered sites located off the main loop. Specific directions to those sites are italicized within the text associated with each of those numbered sites. To stay on the main loop, ignore those shaded insets.*

Directions	Road	Mileage
Start at	Stein Lane & Rte. 15, Lewisburg	1.3
Right	Pheasant Ridge Rd.	4.0
Left (at T)	SR#2003 (Dreisbach Church Rd.)	0.4
Right	SR#2004 (Furnace Rd.)	0.4
Left	SR#3016 (Ridge Rd.)	4.1
Straight (cross Rtes. 304 & 104)	T#323 (Beaver Rd.)	2.6
*To Site 1: Bear left onto T#332 Quarry Rd. at 1.9 mi.		
Left	T#376 (Brethren Church Rd. becomes White Springs Rd)	0.3
Right	SR#3004 (Red Ridge Rd., becomes Creek Rd., becomes Trails End Rd.)	10.4
*To Sites 2 and 3: Left onto SR#3002 for 2.0 mi.		
*To Site 4: Right onto SR#3002 for 3.5 mi. then left onto Rte. 235		
Right (at T)	SR#3002 (Weikert Rd.) becomes Laurel Rd.	6.0
Right onto	Rte. 45, Hartleton	0.3
Left	SR#3003 (Cold Run - becomes Grand Valley Rd.)	5.9
Left	SR#3005 (Pleasant Grove Rd)	0.3
Right (at T)	Green Ridge Rd. to Forest Hill Rd.	1.3
*To Site 5: in .7 mi. on Green Ridge, right onto Fourth St. for .6 mi		
*To Sites 6, 7 and 8: SR # 3007 Forest Hill Rd. for 3.1 mi. to Forest Hill. Turn left onto Rte. 192 for 9 mi.		
Right then left to cross Forest Hill Rd. to stay on Green Ridge		0.3
Left	T#380 (Creek Rd.)	0.3

Right	SR#3009 (Church Rd.)	2.9
	(crosses Rte. 192 at 2.4 mi. – Cowan)	
Becomes	T#406 (Glover Hill Rd.)	1.8
	turns left in 0.2 mi.	
Right	SR#1002	1.7
	(Col. John Kelly Rd.)	
Right	SR#1001	1.2
	(Johnson Mill Rd.)	
Left	T#377 (Wolfland Rd)	1.3
Left (at T)	SR#1003(Hoffa Mill Rd.)	2.1
Right (at T)	SR#1002	0.4
	(Col. John Kelly Rd .)	
Right	Strawbridge Rd.	1.6

*To Sites 9: Dale's Ridge Trail at 0.4 miles on Strawbridge

Left	T-379 (Campbell Mill Rd)	1.3
Right	SR 2007 (Airport Rd.)	0.2
Left	Rte. 192 to Rte. 15, Lewisburg	0.6

Sites

- ★ Starting point of driving loop.
- 1. Limestone Pavilion (Penns Creek)
- 2. White Mountain Natural Area (Chimney Rock)
- 3. Cherry Run Area (Midstate Trail)
- 4. Joyce Kilmer Natural Area
- 5. Koon's Trail
- 6. R.B. Winter State Park
- 7. The Hook Natural Area
- 8. Mountain Vista
- 9. Dale's Ridge Trail

