

Rural Routes I

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

The Merrill W. Linn Land and Waterways Conservancy

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 millions of 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 of that thick, folded rock sequence has created our present valleys and ridges. 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 yield 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-leafed mountain laurel provides a showy display in late spring equaled 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 Agriculture 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. 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 freshwater 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 creeks- White Deer Hole, White Deer, Buffalo, and Penns. Each provides natural scenic attractions 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 a mature stand of hemlocks 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 miles. Turn right onto SR#3012 and travel for 1.0 mile.

Site 2: 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 is a spectacular view 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.

To get to the Chimney Rock Trail, turn left opposite the store in Weikert. Travel 0.7 miles (crossing Penns Creek) to a picnic pavilion on the right. Parking is available at the side of the road. The trail, beginning in the back of the picnic pavilion, is marked with red blazes. Total walking distance is about 2 miles, and involves a short but steep climb.

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 at the turn of the century.

Due to its origins in the limestone environs of Penns Cave, the creek has an alkaline pH. Abiotic and biotic conditions in the creek support 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 mouths of Weikert Run and Cherry Run - two tributaries of Penns Creek.

From the PA fish commission parking lot, one has access to a railroad grade. Not open to motorized vehicles, 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.

Follow Route 45 west of Laurelton Center for 2.9 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 rather steep and poorly maintained.*

Site 5: Koon's Property

Within the borough of Mifflinburg, this 17.6 acre conservation easement preserves a bit of nature in the heart of a growing community. A mix of open fields and a 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.

From the main route turn right (south) onto 8th St. Proceed 0.6 mile to the bridge over Buffalo Creek at the south border of Harry Haney Memorial Park. From the bridge, walk eastward along the north side

of the creek to the tree row. There you will see our informational kiosk at the trail head. Pedestrian access is also possible at the Hassenplug Bridge on North 4th St. (little parking available here).

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. Dedicated in 1997, the center houses displays and resource materials about the natural history, flora and fauna of the area. By securing a grant from the Edna Sheary Trust, the Linn 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 expand greatly 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 pingo scars. Formed by subsurface ice masses during the last ice age 10,000 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. Comprised of 5,119 acres of second growth mixed oak forest, it is 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 hemlock 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: 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 works 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 out-right purchases, special areas can have permanent protection.

Membership in the conservancy is based on the calendar year and is \$25 for individuals and \$50 for a family or business. Other categories include Contributor (\$100), Sponsor (\$250), Steward (\$500), Patron (\$1,000), and Benefactor (\$5,000). The Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law. For further information or to join, write to:

The Merrill W. Linn Land and Waterways Conservancy
P.O. Box 501
Lewisburg, PA 17837

This project has been funded in part by Butter Krust Baking Company, Inc. (Revised 1998)

Main Driving Loop

Direction	Road	Mileage
Start at	Stein Lane & Rte. 15 go 1.3	
Right onto	Pheasant Ridge Rd. for 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
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*To Site 1: Bear left onto Quarry Rd. at 1.9 mi.		
Left	T#376 (Brethren Church Rd.)	0.3
Right	SR#3004	10.4
Right (at T)	SR#3002 (Weikert Rd.)	6.0
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*To Sites 2 and 3: Left onto SR#3002 for 2.0 mi.		
Right	Rte. 45	0.3
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*To Site 4: Left onto Rte. 45 for 2.9 mi.		
Left	SR#3003	6.6
Left (at T)	Eighth St.	0.2
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*To Site 5: Turn right at Eighth St. for 0.4 mi.		

Right (at T)	Green Ridge Rd.	0.7
Left	SR#3007 (Buffalo Rd.)	0.4
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To Sites 6 and 7: Follow Buffalo Rd. for 3.1 mi. to Forest Hill. Turn left onto Rte. 192 for 9 mi.		
Right (veer left at 0.3 mi. and cross Rte192 at 2.7 mi. - Cowan)	SR#3009	3.2
Straight onto (turn left at 0.2 mi.)	T#406 (Glover Rd.)	1.8
Left	SR#1002 (Col. John Kelly Rd.)	1.7
Right	SR#1001 (Johnson Mill Rd.)	1.2
Left	Wolfland Rd.	1.3
Left (at T)	SR#1003 (Hoffa Mill Rd.)	2.1
Right (at T)	SR#1002 (Col. John Kelly Rd.)	0.4
Right	Strawbridge Rd.	2.0 (Site 8)
Left	Rte 192	1.7

*Directions to the natural sites located off the main driving loop. See text for complete directions to these sites.

Note for bicyclists: Portions of Glover Rd. and Wolfland Rd. are unpaved gravel roads.

Sites

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 Property
6. R.B. Winter State Park
7. The Hook Natural Area
8. Dale's Ridge Trail

(Map)