

## The Great Allegheny Passage

## Rail-Trail Unifies Communities and Provides Economic Development

## The Challenge

The Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA) was a loose network of seven trail councils in two states that worked independently on their own specific trails. The challenge was to get these groups to work together to name the trail that stretches from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; develop a logo; mark the trail; and then publicize its many benefits. The councils needed to create and share a common vision for the trail that would encompass the region's rich history and culture, while providing 152 miles of spectacular hiking and biking experiences.

## The Solution

Using a grant from the Northeastern Area, the Allegheny Trail Alliance Marketing Committee was formed. Over 15 communities and 30 public and private partners came together to create and aggressively market what Travel & Leisure magazine calls one of the "World's Best Walks." The committee sought expert advice and held several community meetings to gain input from a variety of trail users and communities.

- The trail was named "The Great Allegheny Passage," and a unique logo was developed.
- The committee worked to have the trail designated a National Recreational Trail by the U.S. Department of the Interior.
- A celebration was held in August 2001 commemorating the opening of the first 100 continuous miles of the trail from McKeesport to Meyersdale, Pennsylvania.
- A newsletter and website were developed to promote the trail.
- A color trail map and guide were also created. The Great Allegheny Passage has been featured in both regional and national magazines, as well as on public television stations.

*The Great Allegheny Passage attracts 500,000 tourists annually, and brings economic and social benefits to an area that previously supported only heavy industry. The passage provides \$15 million in direct benefits annually to communities along the trail.*



An adventurous rider crosses the 100-foot-high Salisbury Viaduct near Meyersdale, Pennsylvania. Photo by Ned Williams

## Resulting Benefits

- Five new bed and breakfasts, a bike tour company, a private campground, a bike shuttle service, and a restored opera house-turned-restaurant have opened along the trail.
- The trail preserves and interprets the original route of the C&O Canal, Montour Railroad, Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad, Pennsylvania Railroad, Western Maryland Railroad, and the Salisbury Viaduct.
- Educators have developed a "Rails to Rocks" pilot program that uses a 7.5-mile section of the trail as a classroom to study the geology of the Casselman River gorge.

## Sharing Success

Annually, volunteers organize and conduct several successful festivals and bike rides on or near the trail:

- Meyersdale Maple Festival
- Yough N'Roll bike tour
- Rockwood River and Rails Festival
- M & M Century Ride (McKeesport to Meyersdale)
- Youghtober Fest and Fall Foliage Ride
- Fall Buckwheat and Ohiopyle Mountain Festivals
- Annual Allegheny Trail Alliance Conference.



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