

Spanning the Gap

History along McDade Trail II Hogback to Hornbecks



U.S. Dept. of the Interior
National Park Service

Additional Material for
Spanning the Gap
The newsletter of
Delaware Water Gap National
Recreation Area
Vol. 25 No. 3 Fall 2003

McDade Trail from the Hogback to Hornbecks Creek

History along McDade Trail I: Hialeah to Turn Farm was published in 2002. In 2012 it was expanded to reach to Owens Trailhead on Freeman Tract Road. This present feature on McDade Trail covers the area from mile 6 at Owens Trailhead to mile 21.4 at Schneider Farm Trailhead near Dingmans Campground. A third feature was written in 2003 and has been updated as *History along McDade Trail III: Dingmans Campground to Milford Beach*.

The section described here is half of McDade Trail. Overall there are some hilly sections in these miles, but also some very flat long sections. Around headquarters there are some steep climbs but also interesting sites in the history of old Bushkill. Along Rt. 209 the barns and silos of the dairying business can be seen in the distance while walking along the valley floor past Pocono Ridge.

There are lots of sunny fields to walk or bike around. Use sunscreen and bring a hat and some water.

For **everyone's safety**, please observe the **Rules of the Road** for McDade Trail, posted at trailheads, before you hike or bike.

- *Hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing only are permitted. **NO** motor vehicles are permitted.*
- *Pets are restricted, especially in summertime.*

For emergencies call
(800) 543-4295.

Up the Hogback, Out of the Water (*miles 6.0-6.5*)

From McDade mile 5.9 at Owens Trailhead on Freeman Tract Road, the trail switchbacks sharply up the side of the *Hogback*, or ridge. (Even the best bikers dismount and jog up the trail in a race.) Had the Tocks Island Dam been built, the resulting reservoir would have flooded River Road and all the low areas along the trail from Hialeah to this point. Headquarters, just ahead, was built to be a visitor



The 300-ft. boardwalk provides a dry-foot view of the swamp.

center for the park, overlooking the reservoir.

Atop the ridge the trail levels and crosses a small swamp on a raised boardwalk. This was the last section of McDade Trail to be completed. The raised walkway enables amphibians to migrate across River Road each spring to mate and breed in the water, and to return to their upland habitats afterward. Each Spring, River Road is closed on specific days to allow this migration to take place safely. Join us next Spring for the *Migration Sensation!*

At Park Headquarters information, restrooms and water are available weekdays (except federal holidays) from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. There are also observation decks around the right side and back of the building where park employees, looking up from their desks, have spotted bear, bald eagle, fox, merganser, deer, and bobcat in the swamp.



(Above) *Migration Sensation!* lets kids get a close but safe look at amphibians crossing the road. (Below) A newt heads to the swamp.



Changing Bushkill (*miles 7.0-10.0*)

North of headquarters the trail begins to roll up and down alongside small a township road called Community Drive.

At the red barn the land to the right is a *fen*, or marsh. The barn and house across the road date from the 1880s when this was a farm, but the property became a summer home for city dwellers by the 1950s. The fen feeds a stream which flows under the footbridge and across the yard of the next house, Schoonover Mountain House. With its white barns and a stable, the farmhouse dates from the 1850s, and was enlarged into a boarding house about 20 years later, then enlarged twice more to accommodate summer guests. The small enterprise had a pond and vegetable gardens. It belonged from earliest times to the Schoonover Family, one of the oldest names in the area.

The trail turns away from Community Drive and past a few clearings that are former home sites, then turns left to descend the unpaved *Hogback Road*. This



The Van Auken barn at Arnott Fen.



Barn at Schoonover Mountain House.

very old road once handled traffic between the ferry landing at the northeast tip of Freeman Tract Road (beyond the springhouse at mile 6) and what was once the heart of Bushkill PA. At Bushkill Visitor Center, a wayside (outdoor) exhibit shows the village in its heyday.

To continue on the trail you will need to carefully walk on the shoulder of Rt. 209 until you cross Bushkill Creek. A trail footbridge over the Creek will eventually be built.

Re-entering the trail on the north side of Bushkill Creek, you are crossing the property of one of the more elegant establishments of Bushkill's years as a resort. Peters House was part of a large tract that included farm fields, riverfront, a 9-hole golf course, and a grist mill with its pond. It operated from 1812 through 6 generations of inn-keepers, and at its height accommodated 150 guests. Between the trail and Rt. 209 is the 1874 Bushkill Dutch Reformed Church, now an outreach center. (The congregation has built a new church farther south on Rt. 209.)

Bushkill Flats stretch north from Bushkill Creek. These farmlands are both fertile and flood-prone. The river is just beyond the tree line to the west. In the distance to the west is Walpack Ridge in New Jersey, which, on the Pennsylvania side is the steep sharp ridge of the Hogback.

You will reach Bushkill Access as you cross a footbridge over Randalls Creek just before mile 10. Rosenkrans Ferry, the last ferry across the Middle Delaware, lasted until 1945. It was not destroyed by flood but by an airplane that flew too low and cut its cable. The area of Bushkill Access, though, went under repeatedly in the floods of 2004, 2005 and 2006, even up to the skylights.

Wayside (outdoor) exhibits explain some of the natural and cultural history of the area, which was also the site of an archeological excavation revealing significant Native American artifacts.



Hogback Road as it reaches its north end in Bushkill.



Bushkill Flats as seen from Hogback Road before the Hogback returned to forest. Note the Bushkill Dutch Reformed Church at right on today's Rt. 209.

(Below, far left) The Rosenkrans Ferry. (Below, left) Bushkill Access restrooms going under in a flood. (Below) A dig at the Kutay (Bushkill Access) site in 1976.



Egypt Mills (mile 12.4)

North of Bushkill Access, the trail follows a narrow ribbon of land between Rt. 209 and the river. Across 209 are shale pits. Though mining has stopped, the extraction of shale is a long-standing industry in Pennsylvania's "Slate Belt." Vegetation is slowly returning to these bared cliffs.

The trail crosses Toms Creek at Egypt Mills trailhead. Egypt Mills was the name of a milling village once located on the land at Toms Creek Picnic Area on the west side of Route 209, as well as the name of a hunt club that was built there later. The trail alongside the north and south banks of the creek and at the footbridge provides good views of Toms Creek, which is well supplied with water from dammed ponds on the ridge.

At Eshback Access there is a fine view of the river. Old Mine Road in New Jersey runs very close to the river bank at this point; sometimes a car can be heard or seen across the water.



Egypt Mills Hunt Club around 1910.



Egypt Mills Pond on the ridge above Toms Creek Picnic Area is along unpaved Big Egypt Road.

The Dairy Trade

At the west end of the length of the access road to Eshback, you can see the large barns of Eshback Farm, once a considerable dairying operation. The farm was once a regular stage stop on the route from Stroudsburg to Milford. A mile or so north of Eshback, the barns of *Wheat Plains* (or Broadhead-Heller) Farm are on the west side of Route 209; the



stately farmhouse in the trees, dating from the mid-1800s, has fragments of the original farmhouse built by Garrett Broadhead after the Revolutionary War. For years Hellers farm stand was a landmark on Route 209; today, local residents can grow their own crops at Community Gardens, located between the farm stand and McDade Trail. Broadhead-Heller Farm is also a significant Native American archeological site.

Dairying became a profitable industry in the valley in the age of tourism. Hotels and boarding houses boasted of raising their own farm produce and featuring fresh milk and butter, which was an attraction for the city dweller. IN a leter era of tourism, Pocono Environmental Education Center, located up Brisco Mt. Road, was once a Honeymoon Resort; it now offers nature programs for families and group, and is the trailhead for several varied trails on the ridge.

Broadhead Heller (Wheat Plains) Farmhouse.



Barn and silo at Eshback Farm on the west side of Rt. 209.

Creeks and Forests (*miles 15 to 18*)

Spackmans Creek at mile 17.2 on the trail is one of the deepest cuts you will see in the fields on the trail. Two miles later, Hornbecks and Merchants Creeks come close together along the trail, though as they cross under Rt. 209 they are 1/2 mile apart.

Hornbecks Creek is well known for its *Indian Ladders* Trail, a fine walk hike back and forth over Hornbecks Creek that reaches a considerable waterfall 1.5 miles back toward the ridge. To sample this shady trail, at mile 19 take the weedy service road out to a large pull-off on the east side of Rt. 209, (Do a tick check!), walk about 100 ft. south and then carefully cross Rt. 209 to the dirt road going west into the woods. You will come to Indian Ladders Trailhead.



Waterfall on Hornbecks Creek.

Schneider Farm Trailhead (mile 21.4)

From about mile 19.5 at Merchant's Creek, a mile-long field stretches northward to the Schneider farmland. Actually there is *another* field just a long on the *other* side of the break of trees running along the west side of this field.

The distance between the river and Rt. 209 is 1/2 mile here. Historically Rt. 209 was laid out to run along the west edge of the valley floor, so as not to bisect farmland. Over the years, as agriculture seemed less important and getting places quickly in a car seemed more important, the road has been straightened out and shifted eastward onto flat land. (The crescent bypass to Toms Creek, which connects to roads up the ridge, is one place where the original roadbed of 209 still functions.)

As you get to the north end of the field and turn left (west) you can just see (and perhaps hear) Dingmans Campground to the north. At mile 20.9, McDade Trail north bears right towards Dingmans Campground, and the spur trail bears left to climb 1/2 mile up to the Schneider Farm Trailhead on Rt. 209.

This guide to McDade Trail continues with *History Along McDade Trail III: Dingmans Campground to Milford Beach*.



The trail behind Snyder Farmhouse.



(Above) Approaching mile 22.3 south of Dingmans Campground. (Far left) cultivation and (Left) wetlands in the mile-long field south of Schneider Farm Trailhead.