

# Spanning the Gap

## History along McDade Trail III Dingmans Campground to Milford Beach Revised September 2012



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**Spanning the Gap**  
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*Most of this section of McDade Trail was first described in 2003 as McDade Trail II, a hike southward from mile 0 at Milford Beach to mile 2.7 at Pittman Orchard.*

*McDade Trail has now been completed and its mileposts run from south to north. This revision covers the northern 10 miles of McDade Trail from McDade mile 20.9 at Schneider Farm Trailhead just below Dingmans Campground to Milford Beach at McDade mile 31. Stops are now ordered from south to north.*

*As there is now a feature entitled McDade Trail II which covers McDade miles 5.9 to 20.4, this revision is re-titled McDade Trail III.*

Fields, forest, and cliffs provide varied scenery on this section of McDade Recreational Trail. This section contains some steep climbs and descents on its hikers-only section and a few short hills just south of the Milford-Montague bridge. The trail runs across some open farmland; water and a hat or sunscreen are a must in summer!

**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.*

There are restrictions on hiking, biking, and crosscountry skiing between White Pines and Pittman Orchard Trailheads. Observe regulations posted on bulletin boards at trailheads

For emergencies call  
**(800) 543-4295.**

*At mile 20.9, bear right up a slight hill to continue on McDade Trail north*

## Dingmans Campground (mile 22)

Dingmans Campground is run by a concessionaire of the National Park Service; the land belongs to the park. The campground extends west to the riverbank just downstream of Dingmans Access and Dingmans Ferry Bridge.



When the river level is low,

Heading north from the campground the trail passes behind a park maintenance compound and then loops toward the river along a narrow ridge. The sound of traffic on Dingmans Ferry Bridge will grow than fade as the trail crosses Dingmans Creek and reaches Route 739.

Dingmans Ferry Bridge can be seen in the distance from the shoals at Dingmans Campground.

### **Dingmans Ferry and Bridge (mile 22.8)**

The village of Dingmans Ferry dates to the arrival in 1735 of Andrew Dingman (1711-1801), a descendant of Dutch settlers in New York. Dingman established a ferry across to New Jersey which ran for 100 years before the first bridge was built here.

The village, meanwhile, prospered under the leadership of Dingmans and his descendants. A grandson Daniel served in the state legislature and as a judge; his large stone home is still visible on the left as you cross the bridge.

No less than three bridges spanned the river in the 1800s, each in service for only about 10 years before a storm or poor construction took its toll, and a ferry had to be pressed back into service. The present bridge dates from 1900 and is built of spans from a railroad bridge on the Susqueanna placed on newly-built piers. The floorboards are held in place with anchor nails and collar plates, causing the characteristic rumble you can hear from McDade Trail.

Like other valley villages, Dingmans Ferry developed into a vacation area in the 1800s. Even when the tourist trade dropped off, the area was used for film locations, and champion tennis players lived here or were pro at the many clubs.

The village stretched along Main Street -- now Route 209 -- from south of Dingmans Creek north past the cemetery. Today, with removal of houses for the Tocks Island Dam project, the commercial life of Dingmans Ferry is uphill along Routes 739 and 2001.



An old postcard of Main Street, Dingmans Ferry PA.



Entitled "Last Trip" this view shows the newly-obsolete ferry in front of the newly-built bridge that still stands today.



Dingmans Creek downstream from the McDade Trail footbridge passes northward under the approach road to the Dingmans Ferry Bridge.

## Ridge, River, Creek (miles 24.7-28.0)

The trail is presently closed from mile 24.5 at White Pines Trailhead to mile 28.5 at Pittman Orchard due to damage from Hurricane Irene in September of 2011. Once repairs are made, this section of trail will continue to be closed to biking and cross-country skiing, and will only be open to hiking from September through February. This is to protect the natural resources of this area.

At Conashaugh Trailhead (mile 26.2), in fact, the trail becomes a narrow footpath. The path runs along a ridge beside the river with steep descents to river level and climbs back up the ridge. The trail broadens again at a bridge at mile 27.5, just before reaching the south bank of Raymondskill Creek, where the hurricane completely destroyed the trail footbridge. Hikers can reach the north bank of Raymondskill Creek by walking south .3 mile from Pittman Orchard; the return trip north to Pittman will provide some of the finest views of Raymondskill Cliff from the valley.

Before Hurricane Irene, there was Hurricane Ivan in 2004, which did considerable damage to a Native American archeological site near the mouth of the Raymondskill. A state historical marker along Rt. 209 commemorates the Wyoming-Minisink Path to the Susquehanna River. Raymondskill was also the scene of a

This stretch of the trail is not without more recent cultural resources either. Along Adams Creek, just south of White Pines Trailhead, is an early hydroelectric plant; the water wheel and its housing still remain. The Marie Zimmermann House once overlooked the river between White Pines and Conashaugh Trailheads. The vista is now blocked by trees, but the home is being beautifully restored and put to use as a center for the arts. Zimmermann was an internationally known crafts artist in metalworking. Along Raymondskill Road (McDade mile 18) is one of the nation's earliest homes with solar energy, and at the foot of Raymondskill Road, Hotel Schanno and



The McDade footbridge went under as Hurricane Irene swelled the Raymondskill.



Sproul-Aspinall waterwheel on Adams Creek powered a hunting and fishing retreat of Pennsylvania Governor William Sproul in the 1920s. NPS photo by Kelly Althouse

other "Indian Point" resorts once served vacationers on the outskirts of stylish Milford.

*(Below, left)* Nadler Solar (Ramirez) House was a farmhouse remodeled in 1944 to use solar heat.

*(Below, right)* Little remains of the Schanno property except a bridge over the Raymondskill west of Route 209.

*(Right)* Marie Zimmermann House at its 100th anniversary in 2012.



### Raymondskill Cliff (mile 28.3)

Though the cliff is visible for a long stretch of McDade Trail, one of the best places on the valley floor to look up at Raymondskill Cliff is between Raymondskill Creek (mile 28) and Pittman Orchard. The Cliff is part of the eastern fringe of the Pocono Plateau, an eroded ridge slit from west to east by streams like Raymondskill Creek. The Cliff runs 3 miles southwest from Milford, plunging from its 900-foot edge to the floodplain and river 500 feet below.

Close to New York City film studios, and seeming as they did to Easterners to be very rugged landscape, the cliffs were once the locale for "western" films, such as those made by Tom Mix, flamboyant radio and silent film star of the 1920s and 1930s.

Atop the cliffs was a large inholding within the recreation area, owned by the Buchanan family since 1803. Cliff Park Inn, located at the northern end of the property, began as an 1820 farmhouse and has been owned and operated by the Buchanans since 1900. A 9-hole golf course opened to the public in 1913, and has been continually expanded. In 2002 Harry Buchanan sold Cliff Park for \$5,000,000 to the



Mary Pickford(?) and Walter Miller on location at Cliff Park in D.W. Griffiths' *The Informer*, a Civil War silent released in 1912. Below them is Model Farm; the Delaware River at Minisink Island gleams in the distance. (Courtesy: Pike County Historical Society Milford PA)

Conservation Fund, and this year the recreation area purchased it from the Conservation Fund. The Inn and golf course will continue to operate.

### **Pittman Orchard and Model Farm (mile 28.6)**



At the foot of the cliffs once lay Model Farm, a tract purchased in 1850 by Ebenezer Warner. Apparently an

enterprising soul, Warner also commuted by scow to farmland on Minisink Island, served as a federal marshal seeking draft evaders in the Civil War, and scavenged lumber from timber rafts that foundered in the river at the Minisink rifts. He was married to Emily Buchanan, whose father established the Cliff Park property.

The name Model Farm may derive from the success of Warner's operation. Another explanation is that in 1915, when Oregon apples were fetching a good price, the Department of Agriculture established a "Model Orchard" program in every Pennsylvania county to demonstrate orchard care, with weekly visits by experts. The orchard at the end of this section of trail, known as the Pittman Orchard, dates from 1939, but may have been associated with the Model Orchard program and Warner's Farm.

(Above) Postcard of Model Farm, Minisink Island, and the river valley, taken from where the Pickford and Miller (See above) stood. (Courtesy of Pike County Historical Society, Milford PA.)



(Above) Postcard view looking north from the cliffs. Minisink Island is at far right; Model Farm at the left. (Courtesy of Pike County Historical Society, Milford PA.)



(Above) "Farming the Flood plain", a view from park archives looking north from the area of Model Farm (NPS photo)tr>

### **Farming the Floodplain (mile 29.0)**



All that survived a 1950s fire at the Snyder Farm was a concrete silo, for years a landmark to hikers both on the Raymondskill Cliff above

(Left) Snyder Farm Silo in 2003 from Flying Hawks Airfield.

and on the valley floor. Early silos were made of wood, and after World War I taller silos of glazed-tile blocks appeared. After 1945, still larger silos like this one were built of concrete staves. This was a large dairy operation with numerous outbuildings. The silo was recently removed.

These fields can still be farmed under the park's *agricultural lease* program. Hedgerows provide shelter, and corn cobs left behind provide food for park wildlife.



The only housing opportunity today at Snyder Farm. (The Snyder silo is behind the birdhouse.)

(Below, left) View of the Cliff from Flying Hawks airfield.  
(Below, right) The valley floor at the base of the Cliff.  
(Right) A section of Raymondskill Cliff from McDade Trail.



### Minisink National Landmark (miles 29 to 30)



(Left) Minisink Island in 1922, looking south and west from Milford Cliffs, photographed by a participant of Gifford Pinchot's Yale summer school sessions. The island is entirely under cultivation. The curving line of trees along the far side of the island runs along a course of water called the Bennekill, which separates the larger Minisink Island in the foreground from Everett's Island in the background and to the east. Today the island is almost completely reclaimed by forest and undergrowth.

The lonely dirt crossroad at the site where Snyder silo stood is perhaps the best place to consider not only Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*, but the terrain directly to the east. Low-lying Minisink Island, which stretches nearly two miles down the Delaware River, lies beyond the line of trees on the Pennsylvania shore. The island was once the centerpiece of a large Native American settlement extending onto both riverbanks, where the Delaware River, the Minsi Path to the New Jersey shore, and the Minisink Trail southward along the river to the area of Philadelphia, all converged. The federal government set aside 1,320 acres here in 1993 as *Minisink National Landmark* to protect this archeological resource.



A dig in the Minisink District reveals post holes (marked by stakes) of a native long-house.

### **Across to Montague (mile 30.5)**

The 1950s concrete span now linking PA Rt. 209 and NJ Rt. 206 is the fifth bridge over the Delaware at about this point, the first having replaced a ferry in 1826. (An old bridge pier still stands on the New Jersey side across from Milford Beach.)

The village of Montague NJ, terminus of 3 turnpikes, once lined Old Bridge and Old Mine Roads. Today, only fragments of the village remain and the once-open vista from the village across fields and down to the river has filled in with trees.



Milford-Montague Bridge today.

### **Milford Beach and Bob's Beach (mile 31)**

Until the end of World War II, this beach area was farmland renewed by regular river floods. A Methodist church built here in 1835 had to be abandoned because of the constant overflows. In 1945, Robert Blood, whose family had owned and farmed the land here for years, developed a facility known as Bob's Beach. This popular site boasted picnic pavilions, a snack bar and patio, a diving float, boats for hire, and a beach house (which may have used the old church foundation.)

Since those days, the town of Milford has spread and the farmland has retreated southward. The National



Park Service developed modern beach facilities and boat ramps here by the late 1980s, and the only structure Bob would remember is the large house at the parking lot, built around 1910. But he is not totally forgotten: long-time residents of Milford occasionally still refer to this spot as "Bob's Beach."

*(Right, top) Postcard of Bob's Beach. (Courtesy of Pike County Historical Society, Milford PA.)*

*(Middle) Milford Beach ranger station in 1973.*

*(Bottom) Milford Beach parking lot in 1973.*

