



Guide to the Gap

Childs Park - Renewing A Woodland Paradise



Autumn colors line the passage of Dingmans Creek over Factory Falls in Childs Park.

For more than 100 years, the public has enjoyed the “woodland paradise” along Dingmans Creek known as George W. Childs Park. Purchased and designed by wealthy newspaper publisher and philanthropist, George W. Childs, the 155-acre site is a popular destination within Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and attracts tens of thousands of visitors annually. People are captivated by the shaded hemlock ravine, the cold-water creek with its three waterfalls, the hiking trail and bridges, and the stone ruins and rustic wood structures.

However, after a century of steady public use, Childs Park is showing its age. Wear-and-tear and storms have taken a toll on the site’s natural and cultural features.

“... living water, trees and rocks as nature intended ...”

Weakened and dying hemlock trees, infested by the invasive insect *Woolly Adelgid*, are further threatened by deer browsing and by people trampling on their shallow roots. Trails are eroded. The

woolen mill, signs, bridges, boardwalks and shelters have deteriorated. Parking and picnicking areas have become ill-defined and dispersed, and the restrooms are outdated.

Now, following several years of planning and design, Childs Park is getting a much-needed “makeover.” Major restoration is underway to preserve the site’s natural and historic features in a manner befitting George Childs’ original vision of a rural retreat for the public.

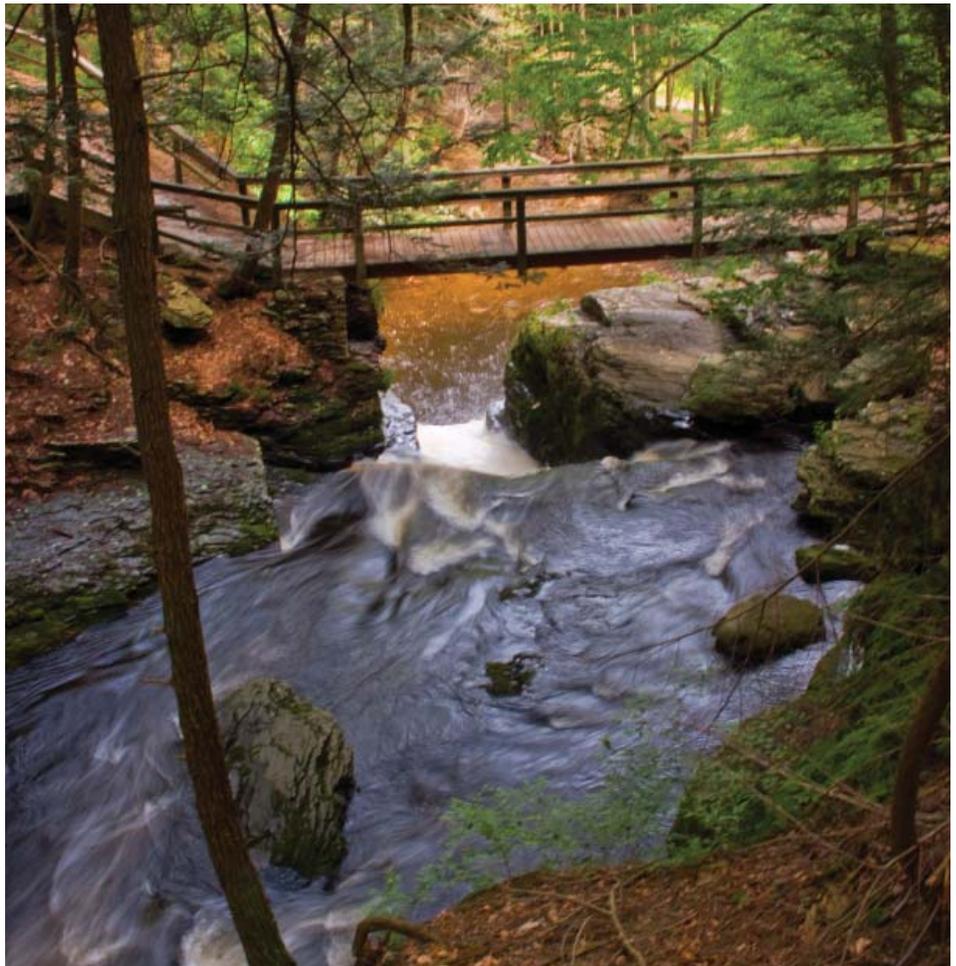
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Childs Park

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Pursuing his idea of a public park, in 1892 George Childs purchased a 53-acre parcel of land along Dingmans Creek that once belonged to the Brooks family. In the spirit of the times, the Brooks woolen mill, by then a deserted two-storey structure, was perceived as a “picturesque ruin” that added charm to the waterfalls and to the ravine’s appeal. Childs and his friend, George Donaldson, improved access to the park and designed trails to highlight the natural features of the landscape. They laid out footpaths, benches, bridges spanning the creek, and the “most complete arrangements ... for exhibiting the beauties of Factory Falls, Fulmer Falls and Deer Leap Falls.” Their work reflected the informal and naturalistic landscape style of 19th century urban parks designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, Sr.

Following Childs’ death in 1894, his wife Emma kept the park open to the public, eventually donating it to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1912 under the condition that the park remain open to the general public as a place with “living water, trees and rocks as nature intended.” The state improved roads for motor vehicles and added paths, bridges, picnic tables, toilets, and a camping area (closed in 1936). Between 1933 and 1936, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) put up new buildings in keeping with the park’s rustic character – picnic pavilions,



Evergreen hemlocks overhang the footbridge at Deer Leap Falls in Childs Park.

a log truss bridge over Fulmer Falls, a ranger’s cabin, and a new park entrance.

In 1955, the Commonwealth acquired another 102 acres of undeveloped land surrounding Childs Park, increasing the park’s size to 155 acres. In 1983, the Commonwealth transferred ownership to Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. In the 1990s, planning for a comprehensive rehabilitation of Childs Park began.

The project started off in October of 2010 with treatments for Hemlock Woolly Adelgid to keep the remaining hemlocks healthy. Childs Park then closed to the public in early January 2011. Through the winter months, dead and dying trees that posed a threat to facilities and public safety were taken down. Most of the timber will be re-used on site for boardwalks and overlooks or to control

erosion and replenish the soil for new growth. In spring of 2011, work began to repair trails and bridges in the style of the original trail system, to relocate the picnic area closer to parking and make it accessible to more visitors, and to preserve the woolen mill ruins and the CCC structures. Fencing will help reduce erosion and allow the regeneration of hemlock and other understory plants and also protect the water quality of Dingmans Creek for trout and other stream dwellers. Outdoor exhibits are planned detailing the site’s long history and the legacy of George Childs and his vision of creating trails for the public.

To protect the public and ensure that work progresses on schedule, Childs Park remains closed until the project is completed. The re-opening of this restored woodland paradise is scheduled for next year.

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