

Standing Stone Trail offers scenery

By CANDY E. PRICE
Daily News Staff Writer

The Standing Stone Trail, running through Huntingdon, Mifflin and Fulton counties, is one of the area's most beautiful scenic hiking paths and a true diamond in the rough.

"The Standing Stone Trail is a 77-mile trail extending from Greenwood Furnace State Park in the north to Cowan's Gap State Park in the south," said Jim Garthe, president and representative of the Standing Stone Trail Club.

"The trail is part of the Great Eastern Trail," said Garthe, "which runs more or less parallel to the Appalachian Trail. The Great Eastern Trail is 1,800 miles long and allows people to hike from Alabama along the Florida state line to New York."

"The Standing Stone Trail, formerly known as the Link Trail, was developed as a project of Keystone Trails Association in the 1980s," said Garthe. "The primary Link Trail proponents were Bob Olsen and Dave Raphael, both of State College, with help from lots of

other people including, Jean Aron and Tom Thwaites of State College and Mike Sausser of Schuylkill Haven, who carried the main burden for the Link Trail for many years."

"Earlier this year, the first two people to complete the Great Eastern Trail, Joanna

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Photo by CANDY E. PRICE

Standing Stone Trail Club members Betty and Joe Clark, Mount Union, talk about the Standing Stone Trail at a trail marker near Motel 22, just off Route 22 north of Mount Union. The marker shows an orange blaze mark particular to Standing Stone Trail, this signifies the trail as a link in the Great Eastern Trail.

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Swanson and Bart Houck, came through the area," said Garthe. "They loved our trail because it was well blazed (orange) and easy to follow. They especially loved Thousand Steps and the intriguing boulders and unique flowers in the Rocky Ridge Natural Area."

"In the Rocky Ridge Natural Area north of Huntingdon toward McAlevys Fort, there are many exotic plants, namely the showy orchid, and both pink and yellow lady slippers," said Garthe. "For true nature lovers, there are toads, frogs and salamanders of many types. In remote areas in particular, rattlesnakes and bear make for an interesting hike."

"Standing Stone Trail Club has a membership of about 85, most from Huntingdon County, but with many hailing from around the state as well," said Garthe. "Our club builds rock steps and tread ways, steam crossings, and 27 section maintainers keep their three- to five-mile section clear of deadfalls and brush."

"Additionally, we have a group of about 15 retirees, informally called the Old Timers, who does maintenance on the trail," said Garthe. "Part of that team effort includes maintaining Thousand Steps. Much of the work often involves lifting and maneuvering large, heavy boulders with crowbars and we often have a special rock crew come in from Harrisburg to lead that."

Garthe also addressed the perils of hiking along the trail.

"As with any outdoor activity, hiking comes with some hazards, especially for the unpre-

pared. This trail is no different from any other hiking trail," said Garthe. "Hikers should be in good physical form, carry water and snacks with them and carry a whistle, too. Hiking in a group is also safer. On Thousand Steps, all too many hikers wear sandals or flip-flops, leading to toe stubbing and poor traction, sometimes resulting in falls. Sturdy shoes or boots are important to safe hiking."

For avid hikers, the trail offers year-round access.

"The trail is open year round. It is a footpath only for most of its length, but in some designated areas in the State Game Lands in particular it follows roadways open to hunters, mountain bikers and cross country skiers. No horses are allowed along its entire length except for a few short stretches of paved public roadways," said Garthe.

Residents can support the Standing Stone Trail Club by becoming a member.

"Membership is very inexpensive," said Garthe. "Also, for older residents, we recommend encouraging children or grandchildren to get outdoors and get hiking."

"Maps that detail the length of the trail are available online at www.hike-sst.org/sst-maps.htm," said Garthe.

Standing Stone Trail Club will be dedicating a tributary trail near Greenwood Furnace State Park in August.

For information on helping to build or maintain this Pennsylvania footpath, contact Garthe by calling 667-2409 or via e-mail jwg10@psu.edu.

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