

Thousand Steps

Welcome to the Thousand Steps. Here, amidst the rugged grandeur of Jack's Narrows, are important remnants of regional industrial and transportation history, tangible reminders of a work ethic which helped transform a nation and a story of a community partnership that coalesced to preserve the tract for future generations.



The Juniata River carved a strategic east-west passage through a chain of mountains known to geologists as the Ridge and Valley Province. Native American paths, stagecoach roads, an early 19th Century turnpike, the Pennsylvania Canal, the Pennsylvania Railroad and the William Penn Highway have all utilized Jack's Narrows below.

Abundant reserves of ganister, a Tuscarora sandstone used in the production of silica bricks, led to the construction of three refractories and Mount Union's position as the "Silica Brick Capital of the World." The heat resistant refractory products were crucial to the steel, iron, glass, railroad and other industries. Harbison-Walker utilized quarries on both sides of the Narrows between 1900 and 1952. Miles of dinkey railroad grade and six inclined planes were used to move the ganister to the refractory. At their peak, Mount Union's refractories employed 2,000 people and produced an estimated 500,000 silica bricks per day.

The Thousand Steps were constructed about 1936 by Harbison-Walker employees. A challenging hike today, the steps were a commute to a long and difficult workday in Ledge Quarry. It is to the memory of these workers and their brethren in Mount Union's refractories, that the members of the Save Our Steps Committee pay special tribute.

The Committee was formed in 1996, when loss of public access to the property was imminent. Thanks to partnership that included the Central Pennsylvania among others, public and financial support was rallied and the Thousand Steps and surrounded 669 acres were preserved for future enjoyment. The project would not have been possible without the financial support of those listed on the opposite side of this sign.

Today, the tract is managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. It includes threatened species, unusual fossils, a diversity of plant and wildlife and several miles of the Mid-State-Tuscarora Link Hiking Trail. Please respect the fragility of the natural and cultural features and enjoy your visit.

**A COMMUNITY
CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

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