



# Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy

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## Walking in America

By Todd Chambers

Did you know that the average resident of Australia and Switzerland walks over 9600 steps a day, the average Japanese resident walks 7100 steps a day, while Americans walk, on average, only 5100 steps per day? These are just a few of the facts examined in a series of articles by Tom Vanderbilt for Slate.com. One of the questions asked in these articles is, 'Why do we Americans walk less than any other industrialized nation in the world?'

The answer to that question is simply: Because walking has been engineered and planned out of our existence. Since the end of WWII, our nation has pursued the creation of the auto-centric society that we now have. However, we have paid a steep price in the unforeseen consequences. Before the 1940's our roads were designed with sidewalks that were separated from the roadway by trees, providing a safety and comfort zone for the sidewalk users and a pollution absorbing greenway for our communities. Since then, as we have extended our roadways into the countryside, the sidewalks have disappeared because we have designed and planned away any place for these sidewalks to take us. Our sprawling growth has made it necessary to use our cars to drive anywhere we need to go, even, ironically, to the places where we want to walk!

There is an increased interest in walking these days as many now realize the benefits that walking and exercise have to offer. Studies have shown that it reduces blood pressure, the

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incidence of obesity, depression, and Alzheimer's, while increasing academic performance, self-esteem and general overall health. And it allows us to go from point A to point B with no added equipment, energy, or pollution.

Our residential areas have been engineered and planned to be separated from the commercial areas where we shop and work, where our only option is to drive the "sidewalk-less" roads between. While there is no changing the development patterns of the last 70 years, it is possible to begin to make our suburbs into more walkable, bikeable and therefore more sustainable communities.

This is where the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy gets involved. We are dedicated to the development, protection, and promotion of hiking, biking, and walking trails throughout our region. We want to get more people interested in physical activities and to experience the beauty of our region and the natural world. One of the ways that the Conservancy can

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## Pittsburgh Foundation Grant Makes UltraChallenge Safer

By Kathleen Ganster

Thanks to the Trail Volunteer Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation, the Conservancy and the Redbank Valley Trails Association were able to make the Baker Trail UltraChallenge much safer and a lot more scenic.

The Foundation awarded the Conservancy a \$17,928 grant which enabled the Association to install decking and side rails on several old railroad trestle bridges between Summerville and Brookville along the Redbank Valley Trail corridor.

This allowed the Conservancy to use that section of the trail as the final part of its Baker Trail UltraChallenge course last year.

Participants no longer had to run along roads with rolling hills, narrow shoulders, and limited visibility, including a busy state highway, making for a much safer -- and attractive -- event.

The Redbank Valley Trail is a new rail-trail, with its western terminus at the Allegheny River just below East Brady. From there, the trail continues 42 miles east and parallels the Red Bank creek for its entire length, traversing the western Pennsylvania countryside through small towns such as Kellersburg, New Bethlehem, and finally Brookville at its eastern terminus. For more information, visit [redbankvalleytrails.org](http://redbankvalleytrails.org).

## North Park Improvements and the Rachel Carson Trail

By John Stephen

The Allegheny County Parks Foundation and the County Parks Department will be releasing an updated North Park Lake Master Plan this spring. The Plan will make recommendations and prioritize critical park needs such as improvements to Ingomar Road, the Boathouse and the Lake Trail. Trail advocates attending the public sessions were excited to see the draft Plan featured the Rachel Carson Trail and other trails.

With all of the increasingly popular connections between the Rachel Carson Trail and other park trails, the Conservancy asked that the Plan include some important hiking improvements:

1. Upgrade the trail crossing over the stream inlet to the Irwin Run lagoon from the restored wetland with a small bridge.
2. The trail on the hillside of Irwin Run lagoon is prone to erosion and collects standing water after rain. Some additional trail design would be appropriate to improve water drainage from the hillside.
3. Create a visible pedestrian crossing of Babcock Boulevard near Pearce Mill Road, such as a crosswalk to alert vehicles about the active trail crossing and further slow cars descending Babcock Boulevard hill.

In addition there is an opportunity to transform the modest Beaver shelter into a primary trailhead for long distance trails throughout North Park and beyond. The Master Planners should consider the

## Harmony Work Day a Success

By Marian Crossman

Fourteen adults and 10 youngsters took part in this satisfying group project on November 19. The trail erosion problem, caused by a water diversion upstream, is corrected. Now it all flows properly again into pipes placed when the contractor surfaced the trail last summer.

RCTC president Todd Chamber's neighbors brought their pick-up truck to transport stone and gravel from the supply at the Route 910 end. Everyone had a hand in loading, unloading, ditching or placing stone. It was great to meet the neighbors who use the trail most, and to see they want to participate in its maintenance. This work site was in Pine Township, a half-mile west of Route 19 on the northern half of the one-mile Harmony route.

Further trail drainage work is still needed southward in the Town of McCandless where year-round springs and occasional storm water overflow come from the western hillside. The Conservancy is awaiting contractor bids for the work that will include the final trail surface finishing.

following improvements to recognize that use:

1. A new or improved shelter, perhaps one that provides more all weather use; Include water and electricity, bathrooms. None of those are currently in the area.
2. A kiosk that highlights and maps the trails accessible from this point, including the Rachel Carson Trail, the Pfundstein Trail, the Irwin Run Trail, and all the well-blazed PTAG trails.
3. Convert the parking lot so it is more complementary with a low-impact philosophy and is more organized for parking on busy days.

Finally with the Allegheny Land Trust's recent acquisition of property up Irwin Run, the Beaver shelter could take on additional duties as the 'gateway' to that secluded section of the County, and an information station for the Irwin Run wetland area. The Master Plan should improve the links from the Lake to this tributary with a trail blazed to allow for an attractive connection to Irwin Road, linking the trailhead with the woodland hiking opportunities up Irwin Run.

The difficult work will begin once the Final Master Plan is released. But it will be encouraging to approach that work with a long term plan that recognizes hiking trails and the users who enjoy them.

Mark Eyerman, who helps maintain the Rachel Carson Trail, was especially pleased to see kids and their moms as part of the trail repair team. Some also took time to explore the stream crossing over to the Brooktree hillside, where the trail leads up to their corporate area sidewalks.

The Annual Winter Hike that Mark leads (on the first Sunday in February) uses this section. It is just 0.6 mile from the stream valley up and then across Route 19 to reach the western edge of North Park. The Winter Hike continues from there to the Beaver shelter, north of the dam on Babcock Blvd., for a total of almost 6 miles.

The connection with North Park gives the Harmony Trail even more value, especially for neighbors who live west of Route 19. We are pleased to report that all six of the Limauro family, plus friends, gave an extra donation of time and energy this past month cleaning up near the trailhead area in the valley of Route 910. These were major efforts and can be credited for community service by high school youngsters. Pine Township provided the Harmony Trail sign.

## The Karma Initiative

By Steve Mentzer

In most volunteer organizations, a small group of individuals contribute most of the effort, relative to the number of people who benefit. The Conservancy is no exception, and over the years we've pondered ways of encouraging more folks to get involved. We've made pleas but received little response.

In 2009 we tried an incentive approach, the Volunteers Start First program. It was a way to incent anyone, including fast hikers, to earn the right to start first on the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge by volunteering at least four hours. The program has been fairly successful, resulting in several dozen volunteers showing up for trail work projects since its inception.

Clearly, incentives work. But the primary constraint we faced when considering other incentive programs was managing the recordkeeping required to fairly and accurately track the activity. The VSF program was small enough it could be managed by hand with existing resources. Anything more popular, however, would need more.

We've needed a new system for registering for the Challenge in order to more equitably allocate the limited spots available. No matter what we considered, technology would need to be applied for it to be manageable. A straightforward lottery system would be the simplest, but a strictly random selection process could exclude people who've contributed significantly to the organization. To balance our goals with the interests of new and veteran participants, along with volunteers and members, we introduced the Karma Initiative.

The term *karma* means action or deed, the cumulative effect of which determines a person's destiny. On March 1, we opened a new web site which allows everyone to view and manage their

contribution to the Conservancy in four distinct areas: volunteer hours, event participation, donations, and membership. Karma is earned in each area, the sum total of which influences the person's position when allocating spots for events like the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge. Here's how karma is earned:

**Volunteer Hours** Beginning in 2012, every hour volunteered at a Conservancy event earns 150 karma. Volunteering for six hours on a trail work project earns 900 karma.

**Event Participation** Every paid Conservancy event participated in earns 250 karma. Participating in the Homestead Challenge twice and the UltraChallenge Relay once earns 750 karma.

**Donations** Every dollar donated to the Conservancy since January 1, 2012 earns 10 karma. Donate \$20, earn 200 karma.

**Membership** Every Conservancy membership-dollar earns 10 karma. Join or renew at the \$50 level and earn 500 karma.

Karma has two characteristics to keep in mind. First, karma never expires. Second, karma can be gifted. Someone with lots of karma who wants to give it to a friend to help them get a spot in the Challenge can do so via the web site. Once gifted, karma cannot be revoked. The only way to retrieve it is to have the recipient gift it back.

We believe the Karma Initiative is an objective way of determining the contribution an individual has made toward achieving the goals of the Conservancy. That's important because it's an essential element of the new Challenge registration system.

## Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy Membership Application/Renewal

Join RCTC leaders by volunteering for a role that suits your time and inclinations. Make check payable to the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy, P.O. Box 35 Warrendale, PA 15086-0035, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. NEW! Renew online at [store.rachelcarsontrails.org](http://store.rachelcarsontrails.org).

I Am A	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewing Member	Date	Your mailing label notes last RCTC contribution. Please plan your renewal!
Annual Dues	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining \$100
	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$250			
WHILE THEY LAST - RCTC t-shirt, with your membership of \$25 or more. Circle size: M, L, XL -or- Challenge ballcap at \$50 or more <input type="checkbox"/>				
Name			Age	
Street Address				
City, State, Zip				
Telephone		Email Address		Municipality
Contact Me For				
<input type="checkbox"/> Rachel Carson Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> Harmony Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> Membership development
<input type="checkbox"/> Baker Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> Vestal Trail maintenance		<input type="checkbox"/> PR/Publicity

# Walking in America

*Continued from page 1*

continue to do this and promote the changing of our suburbs into more walkable communities is to create trails and bikeways that take us to where we want to go. The Harmony Trail network, if completed through our northern communities, could connect five schools in the North Allegheny School District and offer adjacent neighborhoods walking and biking routes to the office and shopping areas that we use every day.

I imagine that many of you would walk or bike to where you work and shop if the trails existed. Please let the Conservancy know of places where we could facilitate the development of such trails.

## Event Calendar

*Details and many more events on [www.rachelcarsontrails.org/events](http://www.rachelcarsontrails.org/events)*

### **Every Sunday, April 22–June 10: Rachel Carson Trail Training Hikes 8AM–**

Eight hikes on the Rachel Carson Trail to help prepare for the Challenge, 8–21 miles each.

### **Saturday, May 12: Volunteer Appreciation Picnic 1PM–2PM**

**Calling all volunteers!** If you participated in a trail work crew, or helped out on the Challenge or UltraChallenge, or any other activity related to our trails or would like to, then please attend our Volunteer Appreciation Picnic! There'll be food and drink and lots of discussion about trail related topics. Takes place at the Old Firehouse (Walter Road at Lakeshore Drive) in North Park prior to our Annual Public Meeting. Contact Marian at (412) 366–3339. **FREE and open to all!**

### **Saturday, May 12: Annual Public Meeting 2PM–3PM**

Come hear us discuss a year of progress and teamwork on the

With the coming age of higher energy costs, the more we can offer alternative and energy-free forms of getting around, the healthier we as individuals and our region will be. Then, maybe the average steps per day that we Americans take will begin to increase.

On that note, the Conservancy is doing its part to increase that average with our annual Rachel Carson Trail Challenge, where over 800 participants will walk, climb and scramble over 70,000 steps in one day. That should increase the national average by a step or two, anyway.

Baker, Harmony and Rachel Carson Trails in addition to details for participants and volunteers on the Rachel Carson Challenge and the Baker Trail UltraChallenge. Takes place right after the Picnic above. Contact Marian at (412) 366–3339. **FREE and open to all!**

### **Saturday/Sunday, June 2/3, June 9/10: Challenge Training Hikes 8AM–12PM**

Four hikes on the Rachel Carson Trail to help prepare for the Challenge, 6–8 miles each.

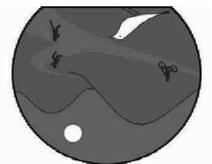
### **Saturday, June 23: Rachel Carson Trail Challenge**

The sixteenth annual grueling 34-mile endurance hike on the Rachel Carson Trail, plus the 17-mile Rachel Carson Trail Homestead Challenge and the 7-mile Rachel Carson Trail Friends & Family Challenge.

### **Saturday, August 25: Baker Trail UltraChallenge**

The eighth running of the 50-mile Baker Trail ultramarathon.

*Please check mailing label date and plan your annual renewal now.*



Preserving and Promoting  
Community Trails In  
Western Pennsylvania

*Return Service Requested*

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