

THE FRIENDS OF
RIDLEY CREEK
STATE PARK



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The Friends

VOL X ISSUE 1

SPRING/SUMMER 2017

CELEBRATE EARTH DAY WITH US

There's no better way to honor Earth Day than spending time at your favorite state park!

Join us Sunday, April 23, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Area 17 Pavilion for this free event filled with fun activities for all ages.

The Friends of Ridley Creek State Park

Earth Day Every Day

**Sunday, April 23
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

Rain or Shine

free for everyone

FRIENDS OF RCSP VOICEMAIL

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR FRIENDS AT ANY TIME WITH YOUR COMMENTS AND/OR QUESTIONS.
LEAVE A MESSAGE AT 484-442-0223, AND SOMEONE WILL GET BACK TO YOU ASAP!

Earth Day from Page 1

Enjoy:

- Guided trail hikes
- A butterfly display
- A wildlife display
- Kite flying
- Refreshments

Learn about:

- Wildflowers
- Invasive plants
- Park history

Meet:

- Park Rangers and Educators
- Local environmental groups

Recycle:

- Bring gently-used clothes to our Clothes Drop
- Bring recycled egg cartons or aluminum cans to plant seeds in

Meet the Board and other members of the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park and learn more about our accomplishments and how your membership supports our neighborhood natural treasure.

We look forward to seeing you there, rain or shine!

This article was contributed by Friends member Sandy Farnan, Co-chair of the Earth Day Event at Ridley.

THE FRIENDS WELCOME OUR NEW PARK MANAGER, JAMES WASSSELL

As we enjoy the beauty Ridley Creek State Park has to offer, it's not often that we think about all the work that goes on behind the scenes to make it so. But recently, I had the pleasure of meeting with our new Park Manager, James Wassell, to find what brought him to our wonderful park.

James joined the Ridley team in November 2016, bringing along Lucy and Kangi, his beloved dogs, for the big move. He came to us from Marsh Creek State Park where he served as the Assistant Park Manager and we sure are happy to have him.

So, what exactly does a Park Manager do? At Ridley Creek, the Park Manager oversees all operations and staff - from Rangers to Maintenance to Grounds - for both Ridley Creek State Park and White Clay Creek Reserve. James said he was excited about coming here



because the area poses new challenges, including lots of land to maintain. Ridley also has an amazing array of users - hikers, families, rentals, and partnerships,

just to name a few - and serving all of their needs is a challenge James looks forward to taking on.

What does our new Park

Manager do in his free time? Volunteer and anything outdoors! Back in his former town, James was a volunteer firefighter and helped out with all emergency services. He also loves hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, and of course, walking his dogs. Insider tip: if you're looking to win him over, breakfast is his favorite meal and he likes everything!

He said his team here at Ridley is passionate and dedicated to maintaining an open, beautiful, and

safe natural space for all to enjoy. James believes it takes about a year to fully understand and learn the ins and outs of a new park, and each day he is discovering something new at this wonderful place. While walking the grounds he understands that listening to visitors and hearing their ideas are some of the best things he can do to keep this park great. There's nothing like a fresh set of eyes and ideas from those who use the park to come up with the

next best thing.

As for getting to know the Friends of Ridley Creek group of volunteers - he's off to a good start. He knows if you want a well-maintained trail system, you need the help of a volunteer group and he looks forward to working with us.

Welcome James!

This article was contributed by Friends member Lauren Bacigalupi.

ANNOUNCING THIS YEAR'S PHOTO CONTEST

We are pleased to announce that once again, we will hold the award ceremony for the annual photo contest in June. Last year's event - on the patio of the mansion - was so successful, we are repeating the event, this time on Wednesday, June 21 at 6:00 PM. We'll hold it outdoors if the weather cooperates; otherwise it will be inside the park mansion.

The contest is open to amateur photographers of all ages, including children. We especially encourage youth under 18 to enter the contest.

There will be several awards in adult and youth categories and we may add categories at the discretion of the judge (for example, best animal picture, best winter picture, etc.) - Prepare to be surprised!

Specific prizes are to be announced.

Take note, photographers: Another innovation will be to allow up to 3 entries (formerly it was 2) per person. The entry fee will vary based on the number of submitted photos - the first 2 photos for \$10 each, and a 3rd photo for \$5.

Look for the contest rules, entry form, and updated information on the Friends website www.FriendsofRCSP.org. Flyers have been posted in the park and on the bulletin boards of the Multi-Use Trail. Note that the submission deadline for photos eligible to win prizes is Wednesday, June 14, one week prior to the award ceremony, to allow time for judging. However, late entries will be accepted up to Tuesday, June 20, and will be posted at the award

ceremony, but will not be eligible for prizes.

Photos of all seasons are welcome. So gather your summer, fall, and winter pictures, and then take some spring pictures and submit your best entries. The photo contest has always been one of our most popular fund raisers, while also raising awareness of the park and the Friends.

Come and bring your family and friends to this free event, the award ceremony on Wednesday, June 21, to look at all the beautiful pictures of our park. Light refreshments will be served. We will also have a collection box for canned food items for the local Food Bank; bring a donation if you can.

FRIENDS SURVEY TO BETTER CONNECT YOU TO OUR PARK

In December, many of you responded to a survey we sent out asking about your membership and engagement with the Friends group. The survey was sent to our email list of members, volunteers, and community members who we've met at previous events and was posted on our website and Facebook page.

Here are some highlights of the survey results and our near- and long-term action items to meet your needs.

Membership

With a higher level of confidence, we were able to confirm our membership database – and use the opportunity to clarify our membership model and benefits with you.

The Friends group is a dues-based membership. Your tax-deductible dues support maintenance of the trails (white, yellow, blue, orange), special projects like footbridge repair, and Friends events like our annual picnic and Photo Contest.

Membership fees range from \$15 - \$100 and can now be submitted online as a direct and immediate response to your survey feedback!

This article was contributed by Friends member Sandy Farnan, who designed the survey and compiled the results.

Current Activities

One-third of all survey respondents participate in Friends activities of which you reported being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied. Data showed the following approximate percentages of respondents participating in each of the current Friends activities.

Activity	Percent of Respondents who Participate
Volunteer Trail Work on first Saturday	59%
Attend the Volunteer Picnic	29%
Volunteer on special projects	26%
Volunteer through the Adopt-A-Trail program	22%
Contestant in annual Photo Contest	18%
Attend the annual Photo Contest Reception	15%

Potential Future Activities

We presented you with questions to gauge your interest level and likelihood of attending potential future events. Here's how these activity types rate among respondents in terms of likelihood of participating.

Activity	Percent likely to participate for free	Percent likely to participate for a fee
Educational Workshops	72%	63%
Group Hikes	72%	52%
Children's Activities	22%	18%
Social Events at the Mansion	43%	39%

Your Comments Answered

We appreciate the time you took to respond to the survey and for your thoughtful comments and input. It was very insightful to hear from you and we feel a responsibility and commitment to responding to your comments.

We are reaching out in a variety of ways, including personal correspondence, this newsletter, our website, and our Facebook page. We hope you will notice how valued your comments are through our actions.

Remember to check our website regularly for news and events, and like us on Facebook where we've been posting with more frequency since the new year.

EXPLORING PENNSYLVANIA'S KINZUA BRIDGE STATE PARK

Here in southeastern Pennsylvania, state parks are heavily valued for their rare swaths of open space and natural woodlands. As urban sprawl has developed on so much vacant land over the years, our parks are becoming even more precious. But there are many parts of this state where parks aren't seen as such a rare find. In many rural regions, state parks have to be extra unique in order to set themselves apart from the abundance

of open land that surrounds them.

Today we're going to look at one that not only rises above the rest in terms of uniqueness, it might arguably be the most unique attraction in the state of Pennsylvania: Kinzua Bridge State Park. It is located in rural northwestern PA, with the nearest town being Mt. Jewett in McKean County.

The park was named after the Kinzua Viaduct, which was considered the 8th Wonder of the World

at one time. The bridge was the tallest and longest railroad trestle ever built at the time of its completion in 1882. During its working years the Kinzua Bridge was used to service the coal, oil, and timber industries on the northern tier of Pennsylvania. By cutting across the valley, the railroad was able to avoid laying 8 miles of track.

Spanning two mountainsides, the viaduct stretched 2,053 feet long
cont. Bridge on page 7



A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT: THE FRIENDS OF RIDLEY IN CONTEXT *BY JACK MILLER*

Toward the end of 2016, the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park sent out a survey to our members and email list and posted it on our website and Facebook page. The purpose: to get ideas on how to focus our activities for future Friends events within Ridley Creek State Park. We received a wide range of responses and comments. Thank you all for your efforts in responding to the Friends Survey! There is more information about the survey in this newsletter – see article by Sandy Farnan. We want to assure you that your comments have been reviewed and we have started to take action. We are listening.

It is clear to me that people need to understand who the Friends are and what we can do together with your help. The Friends of Ridley Creek State Park is a group of volunteers who want to give something back to the park, have some fun while giving back, and try to help park visitors enjoy their time at Ridley. We are one of approximately 48 Friends chapters across the state, each representing a state park or forest. Our “parent” organization is the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation (PPFF).

In November 2016, the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park attended a meeting of Friends groups from the eastern part of the state at French Creek State Park. One of the presentations

at this meeting was by a state representative who explained the state’s four year plan. Big projects within the state park system need to get their project on the state’s four year plan to be considered for implementation by the state. There is only so much state money to be allocated and discussions about needs on the four year plan moves projects up or down on the State priority list.

We can report that repaving the entire Multi-Use Trail at Ridley Creek State Park is on the state four year plan. The state is aware of the condition of this road and how much use the trail gets from park visitors. Our repaving project is discussed at state meetings and compared with the needs of other parks and forests. Obviously, a need such as a new roof on a park building can take precedence over another project. The four year plan is in constant state of review and prioritizing.

The state park system will take care of the major projects within each state park or forest. The state most recently funded the new drainage and paving operation around the Sycamore Mills entrance of the park. The state also funded the rebuilding of the culvert on the Multi-Use Trail that was washed out by severe rains several years ago. You can appreciate that these improvements need

to be approved by a very rigorous state planning and funding system and that they take time to complete.

The Friends of Ridley Creek State Park was formed from the most active volunteer group within the park – the hiking trail maintainers. For over 20 years now, a dedicated group gathers on the first Saturday of each month at 9 am outside the Ranger Station at the mansion. Many of today’s Board members came from the trails group. Currently, the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park volunteers not only help maintain the hiking trails, but they also replace bridges along the hiking trails, replace picnic tables, conduct a yearly photo contest, and hold an annual members meeting and picnic.

The Friends group here was the first chapter organized within the state park system and was advertised to the public with a short meeting notice in the Town Talk approximately 18 years ago. People came to the meeting in the mansion and by the end of the meeting, the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park became a reality. The makeup of the Friends has varied over the years and the activities promoted by the Friends have also changed.

New volunteers bring new ideas for events and activities. Hopefully, the

Friends survey will result in new activities for Ridley Creek State Park visitors. We appreciate each idea and each volunteer willing to help. The Friends of Ridley Creek State Park tries to take care of small projects within the park and let the maintenance crews and state concentrate on the larger jobs.

On Sunday, February 18, 2017 I visited the park to enjoy a sunny day. I parked at the popular Area 17. When I got out of my car I heard chain saws nearby. There was an old ash tree

along the Multi-Use Trail intersection with the Yellow Trail that had fallen across the trail and was being attended to by the park maintenance crew. As with many trees within the park, this tree had a story. Many years ago, a family joined our Saturday trail work when we worked around Area 17. This same ash tree was completely hidden by vines that obviously grew well in the damp soil and sunshine. All day long the family worked to clear the tree of every vine growing up the tree trunk. They invested

a lot of sweat and a little blood in the process. Years later the vines had finally dried and fell to the ground, revealing the huge ash tree. Unfortunately, it seems that the tree was not cleared of its huge load of vines in time to save it, and branches had started falling to the ground. After February 18, a stump was left to remind us of another day in the park.

We invite you to make more memories at Ridley Creek State Park and share them with the Friends and others!

Bridge from Page 6

and soared 301 feet above the valley floor. At its highest point the bridge was only 4 feet shorter than the torch on the Statue of Liberty. In 1900 the bridge was rebuilt in order to carry heavier train loads. It took only 105 days to convert the iron bridge into a steel bridge.

In 1959, the freight traffic stopped and four years later the park was created in 1963. From 1987 to 2002, tourist trains would roll over the bridge, giving scenic views of the region. This continued until the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources closed the bridge to rail traffic due to concerns about its structural integrity. Shortly after that, the bridge was closed to foot traffic as well.

Sadly, only less than a year after the closure, an F1 tornado on July 21, 2003 tore down most of the Kinzua Bridge. The destruction was

very quick and the damage was devastating. When the dust cleared, only 600 feet of the iconic bridge was standing. The opposing hillside was stripped of trees and the valley floor was littered with the mangled debris.

For several years, the once impressive Kinzua Bridge lay in ruins in the woods of northern Pennsylvania. Then in 2011, the remaining 600 foot section was converted into a skywalk, complete with a glass floor. So now visitors who aren't fazed by heights can walk out 600 ft. and look down 300 ft. to the valley floor below. Those who aren't big on heights can still appreciate the bridge and scenery from one of the observation decks strategically built along the hillside.

In 2016, the park was fully outfitted with a state-of-the-art Visitors Center that greets tourists exploring the region. Two floors

of interactive exhibits celebrate the history and there's even a gift shop with locally made products. It is quite admirable the way a relatively small park with 339 acres has turned itself into such a tourist attraction that it draws both locals and travelers from far and wide.

When you are traveling through the woods of rural northern Pennsylvania, you would never guess you'd run across something like Kinzua Bridge. In fact, you would probably be hard pressed to find anything quite like it anywhere else. So if exploring Pennsylvania's parks or history is of any interest to you, be sure you make a trip to Kinzua Bridge State Park at least once in your lifetime.

This article is second in a series about other state parks in Pennsylvania, contributed by Friends Board member, the much-travelled Paul Mickle.

PICNIC JUNE 3 FOR FRIENDS MEMBERS AND TRAIL WORKERS

Mark your calendars for our annual member and volunteer appreciation picnic on Saturday June 3 at noon, rain or shine, after the trail workday. The picnic is open to all trail workers and members of the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park and will include an annual election for Friends officers.

The location for the event is Pavilion 8, which is a sheltered site off Sandy Flash Drive at the top of the hill, next to the horse farm building. The picnic treats

are compliments of the Friends: hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad, coleslaw, beverages, and other fare. People are welcome to bring a dessert or other dish to share.

The annual meeting will include officer elections. Current members of the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park and newly signed up members will be able to vote. The Recording Secretary position, ably held by Gary Sawyers for several terms, will be up for election

or re-election. Anyone else interested in running should e-mail members@friendsofrcsp.org or call Joan at 610-352-5685.

Please RSVP for the picnic so we can plan the food. E-mail members@friendsofrcsp.org or call Joan at the number above by Wednesday, May 31, if you can. We hope to see you there!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MONTHLY TRAIL WORK. MEET AT PARK OFFICE

FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH, 9AM.

FREE EARTH DAY EVENT

SUNDAY, APRIL 23RD, 11-3 AT PAVILION 17

FREE PICNIC FOR FRIENDS MEMBERS AND TRAIL WORKERS

SATURDAY, JUNE 3RD, NOON AT PAVILION 8

DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING ENTRIES ELIGIBLE FOR AWARDS OF PHOTO CONTEST

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14TH UNTIL 4PM AT PARK OFFICE

AWARD CEREMONY FOR THE FRIENDS PHOTO CONTEST - OPEN TO PUBLIC

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21ST, 6PM IN MANSION AREA

DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING ENTRIES TO THE PPF PHOTO CONTEST

THURSDAY, SEPT 7TH, SEE PAPARKSANDFORESTS.ORG