

The Friends

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MONTHLY TRAIL WORK
On hold until further notice.

FRIENDS ANNUAL PICNIC
Cancelled until 2021

PHOTO CONTESTS
Cancelled until 2021

FRIENDS OF RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK NEWSLETTER

Editor..... Joan Nikelsky
Design.....Mark Dougherty

Our Park During COVID-19

by Friends President Jack Miller

As you are well aware the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in the normal operations of Ridley Creek State Park. The park went from completely closed to partially open and finally to the Green Phase and open with restrictions.

When the hiking trails did reopen initially, the restrooms were not open since the park maintenance staff had been furloughed. Park users were encouraged to find a park close to home for that reason.

In spite of the restrictions, people came to Ridley Creek State Park to get outside and use the Multi-Use Trail on foot or with their bicycles. The unpaved hiking trails were crowded with hikers even during the weekdays. All Pennsylvania state parks experienced an increase in visitors, which caused some difficulties. Some parks were closed at times due to overcrowding and others experienced an accumulation of uncollected trash from the many visitors. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservations and Natural Resources introduced a "Leave No Trace" policy to encourage park visitors to take home any trash generated while they visited their local state park.

The visitors to Ridley Creek State Park are very considerate and know how to take care of our local treasure. Very little trash was left at the restrooms or along the trails. The hiking trails were kept clear by the thousands of people using them every week. They cleared stray branches off the trails and kept the vegetation at bay.

When we did have a storm which took down trees and branches, the dedicated trail maintainers did the hard work sawing away trail obstructions. Several of the large downed trees had to wait for the chainsaw gang or the return of the maintenance crew to clear them away, but the trails remained open with a short temporary detour.

The first Saturday of the month trail work crew has not met since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 restrictions, so the extra help provided by the trail maintainers, park maintenance crew, and park visitors has been greatly appreciated. Thank you all for your hard work.

One thing is common when we are doing work on the trails, whether as an individual or as our first Saturday group. Hikers always thank the trail workers for their efforts and truly appreciate the trails being in such good shape and clear for their use. Yes, Ridley Creek State Park does have some special people as our visitors, regulars, and volunteers. We may not know each other's names but we share a common goal of keeping the park the special place we all enjoy. Thank you all for your help!

New Leadership Blazes a Trail at RCSP

by Friends member Lauren Bacigalupi



On June 5th a new Park Manager, Alexa (Lexi) Rose, started at Ridley Creek State Park. Her appointment marks the first time a woman has held the leadership position at our beloved park. Exciting times!

But before we tell you more about our new leader, we want to say farewell to Phil Schmidt, who served our park well. Phil took a new position at Tyler State Park, closer to family for both him and his fiancée Malia. Since they are planning their upcoming nuptials it made perfect sense! I had to reach out to Phil for one last chat on his time serving as Park Manager and working with our Friends group.

Phil said though his new park is half the size of Ridley Creek State Park, it still has its own challenges for him to tackle. At Tyler you can kayak, canoe, and paddle board, so keeping an eye on water levels is key. They also have a disc golf course, a Center for the Arts and a Playhouse- so it sounds like Phil will have his hands full with a new set of adventures.

“I absolutely loved my time at Ridley Creek State Park, and feel I have grown as a manager from my experience there,” Phil said. “One thing I will certainly miss is working with the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park. Tyler does not have a Friends group (yet!), and the group at Ridley Creek is easily the

most organized and fun group I have worked with. I think they highlight exactly the benefits of having a Friends group.” Well-said Phil, and we appreciate it as we keep our park moving forward with Lexi, our new Park Manager.

Lexi comes to us from Marsh Creek State Park where she served as the Assistant Park Manager since 2017. “This is the natural next move for me,” said Lexi who had already served as a Park Manager Trainee at Ridley Creek State Park back in 2015, so she is quite familiar with all our park has to offer.

Taking the baton from Phil, Lexi had to jump right into a bunch of projects in progress like finalizing the tornado clean up! In case you didn’t know, there are already two timber sales going on at the park. There will also be clear cutting, which means taking down trees impacted by the tornado. All of this has been overseen by the Bureau of Forestry and they have been careful to salvage all they can.

Lexi is thrilled to be the first woman Park Manager at RCSP. “Women are becoming well represented in the parks and I think it’s really cool to be able to show my daughter what’s possible,” Lexi shared. As for what she loves most about being here... “I love interacting with all the different people that come by. I’m also surprised by the amount of people using the trails all week!”

We also talked a bit about the pandemic and what that has meant for our park. “It’s great to see people visiting the park more, finally realizing what’s been so close to them. When you get people who’ve never been here and you show them all we have to offer, it’s really exciting” Lexi said.

So, what does our Park Manager do in her spare time? Challenge herself...of course. When she’s out of her comfort zone, she’s actually comfortable. For instance, she took her intense dislike of public speaking and ending up giving a speech at her high school graduation! She is sure to bring that “go get it” spirit to our park. Her friendships with our past Park Managers, James and Phil, will certainly give her great preparation for taking us forward, along with the wonderful staff already in place.

So, welcome Lexi - we look forward to doing great things together!

Trail Work during the Pandemic and Tropical Storm

by Gary Sawyer, Board Member and Trails Chair



Footbridge behind the mansion relocated by flooding

The Friends are delighted that the park has become a welcome refuge during the pandemic. Maintaining the wooded foot trails has been the job of many dedicated volunteers. We have had to make adjustments, of course, in light of the pandemic. Most notably, our open invitation to join us the first Saturday of each month is on hold indefinitely. In the past, we had upwards of 20 volunteers come to the park each trail work day to maintain and improve our trails. In addition, we have trail adopters who regularly walk their designated section, doing light clearing of vegetation and reporting any major issues.

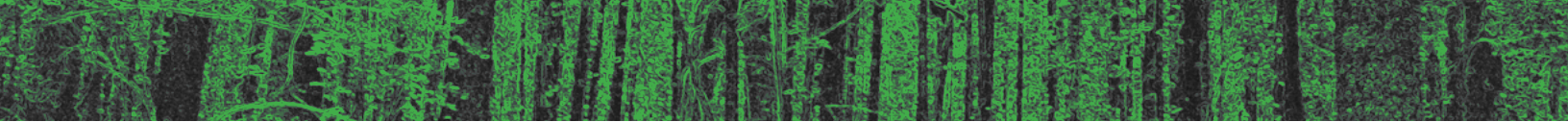
Without the monthly trail day, some of the larger issues go unattended, such as significant blowdowns, keeping up on our erosion control, or addressing any issues with drainage or minor trail re-routing. We organized a small group in July to make repairs to a bog bridge and clear some blowdowns on various trails.

This summer's major storm Isaias dropped about 6 inches of rain in the region in just a few hours. This caused significant flooding in the park. If you're familiar with the

Orange Trail or Equestrian Trail, they were both under water. In fact, the picnic table along the Orange Trail was nearly submerged! Bog bridges on the White and Yellow Trails were dislodged in places and need our attention. Besides the flooding, a number of trees fell on trails this summer. Mark Kern and Dan Chavar worked on the larger blowdowns with chain saws, while others of us chipped away with hand tools as we came across obstacles while out for a walk. Hats off to all the trail adopters and other volunteers who got out their pruners, saws, and loppers.

Another casualty of Isaias: A footbridge behind the Mansion that leads to the Yellow Trail was picked up by rushing water and deposited about 50 yards downstream! On August 22, a small team of trail workers re-installed the bridge (Jack Miller, John Walters, Mark Kern, George Meng, and Gary Sawyer). Lessons learned from the work done the previous week also played a major part in getting the bridge functional once more. Supervisor Sue Berg kept us moving and pushed the team to completion. See the before, during repair, and after pictures.

Continued page 3



Trail work continued

We all agreed that the installation was temporary but is important to have this section of the trail passable once more so our hikers can keep their Adidas dry. We also needed to demonstrate that we could operate under the official approved COVID-19 mitigation plan or discover any problems with the plan. This project was another step toward the eventual reopening of our first Saturday work days.

So to all the hikers and runners who are used to well-cleared trails, be patient as we enter the Fall season. We'll send out word to our regular volunteers when the monthly trail work starts up again. In the meantime, if you want to pitch in, you can send an e-mail to Gary Sawyer at trails@friendsofRCSP.org.

Anecdotes from Pandemic Times in the Park

by President Jack Miller

I frequently take hikes along the trails in Ridley Creek State Park. I usually take a tool such as a grass whip, loppers, or saw with me in case I come across a section of trail where there is an obstruction that needs to be cleared out. I was on a hike one day with a hand saw and had cleared several small trees and branches from across the trail. I came to one section where there was a large tree across the trail. I started cutting the tree when a voice came up from behind me. I turned to see a gentleman carrying a beach towel with a handle sticking out of the top. He said we both had the same idea and asked if I wanted his help. He unwrapped the beach towel to reveal a chain saw which he quickly started and took care of the tree across the trail. He rewrapped the beach towel around the chain saw and went back toward the parking lot.

On another occasion, I was leaving the Friends tool room at the mansion one afternoon. A man came up to me and asked if I worked at the park. After explaining my connection to the park he said he had found some keys while he was running on one of the trails. There was no one in the ranger station so we went over to the nearest parking lot. Each key ring is unique and this one included a key fob from a Mercedes, according to the logo on the case. We went to the parking lot to look for the Mercedes but there was no car of that make in the lot. He decided to push the key unlock button to see if any headlights came on. Surprisingly, the headlights of an SUV in the lot did come on but it was far from a Mercedes! We shared the humor of the SUV owner and left the keys hanging in the driver's door.

There are probably many untold stories of unnamed park visitors doing marvelous things to make a visit to Ridley Creek State Park a trouble free and worry free experience. We appreciate all of you.



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MAPS

HISTORY

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS

White Clay Creek Preserve

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

In keeping with a common theme of 2020, in this edition we will be sticking close to home. Over the last few tours we have travelled many miles across the rural areas of Pennsylvania. This time, however, the journey is only about 30 miles from Ridley Creek State Park. It is actually close enough and quiet enough so that many aspects of it are managed by Ridley Creek.

The place is called White Clay Creek Preserve and most of it is literally on the border of Pennsylvania and Delaware, very close to the Maryland line. Being only 3 miles north of New Castle, Delaware, the preserve is arguably more of a Delaware destination than of Pennsylvania. It is also worth noting that the preserve being discussed here continuously abuts White Clay Creek State Park, which is on the Delaware side. Both sections of land were originally donated to each of the states from the massive collection of Dupont acreage.

Despite being out of the way and often overlooked, White Clay Creek Preserve is nearly 80% of the size of Ridley Creek, coming in at 2,072 acres. It is centered around the White Clay Creek in which it is named. The creek is notable for a number of reasons. One of the most impressive is that the 107 acre watershed was federally recognized as a National Wild and Scenic River in its entirety. This will protect it from various hazards like damming or pollution to keep it as clean and naturally flowing as possible. The fact that White Clay Creek was named a preserve rather than a state park has also kept its development as a recreational destination minimal.

The land has been inhabited for generations, though with several early colonial buildings still standing. Legend has it that

William Penn bought the land from a local Native American tribe and a Quaker Meeting House still stands on the property, shown in the photo. Walking through this area is like stepping back in time as visitors are seeing and sensing the same surroundings as those who visited in years gone by.

When wandering the trails along the stream, hikers can see all kinds of wildlife. Activities include fishing, horseback riding, and hunting under certain conditions and in certain areas. The laid-back feel of the park makes it seem as though one is far out in rural PA.

Along with all of the other events in 2020, White Clay Creek Preserve made an appearance in the news with the recent acquisition of 978 acres of land formally owned by George Strawbridge from the Campbell soup family. This section is not, however, contiguous to the main part of the preserve. Instead it inflates the acreage of the Big Elk Creek Section of the preserve that lies along the Mason-Dixon Line bordering Maryland a few miles west. The Big Elk Creek Section was also garnered from the George Strawbridge estate about 10 years earlier.

The Big Elk Creek section borders the Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area in Cecil County Maryland. This means that both sections of the White Clay Creek Preserve provide open space that continuously flows beyond the state borders.

No matter which section you opt to travel to, or what activity you choose to enjoy, a visit to White Clay Creek is definitely worth the trip. Especially since it's all only a short and scenic 30 mile drive away!



Walking trail in White Clay Creek Preserve

COVID-19 Update from the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park

by Friends Vice-President Joan Nikelsky

Update September 2020: Pennsylvania remains in the green phase of reopening. There are still restrictions, like the requirement to wear a mask when out in public. See details of openings and closings and mitigation strategies at the link here: <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/#WhatPhaselsMyCountyin>.

The park office is open and educational activities are being offered by Gary Stolz, Park Naturalist. Pavilions are rentable for family groups, and playground equipment can be used. Most restrooms are open, but individual restrooms temporarily close at random for sanitation.

The Board had a “socially distant” outdoor meeting on July 26 (see picture) with our new Park Manager, Alexa Rose (Lexi) and we look forward to working with her on projects of mutual interest.

Due to ongoing health concerns, we decided to cancel our annual picnic for 2020. Some light trail maintenance is being done by individuals and groups of two, but no monthly trail work is being scheduled yet. We conducted our annual election for officers by email in early June; thank you to those who participated. We re-elected Jack Miller, President; Joan Nikelsky, Vice-President; and Dave Case, Treasurer, for an additional two-year term.

In addition, the 2020 photo contest has also been cancelled. Hold on to your fantastic photographs until next year. We will announce a new date when it is decided.

