

The Friends

VOL XIV ISSUE 2

FALL/WINTER 2022



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

50 TH ANNIVERSARY RECAP	1
PICNIC TABLE UPGRADE PROJECT	3
TUSCARORA STATE PARK.....	4
FIRST DAY HIKE	5
PHOTO CONTEST UPDATE	5
DEER HUNTING	5
ADOPT-A-TRAIL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES	5

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MONTHLY TRAIL WORK

First Saturday of each month, 9AM.

FIRST DAY HIKE

January 1, 2023, starting 10 am behind Pavilion #8

FRIENDS OF RIDLEY CREEK STATE PARK NEWSLETTER

Editor..... Joan Nikelsky

Design.....Mark Dougherty

50th Anniversary Celebration of Ridley Creek State Park

by Friends President Jack Miller

WEDNESDAY EVENT

On Wednesday evening, October 5th, the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park put on a fantastic show at the Mansion, in our first event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the opening of Ridley to the public as a state park.

The Mansion was clean, well-lit, and many usually closed doors were opened for the Mansion tours. A great buffet of snacks and the smell of fresh coffee brought our guests out of the lobby and into the living room for a wonderful selection of pastry. The ballroom was set up for the slide shows, the Friends Event Today signs were posted, and the crowds started to come.

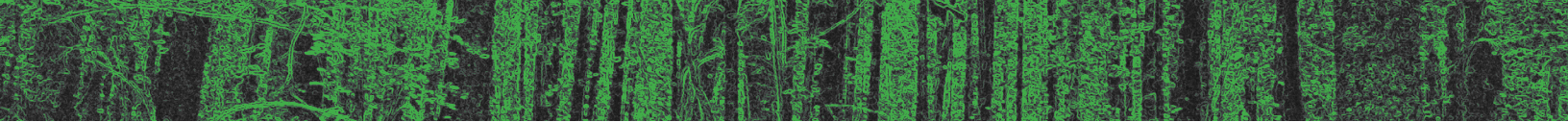
The first slide show and first Mansion tour started at the same time and we got our guests promptly to the right place. In the ballroom, historian Keith Lockhart presented his Ridley Creek photos, including “then” and “now” comparisons and provided explanations and commentary. Dave Case led the first two Mansion tours and showed our guests what it was like to live in a mansion in the early 1900s.

The guests seemed eager to hear more history. For the first slide show we had Warren Graham in the audience. The Graham farm was located just above the Colonial Plantation and Mr. Graham shared some stories of living there with the Jeffords family. We learned that the Jeffords negotiated with the surrounding farms to keep their gates open during the weekend fox hunts just in case the fox came in their direction. Truly a memorable experience. I followed Keith Lockhart’s presentation with some photos from the park’s archive collection. We had one family in attendance that had created their own Ridley Creek State Park t-shirts and a young son with a Ridley Creek State Park hat.

A 30-page booklet was available for sale, written by Keith Lockhart, and chock full of historical photographs and articles from old newspapers that describe the people, buildings, and events from the past that led to what is currently Ridley Creek State Park.

Thanks to all the Board and committee members who worked on the organizing of this event. The first night of celebration for the 50th anniversary of the opening of Ridley Creek State Park was a complete success. All their hard work and dedication paid off. Our guests had a great time; I got to spend a lot of one-on-one time with several of them and heard wonderful feedback. All the planning, meetings, late nights, running errands, and individual efforts paid off.

continued page 2



Park Manager Lexi Rose was there to support the Friends in any way she could and, as always, solved every last-minute panic. Tim Higgins, Liz Higgins, and Gary Sawyer ran around as needed putting out fires and greeting our guests. Joan Nikelsky and Paul Mickle welcomed guests as they entered and directed them to their chosen activity in the ballroom or entrance lobby.

Now we have many more people aware of the Friends of Ridley Creek State Park and the history of the park and its Mansion.

SATURDAY EVENT

On Saturday morning, October 8th, the Friends sponsored a full day of activities at Area 17 in the park. It was just getting light when the tents were put up, chairs set out, the banner was hung, and the last of the directional signs were placed to get our visitors to Area 17.

The early morning 5K Fun Run participants gathered at the starting line and started on time under the supervision of Mark Dougherty. The attire of the participants varied but they all had their 50th Anniversary buttons on. Our trail guides kept them on the intended route and got them safely back again. The runners included experienced and serious runners, families with strollers, and at least one participant with a rollator walker. I had had email conversations prior to Saturday with the rollator lady. She has been trying to do as many 5K runs as possible as a means of recovering from surgery. She seems to be recuperating quite well.

Joan Nikelsky helmed the welcome table and checked people's pre-registration. Pastries, granola bars, and bananas were offered. The staggered starts of the day's activities worked very well. During the 5K run, the next group was gathering for the nature walk led by Gary Stolz. Each half hour another group started off from Area 17 toward their area to explore – the 4-5 mile hike led by Gary Sawyer and the history walk led by Tim Higgins.

The shuttle bus between Area 16 and Area 17 to handle any overflow parking problems was only used two times; the visitors came and left with regularity, so parking spots were never at a premium. The food trucks sold meals and coffee and several families picnicked on the lawn (in the sunny spots) or in the pavilion. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves.

A balloon artist and a face painter attracted many children and others young at heart. The nature display by Park Naturalist Gary Stolz had participation from children wanting to contribute their balloon animals they had just made. Several of those children sported painted faces. The nature display grew larger before our eyes as the balloon artist and face painter continued their crafts.



Keith Lockhart shared history with a slide show in the ballroom.



Friends President Jack Miller and Park Manager Lexi Rose in the entrance vestibule.



Friends Vice-President Joan Nikelsky at the welcome table.

continued page 3



Music by the Midnighters.

During the middle of the day, the local group the Midnighters played and sang songs on a guitar (Brian Kors) and violin (Jake L'Armand), which resulted in several rounds of applause. Perfect atmosphere.

Our new Assistant Park Manager Robert Campion arrived to make sure all was going well. Welcome to Ridley Creek State Park, Rob. We hope that every weekend here will not be as busy as your first weekend. The rangers passed by in their trucks several times to see that everything was running smoothly. Lexi Rose kept in telephone contact whenever she was not on site.

I spoke to several people during the day; a few had attended the Wednesday evening festivities too. Many were taking part for the first time. Every event and activity attracted a mostly different audience. (Note for the future: Good idea to have lots of activities.)

Thank you all for your participation setting up, leading the activities, putting out signs, and hanging around to clean up! The Boy Scouts assembled six picnic tables as their service project so the Sunday trail workers would not have so much to do.

Again, a lot of positive feedback for a job well done. The advance planning was successful and we were assisted greatly by a professional planner, Sarah Haas. We prepared for the masses and were not disappointed.

Picnic Table Upgrade Project

By Gary Sawyer, Board Member and Trails Co-chair

If there's one object people associate with a visit to any park anywhere, it's a picnic table. Most people familiar with our park have their favorite "Area" - Area 8 by the stables, or Area 17 by the Multi-Use Trail, for example. This past summer, the Friends did an inventory of picnic tables at Ridley. Of the 12 Areas open to the public, we counted 41 groupings of tables, totaling 178 tables all together. Most groupings have a charcoal grill; some are under the cover of a pavilion or near playground equipment. But some show signs of their age and aren't as inviting as they used to be, as shown in the photo.

Working with Park Manager Lexi Rose, we identified 34 old wood tables to be retired. Volunteers have disassembled most of them as of this writing, saving heavy bolts for reuse or recycle. The oak wood from the tables is being used as firewood at Area 13 group camping.

Some of the retired tables are being replaced from the park's inventory of picnic table kits, including both traditional all-wood and metal-leg designs. Again, volunteers are tackling this phase of the upgrade project. It's great to see folks come together as a team, enjoy working outside, and practice skills they don't normally get to do. Cub Scout Pack 110 from Gladwyne camped in Area 13 over a weekend and assembled half a dozen tables there. Hats off to them!

Looking ahead, we will focus on the Mansion area and Area 8, retiring some tables and adding new ones. Join the volunteers on one of our first Saturday of the month work parties (starting 9 am at the Mansion) if this is your cup of tea. We will also work with park management to see if more new tables are needed.

There are covered pavilions at Areas 3, 8, 11, 14, and 17. Each have 10 tables in excellent condition. Pavilions can be reserved on a daily basis, but if not reserved, they are open for use by all park visitors.

So on your next visit, bring a hoagie or a picnic basket, and spend some time under the trees at the park!





TUSCARORA STATE PARK

687 Tuscarora Park Rd,
Barnesville, PA 18214
Phone: 570-467-2404

MAPS

HISTORY

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS

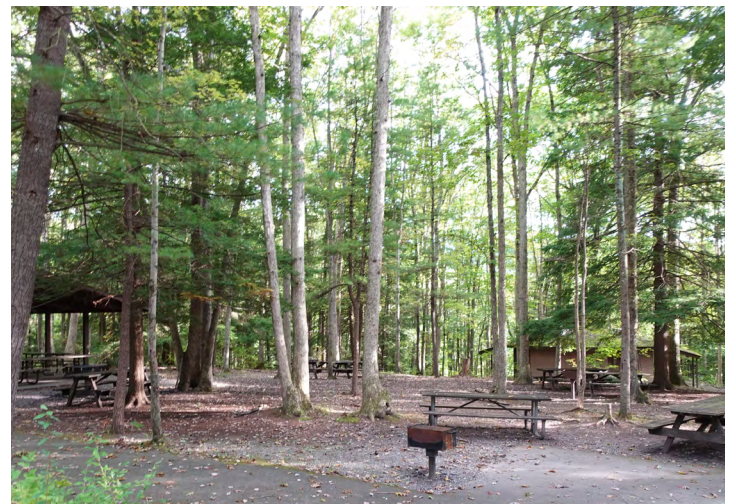
Exploring Pennsylvania's Parks: Tuscarora State Park

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

In this state park edition, we will be traveling about 70 miles north of Ridley Creek into the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania to a place called Tuscarora State Park. Tuscarora is located in Schuylkill County and was created from the same tract of land as neighboring Locust Lake State Park and houses the offices for both. They have a similar history to Ridley Creek in that one family owned the land and then sold it to the state to become a park in the 1960s. After building the lakes, the park opened in 1971.

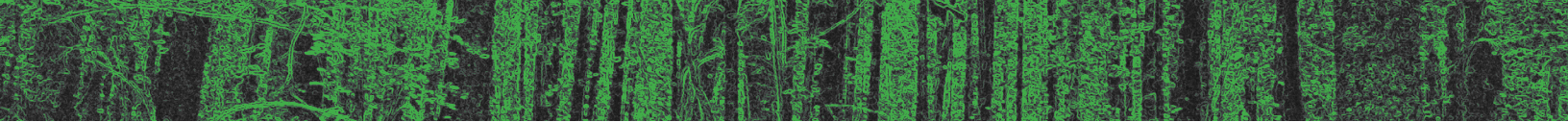
Tuscarora State Park is approximately 1,618 acres and has many outdoor activities to offer, many of which are centered around Tuscarora Lake. There is a very large picnic area that has been developed for large gatherings and a sandy beach for swimming. Also available are opportunities for fishing, hiking, and boating. Even those looking to just sit quietly by the lake will be entertained all day long. In addition to daytime activities, Tuscarora State Park offers night fishing and overnight accommodations in either cabins or yurts.

Due to its location in a rather rural setting in the coal country of Pennsylvania, the park does not get that many visitors compared to other attractions in the region. It sits outside of the town of Tamaqua, which is between Pottsville and Jim



Thorpe along Route 209. The general tone of the park is a very laid back and relaxed atmosphere, while at the same time it is evident from the layout that it is designed to handle large crowds when needed.

Although Tuscarora State Park may not be the most popular or well-known of Pennsylvania's state parks, it is unique in its own special way. Those looking to experience an out-of-the-way state park in a rural setting will likely enjoy a visit. The fact that it is under 2 hours of driving time from Ridley Creek makes it an enjoyable day trip worth visiting.



First Day Hike in Ridley Creek State Park

By Gary Sawyer, Board Member and Trails Co-chair

Come celebrate New Years Day 2023 with us at Ridley Creek State Park. The Friends of Ridley is hosting a First Day Hike along the Equestrian Trail, beginning promptly at 10 am, Sunday January 1, behind Pavilion #8.

Gary Sawyer will lead a 3.5-mile lollipop loop with views of the creek and a stop at the historic hilltop Russell Cemetery. It is expected to last 2 to 2 ½ hours.

The hike starts at the parking lot behind Pavilion 8, descends to the creek at Gradyville Road, passes by an area recovering from a tornado in 2019, and winds around a lovely wooded section up and over Hunting Hill and the Russell Cemetery. The trail is wide, mostly gravel, with good footing. Be prepared for early January weather conditions, and for elevation gains of about 350 ft.

We will have hot chocolate, coffee, and light refreshments at the trailhead after the hike. We have a limit of 25 participants for the hike. Dogs are allowed on leash at all times. Please register by email to Gary at muddyboots@comcast.net to secure a spot.

Adopt-a-Trail Volunteer Opportunities

Have you ever wondered how the trails in Ridley Creek State Park stay free of encroaching vegetation and who removes trees and objects that block the trails? There are a group of volunteers who regularly walk their assigned section of trail to make sure the trails are open and passable for the enjoyment of hikers. Adopt-A-Trail has been a successful program that has been going on for several years. If you are interested in giving back and hearing more, please contact Tim at TimHiggins2@gmail.com for a no-pressure chat about how the program works and how you can join if you are so inclined. Thanks!



UPDATE ON FRIENDS OF RIDLEY PHOTO CONTEST

Good news for photographers – we plan to resume the photo contest in 2023, with the awards ceremony next summer. So start (or continue) to take those pictures!

PARK CLOSINGS FOR DEER HUNTING

Frequent park visitors: The annual deer hunt will be held in Ridley Creek State Park on Thursday, December 1, and Thursday, December 8, 2022. Gradyville Road will be closed from Providence to Delchester Roads. Traffic on Gradyville Road will be diverted around the park during the hunts. Expect to see law enforcement at park entry points.