



## Lose Yourself on the Trail

6 to 10 Trail

By Doug Bosley, Park Ranger

*“They have now actually seen the Allegheny Portage Railroad. Not in a book, or an exhibit, or the park movie. The real thing.”*



I remember the first time I hiked the Inclines 6 to 10 Trail in my park, Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, near Cresson. Or, I should say, what is *now* the Inclines 6 to 10 Trail. When I first hiked the trail in 2002 with a fellow park ranger, it was still undeveloped. Much of



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it was unpassable, an old trace of the Allegheny Portage Railroad that hadn't seen much traffic of any kind for almost 150 years. The rest, more recently abandoned by Conrail in the early 1980s, was made up of a jumble of large, ankle-twisting railroad ballast rocks that were left after the rails were removed for scrap. The National Park Service was expecting visitors to want to hike this? And enjoy themselves while hiking? I certainly wasn't completely enjoying my first time out there. I was cursing my co-worker under my breath for getting me out of

my comfort zone in the Visitor Center and out onto this so-called trail.

As we hiked, though, I started making little discoveries. A few of the old stone sleepers (the railroad ties of the Portage). The decaying ruins of Engine House Number 8. Finally we came upon one of the finely crafted sandstone drainage culverts. These

hand-cut stone archways allowed small streams to pass beneath the railroad. I had seen other examples in the park. They only spanned a few feet across a usually dry streambed. The culvert I now found myself next to, near the bottom of Inclined Plane No. 8, was large enough to walk through. Large enough, in fact, to almost drive a car through. I was amazed by its craftsmanship. Hundreds, if not thousands, of individually chiseled stones. All shaped by unknown stonemasons in the early 1830s. The workers who created the arch were long gone,

but the work they did was still here, telling me their story. I could see it. I could touch it. The Portage Railroad was right here in front of me.

Fifteen years later, it is now a regular part of my job as a park ranger to share my wonderment out on the 6 to 10 Trail.

It's been almost ten years since the trail was developed. Some sections along the oldest parts of the railroad are for hiking only. The trails are still fairly primitive, but much improved since my first time out there. Other parts of the trail, where the rough ballast rocks used to give me so much trouble, have now been covered with smooth, crushed limestone for the enjoyment of thousands of hikers and bicyclists every month. On select Sundays all summer, I have the privilege of leading a dozen or so eager visitors on a hike from our Visitor Center on the top of the mountain, the whole length of the Inclines 6 to 10 Trail to the bottom of the mountain almost nine miles away. I get to share all of those little discoveries that I made so many years ago. Even though I've seen these remaining pieces of the Portage Railroad many times, I get to see them seen for the first time all over again in the faces of the visitors. They have now actually seen the Allegheny Portage Railroad. Maybe only a small part of the old 36-mile line, but they've actually seen it. Not in a book, or an exhibit, or the park movie. The real thing.

The Inclines 6 to 10 Trail does not give up its secrets easily. It makes you work for it. Park staff must inform hikers that the trail is very rugged in places, more so than they might be



used to in this area. There are still remote sections of the trail in the park that have no cell phone service, even though Altoona is only a few miles away. There are parts of the trail where you are transported to another place, in another time. The trail is well marked. But we recommend taking a hike

there as a way to get lost. Get away from everyday stress and worries. Whether you are coming for the history, nature, or the scenery, just get lost. You'll find what you're looking for on the Inclines 6 to 10 Trail at Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site.

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