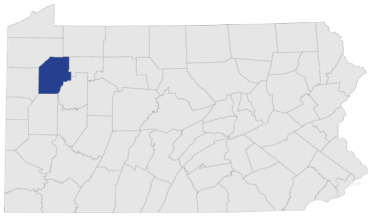


My Story



Visiting a Bygone Era

Allegheny River Trail

By Douglas Baker, Mayor of Franklin

"You can stop almost anywhere along the trail and marvel at the beauty and wildlife you see...It's a trip well worth your time."

Set in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, along the Allegheny River at its confluence with French Creek, Franklin, Pennsylvania has a long history of being a "Trail Town."

Native American carvings on a what is now known as the "Indian God Rock"

eight miles south of Franklin, along what they called the "beautiful River," tell us that the Allegheny was used as a "water trail" by the indigenous people for hundreds of years before American colonial times.

In the middle of the 18th century, Europeans arrived in the area and developed four different frontier forts between 1754 and 1799 to help protect the strategic assets of the area. By the later part of the 19th century, the entire region was the center of worldwide oil production and the birthplace of the modern oil industry. Industry, manufacturing and the



Keystone Fund Investment: \$190,000

Total Public/Private Investment: \$3.6 million

railroad flourished in the area for many years. Much of the boom era architecture has been preserved and in 2010 the downtown main street was designated as a "Great Place in America" by the American Planning Association.

Even as the boom years ended, the Franklin area's "can do" spirit survived and the community began going about the business of reinventing itself, a process that continues today. In the tradition of visionaries past, local resident Jim Holden and fellow Clarion University Professor David Howes started the Allegheny Valley Trails Association and went to work building a network of recreational rail trails.

Learn more at KeystoneFund.org.



The first rail trail developed in Venango County was the Samuel Justus Trail that starts just across the Eighth Street Bridge from Franklin, in Cranberry Township and extends about six miles to Oil City. As interest grew and the work proceeded, a trail head was developed near the beginning of the Samuel Justice Trail and the Allegheny River Trail evolved as a natural extension of the rail trail system along the Allegheny River towards Clarion. Today the 32-mile Allegheny River Trail is part of the developing Erie to Pittsburgh trail system.

My interest in the local rail trails started in the mid 1990's as I approached my 40th birthday. It started out as a "get back in shape" project but I soon realized that the Native Americans were right: the Allegheny is a beautiful river and just being near it is an almost magical experience. Joined by my good friends, we pedaled the Allegheny River Trail day after day, usually 5 or 6 days a week. Frankly, those trips have been among some of the best times in my life. Starting down the trail you can feel the cares of the day melting away and by the time you get back you're already looking forward to and planning your next adventure.

You can stop almost anywhere along the trail and marvel at the beauty and wildlife you

see. At times I allowed my imagination to take a trip of its own. At the Indian God Rock, I imagined the Native Americans canoeing along the river and what their lives might have been like. You see, to me the Garden of Eden is not so much a place, but a way of life. They lived right in the middle of it and so do we, if we only take the time to look.

About 5 miles south of Franklin, near the Belmar Village, a 1907 railroad structure built by local oil man Charles Miller and John D. Rockefeller spans the Allegheny River. Looking at the Belmar Bridge, the steel beams and hefty hardware that holds it together, I often thought about what a difficult job it must have been to build it. And while pedaling down the trail it's easy to imagine how the railroad engineers must have enjoyed travelling through such a beautiful area.

It's a trip well worth your time. You can see the valley that appears much as it would have hundreds of years ago. You can see remnants of the oil industry, ride through railroad tunnels, and, with a little imagination, visit a bygone era.

[Learn more at KeystoneFund.org.](http://KeystoneFund.org)