

Discover Pennsylvania

Rollin' on the Great Allegheny Passage

There is something about the sound of a train whistle that stirs our souls. It is the symbol of movement, of traveling to far-off places, the call to adventure. More than 50 trains a day roll through the village of Rockwood, Pennsylvania, one of the best stops along the Great Allegheny Passage. The "passage" is a premier 135-mile trail that links Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland, and then onto the 184-mile-long C&O Canal.

Since the trail's completion, B&Bs and campgrounds have sprouted in neighboring communities. But B&Bs are not in everyone's budget and camping can involve lugging gear. In Rockwood, Judy Pletcher and her husband Terry provide another alternative: the Hostel on Main. Hostels provide an economical alternative, with dorm-style bunkrooms, kitchen facilities, common room living space, showers, and laundry. Pletcher says that, in only one year of service, the impeccably clean "Green" Hostel on Main has housed folks from ten states and five different countries.

Biking the Great Allegheny Passage

My son Bryce, brother-in-law John, and I traveled to the Rockwood area for a two-day bike ride on the Great Allegheny Passage. We planned a 32-mile day to Rockwood and a 24-mile second day to the Eastern Continental Divide and the impressive Big Savage Tunnel.

We began in the outdoor-lovers' Mecca of Ohio, where you can find a variety of outfitters who rent bikes. The trail follows the Youghieny River, a premier whitewater rafting and paddling river, with its beautiful deep green color, large sandstone boulders, and swirling eddies. It was both our constant companion those first 12 miles to the village of Confluence and a temptation to swim on a hot summer's day.

The trail is a very gradual, almost imperceptible

one- to two-percent grade up to Rockwood, our destination for the night. Crushed stone makes for easy cruising and its wide shady path is perfect for chatting side by side or rolling along at your own pace, lost in thoughts and taking in the beauty of the place.

Lucky Dog Café in Confluence is a favorite lunch spot, with its delicious homemade food and friendly dogs that stop by to visit on the outside deck. From here, our trail follows the Casselman River, and the countryside changes to open views of rolling farmland, dotted with giant bales of hay, sleepy cows, and frisky horses.



Crossing the Eastern Continental Divide along the Great Allegheny Passage.

After pedaling all day, the Hostel on Main was a welcome sight and the savory homemade pizza at the Rockwood Mill Shoppes was an added bonus. Pletcher and her husband transformed this sprawling brick building that once held a feed and lumber mill (as well as an Opera House upstairs!) into the perfect destination for a trailside stop. A warm coffee shop featuring all the original woodwork and a circulating "O" Gauge train above our heads greeted us. As our

pizza baked, we wandered the maze of gift and craft shops, antiques and collectibles, and toured the restored Opera House. Vaudeville troupes once traveled the country via train while providing entertainment for the locals. Today, if you time your cycling adventure right, you can take in one of the regular performances before retiring to the comfort of the hostel.

On to the Continental Divide

Three states can be seen when we arrive at a lofty perch atop the soaring 1,908-foot steel Salisbury Viaduct, one of the most distinctive structures on the Great Allegheny Passage. Later, at the Eastern Continental Divide, a painting of the elevation explains that we are poised at the boundary between the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

But the best part of our second day is the incredibly long Big Savage Tunnel, a 3,294-foot railroad tunnel bored through the mountainside back in 1912. Major concrete restoration work was completed in 2004, making it safe to cycle through. And on the far side is a breathtaking view of the Cumberland Gap and the Mason-Dixon Line. Two short days of cycling made us appreciate the tremendous work that went into creating our nations' railroads and the gift of rail-trails like the Great Allegheny Passage.

By Cindy Ross

BEFORE YOU GO

Allegheny Trail Alliance: 888-282-BIKE,
www.GAPtrail.org

The Hostel on Main: 814-926-4546,
www.hostelonmain.com

Laurel Highlands Tourism: 800-925-7669,
www.laurelhighlands.org

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Take a Break at Pocono Palace

The Poconos have long served as a favorite vacation and getaway destination, a place to enjoy both the natural wonders of the mountains and a grand life style for a few days.

Pocono Palace and its sister properties, Paradise Stream and Cove Haven, capture the best of the "Dirty Dancing" era and provide an all-inclusive experience for couples that will long be remembered. Pocono Palace has something to do throughout the day to meet each individual fancy and whim. As an added bonus, some of the best waterfalls on the East Coast are nearby.

The entry drive into the Pocono Palace provides a quick glimpse of tennis courts and driving range, and then proceeds through lowlands, wildflowers, and shrubs into the forest that starts to separate you from the outside world. The main buildings sit on a hill overlooking a golf course on one side and a secluded lake on the other.

After checking in, you drive to your room. Each area of the property has differently designed room themes. Most all of them have a number of amenities that the usual hotel lacks. During our visit, we were housed in one of the Garden of Eden Apple suites. Opening the door, we found fresh apples for our enjoyment. There was a red heart-shaped tub in the

far side of the room. Down three steps was a large bedroom featuring a round bed, a fireplace, and an additional room with both an indoor swimming pool and a sauna. The pool even had a relaxing beach mural painted on one wall. The suite bathroom was spacious and included a small refrigerator.

The great thing about these facilities is the privacy and roominess of the suites. We didn't hear anyone else during our three days on the property. There are more expensive suites featuring such titles as the Roman Tower or the Champagne Tower by Cleopatra, as well as rooms with a secluded view of the lake.

We kept busy swimming in the outdoor pool, playing the nine-hole golf course, hiking, canoeing, or skiing behind a speed boat. The inside Arena features an indoor pool and spa, gym and other activities.

The bar area of the facility gives guests the opportunity to do a little "Dirty Dancing" and additionally serves as the hub for a host of activities each day and evening. Several nights a week, live bands or DJs provide entertainment.

The atmosphere is easygoing and romantic. Staff members are very friendly, going out of their way to make sure that each guest has a wonderful stay.

By Jim Massey