



The Keystone Hiker - July 2020

Member's Corner

The New Normal for Trails

Over the past few months, hiking and other outdoor recreation has remained available in a limited capacity throughout Pennsylvania. Facility closures and suspended maintenance have been challenging, but we are now getting back to a more normal routine in supporting our trails.

To ensure these re-openings are safe and permanent, we encourage continued precaution against the spread of covid-19. Socially distance on trails, wear masks when appropriate, and hike on less populous trails to assist with both health and maintenance concerns.

- Most of the [Appalachian Trail](#) is officially open. However, many shelters are closed and overnight camping prohibited in many places.
- Many State Park and State Forest facilities are now open. Check before you go at www.dcnr.pa.gov/FacilitiesMap.
- [KTA Trail Care](#) is hitting the trail again in July. We are eager to begin again and make up for lost time.

Favorite Hiking Trail Survey

KTA is conducting a member survey of our favorite PA hiking trails and we want to hear from you!

Visit kta-hike.org/trail-survey or email us listing a few of your favorite trails.

Please include location, brief description, approximate distance, and why you think it's special, and please include any rail trail or historic trails as well. We will compile a list of these trails for our membership and it will help KTA in promoting and protecting trails in the Keystone State. Thank you!

2020 Spring Photo Contest Winner

Congratulations to Jamie Green Chang, winner of our 2020 Winter/Spring Photo Contest for this photo of Garibaldi Lake in Brackendale, British Columbia



Forests Becoming Younger, Shorter

Coleen Engvall, Research Analyst

Pennsylvania's forests are important for the wellbeing of its citizens, the environment and the economy. Higher levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere, while speeding growth in some cases, has contributed to an overall reduction in forest age, height and resilience due to higher temperatures.

Carbon dioxide is known for contributing to the atmosphere's greenhouse effect, warming global temperatures. However, it is also the compound that plants photosynthesize for food. So, with increasing concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere, scientists have been gathering data on what this means for plants and ecosystems.

A study from the U.S. Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory compared research on the effect of CO₂ fertilization on trees with the trend of forests all over the world becoming younger with higher turnover rate of trees.

There are many variables that can potentially help or hinder the growth and survival of trees.

Forest harvesting, wildfires and pests are still the leading causes of forest age changes, however, increased available carbon speeds up growth and seed production in young trees with ample resources. Higher temperatures, on the other hand, inhibit photosynthesis and regeneration. Overall, forests are becoming shorter, with higher mortality, even in forests that are not being

harvested for lumber.

Wildfires, invasive pests and disease have also worsened, with projections showing that they will continue to do so as the climate changes. Combining all of these factors with the slower recovery due to higher temperatures, despite increased CO2 fertilization, means that forests and the ecosystems they support will continue to face dramatic change. The article predicts that forests across the globe will lose canopy cover and biomass as a result.

This, they note, has already been happening over the past century and they project the pace will increase.

[Read the study here.](#)

Volunteer's Corner

Lost Turkey Trail Care Goes... Orange

The KTA Trail Care season is finally going to get underway in July with a modified event on the Lost Turkey Trail. Originally scheduled as a weekend Trail Care BTD from July 9 –12, it will take place, but as a Code Orange Saturday only work day on July 11th.

This format will allow volunteers to join in the effort to upgrade the trail's blazing while also minimizing the use of the park's public facilities. Camping will still be available for participants both Friday and Saturday nights in sites 3,4,5,6 and 10 at Blue Knob State Park.

The Covid-19 virus is still on the prowl and a very real health threat, so trail care volunteers should familiarize themselves with the recommended protocols for participants that can be viewed on the [Trail Care](#) section of the KTA website.

The priority project on this work day will be to reblaze the trail on the lengthy State Game Lands sections. The current blazes are weathered, confusing or non-existent, which makes following the trail difficult in places. Volunteers will be assigned, as needed, to small painting teams, so dress in paint ready work clothes.

All participants should be sure to contact the leader, Wanda Shirk: wshirk49@outlook.com prior to the 11th. Plan on being at the park campground by 7:30 in the morning if you are arriving Saturday morning.

2020 Trail Care Schedule

Visit <https://www.kta-hike.org/trail-care-and-trail-crew> for more info

July 11: LOST TURKEY TRAIL (Code Orange)

Aug 6 – 9: MID STATE TRAIL, Everett Region
Aug 13 –16: PINCHOT TRAIL
Aug 20 – 23: THUNDER SWAMP TRAIL SYSTEM
Aug 27 – 30: THE DONUT HOLE
Sept 18 – 20: TUSCARORA TRAIL
Oct 3: GIFFORD PINCHOT STATE PARK
Nov 5 – 8: BUCKTAIL PATH

Hiker's Corner

Batona Trail



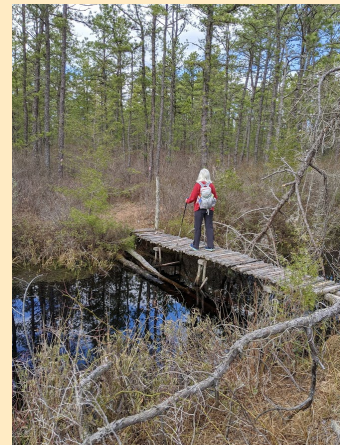
As members of Pennsylvania's state-wide hiking organization, we generally hike trails within our Keystone state. But there are many other trails not far from PA that offer great opportunities. One of those is the Batona Trail in southern New Jersey. The BT is the creation of the [Batona Club](#) (BACK TO NATURE), a Philadelphia organization formed in 1928 that provides hiking and trail maintenance activities in Philadelphia, NJ, and Delaware.

The trail was completed in 1961 and, like most trails, has been expanded and re-routed over time. It lies entirely within the Pine Barrens of NJ, which is the largest remaining example of the Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens ecosystem, spanning more than seven NJ counties. Currently it runs for 52 miles, starting at Bass River State Forest, passing through Wharton SF, and ending in Brendan Byrne SF. As a point of reference, the trail is roughly an hour from Philadelphia.

The trail is very forgiving – it's mostly packed sand cushioned by soft pine needles; there is little elevation gain or loss. Hikers accustomed to rocky trails such as the Mid State or Standing Stone will feel spoiled! Frequent pink blazes mark the way and it's fairly shady.

There are multiple road crossings and trailheads, so shuttling vehicles for day hiking is a simple matter; we were able to hike the trail NOBO in five roughly equal segments. The southern terminus is in Bass River at Dan Bridge Rd. and Stage Rd. There are 3-4 sites where camping is permitted, so backpacking or overnighting is an option (note: the water found in this area is tinged with cedar tree runoff, so self-supply is recommended).

Although the Pine Barrens, as the name suggests, are mainly flat pine forests, there are a large variety of plants and animals along the trail. Wild edibles, such as huckleberry, blackberry, cranberry and, of course, blueberry are common. Notable plants along the trail include wild orchids, carnivorous plants such as sundews, and



prickly pear cactus. Beavers, muskrats, mink, and river otters are frequently observed. Native reptiles include the pine snake, hognose snake, and musk turtle. The only venomous snake in the New Jersey Pine Barrens is the timber rattlesnake, which is a state-listed endangered species.

The website southjerseytrails.org and the Facebook group of the same name are valuable resources for not only the Batona Trail, but many others in the area. They also offer a beautiful BT patch at a nominal cost.

[A map of the trail is available here.](#)

by Jack Hauler

[Donut Hole Trail Thru Hike](#)



The Donut Hole Trail is widely considered Pennsylvania's most isolated, remote, and least used trail. The trail was hiked from east to west, from Farrandsville to Jericho. The thru- hike started June 7th and was completed on June 12th, 2020. The path encompasses the span of Sproul State Forest, featuring a number of great views, abundant wildlife, ample water with some cool cascades, variety of scenery, and just some of the downright best of everything a trail has to offer.

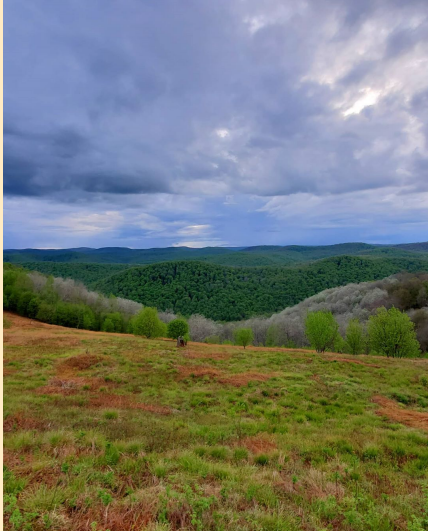
[by Greg Strine \(SleepyHeadOutdoors\)](#)

Jeff's Jaunts

[Hike to Twin Sisters Vista-Hammersley Meadows](#)

This is an easy to moderate hike that leads to spectacular mountaintop meadows and beautiful views across the Hammersley Wild Area. This is a truly unique place in Pennsylvania. The hike is about 2.5 miles one way.

From Red Ridge Road, follow the yellow blazed trail; you'll also notice new orange blazes. The terrain is hilly as the trail goes through hemlock groves and under forests of some huge hardwoods. It is a beautiful forest hike. The trail



crosses the side of the valleys and gorges, allowing you to look down through the open forests with glades of ferns. In one place, the trail follows an old grade with original stonework.

Reach a sign indicating the meadows were created by a fire in the 1960s. The trail crosses what I call the north meadow. Enjoy the stunning views, with the ridges, knobs, and peaks over deep gorges and valleys. In the valley below is the Susquehannock Trail. The trail continues across the north meadow and then reaches the corner of the south meadow

before entering the woods. The Twin Sisters Trail continues south and eventually meets the Susquehannock Trail.

I suggest you go off trail to explore both meadows (red on the map). I really enjoy the expansive views from the south meadow, which is an ideal place for sunsets. In spring, you will see many painted trilliums growing in the meadow. For the north meadow, climb to the top for 30-40 mile views. Keep in mind that pickers grow in parts of the north meadow. If you want more of an adventure, descend along the northern edge of the north meadow along a ridge to more meadows with views down the canyon of Hammersley Fork.

This is a place where you will want to linger and enjoy. On our visit, some people were camping at the meadows and I was a little bit jealous. Beautiful clouds swept across the horizon and I could see distant rainstorms drifting across the wild area.

The Hammersley Wild Area is a special place, a sanctuary in Northern Appalachia. Explore and enjoy it.

Parking is at 41.572678, -77.847954. Red Ridge and Windfall Roads are in good shape. Avoid McConnell Road as sections are in poor shape.

[by Jeff Mitchell](#)

2020 Summer/Fall Photo Contest

Submit your photos at <https://www.kta-hike.org/photo-contest.html>

The winner will be announced in January and will receive a free 1 year membership and KTA hat.

Community Calendar

KTA Events

Allegheny National Forest - July 24-26

Spend a weekend in Pennsylvania's only national forest. Stay in Groves Lodge as you explore the many trails and sights of the ANF.

Trail Challenge - Sept 12

Join us on September 12th for a one-day hiking event spanning 50 (or 25) kilometers of trails in Lancaster County

Fall Hiking Weekend - Oct 2-4

KTA hosts a weekend in Cumberland Valley south of Chambersburg with hiking opportunities on the AT, Tuscarora, Standing Stone Trails, and more.

Black Forest Trail Slackpack - Oct 23-26

Hike through the 42 mile BFT in 4 days with just a day pack. Stay in comfortable cabins at Pettecote Junction Campground.

Cancellations

To protect the health and safety of our members and help reduce the spread of COVID-19, KTA events have been cancelled through June. Later events are set to go on as normal and will be reevaluated closer to the date.

Many events from member clubs and outside organizations have also been cancelled or postponed. Please check for the latest information from event organizers before attending.

WANT YOUR EVENT FEATURED ON THE COMMUNITY CALENDAR?

KTA will promote your club/organization's major events through The Keystone Hiker, Facebook, and our website. It's a perk of membership! Just submit a list with date, time, location, and link to web page for only those events that the public should see, to ktaadmin@kta-hike.org.

Club Spotlight

Mountain Club of Maryland



The Mountain Club is the oldest hiking club in Maryland (since 1934) and the premier hiking group in the state. We are a volunteer organization that is centered on hiking. We support Leave No Trace principles, and we work on both local trails and the Appalachian Trail. We organize and lead hikes and other outdoor activities such as camping, canoe / kayak trips, and backpacking. We have a year-round schedule with hikes in and around Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, New Jersey and Delaware. Our trips are rated by length and difficulty, so you are sure to find one that suits you. Our trips are well organized and led

by experienced trip leaders.

We are also one of the volunteer clubs responsible for maintaining the Appalachian Trail, and we offer volunteer opportunities and service trips for trail work.

Hiking is one of the best ways to get exercise. No matter what type of trail you choose, hiking is a great whole-body workout. The physical benefits of hiking include: building stronger muscles and bones, improving your sense of balance, and improving heart health.

We welcome guests. And for a very moderate fee, you can become a member and gain access to our members schedule that contains the full trip details, as well as our regular newsletters and email updates. Hiking with the Mountain Club is a great way to stay in shape and make new friends, and it costs a lot less than a gym.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

This newsletter is published monthly by Keystone Trails Association. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis. Opinions expressed are those of the listed authors. The Editor encourages submissions reflecting all viewpoints, but reserves the right to edit material. You are encouraged to submit material (even just a trail closing or care alert!) to the Program Administrator, Casey Schneck, at ktaadmin@kta-hike.org. The deadline for newsletter submissions is the 15th of the prior month. Submissions received after that time will be considered for the next month.

Please reference our [**Editorial-Style Guide**](#) while you compose your piece.