

Quemahoning Trails

The Quemahoning Trails are slated to be around 37 miles of machine cut single track trail. As of October 2020 there are around 22 miles complete. Close to 17 miles around the lake and another 5.5 miles of loops. Approximately 7 miles are planned in each of the next two years (2021 and 2022) that will complete the project. Deer ticks are prevalent in the woods so please take precautions. Though you should not see any ticks if staying on the trails.

The first 17 miles of trail opened in the summer of 2019. An additional 5.5 miles of loops opened in the summer of 2020.

There are several parking areas around the lake that will likely be improved and enlarged by the largest landowner, Cambria-Somerset Authority (CSA) starting in 2021. North American Hoganas and Stonycreek Township also own smaller sections of the trail.

CSA owns most of the land and the Laurel Highlands On & Off Road Bicycling Association (LHORBA) manages the trail. The trails are designed, flagged, and cut with an excavator by Clark Fisher, while the flagged corridor is cleared by Maher Contracting. Brad Clemenson with the Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative is instrumental in securing funding to build the trail. LHORBA along with other groups have volunteered thousands of hours hand finishing all of the trails. The trails are closed to bicycles November 15 through January 1 for hunting.

The easy trail is currently from the Quemahoning Family Rec Area to close to Mastillo Rd (about 2 miles). More trail is planned for 2021 that will make this a 3+ mile loop. The easy trail does not have any steep hills but there are a few rocky(ish) stream crossings. My 11 year old daughter rides this section with joy and ease.

The rest of the way around the lake is classified as moderate trail, though much of it can be classified as easy. The trail around the lake was designed as "level" as possible though there are several short steep sections and longer gradual climbs. There are also several rocky sections mostly on the north side of the lake. Most road crossings are at larger streams and are very short.

On Hoganas' property, going up the hill from Plank Rd, the current trail turns right in a couple hundred meters. The machine cut trail actually continues straight up the hill staying on the left side of the stream (if facing up hill). The current trail that crosses the creek (to the right side facing up the hill) and goes up the power line is not part of the Quemahoning Trail. Verizon put a communication line on a telephone pole about 6 feet above the trail near the top of the hill (just after the trail was built). Once that is moved the trail will go back to its original location. The trail "reroute" was actually a mistake by someone clearing the trail and it stuck for now (mainly because of the low communication line on the actual trail). It should be obvious this section does not flow as nicely as the rest of the trails.

The "Hog Tail" was constructed mainly because there was no other way to connect the trail, so straight up the hill it went. The Hog Tail is a set of 6 tight switchbacks that you can easily get on the backslope if

skilled enough. We originally built the trail differently but found out it was on someone else's property (bad property lines). Oops. My fault.

Cooper's Quarry and Clark's Quarry loops were finished in 2020. Cooper's Quarry is rather rocky in sections and is classified as moderate. Though there is a short section that seems more challenging. Clark's Quarry was a little more challenging to construct and even design due to a short and severely rocky section just past Cooper's Quarry. No way around. Clark's Quarry is challenging. Not every experienced rock rider will be able to clear the short rocky section – though know that it has been done. There are several boulders that can be ridden up and off along both trails. Both trails pass through / along a boulder field as well.

There is currently an unnamed easy + trail loop (we need a name for it) starting near Pheasant Rd. Sweet 16 is a challenging set of 16 switchbacks through a dry ravine that comes off of this unnamed loop. Sweet 16 was rather challenging to get up on my excavator. There are several areas throughout the trails that I look at today and have trouble figuring out how my excavator got through them. Sweet 16 is certainly one of those areas. Though two switchbacks near the top of Sweet 16 will be excavated in 2021 to give them a high backslope (if I can figure out how to get down to them :-). Those will be specifically for Mark Woods :-). And anyone else with his skill. Sweet 16 is designed as it is so as many people as possible can get down it and enjoy it. Though it is challenging, it could have been made much more challenging with fewer switchbacks.

The trail splits at the bottom of Sweet 16. This trail needs a name as well. If you continue straight at the bottom of Sweet 16 the trail descends down to the Que Trail near the Jerome Parking Area. If you turn left at the bottom of Sweet 16 the trail goes back up to the unnamed loop where you can turn left again to go to the top of Sweet 16. There is a 3 way intersection half way up this trail that if you turn right the trail currently ends at a paved road. Trail will be completed in 2021 across the paved road. There is also a dry ravine directly beside Sweet 16 that will likely have a trail in 2021.

History of the Que Trails from my perspective:

I first heard about the potential for trails at the Quemahoning Reservoir from Rich Maher around 2011. I sort of blew it off because I did not think there was enough land around the lake. Oops. Then I looked at parcel maps and found out there is plenty of land around the lake. Turns out Mick Planincek (passed away in 2020) may have been the first LHORBA member to contact CSA and suggest trails around the lake.

Brad Clemenson with the Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative got involved and hired me to design the first 17 miles around the lake and to manage the stream crossing permitting and soils permitting. Brad knew that I designed and flagged most of the first 30+ miles at Raystown. Brad also hired me to design and flag 13+ miles at Ohio State Park (that were not built to date due to changing land managers).

Permitting. Phase I (17 mile loop around the lake). Not fun. Original permit took 3 years and had to go through the DEP Regional Office in Pittsburgh because 500 feet of trail went through a High Value

Watershed. That 500 feet eliminated a half mile of paved road. Had to build an 800 foot swale across from Summer's Best Two Weeks. Still not closed out.

Phase II permit (20 miles of loops). Was able to go through the Somerset County Conservation District. Still active. Still not easy. Still not fun...

Trail design in 2013 was challenging and awesome at the same time. Uploaded parcels onto my GPS receiver and uploaded my best guess route from my computer using Geographic Information Systems (GIS)...then went out with flags. 2013 was a rather warm spring so it was challenging going out dressed for 20 degrees on a 75 degree day (had to dress "heavy" for the green briars and thick vegetation).

Took a few days to flag a really steep side slope section (could barely walk on it). Finally threw my hands up and said, "IMBA will figure it out when they build it." Turns out I had to figure it out when I built it.

Flagging behind the CSA Dam caretaker's house was also rather challenging due to CSA not wanting the house visible from the trail.

One of the most challenging aspects of trail design is designing a great trail while not destroying the corridor clearer. Much more challenging than anyone would suspect.

The permitting was complete in mid-2015. Then I had a stroke while surfing my raft on the Stonycreek River in August of 2015. Scary. Turns out I got lucky and mostly it was my speech that was altered.

I had no idea how we would build the trails in 2015. I contacted a person with a 5 foot wide excavator that built trails on private property near 7-Springs that I designed but did not want the Que Trails that wide. Had a rather disappointing and combative experience with IMBA while managing the trail build at Raystown so that was out. Though LHORBA did try to get IMBA involved.

Then I started looking at excavators myself. Found a 31 inch wide rather small mini excavator in Meyersdale. I was told by other trail builders not to buy it since it was so small and underpowered. I figured "what the heck" and my daughter and I were off to Meyersdale to look at it. Turns out it has been the best tool I ever owned. Of course at the time I had never even sat on one before. The seller had ramps and loaded it onto my Ford F150 pickup truck. I watched a YouTube video and figured I could get it off the truck with no ramp. That almost ended badly. I got ramps after that.

Learning to build trails with an excavator came with a good bit of trial and error. But I learned quickly – for the most part. Luckily the terrain was rather gentle where I started. It was a month into trail building before I found all of the grease fittings. Thanks goes to Fran Jubinsky for that one when he came out to help push a pin back in. Fran has been out at least 4 times to help keep the excavator going. Thanks buddy.

Then came the steep side slopes on the other side of the lake. The ones I thought IMBA would have to deal with. Luckily I learned to finish the section I was working on before moving forward. That was a bit scary. We had to change the route once. Rich Maher had a plan to get my excavator out of the lake

with a barge 100 feet below where I was working if it fell in. I did not listen too much to that since I likely would not be around if that happened.

Crossing logging roads where one side was cut away was very challenging. Almost put the excavator on its side once trying to cross a logging road. Got out of that with the boom. Lesson learned.

Getting dead tree stumps out was challenging. One had a huge root ball and almost tipped the excavator to the side. Luckily I dropped it at the last second and the excavator popped back up. Lesson learned.

Ran into several rather large rocks that I ended up having to dig out. At least one was likely heavier than the excavator. Awesome little machine. It is pretty neat remembering all of that when riding the trails.

There were several instances when I was not sure if I could get across a section with a severely steep side slope. This was prevalent at a few stream crossings. One steep side slope was going behind the guard rail on Que Dam Rd. I somehow cut across it but came a little too close to the guard rail. It was decided to cross the road back further about 200 feet. So I had to go back across the steep side slope and put the soil back the best I could. That could have been the sketchiest thing I had to do.

I wanted to make an easy loop near Summer's Best Two Weeks. Turns out we had to stay at least 750 feet away from a private shooting range so the trail did not end up as easy as I had planned.

We rode the trails with several dirt bike motorcycles as the last step in trail building. The dirt bikes do a great job at smoothing the trail surface.

That is it for now. Will likely include more information when the project is complete.

Enjoy the Trails,
Clark Fisher 2020