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FINDING FALL COLOR IN THE HIGHLANDS



Photo © Paul g Wiegman

Fall Along the GAP

A 2019 survey revealed that for over 40% of us, fall is the favorite season. If you are among that number, you are in luck; the Great Allegheny Passage in Somerset County offers plenty of places to enjoy autumn color.

Our section of the GAP boasts an extended season because of differences in elevation. At the Eastern Continental Divide (ECD), the elevation is 2,392 feet above sea level. In Confluence at the Somerset County line, the elevation is 1,327 feet. This change of 1,065 feet makes a difference in when fall begins, reaches its peak, and ends.

The last week of September is often when change can be found on a ride starting at the Deal (PA) trailhead heading toward Big Savage Tunnel. It's a short ride of two or three miles one way. You can extend your mileage by continuing on to the Mason-Dixon Line (the Maryland border) or by beginning at Meyersdale. The latter adds nine or ten miles to a one-way trip.

On the longer ride, you'll find plenty of color and enjoy crossing the Bollman Bridge and massive Keystone Viaduct. Either tour features a trip over the ECD, going through the Big Savage Tunnel, and taking a break at the Big Savage Vista.

Early October is the time to ride Meyersdale to Rockwood. After the Garrett trailhead (where eventually the 9/11 National Memorial Trail will link to the GAP), the trail winds along the Casselman River. Here, much of the route is forested. You'll pass through a tunnel of color where trees overhang the trail, as in the photo above.

From the Visitors Center in Meyersdale, Rockwood is eleven miles away. You might want to start the ride in Rockwood. That way, you ride uphill first and enjoy the downhill to end your ride.

Finally, around Columbus Day weekend (October 10 and 11 in 2020), autumn color peaks around the lower elevation at Confluence. That's the time to ride Rockwood to Confluence, a 19-mile ride. Again, begin at Confluence to get the uphill done first with a smooth glide back down after lunch in Rockwood.

Highlights of that segment are two bridges and a tunnel at Pinkerton Horn, plus two bridges near Confluence. The bridges, especially Pinkerton High Bridge, are great vantage points for taking in the color. Make sure to have your camera ready and take time off your bike to imprint the scenes in your mind to recall during the winter months to come.

The intensity of fall color depends on many variables. Temperature is one, and our warm September this year may push the peak hues later into October. The Department of Conservation & Natural Resources has activated [their annual Fall Foliage Report website](#) where you can stay informed on the movement of peak color all across the commonwealth.

SCRTA Board member, botanist, and local photographer Paul g Wiegman loves sharing his fondness for all things growing and green in southwestern Pennsylvania. You'll find his photographs, among other places, on the [Great Allegheny Passage Facebook page](#) and at [Phipps Conservatory](#).

OUT AND ABOUT



Photo © Allegheny Trail Alliance

Great Allegheny Passage

The Allegheny Trail Alliance is asking for input on trail use with an eye toward assessing the trail's economic impact. [Participate in the online survey](#) and you might win a \$100 REI gift certificate.



Photo © Todd Berkey, Tribune-Democrat

9/11 National Memorial Trail

Ground was broken in Garrett on September 5th for the connection from the Passage to the 9/11 Trail with speakers including David Brickley, President Emeritus, of the 9/11 National Memorial Trail Alliance. This first purpose-built section of trail will connect Garrett to Berlin and provide a way forward toward New York City.



Photo © Wendy Duchene

Somerset Lake Nature Park

COVID-19 restrictions aren't so bad for the SCRTA board when it means the opportunity to gather physically distanced outside at the picnic pavilion near the Fish & Boat Commission office. Shown here, Board Treasurer Paul Wiegman and immediate past Treasurer Larry Mazer at September's meeting.



(Photo © Lindsay Pyle)

A Friend of the Trail We Won't Forget

Mr. Maynard Ralph Sembower was a fixture at the Rockwood trailhead from the time it opened. His friendly and sometimes mischievous manner was as much a part of the experience as the ride.

Maynard passed away on September 16, 2009, at the age of 100 years.

Following is an excerpt from an article by Larry Walsh, former recreational bicycling columnist for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on September 19, 2009.

Maynard R. Sembower watched the construction of the Western Maryland Railway, rode it as a child and an adult, saw it through its final days of passenger and freight traffic and was delighted to see its right-of-way reborn as a rail-trail.

He was proud that the first segment of the new bike trail in Somerset County started in his beloved Rockwood in 1993 and extended about seven miles down to Markleton. And what is now the Great Allegheny Passage was only five houses away from his home.

"That gave him the opportunity to talk to the workmen and monitor the progress of the trail," said Hank Parke, president of the Somerset County Rails to Trails Association (now Somerset County Recreation & Trails Association). "When local residents and visitors had questions about it, Maynard had the answers."

After his wife, Edna, died in 1992, Maynard, a tall, friendly man with a warm smile and a firm handshake, directed his attention to the new trail.

He asked Parke for printed information about it and gave it to visitors. He referred them to local businesses when they asked about lodging and restaurants. When bicyclists asked about Edna's, Parke got them and Maynard said them - first from the trunk of his car, then from a card table, and finally from a small wooden building that he and his son-in-law, Roger Ronesburg, designed. [The building was dedicated as the Maynard R. Sembower Visitors Center in 2006.]

"He sold thousands and thousands of dollars of T-shirts, sweatshirts, ballcaps, pins, you name it," Parke said. "The proceeds all went to our trail association. He was a terrific ambassador for Rockwood and the Great Allegheny Passage. Bicyclists come to Rockwood just to see him and shake his hand."

Maynard's daughter and only child, Carol Sembower Ronesburg, remembers her father as "Pop," a man devoted to his family, his town and the trail. "The trail was his life for the last 17 years of his life."

Trail visitors from around the world still remember their stop in Rockwood, meeting "The Ambassador," and enjoying his gracious hospitality.



We're on Facebook! Find (and Like) Us at [Facebook.com/Somerset-County-Recreation-Trails-Association/](https://www.facebook.com/Somerset-County-Recreation-Trails-Association/) 100891231774856/ And a redesigned and expanded website is in the works SomersetRTA.org



GAP rider Michael noted that he had the Salisbury Viaduct all to himself on the morning of September 25. Give the photo a click to the original. (Photo © Michael Sexton)



Many people shared their breathtaking photographs of local views of the Tower of Light from the Flight 93 National Memorial on the night of 9/11/2020. Few are as breathtaking as this one by Rusty Glesner. Again, please click the photo to visit the original. (Photo © RustyGlesner@PABucketList)



This autumn aerial over Lake Somerset was provided by the Somerset County Conservancy back in 2013. (Photo © Somerset County Conservancy)

Somerset County Recreation & Trails Association 300 North Center Avenue Somerset, PA 15501 **JOIN NOW** BOARD OF DIRECTORS Bill Hugel, Brian Pelesky, Carol Farnass, Cathy McColom, Cody Poole, Craig Barclay, Dennis Stahl, Hank Parke, Jill Lutsh, June & Deak Deakins, Larry Mazer, Lindsay Pyle, Susan Walker, Paul g Wiegman, Sandy Cline, Wendy Duchene

The official registration and financial information of Somerset County Recreation & Trails Association may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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