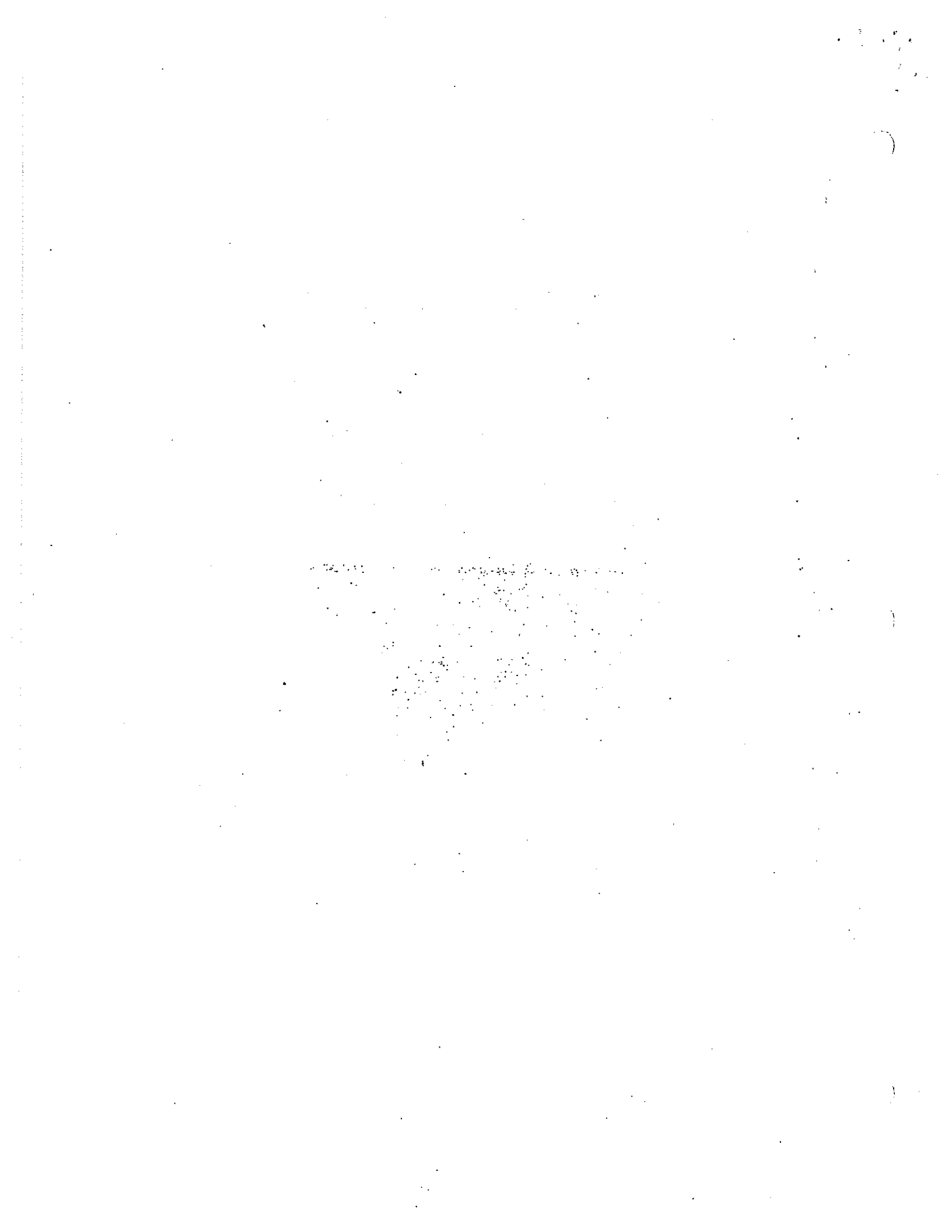


SHENANGO TRAIL



FRENCH CREEK COUNCIL

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA



Beaver and Erie Canal 1888

In the session of 1822-23 the Legislature authorized a survey to ascertain the practicability of connecting Lake Erie with the Ohio River by a canal. In 1824 the United States Government ordered an examination to be made with the same object in view, and the engineers reported in favor of the scheme. After considerable contention the route via the Beaver and Shenango Rivers was adopted. In 1827 the Legislature passed the act for the construction of the canal, and also for the "French Creek Feeder," which previously had been surveyed. Ground was broken on the latter at Meadville, August 24, 1827, and it was completed to Corneant Lake in December, 1834, but nothing had yet been accomplished toward building the main line, though the subject continued to be agitated by the people along the proposed route. The State ultimately made a preliminary re-survey. This was followed, under the administration of Gov. Ritner, by a limited appropriation, which resulted in pushing the work toward completion. In 1842 the Legislature adopted the watchword of "retrenchment," annulling all the contracts and stopping the work throttled the enterprise. This shortsighted policy resulted in sufficient costs of litigation to have completed the enterprise and made it efficient. Gov. Porter, in his annual message in 1843, said that ninety-seven and three-fourths miles of the main line had been finished, extending from Rochester on the Ohio to the mouth of the French Creek Feeder in Crawford County, and that \$4,000,000 had been expended on the improvement between 1827 and 1842.

The work was now turned over, without cost, to the "Erie Canal Company," chartered by the Legislature at the session of 1842-43, on condition that that corporation would finish and operate the canal. In September, 1843, contracts were let for the unfinished portion of the work, and December 5, 1844, the two first boats, the "Queen of the West," a passenger packet, and the "R. S. Reed," loaded with Mercer County coal, passed through to Erie. Business was brisk, and a new life sprang into the Shenango Valley. It spoiled many old milldams along the Big Shenango, but gave recompense in increased facilities for transportation. Sharon, Clarksville, Big Bend and Greenville were all given a commercial importance by this new means of travel and transportation. Big Bend was specially important and active, because it was the point from which supplies were hauled to the eastern, central and southeastern parts of the county. The canal flourished until the Erie & Pittsburgh Railroad was completed along the same route, when a downward movement began, which finally resulted in its purchase by that company in 1870. The railroad company continued to operate it until 1871, when the fall of the Elk Creek aqueduct in Erie County gave them an excuse for abandoning the enterprise, which no doubt was the intention at the time of purchase. Its bed has since been a source of annoyance to the people of the towns through which it passed, as a breeder of disease, though most of it is now filled up. The whoop of the boy on the towpath is no longer heard, but instead the shrill whistle of the iron horse.

History of Mercer County, 1888, pages 174-175

PROCEDURE FOR HIKING THE SHENANGO TRAIL

One copy of the Trail Program booklet is furnished free upon request to a unit. Additional copies can be obtained at the cost listed on the pamphlet. Copies of the Canal History section should be made and distributed to each Scout hiker.

Unit Leader, in conjunction with his youth leadership, selects date to hike the trail, completes appropriate paperwork, and forwards to French Creek Council, 815 Robison Rd. W., Erie, PA, 16509.

The hike must be completed in one day. It is recommended that you start before 9:00 AM. Estimated time to hike the trail is 6 to 8 hours. You may begin either at the Kidd's Mill Bridge terminus, just off Rt 18 at Reynolds, or you may begin at the Big Bend terminus not far from Rt. 258

Hikers must be in appropriate uniform, keep together as a group, respect property along the trail, observe good hiking manners, and be prepared to clear any overgrown or impassable sections of the trail along the way.

Upon completion of the hike, each Scout must write a 100-word essay about what he has learned about life in the days when the canals operated. The unit leader collects these. The unit leader then files the application for Trail Awards, along with the appropriate remittance, to the Council Service Center.

A patch and/or medallion are available for each person completing the hike and writing the essay.

Camping is available at the Big Bend terminus of the trail. To camp there, you must first make reservations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Shenango Dam, Sharpsville, PA, 16150.

Other canal-era attractions nearby include:

The Canal Museum on Alan Ave. in Greenville. To tour the museum and see an actual model of a canal boat, contact them at 724-588-7540.

Riverside Park in Greenville, which, at the time was flooded, and served as the main repair shops for this section of the canal.

Guard Lock 10 - the only existing lock still standing between Erie and Pittsburgh is near downtown Sharpsville. Follow the signs off of Rt 18 or Rt 258.

Beaver and Erie Canal

1888

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History of Mercer County, 1888, pages 174-175

LIFE ON THE CANALS

This article is the fourth in a four-part series on the Pennsylvania canal system and the Erie Extension Canal which helped to open the Pennsylvania frontier in the 1800's.

The great canal era of this country is often depicted in a romantic setting. Canals are painted with a scene of leisure travel and gaily-dressed passengers on a open-air deck surrounded by a picturesque country landscape. However, first-hand historical accounts describe canal travel with adjectives such as crowded, filthy, fatiguing, and slow. Whatever the perspective, there will never again be a period quite as colorful and unique as the great canal era.

The Erie Extension Canal which passed through Mercer County, like other canals of its time, was a slackwater canal. Simply put, it was a ditch filled with water, cleared through the frontier and dug by human toil. Its typical dimensions were 28' wide at the bottom and 40' wide at water level carrying water to a depth of 4'.

Canal boats had no power of their own, but were towed by animals on a 10' wide towpath. Mules were found to be most suitable for the heavy freight boats. Horses, because of their speed, were favored for the packets (passenger boats) which usually travelled at the state-mandated maximum speed of 4 MPH. Higher speeds created a backwash which undercut the earthen banks of the canal. Teams of 2 to 3 animals were used to tow a boat and often there was a spare team carried on board.

Canal boats were typically 50' to 70+' long with 50 to 60 ton capacity. Crews consisted of at least a steersman (who was also the captain) and a driver who kept the team moving on the towpath. The more prosperous packets sported a crew of five, six, or more. The drivers were powerful vocalists and their exhortations to the mules gave rise to the then standard expression, "He swore like a canaller".

Canallers were a hardy and competitive lot. Boats literally raced each other from one lock to the next. The lockkeeper was supposed to decide which boat passed through the lock first, but that choice was more often determined by which crew could lick the other in a fight.

The driver was the forager for the crew. Crops or fruit which grew close to the towpath would end up on board being served for dinner. Fence rails along the towpath would disappear

on cold nights when the boat's stove was low on fuel.

Canal travel, as stated earlier, was not as idyllic as frequently described in history. As many as 25 passengers would be compacted into a boat's tiny quarters. Bad weather was feared for it would confine everyone under deck to stew in the heat and mixed aromas of body odor, alcohol, stale tobacco, and, of course, mules or horses if there was a stable on board.

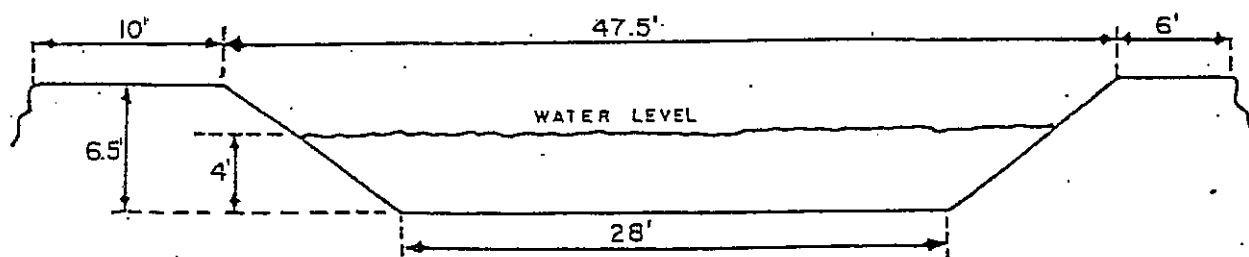
Wash facilities, for those who found it necessary to wash, consisted of a tin ladle and tin basin chained to the deck which was used to fish cold, dirty water out of the canal. Also available was a large piece of common soap, common towel, and a public comb and hair brush.

Sleeping berths gave all the appearance of bookshelves hung from the wall and ceiling by a suspiciously slender cord. The privacy of ladies' and men's quarters was provided by only a single red curtain hung between the two. What with snoring men, squalling children, and the occasional bumping of the boat, there was probably little sleep gained while on board.

Still, there were many delights in canal travel. Charles Dickens, in his account of travel on the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal, portrayed many great pleasures: the bold and striking scenery, the healthy, brisk walks upon the towpath, the lazy motion of the boat, and lying idly on the deck, undisturbed by noise of wheels or steam.

While canal travel seems slow by today's standards, it was fast and efficient for moving settlers and commerce into the frontier in the early to mid-1800's. A trip by packet from Erie to Beaver (136 miles) took about two days and cost a room-and-board fare of \$4.


The railroad, however, soon developed and America's craving for speed diverted its interest in the slow canal boat and put everything on wheels. "Goodbye Old Canal", read the headline of the Erie Observer with the closing of the Erie Extension Canal in 1871. As concluded in Durant's 1877 History of Mercer County, "Railway transportation has entirely superseded it, and never again will the hills and valleys of Western Pennsylvania re-echo to the notes of the 'boatman's horn', or listen to the bray of the patient mule as he 'plods his weary way' along the tow-path".



Typical Cross Section of Canal

HISTORICAL FACTS

- ⇒ Shenango is the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) word for Bull Thistles "Lenni Lenape" translates to "Original People". It was the name the natives gave themselves. The name "Delaware" was given to them because they were the original inhabitants of the Delaware River Valley in eastern PA.
- ⇒ The Erie Extension Canal was the major means of travel from Pittsburgh to the Great Lakes from 1840-1871. This canal system was vital to the iron industry in western Pennsylvania before the introduction of the railroads.
- ⇒ First canal boat from Greenville loaded with coal gets to Erie, 1849
- ⇒ Camp Reynolds. Just up the hill to the west of Kidd's Mill Bridge was Camp Reynolds. Formerly the Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot, the federal government changed its name to Camp Reynolds in 1943 and closed it in 1946. During WWII it also served as a prisoner of war facility.
- ⇒ Kidd's Mill Bridge is one of the few Covered Bridges in Western Pennsylvania and the only in Mercer County. It was built in 1868 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.
- ⇒ The village of New Hamburg, laid out in 1838, was once a bustling town on the canal, filled with many hotels and homes. The area is on the National Register of Historic Places.
- ⇒ Big Bend. At one time was the site of a large Lenni Lenape (Delaware) village. The main Chief of this village at one time was Chief Kiondashawa. Kiondashawa's name translates to "Flying Fish". Big Bend is on the National Register of Historic Places. During the heyday of the canal it was quite a large town since goods shipped on the canal were offloaded there and shipped eastward.
- ⇒ Guard Lock #10 of the Erie Extension Canal in Sharpsville was built in 1839
- ⇒ Along the trail you may also find (see map) the site of an old grist mill, the remains of Canal era buildings near New Hamburg, the old Canal Loading Bay, the site of Locks 18, 17, 16 and 15 as well as some foundations of the old Lockkeeper's homes, parts of the old towpath, and the site of an 1850's iron furnace.



The map shows a topographic view of the Shenango region with contour lines and various landmarks. Overlaid on the map are hiking trails, trail access and parking areas, and historical sites. Key locations include Shenango Falls, Camp Shenango, and the Shenango River. A scale bar and north arrow are also present.

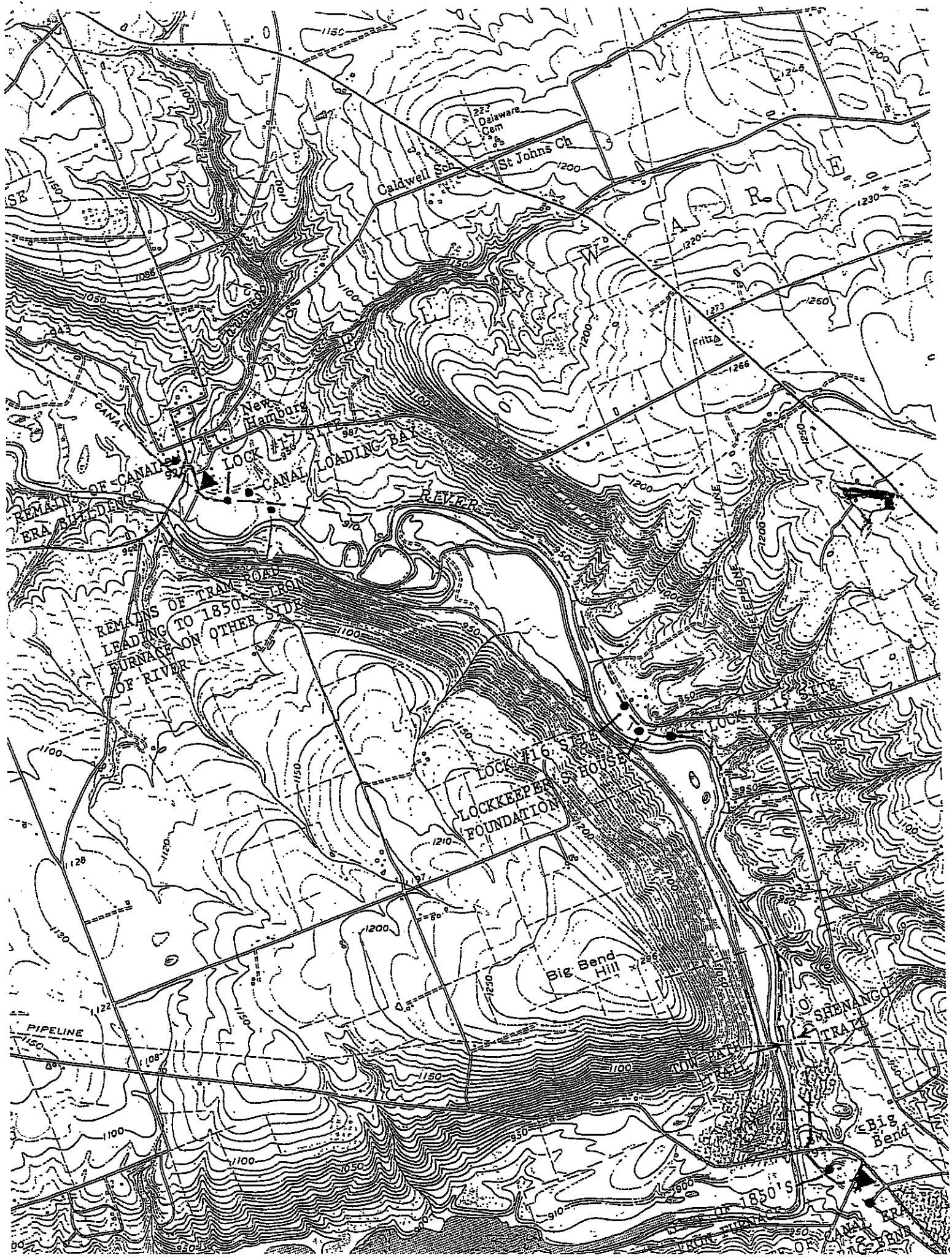
Shenango Trail Map

Courtesy of the Shenango Conservancy
and the Shenango Outing Club

--- Hiking Trails

▲ Trail Access & Parking Areas

● Historical Sites



Caldwell Sch
Delaware Cem
St Johns Ch

ARRE

New Hamburg
LOCK #17

LOADING BAY
REVER

REMAINS OF TRAM ROAD
LEADING TO 1850'S IRON
FURNACE ON OTHER SIDE
OF RIVER

LOCK #16
LOCKKEEPER'S HOUSE
FOUNDATION

Big Bend Hill

SEENANGO
TRAIL

Big Bend

1850'S

PIPELINE

HIKING SENSE

- 1) Always wear comfortable, sturdy hiking boots when taking a hike of any distance
- 2) Please be courteous of traffic. Always wait for cars to pass before crossing the road. Use good Scout sense.
- 3) Take plenty of water along.
- 4) Be good-scout-like. Never litter. Always carry a trash bag with you for your own personal trash.
- 5) Always tell someone where you're going and when you expect to be back. This is just good hiking sense, no matter where you go.
- 6) Dress or pack for all possible weather conditions forecast that day. Layers are the wisest way to dress for the outdoors, of course - you can add or subtract as you go. We also strongly recommend long-sleeved clothing, especially in warmer weather.
- 7) Hiking Dangers
 - A) Poison ivy loves us here on the cliffs, growing as small plants, tall shrubs, vines, and even small trees.
 - B) Ticks. The larger dog tick is far more common than the smaller, possible Lyme disease carrying deer tick. Long clothing with a spray of repellent at the cuffs is your best defense.
 - C) About poisonous snakes. The copperhead is relatively common here though snakes tend to be shy, so mostly just keep an eye to where you step, and especially don't reach up onto stones you can't see - it may be just where one is sunning itself.
 - D) A word on dogs. Treat any dog you may come across on the way as if it were a wild animal.
- 8) Accident, fire, and emergency: 911