

Plan On It

A Dutchess County Planning Federation eNewsletter

June 2011

Dutchess Rail Trail: A Park with Something for Everyone

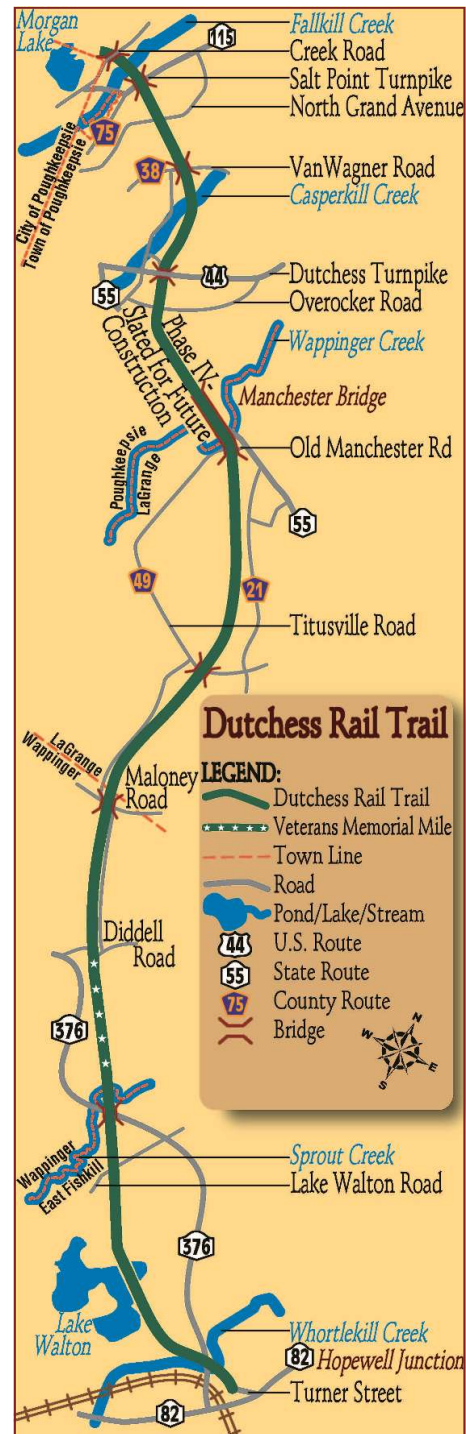
By Lindsay Carille, Senior Planner

When planning began for the Dutchess Rail Trail park, County Executive William R. Steinhaus envisioned a multi-faceted experience that would provide not only a place for biking and walking, but would be an educational and informative venue. Whether you are looking for vigorous exercise or a leisurely stroll, enjoying time with friends or time with nature, being a part of culture and history or making your own memories; the Dutchess Rail Trail is for you.

Interpretive Signs

To add to the trail's amenities, the Planning Department was asked to develop signs that would provide historical, environmental and cultural information to trail users. The first step was to walk the trail, camera in hand, to find out what can be seen from the trail. We then looked at our [1986 Historic Resource Survey](#) on the County's GeoAccess mapping application. This gave us base information, but what really made the project a success were the sources we contacted for research.

A variety of individuals and organizations provided information, pictures and fact checking. Bernie Rudberg – local railroad buff, author, and Hopewell Depot restoration project leader – provided a wealth of information, as well as all of the old train and train-related pictures for the signs. Other sources included the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Dutchess County Federation of Fish and Game Clubs, St. Peter's and Poughkeepsie Rural cemeteries, Locust Grove, and Vassar



Map of the Dutchess Rail Trail.
[CLICK HERE](#) for larger view.

College. There were too many to list here, but thank you to all who answered the call.

The following is a look at some of the signs you will see along the trail, and how the features combine to make it a "recipe for success."

One Part HISTORY

The Dutchess Rail Trail is a 12-mile segment of what was the Dutchess County Railroad, later known as the Maybrook line. This section of the rail line, between Poughkeepsie and East Fishkill, opened in 1892, four years after the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge was completed. It was the last railroad line constructed in Dutchess County and the final piece for a main east-west route.

Hopewell Junction

East Fishkill was established in 1849 and was originally the eastern part of the Town of Fishkill. The name "Fishkill" comes from two Dutch words, "Vis" meaning fish, and "Kill" meaning creek or stream, referring to Fishkill Creek or the "stream full of fish." The Town was centered a little over a mile east of here at Old Hopewell. With the advent of a second railroad line in 1881 and the growing importance of the rail system to the local economy, Hopewell Junction developed as the new town center and adopted the station name.

The railroad lines enabled connections to New York City, New England and western New York State. The Dutchess County Railroad, completed in 1892, four years after the opening of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge (now the Walkway Over The Hudson), is today the Dutchess Rail Trail.

Hopewell Junction rail yard was a busy place. In the lower left photo, the engine service area and turntable are on the right. The engines were manually rotated on the turntable, until newer and bigger engines no longer fit and a wye track (tracks in the shape of a Y) had to be used.

The locomotive in the photo to the right was sometimes used as a "pusher." The pusher attached to the rear of the caboose and helped push trains heading up the mountain towards Connecticut, cutting loose at the top and returning to Hopewell Junction to wait for the next eastbound train.

Dutchess Rail Trail
www.dutchesscountytrails.com

Dutchess Rail Trail sign about Hopewell Junction. [CLICK HERE](#) for larger view.

The Maybrook line originated in Orange County, New York, went over the Hudson River via the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge into the City of Poughkeepsie, down through Hopewell Junction in East Fishkill, through the towns of Beekman and Pawling and into Danbury, Connecticut. Both passenger and freight trains used this east-west route. In the early 1900s passenger trains used the Maybrook line for travel between Washington D.C. and Boston, Massachusetts. As the use of automobiles increased, the line was used mostly for moving freight. Trains continued running for nearly a century, ending service in 1982, eight years after the closing of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge.

In 1984 Dutchess County purchased a 12-mile segment of railroad right-of-way from Conrail. The original plan was to develop a County Route 11, connecting Interstate 84 (I-84) and Poughkeepsie, but environmental concerns for the Route 82 to I-84 connection were deemed too great. Plans turned to developing a pedestrian trail and determining what utilities might also use the railroad corridor.

In 2007, the Dutchess County Water and Wastewater Authority completed the Central Dutchess Water Transmission Line along the abandoned railroad right-of-way. The water line has the capacity to carry up to 10 million gallons of water per day, and is one of the most significant infrastructure projects in the County's history. That same year the 1.7-mile Phase I of the Dutchess Rail Trail opened in East Fishkill, from Route 376 in Hopewell Junction to Lake Walton Road. Phase II, a 2.4-mile section, opened in 2009. With Phase III opened in May 2011, trail users are now able to enjoy 8.3 miles of trail through LaGrange and Wappinger connecting all the way to East Fishkill. Phase IV, which is the final section, will open upon the completion of the massive bridge needed to go over the Wappinger Creek, Old Manchester Road and NYS Route 55 in LaGrange.

One Part NATURE

When railroads were built in the 1800s the major concern was to find the best route between destinations, even if that meant going through wetlands, lakes and even mountains. One benefit to this mindset is we can enjoy the natural areas along the trail today without further intruding upon or disturbing environmentally sensitive lands. If you would like to know more about the wetlands, creeks and watersheds along the trail, there are informational signs such as the one below.

Fallkill Creek

The Dutchess Rail Trail crosses five significant creeks that meander through the County. They are the Fallkill, Casperkill, Wappinger, Sprout, and the Whortlekill. The Fallkill Creek begins in the Towns of Hyde Park and Clinton and flows southward approximately 16 miles into the Hudson River. The Fallkill watershed is entirely within Dutchess County and covers approximately 19.5 square miles (12,476 acres).

The stream and associated riparian zones host a variety of wildlife including birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and amphibians. Riparian zones are distinctive bands of vegetation bordering waterbodies.

The waters of the Fallkill provide habitat for at least 15 species of fish including bluegill, cutlips minnow, tessellated darter, and white sucker. The Fallkill also provides vital habitat to the migratory American eel, which is also a fish.

Each spring thousands of tiny "glass eels" arrive in the Hudson River, where they mature for between 5 to 20 years in rivers and streams like the Fallkill. Once mature, they journey to where they were born, the Sargasso Sea in the Atlantic Ocean, to produce and fertilize eggs (spawn). The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC), along with local students and volunteers, conducts the Hudson River American Eel Research Project on juvenile eels each spring when the eels are captured, counted, weighed, and released.

Fowler's Toad
Photo: Chris Carlin

American Eel
Photo: Chris Bauser, NYS DEC

Fallkill Creek Watershed
Created by Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development

Dutchess Rail Trail
www.dutchesscountyrails.com

Dutchess Rail Trail sign about the Fallkill Creek. [CLICK HERE](#) for larger view.

If you are planning on a leisurely stroll, you might want to bring your camera and binoculars along to view the flora and fauna. There is a wide variety of wildflowers and plants, small and large animals, and hundreds of bird species. You may be surprised at what you might see while walking through some of the most densely populated areas of our County.

Rail Trail Wildlife

While walking the Dutchess Rail Trail, you may see a wide variety of wildlife common to New York State. It doesn't matter if you are in a wooded area, or walking through a densely populated area, you are likely to see a wide range of plants and animals, from fox, pheasants and deer to chipmunks and mice.

If you look up along your walk, you may spot nests made of twigs and leaves in the forks of trees. These are known as "dreys." They are the homes of the eastern gray squirrel.

Cottontail rabbits like to remain hidden during the day and browse at night on grasses and gardens. They are very good photo subjects as they are experts at freezing in place to avoid being noticed by predators.

Folklore has it that the woolly bear caterpillar can predict the winter weather. If the stripe on the woolly bear is narrow, it means the winter is going to be rough; and if the stripe is wide, it means the winter is going to be mild.

Cameras and binoculars are recommended when walking the trail as there is an abundance of wildflowers, and over 300 bird species in Dutchess County. Cedar waxwings are social birds that you might see eating berries in the fall, or hunting over streams looking for flying insects to snack on in the summer. The male rose-breasted grosbeak, boldly patterned in black, white, and rose, is easily identified. The drab, striped female however, is more of a challenge, as it resembles a large finch or sparrow. The grosbeak's song is like that of the robin, only more mellow and sweetly melodic.

Dutchess Rail Trail
www.dutchesscountytrails.com

Dutchess Rail Trail sign about wildlife along the trail. [CLICK HERE](#) for larger view.

A Dash of CULTURE

While you may not expect a cultural experience on the rail trail, it definitely can be one. You can look through the woods off the trail and see the largest Celtic Cross in America, and find out how and why it was erected. Maybe you are interested in learning a little bit about the rural cemetery movement, stone walls, the importance of the telegraph, early industry in the area, or our military history. The signage along the Dutchess Rail Trail provides information on all of those topics.

Trains and Communication

If you look closely off the sides of the Dutchess Rail Trail, you might spot old telephone poles. Some of them date back to the time of the original railroads in the 1800s and were first used to transmit telegraph messages. Continuous railroad rights-of-way connecting villages and city centers made excellent corridors for telegraph, telephone and electrical lines.

Samuel F. B. Morse, a famous resident of the Town of Poughkeepsie, is well known for his work with telegraphy. The telegraph allowed communication before telephones or cell phones, using electric impulses transmitted through a wire. The impulses were sent based on a system of dots and dashes, which were code for letters and numerals. This system is better known as Morse Code.

The use of telegraphy also allowed communication between a train dispatcher, who was usually many miles away, and the whole rail system. The telegrapher was the eyes and ears of the train dispatcher. Each small town along a rail line, usually about ten miles apart, had a depot. Some had a telegrapher on each shift around the clock.

The glass or porcelain caps you can still see on some poles are called insulators. Insulators were necessary to prevent the electrical current that passed through the wire from grounding out on the pole and making the line unusable.

There were just a few versions and types of insulators used in the early 1800s, but glass manufacturers began to create many new designs in an effort to secure a niche in the rapidly growing insulator market. By the advent of the Civil War in 1860, insulator models could be found in both porcelain and glass, and over time hundreds of designs were produced.

Dutchess Rail Trail
www.dutchesscountytrails.com

Dutchess Rail Trail sign about railroads and the telegraph. [CLICK HERE](#) for larger view.

History + Nature + Culture = SUCCESS

The railroads were used to move people and freight, and were an integral part of our social and economic history. The Dutchess Rail Trail is for both residents and visitors, and is a part of our social and economic future. To illustrate the connections with our past there are five sets of “then and now” pictures on the bottom of every sign. One picture is of a train that might have been seen when the railroad was operating, and one is of rail trail users today. The signs, both the text and the pictures, provide an opportunity to appreciate our past while we enjoy what Dutchess County is today.



World War II Army trucks rolling through Hopewell Junction, c. 1942 (Richard Teed Collection, courtesy B.L. Rudberg)



Bikers rolling along the rail trail, c. 2010.

More Information

Dutchess Rail Trail — [website homepage](#)

Dutchess Rail Trail — [Trail Map](#)

[CLICK HERE](#) to view past issues of the DCPF’s newsletter, *Plan On It*.

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

To unsubscribe from our eNewsletter mailing list, please send an email with the word “unsubscribe” in the subject line to DCPlanningFederation@co.dutchess.ny.us.