

Mounts
edge
Knights
in soccer.

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THE POST

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Long abused, creek could be a gem

Toby's Creek



Our hidden resource

Toby's Creek, which winds its way through the heart of the Back Mountain, has been hidden, abused and nearly forgotten. But this distinctive waterway may hold the potential to spark interest in the area as a historic, natural and recreational destination.

Through this spring and summer, Post writers and photographers have examined the past, present and possible future of Toby's Creek, from its formation by glaciers through its service providing water power to a vision of the stream as a delight for residents and a magnet for visitors.

This first part of a multi-week report relates the geology and forgotten commercial history of the creek. Other stories, including the one that starts on this page, look at the creek's environmental condition and explain the origin of its name. There is also the first installment of notes from a walk down the entire length of Toby's Creek in the Back Mountain.



POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

This rushing fall, just below the Harris Hill Road bridge, once powered a mill owned by William Trucks, for whom Trucksville is named. It has also provided generations of youngsters a place to frolic.

By **VICKI KEIPER**
Post Correspondent

To hear Rich Adamchick talk, the fish are biting in Toby's Creek.

A few yards from his business on Carverton Road, local children, including Adamchick's son, usually catch "a stringer full" and in 2003, a youngster pulled a 23-1/2" brown trout from a shallow area by the Trucksville fire hall, he said.

"They're there," Adamchick said. "You gotta sneak up on 'em."

Although the children in Adamchick's neighborhood see plenty of fish, Walter Chamberlain of the

"For years Toby's Creek has been treated as a nuisance."

Walter Chamberlain
Luzerne County Conservation District

Luzerne Conservation District wasn't as lucky. During an April 24 cleanup in Dallas Borough, he encountered only one fish.

"I don't know what kind it was, though I can tell you it was certainly not a trophy fish," he said. "It was 3" long. I might be exaggerating here — actually it was only 2" long."

So Toby's Creek isn't an angler's par-

adise. In fact, it could be categorized as a plant-choked, garbage-filled trickle of water that moves mostly unnoticed under and alongside Memorial Highway. But the creek supports a great deal of wildlife while providing recreational opportunities. In recent years, various agencies and individuals began working to revitalize the neglected and forgotten waterway.

The kind of animals you find along the creek depends upon your location, Chamberlain said.

"In areas where trash accumulates, especially food stuff, we find rats and

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Toby's Creek

Our hidden resource

Editor's Note: In preparing this news package, I thought it would be informative to walk the entire length of Toby's Creek in the Back Mountain, from its source on a hillside in Dallas Township to its final highway crossing at the Luzerne line. To simplify the description, I've designated only an eastern and western side of the creek. For these purposes, the eastern side would be on the right to someone traveling into the Back Mountain from Wilkes-Barre.

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

A walk along Toby's Creek is as much a journey through time as it is through space.

On the way from its source to the Susquehanna River the stream is alternately wild and controlled, neat and

sloppy, natural and artificial. Its modest beginning provides little indication of the powerful force it will become as it moves inexorably toward the Wyoming Valley.

Topographical maps show the stream starting on the northwest side of Country Club Road in Dallas Township, seemingly appearing out of nowhere. Unlike other waterways, this one is not born from a pond or swamp, but simply emerges from the side of a hill.

And sure enough, that's exactly what it does, bubbling up from the ground behind a stately colonial home at 420 Country Club Road. Judging by the old spring house built over it, and the attractive, stone-lined pool that is its first stop just a few feet below, inhabitants of the house have taken advantage of the cool flow for decades.

The baby creek tumbles off the hillside into a marshy area, some of which has been corralled into two small ponds, be-

fore resuming its plunge to the valley floor.

Once it leaves the ponds and crosses under Country Club Road, the flow passes alongside a swamp where in the spring spindly pines look down on fiddlehead ferns and wild violets.

Its first tributary emerges from another spring that has softened the ground beneath a tall oak, toppling it in the middle of a forest where the only evidence of human intervention is the remains of a children's fort.

The upturned roots of the massive tree now provide a foothold for wild bushes, and the water that flows from beneath them is thick with dark green algae.

At this stage Toby's Creek is a bucolic stream, maybe four feet across with low, gradually sloping banks.

It soon crosses under another roadway,

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The first small tributary into Toby's Creek emerges from beneath a fallen tree in woods between Country Club Road and Lake Street in Dallas Township.

Powerful forces shaped creek and the land around it

By M.B. GILLIGAN
Post Correspondent

From its geological foundations to its current condition, Toby's Creek is an integral part of the Back Mountain terrain.

The path Toby's Creek takes from its source near Irem Temple golf course to its final destination, the Susquehanna River, although random in appearance, was actually determined thousands of years ago and is the result of a series of episodes of alternating glacial and interglacial periods. The most recent glacial activity in our area occurred approximately 20,000 years ago during the late Wisconsin Glaciation stage.

Glaciers are sheets of moving ice, some hundreds or even thousands of feet deep. Whether they are advancing or retreating,

"The largest pollutant we are putting into the river is probably soil sediment. Our topsoil is flowing down past us."

Dr. Brian Mangan

Founder and director of The Susquehanna River Institute

el thus frozen onto the glacier abrade the landscape much like cut paper works on wood. Boulders loosed in the ice sand deep gouges in the bedrock and loosen even more material, which is then picked up by the glacier.

"The bedrock for the area of Toby's Creek is in the Catskill Formation of the Devonian System," said Brian Oram, Dallas, a registered professional geologist who has served as director of the Center for Environmental Quality at Wilkes University since 1989. "This type of bedrock is characterized by shale, clay stone, siltstone, sandstone, and conglomerate. Groundwater runs through these bedrock planes."

Like most other small streams, Toby's Creek is created by springs and weeps of this underground water. Where the groundwater rises indiscriminately and flows over the land into a channel, it is said to weep, and springs result when the groundwater confined in aquifers comes to the surface at outcroppings in the bedrock.

"The water moves along what is called secondary porosity, which is formed by fissures and cracks in the bedrock," said Oram. "It gives the impression that there are underground rivers but that's not the case. It is that some of the fractures are more interconnected than others."

The geological characteristics of the soil composition in the Toby's Creek watershed have a direct impact on the water quality. There can be very rapid changes in water quality in our area. "Our streams are more vulnerable to the effects of acid mine drainage, general rainfall and storm water runoff," said Oram, who is also a partner in B.F. Environmental. The firm provides expert testimony on water quality, and consults on development of water supplies and the impact of well drilling.

The creek gains water during high water periods and loses water during dry spells. The area surrounding a creek has a great deal to do with how well the creek is able to handle those differences. The perennial vegetation that grows alongside a creek, called a riparian buffer, acts as a natural obstacle and filter to help control the water that flows downstream. Soil sediment, and lawn and agricultural chemicals, are trapped, changed or used by the vegetation for growth, reducing the volume of pollutants that make their way downstream.

"The largest pollutant we are putting into the river is probably soil sediment," said Dr. Brian Mangan, founder and director of The Susquehanna River Institute, and director of the environmental program at King's College. "Our topsoil is flowing down past us."

Increased development in the Back Mountain directly affects the flow of water in Toby's Creek. Impermeable surfaces like parking lots, rooftops, and even manicured lawns cause rain to just run off the land, rushing to creeks and rivers without benefit of soaking into the surface and recharging the underground aquifers.

"Something as simple as a roof and a driveway can have such a big effect if you put enough of them together," said Mangan. "People have to be mindful of the watershed."

The rise and fall of commerce

Once, mills of all types lined the banks of Toby's Creek.

By SANDY PEOPLES
Post Correspondent

As early as 1773, residents of Wyoming Valley recognized the potential afforded them by the rushing waters of Toby's Creek. The fall of the stream from Dallas to Luzerne exceeded 500 feet and showed that the water could provide a substantial source of power. Consequently several sawmills and gristmills were erected along its path.

Early dirt roads seemed to follow the mills from one place to another, as people needed them for early footpaths and horse and mule trails to haul raw materials to the mills and finished goods to market.

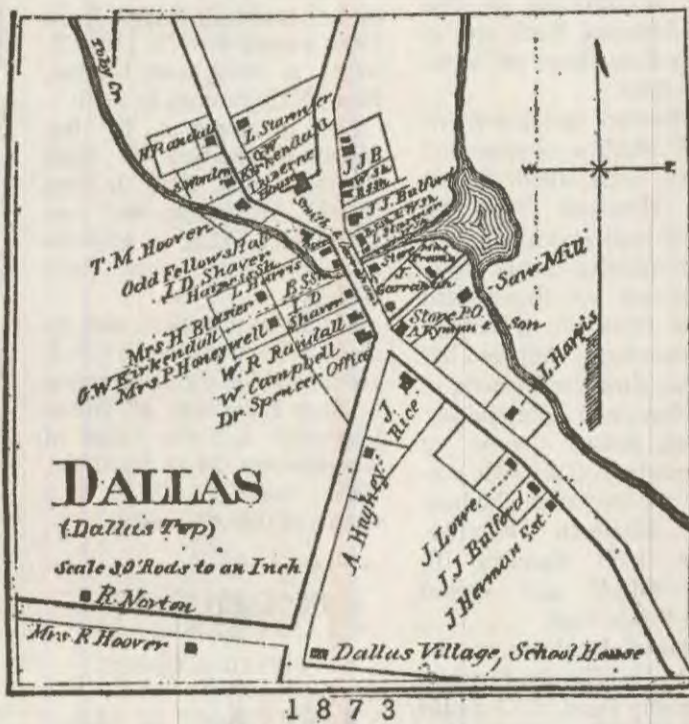
To operate the mills, small dams were made and located above where the mills were built, and the water was directed into water wheels by wooden flumes or sluices. The forests, rich in good timber, provided all of the raw materials necessary to construct the flumes and wheels. The wheels were 12 to 16 feet in diameter and three types were in general use.

The overshot wheel was a series of buckets on the circumference of the wheel. When the buckets were filled, the wheel revolved, moving the main shaft of the mill.

The breast wheel led the water into a gate controlled flume at the back of the wheel above the axle and was operated by the speed and weight of the water.

The turbine wheel had a series of openings where the water entered and left. It was also known as a flutter-box. Because it was so expensive to maintain, only one, the Rice sawmill at Shavertown, was used along Toby's Creek. The overshot wheel was the most common because of its efficiency.

When the early settlers arrived in the Back



This map, dated 1873, shows the location of a sawmill and mill pond in Dallas Borough. This would later be the site of the Hildebrand-Frantz gristmill.

Mountain, or the country back of Kingston Mountain, items made within the household met most of their needs. Gradually, due in part to the water power of Toby's Creek, industries began to emerge in the form of local mills and factories to produce much-desired goods and jobs outside the home and off the farm. There were sawmills, gristmills, oil mills, plaster mills, carding mills, fulling mills, paper mills, foundries, tanneries, blacksmith shops and the like. (Carding is the process of combing or brushing textile fibers while fulling is the process of cleansing, shrinking and thickening the cloth.)

"The early prime movers and shakers of the Back Mountain were Jacob Rice and William Trucks, who ran mills along the creek in those early days," said Louise Hazeltine, a Truckville resident who lives near the creek. "When the first post office was created in what

was then Branchville, the area was renamed Truckville, after William Trucks, a skilled carpenter and millwright." Along with his many mills, Jacob Rice also opened one of the earliest general stores in the Back Mountain.

Through the years, there were many mills along Toby's Creek. Although all of them cannot be listed, they include a gristmill and sawmill owned by Elisha Swift and put into operation as early as 1776 in Kingston Township. In the early 1790s, Zachariah Hartsouf purchased land along Toby's Creek and built an oil mill to manufacture linseed oil, and in 1805 Hartsouf erected a carding machine at his gristmill to break and card wool into rolls. For many years that area was known as Hartsouf's Hollow. Also in 1811, Henry Buckingham brought the first paper mill to the valley along Toby's Creek.

Toby's Creek afforded the residents of Wyoming Valley, and the Back Mountain in particular, a natural source of power and therefore a piece of the Industrial Revolution. By harnessing the water power, they were able to remove some of their daily chores from their homes and farms and into mills and factories that could produce goods in a less grueling manner. Mills of all kinds operated for decades, employing people and providing goods that were needed by the ever-increasing population.

Toby's Creek provided a very good supply of water to the early mills, but the very act of building the mills and felling the timber stripped much of the forestry and lessened the supply of consistently running water once held intact by the lush vegetation. The waters of the creek became undependable and the surrounding land became victim to floods and droughts. While other areas, not depending on water power, were becoming more prosperous, the area along Toby's Creek soon fell behind.

The remains of an early mill foundation loom over Toby's Creek just below the Harris Hill Road Bridge.



The Hildebrand-Frantz mill, on Mill Street in Dallas Borough, 1916. The building was later turned into a roller skating rink.

Records, references abound, but little hard evidence remains

Various historical resources contain information about early mills along Toby's Creek and elsewhere in the Back Mountain.

According to the Internet web page, "Luzerne County, Pa Town Histories," The first sawmill in Kingston Township was James Sutton's, "on Toby creek, built 1778." In Dallas Township, "Judge Baldwin built on Dabey creek, in 1813, his sawmill. In 1818 Christian Rice built his sawmill on the same creek. The place descended to his son, Capt. Jacob Rice. This mill was in use until 1875."

A town history donated by Sharon Freeman to the web page says that in Dallas Borough, "Albert Lewis, lumber king of this region, has here a saw and planing mill. Another large similar establishment is owned by A. Ryman & Co. There are in the place 3 general stores, 1 hardware store, an elegant hotel that is much patronized as a summer resort. Gregory & Heitsman's merchant mill is quite an institution of the place."

In his "History of Dallas," D.A. Waters writes that, "Probably before 1796, two broth-

ers, Benajah and Joshua Fuller built the first sawmill and the first gristmill on that branch of Toby's Creek now called Huntsville Creek ... The sawmill burned in 1805 and was immediately rebuilt."

Waters also writes, "Jared Baldwin, a Revolutionary veteran, built a sawmill in 1796 at Huntsville and was a family partner in a gristmill built in 1799-1800."

Stewart Pearce, who published Pearce's Annals of Luzerne County, said in 1866 there were eight sawmills in Dallas Township.

Ralph L. Hazeltine wrote a section titled, "Some Notes on the Use of Water Power Along Toby's Creek" in the Proceedings and Collections of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, 1970, Volume XXIII.

He describes a number of mills, the earliest having been constructed on the lower reaches of the creek, in what is now Luzerne and Courtdale. In the late 18th and early 19th century, that area was part of Kingston Township.

Often referring to prior written histories, Hazeltine writes that between 1804 and 1807,

William Trucks built a gristmill and sawmill "at the falls of the creek, where the water dropped some 15 feet from a rocky ledge." This location is just below the present Harris Hill Road bridge, and the remnants of a stone foundation are still evident on the western bank of the creek.

According to Hazeltine's account, in 1815 Philip Shaver built the first mill on the main branch of the creek above Trucks' mills. Writing in 1886, William P. Ryman placed Shaver's mill "on the site where the old mill now stands near the residence of Lewis R. Shaver.

Ryman mentions two sawmills, erected in the 1830s "on the northernmost branch of the north fork of Toby's Creek," which had to be abandoned because the creek was too small to provide sufficient power.

Hazeltine writes that in 1841-42, two brothers, Abram and Richard Ryman, built a water-powered sawmill on Toby's Creek one-half mile below Dallas village. They built a steam-powered mill near the water-powered mill in 1852 and ran both of them until 1870.

WALKING THE CREEK

(continued from page 6)

Lake Street — one of more than 20 such crossings — and meets its first man-made obstruction, a small earthen dam behind 390 Elmcrest Drive. Water gurgles as it struggles to exit from a standpipe that carries it from a broad pool to the stream bed beyond.

As it moves on its generally southeastern course, Toby's Creek gains mass from countless small tributaries that feed into it. Soon, the stream bed is six feet across, and the banks are steep. Here, behind the Elmcrest development, the creek runs parallel to a dirt road built to service a pump station for the Dallas Area Municipal Authority.

And this is the beginning of the indignities that have been inflicted on Toby's Creek over the years, since it appears before the road was built the flow must have spread out in this low-lying space, its water being purified as it seeped slowly through the swamp.

The first worn-out tire appears here, soon to be followed by many more. And an odd culvert, about 20 feet long, lies in the bed, the water directed through it, but nothing passing overhead.

The banks grow steeper now, and the flow quickens. Sewer basins protrude from the stream bank, about 100 yards apart as the stream approaches the pump station.

Nerle Thomas has run a produce stand near the creek for more than 60 years. Since 1972 it has been located where Toby's Creek meets Memorial Highway, near Payne Printery. Until the mid-1940s he grew green tomatoes on land he leased from Howard Warden. Then someone suggested a fresh produce stand would be popular and he built his first six by eight foot stand a few hundred yards away.

As the creek turns parallel to the highway, a clue appears of how powerful the innocuous looking stream can be. Barely a mile from its source, it passes through a culvert that is about 8 feet wide by 6 feet high. Most of the time, the waterway looks puny by comparison, but it can rise amazingly quickly in a hard rain, such as during last month's flooding associated with the remnants of Hurricane Ian.

Litter, litter everywhere

Because it now runs alongside a busy roadway, the stream banks become incredibly littered here, with a hubcaps, fast-food packaging, beer cans and other detritus of modern civilization staining the landscape.

As it approaches the Meadows Nursing Center complex, the stream zigs sharply left, then zags right, through a 75-foot-long culvert that deposits it behind the Dallas Agway. After meandering beside but not into a pond on the Meadows property, it leads back toward the highway.

Many people think the duck-filled stream that crosses between the Meadows Center and Pickett's large restaurant is Toby's Creek, but it is not. That waterway is fed by runoff from the Meadows' pond, and a small tributary that runs down from the area of the Fern Knoll cemetery.

The real Toby's Creek hugs the highway in front of Pickett's before swinging hard left to go behind Hilbert's Equipment. From there it continues straight to its next highway crossing, near A.J.'s Beverage.

When it reaches the center of Dallas, Toby's Creek begins a series of twists and turns that take it beneath buildings and highways, through concrete-lined sluiceways and past venerable stone walls.

Crossing Memorial Highway (Rt. 415) at Lake Street, the creek flows underground much of the distance to the Dallas Post Office, about 500 feet in all. On the way, it emerges briefly on the western side of the highway, only to disappear beneath Fino's Pharmacy, confined by 15-foot-tall concrete walls. The water is next seen on the eastern side of Main Street, gurgling along between White's Appliance and the Bufalino Law Office. Finally, it again runs through a tunnel below the highway, flowing into a channel defined by now-hidden but beautifully cut stone walls that take it about 150 feet away from the roadway, behind the post office.

At that point, the creek takes a sharp bend to the right toward Mill Street, where it will again cross under the highway, but not before passing below a tumbledown bridge made of old railroad ties that connected two parcels of land that once housed the Agway store, and before that the Hildebrandt-Frantz mill. Early maps show a mill pond here, fed by Toby's Creek and a small tributary that runs through a marshland off Upper Demunds Road before tumbling down to the center of town.

At many highway crossings such as this, metal or plastic pipes carrying water and gas are suspended over the creek.

For the first 50 feet after it reaches the western side of the highway, the stream runs in a 15-foot-deep channel lined by concrete walls. When the concrete ends, the creek widens and several different materials are used to keep the bank from sliding into the stream, with varying degrees of success.

A little below Wendy's restaurant, the bank becomes soft and vulnerable to erosion. At several points, the guard rail has begun to lean toward the

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POST PHOTOS/RON BARTIZEK

Merle Thomas holds his hand at about the level Toby's Creek water reached in the 1972 Agnes flood. He has operated a produce stand near the creek for nearly 60 years.

All things considered, we'll opt for 'Toby's'

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

Is it Toby's, Toby, Tobey's or Tobey? Looking through historical resources, you can find all those names for the stream that flows through the heart of the Back Mountain.

On a map of Bedford Township, from the early 1800s, several streams and creeks are shown, but only two

toby's creek

are named: Harveys and Tobys, neither using an apostrophe. To this day, Harveys Lake appears to be incorrect by the terms of strict English usage. So does Clarks Summit, the Lackawanna County town named after its first preacher.

F. Charles Petrillo, a lawyer with a keen interest in local his-

tory, provided several references for the name. In one of them, both Toby's and Harvey's are used, and so is Harvey's Lake.

One of the earliest publications, Pearce's Annuals of Luzerne County, falls on the side of Toby's, and so do we.

So, who — or what — was Toby? The answer to that is as murky as the water in the creek during a spring flood, but here are some of the historical legends:

- Toby was an elderly Native American who lived in the area in the middle of the 19th century. According to Petrillo, a Wilkes-Barre newspaper, the Luzerne Union, described a Toby's Cove, and other references say he lived somewhere near the creek, but in the Wyoming Valley.

- Toby is a contraction of Tobyhanna, a Native American term for alder or birch-like tree. Or, it could refer to a Tobyhanna Creek in Monroe County, although that seems the most farfetched possibility.



This hidden stretch, across from the Sheetz convenience store, illustrates both the beauty and abuse of Toby's Creek. An uplift of shale forms the eastern bank, where trash and debris interrupt the flow of water.

TOBY'S CREEK

(continued from page 1)

cats," he said.

The creek provides drinking water to deer, bear and other wildlife in more wooded areas such as Trucksville, while the wetlands between the Meadows and Route 415 is home to birds, turtles and "spring peepers," little frogs that "usher in spring with a wonderful chorus of chirping or peeping," Chamberlain said.

Although the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission doesn't stock the creek, some residents have done so on their own.

Adamchick, co-owner of Pizza Perfect in Trucksville, began in 1992 to stock Snake Creek, a tributary of Toby's Creek, with trout for children to catch during fishing season.

Each year he would purchase \$600 worth of trout, he said. Part of the money came from a collection jar that Adamchick would start shortly after Super Bowl and the rest would come out of his own pocket.

Just before trout season, Adamchick, with the help of volunteers from fire and police departments as well as nearby businesses, would prepare the creek for delivery of the trout from a Bear Creek hatchery.

"We enjoyed cleaning up the creek," he said.

But he stopped stocking the creek two years ago because too many adults used nets to remove fish from the creeks.

"Adults ruined it for the kids," Adamchick said.

Unfortunately, many human habits and attitudes negatively affect the creek.

"For years Toby's Creek has been treated as a nuisance," said Chamberlain, of the conservation district.

"It has been channeled, piped, redirected and filled in. For years, residents and businesses have filled its banks and elevated its flood plain, attempting to acquire more level land to the rear of their property," he said.

All of the changes made to the land by humans have affected animals' mobility and quality of life.

"Wildlife attempting to use and enjoy the creek must traverse highways, parking lots, steep banks, and chain link fences to do so," Chamberlain said.

"The lack of wildlife corridors, a stream buffer zone, greenways and open space along the creek, and a conduit to and from wooded or natural areas diminishes

"Toby's Creek has a fair amount of suburban development but its water quality looks reasonably good at this point."

Dr. Dale Bruns

Dean of the College of Science and Engineering at Wilkes University

wildlife populations of both songbirds and animals."

Items like a stream buffer zone act as "vegetated filter strips" between a body of water and areas that could contaminate it such as parking lots, chemically treated lawns, plowed fields, barnyards, or junkyards, he said.

"A natural stream buffer not only provides a corridor for wildlife but it provides an ecosystem for habitat and food sources for wildlife ranging from birds to mammals," Chamberlain said.

Another problem involves stormwater runoff and what it carries.

Jim Stout, an officer with the Fish and Boat Commission, said that like most waterways, Toby's Creek is at risk from construction pollution from residential developments, industrial pollution from retail gasoline stores or industrial development, or pollution caused by vehicle accidents.

"They generally get stressed by the activities around them," he said.

Mark Carmon, community relations' coordinator at the Department of Environmental Protection, agrees that growth in Back Mountain communities can potentially impact the creek.

"Stormwater is the largest impact," he said. "It comes from everywhere — parking lots, drainage ditches, rain gutters. Different points of impact can be more harmful than just one." The DEP is working on developing stormwater management plans with counties, he said.

Luckily, programs exist to reverse the damage and monitor any potential problems. A major but basic step in renovating the creek is by cleaning it.

Chamberlain said that his district recommended Toby's Creek as a potential cleanup project for the Wyoming Valley Watershed Coalition's annual Streamside Cleanup program. Then they planned and coordinated the cleanup with Dallas Borough officials, he said.

During the cleanup, volunteers collected 35 cubic yards of junk

from a 900-foot section located behind the Commonwealth Telephone building, Chamberlain said.

"The creek has become a depository for trash, tires, and garbage," he said.

The weeds that hid all of the garbage were another problem. Through a Chesapeake Bay Foundation grant, the district provided seedlings, technical support and assistance to Dallas Borough's road department, which is trying to control invasive plants such as Japanese knotweed and multiflora rose, Chamberlain said. The seedlings, he said, would be used for enhancement, bank stabilization, and screening as well as to prevent invasive weeds and shrubs from choking the creek's banks.

The creek will also be marked with blue PennDOT-approved identification signs, Chamberlain said. The district and the Pocono Northeast Resource, Conservation & Development Council is helping Dallas Borough acquire the signs.

The district also created a conceptual site plan for a Greenway/Rail trail behind the Commonwealth Telephone building on Lake Street in Dallas. It then presented this plan to both Commonwealth and College Misericordia on behalf of Dallas Borough and the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association in hope of gaining their support, Chamberlain said.

So far the trail group has developed the Back Mountain Trail along Toby's Creek from Luzerne to N-Mart in Trucksville and continues to convert the abandoned Lehigh Valley Railroad grade into a trail.

During a recent hike on the 2-mile trail, Chamberlain said he didn't encounter any litter or trash. That, he said, illustrates an unseen benefit of the trail.

"Having a linear park attached to your property or business may increase property value and the profitability of a business. The people who utilize a trail often treat it as if it were their own and keep it clean."

While some work on beautifying the creek's banks, others con-

cern themselves with monitoring water quality.

A research proposal by Dr. Dale Bruns, dean of the College of Science and Engineering at Wilkes University, led to the start of the Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking (EMPACT) program in 2001.

Created under the Heritage River program and initially funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, EMPACT "integrates GIS (geographic information system) software, computer mapping, and environmental assessments of watersheds with real time water quality monitors," Bruns said.

By using measuring equipment called sondes, the team collects information on items such as dissolved oxygen, acidity, nitrates, and ammonia, he said. One of four sondes was installed by the Dallas Area Municipal Authority, which offered some security since vandalism was a concern.

So far, the team hasn't found any surprising data.

"Toby's Creek has a fair amount of suburban development but its water quality looks reasonably good at this point," Bruns said.

The most interesting find, he said, were "salt spikes" from snow melt runoff and the salting of roads. "But I cannot say that levels were severely high to impact aquatic life," he said.

The community can easily see EMPACT's findings by visiting displays at events such as Earth Day, the Wyoming Valley River-Fest, or watershed demonstration projects with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bruns said.

At these events, EMPACT displays items such as the global positioning system, sondes, and samples of aquatic insects, "all of which help to provide environmental education to the public about the causes and solutions to water quality problems in our region and watershed," he said.

Several EMPACT websites also exist. "In our grant, our web material was intended to be a critical part of our education and outreach programs," Bruns said.

The conservation district also works with sponsors, communities, watershed associations and schools "to promote awareness, appreciation, education, and sensitivity to all our natural resources," Chamberlain said.

Most of the time, living is easy by the creek

By CAMILLE FIOTI
Post Correspondent

Over the bridge and through the woods is a quiet little row of houses tucked safely away from the noise and traffic of Route 309 in the "notch" between Luzerne and Trucksville.

Cross a small bridge over Toby's Creek on the west side of the highway and you'll enter the tiny neighborhood known as Birch Grove. Todd Calkins has lived in the grove for eight years. He never had a problem with water damage from the creek. His home, built by his father-in-law out of hemlock, sits high up on a ledge and overlooks the creek and the highway.

"I've never experienced flooding, but it can get pretty high and violent sometimes," he said. The narrow road that runs along the front of the homes and out to the bridge used to be a trolley line, according to Calkins. Before the age of refrigeration, ice was transported from Harveys Lake to Wilkes-Barre on the trolley. At some points, it would cross the road and run alongside the Lehigh Valley Railroad, the bed of which is now the Back Mountain Trail.

Toby's Creek crosses the highway in several places, too. On the east side, it flows under Dr. Francis Collini's office at the intersection of Route 309 and Center Street in Shavertown. Susan Collini, Dr. Collini's wife and office manager, said they haven't had any problems with flooding or water leakage since they bought the building in 1995.

"Knock on wood, we've had no water from the flood, but we've had to rebuild the parking lot and restructure the



FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Alexandria Krebs lives and plays beside Toby's Creek in Shavertown. Two weeks ago, the stream, swollen by rains from remnants of Hurricane Ivan, lapped at the top of the channel.

walls because of erosion. It's been a real investment," she said.

A few hundred feet below Dr. Collini's office, on North Main Street, is another section of houses with a scenic view of the creek in their front yards. Each house has a private bridge that is maintained by the owners.

Beside the stream, Leeann

Malacavage and her husband Mark have a private "beach for two" complete with sand, seagulls, striped canvas beach chairs and nautical signs. "We sit on the bank every chance we get," she said.

Noise from the highway is a non-issue to her. "The creek really helps block out traffic noise. We don't hear much unless someone really loud goes

by and honks the horn."

Their front yard is beautifully landscaped with a variety of flowers and shade-loving hostas spilling over the creek's banks. "We've worked really hard, but we've had fun with it."

The Kingston Township road department maintains the grass and snow removal up to the Malacavages' bridge. White lights draped across both sides light up and welcome guests when they throw a party. "We joke we're going to put up a brick wall and make the bridge a drawbridge."

Matt Krebs has lived on South Main Street for 18 years. The creek flooded two years after he moved in. Luckily he didn't have water in his basement, but some of his neighbors did.

The creek makes a sharp curve just before the beginning of Krebs' front yard and travels towards the back of the property. He was able to drop his flood insurance because there hasn't been a flood in his section for 100 years.

Krebs commended Kingston Township for the upkeep of the grass and roads along the creek in his neighborhood. "They do an excellent job. I don't think they have to do all of that, but they do." He pointed out that he sees kids fishing on the banks quite often. "There's a lot of fish in there," he said.

Below where it exits the Back Mountain, the creek is stocked every year by The Toby's Creek Fisherman's Association in Luzerne. James Kelly Sr., Luzerne Mayor, said every May, brothers Jim and George Riley, members of the association take up a collection from businesses and residents, then use the donations to purchase trout and stock

the creek for the annual trout derby. The three-day event attracts large numbers of kids hoping to catch a fish of their own.

"By the end of the weekend, most of the fish are gone," he said. He believes the creek could use more attention, though. "Here in Luzerne, Toby's Creek was a source of income to a lot of people."

More than 100 years ago, grist mills were big business along the creek. According to Mark Albrecht, President of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association, William Trucks Sr. one of the early settlers of Kingston Township, operated mills along Toby's Creek. Trucksville was later named after him.

Albrecht has been on the trail council for 10 years. One of the projects he is most proud to be a part of is Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Day.

"We've been very abusive to our little creek," he said.

In order to make amends, Boy Scout troops and community volunteers have worked the last few years to clean up the trail, which runs parallel to the creek. With the help of PennDOT, they've hauled away washing machines, re-



Toby's Creek

Our hidden resource

frigerators and about 85 trees.

"The kids kept finding them and finding them. They literally rolled them from areas of Luzerne Borough to Kingston Township. Despite how much we've abused and neglected our little creek, it still runs pretty darn clean. Hopefully the trail will be one more thing that will remind people of our beautiful little creek."

NEXT WEEK

Elsewhere, streams and rivers have become engines of economic and cultural progress, and the same thing can happen here. The Post talked to people close by and far away who have committed themselves to restoring and utilizing waterways for recreation and as lures to attract tourism and new residents. And we talked to local public officials and leaders of organizations who have a vision of the tremendous asset Toby's Creek can become.

WALKING THE CREEK

(continued from page 7)

stream, and gullies have been dug by runoff water. Aside from posing a risk to the highway, the unstable bank allows a great deal of silt to get into the stream, covering the rocky bottom with sediment.

A brief peek at the past

A little further down, the creek moves away from the roadway, leaving room for brush to grow and stabilize the bank. Here, the creek's original rustic character is revived, and the water flows over scattered slices of shale.

But the reverie doesn't last long. Just below the former Pizza Hut, a massive coarse concrete wall shoves the stream nearly 90 degrees to the right, sending it behind the 309-415 shopping plaza. The rocky stream bed widens considerably, to 20 feet or more, as it passes behind the plaza and the Uni-Mart convenience store.

On the other side is a spectacular glade where ferns cover the ground beneath tall hardwood and fir trees that reach skyward for the sun. The tranquil scene is spoiled only by a pile of discarded appliances at the edge of the glade.

As Toby's Creek turns back toward the highway below Uni-Mart, it narrows where it passes a stagnant pond covered with algae that is separated from the creek by as little as 15 feet.

Again turning parallel to the busy highway, the stream bumps up against rip-rap that keeps it from undermining the road.

A few hundred feet ahead, an area of neatly clipped grass separates the highway and creek. Carl Gladey, who operates a barber shop at the corner of Main Street and Route 309 cuts the grass and picks up litter, even though he doesn't own the property, a state right-of-way.

"Maybe I'm crazy, but I just like to keep it looking nice," he says.

And he's noticed that when the roadside is clean and neat, people seem to toss less litter.

Now the creek takes a sharp left turn, and yet again runs below the highway. As it passes alongside Offset Paperback, Toby's Creek is well-controlled, flowing gently by a two-acre mowed field, complete with a bench where workers can enjoy lunch in serenity. It's hard to imagine that 60 years ago this same area was home to one of the liveliest entertainment centers in the region, Fernbrook Park, where Guy Lombardo once played and roller coaster riders screamed.

Red stakes are stuck into the ground here, marking the limit of jurisdiction for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which regulates waterways and adjacent wetlands. Any proposed disturbance of the ground between the

stakes and the creek would need approval from the Corps.

The creek then disappears into thick underbrush, where it slows and spreads out to create a large swampy area dotted with cattails.

A boost to the flow

Within the next 100 feet, the stream is swollen by its first major tributary, Trout Brook. Running about four miles from a pond near Demunds Corners to its juncture with Toby's Creek just above Lower Demunds Road, Trout Brook has a reputation for filling up quickly in hard rains, flooding fields along its path.

After it crosses under Lower Demunds Road, the larger Toby's Creek runs directly behind Pen-Fern Oil Co. — really directly, as the right bank is the concrete foundation of the building. Soon, it enters one of its loveliest stretches, and its first link with the Back Mountain Trail, which parallels the creek most of the way from Fernbrook to Luzerne.

After flowing over a small dam made by someone who propped shale on its edges, the stream bubbles over a rocky bed, through dense forest. The trail, built on the former Lehigh Valley Railroad line, is set about 10 feet above creek level. The combination of babbling brook and distance from busy Route 309 makes this a very pleasant walk or bike ride.

As it nears Franklin Street in Shavertown, the creek is hemmed in by walls that protect properties along its banks. Some of them are stone, both old and new, and others are made by combining stone and railroad ties. A few are



Because the passages through the Back Mountain are often narrow, Toby's Creek closely parallels the highway in many spots. This bank, across Memorial Highway from Wendy's, shows serious erosion from runoff water that flows from the roadway and into the creek.



of the "Gabian Wall" type, in which stones are kept in place by a heavy wire mesh.

After the creek again crosses below a road, this time North Main Street, it makes its way back to the highway. From Cook's Pharmacy to beyond Center Street, a narrow channel controls the flow, which begins a steeper elevation drop that will eventually take it to the Wyoming Valley, and the Susquehanna River.

Here is evidence of the creek's relentless attack on its banks. A section of the wall separating the creek from the parking lot at Snowdon Funeral Home collapsed two years ago. Rather than rebuild it, the business chose to create a rock-covered slope that held up well in the recent floods.

Just prior to entering a tunnel under the Center Street bridge, the creek has eaten several feet into the foundation of a concrete wall that lines the east-

ern bank. It seems only a matter of time before the wall comes tumbling down.

The tunnel is about 15 feet high and 12 feet wide, dimensions that seem extravagant most of the year, but are necessary when the normally docile stream swells with runoff from heavy rains, as it did in the 1972 Hurricane Agnes flood and again last month.

Next week: Toby's Creek grows stronger, and passes through secluded woodlands that hark back centuries, as well as evidence of early settlers' influence.

DO YOU HAVE ANY TOBY'S CREEK STORIES?

At different times and places, Toby's Creek has been a fishing hole, a natural sliding board and an engine of industry. If you have any stories to tell or pictures to share, we'd love to hear and see them. They may be published in the weeks following the completion of this series.

You can contact us many ways:
By e-mail (best): thepost@leader.net
By phone: (570) 675-5211
By mail: The Post, 15 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre PA 18711

Items may also be dropped off in our locked box at the Uni-Mart convenience store, across from the Dallas Shopping Center.

No matter how you contact us, please include a return address and phone number, so that we can follow up with you and return items.



POST PHOTOS/RON BARTIZEK

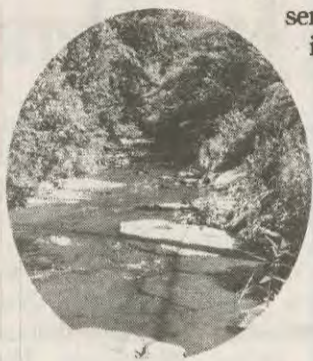
Toby's Creek has eaten away at the footing of a concrete wall on its eastern edge at Center Street in Shavertown that protects buildings from its storm-swollen flow.

OUR OPINION

We can't afford to keep this precious resource in hiding

Following the path of Toby's Creek is a solitary exercise. Other than a lone hitchhiker along Route 309, I did not meet one other person while trekking the length of the creek from its source off Country Club Road in Dallas Township to its exit from the Back Mountain at the border between Kingston Township and Luzerne.

This is the best illustration of why we chose to call the creek a hidden resource — perhaps the most valuable but overlooked one in our region — for a series of reports that begins in this issue. And that's a shame, because despite its proximity to highways, stores and shopping centers, this modest stream passes through striking scenery that is more likely to be lost for all time simply because it is mostly inaccessible to either the eye or hiking boot.



Toby's Creek

Our hidden resource

To appreciate Toby's Creek, you must get down next to it, even in it. From that perspective, at several points in Dallas, Shavertown and Trucksville the din and stench of speeding traffic cannot blot out a sense of naturalness that radiates from the burbling water as it flows over massive slabs of shale and sandstone, continuing a never-ending journey to the Susquehanna River, Chesapeake Bay and eventually the Atlantic Ocean.

The creek and its tributaries have played important roles in the life of the Back Mountain for thousands of years. More recently, their water powered a number of mills that provided sustenance and income to early white settlers. Only a few remnants of stone foundations remain from that era, and those too must be preserved so that future generations can have a tactile connection to their past.

Despite being shoved this way and that, filled with sediment washed in by storms, fouled by trash and treated shabbily in other ways, Toby's Creek exhibits remarkable resilience. Its water is quite clean and the stream bed itself is relatively free of garbage, at least in those places man has kept his distance. But we can do better by this natural asset, and in the process help ourselves both materially and spiritually.

Last spring's cleanup in Dallas Borough was a good start. In April, dozens of volunteers spent a day removing discarded tires, trash and overgrown brush from what was undoubtedly the most-abused section of the stream. The cleanup provided another reason to get up close and personal with Toby's Creek, because participants had no idea how much junk that was in it until they clambered down the banks.

So, we are making some progress, albeit in baby steps. You can get an idea of what a protected Toby's Creek has to offer by walking the newest stretch of the Back Mountain Trail, between Franklin Street in Shavertown and Lower Demunds Road in Dallas Township. As it does for so much of its length, the trail here runs parallel to the creek for about a half mile. This easy walk along a level path through a stand of fir trees is made more enjoyable by the views and sounds of the water flowing gently by.

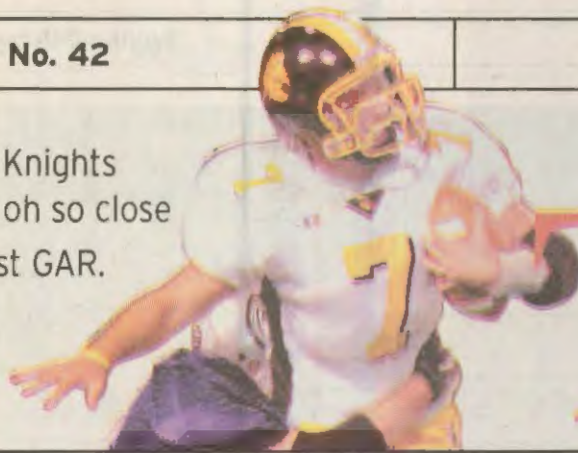
Sadly, there are very few places where the creek is this easy to approach. There are many other attractive, even awe-inspiring spots, but you can't get to them without a lot of effort and some risk to life and limb. If that doesn't change, it is hard to see how Toby's Creek can receive the respect and care that is needed to preserve this God-given resource.

Ron Bartizek

Editor's Note: This opinion is signed because it is based on my personal observations while walking the entire span of Toby's Creek in the Back Mountain. Unfortunately, this isn't an easy task, particularly where the creek, as it does over so much of its length, runs hard by a highway.

Black Knights come oh so close against GAR.

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THE POST

50¢

SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE DALLAS & LAKE-LEHMAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

For decades, Toby's Creek has been hidden, abused and nearly forgotten. But this distinctive waterway may hold the potential to spark interest in the region as a historic, natural and recreational destination.

In this second part of our series, Post writers describe how other communities are protecting and enjoying their streams and rivers, and discover there is a wealth of support to help us do the same.



Toby's Creek

Our hidden resource

Needed: A shared vision of the creek's potential

A watershed association can unlock funding sources, coordinate viable projects.

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

Two centuries ago, Toby's Creek was prized for nothing more than its rushing water. Early entrepreneurs constructed mills along the creek and its tributaries, buying wood, grain and other raw materials from local farmers and turning them into foodstuffs and useful products.

But only a few decades after the first mill was built, exploitation of the creek and surrounding land sowed the seeds of its downfall as a power source. After trees were cut and fields cleared, the ground could no longer soak up rainfall and release it gradually. Instead, a pattern developed

"Getting people involved and aware is more than half the battle."

Mark Carmon
Department of Environmental Protection

of low flow interrupted by brief high water; a sequence that continues to this day.

Now the creek may be suited to a new role, one that emphasizes enjoyment over utility. Around the nation, communities are rediscovering the streams and rivers that have been neglected — even abused — for generations. Surrounded by home and store development, people are finding that cool glades beside clear water offer a refuge from the indignities of daily life.

Paired with walking and biking tracks, such as the Back Mountain Trail, these hidden resources

may become important contributors to their communities' quality of life, and even economic health.

Joe Moskovitz, Dallas Borough Manager, believes Toby's Creek can be an "economic development engine," a most important part of the downtown revitalization initiative now going on.

"The creek is a community treasure, and could be the linchpin" for educational and recreational activities, he says.

Six months ago the borough applied for a \$30,000 state "Growing Greener" grant that would look into development of the creek between Irem Temple Country Club and Offset Paperback.

"We look at the creek winding through the borough as largely a nuisance," says Moskovitz. But better use of the watershed area could bring bene-

See VISION, pg 6

Surprises abound along the creek

Editor's note: This is the second of two parts documenting a walk down the entire length of Toby's Creek in the Back Mountain. The first appeared in last week's (Oct. 10) issue of The Post.

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

After winding from its source near Irem Temple Country Club to Shavertown, Toby's Creek disappears for nearly 100 feet in a tunnel under the Center Street bridge, which is supported by a handsome stone arch. It then runs parallel to Route 309 for a few hundred feet, kept in place by a concrete wall that is 12 to 15 feet tall.

The stream swings left before making a wide loop back toward the highway. Here it is again rocky in the bottom, and the banks are covered with some vegetation, but that hasn't completely stopped erosion.

As the creek turns to the west, it is kept away from the highway by yet another concrete wall, but one that curves gracefully, a pleasant departure from the straight-sided sluiceways that have been seen until now.

After crossing below the highway through a standard-issue bridge, the flow widens and slows considerably. This is another spot where, if it wasn't for the din of passing traffic, the stream could be rolling through remote woodlands. It is wide and shallow, with the rocky bed that is seen when sedimentation is kept under control. But it also is marred by fallen trees, brush and garbage.

With its increased volume, Toby's Creek looks here to be deep and fast enough to support fish, although none are visible. There's plenty of the pesky Japanese knotweed on the banks, though. It has the look of bamboo, and its hollow trunk is easily broken, yet this invader has become an unstoppable presence.

Very shortly, the creek again approaches the highway, the water flowing over huge, one-piece slabs of shale, some showing many layers. Large rock outcroppings loom over the western bank of the stream as it nears the next bridge.

When it emerges on eastern side, the creek is confined by concrete walls and a collapsing old stone wall. Banks here are lower and covered with trees that appear to be no more than 25 years old.

Behind the former Rave's Garden Center, the creek takes a sharp right turn, eroding the eastern bank hard by North Main Street, causing guard rails to lean toward the stream. While rock and concrete have been installed to protect the bank, it looks far from secure.

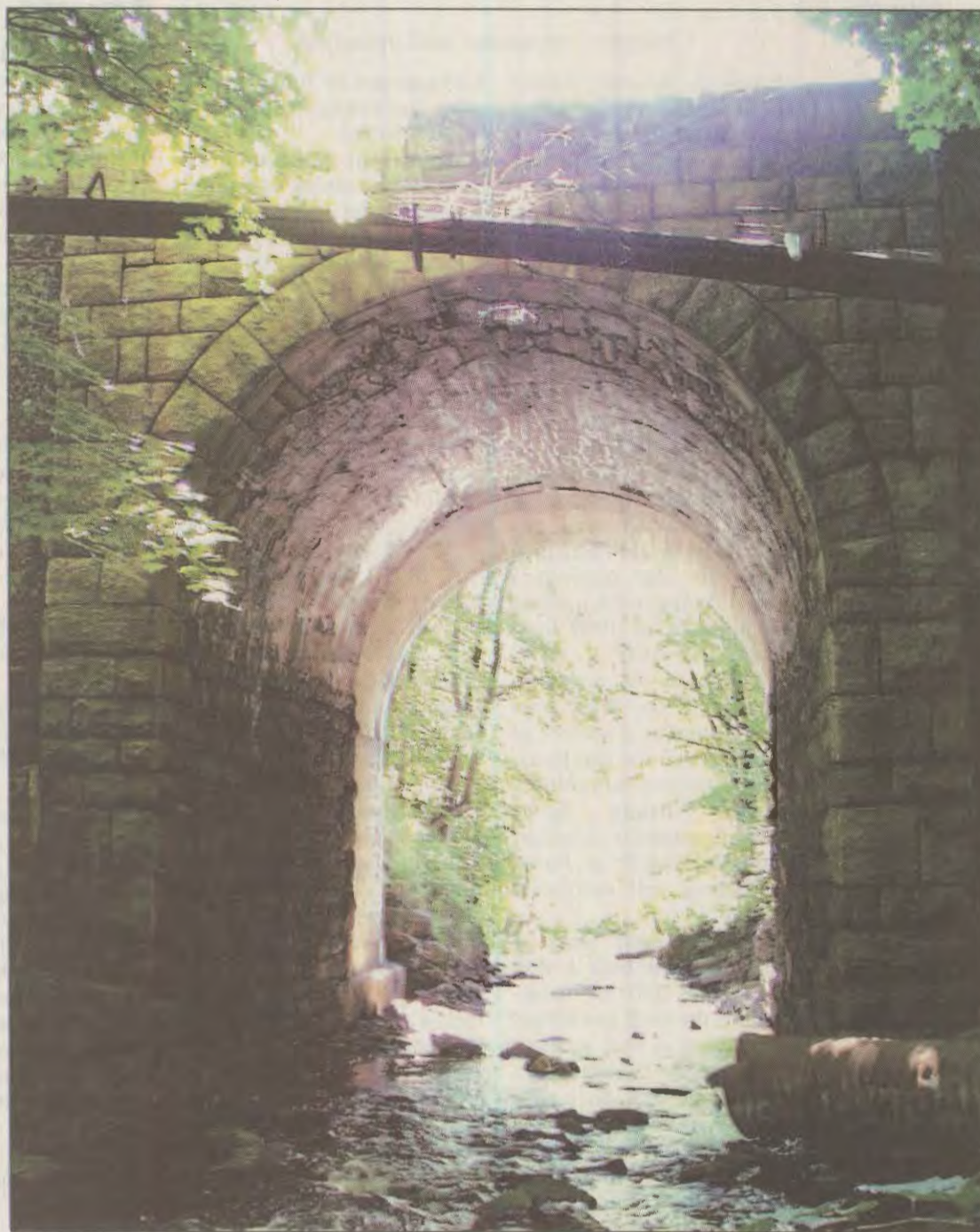
Shorter stone walls on the highway side are beginning to fall apart, but seem to still be doing their job, since the force of the water runs to the other bank.

Soon, stone walls line both sides of the creek, narrowing the flow and protecting a house along North Main. One homeowner has set a patio set and horseshoe stakes next to the stream, another a wooden swing — these folks are clearly enjoying life by Toby's Creek.

Again a cement wall nearly 10 feet tall guards the highway side of the creek. All along this section, large concrete pipes dump storm runoff from the roadway and parking lots into the creek, one of the reasons it rises so quickly in a heavy rainfall.

Now the creek passes under North Main, then runs past several homes whose owners have landscaped both banks and set out hammocks. Pretty stone walls guard the banks here, but they also show signs of wear and tear. One-lane wooden bridges, some for cars, others just for walking, connect these families with the rest of the world. One has wrought iron fences along each side, and another has lights strung on the sides, creating a festive look.

After it leaves the homes, the creek channel widens to perhaps 20 feet, and is well-contained by the hillside on its eastern side.



POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

Sunlight streams through the Harris Hill Road bridge. Just beyond, the creek tumbles over a huge slab of sandstone. This is where early mills were built to take advantage of the rushing flow.

The old Lehigh Valley Railroad line is clearly visible on the eastern bank above the stream. The bed of cinders that held the tracks is still largely in place and discarded ties are scattered here and there. But the steep bank is thick with cinders that have been washed off the bed, and some have made it into the creek.

Toby's Creek again crosses under the highway, following the old South Main Street, which is now only a dirt path.

About 100 yards from the crossing, someone has built a rock dam. Combined with the increased flow, this has created a fairly large pool, but whether it is for splashing or fishing isn't clear.

A short stone formation on the eastern bank looks as if it could have been the foundation of one of the many mills that once took advantage of the creek's flowing waters.

Another old foundation is visible as the stream swings left to approach Route 309 yet again.

A little further on, the remnants of the former main thoroughfare through the Back Mountain appear — lengths of rusted guard rail, an old, broken-down stone wall and some concrete blocks that must have been needed to keep the stream and roadway apart.

After it crosses under the highway just below N-Mart, someone has cut down a stand of Japanese knotweed, in a futile attempt to snuff out the tireless invader. But there's a lot

more work to be done; the entire western bank between Route 309 and the stream is a tangle of knotweed, almost to Harris Hill Road. And as unwelcome as this plant may be, its roots hold together a steep bank that might otherwise be washed into the stream.

The creek bed in this area is marked by sharply angled outcroppings of shale, evidence of geologic activity that took place before recorded time. Here, one can imagine dinosaurs and mammoths traipsing down to get a drink from the clean water.

The flow of water picks up here, and except for some trash, there is a natural feel to the creek and its banks. Insects and tiny fish become visible near the bridge at Harris Hill Road. And the realization creeps in that there haven't been any discarded tires marring the stream for some time.

The bridge, a marvel of stone construction that looms at least 25 feet above the creek, is showing its age. A Gabian wall has been installed on the eastern side, but a mortared stone wall on the other bank appears to be holding up well.

After it exits the bridge, Toby's Creek flows over a massive, smooth stone, where generations of brave youngsters have slid down into the pool below on hot summer days.

The remains of an old foundation jut from the west bank, possibly from a mill built by either William Trucks or Jacob Rice in the early 19th century. According to historical accounts, William Trucks built a gristmill and sawmill "at the falls of the creek, where the water dropped some 15 feet from a rocky ledge." This seems to be that place.

The stream widens and slows now, dividing around a 200-foot long island that is covered with trees and brush. Huge globs of discarded mine waste, probably dropped somewhere upstream years ago to shore up the bank, have been washed down by floods and deposited here.

From this spot to Carverton Road, about a quarter mile, the creek seems barely disturbed. Devoid of trash, it flows swiftly toward a solid wall of rock that shoves it 45 degrees to the east. This is perhaps the most impressive natural barrier the stream has confronted, and it hasn't budged in centuries.

Throughout this stretch, Toby's Creek appears to follow its natural path, perhaps having grown too robust for man to tame — at least the men of 100 years ago.

The remnants of two more stone foundations are visible on the western bank about 100 yards above Carverton Road. One, at creek level, appears to be built without mortar, indicating that it is older than the other, which sits up at road level.

A little further on, a classic and beautiful arched stone tunnel feeds a tributary beneath the old railroad line. It is held in place with a keystone, and the floor over which Snake Creek flows looks like cobblestone. Sadly, this impressive piece of architecture and construction is visible only to those willing to risk tumbling down the bank to see it.

This is the largest tributary since Trout Brook joined Toby's Creek in Dallas Township, and its contribution during a storm can be quite impressive.

As it passes the old Kingston Township municipal building at the corner of Route 309 and Carverton Road, Toby's Creek's flow has been slowly but surely eating into the soft bank between it and the building. The only thing that appears to be averting disaster is the oft-scorned

VISION

(continued from page 1)

fits to the towns it flows through. But, "We need to change the mindset of the community," he says.

While he doesn't think the municipalities should be originators or managers of a watershed association, he hopes other groups or individuals will step up and take on such a challenge.

Moskovitz said the borough would be eager to help a watershed group or coalition of groups interested in developing and preserving the Toby's Creek watershed area. He said the Growing Greener grant monies could be used toward this end.

"I feel there is a lot of potential for a Toby's Creek watershed association."

Josh Longmore
Watershed specialist, Luzerne County
Conservation District

The idea of municipalities helping infant watershed associations is not new, explains Josh Longmore, watershed specialist for the Luzerne County Conservation District. Butler Township sponsors the Oley Creek Watershed Association with "Growing Greener" funds and so does Conyngham Township.

If a new watershed association hasn't yet received non-profit status, a town can help, notes Longmore. "As long as the towns are not the leaders of the associations, because then the public thinks of the association as an arm of the government."

Longmore imagines a watershed coalition for Toby's Creek made up of diverse interested groups.

"I feel there is a lot of potential for a Toby's Creek watershed association. There are very willing municipalities along the creek, there's plenty of neighborhood technical help, students at the colleges are a tremendous resource, and Pa. American Water Co. has a large vested interest in the watershed area, because Huntsville Reservoir is within the Toby's Creek watershed area," he says.

He also feels that a coalition group would help coordinate the different groups, so they don't work on the same projects.

One eager potential member organization is the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association, developers of the Back Mountain Trail.

"I'm very aware of the water; it's a fantastic amenity," said Judy Rimple, the group's executive director.

The trail runs parallel to the creek for much of its length, following the old Lehigh Valley Railroad bed. Rimple said ASTA would like to develop access points for trail users to get closer to the creek.

Right now, ASTA is seeking bids for a feasibility study on an "urban greenway," a walking path from the center of Dallas to College Misericordia. "That is all along the creek bed," Rimple said. "That may be one of the strongest urban area parts we have." The college and Pickett's Charge restaurant have already committed to granting easements.

Mark Carmon, spokesman for the local office of the state Department of Environmental Protection, says the more involvement, the better.

"Getting people involved and aware is more than half the battle," said Carmon, who has lived in the Back Mountain for most of the last 40 years.

While other Luzerne County streams have gotten a lot of attention, "That stretch from Dallas to Luzerne is kind of an orphan."

One nearby good example is the Bowman's Creek Watershed Association, formed when the Noxen-Monroe Sportsmen's Club and the Stanley Cooper Chapter of Trout Unlimited became interested in protecting Bowman's Creek. The group is supported by 12 municipalities and the two counties that Bowman's Creek flows through.

The Bowman's Creek Association receives "in-kind services from municipalities, technical help from DEP, and assistance in applying for grants from state representatives," says Dorn White of Noxen, one of the founders. He is in the process of helping to starting another area watershed group on Tunkhannock Creek.

Not all the municipalities along Toby's Creek are ready to plan a new future for the waterway. Kingston Township Manager Eddie O'Neill says it's premature to talk about the creek as a recreational resource. "Basically, we're trying to identify problem areas."

One of the worst is North Main Street in Shavertown, where the creek jumped its banks in September, sending a stream of water down the street and into the parking lot at Cook's Pharmacy. And the creek is gradually eroding the eastern bank between it and the old township building, at the intersection of Route 309 and Carverton Road.

"Right now, it's a liability," O'Neill said.

It's possible, though, that making better use of the creek — once it's no longer a threat — could be included in a comprehensive master plan that has been authorized by the Back Mountain Council of Governments, he said.

Dallas Township Secretary Len Kozick said the creek has not been on the supervisors' radar screen, since only a small segment of it is in their township.

Correspondent Charlotte Bartizek contributed to this article.



**Toby's
Creek**
Our hidden
resource



POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

This gorgeous arched stone tunnel carries Snake Creek under the old Lehigh Valley Railroad bed, behind the Uni-Mart off Carverton Road. The floor of the tunnel appears to be cobblestone.

See WALKING THE CREEK, next page

WALKING THE CREEK—

(continued from page 6)

scrub vegetation whose roots hold the soil in place.

A few hundred yards down, a rock ledge gently turns the creek as it approaches yet another passage below the busy road. The water moves faster now, as the bed pitches more steeply toward the rock cut.

As the creek flows behind two abandoned houses hard by the busy highway, the bank on either side is again lined with Japanese knotweed. There isn't much space between the stream bank and roadway at some points, and soil is being washed in. Rip-rap has been installed now and again to provide reinforcement, but again, the invasive plant is doing its part.

Just above Hillside Road, Huntsville Creek adds to the flow with water that has tumbled down from the Huntsville Reservoir. The remains of an old foundation can be seen beneath the trees on the creek's southern bank, probably another mill.

Now the flow becomes slower and wider, for about a quarter-mile until it passes below Hillside Road. Just before that point, a large old culvert funnels runoff into the creek from the hillside beyond.

As Toby's Creek passes the building that once housed a Linear plant, it narrows by half and flows strongly after a summer rain, over a huge sewer line that carries waste to the Dallas Area Municipal Authority not far below. Soon it again bumps into an outcropping and turns left, then right, to parallel the highway through the rock cut.

A long stretch of Gabian wall has been installed here, and it keeps the creek from undermining the roadway. Just before reaching the first of two small private bridges that connect several homes with the rest of the world, the water slips over another massive pipe laid across a stone spillway. Smooth concrete walls hem the creek in here, the one on the western side set at a steep angle, whether by design or because of years holding the flow in line.

Another of the many old foundations that still exist along the creek banks rests on the western side just below Russell's Auto Sales. It is made of stone with no mortar, a sign that it has been there a long time. Whether or not it was associated with a mill is unclear, although early accounts describe many mills along the lower reaches of the creek.

The stream really picks up speed now, and enters a stretch where — if only the highway noise could be blocked — an observer might think he's gone back a century in time. The old trolley line bed provides a level walkway through the woods, the creek speeding down one side and towering rocky cliffs looming on the other. The stream bed, sunken 15 feet below the trail, is now huge slabs of shale, interrupted by massive boulders that have come crashing down from above.

Unfortunately, the natural splendor has been marred by decades of illegal dumping, revealed by three sofas that have been lying beside the trolley bed so long they are covered with moss.

The sudden appearance of a concrete wall keeping the creek and roadway separated signals that this idyllic segment is ending. And as if to remind us of the abuse our hidden resource has absorbed, a modest dam has been formed by fallen tree trunks and a roll of carpet blocking the flow.

A short way further, the stream again crosses under the highway, through a pair of massive culverts each 12 to 15 feet in diameter. It emerges about 400 feet later, again picking up speed as it passes by the Dallas Area Municipal Authority, where a large steel tube carrying sewage arches over the creek rather than passing through it. Now Toby's Creek makes its last swing to the right, behind a tall outcropping left when the highway was straightened, before passing under Route 309 one more time as it leaves the Back Mountain.

In its roughly six-mile journey through the Back Mountain, Toby's Creek has progressed from a lazy spring to a rushing torrent. It has traveled through untouched forest and beside busy shopping centers, and has crossed under a roadway more than 20 times. Along the way, the creek has been rerouted, trashed and has become overgrown with shrubs and trees.

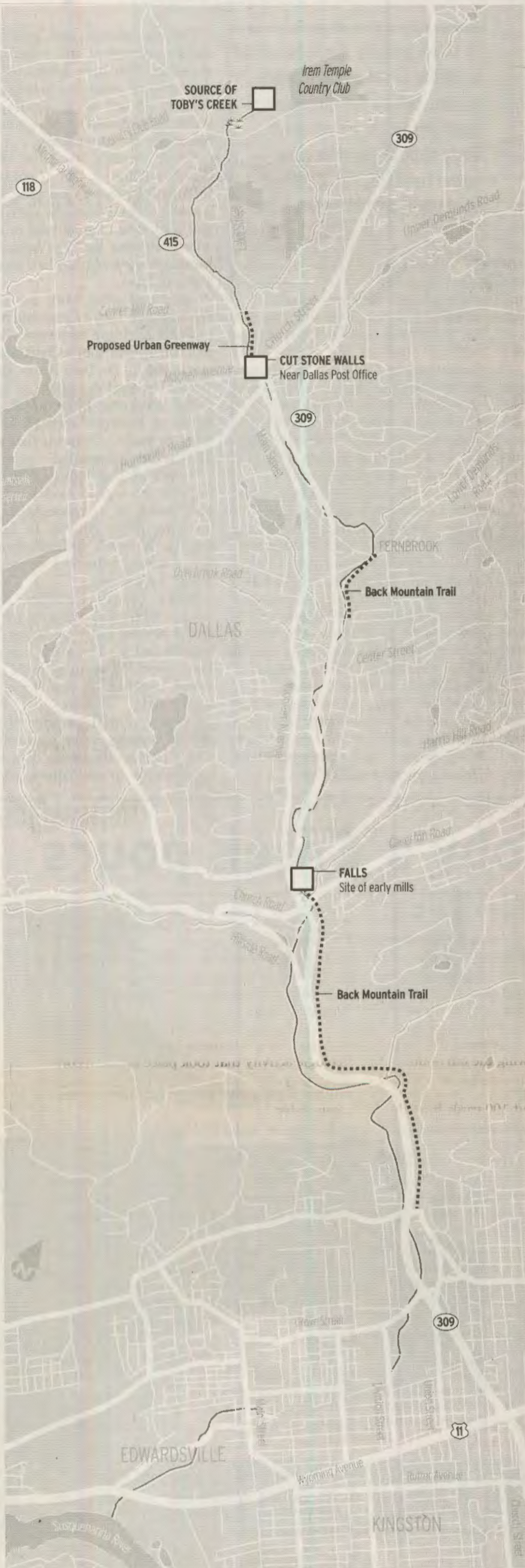
Yet, there are places where it has retained a remarkable sense of majesty, sweeping over enormous blocks of shale and beside glades that beckon on a hot summer day. Scientists who study Toby's Creek say its water is impressively free of contaminants, save sediment and road salt, and people who live near it marvel at its power and ever-changing personality.

This may not be the Toby's Creek discovered by early Back Mountain settlers, but it is not so different that it can't contribute to our quality of life. With more care and cleanups, easier access and heightened appreciation for its important place in our community, Toby's Creek could be transformed from a hidden resource into a key asset that links us to our history while contributing to a brighter future.

Toby's Creek through the Back Mountain

This graphic representation shows just a few of the interesting points along Toby's Creek.

POST GRAPHIC/PAUL BOWERS



As it approaches the lower end of the "notch" to Luzerne, Toby's Creek is a rushing torrent, here impeded by a dam formed from fallen tree trunks and a discarded roll of carpet. The old trolley line runs along the western bank.

Near and far, blueprints exist for protecting creeks

The streams vary in size and character, but share a community of advocates.

By CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK
For The Post

Across the nation, people are learning to appreciate the waterways that beautify their communities, and are taking action to clean and enjoy them.

Prompted by state and federal programs to foster clean water, stream awareness and to reclaim the environment, grassroots watershed protection groups are taking up the challenge to welcome back into the community small streams and rivers long taken for granted.

"When we started to think of our river (the 13-mile Pequabuck River in central Connecticut) as a possible asset rather than a dumpster, things started to happen," says Mary Moulton, treasurer of the Pequabuck River Watershed Association. "And when we started cleaning it up, people became more careful about not trashing it again."

Assistance, grants are available, page 8

The group's first project tore down two dams that had been built to create mill ponds. "The dams were not necessary for flood control and prevented fish like the Eastern salmon, or any fish, from spawning in the river," says Moulton.

"We are considering 'sunlighting' parts of the stream that are conduited because the fish will not travel underground very far to spawn."

Moulton points out that by looking forward, opening up a river and controlling pollutants, a community group can tap in to federally funded programs like the Environmental Protection Agency's salmon stocking initiative being conducted in the Connecticut River.

Partnering is important for all-volunteer, grassroots groups.

Because small streams are feeders for larger rivers, Moulton points out that larger rivershed organizations are usually very helpful with staff, ideas and resources.

"Our claim to fame is that we are the biggest polluter of the Farmington River and so we've attracted the attention and help of the Farmington River Association, one of the oldest and most well-endowed in the country."

Tonia Shoumatoff, of Wassaic, New York, is her town's citizen representative to a state-mandated advisory council on threats to the local watershed area. Her local chapter of a larger stream association watches over the Webutuck River, which flows through upstate New York, then empties into the Ten Mile River and eventually into the Housatonic River in Connecticut.

"We make recommendations and then threats, through our advisory council, because we have set up ordinances in each town," says Shoumatoff. The watershed protection ordinances had to be accepted by the towns, and cover water quality, land use near the rivers, dumping and pollutants.

"It's so important to have these

"When we started to think of our river as a possible asset rather than a dumpster, things started to happen."

Mary Moulton
Treasurer, Pequabuck (Ct.) River
Watershed Association

ordinances in place and I'll tell you why. We are trying to stop the development of a 200-home mobile park on the river bank because they will lack enough septic or sewer capacity to protect the river," says Shoumatoff.

"Yes, we partner with the Housatonic River Association, but locally the legal structure has been set up to really give teeth to our recommendations, and that's done through our citizens' council."

The Eno River Association in North Carolina was established when a citizens' group successfully blocked construction of a dam across the Eno River, near Durham. The dam area became a new state park. The group functions as a river watch and land trust, buying up riverfront property as it becomes available and incorporating it into the state park system.

They have become so successful that the park is now the site of an annual music and craft "Festival for the Eno" that attracts 40,000 people over the July 4 weekend.

Most of the river groups begin with a study to define and name the watershed area, followed by watershed and water quality studies involving laboratory and field work. Some groups become funded and supported through regional tourism systems, but many remain grassroots organizations. Some gain political clout through municipal or state involvement while others are membership based.

Whether a group is just starting out or well along in its organizational development, community awareness of the river and its assets is constantly emphasized. In Pennsylvania, the League of Women Voters Citizen Education Fund gives PA Department of Environmental Protection grants to projects under \$5,000 for the protection of watershed areas and awareness of pollution issues. Many projects involve education and even the school systems. Funds for watershed signs and stream signs are available.

The stream preservation groups have held rock concerts, set up garbage cans, run poster contests and floated large golden balls down river to help foster awareness of their streams. For most, stream cleanups are semi-annual events. They have found that after an arduous initial cleanup, subsequent events are faster and easier.

Local and municipal groups can also help stock fish in rivers, clean up stream beds and banks and help with stream surveillance and maintenance. "It used to be the City of Bristol, (Ct.) would dump all the extra asphalt and road debris in the river. We now know we shouldn't do that any more, and the town will help cart away polluting debris," says Moulton.

The creek by any other name?

Guy Giordano of Harveys Lake wrote in an e-mail that he read the coverage on Toby's Creek with great interest. But he has yet another twist on the name.

"I've been an avid post card for collector and I've got seven different postcards that use the name TOPY Creek. Some of these cards have actual postmarks dating back as far as 1907. I noticed this name several years ago and have often thought about it since. Because my seven cards are all different views using the name Topy Creek, I have to give serious consideration to the fact that "Topy" might be the correct name. "The name Topy creek has some real meaning if you consider what thought must have gone into developing mills and dam ponds to take maximum advantage of the land topography. Having walked the creek, you must admit, it's amazing how this watercourse and its tributaries drain the Back Mountain area, over a 500 foot difference in elevation. Topy Creek winds around all kind of topographical obstacles to finally make its way to the Susquehanna River. Consequently, I have found it easy to buy into the name "Topy Creek.""

POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

Plenty of help is available to reclaim and protect streams

By CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK
Post Correspondent

The Bowman's Creek Watershed Association is a good example of how volunteers can improve conditions on a local waterway.

The group was formed when the Noxen-Monroe Sportsman's Association and the Stanley Cooper Chapter of Trout Unlimited became interested in protecting Bowman's Creek. Established in 1998, it enjoys the support of 12 municipalities and the two counties that Bowman's Creek flows through, and partners with 14 other organizations and agencies.

The association annually limes the creek to reduce the acidity of the water, and is in the process of completing handicapped access to the stream with a \$32,000 grant from the "Growing Greener" state fund.

The process begins by engaging a volunteer core group with elected officers and filing for tax-free status with the state, says Dorne White, of Noxen, a founder of the association. "You need volunteers, and people; you just can't do it all yourself," he says.

White says the Bowman's Creek Association receives "in-kind services from municipalities, technical help from the Department of Environmental Protection, and assistance in applying for grants from state representatives."

He is in the process of helping to start another watershed group on Tunkhannock Creek, or perhaps two, one for the lower and one for the upper creek.

Startup money for the Bowman's

Creek Association came from the Eastern Coalition of Mine Reclamation.

The initial funds were used to print brochures, attract membership and produce a video of Bowman's Creek. The group sought membership at the Luzerne and Wyoming County fairs and through civic and municipal groups.

Karen Szwast is coordinator for the Hicks Creek Watershed Association, serving a stream that flows from the top of Peters Mountain down through Exeter and into the Susquehanna River. This relatively new group formed in 2002 as a result of an Exeter Borough cleanup and the concerns of individuals living along the creek's banks.

"People had problems, there was erosion and slides on the upper part of the watershed and sedimentation and stagnant water downstream," says Szwast. "The mine companies rerouted the creek and it's probably the only creek running north. Of course, we had West Nile virus as a result."

The watershed group boasts 130 members and has been approved for a \$46,000 DEP Growing Greener grant to do a stream assessment and design a plan to prioritize the problems.

"It's a lot of work but worthwhile. I stepped in because these people needed help," says Szwast. To keep members informed of activities, the group publishes a monthly newsletter.

Other state and federal groups are assisting the Hicks Creek group, and can help any watershed organization. Locally, the Wyoming Valley Watershed Coalition helps coordinate

"I think people are interested in these creeks and watersheds, but so far they have considered them burdens ... They should see them as opportunities, for fishing spots and picnic areas."

Holly Frederick
Project manager for watershed associations
Pennsylvania Environmental Council.

and establish watershed groups.

Holly Frederick is project manager for watershed associations at the regional office of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. "I think people are interested in these creeks and watersheds, but so far they have considered them burdens, to maintain the bridges for example," she said. "They should see them as opportunities, for fishing spots and picnic areas."

Part of the the Susquehanna River Basin Commission's strategic plan is to restore, manage and protect watershed areas. Along those lines, the commission can help environmental and civic groups, municipalities and smaller watershed organizations organize stream cleanups. They provide mini-grants of up to \$2,000 to help watershed groups with these events, one of which was held in April on a section of Toby's Creek in Dallas Borough.

One of their outreaches is too "assure the sustainability of these grassroots groups in the Susquehanna River Basin," according to Susan Obleski, communications director.

The commission also assists with stream assessment and water quality sampling. "We have contracted legal and technical assistance to help groups starting out and we do on-site workshops," says Anne Devine, watershed liaison, for the commission.

"Most recently we have established, on line, a GIS (Geological Information Service) mapping service with a grant from the state DEP that should be of great help to these groups starting up," she says. Their website is www.srbc.net (see programs and activities).

Some evaluative work has already been done in Toby's Creek and may be available to future endeavors. For the past three years Toby's Creek has been monitored by Dr. Dale Bruns, dean of Wilkes University's College of Science and Engineering Department and a group of students, through an EPA grant to study tributaries that empty into the Susquehanna.

"I can't say that Toby's Creek is pristine, but it's a good model and reference point to compare in a study involving other streams in Luzerne County. It hasn't suffered from the severe mining influences we see in the valley," says Bruns.

Toby's Creek's turbidity, acidity, oxygen levels and temperature seem in the normal range as far as Bruns has studied it. The stream is monitored every 15 minutes with instruments installed on the stream that send data directly to Wilkes University. Aerial photographs and ground surveys were completed in 2000. This accumulated data would be available to any interested local



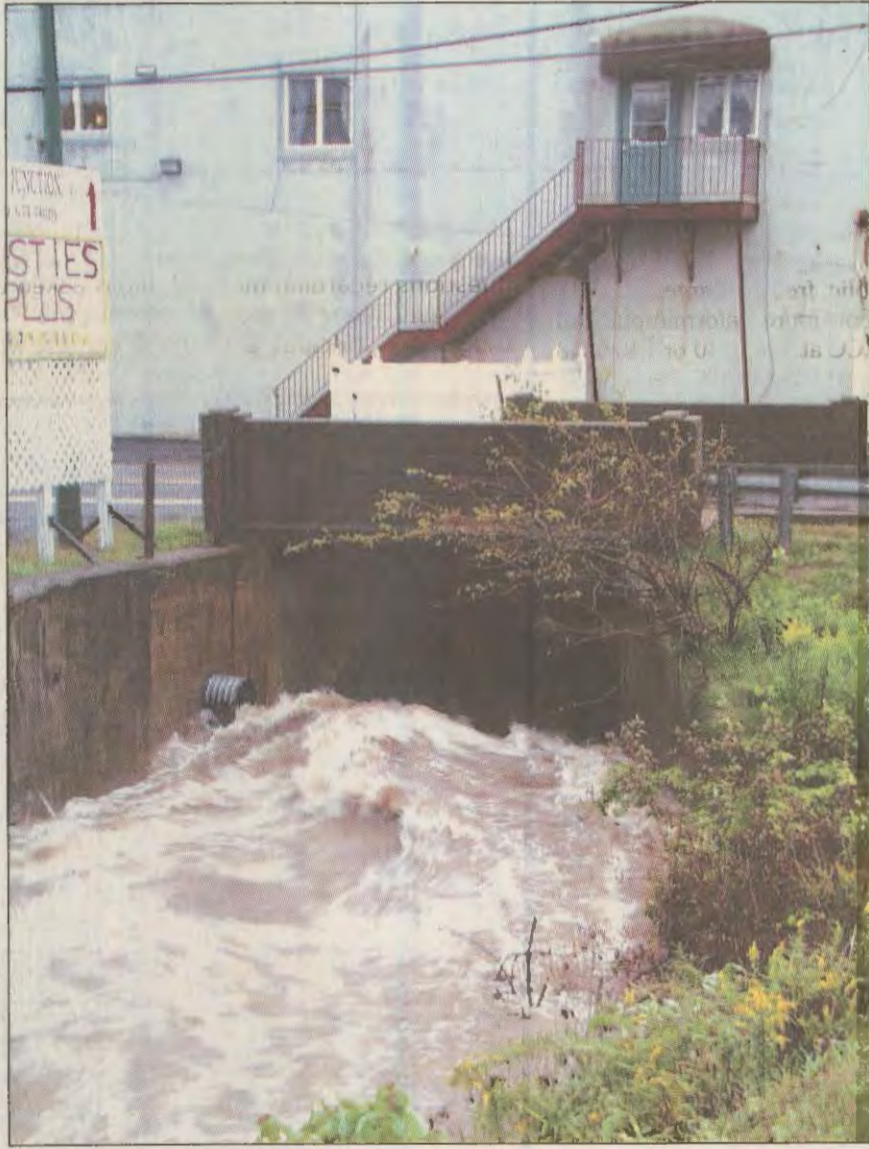
Toby's Creek

Our hidden resource

group. Though optimistic about Toby's Creek's condition, Bruns cautions that the amount of dissolved solids from salted roads needs to be looked at each spring and land use still needs to be monitored in order for the creek to remain healthy.

"Toby's Creek, with good stream management, could have economic benefit to the area in terms of tourism and just through the enjoyment residents could get from it," says Bruns.

When it rains, Toby's Creek pours



POST PHOTOS/RON BARTIZEK

Change in character. The photo at left was taken in the spring, showing a docile Toby's Creek at the Center Street bridge. The photo at right was taken in September, at the height of flooding caused by six inches of rain from the remnants of Hurricane Ivan.

Usually placid creek can pack a punch

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

Most of the time, Toby's Creek is tame, even invisible, with water levels that barely cover the shale lining its bed. But when the rains come hard, long or both, watch out. Quickly swollen by runoff, the tranquil stream can become a destructive menace, capable of ripping apart roads and washing away property.

In the record flooding of June, 1972, the creek tore up sections of Memorial Highway in Dallas and Hillside Road in Trucksville, before causing even more damage to Luzerne to Edwardsville, where it enters the Susquehanna River.

Last month, swollen by about six inches of rain dropped by the remnants of Hurricane Ivan, the creek jumped its banks in Shavertown, flooding North Main Street and the parking lot at Cook's Pharmacy and coming perilously close to topping the channel between several homes and Route 309. It is the Back Mountain's good fortune that nowhere is the torrent's flow blocked, and thus it simply washes through on its way to the river.

A variety of piecemeal measures have been taken over the years to contain and direct flood waters. At several points, the creek has been channeled by high concrete walls; at others, Gabian walls — stone secured by heavy wire mesh — hold the banks while at still others rip rap stone is the protection of choice.

About a decade ago, local municipalities were required to adopt a storm water management ordinance that applies to construction within the creek's watershed, said Ben Gorey, a past zoning officer in Kingston Township. The ordinance requires that developers not increase storm flows, often by capturing it in detention ponds on their sites.

"That should be a good control over runoff," Gorey said.

There is also a state-imposed restriction of any development within 50 feet of any stream, which Gorey feels helps protect tributaries to Toby's Creek.

Now, a comprehensive approach to mitigate flooding along Toby's Creek and its feeder streams may be on the way, thanks to State Sen. Charles Lemmond.

Tom Rathbun, spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection, said a preliminary study is nearly finished — 16 years after funding of \$150,000 for it was set aside by



FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Friends Matt Krebs, left, and Dale Daniels, relax on a Sunday afternoon on Toby's Creek in Shavertown. They are sitting atop a Gabian wall, stones held together by wire mesh, a design that is used at many points to protect the banks from erosion.

the state Legislature.

The study is under review at DEP and the Department of General

Services, which manages construction of state-funded projects.

Because the study has just been submitted, Rathbun was unable to describe its recommendations. But he expects officials in Dallas Borough and Dallas and Kingston townships to be given a review soon. "They'll be able to see the scope of it," he said.

A decision on whether to proceed should be made in January, 2005.

Rathbun said this approach — trying to eliminate the causes of flooding rather than simply protecting vulnerable locations — is more effective. "Otherwise, you just keep trying to out-engineer Mother Nature," he said.

Funding for the project would be split between federal, state and local sources, with the local municipalities responsible for ongoing maintenance and upkeep. "It's a bit of a financial commitment," Rathbun said. Grant funds would be available for non-routine repairs or useful additions.

While DEP would consider the environmental impact of such a project, other support is valuable when trying to incorporate public access into the plan.

"That's where the local watershed groups are vital," he said.

And DEP could help such a group get started and be effective. "There's funding sources for those folks."

Web resources

Government and nonprofit agencies

Pennsylvania Environmental Council
www.pecpa.org

Susquehanna River Basin Commission
www.srbc.net

Luzerne County Conservation District
www.luzerneconservationdistrict.org

Local environmental organizations

North Branch Land Trust
www.nblt.org

Back Mountain Trail
bmt.editthispage.com

Watershed associations

Eno River Association (Durham, N.C.)
www.enoriver.org

Farmington River Watershed Association (Farmington, Ct.)
www.frwa.org

Harlem Valley Rail Trail (Amenia, N.Y.)
www.hvrt.org

DO YOU HAVE ANY STORIES ABOUT TOBY'S CREEK?

At different times and places, Toby's Creek has been a fishing hole, a natural sliding board and an engine of industry. If you have any stories to tell or pictures to share, we'd love to hear and see them. They may be published in the weeks following the completion of this series. You can contact us many ways: By e-mail (best): thepost@leader.net By phone: (570) 675-5211 By mail: The Post, 15 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre PA 18711 Items may also be dropped off in our locked box at the Uni-Mart convenience store, across from the Dallas Shopping Center. No matter how you contact us, please include a return address and phone number, so that we can follow up with you and return items.

What do you think?

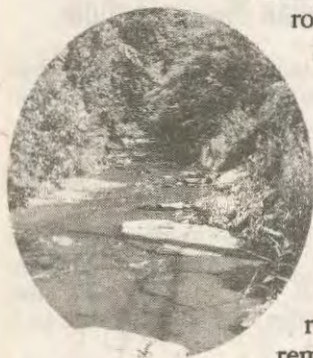
So, using your own experience and what we've presented, what do you think about the future of Toby's Creek? Is it simply a nuisance that should be tamed and paved over, or could it be a valuable asset to the Back Mountain's families and business community? In the end, how the creek is used — if it is used at all — will depend on what the people who live, work and do business here feel is best. Send your comments to us by e-mail at: thepost@leader.net or by mail: The Post, 15 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711

OUR OPINION

Let's reach out and grasp a bright future for Toby's Creek

For every person who cares about Toby's Creek, there are a dozen who hardly know it exists. That is the principal motivation behind The Post's series of reports about this historic and irreplaceable natural asset — to raise awareness of the creek's character and support efforts to protect and utilize its attributes for the benefit of our community.

Over the past several months, Post reporters have examined the creek's past and present, and have talked to people nearby and far away who recognize the role a truly public waterway can play in a community. We say "truly public" because, although along much of its length Toby's Creek is within a few dozen feet of roadways and neighborhoods, it is virtually invisible because of tangled brush that obscures it or lack of access to beautiful pools, falls and rock formations. As a result, hardly anyone has seen the remnants of early mills' stone foundations, shale stream beds smoothed by centuries of water flowing over them or the impressive arched tunnel that leads Snake Creek into the larger stream near Carverton Road.



Toby's Creek

Our hidden resource

In this issue, we report on notable efforts to protect streams and rivers. The closest example is the Bowman's Creek Watershed Association, serving a stream that runs barely five miles from the source of Toby's Creek. Others we discovered are elsewhere in

Luzerne County, and in Connecticut, New York and North Carolina.

The streams and rivers vary in size and character, as do the communities that surround them. But there is one universal factor in each successful venture; an active and involved group of people who cherish the gift of such a valuable resource and are determined to no longer disregard or damage it.

We learned that there is strength in numbers, although a large core organization isn't required. Instead, existing interest groups can join forces in support of a watershed association, strengthening its hand when seeking grants for cleanup, restoration and preservation. And we were told at many points that funding and services are readily available to associations able to demonstrate a high level of community support for stream improvement.

So, what are we waiting for? We have already heard from some individuals eager to save Toby's Creek before it's too late to do so. If there are others with that interest, we invite them to contact The Post, and we'll put you all in touch with one another, and provide whatever contacts and information we've found that can lend a hand. Then we can work toward a day when this hidden resource becomes the sparkling asset it can and should be.