

# Cheat Lake Rail Trail

By Jim Hudson, Recreational Trail Program

I first visited the area served by the Cheat Lake Rail Trail in the 1970s. Bob Komorous, a fraternity brother, brought several of us out here to enjoy the scenery. Soon it became a regular ritual. Friday after class, a half dozen or so of us would drive to the old iron bridge on Morgan Run Road. There we would load camping gear into an assortment of canoes and paddle across Cheat Lake to a grassy area along the lakeshore. We would stay at the isolated campsite until Sunday when we would rush back to Morgantown to finish homework for Monday's classes.

Fast forward to 2007. There was no sign along Route 857 pointing to the Rail Trail and I missed the little green sign pointing out Morgan Run Road. After I turned around, I discovered the road down Morgan Run is still as narrow and brush choked as I remembered, except for where construction of the Fayette-Monongalia Highway crosses it.



My first shock came at the trailhead. Thirty years ago, we had parked our vehicles helter-skelter among trees and brush wherever we could dodge the mud holes and erosion gullies. Today, there is a nice paved parking lot with space for a couple of dozen cars. A paved road connects the parking lot and the waterfront so people with disabilities can avoid the steep hill down. Others who want to avoid walking or riding down the hill can drive down to unload and then move their car back up to the parking lot.

From the trailhead, you can see most of the amenities around the trail. Beside the accessible parking lot is a small playground. In addition to the playground, there are nicely maintained bathrooms, vending machines, and a ramp to carry small boats down to the waters edge for launching.



From the trailhead the trail extends northwest on a causeway across the Rubles Run arm of the lake. A footbridge spans the gap in the causeway that connects this arm of the lake to the main body of water. During the seventies, an old iron bridge spanned the lake a few hundred yards upstream. It has been removed so it is no longer possible to drive down Morgan Run Road, cross into Pennsylvania and cruise through the little town of Lake Lynn (the real name of Cheat Lake) and on to Point Marion. According to my source, the bridge was removed because too many stolen cars were being dumped into the lake from it.



In the opposite direction, the trail crosses the Morgan Run arm of the lake on a causeway and another bridge. Fishing is not allowed from the bridge but the dock area on the upstream side of the causeway and bridge appears to be available for fishing. A picnic table near the bridge provides seating while you view the wildlife and catch your breath. According to the maintenance people, there is an eagle's nest not far from the trail down the lake.

On to the southeast, there is a series of boat slips, a second set of bathrooms and even a fish cleaning station. The last item is an indicator of how clean the water has become since the last time I was here. During the seventies, acid mine drainage from upstream had all but wiped out the aquatic life in the lake. Now there are sufficient fish to maintain a pair of eagles and a fish cleaning station.





A few hundred feet south of the boat slips is a large millstone beside the trail. Between the trail and the lake is the grassy area where we camped thirty years ago. Several millstones dot the area. The presence of the millstones and a picnic table along with the absence of weeds, an open dump and an open fire ring are the major changes that have occurred over the years.

I didn't walk much further along the trail. It was getting late and I had two more stops to make before my day was done. Once back at the trailhead I spoke with the maintenance supervisor who gave me a ride to the top of the hill and past it to the new picnic area on the hillside above the road. Here a dozen small picnic sites that resemble tent camping sites more than picnic sites, dot the hillside along a gravel road. A third set of bathrooms located here was temporarily out of order due to a water leak.

The isolated campsite isn't as isolated as it once was. And, while it has been almost thirty years since my last visit to the Morgan Run area of Cheat Lake, it won't be that long before I go again. The Cheat Lake Rail Trail will make sure of that. The next time I'll bring my bike, my wife and maybe a few old friends who haven't seen the area since Bob Komorous first brought us here.

