



# Friends of Oil Creek

## Late Spring 2025



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Occasionally, I like to write about the interesting animal encounters that I get to experience from time to time here at Oil Creek. It has been a while since I have done so, so I thought I'd talk a bit about the American Woodcock this time around. This funny looking migratory bird, while difficult to see at times, is common bird species found within the boundaries of Oil Creek State Park. They are commonly found in forests, old fields, and wet meadows of Eastern North America. Their long beak is a useful tool that they use to search for worms and other ground dwelling insects.

Even though they can be difficult to find, one sure way to locate a woodcock is by their odd yet intriguing matting call which is called a peent. Peenting is done by the males, usually from early March to mid-May. The males peent with the hopes of attracting a female to their location. In addition to their peenting, they perform an aerial display called a sky dance. Males will fly about the sky showing off their aerial acrobatics before fluttering back down to earth only to resume another round of peenting and flying. This behavior can be viewed during the early morning and late evenings. I have the best luck during late evenings.

A favorite activity for my family is calling one on of these beautiful birds in. Calling to a woodcock can be done by playing their call with a smartphone or another device that has internet capabilities. The first time I tried this with my family I got the woodcock to land within feet of where we were standing. I was under the impression that I was calling them in because they were searching for a mate. However, being that the males are the only ones that peent, I discovered that they were attracted to the call because they believed there was another male nearby attempting to move into his territory. The woodcock that lives below my house has been in the same spot calling every evening for the past two and a half months. If anyone is interested in learning more about this bird, Oil Creek usually host a woodcock program in April or early May.

Dave Hallman-Park Manager



*Thank you to Dot Monahan for many of the excellent wildlife pictures in this newsletter.*



## The Ray Gerard Hiking Trail

By Tambra Warner Sabatini



From your first fresh step onto the scenic Gerard Hiking Trail in Oil Creek State Park until your last weary step back into the “real” world outside of the Park, your every sense is filled with delight. No matter how many times you travel a section of the Trail, it never gets old or boring. Every season brings new pleasures, old treasures appear among the ancient ruins, and the sounds and sights of birds, bears, or even bobcats generate a sense of adventure and exploration. The most amazing realization from time spent on the Gerard Trail and offshoots is the visual impact of seeing old photos of total devastation and knowing the incredible recovery and diversity of the various ecosystems of the Park.

Ray Gerard, a 1937 graduate of Titusville High School, grew up at the north end of the Park, which wasn't even a Park for him as a child. He knew it as a valley filled with relics, ruins, and a very special wildness that I can imagine he loved to explore as a young man. More than 30 years after he graduated from school, and a tour in World War II on a landing team at Okinawa, Japan, I can also believe that the valley brought much peace and joy to him as he worked at Universal-Cyclops Specialty Steel for 29 ½ years .

In the early to mid-1960s, an idea began to take shape with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. A local legend by the name of Virginia Hunt (Hunt Farm in the Park) guided a group of locals and Conservancy directors on a tractor-driven wagon tour down the valley. Mrs. Hunt drove the tractor down the muddied and messy



old rail line access road on the east side of the valley. I have vivid memories as a young child of riding in the back of our 1967 blue-green Jeep Gladiator truck in the late 1960s/early 1970s on the rough, muddy, and wet western rail line after the tracks and ties had been removed before the asphalt bike trail we now enjoy was completed.

The wagon tour was a success, lands were purchased throughout the valley, and the Oil Creek State Park became a reality. Prior to the bike trail development, there were very few trails in the Park. Old logging roads had become oil lease roads in the mid-to-late 1800s, and a few old-timers still pumped oil in and around the valley for many years after the oil boom. Those old roads were access points for those of us who grew up hunting, fishing, and even riding our horses into the valley into the 1980s. Over the course of time, the roads became overgrown. But Ray Gerard had a vision of a trail circumnavigating and accessing the entire Park so that everyone would have access to this fascinating wilderness filled with history.







In 1980, just one month prior to his retirement, Ray began working on the trail which later became known as the Ray Gerard Hiking Trail. In the first two years of working on the trail, and thousands of hours of scoping out, marking trail, and clearing trail, the first 10 miles of the trail were ready and highlighted in a June 17, 1982 article in the Titusville Herald newspaper. "It is a one-man trail, created physically by one man from his own dreams."

Six years later, the well-known Swinging Bridge, also known as the Boughton Bridge, was dedicated. The Boughton Bridge was a key component of connecting the east and west sides of the Park for hikers...and many years later, the Oil Creek 100-mile runners use this bridge on their "going home" loop for the final miles of their quest to conquer the 100-mile race distance.

In March 1986, the Western PA Conservancy called the trail "one of the finest in the eastern U.S." and gave credit to Ray, "...was constructed in just five years, largely through the efforts of Conservancy member, and Titusville resident, Ray Gerard."

Ray continued maintaining the trail until a few years prior to his passing in 1997 with the enthusiastic help and dedication of the well-known and loved "Over the Hill Gang." To this day, this crew volunteers to clean up fallen trees, fix trail sections that washout, and keep the 36-mile trail in great shape. In March 1997, the trail was designated at the Ray Gerard Hiking Trail in Ray's honor.

The Gerard Trail brings the highlights of over 7,000 acres which comprise the Park to hikers, backpackers, trail runners, birdwatchers, and more.



From scenic misty waterfalls tucked away into sharp-walled side valleys, to lush trillium-laced rock outcroppings, and all the way up to the hilltop overlooks, there is something for everyone. History refuses to be ignored on the trail – you will encounter old cemeteries, ghost towns, the world's first oil pipeline track, along with abandoned wells, tin-sided dilapidated lease houses, storage barrels from the vast cooperages (including the Heisman family cooperage), and much more related to the world's first industrial foray into petroleum.

The Trail is extremely well-marked and maintained. There are several alternate loops that intersect with the Gerard Trail throughout the Park. There really is no way to become "lost" in the Park...just head downhill to Oil Creek and find either the bike trail on the west side or the rail line on the east side and follow north or south. Those hikers / backpackers who wish to camp in the Park can take the Gerard Trail directly to either one of the two Adirondack Shelters / camping areas. Wildlife and birds abound in the Park, right along with an incredible array of wildflowers and unique plants. There truly is something for everyone in the Park and on the wonderful Ray Gerard Hiking Trail.





## 4th Annual Oil Creek 5 & 13 Stacked Trail Races Article by: Rebekah Deal



From left  
Rebekah Deal, Heather Nelson,  
Rebecca Beach, and Kat Thompson

The 4th Annual Oil Creek 5 & 13 Stacked Trail Races were recently held on Saturday, May 17, 2025, at Drake Well Museum and Park in Titusville, PA. If you are looking for a unique trail race which utilizes the Gerard Hiking Trail as well as other trails in nearby Oil Creek State Park, this is it! The 5-mile race began at 7:00 AM at the “Jersey Bridge,” just outside of Drake Well Museum and Park and ended within the main parking area of the Museum. The 13-mile race began at 8:30 AM in the same parking area and ended there, too. Race times are staged 90 minutes apart, making it possible for participants to run both for a “stacked challenge!” There were finisher awards for each race distance as well as for those runners who completed both races for the quickest “stacked” finish time.

Jacob Kosker, a runner himself, took on the labor of love of being the official race director of the Stacked Trail Races in May of 2022. After months of planning, phone calls, and focus groups, he resurrected a very similar race series that ended in 2020. For the past three years, he has grown exposure and attendance each year with the help of Emily Weaver, Friends of Drake Well Executive Director, and countless volunteers. All race proceeds benefit [Friends of Drake Well, Inc.](#), the non-profit organization which partners with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in the administration of Drake Well Museum and Park.

The Friends of Oil Creek had a whopping five board members participate in the races: Kat Thompson, Rebecca Beach, Heather Nelson, Scott Bailey, and Rebekah Deal. This alone shows how personally invested our board members are in Oil Creek State Park!

If you have ever wanted to test out trail shoes and see what the hype of trail running is all about, the five-miler option is a perfect way to get your feet wet! Even beginners can hike the entire course. Both races end at 1:30 pm, which gives the five-mile trail runners an extremely generous time limit of 6.5 hours! And for the experienced trail runner, there are not many races where you can race back-to-back races in one day. Get out there and go for the 5 miler and then the 13 miler! Whatever you choose, one thing is clear for 2026, save the date: May 16, 2026; I will see you at the Drake Well Museum!



Scott Bailey finishing the race!





## Nature Nuggets at Oil Creek State Park

Spring has arrived in the oil valley, and soon days will roll into summer. The woods have awakened with color, sound and activity. The creek is flowing with fresh rain (so much rain) and trout!

Come along on a Nature Nugget journey to discover what is happening in Oil Creek State Park. Nature Nuggets are short fun facts drawn from seasonal occurrences in nature. What is happening in the forest? Who is making that animal noise? Why is creek water breaching its banks?



Let's start this Nature Nugget journey in the forest where treasures underfoot include the blooming of woodland wildflower such as trout lilies and trillium that are splashing delicate spots of color on the fresh forested floor. Take one whiff and you will know how skunk cabbage, another woodland wildflower, earned its name. Skunk cabbage is one of the strangest plants growing in wet woods. It is often the first wildflower to appear because its odd-looking flower actually generate heat, thawing the ground around it so that it may emerge! As the name implies, the flower also gives off a stinky smell. This attracts flies and beetles that also feed on dead animals. Tricking these insects in this way is the skunk cabbage's clever method of ensuring that it is pollinated. Look for its purple pod-like spade in early spring while large green cabbage-like leaves appear later. Also on the forest floor, ferns, mosses, and mushrooms are too taking center stage, and can be great places to find tiny forest critters like red eft salamanders, land snails and the roly-poly pillbug.



Turn your attention tree-ward and you might spot a bird nest. Many birds you will see in the eastern forest build their nest after the canopy trees (the tallest trees) have leafed out. To spot a new nest, watch for a bird flying with nesting materials clutched in its beak. Twigs stems, bits of vine or leaf, mosses, feathers and even string or paper. Keep your eye on the bird to see where it goes. A favorite bird of mine, the wood thrush, is a pot-bellied forest bird with a short tail and brown chest speckles. Its musical flutelike song echoes from the understory as it forages for ground-dwelling insects.

Venturing creek side, keep a look-out for the common merganser duck. These streamlined ducks float gracefully down Oil Creek. The males are striking with clean white bodies, dark green heads, and a slender serrated red bill. They are often the first to arrive during migration, diving underwater to catch fish in the cool spring waters. Often unseen below the creeks surface is a group of aquatic insects known as macroinvertebrates. Their secretive lives become fully visible to us this time of year once many of them morph into their flying adult stages. Critters like dragonfly, mayfly, stonefly and more! A shoreline walk or a gentle lift of a creek rock will lead you to the discovery of these amazing critters.

Want to know more? Attend one of the parks upcoming environmental education programs. The month of June is focused on the Bio Blitz, a friendly competition between Pennsylvania State Parks to document plants and animals in our parks. Utilizing the free iNaturalist app, you can submit observations on your own or attend one of our Bio Blitz events to help us identify all things nature!

**Birds:** Sunday, June 1 (10:30am-12:30pm) Meet at Park Office.

**Plants:** Sunday, June 8 (12:30pm-2:30pm) Meet at McCrea Farm/XC Ski Area.

**Critters Big & Small:** Sunday, June 22 (12:30pm-2:30pm) Meet at Blood Farm Day Use Area.

For more information on environmental education programs happening at Oil Creek State Park, visit our calendar of events web-site at [https://events.dcnr.pa.gov/oil\\_creek\\_state\\_park](https://events.dcnr.pa.gov/oil_creek_state_park).

Enjoy the Park!

Emily Pritchard

Environmental Education Specialist





OC100 will be held on October 4, 2025. Registration has been open for quite some time. Presently there are 217 participants. Throughout the summer there will be training runs. The first training run was held Memorial Day weekend.



Pictured above is Rebecca Beach finishing the OC100 in 2023.



Oil Creek Stare Park won the 2024 Oil Region Alliance award for “Best Scenic Selfie Spot”. The award was presented to Dave Hallman, park manager at the Ida Tarbell House in Titusville on April 3rd



Dave receiving the ORA award at the Ida Tarbell House.



# Over-The-Hill Gang



A significant OTHG event this past winter was the retirement of Duane Whitehill after 25 years of participation and leadership. Duane was recognized at a breakfast gathering at Sam's restaurant in Titusville, at which he was presented with a certificate of appreciation from Pennsylvania State representative Scott Hutchinson. Duane was also recognized from Oil Creek State Park by Park Manager Dave Hallman. Roger Locker another Gang member has also retired.

His service with the Gang is highly appreciated.

The OTHG has been out on the trails every Wednesday. The pictures show before and after repairs to bridges on Shaffer Run and Pioneer falls. Both were damaged by falling dead trees.

Austin Gray a reporter from The Derrick (a local newspaper) spent a day with the Gang and wrote a feature article for the paper. The Gang enjoyed Austin's visit where besides writing his article he also helped out with the day's projects.





# President's Report



Warmer weather is finally here and it is a terrific time to come out to the park to see the changes from late winter to late spring! Oil Creek State Park attracts a wide variety of visitors and park users during each season. For most of us, the park is in our backyards with in only about a 10 or 20 minute drive. Even city folk from places like Cleveland and Pittsburgh can get here in less than two hours!

Even though Oil Creek is close by, it is truly a get-away. The Park is a place to find beauty, peace, and relaxation. If you want solitude, there are so many places to walk, hike or bike where you may not see another person for hours. Fly fishing is another opportunity to enjoy solo. Or, you can just sit on one of the many benches throughout the park and quietly listen to the sounds of nature.

There are park educational programs to experience, as well as picnic and playground areas to enjoy with friends new and old.

A way to be a good "Friend" to the park is to respect the park and fellow users. There are over 7,000 acres, 52 miles of trails, and 9.7 miles of bike trail - so there is plenty of room for all to enjoy our beautiful park.

Having a trail etiquette is one way to show respect:

- First, the old adage "LEAVE NO TRACE" (LNT) is a good place to start. LNT can mean staying on the designated trails when applicable as to not disturb the flora and fauna.
- Take photos of plants and flowers, leaving them in the park for all to enjoy.
- Stay far away from wildlife, especially things like eagles' nests and bears!
- Keep dogs on leash and on the trail for their own safety and the safety and consideration of others. Pick up any dog waste from the trail or bike path. No one wants dog poop on their running or hiking shoes and feces can spread disease.
- LNT means you should pack out anything you bring in. To be a good steward, pick up any litter you find. Another good motto is to "leave your campsite better than you found it".
- When using the hiking or paved bike trail, be considerate and stay to the right when passing someone head on. Trail users coming downhill have the right of way. If you are catching up to a slower trail user, let them know well in advance that you are behind them and want to pass. Say something like "excuse me, I'm right behind you" or "passing on your left". Slower trail users should move over.



With some thoughtfulness and consideration everyone can happily experience the wide variety of outdoor adventures to discover there. Be a "Friend" and respect the park and fellow users.

Jen McAlevy-Board President





# Membership

The Friends of Oil Creek would like to thank all the members who renewed their membership and to thank the many new members.

Your membership helps maintain existing projects in Oil Creek State Park. Your contributions also help maintain new initiatives in the Park. Your membership also helps to maintain the Gerard hiking trail, the bike trail, and the ski trails. In addition, these resources fund the “Over the Hill Gang”.

If you haven't renewed your membership or would like to become a member, follow the link to become a friend of Oil Creek State Park: [www.friendsocsp.org](http://www.friendsocsp.org). The membership prices: single \$10, family \$25, and corporate/business/group \$100. You can also become a Friends member or renew your membership by contacting the FOCSP in one of the ways listed below:

- Write the Friends of Oil Creek  
PO Box# 1273 Oil City, Pa 16301
- E-Mail– [oilcreekfriends@gmail.com](mailto:oilcreekfriends@gmail.com)
- Website– [www.friendsocsp.org](http://www.friendsocsp.org)
- Call Park Office—814 676-5915
- Please Note: All checks should be made out to Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation (PPFF) with Friends of Oil Creek State Park listed in the memo section.



## Friends of Oil Creek Mission Statement

The Friends of Oil Creek State Park support the Park's mission to preserve, protect, and interpret our natural environment while providing recreational and educational opportunities for residents and visitors to the region.

The Friends of Oil Creek  
State Park is a Chapter of  
the Pennsylvania Parks  
and Forest  
Foundation