



“It was one of those March Days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light and winter in the shade.”

Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*

Go into the woodlands before the leaves are on the trees and look for the wildflowers that are sprouting up. After the leaves come out and shade the forest floor, most of these flowers will be gone for the year. There are some excellent field guides available that make identification pretty easy, even for the novice. Wildflowers make great photography subjects since they can't run away.

Keep your ears open too. Listen for the “drumming” of the ruffed grouse or the call of wild turkeys. With practice you'll be able to identify the sounds of some of the songbirds that fill the trees.

With the snow gone, all of the trails are open to hiking, including the ski trails. New maps of these trails are being upgraded using topography lines. These will be available at the park office as they get printed. With these you'll be able to see how hard a particular trail might be to climb. Trail length can be as long or as short as you like thanks to many crossover trails. And of course the paved bicycle trail is nearly level its entire length, and is mud-free even in the wettest weather.

For those who like to fish, trout season opens on April 14th. The Fish Commission has stocked Oil Creek twice in March and will stock it again on April 11th and May 3rd. For the hunters, spring grouse comes in on April 28th.

If nature cooperates and provides enough rain, spring is the best time of year to canoe Oil Creek. Even though the creek is mostly shallow, don't forget to wear your PFD. After you're in the water it's too late to put it on.

If you're interested in improving some habitat, get in touch with the DCNR forester Ty Ryan. He's going to be working on getting the park's apple trees back into shape to produce more apples for the wildlife. He's also going to be working on propagating hardwood cuttings.

So grab your camera and binoculars and meet spring head on. Take a look and listen to what nature has to offer. It's the best spring tonic available, and it's free of charge!

President's Column

March 20th is the first day of spring according to the calendar. Most years, to call March a spring month can be quite generous. Oftentimes it has more winter in it than spring.

But this year has already proved to be quite different. At my house just south of the park I recorded 13 days of high temperatures of 40° or higher, and 3 days of 50° or more. That's well over half the month of very warm “winter” weather.

Sooner or later though, spring will get here. Are you going to notice its arrival? Spend some time in various parts of the park and see for yourself how it introduces itself.

Wet areas are some of the first places spring shows up. Vernal pools are visited early by salamanders and frogs for courtship and egg laying. Spring peepers can be deafening on a warm night. Look for signs of the first flowers of the year here too. The hoods of skunk cabbage start growing in late winter in wet areas, and are well up before other flowers even break ground.

Migrating birds are coming back from warmer climates. The white bodies of mergansers are easy to spot on Oil Creek as well as other less colorful ducks with a little more effort. While in a wetland area just before dark, keep an ear and an eye open for the courtship flight of the woodcock. Its crazy and erratic flight along with its *peenting* sounds are something you won't soon forget.

You'll find one of nature's “tricksters” growing alongside the roadways. Many people see the new yellow flowers and mistake them for dandelions, but in truth, they are coltsfoot. Take a close look at one and you'll see projections that look somewhat like scales all along the stem. Dandelions don't have these markings.

Skunk Cabbage popping up by Gregg Falls along The Gerard Trail.



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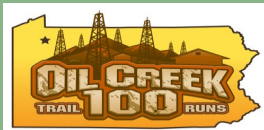
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Yellow Lady's Slippers growing on the side of a hill in a remote Oil Creek State Park area...

Harley F. Neubert



Katie and Adam, veteran OC 50Kers, embarking on an evening run in preparation for their first 100K.



OC100

The 4th annual “Oil Creek 100 Mile Trail Runs” are three concurrent trail races that will be held on October 13th this year. The 31 mile (50K) and 62 mile (100K) events are hiker-friendly . This hiker-friendly run encourages those new to trail running to enter. All races sold out very quickly when registration opened March 17th. The 50K sold out in less than 1 hour, the 100K, with 100+ participants, sold out in 1hr.-45min., and the 100 mile race is well over half full .The 100 mile trail race is Road Runners Club of America’s national “Ultra Championship” race.

The race course is held primarily on Oil Creek State Park's Gerard Hiking Trail (GHT) between Titusville and Petroleum Center, PA. The runners start at Titusville Middle School and follow the paved all-purpose path to the park, entering the trail just south of the Jersey Bridge bike parking lot and going south on the west trail to Petroleum Center. The participants complete one loop by heading north on the east trail and returning to Titusville Middle School.

For more information check out the race web site Oil-Creek100.org / oc100.org

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.”



Daffodils blooming high on a hill in the middle of the trail – along the Gerard Hiking Trail.



May Apples boom in mid-May. They are everywhere in the park. They are easily identified by their umbrella-like foliage.

Upcoming Events

-Fly Fishing with Mike Laskowski

(4-3-12)
 (Owner of Oil Creek Outfitters)
 April 3, 2012
 9:00 AM-Noon
 Fly fishing demonstrations
 Basics of rod, reel , flies, etc-explained and demonstrated
 Bring your own rod and reel...

-Kock Down Knockweed **(4-28-12) 1:00 PM-\$:00 PM**

-Joint project with Clarion University students, local schools, and Oil Creek Park
 - Take your frustrations out with Park Naturalist Robin Baker and knock down invasive species with paddles. This will help control the propagation of these intrusive species.

-Oil Creek Canoe/Kayak Trip (May 5, 2012)

Join Allegheny Canoe Club, Presque Isle Audubon Society, and Oil Creek Park in an enjoyable trip down Oil Creek.
 May 5, 2012-
 10:00 AM -3:00 PM
 Meet at Jersey Bridge Parking Lot(GPS coordinates N41o36.940 W079 o39.511) at the North end of OC State Park.
 Bring your own canoe/kayak, change of clothes, lunch, and water.

ORPHAN WELL PROJECT



Left– Abandoned well with wooden tank in the background.

Right– Open well– The casing was removed at some time in the past.



The Orphan Wells Project involves a group of volunteers who look for abandoned oil and gas wells on public lands, including Oil Creek State Park, in Venango County. The group of volunteers, members of the Venango Pa Senior Environmental Corps (VPaSEC), started looking for wells in 2003, after other groups had also searched for and found numerous abandoned wells in the park. The purpose of the project is to get the wells properly plugged.

The story of oil and gas wells in the Park began in 1859 when Col. Edwin Drake drilled the first commercial oil well and started the oil boom of the 1860s. Since then the Park's land has seen a series of drilling operations. The state did not require the registration of all oil and gas wells prior to 1984 and since most of the Park's wells were drilled before that date, they were not registered and no maps or other records give their specific location. Over the years, most of those wells have been abandoned.

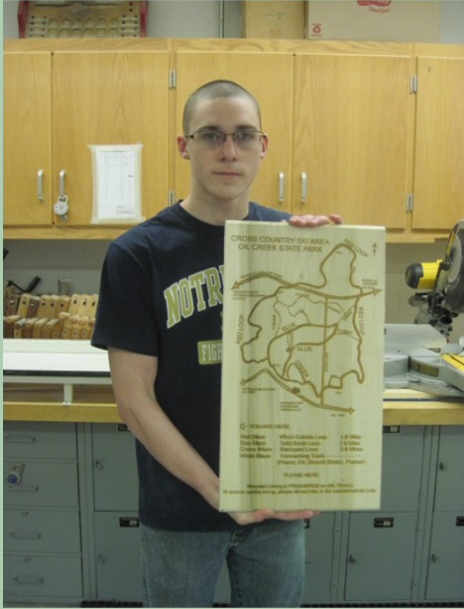
Such orphan wells are the source of many environmental problems. The well bore acts as a conduit which allows materials from normally separate layers to mix together. Gas and oil come to the surface. Gas and oil mix into the water table and contaminate springs, streams and water wells. Oil that reaches the surface can pollute streams. Wells also collapse and are hazards to hunters and hikers in the Park.

Since the VPaSEC project began, volunteers have located over 680 wells in the Park. The well hunters work in groups of three to nine. The only way to find a well is to actually walk the wooded hillsides and look for the tell-tale signs of an abandoned well. Some still have a pumping jack but most are just pipe casings or open holes in the ground. When a well is found, the group photographs, marks and tags the site and records specific details about the well including its GPS location. This information is then turned over to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for evaluation. DEP then examines the site and adds it to the well plugging list. Between 1997 and 2010, eleven plugging contracts worth 2.2 million dollars have plugged 528 wells in the Park. More than 650 additional wells are on the list and need to be plugged. Each year additional wells are plugged and more are added to the list. Well hunters are always amazed at how many abandoned wells they find. They estimate that they have covered about 30 percent of the Park. The well hunters describe their work as a treasure hunt in the Park. They never know what they will find. Some days it's abandoned wells, others it's oil field artifacts, and others it's an opportunity to enjoy the wildflowers, fungi and animals of the Park.



This well has been plugged by DEP. It is the final result of the Orphan Well Project.

Oil City Student Does Community Service



Dan Stoltenberg, a 10th grader at Oil City High School, contributed over 20 hours of community service to the Friends. Working in his spare time at school, Dan cut, glued, planed, jointed, routed, and laser engraved 18 new map signs for the Cross Country Ski Area trails. Brian Reed, the Industrial Arts Teacher was his mentor. The wood for the project was donated through the Friends. The signs are made of poplar and have the entire trail system engraved on them. Each sign has a star showing the "you are here" location for each trail head and intersection. The Friends purchased the polyurethane for the signs and Joe Guthrie, Park Maintenance Supervisor, has graciously volunteered to apply the polyurethane. The signs will be installed by the Cross Country Ski Volunteer Group some time this summer and will be ready for ski season next year. We are grateful to Dan for his service to the FOCSP.



On a beautiful March Saturday the hikers on the right were found enjoying their lunch after a great hike through the cross country ski area. They are from Erie and are members of the Erie Outing Club. They frequently hike in Oil Creek and have walked much of the Gerard Trail.

The couple on the left were hiking on the Gerard Trail in the Cow Run Area. They often come to the park to hike. They are from the Pittsburgh area.

Oil Creek Spring Wildflowers



Trailing Arbutus growing close to the ground is one of the first spring flowers; it is frequently overlooked since the flower is often hidden under the foliage. The Trailing Arbutus is quite possibly the most fragrant of the woodland flowers.



These pink Lady's Slippers were found along the Gerard Trail close to the steps leading to Gregg Falls. These plants, part of the orchid family, grow in densely wooded areas often under pine trees.



Jack in the Pulpits flower from April to June. They then produce green "berries" which turn bright red in summer. They can be found through out the park usually in moist areas. This one was found by the switch-backs in the Wolfkiel Run area.



Brian S Weckerly.

Brian is the son of James and JoAnn Weckerly. He has three brothers Jason, Robert, and Anthony and a sister Jessica. Brian graduated from Cranberry Jr/Sr High School in Seneca PA. He attended college and graduated from Indiana University of PA with a Bachelor Degree in Criminology. Brian has many skills which were demonstrated when he helped his parents repair their home and family business office buildings. Brian initially worked in the construction field with a small company in Seneca PA, and then he started his own construction business. He was also employed by Commodore Homes in Shipperville, Pa for several years. Brian worked at Moraine State Park before coming to Oil Creek State Park. He enjoys hunting, fishing, family life, and reconstructing homes in the area. He is married to the Diane Yeany Weckerly, and they have a son, Hunter. He is a fabulous addition to the Oil Creek staff!

Friends of Oil Creek State Park contribute in many ways to the community and our park. Each member receives a quarterly newsletter that has details of park programs, volunteer dates, events that take place and more! With your annual membership, the FOCSP will draw names for opportunities to win a night in an Adirondack Shelter along the Gerard Hiking Trail or Family Value Bike Rental pack for our park's National Recreation Trail from Petroleum Centre to the Jersey Lot, near Drake Well. Annual memberships are due every January and continue through the month of December. Monies collected are used for programs, events and focus projects at the park. If you would enjoy being a part of the FOCSP community, applications are available at the park office or by visiting the FOCSP website. (\$10 individual, \$25 Family and \$100 corporate).

Support Your Friends and Community



All proceeds benefit the educational programs, events and focus projects within Oil Creek State Park.



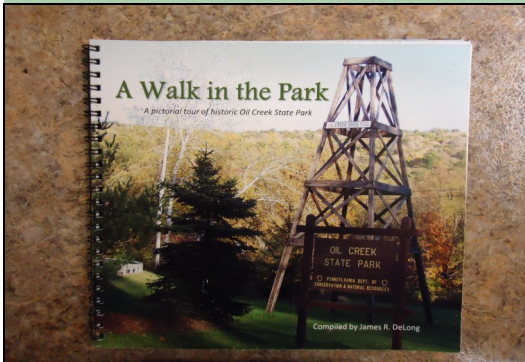
Friends of Oil Creek State Park T-Shirts
\$ 15.00

Park Office Hours:

Monday through Friday 8 AM to 4 PM
Saturday and Sunday 10 AM to 6 PM

Contact the Park Office at 814-676-5915

Pennsylvania State Park
Calendars
\$8.49 + Tax



A Walk in the Park Photo Guide
to Oil Creek State Park
\$ 15.00 + Tax

Oil Creek State Park Pin
\$ 5.00

Friends of Oil Creek Patch
\$ 3.00



**Friends of
Oil Creek State Park**

305 State Park Road
Oil City, PA 16301

Park Office Phone: 814-676-5915
E-Mail: friendsocsp@gmail.com
Website: www.orgsites.com/pa/focsp

