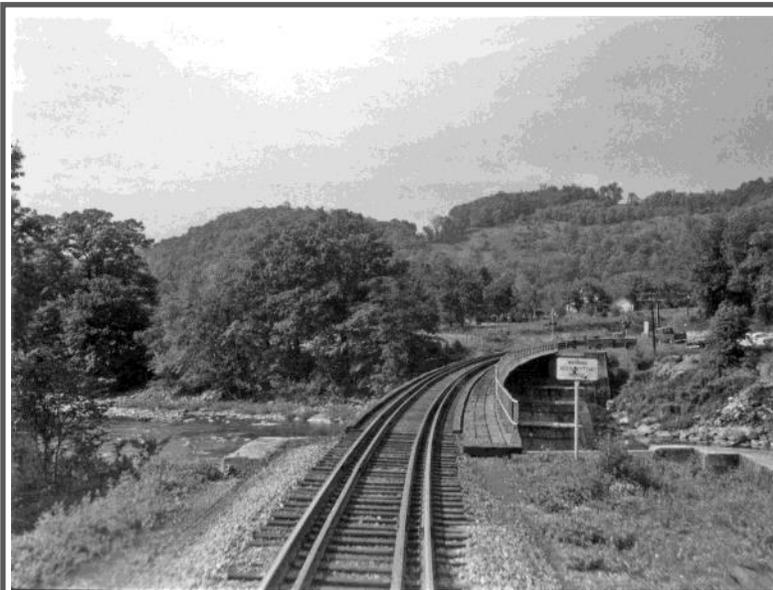


Chapter 14: Confluence or Into the Valley of the Foot of the Turkey

Mile 58.4



Bridge No. 224.6, Deck Plate Girder Bridge, 302.7' Long

John Barriger III was president of the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad when he took this picture from the rear platform of a business car on an eastbound inspection tour of the Western Maryland Railway (WM) in the early 1960s. The bridge was decked for trail use in 1994. Some nice sized fish hang out just upstream.

Photo courtesy of The University of Missouri of St. Louis
John W. Barriger III National Railway Library collection of the
St. Louis Mercantile Library

Mile 58.5 Turkeyfoot Trail

The Turkeyfoot Path, a Native American trail, ran from here over the mountains to what is now Cumberland. It was laid out as a shortcut to following the rivers, which were then more an impediment to travel than a convenience. The Ohio Company (the one started by George Washington's brothers and friends) proposed to widen the Path in 1751 as a road and advertised to pay anyone who did the work the sum of "twenty five pounds Virginia currency." A 1752 map showed the road, so they must have gotten the work done. There were roads that led in several directions from here and each was called "the Turkeyfoot Road."

The main route that carried the name ran from Shippensburg, Pennsylvania to the east, through Turkeyfoot then south of Sugar Loaf Mountain to Dunbar and Uniontown. The road you cross here was the Turkeyfoot Trail and unless they change it by the time you read this, the sign that says Ursina-Harnedsville Road is wrong. It's now Hogback Road, named for the ridge you see to the north.

Mile 58.6 Harnedsville, unincorporated

Harnedsville is one of the oldest towns in the area; Native Americans of the Monongahela Culture had several communities around here.

Settlers from New Jersey came into the area about 1770. They are said to have built mud houses as their first dwellings so of course the place was called Mudtown. “Edward Harned was the first of the name in this county. His son Samuel, who laid out the village of Harnedsville, was a man of business activity, and at one time owned considerable property,” according to *The History of the Turkeyfoot Road*.

Edward built a distillery in 1785. The man had his priorities straight; he built the still first. According to a recent article in the *Somerset Daily American*, once Harned got the still a’goin’, he added, “a gristmill and a tannery to the town, attracting a new settlement of people. He also operated one of the first stores in the town. By 1876, Harnedsville had a blacksmith shop, shoe shop, saddle shop, cabinet shop, church and about 17 houses.”

The B&O built the Low Grade Line through town in 1902, the Western Maryland came in 1912, and the B&O Whites Creek Branch (see Mile 60.3) originally owned by the Droney Lumber Co. was just across the creek. But even with three railroads close by, only the Western Maryland bothered to put a station shelter here. It sat where the kayak launch and porta-potty are now and was removed in 1933. There was no point in keeping it since the last passenger train stopped here in 1933.

The B&O put their small station in Ursina just over Hogback Ridge on the original main line and the WM’s manned station was in Confluence, just two miles away. Confluence got the stations; Confluence prospered and Harnedsville dwindled. Ursina (pop. 217) did pretty well while the coal and timber lasted. The name was derived from “ursum,” the Latin word for bear. The man who laid the town out was named Baer.

Mile 58.8 Borrow pit

SWAG (Scientific Wild-Assed Guess) is a fairly well known engineering term. This is my SWAG. I believe that the quarried-out area on the opposite side of the trail from the river was a borrow pit for the railroad. Civil engineers never really “borrow” anything; they dig it up and use it somewhere else where fill is needed. A great deal of fill was needed to cross the Yough River at Confluence and I think this is where they borrowed a lot of it. It’s only a SWAG but will do until someone comes along and proves me wrong.

Mile 59.2 The Transfer

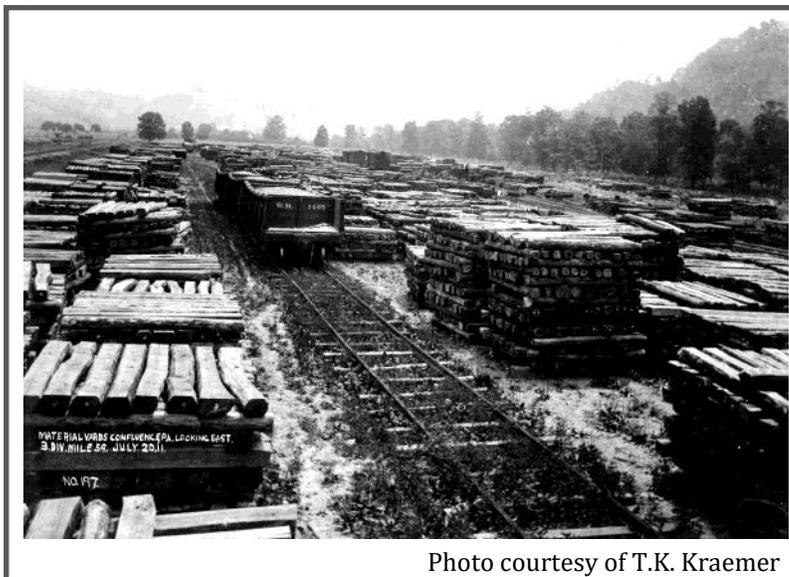


Photo courtesy of T.K. Kraemer

This section of trail, about two miles, is like riding down a country road without the traffic. It’s wide and pretty flat; there were two tracks, the main line and a passing siding* from Harnedsville to Confluence. And your author thinks it’s terrific. There was an emergency track here between the B&O and the Western Maryland so trains could cross from one railroad to another should the need arise. Locals still call the area “the transfer.”

* One of these days there’s going to be a loop trail that will include the parallel former B&O Whites Creek Branch.

During the railroad's construction this was a material storage area. Both Somerset County and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy now own the properties through here.

Mile 60 Somerset County Benches

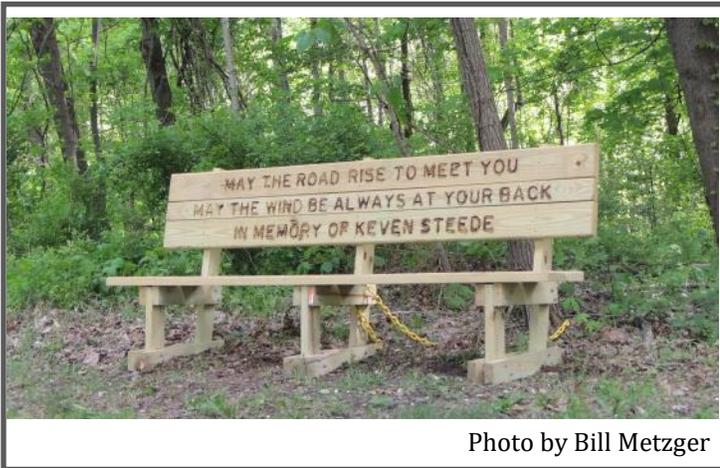


Photo by Bill Metzger

By now, you've noticed quite a few benches along the trail in Somerset County between the Mason-Dixon Line and Confluence. This particular bench was placed across from the milepost in memory of Confluence resident and avid bicyclist Kevin Steede by the Confluence Lions Club. because after "exhaustive research" it was determined that both Kevin and the post were from Boston, Massachusetts.

Woodworker Gene Kelly of Rockwood donates his labor to build the benches. You can have your own in memory of your loved one by contacting Somerset County Trail Coordinator Brett Hollern at

brettehollern@gmail.com or 814-445-1544. He'll send you an application to fill out. A bench will cost you a mere \$200.

Mile 60.2 Confluence Western Maryland Station

The Plymouth parked behind Western Maryland's Confluence station belonged to H.S. Emerick, hero of Big Savage Tunnel fame (a story told elsewhere in the book). After working at Colmar, Mr. Emerick was transferred to be the stationmaster here, where he stayed until he retired.

The semaphore signals in front of the station were called "train order boards," that told the train crews they had to pick up orders from the dispatcher. The two signals to the right were "block signals" that told whether the track ahead was occupied.

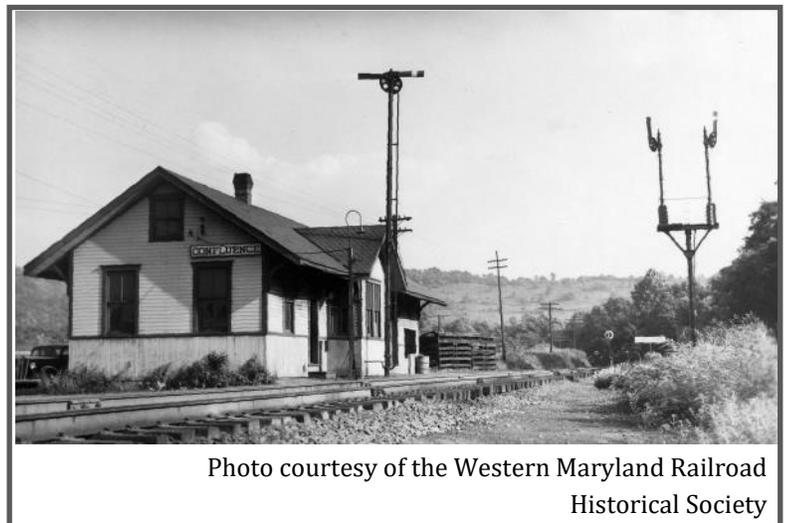


Photo courtesy of the Western Maryland Railroad Historical Society

The Luther Miller fuel depot sits on the site of the Western Maryland's Confluence station. You probably don't smoke, but stopping here to light one up would be a real bad idea.

The station was built to the standard WM design for a station that size and wasn't removed until after the railroad was abandoned. It became a garage that has since been torn down. This is yet another example of the Western Maryland Railroad's being the new kid in town. You don't get a lot of business when your station's three quarters of a mile out of a town that was built around your competition 40 years ago.

Mile 60.3 Bridge No. 226.5, the Ghost Bridge

I ride this part of the trail quite a bit and over the years I couldn't figure out how this bridge worked. Aerial photos and railroad maps didn't tell the tale. There are concrete abutments in the ground but they didn't make any sense. I knew it crossed the B&O Whites Creek Branch but couldn't figure out how it did it.

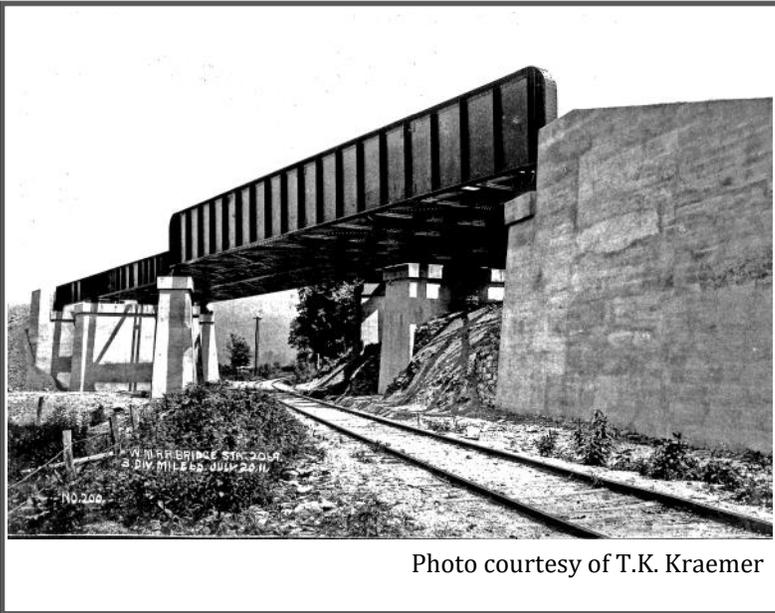


Photo courtesy of T.K. Kraemer

That was until my friend Tom Kraemer gave me what I think is an extremely rare photo, perhaps the only one ever taken of this deck girder bridge. Mystery solved. And further, this is the only one of few WM bridges that was actually double tracked. By the time this bridge was built, the mill at Unamis* was soon to be shut down.

After the Whites Creek Branch was gone, the Western Maryland removed the bridge over it in 1943 and filled it in but left the concrete abutments and piers. The new shorter trail bridge was built in 2001. You run over one of the original concrete bridge abutments in the trail just opposite the tanks.

Mile 60.3 B&O Whites Creek Branch

The Whites Creek Branch was originally built in 1901 by the J.R. Droney Lumber Company using rails and ties leased from the B&O. In 1902, the B&O bought it. It ran about five miles up Whites Creek to Unamis, where the lumber company built a town and sawmill. The area was logged out in 1911 and the last lumber was shipped in 1912. After that, the line served several small coal mines. It was abandoned after the bridge over the Casselman washed out in the flood of 1936.

Bridge Mile 60.5 226.7, Deck Plate Girder, 478' Long

This bridge was rehabilitated for trail use in only six weeks in the spring of 2000 with an innovative decking system that used prefabricated modular construction. The 10-foot-long sections were put together at a blacksmith shop in Somerset, then bolted into place on the original ties. The whole job cost \$170,000 and was funded with federal and state money.

Stop for a second on this bridge and look upstream. All you see are the river, the valley, and trees. You could be way out in the boonies somewhere. Now turn downstream and voila! The town of Confluence spreads before you in all its dazzling glory.**



Mile 60.5 Klondike Road

Soon as you cross the bridge you'll notice a grade crossing the trail and going up the hill. This was the old Klondike Road that went to Addison. It's been abandoned since at least the early 1950s.

* When the post office was opened, nobody could come up with a name for this new place, so they sent the form in with "you name it" written on it. Somebody deep in the post office bureaucracy named it *Unamis*, which was fine since it only lasted ten or so years until the mill closed.

** Well, okay. Confluence is technically considered the boonies, but still...

The cut you're going through here was dug extra wide to use as another borrow pit for the huge amount of earth that was

needed to cross the Turkeyfoot Valley. The stone "wall" right before the sign is natural sandstone that any mason would be proud to have laid.

Christopher Gist (1706-1759)



Photo by Bill Metzger

This detail, from a 12-foot high sculpture that once graced Pittsburgh's Manchester Bridge, can still be seen in all its splendor on Pittsburgh's North Shore between Heinz Field and PNC Park at the corner of Art Rooney Avenue and North Shore Drive. It's worth a visit when you reach trail's end.

It's impossible to study the history of the trail corridor without encountering Christopher Gist—which we are about to do. He was a frontiersman and explorer of the first rank who started life as a city kid. He was born in Baltimore and was taught the surveyor's trade by his father, who is credited with laying out much of the city of Baltimore.

He married and had six kids. By 1750, he was an accomplished surveyor and frontier explorer and enjoyed excellent relations with the Indians. He was called "an intelligent and brave pioneer;" and was hired by the Ohio Company to survey the Ohio river from Pittsburgh down to the falls at what's now Louisville. The survey took two years.

He was hired by the Ohio Company again in 1751 to survey the Turkeyfoot Path, then accompanied George Washington on his futile trip to Fort LeBoeuf surviving crossing the frozen Allegheny River on a raft that broke up in mid stream. He was with Washington again the next year on the abortive campaign to chase the French from Fort

Duquesne and survived the Battle of Fort Necessity.

Gist was with Washington again at Braddock's Defeat, fought bravely and survived. He had established a homestead near Uniontown, which was called "Gist's Plantation." Ten families settled there but the Indians burned it during the French & Indian War and it was never rebuilt.

His death is somewhat ambiguous. He died in either South Carolina or Georgia, possibly of smallpox. But the last nine years of his life were the stuff of legend.

Mile 60.7 Confluence, Population 759



Aerial view of Confluence, Yough Lake, and the way east

Photo by Bill Metzger

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Everybody who writes about Confluence says it's "nestled in the mountains." So I will too.



Photo by Bill Metzger

Sometimes time stands still in Confluence. Such was the case when this military re-enactor band played in the gazebo just like countless other bands who have entertained folks here for more than a century.

Confluence is nestled in the mountains. On June 26, 1871, the Pittsburgh and Connellsville Railroad from Cumberland to Pittsburgh was completed; the line from Cumberland met the line from Pittsburgh at Fort Hill. The celebration was held in Confluence (CON-flu-ens). One hundred and thirty years later, on August 24, 2001, the section connecting the first 100 miles of the Great Allegheny Passage was opened between Confluence and Fort Hill. Repeating history, a two-day celebration was held here.

The word "confluence" is defined as "a coming together." The town is well named. The Yough and Casselman Rivers and Laurel Hill Creek join here. Christopher Gist is said to have given it the name Turkeyfoot because the three streams flowing into one resembled a turkey's foot when viewed from up on the surrounding hills. It's more likely that Gist was the first to call it the Turkeyfoot in English,

having learned the name from the area's Native Americans. Several of their settlements were located in the area, but most had left by the time Gist got here. It was also called Crow Foot. Whatever the bird in question, a look at the map shows that said fowl had really crooked toes.

Washington stopped here May 20, 1754. He wrote in his diary:

"... we gained Turkey Foot by the Beginning of the Night... Tarried there some time to examine the Place, which we found very convenient to build a Fort, not only because it was gravelly, but also for its being at the Mouth of three Branches of small Rivers..."

Yep. George Washington slept here, too. Next morning he canoed down the Yough as far as Ohiopyle, looking for an easy water route west for his troops, and turned back when he found the falls and the miles of rapids downstream. Washington estimated that it was about 10 miles from Confluence to Ohiopyle. Not a bad guess on his part; it's exactly that.

After failing to find a suitable water route west, Washington came back upstream and took the Nemaquin Path. A week later, he ambushed and killed the French Lieutenant, Jumonville, and started the French and Indian War. It was just luck that Washington found the French first. The French were trying to do the exact same thing to him.

Washington's proposed fort at Turkeyfoot was never built.

William Tissue laid out a town in 1800 and called it New Boston, but that was as far as it got. For a time, Turkeyfoot was a stopping place on the way west and cattle drovers continued to use the Turkeyfoot Road even after the National Road was paved; it was easier on the animals' hooves.

Local citizens strongly resisted the coming of the railroad because of the loss of business from the road, but when the Pittsburgh and Connellsville Railroad was completed, it brought more prosperity to the place than the cows on the road ever did. The town site of Confluence was laid out in 1870 as the railroad was arriving. The fancy-pants Baltimoreans were doubtless offended at calling their station "Turkeyfoot" and went for the name "Confluence" instead, which we immediately mispronounced.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Confluence was a bustling burg, with lots of lumbering and coal mining, and railroad branch lines going off in all directions. There were several factories here that used the plentiful local timber. The biggest industry in town at the time was the Beggs Tannery, a large operation that was directly across the railroad tracks from town.

Tanneries were common in Pennsylvania due to the abundance of hemlock and oak bark. Both are high in tannin, which is the principal ingredient in tanning leather. As the supply of big trees dried up, the tanneries moved elsewhere; this one closed in 1920.

After the old growth timber was cut and the coal mined out, the trains quit stopping and the dam was built, Confluence was well on its way to drying up. River and trail recreation changed that.

Often cited as riders' favorite Trail Town, Confluence now boasts several restaurants and many B&Bs and the place is coming back to life as a result. The town is unusual for a trailside town in that it's flat and it has a large town square, complete with gazebo. The benches in the square are a great place to take a break and watch the world go by very, very slowly.

The Youghiogheny River

This is your introduction to the Youghiogheny River. It's pronounced "YOCK-a-GAIN-ee," or "Yock" for short. We'll mostly refer to it as the Yough—it looks nicer in print. Since this is being written in English (thanks in no small part to events that took place along this trail corridor), Yough could also be pronounced "Yoff" as in cough, "Yow" as in bough, "Yew" as in slough (the ones along the river), "Yo" as in dough, "Yaw" as in ought, or "Yuff" as in rough and tough. But it's not.

There is a precedent. The Irish *lough* is the same as and is pronounced like the Scottish *loch* which is pronounced “lock”. Like Yough.

The name Youghiogheny means, according to historians who know these things, “a stream flowing in a contrary direction” in some Native American language or other. One source defines Youghiogheny as “four streams.”

The spelling of Youghiogheny didn’t come easy either. As Tim Palmer observes in *Youghiogheny, Appalachian River*:

*“It may be only chance that has given us the spelling of Youghiogheny. The earliest reference to the river is a caption on a map drawn in 1737 by William Mayo: ‘Spring heads of Yok-yo-gane river a south branch of the Monongahela.’ In 1751, a map of Virginia and Maryland called the river the Yawyawganey. One year later a trader’s map listed Ohio Gani. Captain Robert Orme of the Braddock expedition in 1755 called the river both Joxhio Geni and Yoxhio Geni. Nicholas Cresswell, an Englishman who traveled west to acquire land for a group of Virginians, wrote in 1775 that he “crossed the Yaughagany River at the Steward’s Crossing.” Local petitioners for a road from Uniontown to the river spelled it Youghiogheni in 1784, and in the same year, George Washington spelled it Yehiogany. In 1798, Robert Proud’s *The History of Pennsylvania* referred to the “Yoxhiogany River.” Early land grants spelled Yohogania; other variations were Yochi Geni, Youghanne, and Yuh-wiac-hanne. For some reason, none of these spellings stuck.”*

George Washington, who one biographer characterized as “an heroic speller,” at various times tried Yohiggany, Yohiogany, Youghyaughgane, and just Yaugh.

In Pennsylvania especially, we’re used to most of our rivers flowing southward and this creates some confusion because southward here is upstream and we think of south as down. So you have to get used to the idea that down is up. Same thing happens at McKeesport when we get to the Monongahela River. It too flows northward.

So, the Yough rises in Silver Lake, West Virginia, and flows north but only drains a small sliver of the Mountain State. Straight line, it’s about 75 miles from the source to McKeesport. By the meandering river, it’s about 122. On its way, it manages to cut some fine gorges through the mountains and surrounding countryside.

The water people – the kayakers and rafters – call the river from here to Ohiopyle the Middle Yough. Moderate rapids and long stretches of still water characterize it. It’s favored by river wusses like your author. The Upper Yough runs eleven miles from Sang Hollow to Friendsville, Maryland. When water is released from Deep Creek Lake, which happens on schedule, five Class V rapids are created. A Class V, for you novices, ranges somewhere between “grievous bodily harm” and “notify next of kin.” You’ll meet the Lower Yough at Ohiopyle.

Yough Dam and Reservoir

“The Youghiogheny is a particularly troublesome flood-producing tributary . . .”

Report of the Flood Commission of Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania, 1912.

After a series of disastrous floods in Pittsburgh in 1907 and 1908, the Pittsburgh Flood Commission, chaired by ketchup magnate H.J. Heinz, was formed to study the watersheds of the Allegheny, the Monongahela and the Yough/Casselman Rivers. The biggest cause of the floods was all the old growth forests upstream in the Ohio River watershed, of which the Yough is part, had all been logged off. There was nothing left to hold the water.

One of the many suggestions of the Commission was that a flood control dam be built at the horseshoe bend in the Yough just upstream from Confluence. The suggestions, indeed the entire study, were ignored. Then the mother of all floods hit Pennsylvania and surrounding states on St. Patrick’s Day, 1936. All of a sudden there was a flurry of action culminating in the building of the Youghiogheny Dam and Reservoir beginning in 1938. The dam

was officially completed in 1943 and is 184 feet high, 1,100 feet wide at the base, and 1,160 feet long at the top. It is built of 3,060,500 cubic yards of concrete, stone, and earth and backs up a lake 14 miles long down into Maryland.

The 12-megawatt hydroelectric plant generates electricity that goes out on the power grid. It's enough to power 14,400 of those average homes you hear about. Youghiogheny Hydroelectric Authority owns the plant and it's operated by D/R Hydro Co. It went into operation in 1989 after costing \$19 million to build.

The dam makes the river cleaner because silt coming downstream settles out into the upper lake, which of course, is filling up. The dam also makes the river really cold because they draw the water off the bottom at a temperature of around 52 degrees Fahrenheit, which makes Confluence very foggy. Because of the dam, a flood at Pittsburgh will be but six inches lower. But the big benefit of the dam, as far as recreation is concerned, is that it keeps the downstream river levels high enough for boating and fishing.

Operators at the dam maintain the water level, but they get their orders from the US Army Corps of Engineers District Office in Pittsburgh. Each flood control dam in the district sends in a daily morning report that includes rainfall, stream flow based on gauges in each river, and the lake level. The district then tells each dam what the flow should be based on the optimum lake level for the time of the year and down-stream needs. The Corps works closely with Ohiopyle State Park and their needs for water not only for daily recreation but also for special events.

Yough Dam is the second hydro dam on the Yough. Upstream, the Deep Creek Hydro plant has two generators built in 1925 that generate 20 megawatts.

If you're feeling frisky and want to ride up to see the dam - you can ride or drive across it - there's a visitor's center of sorts at the top of dam with a real restroom, picnic tables, and brochures and a swimming beach on the other side of the lake. If you feel going swimming, be advised it's a pretty steep climb afterwards back up to the dam, which pretty much cancels out the cooling effects of your swim.

Outflow Campground

In a choice between camping here and at Ohiopyle, camp here. First, it's at the same level as the trail. You don't have to climb a mountain to get there. Second, the restrooms are excellent with fine showers. Third, it's close to Confluence and all its services. And last and most important, they have hiker- and biker-only campsites for less than ten bucks a pop. Is that a great deal or what?

Mile 61 Old Route 281 Bridge

The nifty pedestrian bridge you're crossing here didn't always look this way. It was originally a steel truss bridge that carried Route 281. It had an open grate steel deck that scared the bejeezus out of bikers (including your author) and was slated to be demolished when the new bridge, the one upstream from here, was put into service. The superstructure was seriously deteriorated and everything pointed to tearing it down. But the borough (that's what we call a town in Pennsylvania) of Confluence wanted to keep it open for trail use because of the heavy bike traffic that comes into town.

PennDOT did a safety analysis and it turned out to be cheaper to save the bridge than to tear it down. Girders that had been placed under the bridge in the 1930s to strengthen it were actually the only things holding it up. The girders needed to be repainted but were otherwise in fine shape. With a \$200,000 grant, the superstructure and offending steel deck were torn off, the bridge was re-decked and observation platforms with benches were added. All in all, it's a vast improvement over the old bridge. The builder's plates for the original bridge, which was built by the King Iron Bridge Co. of Cleveland in 1896, are embedded in the stone walls at each end.

It was re-decked again in 2016 by volunteers from the Confluence Tourism Association and a funding campaign is underway as of this writing to replace the temporary wooden decking with permanent concrete. Contact Brad Smith at the Confluence Cyclery to help make this happen.

When you cross this bridge, you leave Somerset County and enter Fayette County. You've entered the Youghiogheny Trail South, owned and operated by Ohiopyle State Park from here to Connellsville. Or you can turn left and take a side trip on the trail up to the Outflow Campground and take a look at the dam. It's an impressive pile of rocks.

Local volunteers keep the flower beds at each end of the bridge looking sharp and there's a visitors booth on the Fayette County side, where our well-informed local "Town Criers" will tell you all you need to know and maybe even a little more. Our kids are good.

Mile 61.2 Bridge No. 227.2, Deck Plate Girder Bridge, 715' Long

This is the only former Western Maryland bridge that's not being used by the trail. In 1975, within days after this section of the Western Maryland was abandoned, PennDOT removed the eastern two spans of this bridge on the Confluence side to improve highway clearances. River Road was Route 281 then, before the bypass was built. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources made a deal with the Turkeyfoot Fish and Game Club to swap property—the original right of way ran right through the club—and the railroad bridge was bypassed. And there it rustily sits and probably will for a long, long time.

The murals on the bridge pier and abutment were part of a Community Co-op Art Project. They were designed by professional printmaker Eddie Maier of Morgantown, West Virginia, who also did the outlines, sort of like a giant paint by numbers project that was filled in by kids from the community.

Mile 61.2 Confluence & Oakland Railroad

The section of trail from here to the ramp up to the overlook is built on the grade of the Confluence & Oakland Railroad, once a branch of the Baltimore & Ohio. This C&O also had no relation with the C&O Canal or the C&O Railroad, former owner of the caboose at Meyersdale. This line was built in 1890 and connected with the B&O main line across the river. It ran 20 miles south to Kendall, Maryland and seldom if ever operated more than one train a day down and back. It never quite got to Oakland, Maryland, another 20 or so miles upstream. The southern end of the line was abandoned in 1941 in anticipation of the building of the Yough Dam. The northern two or so miles were used to bring materials for the dam's construction. The bridge that crossed the river here was removed without a trace in 1960 after debris backed up behind it and caused flooding. Much of the grade of the Confluence & Oakland is now on the bottom of the Yough Lake but three miles of the old line are now a hiking rail trail south of Friendsville, Maryland.

Weather in the Gorge

"Since Laurel Ridge is oriented at right-angles to approaching weather systems, it forces the prevailing westerly airflows upward. As the rising air cools, the moisture it contains can condense. If the level of moisture reaches the saturation point, precipitation results. Additionally, the mountain can act as a barrier and slow the movement of storms, prolonging their impact on the local area."

A Hiker's Guide to the Laurel Highlands Trail, Sierra Club, Pennsylvania Chapter.

What this means to you is that if it's going to rain here, chances are it's going to rain harder and longer than every place else. The other problem is the mountains often block the radar so it can be raining like a cow peeing on a flat rock here and it won't show up on the radar.