

Trail dispute

How Trail controversy got where it is

CARLISLE — Feelings were hurt from the first day landowners in the Cumberland Valley found out the U.S. Government planned to take the Appalachian Trail off the roads crossing the Valley and put it on private property.

Incidents since then have not endeared either the farmers or the trail people to one another.

Things got off to a bad start when a number of farmers and other landowners were informed the Appalachian Trail was to be relocated under the Scenic Trails Act's provisions.

The Department of Interior's National Park Service has \$90 million to assure the Trail, which runs from Maine to Georgia, would remain a woodland trail and not a path through developed areas.

Cumberland Valley, along with some spots in New York State, is one of the few remaining areas not running

through state, national, or privately owned forest land.

Many of the landowners said they were told the government wanted to take a 1000 foot wide stretch across the Valley. And, they said, they were told they'd better concede the land would be taken or else they'd lose it to eminent domain.

Needless to say, this did not make any of the Valley's landowners happy. They banded together in a group called CANT — Citizens Against the New Trail.

But Karen Wade, Regional Coordinator for the National Park Service's Pennsylvania division, denies the Park Service had even talked to any landowners in the Valley at that time.

"It is not National Park Service procedure to talk to landowners at that stage," she said. She said the Park Service needed to have a plan before it got to the stage of talking to farmers and other landowners.

Wade said it was against National Park Service policy

to threaten landowners with eminent domain.

"It's a last resort, not a first step," she said.

She indicated the Park Service has not reached that stage even yet.

"We don't mention the matter since most landowners realize in the back of their mind that we could eventually take the land," she explained.

Actually, the initial study was made not by the Park Service but by members of the Appalachian Trail Conference.

The Conference is comprised of over 60 independent Trail clubs, including the Maryland club which maintains the Cumberland Valley section of the trail.

The Appalachian Trail Project is a bit unusual from the National Park Service's view since it is cooperating with the Trail Conference rather than doing the work on its own.

But the particulars of who was doing what mattered little to farmers who knew

only that someone with a lot of power and money was out to take some prime limestone valley farmland.

Farmers took their case to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

"I was disappointed when the Agriculture Department did not even take a look at it," said Sheldon B. Brymnesser, R2 Boiling Springs.

He and his father Stanley could have lost 15 acres of farmland under the original proposal.

Sheldon pointed out that the Department was approached before the current administration took office.

"Maybe they did not want to get involved with something that concerned the Federal government," he speculated.

The farmers of the area also put through an ASCS committee resolution. They passed a local resolution through the Farmers' Association.

Both statements asked for

support in saving their farmland.

Shortly thereafter, the trail proposal was modified.

Under this proposal the Park Service called for a 200 foot easement. Of this, 25 feet were right-of-way for the trail, 175 feet a scenic easement to surround the trail with natural beauty.

This was the first compromise proposal advanced by the trail people.

But farmers like the Brymnessers did not want to give up their land — especially not when it sat right next to the buildings as it does in the Brymnessers' case.

The route followed under this proposal is called the Eastern Route and would closely parallel the existing trail.

A counter-proposal was offered. Local residents asked the trail be relocated

along the ridge to the West of the Valley and that it cross farther south in the Valley where much of the land is owned by Pennsylvania in state parks.

This proposal was rejected.

About this time the Trail Relocation Advisory Commission was formed to try to mediate the situation.

The township supervisors in the four townships through which the trail passes came up with their own solution.

Their Advisory Commission was chaired by County Commissioner Jake Myers.

Under the supervisors' plan the trail would be placed adjacent to existing roads on a dirt path which would be maintained by the municipalities.

Their offer was rejected
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Appalachian Trail

(Continued from Page 1)

The proposal has run into strong opposition by members of CANT, the Citizens Against the New Trail.

They have the backing of Cumberland County Commissioner Jake Myers who has been working as a mediator on the Trail Advisory Committee.

Myers has sent out a letter more or less rejecting the idea.

This follows on the heels of a December meeting where the National Park Service and Trail people rejected a proposal by landowners.

Landowners said they would like to see the trail moved off the roads and onto the right-of-way next to the roads.

The four Cumberland County townships involved all agreed to maintain a dirt path parallel to the roads. Hikers would be off the highways, and since the easement for the highway setback already existed, little if any land would be lost.

This idea was presented to Bob Herbst, Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks with the Department of the Interior.

Herbst is in charge of the total relocation project. He rejected the Cumberland Valley proposal.

Herbst said the proposal did not move the trail far enough off the road, would leave the trail close to buildings and houses, was on a highway right of way which could be taken at some future date, and might restrict the landowners' use of their road frontage.

According to Karen Wade, regional coordinator for the National Park Service's Pennsylvania and Virginia activities, the whole plan simply was not consistent

with the Congress' intentions in the Scenic Trail Act.

Meanwhile, farmers like the Brymnessers can't see losing prime farmland to a project which best could be carried out in woodland or less valuable acreage.

There is some question whether hikers really object to the present location of the trail.

Members of CANT have advanced several alternative plans, none of which has been found acceptable to the Park Service.

There is a feeling of resentment over how the whole project was presented to farmers and other landowners.

And the National Park Service is running into a deadline.

The Park people want to have a preliminary plan to present by this coming May.

The appropriation for the Scenic Trails Act expires in September 1981, although Commissioner Myers said he believes Congress would extend the funding if the Park Service so requested.

Wade said the Park Service wants to have all of the planning done by May so they can get on with the buying of land.

Neither side expressed much optimism over coming to an agreement at this week's meeting.

Both sides voiced concern about reaching some workable conclusion.

The National Park Service has its deadline.

For the CANT members, the spectre of eminent domain — a sore point from the very beginning — lurks in the background.

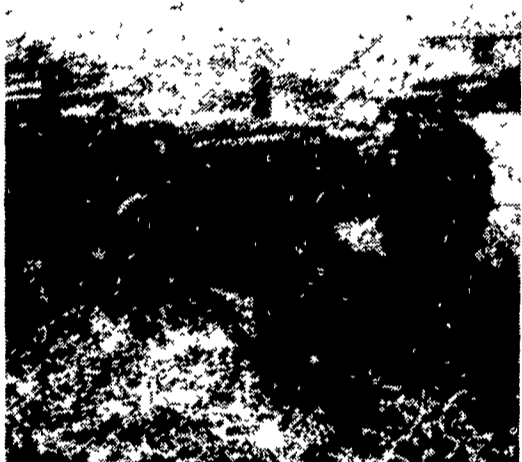
Thursday's meeting will have to be a busy one if both sides are to come away satisfied.

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