

Rains wash out section of trail

By ERIN YOUNGMAN
Post Staff

TRUCKSVILLE — Improvements made to the Back Mountain Trail just last spring have been washed away by heavy rains said Mark Albrecht, President of the Back Mountain Trail council. The organization will have to spend \$15,000 dollars on repairs.

As joggers, bicyclists and dog walkers passed by Tuesday morning, Tom Johnson of Tom Johnson Excavating cleared what was left of a rockslide on the trail about one-half mile from the Luzerne entrance.

As he maneuvered his machinery to scoop up debris that had slid down the mountain and covered not only newly constructed drains, but the width of the trail as well, Johnson explained that it was the second time in three months he had to clear the area.

He said the first occurred in July and the most recent in the last few weeks. Along with the rocks came unusual finds — or trash, depending on your perspective — plates from another era, antique bottles, boots, old Ford hubcaps and lots of glass.

"We're clearing the path to make it safe for people to get through. The amount of rain we've had is so unusual; it has really caused a lot of damage," said Johnson.

Albrecht agreed, adding that the culprit was either extra water being directed to the area from Bunker Hill or just really bad luck with mother nature.

"It's more wiped out now than when we started working there," he said. "We're having 100 year flash floods twice a year."

Some areas of the trail fared better than others, but Albrecht said the entire of the trail from Luzerne to Trucksville suffered various degrees of washout. No other area sustained the same



POST PHOTO/ERIN YOUNGMAN

Tom Johnson, of Tom Johnson Excavating, and Albert Cooper, volunteer, work to clear rock slide debris off of the Back Mountain Trail.

degree of damage, however, as where the rock slides occurred. Albrecht attributed the slides to the general instability of the hill.

In addition to being a nuisance, the rock slide has caused other complications. With that volume of matter coming down off the hillside and covering the drains, water has no choice but to make its way across the trail's surface causing another problem — erosion.

After the earlier storms, large ruts had been cut into the trail and piping was exposed. Johnson said he cleaned up the leftover rock slide matter by dumping the material over the edge to fill in the ruts.

But by Tuesday, the newly packed material had been washed away and once again the ruts and bare piping were left sticking out of the side of the hill.

"It's frustrating because we have to figure out a way to make something that can han-

dle these types of washouts," said Albrecht.

Still the spirits and determination of those connected with the association have not been dampened.

"It's not insurmountable, it's just a setback," commented Albrecht.

This week Johnson said he would work on clearing the path and making it safe. Over the next few weeks, he will dig ditches and put additional drains in.

"It should be in beautiful condition in about three weeks," said Judy Rimple, President of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association. Just in time for fall foliage.

Trail

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trail association. The goal, is to have all of the right-of-way issues resolved by this coming spring, at the latest, said Rimple.

Conviction, life sentence in murder of teenager

By DAVID WEISS
For The Dallas Post

WILKES-BARRE — Prosecutors said they agreed to let Tina Young plead guilty to a lower charge of murder in the death of a teenager because her testimony was a key part of convicting Larry Tooley.

Both Young and Tooley undoubtedly played a role in the killing of 16-year-old Casey Zaleski, prosecutors said.

Young planned the burglary to steal money for drugs and drove to the Zaleskis' Franklin Township home Nov. 8. But Tooley turned the burglary into a murder when he fired three shots into the teen.

And prosecutors believed it was necessary to make an agreement with Young to get her testimony to deliver justice.

Now, Tooley will spend the rest of his life in prison after a jury convicted him of first-degree murder. Young faces 20 to 40 years in prison — at the most — on a third-degree murder charge. A judge will impose the sentence, which could be lower.

"When you're looking to make sure that the person who ultimately committed this heinous act is held accountable, you want to make sure that you have everything that you can to get that conviction," Assistant District Attorney William Finnegan said Monday evening, shortly after jurors said they could not unanimously decide if Tooley should be put to death for the killing.

"There would have been a lot of unanswered questions if she was not put on the stand."

The jury convicted Tooley September 11 of first-degree murder in the case. But after three hours of deliberating about Tooley's sentence the jury deadlocked 10-2 in favor of the death penalty. The deadlock called for a life jail term.

Young, who was once a

babysitter for the Zaleskis, was initially charged with second-degree murder, which carries a life jail sentence, in the case.

But Finnegan, who prosecuted the case with Assistant District Attorney Paul Galante, said prosecutors made the plea agreement with Young to help ensure Tooley's conviction.

"Any time you have a case like this, you have to make judgment calls," Finnegan said. "And in a case like this, I think that the jury would have wanted to hear from the other person who was principally involved."

Her credibility was challenged by Tooley's attorneys, Jonathan Blum and Mark Bufalino. Blum accused Young, 33-year-old mother of four and former Army reservist and foster parent, of killing Zaleski and lying to police to pin the blame on Tooley.

Young admitted lying to police. Finnegan said she lied because she was "afraid" and initially tried to protect Tooley. But she had told police all along that Tooley was the only person inside the home when she saw Zaleski dead on the floor, he said.

It was that testimony, along with Tooley's statements to police, that played the crucial elements of the conviction, Finnegan said.

A juror said the panel didn't think prosecutors had a "slam dunk" case. They deliberated for nearly two hours before finding Tooley guilty.

"I think (Tooley) deserved it (execution)," the juror said. "I feel sorry for the Zaleski family. Words can't describe the sorrow I feel for the Zaleskis."

"All I could say is we tried, the juror said. "The only good note is at least (Tooley's) going to spend the rest of his life in prison."

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7:00 Swimming Pool
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