

## WALKING THE CREEK—

(continued from page 6)

scrub vegetation whose roots hold the soil in place.

A few hundred yards down, a rock ledge gently turns the creek as it approaches yet another passage below the busy road. The water moves faster now, as the bed pitches more steeply toward the rock cut.

As the creek flows behind two abandoned houses hard by the busy highway, the bank on either side is again lined with Japanese knotweed. There isn't much space between the stream bank and roadway at some points, and soil is being washed in. Rip-rap has been installed now and again to provide reinforcement, but again, the invasive plant is doing its part.

Just above Hillside Road, Huntsville Creek adds to the flow with water that has tumbled down from the Huntsville Reservoir. The remains of an old foundation can be seen beneath the trees on the creek's southern bank, probably another mill.

Now the flow becomes slower and wider, for about a quarter-mile until it passes below Hillside Road. Just before that point, a large old culvert funnels runoff into the creek from the hillside beyond.

As Toby's Creek passes the building that once housed a Linear plant, it narrows by half and flows strongly after a summer rain, over a huge sewer line that carries waste to the Dallas Area Municipal Authority not far below. Soon it again bumps into an outcropping and turns left, then right, to parallel the highway through the rock cut.

A long stretch of Gabian wall has been installed here, and it keeps the creek from undermining the roadway. Just before reaching the first of two small private bridges that connect several homes with the rest of the world, the water slips over another massive pipe laid across a stone spillway. Smooth concrete walls hem the creek in here, the one on the western side set at a steep angle, whether by design or because of years holding the flow in line.

Another of the many old foundations that still exist along the creek banks rests on the western side just below Russell's Auto Sales. It is made of stone with no mortar, a sign that it has been there a long time. Whether or not it was associated with a mill is unclear, although early accounts describe many mills along the lower reaches of the creek.

The stream really picks up speed now, and enters a stretch where — if only the highway noise could be blocked — an observer might think he's gone back a century in time. The old trolley line bed provides a level walkway through the woods, the creek speeding down one side and towering rocky cliffs looming on the other. The stream bed, sunken 15 feet below the trail, is now huge slabs of shale, interrupted by massive boulders that have come crashing down from above.

Unfortunately, the natural splendor has been marred by decades of illegal dumping, revealed by three sofas that have been lying beside the trolley bed so long they are covered with moss.

The sudden appearance of a concrete wall keeping the creek and roadway separated signals that this idyllic segment is ending. And as if to remind us of the abuse our hidden resource has absorbed, a modest dam has been formed by fallen tree trunks and a roll of carpet blocking the flow.

A short way further, the stream again crosses under the highway, through a pair of massive culverts each 12 to 15 feet in diameter. It emerges about 400 feet later, again picking up speed as it passes by the Dallas Area Municipal Authority, where a large steel tube carrying sewage arches over the creek rather than passing through it. Now Toby's Creek makes its last swing to the right, behind a tall outcropping left when the highway was straightened, before passing under Route 309 one more time as it leaves the Back Mountain.

In its roughly six-mile journey through the Back Mountain, Toby's Creek has progressed from a lazy spring to a rushing torrent. It has traveled through untouched forest and beside busy shopping centers, and has crossed under a roadway more than 20 times. Along the way, the creek has been rerouted, trashed and has become overgrown with shrubs and trees.

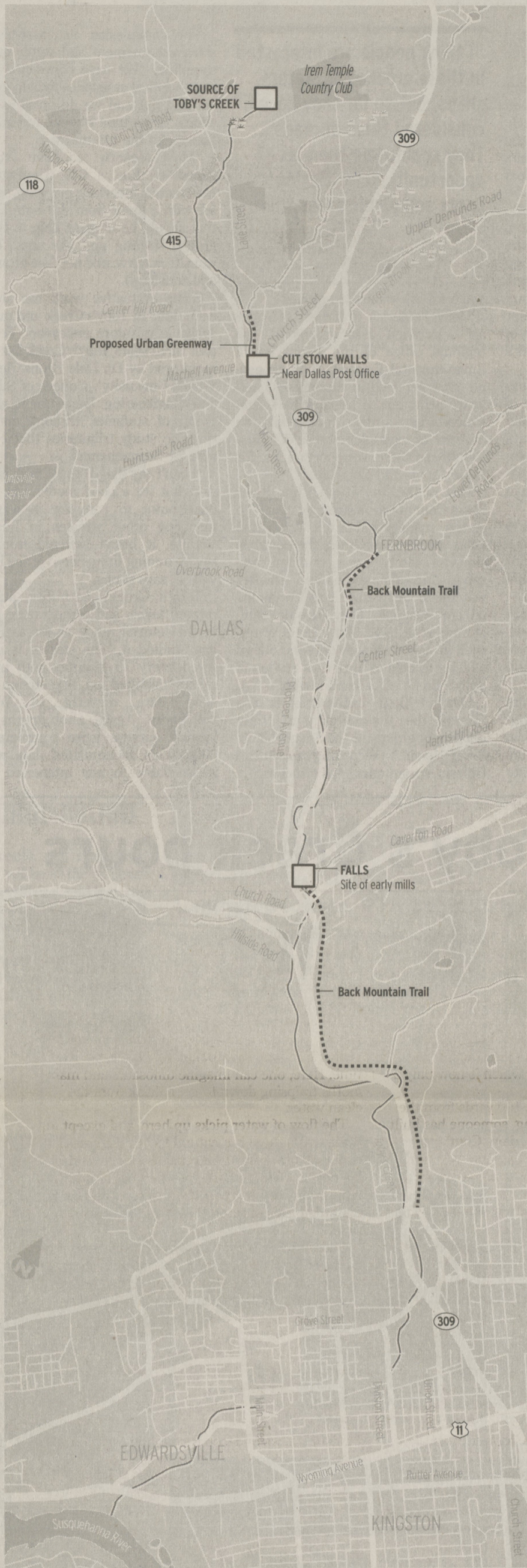
Yet, there are places where it has retained a remarkable sense of majesty, sweeping over enormous blocks of shale and beside glades that beckon on a hot summer day. Scientists who study Toby's Creek say its water is impressively free of contaminants, save sediment and road salt, and people who live near it marvel at its power and ever-changing personality.

This may not be the Toby's Creek discovered by early Back Mountain settlers, but it is not so different that it can't contribute to our quality of life. With more care and cleanups, easier access and heightened appreciation for its important place in our community, Toby's Creek could be transformed from a hidden resource into a key asset that links us to our history while contributing to a brighter future.

## Toby's Creek through the Back Mountain

This graphic representation shows just a few of the interesting points along Toby's Creek.

POST GRAPHIC/PAUL BOWERS



As it approaches the lower end of the "notch" to Luzerne, Toby's Creek is a rushing torrent, here impeded by a dam formed from fallen tree trunks and a discarded roll of carpet. The old trolley line runs along the western bank.

## Near and far, blueprints exist for protecting creeks

The streams vary in size and character, but share a community of advocates.

By CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK  
For The Post

Across the nation, people are learning to appreciate the waterways that beautify their communities, and are taking action to clean and enjoy them.

Prompted by state and federal programs to foster clean water, stream awareness and to reclaim the environment, grassroots watershed protection groups are taking up the challenge to welcome back into the community small streams and rivers long taken for granted.

"When we started to think of our river (the 13-mile Pequabuck River in central Connecticut) as a possible asset rather than a dumpster, things started to happen," says Mary Moulton, treasurer of the Pequabuck River Watershed Association. "And when we started cleaning it up, people became more careful about not trashing it again."

### Assistance, grants are available, page 8

The group's first project tore down two dams that had been built to create mill ponds. "The dams were not necessary for flood control and prevented fish like the Eastern salmon, or any fish, from spawning in the river," says Moulton.

"We are considering 'sunlighting' parts of the stream that are conduit because the fish will not travel underground very far to spawn."

Moulton points out that by looking forward, opening up a river and controlling pollutants, a community group can tap in to federally funded programs like the Environmental Protection Agency's salmon stocking initiative being conducted in the Connecticut River.

Partnering is important for all-volunteer, grassroots groups.

Because small streams are feeders for larger rivers, Moulton points out that larger watershed organizations are usually very helpful with staff, ideas and resources.

"Our claim to fame is that we are the biggest polluter of the Farmington River and so we've attracted the attention and help of the Farmington River Association, one of the oldest and most well-endowed in the country."

Tonia Shoumatoff, of Wassaic, New York, is her town's citizen representative to a state-mandated advisory council on threats to the local watershed area. Her local chapter of a larger stream association watches over the Webutuck River, which flows through upstate New York, then empties into the Ten Mile River and eventually into the Housatonic River in Connecticut.

"We make recommendations and then threats, through our advisory council, because we have set up ordinances in each town," says Shoumatoff. The watershed protection ordinances had to be accepted by the towns, and cover water quality, land use near the rivers, dumping and pollutants.

"It's so important to have these

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Mary Moulton  
Treasurer, Pequabuck (Ct.) River  
Watershed Association

ordinances in place and I'll tell you why. We are trying to stop the development of a 200-home mobile park on the river bank because they will lack enough septic or sewer capacity to protect the river," says Shoumatoff.

"Yes, we partner with the Housatonic River Association, but locally the legal structure has been set up to really give teeth to our recommendations, and that's done through our citizens' council."

The Eno River Association in North Carolina was established when a citizens' group successfully blocked construction of a dam across the Eno River, near Durham. The dam area became a new state park. The group functions as a river watch and land trust, buying up riverfront property as it becomes available and incorporating it into the state park system.

They have become so successful that the park is now the site of an annual music and craft "Festival for the Eno" that attracts 40,000 people over the July 4 weekend.

Most of the river groups begin with a study to define and name the watershed area, followed by watershed and water quality studies involving laboratory and field work. Some groups become funded and supported through regional tourism systems, but many remain grassroots organizations. Some gain political clout through municipal or state involvement while others are membership based.

Whether a group is just starting out or well along in its organizational development, community awareness of the river and its assets is constantly emphasized. In Pennsylvania, the League of Women Voters Citizen Education Fund gives PA Department of Environmental Protection grants to projects under \$5,000 for the protection of watershed areas and awareness of pollution issues. Many projects involve education and even the school systems. Funds for watershed signs and stream signs are available.

The stream preservation groups have held rock concerts, set up garbage cans, run poster contests and floated large golden balls down river to help foster awareness of their streams. For most, stream cleanups are semi-annual events. They have found that after an arduous initial cleanup, subsequent events are faster and easier.

Local and municipal groups can also help stock fish in rivers, clean up stream beds and banks and help with stream surveillance and maintenance. "It used to be the City of Bristol, (Ct.) would dump all the extra asphalt and road debris in the river. We now know we shouldn't do that any more, and the town will help cart away polluting debris," says Moulton.

### The creek by any other name?

Guy Giordano of Harveys Lake wrote in an e-mail that he read the coverage on Toby's Creek with great interest. But he has yet another twist on the name. "I've been an avid post card for collector and I've got seven different postcards that use the name TOPY Creek. Some of these cards have actual postmarks dating back as far as 1907. I noticed this name several years ago and have often thought about it since. Because my seven cards are all different views using the name Topy Creek, I have to give serious consideration to the fact that "Topy" might be the correct name. "The name Topy creek has some real meaning if you consider what thought must have gone into developing mills and dam ponds to take maximum advantage of the land topography. Having walked the creek, you must admit, it's amazing how this watercourse and its tributaries drain the Back Mountain area, over a 500 foot difference in elevation. Topy Creek winds around all kind of topographical obstacles to finally make its way to the Susquehanna River. Consequently, I have found it easy to buy into the name "Topy Creek."