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Linear Parks*

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THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION  
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Metropolitan Ecology

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by  
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Summary:

As metropolitan Rochester develops, it becomes increasingly important to retain unspoiled land for recreation and conservation<sup>1</sup>. Linear parks along waterways and abandoned railroad rights of way would provide facilities for a variety of activities and could form links between existing parks. Progress, such as is, includes the work of the Monroe County Pure Waters Agency in obtaining easements from property owners for a linear park along the banks of Irondequoit Creek<sup>2</sup>.

In this bulletin we discuss local attempts to turn the Barge Canal towpath into recreational areas, and the prospect of making linear parks along abandoned railroad rights of way. A list and map of these abandoned lines throughout New York State is included.

The Towpath:

The town of Ogden is one of several pioneering an effort to turn stretches of the old towpath along the Barge Canal into a linear park<sup>3</sup>. The land belongs to the State, but the township has been given a permit to use it as a public park. The town, of course, cares for and polices the land. It can be used for hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, etc. Motorized vehicles are prohibited.

In 1968 the State was also asked for use of the "spoils area" and the land around it to the west of the village of Spencerport. This is a large dredged out area (filled with water) attached to the canal by a channel. It was made by the State about 25 years ago to deposit silt from dredging operations and is now a "beautiful lake"<sup>4</sup>. The request was denied by the State because the area is still used as a dump for material removed from the water.

In 1970 Ogden invited all the towns and villages in Monroe County through which the Barge Canal passes to come to a meeting on the best use of the Canal and adjacent lands. Brighton, Gates, Greece, Perinton, Pittsford, Spencerport and Sweden sent representatives, Brockport, Fairport, Henrietta and Irondequoit did not<sup>4</sup>. About one half of those present have passed or are in the process of passing resolutions favoring the use of the land next to the canal for recreation or conservation. Ogden, itself, has asked the Governor to change the administration of the canal water and lands from strictly commercial (as it is now designated) to commercial and park. Each town would then care for its own area.

The planners would also like to make the water in the canal available for fishing and swimming. In 1957 and 1959 the purity standard of the water in parts of the canal was reclassified to B<sup>5</sup>. Changing the classification does not change the water.

However, as the towns along the canal hook into the new interceptor sewer to be built by the county<sup>o</sup> the water will improve. Although it will be voluntary, it is assumed that the towns will hook into the interceptor sewers as soon as they are built. If, at the same time, the Health Department enforces the B standard for industrial plants and individuals the water will be useable.

It might be added that there are other considerations which appear to be important to officials. In 1968 Mr. Al Grant, Monroe County Parks Director, obtained an easement from the New York State Department of Transportation to use the Barge Canal service road between Marsh Road and Fairport as a bicycle trail. This plan was not approved by the Conservation and Recreation Committee of the Monroe County Legislature. As of the present, the plan is being held in committee because it was felt that the trail should be patrolled by law enforcement officials.

#### Railroad Rights of Way:

The towpath is only one of several different categories of long, slim stretches of land potentially useable for parks. Abandoned railroad rights of way are a second excellent source for such parks. When a railroad line is discontinued the tracks are removed, leaving a level, clear and well drained cinder bed. To date, railroad companies have abandoned over 2,000 miles of road beds in New York State, and this figure will grow in the next decade. Those discontinued long ago are almost obliterated and bridges may be gone or in disrepair. Those more recently discontinued tend to be in good repair because the cinders keep the right of way from being rapidly overgrown. Some have been purchased in whole or in part, some have unfortunately been taken over for dumping, but there are many miles where it might be possible to get an easement for recreational use in return for a promise to care for the land. It may even be necessary to purchase some. If the procedure for the towpath is followed, the land would belong to the state, but would be cared for by the municipalities or private groups within the municipalities such as the Scouts.

This bulletin lists and maps the origins and end points of 125 abandoned railroad rights of way. Included are the names of the railroad company to which the rights of way belong, an estimate of the year in which they were abandoned, the length of each strip and in many cases a description of its condition.

It is hoped that the state will make an effort to obtain some of this land quickly, before it is too late. Some strips could then be assigned special functions such as use by snow mobiles, while others could be closed to motorized vehicles and left for hikers, etc. The concept of linear parks is new, but it seems like an eminently practical and relatively inexpensive way for the state to preserve lands easily available to all for recreation. It is important to get the land before it is purchased for other purposes.

**References Cited:**

1. "The Future of Conservation and Recreation in Monroe County", Monroe County Planning Council, January 1967.
2. "Proposed Linear Park for the Irondequoit Creek Valley", Monroe County Planning Council, July 1969.
3. Information available from:  

Ogden Conservation Council (Con Rec Dra), Mrs. J. Weber, Secretary  
Town of Ogden  
West Avenue  
Spencerport, New York
4. Personal communication from Mrs. Mary K. Dishaw of the Ogden Conservation Council
5. Official classification by the New York State Water Purity Control Board of the Water Resources Commission of New York State. Obtainable from Rochester Office, New York State Department of Health (Mr. Fuller).
6. Pure Waters Master Plan Report, County of Monroe, 1969.

A LIST OF ABANDONED RAILROAD RIGHTS OF WAY IN NEW YORK STATE

	<u>miles</u>	<u>year out</u>	<u>condi- tion</u>
<b>New York, Ontario and Western</b>			
1 Cornwall-on-Hudson to Fulton (Main line) (via Middletown, Walton, Norwich & Oneida) (a)	260	1957	B
2 Valley Jct. to Monticello	16	"	
3 Kingston to Port Jervis	57	"	D
5 Walton to Delhi	17	"	
6 Randallsville to Utica	32	"	
7 Clinton to Rome	14	"	
8 Hancock to Scranton, Pa. (Pennsylvania)	52	"	
9 Norwich to DeRuyter	-	1880	E
10a Freeville to S. Lansing	-	"	E
<b>Lehigh Valley</b>			
11 Cayuga Jct. to Auburn	9	1969	A
12 Geneva Jct. to Lehigh Valley Jct.	12	"	
15 Canastota to Cortland (Elmira, Cortland & Northland)	49	1968	C
14 Geneva Jct. to Ithaca (via Trumansburg)	37	1963	B
16 Aurora to Ludlowville	18	'51-'61	B
18 Hemlock to Lima	10	1968	A
19 Owego to Nichols Valley (Lackawanna RR)	19	'61-'66	
20 Auburn to Fairhaven (via Weedsport)	31	'39-'51	D
21 Canastota to Camden (old E, C & N)	21	'33-'39	
22 Ithaca to Van Etten to Horseheads (old E, C & N)	45	'33-'39	D
23 Auburn to Moravia	19	1967	B
<b>New York Central (now Penn-Central)</b>			
25 Pittsford to Victor (Auburn Road)	11	'61-'66	A
26 Lake Clear Jct. to Malone (Adirondack Div.)	42	'61-'66	
27 Bronx to Mahopac (Putnam Div.) (b)	44	c1961	E
29 Ogdensburg to Rivergate (via Redwood)	42	'61-'66	
30 Oneonta to Bloomville (old Ulster & Delaware)	20	c1966	
31 Lowville to Lyons Falls	14	'61-'66	
32 Batavia to Akron Jct.	18	'61-'66	
33 North Tonawanda to Transit	9	'61-'66	
34 Attica to Batavia	11	'39-'51	
35 Camden to Richland	24	'51-'61	
36 Goldens Bridge to Mahopac Falls	7	"	
37 Limirick to Cape Vincent	16	"	
38 Oswego to Mexico	15	"	
39 Clearwater to Raquette Lake (old Raquette Lake Rwy)	18	'33-'39	
40 Prospect Jct. (Remsen) to Poland	9	'39-'51	
41 Watertown to Sacketts Harbor	12	"	
42 Holcomb to Caledonia ("Peanut Branch")	23	'33-'39	
43 Helena to Tupper Lake (via St. Regis Falls)	65	"	
45 Tonawanda to Lockport Jct.	12	'51-'61	
<b>West Shore (New York Central)</b>			
50 Vernon to Utica	15	c1966	
51 Earlville to Fayetteville (old Chenango Branch)	34	c1938	
53 Syracuse to Fairport (c)	71	'51-'61	
54 Churchville to Oakfield	20	"	

	<u>miles</u>	<u>year out</u>	<u>condi- tion</u>
<b>Buffalo and Susquehanna</b>			
60 Blasdell (Buffalo) to Wellsville	85	1916	E
<b>Wellsville, Addison and Galetton (formerly B&amp;S, then B&amp;O)</b>			
61 Addison to Nichols	9	1963	
62 Nichols to Westfield, Pa. (Pennsylvania)	27	"	
<b>Arcade and Attica</b>			
63 North Java to Attica	13	1957	
<b>New York and Pennsylvania</b>			
68 Genesee, Pa. to Canisteo	28	'33-'39	
<b>Fulton Chain</b>			
48 Old Forge to connection with New York Central	5	'33-'39	
<b>Pittsburg, Shawmut and Northern</b>			
69 Olean to Swain (via Prosser and Angelica)	60	1947	
70 Swain to Moraine (Hornell Jct.)	7	1947	E
71 Hornell Jct. to Hornell	9	1947	
72 Hornell Jct. to Perkinsville	11	1947	D
<b>Prattsburg and Kanona</b>			
73 Prattsburg to Kanona	11	'61-'66	B
<b>Pennsylvania (now Penn-Central)</b>			
74 Wadsworth Jct. to Hinsdale (via Mt. Morris, Belfast)	86	c1963	B
75 Onoville to Olean	36	"	
76 Nunda to Swain	12	1910	E
77 Nunda Jct. to Nunda	2	c1963	A
<b>New York, Auburn and Lansing</b>			
10 Auburn to S. Lansing (on old O&W right of way)	36	1923	E
<b>Dansville and Mt. Morris</b>			
78 Mt. Morris to Groveland Station	8	1943	
<b>Rutland Railway Corp.</b>			
79 Burlington, Vt. to Alburgh, N.Y. (Vermont)	37	c1963	
80 Alburgh to Norwood (via Malone)	121	"	
81 Chatham to Petersbrgh Jct. (Hoosick Falls)	46	"	
<b>Grasse River</b>			
82 Childwold to Cranberry Lake	16	'51-'61	
<b>Glenfield and Western</b>			
83 Glenfield to Monteola	20	'33-'39	
<b>Fonda, Johnston and Gloversville</b>			
84 Broadalbin Jct. to Northville (d)	12	'20-'33	
<b>Adirondack and St. Lawrence</b>			
85 DeKalb Jct. (on NYC) to Hernon	5	'20-'33	

	<u>miles</u>	<u>year</u> <u>out</u>	<u>condi-</u> <u>tion</u>
<b>Keeseville, AuSable and Lake Champlain</b>			
86 Port Kent to Keeseville	5	'20-'33	
<b>Lehigh and New England</b>			
87 Goshen to Liberty Corners	16	'39-'51	
<b>Sterling Mt. Railway</b>			
88 Sterlington to Lakeville	8	'33-'39	
<b>Middleburg &amp; Schoharie and Schoharie Valley (later D &amp; H)</b>			
89 Schoharie Jct. to Middleburg	12	'40-'51	
<b>Boston and Albany (later NYC)</b>			
90 Hudson to Chatham	18	'51-'61	
<b>New York, New Haven and Hartford</b>			
91 Poughkeepsie to Boston Corners	40	'33-'39	
92 Rhinecliff to Boston Corners	35	"	
93 Hopewell Jct. to Stissing Jct.	27	"	
94 Millerton to Silvernails	14	"	
<b>Greenwich and Johnsonville</b>			
95 Greenwich to Johnsonville	14	'33-'39	
<b>Boston and Maine</b>			
96 Rotterdam Jct. to Glenville	6	'51-'61	
97 Glenville to Mechanicsville	17	"	
98 Saratoga Springs to Schylerville	12	'33-'39	
99 Schuyler Jct. to Mechanicsville	15	"	
<b>Marcellus and Otisco Lake</b>			
100 Otisco to Martisco (on NYC line)	9	'39-'51	
<b>Delaware and Northern</b>			
101 East Branch (on O&W line) to Arkville	38	1942	E
102 Andes Jct. to Andes branch	10	'33-'39	
<b>Unadilla Valley</b>			
103 New Berlin to Bridgewater	20	'51-'61	
4 New Berlin Jct. to New Berlin (formerly O&W)	22	"	
4a New Berlin to Edmeston (old Wharton Valley RR)	7	"	
<b>Ulster and Delaware (later Catskill Br. of NYC)</b>			
104 Phoenicia to Hunter	15	'39-'51	
105 Kaaterskill Jct. to Kaaterskill	8	"	
<b>Delaware and Hudson</b>			
106 Canada Jct. to Mooers	11	'20-'33	
107 Ticonderoga to Baldwin	3	'33-'39	
108 Lyon Mt. to Saranac Lake	37	'40-'51	
109 Cobleskill to Cherry Valley	23	'51-'61	
110 Glens Falls to Lake George	9	'39-'51	
124 Cooperstown Jct. to West Davenport	3	?	

	<u>miles</u>	<u>year out</u>	<u>condi- tion</u>
<b>Erie (now Erie-Lackawanna)</b>			
111 Livonia to Wayland	19	1951	
112 Wayland to Corning (parallels Lackawanna)	46	"	
113 Elmira to Waverly	18	'39-'51	
114 Vail Gate Jct. to Newburg Jct.	5	"	
115 Graham to Howells	10	'51-'61	
116 Jamestown to Kennedy	9	'39-'51	
117 State Line Jct. to Tioga Jct., Pa.	7	"	
118 Avon to Mt. Morris (Rochester Branch)	15	1940	E
<b>Delaware, Lackawanna and Western (now Erie-Lackawanna)</b>			
120 Groveland to Wayland	6	1963	A
121 Ithaca to Owego	34	'39-'51	C
122 Cortland to Cincinnatus	19	'61-'66	
123 Owego to Binghamton	22	"	
124 Horseheads to Corning	16	'39-'51	
19 Owego to Nichols Valley (also Lehigh Valley)	19	'61-'66	

Notes:

- (a) NYO&W: The section from Fulton to North Bay (on Oneida Lake) is owned by the Dept. of Transportation which is planning on using the roadbed for a future expressway; sections from Liberty to Cadonia have been disrupted by the reconstruction of Route 17.
- (b) Putnam Div. NYC: mostly obliterated by new highways; the section from Kitchawan to Mahopac (12 miles) is feasible.
- (c) West Shore RR: from Syracuse to Weedsport this line ran north of the main line of the NYC; from Weedsport to Fairport it ran south of the main line.
- (d) FJ&G: section to Northville probably under Sacandaga reservoir
- (e) D&N: most of this obliterated by Pepacton Reservoir

Total mileage (December 1969): 2635

Roadbed Condition Code:

- A Very good for hiking and bicycling
- B Good for hiking; some bridges out; short detours; bicycling in some sections only
- C Fair for hiking; most bridges out; detours; some growth in roadbed; some ties remain; no good for bicycling
- D Difficult hiking; heavily overgrown; necessary to ford streams unless bridged; swamp land; some sections obliterated
- E Almost completely obliterated



