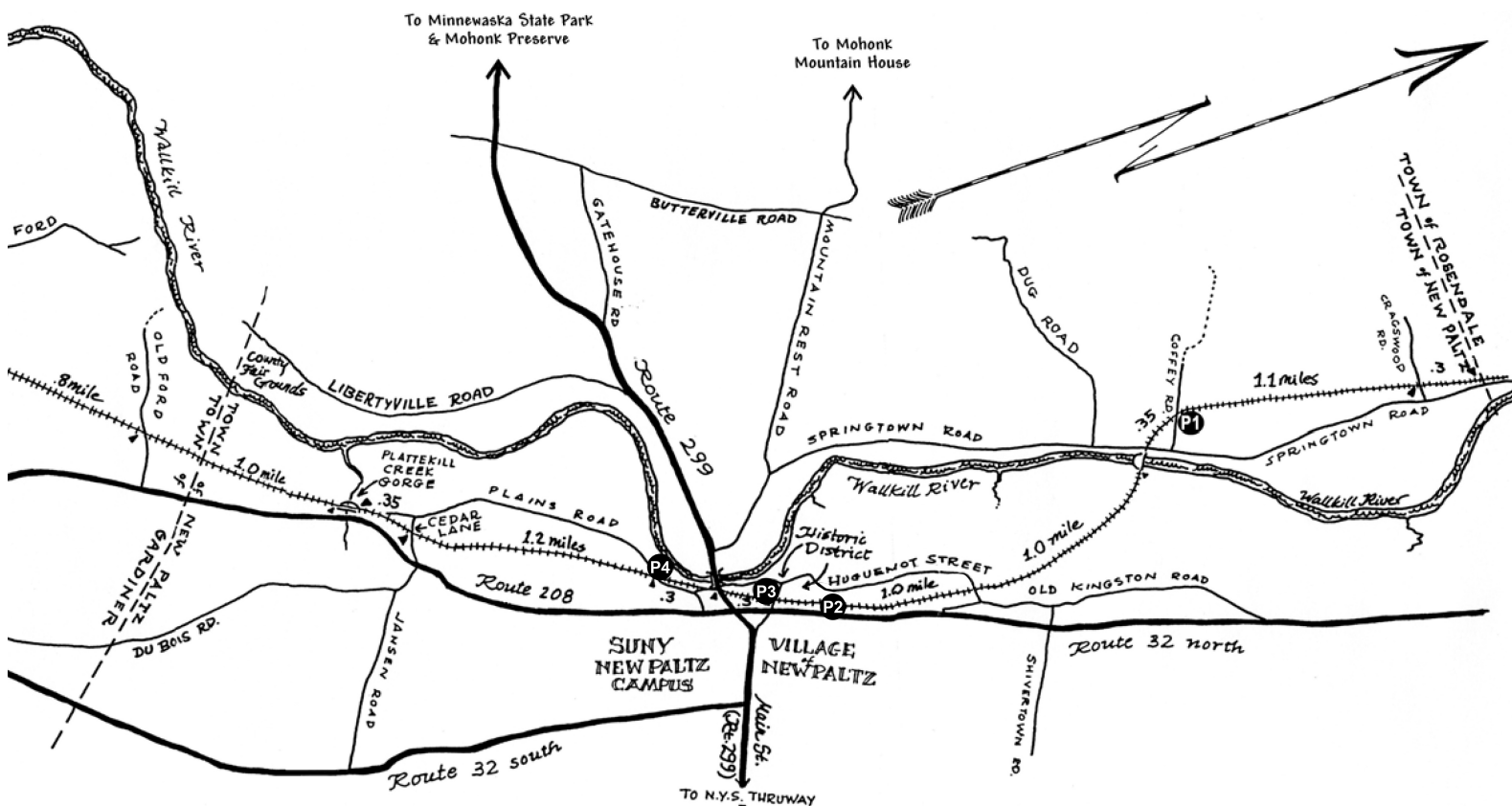


History Along the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail New Paltz Section

Construction on the Wallkill Valley Railroad began in 1868 in Montgomery in Orange County, proceeded through to Gardiner in 1869, and in 1870 an all-day celebration heralded the opening of the station in New Paltz. It took two more years to build the bridge over Rondout Creek and complete the link to Kingston. Through the late 19th century and into the first decades of the 20th century, the Wallkill Valley Railroad ferried fresh produce and vegetables from the farmlands of Ulster County to the streets of New York City. It brought visitors to Mohonk and other nearby attractions and also served as a commuter railroad for passengers traveling along the Hudson Valley. For more than a half century, the railroad supported business and tourism, provided jobs and created a critical economic link between upstate and downstate

By 1933 only one passenger train ran daily each way, and four years later, all passenger service came to a halt. Over the next few decades, numerous stations along the Wallkill line closed. In 1977, the railroad took its last freight run. Like other American rail systems, it had fallen victim to increased competition by automobiles and trucks. The sections of the old rail line in Gardiner and New Paltz opened as the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail in 1993. The northern section of the road bed through Rosendale and Ulster to the Kingston city line, including the Rosendale trestle, is presently in the process of being restored and improved.

While the trains and tracks are long gone, you can still get a sense of the history of the railroad and the countryside and towns through which it passed as you enjoy traveling along the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail.



Cragwood Road-Springtown Road Section: Here the rail trail parallels Springtown Road, the route of the New Paltz Huguenot Patentees in 1678, and passes through high quality alluvial farmland. The agricultural uses continue to thrive to this day, with two produce farms, Evolutionary Organics and the Bradley Farm, adjacent to the trail on the east side of this section. Before the building of the railroad, Springtown Road was the main north-south thoroughfare in the area. The stagecoach route from Kingston came along this road. In the early nineteenth century Springtown was a thriving community rivaling New Paltz and surpassing Kingston in population. An important pasturing place for livestock being driven south to metropolitan markets, its taverns and hostelrys provided lodging for weary travelers.

Coffey Road-Walkill River Bridge Section: Springtown Station, a flag stop at the end of Coffey Road, once saw four trains a day each way carrying passengers and freight between Kingston and New York City. The bridge over the Walkill River was originally constructed in 1870 and rebuilt in 1895. A combination of trestle and bridge, the 122 foot long trestle constructed of wood on concrete block footings was connect to the 291 foot long steel bridge. Together, the span supported 420 extra large railroad ties. In 1993, as the former railroad was transformed into a rail trail, community volunteers devoted 100 hours of effort to constructing the decking and benches now on the bridge. The views up and down the river make this a favorite stop for rail trail visitors.

Walkill River-Huguenot Street Section: The east side of the Walkill River in this section, once known as Middletown and reached from Springtown by a rope-propelled scow, was the site of a tannery. The river and surrounding floodplain required the elevation of the railbed above the high water mark to keep the trains running in this section during frequent floods from snow melt and heavy precipitation. In the 21st century, when flooding closes Rte. 299, the rail trail provides the only access to the west side of the Walkill in New Paltz. The house at the end of a long drive near the intersection of the rail trail and Huguenot St., known in the recent years as the Locust Tree Inn, was built by Abraham Elting in 1759. Abraham's grandson, Methusalem, granted the railroad a right of way for the stretch ending here.

Huguenot Street-Mulberry Street Section: This section of the rail trail parallels Huguenot St., north of where the Huguenots originally settled in the late 1600s. At the time the railroad was built, the property along the eastern side of Huguenot St. was farmland extending about a mile north of the settled part of the community. It was subdivided into a new residential area in the second half of the twentieth century. The few undeveloped acres adjacent to the trail just south of the the intersection with Huguenot Street are preserved as a small nature sanctuary. A wildlife viewing platform extends out from the west side of the rail trail. Mill Brook runs along this portion of the trail and then under it through a culvert. In the 1800s the brook was harnessed to run three mills for grinding grain and cutting lumber.

Mulberry Street-North Front Street Section: Take time to detour off the trail for a visit to Historic Huguenot Street and its many 17th century museum homes. The Reformed Church, visible from the trail, serves a congregation dating back to 1683. The southern portion of this section was once occupied by examples of the types of business that grew up along the railroad line, a cannery and the New Paltz Creamery, which shipped milk daily in rail cars cooled with ice cut from the Walkill River in winter. More recently it was the site of the A. P. LeFevre Coal and Lumber Company. Looking west from the trial at North Front Street you can see the monument to the Duzine, the original Huguenot patentees, and behind it the 1722 Jean Hasbrouck House.

North Front Street-Main Street Section: For the railroad to continue straight through the north through the center of New Paltz it was necessary to make a to do some earthmoving along the right of way. The stone retaining wall you see along the east side of the rail was constructed at that time, and is an excellent example of construction methods used at the time the railroad was built. The railroad's freight office and siding were near

North Front Street. The New Paltz train station was very busy with the visitors to the area's resorts. Dignitaries like William Jennings Bryan, General Leonard Wood, and Admiral George Dewey were driven from the station to the Mohonk Mountain House in horse-drawn carriages. Now a restaurant, the former railroad station on Main Street is the last Wallkill Valley Railroad station still standing. In the 1906 race for governor of New York, Charles Evans Hughes spoke here from the rear platform of his campaign train and went on to victory against William Randolph Hearst.

Main Street-Water Street Section: A lumberyard once occupied the property to the east of the railroad in this short section, and the buildings remained until the 1990s. By the time the site was proposed for development the buildings were too deteriorated for practical re-use, but Water Street Market was designed and constructed next to the rail trail in a manner reminiscent of previous structures alongside the railroad. The Route 299 bridge over the Wallkill, built in 1941, was the third bridge at this location. The steel bridge built in 1891 replaced an 1845 wooden span. The smaller part of the white frame building that stands on the river bank beside the bridge was once the toll house at the eastern terminus of the New Paltz-Wawarsing Turnpike.

Water Street-Plains Road Section: The large wooden building on Water Street next to the rail trail is the last remaining commercial structure exemplifying the importance of the railroad for the economy of New Paltz. After the Elting Grist Mill at this site burned in 1907, the Millham Cooperage was constructed here. Apple wagons lined up to have their perishable cargoes packed for shipping. You can still see the siding where they were loaded onto the trains. The warehouse remained a distribution center for apple boxes long after the trains stopped running.

Plains Road-Cedar Lane Section: Just past the point where the rail trail crosses Plains Road was the site of one of New Paltz's great business, the A. M. Low Brickyard. It flourished from 1886 to 1928 and turned out a million or more bricks a year, supplying bricks for many of the important older buildings in the area. On the edge of Sawmill Brook, which flows along this section of the trail, you can still find bricks stamped with the name of this business. The area along Sawmill Brook between Plains Road and Cedar Lane was once a favorite haunt of tramps. Near Hobo Rock at the south end of the damp area, railroad crews switched cars in preparation for deliveries to sidings in town, resulting in the spilling of coal. The inhabitants of shanties in the nearby area, known as the Jungle, kept warm on the spilled coal and lived on handouts from the prosperous community.

Plains Road Extension-Old Ford Road Section: The view of the Shawangunk Ridge from this section is unparalleled. There is no better place to enjoy this magnificent view than the steel span above Plattekill Creek, built in 1912 to replaced an earlier wooden bridge. At a height of about 35 feet above the creek to maintain the grade, the bridge is supported by massive abutments. Originally built of great blocks of Shawangunk conglomerate (also known puddingstone), in 1912 the southern abutment was rebuilt of concrete. Looking west past the fields where cattle can often be seen grazing along the meandering creek, starting on the north you'll see Bonticou Crag, then south to Skytop, then the Trapps, on past the stony face of Millbrook Mountain, and finally the sloping area known as Gertrude's Nose, named for Gertrude Bruyn, an influential landowner of the early Paltz. Approaching the New Paltz-Gardiner border a little way north of Old Ford Road the trail passes through an orchard established by the Hasbrouck family well over a hundred years ago, and owned and operated by the Dressel family for more than fifty years. The views of fall foliage on the ridge are an added attraction for the many visitors to the orchard for u-pick apples each fall.

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