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TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Swatara Rail-Trail

Pennsylvania



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The Swatara Rail-Trail uses the corridors left behind by a canal and a railroad to snake around an Appalachian mountain in eastern Pennsylvania, passing through the forests of Swatara State Park most of the way.

The trail route got its start with the discovery of anthracite coal in nearby Tremont, prompting construction of the Pine Grove feeder canal in the early 1800s that ran along Swatara Creek and connected with the main Union Canal near Lebanon. In 1862 a flood wiped out the feeder canal, which was never rebuilt. In the meantime, the Reading Railroad had built several connecting lines along the canal that were consolidated as the Lebanon and Tremont Branch in 1871. The Union Canal closed 14 years later.

Operating under several subsequent owners, the rail

branch closed in segments from 1965 to 1981. The state acquired the land and built the trail. The 10-mile trail begins in Lickdale, crosses a gap in Blue Mountain created by Swatara Creek, and ends in Pine Grove. Much of the trail is crushed limestone and asphalt, although segments at either end are dirt and grass and may be more conducive to mountain bikes than road and hybrid bikes. There are several trail junctions, including one with the Appalachian Trail, along the way. Future plans call for the [Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail](#) to meet up with the Swatara Rail-Trail in Lickdale. Horseback riding is allowed from the Sand Siding Trail east to Pine Grove. Cross-country skiing is permitted in the park, although the trail is not groomed.

The southern trailhead begins in the vicinity of a commercial campground in Lickdale, where you'll also find multiple restaurants, hotels, and an RV park. Heading north toward Swatara State Park, you'll pass a small trail parking lot and reach another trailhead on Monroe Valley Road in 0.8 mile. A historical marker nearby shows the spot of Fort Swatara, a stockaded blockhouse built in 1755 to guard settlements against attacks through the Swatara Gap during the French and Indian War.

In another 1.2 miles, the trail begins a narrow passage through the water gap through Blue Mountain created by Swatara Creek. Here, you'll pass the 1890 vintage Waterville Bridge, a 221-foot steel bridge that was relocated here after it was retired in the village of Waterville, more than 100 miles from here. The bridge carries the Appalachian Trail across the creek and connects with the [Bear Hole Trail](#) that runs 5 miles through the state park on the other side of the creek. Remains of seven locks and three dams, as well as sections of towpaths, are visible in the state park, and you'll spot the first ones in this gap if you cross to the Bear Hole Trail for a short distance.

Trending right after the water gap on the Swatara Rail-Trail, you'll pass six mountain bike singletrack runs to your left of about 1.5 miles each. About 4.3 miles from the Monroe Valley



Swatara Rail-Trail

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States: Pennsylvania

Counties: Lebanon, Schuylkill

Length: 10 miles

Trail end points: Lickdale Rd. nr. SR 72
(Lickdale) to Anspach Dr. nr. SR 443 and I-81
(Pine Grove)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Crushed
Stone, Dirt, Grass

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Horseback
Riding, Walking, Cross Country Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

There are several parking locations available along the trail, including at the southern endpoint/KOA Campground, 11 Lickdale Rd., the Lickdale Trailhead along Monroe Valley Rd., at Sand Sliding Trailhead along Sand sliding Rd., and along Sudeberg Rd.



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