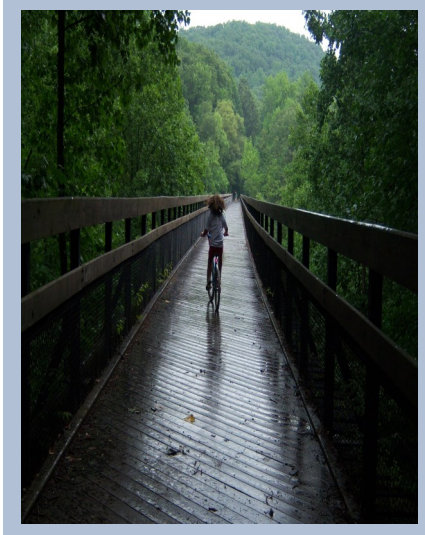
Ohiopyle Geology Biking Tour Ohiopyle to Pipeline: Geologic Influence

People and Rocks

The geologic features of an area dictate human behavior. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Ohiopyle and the Youghiogheny River Gorge. Throughout history the rugged nature of the mountains have defined what activities could take place here from trapping, logging and mining to recreational activities. On this bike trip you will see firsthand how the features of the landscape have influenced our past and current behavior.



This bike tour begins at the Train Station in Ohiopyle. Park at the train station and head towards the low bridge to start this tour.

Stop #24: Low Bridge

While on the low bridge notice the sandstone ledges below the bridge. This is the Homewood sandstone outcropping, or coming to the surface. The river is being stopped by this rock layer and forced to go around the Ferncliff Peninsula. Also notice how high you are from the river level on this bridge. At our next stop compare it to the height to water from the high bridge. These bridges are at the same elevation. The river has dropped 70 feet in its trip around the Peninsula. This drop creates fast moving water. Add to that the presence of large blocks of sandstone that have migrated down from ledges in the gorge to create rapids. Just before you reach the high bridge notice how much fill the railroad needed to keep the railroad at grade. Be careful not to ride your bike off of the edge, it is a steep drop!!

(.25 miles to next stop)

Stop#25: High Bridge

At the end of the high bridge you can see a ledge of Homewood sandstone. In the summer it is hard to see but you can trace it along the bank by looking for rhododendron. These plants like the acid rich Homewood layer and thrive here. They make it easier for us to see this hard rock shelf. The railroad built their tracks on this layer. It is the same layer that started at river level under the low bridge. Notice how much the river has dropped from one bridge to the other. Pieces of this ledge have fallen into the river and make the rapids we see below. This provides great opportunities for whitewater boating, take a moment and see if you see any boaters below on the river. (1.5 miles to next stop)

Look for these markers along the way which indicate stops.

Stop #26 Climbing Area

Here you can see where the Homewood ledge has outcropped. Freezing and thawing broke large sections of rock out of the massive ledges to create boulders. The faces of these ledges, where the boulders broke off are being used today by rock climbers. This is one of the park's designated climbing areas. For the remainder of the trip the Homewood ledge will often be seen outcropping above the trail.

(2 miles to next stop)

Stop #27 Sugar Run

Rock formations aren't just about recreation. Take a moment to step onto the Mitchell trail and hike to Sugar Run falls. This falls is made of Homewood sandstone, like many of the other falls in Ohiopyle. For a falls to form there has to be an easily eroded layer located underneath it to weather away. Under many of the Homewood layers we have Mercer coal beds. In this particular spot a coal mine was located just behind the falls. In fact, in the old days folks used to locate coal seams by searching for springs. Water often indicated a layer of coal, which is relatively permeable to water. At our next stop you will see the Mercer coal outcropping adjacent to the trail.

(200 yards to next stop)

Stop #28: Road Cut

The Mercer coal seam is visible in this railroad cut. The railroad built its line close to the river because the water had already done a good bit of the excavating work. On this section of the bike trail we are riding along the top of the Connequenessing Sandstone ledge for quite a while. It provided a solid foundation for the building of track.

(Continue a couple of miles and pass through a bike gate, cross the road, and through another gate, stop at the pipeline cut– total distance 3.2 miles)

Stop #29: Pipeline

This view is made possible by the gas line that comes through here. The geology of Pennsylvania has provided a variety of fuel resources for humans to use. Throughout our history PA has been known for its great coal reserves. Recently, Pennsylvania's natural gas has come to light as being very important as well, although we have been drilling for gas in PA for decades. If you continue along this trail to the town of Connellsville you will be in the heart of an area that once took great advantage of the geologic opportunities of the gorge. It was a center for glass making (using sand from the river bottom) and coal for coke production. Delivering these products, that fueled the industrial revolution, caused Connellsville to be one of the busiest rail yards in the country during its heyday. Without the coke produced in this area, Pittsburgh would not have been the steel town it was during the industrial revolution.

For many centuries humans did not settle this area because of the rugged landscape created by its Geology. Over time humans made advancements that have enabled them to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the rock layers and folding that are found in the Youghiogheny River Gorge. These have allowed us to take advantage of both mineral deposits and recreation.

(Return trip to Ohiopyle roughly 6.5 miles, continue to Connellsville 10.5 miles)

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