



Left: Keith Pitzer, executive director, Friends of Cheat; Right: Dave Hough, Managing Partner of Mountain Streams



A view of the takeout from the Jenkinsburg Bridge; the Big Sandy Creek comes in on the top right.

The Jenkinsburg River Access Project

Two years ago the State of West Virginia made a strong effort to purchase the spectacular Cheat River Canyon. After they were outbid by Allegheny Wood Products (AWP), a large logging company, river access became an immediate concern. AWP now owned Jenkinsburg, the site of an old logging town, which had been used by paddlers since the mid-1950's. It's the only takeout for the Cheat and Big Sandy Rivers, both popular whitewater runs that draw thousands of canoe, kayak, and rafting enthusiasts to the area each year. It is also a popular place for swimming and picnicking in the summer. But the area has also been the scene of considerable abuse. Heavy use by ATV riders and college party groups had caused considerable damage over the last two decades. The area has been notorious for waist-deep mudholes and industrial-strength litter.

The Cheat Canyon Coalition, a group of organizations that had worked together to support the state's purchase effort, contacted AWP immediately after the sale. They offered to raise money to fix up the area at no cost to the company. This effort went nowhere because AWP was unwilling to agree to a long term lease, without which fundraising would be impractical. After an initial meeting and a tour of the area with company representatives, meaningful contact ended. Their key people were now "too busy" to discuss things further. Although the access remained open, the company regularly threatened to fence it off and shut it down. After they had closed the Allegheny Trail through the Cheat Canyon with no prior notice to the organization maintaining it we took these statements very seriously.

Some months before the Cheat Canyon purchase effort a piece of privately owned land at the upstream end of the Cheat Canyon came on the market. The parcel, running the length of Decision Rapid on river right, had been owned for several decades by Mountain Streams and Trails Outfitters. The company had fallen on hard times and was now up for sale. This land was eventually purchased by Dave Hough, a member of the group that bought the company's West Virginia operations. Later, when AWP decided to convert an old railroad grade into



a haul road, they met with Hough to discuss plans to reopen their right-of-way that ran through on the upper portion of the his property. It was during these discussions that Hough expressed his interest in purchasing the Jenkinsburg Takeout. After months of negotiations AWP agreed to a land swap, exchanging the portion of his property above their haul road for an area between the state road and the Cheat and Big Sandy Rivers.

A Partnership Develops

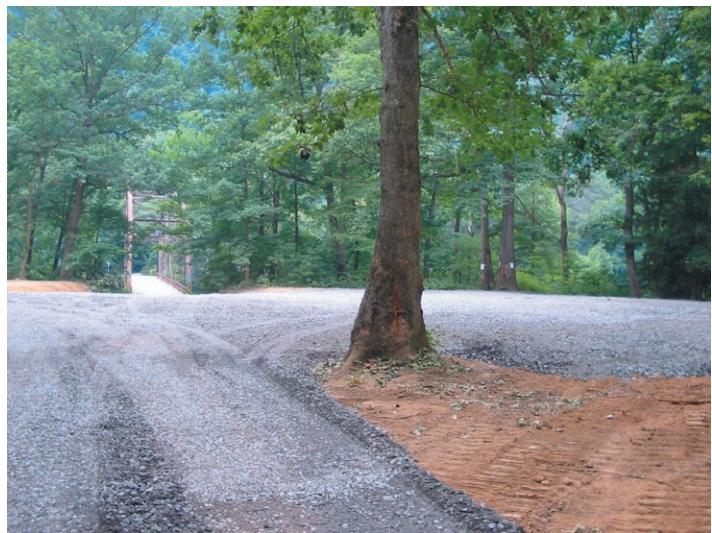
Hough saw possession of the takeout was only a first step. He wanted to allow public river access, but he also wanted to put a stop to the atrocious littering and land abuse that had become the norm here. He wanted it to become an attractive place, an asset to his business and a source of pride to the community. He'd participated in Cheat Canyon Coalition meetings when possible strategies for managing Jenkinsburg were discussed, so he approached Charlie Walbridge, an American Whitewater board member active in the Coalition, to ask for help. Walbridge, who also works with Friends of the Cheat, immediately discussed this with their Executive Director, Keith Pitzer. Both men were former river guides and long-time paddlers who knew the area well. They were excited to have a landowner who was willing to join forces with them and ready to begin work.

The first challenge was funding, and here the two groups quickly found a valuable partner. Over the years Pitzer had managed many acid-mine remediation projects locally and developed a solid relationship with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). He believed that our work at Jenkinsburg might qualify for EPA 319 money. This funding is provided to the states to deal with non-point source pollution like the massive erosion at the Jenkinsburg site. Agencies like the DEP, which deal with huge projects costing many





Upper Parking Lot - Before



Upper Parking Lot - After

hundreds of thousands of dollars, often have 10-20 thousand dollars remaining in these accounts at the end of a fiscal year. While not enough money to fund another major project, these sums could be very helpful on a job the size of ours. Lou Schmidt, a DEP water quality expert familiar with the area, made several site visits and presented the idea to his superiors. After considerable study they told us that the project qualified for a matching grant of \$15,000. There was only one catch – we had to raise at least \$10,000 in private funds in just 30 days!

Fundraising Begins

Fundraising, which American Whitewater had begun soon after the land transfer, now went into high gear. Friends of Cheat, with its well-managed office and credit card capabilities, became the hub of the effort. Our main vehicle was an Internet campaign. Appeals were posted to whitewater club websites and chat rooms, regional message boards like Local Paddler, and national forums like Boatertalk and the American Whitewater website. We also encouraged interested people to copy our message and forward it to their paddling friends. At Cheatfest, one of the largest river festivals in the country, we offered “Cheat River Access Sponsor” stickers to encourage small donations.

Ten \$500 donations came from whitewater paddling clubs and individuals; the rest of the money came in donations of \$100 or less. In all, we raised \$12,000 in just 30 days. Working through the West Virginia Wildwater Association we applied for, and received, a \$1000.00 grant from the American Canoe Association’s CFS fund. Sponsored by LL Bean, these grants are designed to provide quick cash for worthy river access projects. That, combined with the \$2000 raised by American Whitewater, put us way over the top. Dave Hough signed a 20-year access agreement allowing non-commercial access through his land in return for this investment.

A Plan Emerges:

During the preceding months a plan for the area had been developed. The upper parking lot would be enlarged, then ringed with huge rocks to cut off ATV access to the rest of the property. The lower lot would also be

The Jenkinsburg Project is a partnership between a private landowner, two river-oriented non-profits, a state environmental agency, five canoe and kayak clubs, and hundreds of donors from West Virginia and the surrounding states.



FRIENDS OF CHEAT PLAYED A VITAL ROLE

Friends of Cheat and their Executive Director Keith Pitzer played a critical role in all phases of this project. First, Pitzer identified EPA 319 funds provided to the states to combat non-point source pollution as a possible grant source. According to the WVDEP the Jenkinsburg Project Site area was losing 512 tons of soil into the Cheat River each year. Next, he used the relationship he developed with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection to get this request moving from a “good idea” category into a reality. Then FOC used their offices in Kingwood, WV as the main contact point for the very successful fundraising effort fundraising efforts. And lastly, he used the expertise developed in dozens of projects to coordinate the bidding process and supervise construction. For all this work -

THANK YOU VERY MUCH





expanded, and the road to it straightened out to accommodate outfitter busses and equipment trucks. This road would be gated, and a graded path created for river users from the upper lot to the river. Access beyond the upper parking area, except for authorized outfitter vehicles, will be on foot. All the badly eroded and trampled areas would be seeded and mulched. The DEP created the bid package and a winning bid was submitted by Allenwood Construction of Clarksburg, WV. The project was managed by Friends of Cheat executive director Keith Pitzer in consultation with the outfitters, American Whitewater, and Lou Schmidt of the West Virginia DEP.

Construction Begins

Construction began on August 22nd, and aided by a spell of dry weather took only eight days to complete. First the upper parking lot was graded to carry water away from the bridge and into a nearby bog. All the mudholes were drained and filled, including a deep one where a big sport utility vehicle would sink clear up to its windows! Then huge rocks were plucked from the edge of the county road right-of-way and carried to the upper parking lot to form a long lasting barrier to vehicle access. Illegal four-wheeler trails from the road below the switchback were closed off with large boulders. The road to the lower parking lot, once passable only by four-wheel drive vehicles, was graded and straightened to accommodate outfitter busses and trucks. The lower lot was expanded so that several companies could load trips simultaneously, and the path to the main takeout at the mouth of the Big Sandy River was hardened to resist erosion with a special honeycomb fabric. Then the big dump trucks started rolling and a thick coating of gravel was applied to the lots, the road, and the trail. At the last minute AWP contributed \$900 to get a giant mud wallow on their property across the road graded, filled, and mulched.

The Work Continues

The first weekend after construction was completed ATV riders broke through our defenses, tearing up gravel and busting new paths through the shrubbery. Chartlie Walbridge, who owns land nearby, worked with Dave Hough and Keith Pitzer to block these illegal entry sites. Truckloads of Hawthorn, a tree that's covered with interlocking spikes, were dropped in these paths. Then trees were felled over the Hawthorn to keep it from being moved. Pitzer is now arranging for a meeting with the local sheriff, State police, and conservation officers to arrange for regular patrols of the area.

For More Information Contact:

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