

Pepper Hill Trail System

Elk State Forest



Pennsylvania's vast state forest system comprises 2.2 million acres for you to use, enjoy and explore. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Bureau of Forestry manages these forests to ensure their long-term health and to conserve native wild plants.

Elk State Forest comprises 217,000 acres in Cameron, Elk, Potter, McKean, Clinton, and Clearfield Counties.



Trail Information

Enjoy your day in Elk State Forest as you hike this 6.4-mile trail. This is a hiking only trail and marked in yellow.

According to a legend, Pepper Hill was named when a shanty log raft made a sharp turn in the river just below the hollow and dumped the pepper shaker off the table.

This Pepper Hill Trail starts at gate #121 along Ridge Road. This trail is marked in yellow with a portion doubling as a snowmobile trail marked with orange diamond markers. Part of this trail crosses private lands, so please stay on the trail and respect both private and public property. Before the trail turns and follows switchbacks into Pepper Hill Run, there is a short spur trail which takes you to Survivor

Rock. This is the rock where three Civilian Conservation Corps or CCC Corp members took refuge and survived while fighting the Pepper Hill Fire of 1938. Eight other corps members perished on this arson fire.

To connect to Lick Island Trail, when you reach the first pipeline, turn left and follow the pipeline to the yellow blazes across Pumpkin Hollow, onto the pipeline, down the pipeline access road to Lick Island Run and onto a gated road also part of the Lick Island Trail.

Pepper Hill Fire Story

In the fall of 1938, a tragic fire occurred in Grove Township, Cameron County. The following is an account of that fire taken from weather records, news accounts, interviews and reports of investigations conducted by the U.S. Army, State Police, Coroner's juries and the Department of Forests and Waters. Here is the story of the Pepper Hill Fire.

At 11:10 on October 19, 1938 it was again hot and dry. District Forester Baer phoned Camp Cameron, CCC Camp S-132, and asked them to send someone to check a reported fire in the vicinity of Sinnemahoning. By 12:00 they reported that there were several fires. Two crews of C.C.C. enrollees were dispatched to the fire: Foreman Kammrath with 25 enrollees and Mohny with 22 enrollees. Both of these crews had been on the Jerry Run Fire from the day before until 5:30 that morning.

About 1:45 pm, the two crews arrived at the fire scene along the Austin Road (now Route 872). There were four fires burning in the vicinity. Kammrath made the decision to take the middle fire which was the smallest fire and they started along the road on the left side.

Mohny began along the right side of the fire and started to burn out the area but was then instructed by Camp Forester Houpt to proceed to the top of the mountain and construct a line downhill. Houpt then went to another fire.

At approximately 2:45 pm Mohny and crew began walking up the mountain. Because of the steepness and fatigue from the previous day's fire, the crew became separated as some individuals stopped more often to rest. Some enrollees noticed the fire below them but were not alarmed at first. As the weather changed and a frontal system approached, the winds shifted and increased causing the fire to advance rapidly up the hollow. It was now 3:30 pm.

Mohny was not far up the hill when he was overtaken by the fire. He was the first fatality. Enrollee Mackey ran up and to the right and survived. Others now noticed the fire below them as they were about 3/4 of the way to the top. Damico, Vogel, Hollobaugh, Jacofsky and Bogush tried to outrun the fire but were unable. They climbed upon a rock and sprayed each other with water. Unfortunately they all fell off the rock. They were burned and bare. They tried to walk down to the road. Bogush died at the scene. Jacofsky, Hollobaugh and Vogel died later. Damico recovered. Enrollee Kiliany with nine other men were further up the mountain, about 50 yards from the top. Three of the nine men "lost their heads" and then perished in the fire: Boring, Stefphanic and May. Three enrollees reached the top and took refuge on a large rock now called Survivors Rock: Shenal, Majorsky and Gaydos.

The fire was extinguished by rain at around 8:30 pm that night. One hundred thirty-four acres were burned in this fire and it cost eight men their life. The fire was intentionally started.

EIGHT MEN DIED:

Gilbert Mohny, age 38, Ridgway, PA Bogush, age 19, Conemaugh, PA

John Boring, age 19, Johnstown, PA

Ross Hollobaugh, age 18, Rimersburg, PA

Stephen Jacofsky, age 17, Johnstown, PA

Howard May, age 18, Erie, PA

Andrew Stefphanic, age 18, Twin Rocks, Pa

George Vogel, age 17, Hometown Unknown

Memorial Spring was dedicated one year later on October 19, 1939 to those who lost their lives on the Pepper Hill Fire.

Care for the Land

State forests belong to all Pennsylvanians. Take time to enjoy them, but know the rules and regulations designed to protect the forests and you. Please be careful with fire, keep our forests litter free and don't damage trees and other plants.

Dual Certified Forest

Pennsylvania's 2.2-million-acre state forest system is one of the largest dual certified forests in North America. The forest is certified under Forest Stewardship Council™ and Sustainable Forestry Initiative© standards. The FSC© is an independent organization supporting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. SFI© certification focuses on protection of water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk, and forests with exceptional conservation value. Dual certification ensures that Pennsylvania's state forests are managed to the highest third-party standards.



Scan the code to download the Geo-referenced Pepper Hill Trail Map



For more information

Elk State Forest
Forest District #13

258 Sizerville Road
Emporium, PA 15834
(814) 486-3353



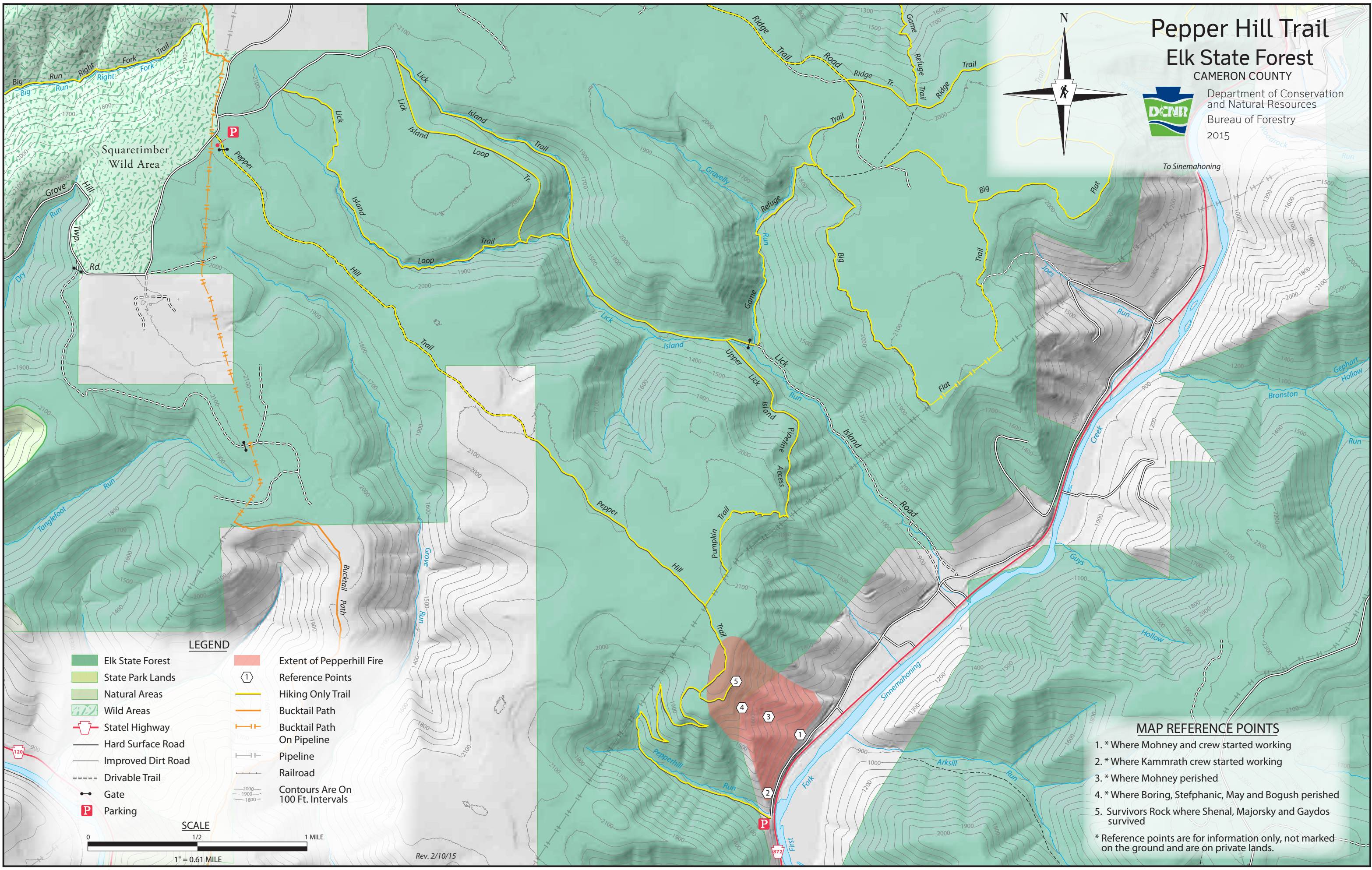
Pepper Hill Trail

Elk State Forest

CAMERON COUNTY



Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources
Bureau of Forestry
2015



LEGEND

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Elk State Forest | Extent of Pepperhill Fire |
| State Park Lands | Reference Points |
| Natural Areas | Hiking Only Trail |
| Wild Areas | Bucktail Path |
| Statel Highway | Bucktail Path On Pipeline |
| Hard Surface Road | Pipeline |
| Improved Dirt Road | Railroad |
| Drivable Trail | Contours Are On 100 Ft. Intervals |
| Gate | |
| Parking | |



MAP REFERENCE POINTS

1. * Where Mohny and crew started working
 2. * Where Kammrath crew started working
 3. * Where Mohny perished
 4. * Where Boring, Stefphanic, May and Bogush perished
 5. Survivors Rock where Shenal, Majorsky and Gaydos survived
- * Reference points are for information only, not marked on the ground and are on private lands.

To Sterling Run

To Pa Rte 120

Rev. 2/10/15