



# CUMBERLAND VALLEY RAIL TRAIL



## Big Spring Creek - Agriculture, Industry and Recreation

**Big Spring Creek:** Big Spring Creek, located down the hill before you, has played an important role in the agricultural and economic history of the Cumberland Valley. The five-mile-long creek emerges from an underground limestone spring about three miles to the south of this location, then flows northward through Newville before emptying into the Conodoguinet Creek north of town. It is the fifth largest spring in Pennsylvania with a median flow of 18 million gallons per day. That's enough water to flood one acre of land to a depth of 54 feet!

**Mills on the creek:** With year-round flows of 50-degree water (no winter freeze) Big Spring Creek served as an ideal site for water-powered mills since the 1760s, with two mills established prior to the Revolutionary War. Historically, six mills have operated on the creek. They were critical for farmers between Chambersburg and Harrisburg who needed grains processed into flour, corn meal, or livestock feed. The establishment of the Cumberland Valley Railroad (CVRR) in 1837 was a great benefit for farmers shipping mill products to distant markets.

**McFarland's Mill** was located on the creek below this point. It was a grist mill from 1765-1827 and a paper mill during the Civil War. The mill was sold to the Newville Knitting Co. in 1898.

**Laughlin's Mill**, the last mill structure remaining on the creek, is located one mile north of here in Newville.

**McCracken's Mill** was located near the headwaters of the Big Spring and could produce up to 75 barrels of flour per day. This mill generated about 35 horsepower, making it the most powerful mill in the area. Owners Abram and John Manning supplied flour from the mill to Queen Victoria in 1877. The mill was later sold to state senator Samuel C. Wagner.



**Big Spring Today:** Big Spring Creek is legendary in the fly-fishing community as one of the finest spring-fed native brook trout creeks in the United States. Anglers come from far and wide to test their fishing skills on the Big Spring.



In 2008, it was estimated that the creek contained over 350 pounds of brook trout per acre in its upper section.

Image credit: Daniel Mayer via Wikimedia Commons

Historic mill image credits: E.P. Macri Jr.

- Gintner's Mill** (undershot waterwheel)
- Laughlin's Mill** (undershot waterwheel, 15 horsepower)
- McFarland's Mill** (undershot waterwheel)
- Piper's Mill** (overshot waterwheel, 8-10 horsepower)
- McCracken's Mill** (horizontal turbine, 35 horsepower)
- Irvin's Mill** (overshot waterwheel, 8-10 horsepower)
- Laughlin's Mill** (then (above); now (below))
- McFarland's Mill** (Image credit: Gregg Obst)

Map labels include: Conodoguinet Creek, Newville, Greenspring Rd., Shippensburg Rd., Big Spring Rd., Log Cabin Rd., Carlisle Rd., Mt Rock Rd., CVRR, 233, 11, Big Spring.

Cumberland Valley TRAIL CONNECTIONS  
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 APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY SOUTH MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP  
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