

# Blue rock lies under the river

Jack Brubaker is "The Scribbler" and here is his column which appears in today's Lancaster *Intelligencer Journal/New Era*

**Dear Dr. Scribblermapmeister:**

**Where is/was the blue rock of Blue Rock Road in Manor Township, one of my favorite roads?**

**The road ends at the Susquehanna River. Is there a blue rock out there on Conejohela Flats or a blue rock somewhere along the route? Or neither?**

**Ad Crable, Staff Writer**

Dear Ad:

Yes, Ad, there is a blue rock. It's a fairly large limestone rock that lies about 50 yards offshore.

So says Charles Douts, who lives not far from the river, but considerably uphill.

Douts, the county's director of facilities management, founded the Washington Boro Society for Susquehanna River Heritage, whose headquarters is not far from the blue rock.

The rock lies in the riverbed about 100 yards upstream -- that is, toward Columbia -- from the end of Blue Rock Road.

Before Safe Harbor Dam was constructed in the early 1930s, the rock was visible in all seasons. The dam backed up the river, which covered the rock.

The rock was visible one day in late September when Safe Harbor dropped the water level almost six feet for an annual inspection of the spillway and power house.

"You could walk right out and stand on the rock," Douts says.

He did not do that this year, but he suggests that next year, "let's take a power washer to the rock and det



ermine how blue it is."

The power washer would be needed because the rock is coated with mud.

Douts has supplied the photo accompanying this column. It was taken during a previous year when the river was drawn down.

The blue rock, when it was really blue, was an early landmark.

"I am certain Native Americans and early settlers traveling along the river would notice the limestone, which has a blue tint, as a type of mile marker as they traveled down the river," Douts explains.

Two bridges downstream

**Dear Dr. Scribblerbridges:**

**When were the railroad bridges over the Conestoga River opened at Safe Harbor -- both the low grade bridge and the other one?**

**Bill Saylor, Millersville**

Dear Bill:

This is a bit more complicated than the location of the blue rock.

The lower bridge (not the low grade bridge) originally was part of the Columbia and Port Deposit Railroad.

The C&PD began construction of its line in 1866, but the section from Safe Harbor to Columbia apparently was not opened until 1877. A six-span stone arch bridge carried the tracks over the Conestoga beside the Susquehanna.

However, that lower bridge (later taken over by Conrail and now owned by Norfolk Southern) washed out in a 1904 flood.

Construction on the Atglen & Susquehanna Branch (also known as the low grade) had begun upriver in 1902, so railroad engineers decided to build the low grade bridge and rebuild the C&PD bridge at the same time at Safe Harbor.

Details of this work are included in the Historic American Engineering Record of the National Park Service.

The upper bridge, which is 150 feet higher than the lower bridge, opened to low grade traffic in July 2006. The new C&PD bridge returned to service the next month.

When Safe Harbor Dam raised the water level of the Susquehanna in the early 1930s, records show that Belmont Iron Works compensated by raising the lower bridge four feet and reinforcing it with concrete.

That is the bridge that carries Norfolk Southern traffic across the Conestoga today.

Then-owner Conrail removed tracks from the low grade bridge in 1990. The bridge bed has been falling apart ever since.

When it is rehabilitated for pedestrian traffic, that bridge will become part of the low grade rail-trail extension along the Susquehanna.