

Falling for Water



Last week's wonderful stretch of warm weather had everybody heading outside to soak up the sunshine. Whether it was doing yard work, going for a bike ride or going to a parade, the early taste of spring brought people out of their winter hibernation. While we're sure to have some cold days and nights ahead of us, the worst is almost certainly behind us.

One of the great things about living in Northeast Pennsylvania is the great outdoors. Hiking is a very popular outdoor activity, and there are plenty of scenic trails close by.

In fact, it was this natural beauty — particularly the waterfalls on the many mountain streams that soak the state — that won over Brooklyn, New York, transplant Raymond Chippa. He started photographing waterfalls in 2004, and in 2005 he created a website, PaWaterfalls.com.



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InSites

The site maps the falls Mr. Chippa has visited and photographed in the state so far. While it's far from a comprehensive catalog of all the waterfalls in Pennsylvania, it does pinpoint many sites in the northeast corner of the state.

Because the site is based on Google Maps, it is familiar and easy to navigate for anyone who has used a computer in the last decade. Little waterfall icons are scattered across a map of Pennsylvania on the homepage. Hovering over an icon produces a little pop-up text box with the name of the waterfall. Another box appears in the lower left corner of the screen with a small photo and a few details on the location.

Clicking on the icon brings you to a page dedicated to that specific waterfall. The page features a full-screen terrain map of the area, including streets and landmarks. An information box is displayed in the upper left corner of the screen. The box contains several categories of information that can be accessed by clicking on the heading you're interested in.

Good information

The first category is Details. It contains the location of the waterfall and a link to directions. There's also a difficulty rating for the terrain you have to cross to get to the falls. A written description gives information on the surrounding area, the terrain, if it's public or private, if swimming is allowed, handicapped accessibility, the height of the falls and more.

Next is a Local Weather section that gives real time conditions in the area. The next section is a photo gallery with a varying number of pictures depending on which waterfall you're looking at. The pictures are nicely composed, properly exposed and processed to present flattering views.

After that is a Share section that allows you to send out a link to your favorite waterfall on various social media sites. The last section, Info, lists the photographer's credit and the year the picture was posted. Most of the pictures were taken by Mr. Chippa, but I did come across another photographer's name on a waterfall in Southwest Pennsylvania.

Nicely packaged

The Google Map foundation of the site is packaged in an attractive, understated wrapper. Thin, slightly transparent, black banners at the top and bottom of the page contain navigation links. The type links are simple, sans serif, white letters. Simple, white icons allow you to zoom in and out, change the type of map and link to social media.

The maps make up the bulk of the site, but there are a few other sections. An About page describes Mr. Chippa's reasons for making the site and his goals for it. The Contact section allows you to email him questions or comments. A Links section connects you with other resources devoted to waterfalls, photography and the outdoors. Finally, a Thanks section lists contributors to the site.

PaWaterfalls is a simple site with a simple mission — to connect you with beautiful waterfalls around the state. Even though the site has a non-commercial, homegrown feel to it, it's very well done. The design, navigation and imagery are all professionally executed.

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