



Discover America

Newsletter of the American Discovery Trail Society

Volume 16, Number 1

www.discoverytrail.org

Spring 2011

ADT Featured Area The Flint Hills



The Kansas Flint Hills are the last large remnants of the true prairie that once covered 140 million acres in the heart of North America.
Photo courtesy of flinthillstallgrass.org

The wind-blown grasses, the spare undulating hills, and enormous blue sky that comprise the Kansas Flint Hills harken to an environment that has changed surprisingly little over time. The area extends in a narrow oval about 50 miles wide across east-central Kansas from Oklahoma almost to Nebraska, covering about 4.5 million acres. The grasslands are the last large remnants of the true prairie that once stretched from the forests of the east to the Great Plains.

In prehistoric times, large buffalo herds and other animals grazed and roamed freely through the prairies. While they no longer dominate, the land is still home to antelope, deer, foxes, coyotes, prairie dogs, badgers, and over 200 types of birds. And the bison, once decimated, have been reintroduced in parts of the region.

How did the Flint Hills remain largely intact? When most of the Midwest was plowed up for cropland, the Flint Hills were left fallow because the rocky limestone underbelly mixed with chert (or flint) was not conducive to farming. As a result, the settlers turned to ranching and fattening their cattle on the rich grasses the soil supported.

Of the 140 million acres in the heart of North America that was originally native tallgrass prairie, only 3 percent is left, and most of that is in the Flint Hills of Kansas.

The era from 1866–85 brought great cattle drives from Texas to Kansas, with cowboys leading

(Continued on page 5, column 2)

Are the Burns a Good Idea?

Fire, which can be so destructive, can often be seen as an enemy to nature and the environment. But can it also be beneficial?

Fire is as natural in the prairies as thunderstorms and lightning. And deliberate burning dates back to the Native Americans and later the Europeans. The Native Americans knew the smoke from the fires attracted the bison to the new growth that would follow. The later settlers also learned the native grasses were good for grazing cattle.

Although it met with popular opposition in the late-19th century through the mid-20th century, controlled burns were still a regular practice in the midst of the Flint Hills. Then studies began to show the wisdom of these practices and many advantages to the ecosystems from the burns.

First, the fires clear away the previous year's plant debris and warm the soil, encouraging new growth. Along with the old grasses,

(Continued on page 5, column 1)



Although cattle have replaced most of the bison that once roamed freely in the tallgrass prairie, some bison have been re-introduced in protected areas.

Photo courtesy of flinthillstallgrass.org

Trail News



Dale Ryan (left), outgoing Nevada state coordinator for the American Discovery Trail, was given a plaque in appreciation of all of his efforts on behalf of the ADT Society. Ted Oxborrow, the incoming Nevada coordinator, presented the plaque to Ryan at a Pony Express Association meeting. Many plans for future cooperation between the Pony Express Trail and the ADT were also discussed at the meeting.

Photo courtesy of Ted Oxborrow

Iowa High Trestle to Open

Grand is the only way to describe the opening of the High Trestle Trail that is slated to host its dedication ceremony on April 30. The one-half-mile-long, 13-story High Trestle Bridge along its path will give users a spectacular view of the Des Moines River Valley from four different vantage points. With that in mind, the grand opening's tagline is "Discover a New View."

The trail, which will be part of the American Discovery Trail, is 25 miles long and connects to the Heart of Iowa Trail in Slater. Each of the five towns and four county conservation boards that the trail passes through are taking an active part in planning the grand opening event. Activities will include food, music, art, and kid's events. The 6-year effort to develop this trail was guided by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

Bicycle Alternate Route

An alternative bicycle route across Nevada has been planned and scouted. An ADT bike traveler with panniers or trailer can enjoy graded dirt roads with minimal sand all the way across the state.

Riders will not have to worry about traffic and will have spectacular views. There is no dependable water over 50% of the route, so support and satellite communication are needed. A GIS mapping project will put the route on paper, and signage will then be posted to help show the way.

Big Plans for Nevada

State coordinator Ted Oxborrow has been busy planning events for 2011 on the Nevada ADT.

On June 10, his son, Trevor, will set out from Lake Tahoe to establish the first

west-to-east mountain bike speed benchmark on the newly designed ADT bike route. His goal is 100 miles a day for a 5-day overall crossing, of which 95% is off-highway. An annual Mountain Bike Race Across Nevada on the ADT will follow this event starting in 2012.

On June 24, Brian Stark will set out from the Utah/Nevada border to establish the first east-to-west ultra-running speed benchmark on the Nevada ADT. His goal is 50 miles a day, finishing at Lake Tahoe on July 4. Stark spent eight months in 1998 running coast-to-coast on the ADT, although he did not follow the official route through Nevada because of its difficult early stage of development. An annual Ultra Run Across Nevada on the ADT will follow this event starting in 2012.

On August 31, the Nevada Backcountry Horseman's Club will ride the ADT from Lake Tahoe to Berlin, Nevada. Their goal is 20 miles a day.

On Sept. 10, 50 mountain bikers will set out from Lake Tahoe for a 10-day crossing on the ADT Bike Route. This first, large-group crossing is planned to become a state-sanctioned annual event. The fully supported event includes a sag crew, meals, camping fees, and more. For information on joining this event, visit www.mtbikenevada.com.

Oxborrow has received the cooperation of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U. S. Forest Service, Nevada Department of Transportation, Nevada Commission on Tourism, Governor's Bicycle Advisory Board, and State Parks Recreational Trails Committee for these events.

In addition, Charlie Johnston, associate editor of *Nevada Magazine*, will be running a section of the ADT with Stark and plans to publish articles on each of the four events.

To generate publicity and excitement for these events, Oxborrow will be giving Powerpoint presentations about the events in February and March to clubs, stores, and other gatherings.

Utah State Coordinator

The American Discovery Trail Society welcomes a new state coordinator for the state of Utah. It is Lynne Cobb, a clinical child psychologist by profession. Lynne is married and has two daughters. She quips, "I grew up in a hiking family, though most of us thought our little brother Eric took it a bit far." *Editor's note:* Lynne's brother, Eric Seaborg, is president of the ADT Society and was the leader of the original scouting team.

Iowa Engineers Develop Homemade Trail Counters

The Linn County Trail Association in Iowa wanted to be able to demonstrate the importance of their trails and how much they were used. So they asked their Rockville Collins Retiree Volunteers to develop a method to count trail users. That's when two retired engineers got to work on the project. The result was the installation of infrared beam counters made from surplus boards and modified TV remotes. Later, when surplus boards were no longer available, a new design was made so additional counters could be installed. The counters are currently in use on several trails, including the Cedar Valley Trail, a part of the ADT.

More Iowa Progress

The Heart of Iowa Nature Trail, a trail the ADT follows, has a newly constructed 300-foot bridge over the Skunk River. The bridge includes two eight-foot "bump-outs" where users can take a rest while enjoying a view of the river.

In the Quad Cities area, Bettendorf plans to link the Duck Trail with the Mississippi Recreational Trail by filling the 1.5-mile gap that currently exists between the two trails. When completed, the trail will provide a 30-mile loop around the Quad Cities, which has been a priority of the cities for some time.

Muscatine is installing solar-powered traffic signs to add to the safety of city trail users. The signs will be placed near where people enter and exit the bike

trails in the hope that they will help to slow traffic in the area.

The Cedar Valley Nature Trail received funding to repair a 1912 bridge over the Cedar River. The old bridge was severely damaged during the 2008 flood. The new bridge will be built higher to reduce backups of flotsam during future flooding.

Legislation

2010 ended with no action on the National Discovery Trails Act although we ended up with 30 co-sponsors. This new year brings a renewed effort and a two-pronged approach. One will be the re-introduction of the same bill as last year with a flip in main sponsors. Last year Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) was our main lead. This year he will be the lead co-sponsor and last year's lead co-sponsor Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.) will take over as the main lead.

The second approach will introduce a more limited bill that will a) recognize the American Discovery Trail as an important national treasure that features some of the nation's most scenic highlights and some of its most important historic sites and therefore serves as a vital tourism attraction across 15 states from the Atlantic to the Pacific; and b) direct all federal land managers to *allow* the signage of the ADT on all public lands. The hope is that this could be a first step providing recognition and publicity for the trail and help ease the way for future passage of the legislation that would include the ADT in the National Trails System.

Indiana to Place ADT Signs on Knobstone Trail

The American Discovery Trail uses parts of the Knobstone Trail in Indiana but there has been some confusion by hikers as to which parts the ADT follows. State coordinator Jeff Edmondson met with Nila Armstrong from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources who agreed to install ADT signage. Trailhead signs will be posted where the trails join and ADT logos will be placed at the Deam Lake trailhead and on each side of Knobstone Trail mile markers.

Indiana Opens More Miles of Nickel Plate Trail

Part of the Nickel Plate Trail in Miami County, near the town of Rochester, was recently paved and is ready to become part of the ADT. Indiana state coordinator Jeff Edmondson says, "This is a really nice trail, 20 miles of flat, well-managed, fresh pavement with good bridge surfaces. This is very good news for the American Discovery Trail since it will move the trail off the county roads and onto the safer confines of a newly completed 20-mile paved trail." Only some paperwork is needed at this point to officially incorporate it into the ADT.



This year, MLK Day hikers found this snowman along their hike on the American Discovery Trail in Hueston Woods State Park in Ohio. Photo courtesy of Pat Hayes

Ohio Winter ADT Hike

Once again the Buckeye Trail hosted its annual Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday hike in southwest Ohio. Over 60 hikers turned out in below freezing weather to enjoy the 11.5-mile hike around frozen Lake Acton through snow-covered woods. It seems like the number of participants on this hike grows larger every year. Is it the congenial people, the chance to get out and get some exercise in the beauty of a winter's day, or the hot lunch that is served that brings out the crowds? This year even a snowman seemed to want to get in on the action.

Newsletters Late?

You may have received the winter issue of *Discover America* a bit later than usual this season. Although they were mailed bulk mail on Dec. 16, some of them took seven weeks to be delivered.

Perhaps the post office was overwhelmed with the glut of holiday mail, but we wanted to let you know that you can always view your newsletter in a timely manner on line, and in color, on the American Discovery Trail Society website: www.discoverytrail.org.

Walkin' Jim Stoltz Dies

The long-distance trail community lost one of its own this past fall when Walkin' Jim Stoltz succumbed to cancer. He died on Sept. 3 in Montana at the age of 57.

Jim was a passionate environmentalist, hiker, and explorer who shared his love of the outdoors and keeping things wild with his words, music, photographs, and performances.

In his lifetime, he hiked over 28,000 miles in long-distance trips ranging from the Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Crest, the Continental Divide, an east to west cross-country hike, and a trip from Yellowstone to the Yukon, as well as many other hikes.

In addition to sharing his love of the natural world with others through his "Forever Wild" tours, which he performed to audiences ranging from small children to experienced long-distance hikers, Jim sought to protect the land and experiences he loved.

Jim was the co-founder of Musicians United to Sustain the Environment (MUSE) to heighten environmental awareness and to protect endangered species and wildlands.

Making Connections...

Coast to Coast

800-663-2387

info@discoverytrail.org
www.discoverytrail.org

Booth Volunteers Needed

The American Discovery Trail Society will be hosting an exhibit booth at the upcoming Appalachian Trail Conservancy's biennial conference July 1-4. The conference will be held at Emory and Henry College in Emory, Va., and will include exhibits, workshops, hikes, excursions, and entertainment. The ADT Society is looking for volunteers to help staff the booth and answer questions so that other hikers will learn more about our trail. If you would be willing to help us out for a few hours or a couple of days, please contact the ADT office.

Facebook Likes Us!

Or at least a number of Facebook users do. Our page now has more than 550 "likes", which were formerly called fans. Our numbers increased when some of our fans urged their friends to sign on. Check out our page to see not only who likes us but also others who are offering to help our travelers: www.facebook.com/AmericanDiscoveryTrail.

Picture this

Jim Shaner, who has been hiking segments of the ADT for a period of years, has posted photos from his hikes on www.photobucket.com. Just type "American Discovery Trail" in the search box. There is an album for every state he has traveled through.



The Outdoor Company™

Many thanks to
The Coleman Company for its
continued support of the
American Discovery Trail!

ADT Board of Directors

*State Coordinators

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

President:

Eric Seaborg

VP/Chair of Corporate Funding:

*John Fazel, California

VP/Chair of Discovery:

Harv Hisgen

VP/Public Relations:

*Dick Bratton, Colorado

VP/Government Affairs:

Ellen Dudley

VP/National Coordinator:

Brian Stark

Secretary:

*Ted Oxborrow, Nevada

Treasurer:

Reese Lukei, Jr.

Newsletter Editor:

Laurel Ibbotson Foot

happifeet@msn.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

*David Bartoo, Delaware

Beverly Byron

*Lynne Cobb, Utah

Joyce Cottrell

*Harry David Cyphers, Maryland

*Jeff Edmondson, Indiana

*Gary L. Gebhard, Nebraska

Ross Greathouse

*Patrick Hayes, Ohio/Kentucky

*Darwin Hindman, Jr., Missouri

*Ed Lincoln, Kansas

Michael Muir

Counsel:

Charles Sloan

STAFF:

Membership Director

Krista Lenzmeier



Burns

(Continued from page 1)

invasive woody plants and trees are kept in check, preventing the takeover of the open land by such plants as the eastern red cedar. Following the burn, the new grass has fewer weeds and is generally healthier and produces better livestock gains. This can also reduce the need for herbicides and pesticides.

Today, controlled intentional burning is often being encouraged throughout the country, although strict regulation may be necessary to maintain air quality. Of concern too is the fact that the burns are more pervasive than would randomly occur, which may impact wildlife habitat and diversity. But overall, the example set in the Flint Hills of preserving the land while making it productive is a unique and rare aspect of good land management that has helped to protect this resource and keep it much as it has been for millennia.

Flint: What's it Good for?

Flint, a hard form of quartz, has been used by people since the Stone Age. When split, it forms hard, sharp edges that were used for tools.

Flint's other main property is that when struck against rocks of iron pyrite (and steel), it produces sparks. These sparks can ignite tinder to produce a flame. It is not a particularly easy way to start a fire, but it was easier than most of the other methods available in earlier times. Later, the flint and steel combination was the basis for the flintlock mechanism on guns and fire-starting tools such as those in survival kits.

But it is no longer flint that produces the sparks in your Bic lighter. Man-made ferrocium makes for a better spark and easier burn. Today, flint's main use is as a building material, particularly in stone walls in England.



Big Bluestem is one of the main species of grasses in the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. It's sometimes called "turkeyfoot" because the three spikes on top look like a turkey's foot, held upside down.

Photo courtesy of flinthillstallgrass.org

The Flint Hills

(Continued from page 1)

their herds to the railroads to reach the eastern markets. Today almost 1 million head of cattle are fattened each year on the nutritious grasses of the Flint Hills during the peak grazing season from May to July. This is more than during all of the cattle drive years combined. While they still come from Texas and the Southwest, rather than walking on foot to the pastures, they are now trucked in. Once they arrive, the cattle are moved infrequently because, like people, they lose weight if they exercise. The native grasses are rich in calcium, which their roots draw from the limestone below. Properly maintained cattle can gain an average of 1.83 pounds per day.

Although the open vistas are always present, visiting the Flint Hills brings different sights at different times of the year. Early each April, the cattlemen, just as the

Native Americans and the mid-19th century ranchers before them, set fire to the land producing orange flames and blackened hills. The spring rains bring the rich green grasses to life. Wildflowers mingle in the grasses, adding a variety of colors. As fall approaches, the grasses turn golden and reach their maximum height. This is often no more than waist high due to a variety of factors including wind, type of grass, or thin topsoil.

Explorers on the American Discovery Trail may learn to appreciate this unique ecosystem by experiencing it in a way that people have for millennia – under their own power. The Flint Hills and the grasslands they consist of should not be passed by as a mere something to get through on the way to somewhere else. A short side trip to the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, owned by the Nature Conservancy and managed by the National Park Service, provides exhibits, trails, a small bison herd that was introduced in 2009, and a better understanding of this unique ecosystem.

Under human power, the Flint Hills can be admired for the wonder of nature they are, in all their tenacity, adaptability, and continual rebirth.

BACKPACKER
THE OUTDOORS AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Backpacker Magazine:
A founding sponsor of the
American Discovery Trail

Change Service Requested

Small Discoveries



One particular joy of traversing the American Discovery Trail is the discovery of unexpected sights. One such discovery is the 30-bell carillon in Lawrenceburg, Ind., the only carillon along the ADT route.

Erected in 2002 for the city's bicentennial celebration, this riverside monument was built as a "War Memorial to the Common Man." It is said to be the largest monument of its kind in the United States. The monument consists of smokestack-styled columns in recognition of the city's river heritage, bronze statues of military and civilian service personnel, and two 12-foot clocks, one facing the river and one the land. The carillon plays music each hour, appropriate to one of the statues, which rotate on a carousel.

Carillons are musical instruments which are usually housed in a free-standing bell tower or the belfry of a church or municipal building. The instruments consist of at least 23 cast-bronze, cup-shaped bells that are rung serially to play a melody or together to play a chord. It is the heaviest of all musical instruments.

Join the Nevada Adventure!

It's a rare chance to be one of the first to explore a 500-mile route across one of the emptiest spots on the American map—a mountain bike ride across Nevada on the proposed American Discovery Trail bicycle alternative.

You can retrace the hoofprints of the Pony Express riders in a landscape that has scarcely changed.

On Sept. 10 a group limited to 50 riders will head east from Lake Tahoe for an 11-day, fully supported ride across the country's most mountainous state. Riders will be traversing some of the Silver State's most rugged and isolated landscapes.

Route guides and crew will be provided for your safety and support. A sag vehicle will be available with water, first aid needs, and bike repair items.

The base camps will feature tent camping in Nevada state parks and on private ranch land, with an occasional hotel option. The camps will offer tables, chairs, snack bar, wash basins, power station, and toilets, with a shower trailer at a few camps.

A chef will prepare a delicious meal each night. The ride will be self-paced at about 50 miles per day.

For more information, and to reserve your space, visit www.mtbikenevada.com