

Discover America

Newsletter of the American Discovery Trail Society

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Remembering our Connections

A Message from the President

This is a very different message from the one I first intended to write for this newsletter. In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks, our country has had to reexamine our national priorities and reach deep within our collective soul to decide how we want to live our lives and respond to what has happened. As we as a nation grieve for those who were lost, it reminds us that the people of America are connected in many ways and how important these connections are to all of us.

Columnist Ellen Goodman wrote recently, “Midwesterners who long regarded the city as if it were a foreign capital know that we are all New Yorkers now. Washington-bashers have discovered that the hole in the Pentagon was a hole in the heartland.” Like any extended family, we may not always agree with one another but we need to try to understand and support each other. We need to think bigger than ourselves.

The American Discovery Trail celebrates America and all that is unique about us—our heritage, our people, and our landscape. One of the most difficult aspects for me when Bill and I traversed the ADT was having to constantly adjust to new conditions—prairies, mountains, deserts, etc. Just as I became comfortable with one terrain, I was greeted by another. But that is also the beauty of this trail and our country.

We may be diverse but we are united. By encouraging us to set foot (or bicycle or horseback) into the outdoors, the American Discovery Trail helps us to meet each other face to face, marvel at the natural resources we share, and acknowledge and learn about those who came before us. What glorious places a journey of this sort can take us!

—Laurel Ibbotson Foot, President

A New Trail Link in Maryland

Maryland’s Eastern Shore, the peninsula jutting south from Delaware to Virginia between the Atlantic and the Chesapeake Bay, is blessed with many streams and rivers.

The Chester River, just east of the Bay, created Kent Island, a five-mile wide swath of land. The Cross Island Trail was dedicated on September 8, 2001. The trail spans the island, affording natural vistas and unique opportunities to view wildlife in an environmentally sensitively designed setting. The trail experience affords something for everyone, including canopied forests, bridges over streams, public parks, and excellent seafood eating. The entire trail is part of the ADT.

ADT Subject of Iowa University Study

Reprinted from the Iowa Trails Advocate

Iowa University Arts Education Department professor Steve McGuire led a group of graduate students on a 24-day trip over the Iowa portion of the American Discovery Trail, starting in Council Bluffs on June 10, crossing the state and returning to Iowa City in early July.

The trip that professor McGuire and his graduate students took was a “Stories Quest.” The trip was a learning experience for the group, in particular about the history of the state and the people who reside in it. The trip was funded in part by a Millennium Trails Grant.

One of the students, Rahila Weed, called the project “experiential learning.” He said, “We were

documenting as we went along—interviewing community leaders, learning about the history of different areas of Iowa and taking pictures as we did this.” One of their stops was to interview Tom Neenan, ADT Iowa coordinator and director of the Iowa Trails Council.

McGuire, who traveled on a tandem recumbent bicycle, said that this trip differed from other bike rides across Iowa in that it was intended to “strengthen this sustainable network of trails by spot-lighting Iowa’s cultural values for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.”

The group’s next task is to produce an interesting compilation of the photos and interviews they made.

West Virginia’s New Trail Brochures

The West Virginia Trails Coalition has published two brochures that feature the American Discovery Trail.

The “Hike, Walk, Run, Bike Across West Virginia” brochure shows two trails that bisect the state, the north-south Allegheny Trail and the east-west American Discovery Trail. The brochure shows the trail routes schematically crossing the state, and picks out 25 highlights of the trails.

Highlights along the ADT include the North Bend Rail Trail, an 81-mile trail featuring ten historic tunnels and many interesting small towns. Another highlight it notes is Canaan Valley, home to the large freshwater swamp bog area in the eastern United States, an area often called a “piece of Canada gone astray” due to the unique species that call the valley home.

These are but two examples that show why the ADT is so special, and are echoed in the second brochure, “Bike Across America,” which focuses on the ADT.

The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health sponsored the project and will use the brochures as a major promotional piece in their efforts to get West Virginians to become more physically active. The brochure notes that “West Virginia ranks third in the nation for the highest percentage of adults who report having no leisure-time physical activities.” The public health bureau will distribute the brochures through doctors’ offices and health agencies.

For information on the brochures, contact the West Virginia Trails Coalition, P.O. Box 487, Nitro, WV 25143.

Documenting the ADT Part One of Three Articles

By Harry Cyphers and Reese Lukei

The American Hiking Society (AHS) and Backpacker magazine began planning the American Discovery Trail in 1989. Proponents envisioned creating the first continuous multi-use link extending across the United States from one coast to the other. This innovative idea would thread together cities and wildernesses, deserts and forests, people and communities. From the beginning, the idea was first and foremost to make the trail accessible to people, so it passes through metropolitan areas and incorporates many existing urban and rural trails—not only for hiking, but also for bicycles and horses where local trails have been designed for such use.

This goal was bolstered by the findings of the 1988 report of the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors, “Trails for all Americans.” This report called for creation of a vast network of hiking and jogging trails, bikeways, and bridle paths. The commission envisioned a nationwide system of trails that would “tie this country together with threads of green,” linking communities and providing access to the natural world.

More recent justification is the recommendation that natural corridors be established to ensure biological diversity. One of the major objectives of the American Discovery Trail (ADT) was realized in June 2000 when the ADT was designated as a National Millennium Trail to symbolize the scope and breadth of this decade long effort.

Describing a Multi-use 6300-mile Trail

Implementing and describing a trail that encompasses many different sociological, political, and natural environments is a tremendous challenge. The customers, if you will, range from the young child trying out a new bike on an asphalt rail trail in Washington, D.C., to the seasoned outdoors person spending a few days or a month in the backcountry of Colorado. The ADT seeks to provide clear directions for locating and discovering the wonders along this cross-section of America.

Evolution of the Trail Descriptions

Members of the American Hiking Society working closely with government officials and local trail experts selected the ADT route. In 1990/91 a scouting team traveled from west to east documenting as best they could, mainly in handwritten form, the proposed route. These notes, later edited and typewritten by National Coordinator, Reese Lukei, and his wife, Melinda, were the first written documentation of the trail route.

In 1996 the American Discovery Trail Society (ADTS) was formed as a separate entity from the American Hiking Society and trail documentation began in earnest. The decision was made to initially document the trail from east to west since it followed many of the early colonists' westward migration routes.

A descriptive, detailed step-by-step format similar to that used for the Appalachian Trail (AT) was chosen. The format was modified to account for the fact that the ADT passes through both wilderness and urban areas using streets, low-volume roads, rail trails and canal towpaths in its quest to expose the traveler to the historic and scenic towns, cities, and natural wonders along its route.

In 1993, Trails Illustrated, makers of top-notch trail guides and maps, began a series of nine maps that would cover the entire ADT route. These maps were intended to complement the detailed trail descriptions being concurrently written.

In 1997 a high school student, Phil Gentry, volunteered to develop an ADT website. As statewide descriptions were developed they were placed on the website.

During this process two facts were becoming clear to the documentation team and the mapmaker, Trails Illustrated, now a division of National Geographic. With the number of changes being made to the still evolving trail, the maps being developed with the ADT overlay on them could not easily be kept current. This is a constant problem with many long-distance trails with ambitious goals. These inevitable and desirable changes to the route were rendering the maps out of date in as little as a year.

The second major development, a technological one, was the application of digital image processing to land mapping. The U.S. government has just completed a program to put detailed maps of the entire country on compact disks. Concurrent with this effort, private industry is developing tools to make this technology available to recreational travelers. Currently there are high-quality, high-resolution topographic maps of the ADT route through two states, California and Colorado. More on this capability later.

In 1999, the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, a charitable foundation managed by Robert and Dee Leggett, awarded the ADTS a grant to upgrade its website. This grant provided the impetus to complete the trail documentation effort for the 2001 Decennial Celebration of the ADT.

This series of articles will describe this effort. Part two will describe the efforts that led to trail descriptions being posted on the ADT website, and part three will look to the future.

Harry Cyphers is the ADT Maryland State Coordinator and chairs the board of directors' website committee. Reese Lukei is ADT National Coordinator.

Combined Giving—to the ADT

Workplace givers should remember the ADT when making donations through the United Way or the Combined Federal Campaign. Giving is easy if you remember that the number for the American Discovery Trail Society is #2350, under Conservation and Preservation Charities.

Tahoe Rim Trail

The grand opening of the Tahoe Rim Trail was marked with festivities on Sept. 22 with keynote speaker Sen. Harry Reid.

The 150-mile trail encircles that lake the Mark Twain called the most beautiful place on earth. It has been under construction for 20 years by an army of 10,000 volunteers. It passes through three national forests and three wilderness areas, and overlaps 43 miles with the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.

The American Discovery Trail follows the Tahoe Rim Trail around the northern end of the lake, moving with it from California and Nevada (or vice versa).

Information on the trail can be found at www.tahoerimtrail.org

Landowner Slows Maryland Trail

The Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis (WB&A) Recreational Trail is a key link in the ADT. It will ultimately provide a completely off-road trail connecting these three major cities. A link connecting Baltimore and Annapolis is already in use.

The WB&A is also unique in that it is the juncture of two National Millennium Trails, the ADT and the East Coast Greenway, which goes from Maine to Florida.

A landowner is contesting the ownership of a key piece of the abandoned Baltimore-Washington rail line adjacent to the Patuxent River. The contest will go to court to resolve the ownership issue. Funds for trail design and construction have probably been diverted for at least a year. An interim ADT route is in use pending completion of this trail.

The View from the ADT in Kansas

This spring John P. Molineaux cycled westward from Cape Henlopen, Delaware. He followed the ADT as closely as possible to Colorado. Here are a few of his observations about the trail in Kansas.

A phenomenon in Kansas is the easy way you gain altitude. From 729 feet in Kansas City, on July 2, I gradually rose to 3310 feet ten days later, entering Colorado. From day to day, it seemed like steady rolling hills, but in reality, the hills were just surface imperfections on a huge sloping tableland 600 miles wide.

I saw some neat places in Kansas. At Larned, there was the Trails Center, a museum of the Santa Fe Trail, that traces the conditions along the route from Indian migrations, through Spanish traders and their subsequent American comrades, through the arrival of the railroads that superseded the wagon trains, right up to today. Outdoors, there were great reconstructions of various dwellings of the plains, including a dugout house and a sod house, both furnished in keeping with their times.

Kansas weather is different from anything I'm used to. Outside a town, where trees and buildings muddle things, the wind blows steadily at 10 to 20 mph, mostly out of the South. At that speed, it never seems to be silent: you're constantly hearing the rush of it past your ears, and around everything near you. When the direction veers a bit to the east, the biker gets a boost, the other way, and it's sweating time.

In Memoriam: Lu Schrader

The ADT and trails in general lost a true friend with the unexpected death of Lu Schrader in early

November.

Lu was involved with the ADT from its inception. He chaired the original committee that planned the route through West Virginia and continued as the state coordinator.

Contributions in his memory can be made to the Lu Schrader Memorial Trust Fund of the West Virginia Trails Foundation, c/o West Virginia Trails Coalition, P.O. Box 487, Nitro, WV 25143.