



Discover America

Newsletter of the American Discovery Trail Society

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ADT Featured Trail: Western States Trail



A horseman tackles a steep, rocky section of the Western States Trail.

Photo courtesy of Hughes Photography

Horace Greeley famously said, "Go west, young man," and people did, in droves. The American West has long held an allure to those seeking adventure, fortune, or a new way of life. But these rewards do not always come easily. The Western States Trail (WST) reflects this history in its 100-mile steep, mountainous route from Lake Tahoe to Auburn, Calif. Today the trail offers many of the same challenges but different rewards from those that earlier travelers sought. The American Discovery Trail follows the WST for most of its distance.

The Western States Trail was first established by emigrants to California during the great Gold Rush in the mid-1800s. Wanting a way over the rugged Sierra Nevada to what they hoped would be their ticket to the good life, the forty-niners used a route blazed by Paiute and Washoe Indians. Later, prospectors from the gold diggings in California needed a way

to reach the silver lodes of Nevada. Although it offered the most direct route over the Sierra Nevada, the Western States Trail certainly wasn't the easiest. Its narrow gorges and rocky terrain take its traveler on a roller coaster of ups and downs as it climbs nearly 18,000 vertical feet and descends 23,000 feet. Temperatures in the mountains and canyons can range between freezing and snowy to greater than 100 degrees within the same day.

Today, rather than gold or silver, the rewards are in the trail itself. Scenic and historic treasures await the trail user. The WST passes through the Granite Chief Wilderness Area at the headwaters of the American River, with its pale cliffs and glaciated valleys, along with

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How Tough are You?

As if the Western States Trail weren't enough of a challenge by itself, horseback riders and runners have raised the bar. In 1955, Wendell T. Robie, an Auburn businessman and founder of the Western States Trail Foundation, organized the first Western States Trail Ride, an endurance horse race that covers the 100-mile distance in a single day. At the time, people didn't believe it would be possible for a modern-day horse and rider to cover the rugged trail, but Robie and a few others proved them wrong.

The event, now commonly called the Tevis Cup Ride, has been held annually ever since and attracts people from around the world. Each summer more than 200 riders compete for the chance to earn the coveted silver Completion Award Buckle given to everyone who finishes in less than 24 hours on a mount that is judged "fit to continue." Race participants who completed the whole trail have ranged in age from 11 to 79. The oldest finisher was Wendell Robie himself, in 1974.

The WST Foundation (www.foothill.net/tevis) helps to preserve and maintain the trail as well as organize the race. The Tevis Cup Ride has spawned other endurance riding events in other areas.

And the Tevis ride's inspiration reaches beyond other riding events. In 1973, Gordy Ansleigh was attempting to complete his third trail ride when his horse became lame after 29 miles. Ansleigh decided to finish the course on foot, coming in just under 24 hours. The following year Ansleigh returned without a horse and the idea for the Western States Endurance Run was born.

In 1977, 14 runners signed up for the first official WSER, but only one was able to complete it in under 24 hours. As the number of runners increased to 63 in 1978, the WSER was held on a separate date from the trail ride.

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Sign in Sheridan, Colorado

Photo courtesy of Harv Hisgen



Sign in Elizabethtown, Ohio

Photo courtesy of Harv Hisgen

ADT Confluence Signs

By Harv Hisgen

The American Discovery Trail Society has marked the spots where the northern and southern routes of the ADT meet in Elizabethtown, Ohio, and Sheridan, Colo., with 2-foot by 4-foot cedar signs. Elizabethtown is a small community west of Cincinnati on the Ohio–Indiana border and Sheridan is a community just south of Denver on the South Platte River and Bear Creek greenways. Like trees on America’s Great Plains, you can’t miss these signs.

The placement and continuing care of

these large signs came about as the result of the efforts of local citizens.

The Elizabethtown sign (“A Gift from the People of Denver”) was made in Golden, Colo., and transported to Ohio by a Lakewood, Colo., hot tub dealer. Local folks installed the sign and planted flowers at its base. Paul Daniel, who was the ADT Ohio State Coordinator at that time, arranged for the installation, a dedication ceremony, and continued care of the marker.

The sister sign in Sheridan (“A Gift from the People of Cincinnati”) was recently erected by the folks in Sheridan and the South Suburban Parks and Recreation

District and is cared for by locals.

If you look carefully at the pictures, you will notice the Elizabethtown sign has ADT logos pointing left down the street where the southern route physically traverses. The picture was taken standing on the northern route.

The Sheridan sign is seven feet from the confluence, where ADT hikers cross the Bear Creek bridge over the South Platte to head west into Colorado’s high country (exactly in line with the bridge). The bike path to the right of the sign is the South Platte Greenway trail, which the ADT follows toward the Rocky Mountains.

Trail Magic

By Harv Hisgen

American Discovery Trail trail magic stories abound and we are sure they occur with fair regularity because Americans are wonderful people. If you read the website logs of our current thru-hikers, you will find many stories of wonderful people willing to help others.

For example, Robin Grapa and her mother, Patti Laatsch, found help this spring from the Kansas Highway Patrol near Ottawa. During the day a number of state patrol officers checked on them to make sure they were all right. They were

stopped for walking on a non-pedestrian bridge and shown an alternate route that bicycles or hikers can use.

Back in 1998, when Bill and Laurie Foot were on their thru-hike/bike of the ADT, in Georgetown, Colo., a shop owner ferried their gear up to Guanella Pass (one of the ADT crossings of the Continental Divide). They had just spent a restful night in a Georgetown motel in this beautiful, mountain community just off I-70. They were beginning to tackle the Colorado high country, and what was then the highest point on the ADT, Whale Peak, so the lighter load on the climb was a real help. The deed done by this person took some unselfish time and effort.

In the last week of May of this year, Dave, an ADT segment hiker, showed up at the door of the Ashley House B&B (which is on an ADT bike alternate) near Evergreen, Colo. He was riding a bike borrowed from a person in Georgetown. The bike was loaned to him (a stranger) by someone in Georgetown, so that he could get back to Denver after his prearranged ride did not show up in Georgetown.

These are but a few of the many random acts of kindness that often don’t make the headlines but do tremendously help our fellow travelers. We applaud the American spirit and those along the ADT willing to help others.

Power-ful Mailing Tips

By Ken and Marcia Powers

It is common for long-distance hikers to use mail drops. They mail boxes of supplies to post offices along the trail ahead of them. The boxes are addressed to "General Delivery" with a note – "Hold for" with their name and estimated time of arrival. Ken and Marcia Powers, who completed the first thru-hike of the ADT in 2005, have compiled a list of some mailing tips for long-distance trekkers. Many of these tips, along with additional information about planning an ADT thru-hike, can be found on their website, www.Trailjournals.com/GottaWalkADT. In the article below, they share some of the tips they have compiled in their extensive hiking experience.

We recommend mailing a letter to every place you plan to mail re-supply boxes. When you send the letter explain what you are doing and enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope for their reply. Ask:

- their hours (including Saturdays),
- how long they will hold your box,
- do they accept a credit card
- do they accept a debit card and give cash back

-to verify their phone number and street address

-will they deliver boxes after posted hours if postal employees are still sorting mail

After determining your re-supply points, carry a list of them complete with street address (so you can find it), zip code (so you can mail to it), and phone number (so you can call if you have problems).

We found that some small post offices don't have the room to store boxes for extended periods. A few post offices cannot accept debit or credit cards. Most post offices were helpful, and many were even watching for us (maybe we had too many boxes waiting for pick-up).

Many times a Contract Post Office (CPO) in a general store is on the trail in a small town and is much easier to use than the U.S. Post Office in a larger city. Many CPO's and some small post offices will give you your re-supply box outside their formal post office hours, but don't expect any other services.

You can use your debit card at the post office and get cash back. Most post offices will give you up to \$50 back on the purchase of a stamp if they have the available cash. If you hit the post office early in the morning you have a higher risk of them not having enough cash.

Many hikers use a "bounce box" to keep items they may need infrequently but don't want to carry. (An example might be a charger for a camera battery. You don't need to carry it on the trail, but you use it in towns along the way.) If you mail the bounce box priority mail and do not open it, you can forward it to yourself at a future post office without having to pay postage again. (The only post office where we had a problem with that was in Crested Butte, Colo., where a postal clerk interpreted the regulation differently from any other clerk we encountered.)

Another consideration about bounce boxes is to be sure that you can send mail out of any location where you mail your bounce box. Mailing your bounce box to a motel or UPS-only site will not work for mailing it on. You may end up carrying all the stuff you put in your bounce box to the next post office.

We found it effective to order replacement gear online or by phone and have it mailed to one of our mail drops. One thing to watch for is that the post office will not accept UPS or FedEx deliveries. You need to specify U.S. Postal Service priority mail. And it is worth checking that they got it right at the end of the transaction. REI, Campmor, and Zappos (shoes) are places where we have ordered gear while on the trail.

If you would like to send something to someone out hiking the trail, we recommend mailing two weeks before the planned arrival date. Add time to this two weeks if you live far from the trail. This will allow ample shipping time as well as a few buffer days in the schedule. Some places don't like to hold mail for longer than necessary.

If you are mailing more than two weeks in advance to a place of business other than a post office, we would confirm it with the receiver first. Space at these places is often limited.

It's also a good idea to let the hiker know ahead of time what you sent: a letter or package. Often the letters and packages are not in the same place. If the hiker isn't expecting it and doesn't ask for it, the item may get overlooked.

ADTS Website

Did you know that the American Discovery Trail Society's website registered 18,571 visits during the month of July and 437,060 hits for that month?

It is filled with information such as: a detailed description of the trail; journals of past hikers, bikers, and horseriders; the current newsletter in color plus archives of past newsletters; the status of the proposed legislation to add discovery trails to the National Trails System and ways you can help; ADT maps, books, and merchandise; links to parks and trails; and an on-line form to join the ADT Society.

No wonder so many people are checking us out!

Correction

The Summer 2006 issue attributed the trail work on the Scioto Trail to the South Western Ohio Trails Association. The work was actually done by the Buckeye Trail Association trail crew.

***Making Connections...
Coast to Coast***

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Looking into the Granite Chief Wilderness on the Western States Trail

Western States Trail

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rich deciduous and evergreen forests, offer up an earthy richness in smells and sights. Much like newcomers to New York City staring at the skyscrapers, trail users often find themselves craning their necks to take in the giant pine, cedar, and fir trees along the route.

And, for a trail within a trail, 14 miles of the Western States Trail is really the Michigan Bluff – Last Chance Trail. This trail, built in 1850, was used by gold miners in Michigan Bluff to reach their claims in what are now the ghost towns of Deadwood and Last Chance. It was a big shortcut over the previous route.

The man who built it charged 25 cents per person, creating perhaps the first toll trail and probably one of very few toll trails in the country. Several tons of gold, worth millions of dollars, were packed out by the mule trains that once plodded this course. Some of the old stone cribbing on the trail is still intact, as are remnants of the abandoned mining towns and their cemeteries.

Before leaving the WST, travelers approaching Auburn get to cross No Hands Bridge, a gracefully arched, concrete former railroad bridge built in

1912 that is now open to hikers and bikers.

Rich in variety, from temperature, elevation, wildlife, plants, and human usage, the WST still offers those with a pioneering spirit an adventure to remember.

How Tough Are You?

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Today the race is one of the premier ultra-marathons in the world and the number of runners is roughly limited to 369.

ADT California Coordinator John Fazel has completed the race five times, and earned one silver buckle for finishing within 24 hours.

Although the uses and users of the Western States Trail may have changed, with the exception of a few miles of paved or dirt roads, much of the trail itself is the same as it was in the 1800s.



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This crew of Frank Mattingly, Gail Kuhns, Vic McCallister, and Norm Goethals posted American Discovery Trail trailhead signs along the Cardinal Greenway in Indiana. Signs along local trails help long-distance users follow the ADT and help local users recognize that their trail is connected to the rest of the country.

INDOT Awards Grant to Restore Historic Bridge

The Indiana Department of Transportation announced in June that it had awarded \$673,600 to finance the rehabilitation and restoration of an historic bridge across Laughery Creek. The bridge connects Dearborn and Ohio counties along the ADT route in southern Indiana. The Laughery Creek Bridge is a 300-foot, single-span through truss constructed as a replacement for an 1868 Howe Truss, which fell into the creek in 1878. Within six months of the collapse, the new bridge was constructed on the old stone abutments. The historic bridge was in poor repair and in danger of collapse. In 1994, it was placed on the list of the ten most endangered historic structures in Indiana. Local officials plan to rededicate the bridge on Dec. 10, 2007, the 130th anniversary of the bridge's original opening.

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