

Discover America

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Documenting the ADT

Part Two of Three Articles

By Harry Cyphers and Reese Lukei

With the formation of the American Discovery Trail Society (ADTS) in April 1996 work documenting the trail began in earnest. It should be noted at the outset that the ADTS does not build trails. It primarily endeavors to connect existing trail systems. Where none exist the hope is that presenting a broader vision of the potential of local trail systems will provide the impetus to local entities to build the necessary connections. This task is far different from constructing a trail; motivating people and organizations to think in terms of making connections between existing trail systems is a mentally challenging effort. The reward is achievement of a recreational system that is more convenient, attractive, and interesting to a much wider range of people.

Working from this premise the critical task was one of developing a national network of local trail enthusiasts, infusing them with the ADT vision, and through their combined efforts realizing the goal of a nationwide "Trail for All Americans."

Under the leadership of the National Coordinator, Reese Lukei, the 15 volunteer state coordinators representing each of the states the ADT traverses approached the documentation effort systematically. Starting with the west-to-east version and the marked up maps provided by the 1990/91 scouting team, each state began the effort of documenting the route in reverse, that is, east to west. The route within a state was broken into several segments delineated by natural features such as rivers, political features such as towns or cities, and manmade structures such as canals and rail trails.

The segments were assigned to a team of local trail advocates under the guidance of the state coordinator who worked in conjunction with the local government officials. Missing links were adopted by local trail activists and work began to make them part of the larger system, namely, the American Discovery Trail.

These local segment teams were the key building blocks in the trail description process. Because the ADT links many trails together the documentation effort was facilitated in several areas by the availability of existing descriptions. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Maryland and the KATY Trail in Missouri are two examples. However, the integration of the new and existing trail descriptions into an accurate, continuous whole was a Herculean task for a volunteer organization.

In 1999, the ADTS received a grant from the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship to upgrade its website. Until then, the documentation effort had been hampered by the logistical difficulties of tabulating, reproducing, and disseminating for review many pages of text, first to team members within a state and then to the ADT Trail Committee. With the availability of a website contractor, the Society soon realized that a website provided the most practical approach to viewing, commenting on, and documenting changes in the detailed trail descriptions. The website version became the most manageable, easily changed, and up-to-date description of this 6800-mile trail.

By 1999 about one half of the states, primarily in the east, had been documented in a descriptive, step-by-step format similar to that used for the Appalachian Trail. Bill and Laurie Foot, in the meantime, completed a bike/hike, with the emphasis on bike, of the entire ADT Trail. During their trip Bill and Laurie provided armchair travelers with a daily journal of their trip. This journal is currently available on the website. These

journals are recommended reading for any one contemplating traveling a considerable distance on the ADT.

In addition, Bill Foot, now deceased, consolidated his detailed pre-trip planning notes, which he field-checked during their trip, into a "data book" that he envisioned being used as a planning tool for persons anticipating hiking or biking the ADT. This "data book" is perhaps best described as a detailed bicycle cue sheet with a listing of the series of sequential maps required. The data book was done using a computer spreadsheet.

The website update effort was at a point where the data book format could be easily adapted to serve as trail descriptions for the Midwestern states. This more abbreviated trail description format is particularly appropriate for these states, where long stretches of the trail are on rail trails, canal towpaths, and rural roads. These descriptions will remain as a key part of Bill Foot's legacy to the Society. The mountainous states of Colorado and California have been documented in the modified Appalachian Trail format.

The Final Product

By August 2001, the entire ADT had been documented. It can be viewed on the ADTS website at www.discoverytrail.org. This is the culmination of a decade-long effort to make available to all Americans, in a healthful, interesting, family-oriented way, some of the wonders of this great country.

The ADTS website is designed to acquaint viewers with the scope and some of the highlights of the ADT while orienting them to the trail with respect to their locale. For persons contemplating traveling some distance on the trail it is recommended that the travel packets, available on a statewide or regional basis, be purchased at a nominal fee from the Society. These packets, constantly being updated with new information, contain, in addition to clear compact trail descriptions, listings of facilities and accommodations along the trail, notices about upcoming events and trail changes, directions for obtaining maps, and other items.

A subsequent article will discuss how the ADTS is planning to further enhance the trail documentation system and use modern technology to make the ADT even more accessible, safe, educational, and interesting to the public.

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

ADT Bill Gets Hearing

The legislation to officially add the American Discovery Trail to the National Trails System received a hearing in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 16.

The Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands listened to testimony on H.R. 36, the National Discovery Trails Act.

A companion bill passed the Senate last year, so House action could move the bill to President Bush's desk later this year. The House bill is spearheaded by Rep. Douglas Bereuter (R-Neb.) and has 39 co-sponsors.

The bill would amend the National Trails System Act to create a new category of trails, National Discovery Trails, and designate the ADT as the first of these trails.

ADT National Coordinator Reese Lukei Jr. testified before the committee: "One of the major accomplishments of the American Discovery Trail has been to provide an incentive to citizens and local leaders across our nation to become involved in creating and maintaining trails in their communities. The mayor of Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, Richard Bratton, made these comments to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee at the hearing on the ADT legislation. 'The ADT provides a unique and important connection between urban and backcountry trail systems. The ADT has helped us realize a non-motorized link between the second largest city in Colorado, Colorado Springs, and the mountain communities that surround Pikes Peak. The concept of the ADT has been instrumental in assisting us in our local fund raising efforts, supporting grant requests, and capturing the interest of state, county, and local

elected officials. The American Discovery Trail is key to our success.”

Lukei continued: “The 160-mile River to River Trail in southern Illinois is another prime example of the incentive the ADT has provided. In 1991 when the ADT scouting team passed through Illinois, the River to River Trail was not much more than a line on a map, and not even that in some places. Today the entire trail is in place, marked, mapped, guidebook written, and has a 1,000 member organization supporting it. In 1997, Backpacker Magazine named it the best trail in Illinois.

“The ADT is producing economic benefits for the communities along its route. In 1999, Muncie, Indiana, hosted the American Volkssport Association convention with 1,800 attendees. The reason Muncie was selected is because of the Cardinal Greenway, which at its dedication in August 1999 was described as Muncie’s ‘new main street.’ The Cardinal Greenway is a vital link in the ADT.”

When the U.S. Senate passed its companion bill, that bill’s sponsor, Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska), said: “This is an historic piece of legislation. By combining volunteer efforts with those of local and state governments, we have created a unique partnership, which ultimately will benefit the entire country. I am excited by this bill and I believe it will set a precedent for future trails across America.”

Senior Thru-Hikers

Joyce and Peter Cottrell, senior citizens from Whitefield, N.H., started a thru-hike of the ADT at the Atlantic Ocean on March 5. By March 14 that they were in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. Since leaving D.C., their major problem has been too much water in the form of rain causing muddy trail conditions in Ohio and Indiana. They even had to take a long detour to get around one flooded creek. By mid-May they had hiked over 1000 miles and were west of Madison, Ind., in good spirits and reporting they were meeting great folks along the way.

Another long-distance hiker this season is 77-year-old Dick Gilbertson, hiking from Indiana to Denver.

New Nebraska Coordinator

Gary L. Gebhard is the new ADT state coordinator for Nebraska. A native of Lincoln and a life-long bicyclist, he helped select the ADT route through eastern Nebraska. He works as an architect for Leo A. Daly Co. in Omaha.

Gary says he started riding a bicycle to deliver newspapers, and a bicycle took him to college and to work for the next nine years. When he moved to Omaha to pursue his architecture career, he found a city in need of facilities that allowed for non-motorized transportation options. So he joined the Omaha Pedalers and helped plan bicycle tours in the area. His ability to draw maps landed him the job of map maker for the Bike Ride Across Nebraska for the next 11 years.

He formed a local trails group called the Eastern Nebraska Trails Network in 1992, an organization that has helped raise trail funds and get several local bridges saved for trail use. The shortest of these is 170 feet long and the longest opened recently thanks in part to his efforts: Last year he helped the Nebraska Trails Foundation obtain a \$200,000 donation from the Lied Foundation to save the bridge at Southbend where the ADT crosses the Platte River. The Lied Platte River Bridge was dedicated on National Trails Day.

He has served on the Nebraska Department of Roads’ Committee for Prioritization of Trail Projects for the past 10 years, where he has reviewed hundreds of trail projects all across the state.

Gary says: “Most recently I spoke publicly at the Omaha City Council to encourage their participation in the building of a pedestrian bridge over the Missouri River from Omaha to Council Bluffs, Iowa. In general I have worked to promote trails on a behind the scenes level by helping public officials to see opportunities to add trail facilities whenever practical.”

A Work in Progress

A Message from the ADTS President

The American Discovery Trail is a living thing, a work constantly in progress. Our state coordinators are working with trail groups in their areas to provide more scenic and remote relocations for the ADT user. I'll list a few examples to give you an idea of what is happening in a state near you.

In Colorado, state coordinator Dick Bratton has divided his large state into subsections with assistant coordinators helping in each area. Relocations are being made throughout the state to take the trail off roads or to less traveled areas. In the process, the trail will be moved closer to cultural sites such as the Overland Trail Museum and incorporate local trails where possible.

In Kansas, Ron Ruoff has been busy working with members of the Kansas Horseman Foundation to promote the Flint Hills Nature Trail. The ADT will adjoin this 117-mile long trail that travels through tall grass prairie and woodlands when it is eventually completed. Approximately 15 miles of new trail will be opened this year.

Nebraska dedicated a new bridge over the Platte River on National Trails Day along the route of the ADT and the Mo-Pac East Trail. The ADT aligns with this trail for 33 miles. ADTS board treasurer Ross Greathouse and new Nebraska coordinator Gary Gebhard have worked with the Nebraska Trails Foundation, the Great Plains Trail Network, and the Eastern Nebraska Trails Network to obtain funding for this \$2.5 million bridge and connecting trails, another vital ADT link.

The American Discovery Trail stands alone in being our nation's only cross-country non-motorized trail. We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish in the few years we have been in existence. But we are always looking for ways to improve our trail. Thanks to the efforts of many, much is being done. More remains to be done. With your help, we can do it.

Laurel Ibbotson Foot, President

Flint Hills Nature Trail Opens

The first section of the Flint Hills Nature Trail near Council Grove, Kansas, was dedicated in April. The 3.5-mile section runs from Council Grove to the new Kaw Indian Nation memorial, which honors the 807 Kaw Nation tribal members of 1862. Festivities were held at the Kaw Agency ruins and included planting burr oak seedlings at the new park.

River to River Trail Guide Update

In southern Illinois, the River to River Trail Society is working on the third edition of its trail guide. This next edition will feature GPS waypoints and a step-by-step description of the ADT through southern Illinois. The project was partially funded through a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

The trail group's featured National Trails Day event is a big fish fry in the small town of Eddyville, "Trailriding Capital of Southern Illinois," with hikes and a GPS seminar taught by an expert from the U.S. Forest Service.

This fall, a bronze statue of Shawnee leader Tecumseh will be set along the Crest Trail, which is a link to the ADT.

ADT Marathon Planned for Ohio

A successful ADT Marathon was held in Colorado Springs, Colo., over Labor Day weekend last year, prompting ADT runner Brian Stark to suggest that other locations along the ADT might stage successful marathons.

A marathon, mini-marathon, and 5 k run are planned for Sept. 21, 2003, in the vicinity of Oxford, Ohio, and the ADT. To bring this about, the Oxford ADT Running Club has been formed. The club will soon

affiliate with the Road Runners Clubs of America to take advantages of their services in race planning and insurance. Ohio/Kentucky ADT Coordinator Paul Daniel will serve as treasurer of the group and interim race director. Rhonda Bohannon, assistant superintendent of the Talawanda Schools and a runner in many marathons, is president of the group.

The event will be part of Oxford's celebration of Ohio's bicentennial in 2003. It has the strong support of Oxford's Visitors and Convention Bureau. Oxford is a small city north of Cincinnati, home of the main campus of Miami University.