

# Discover America

Newsletter of the American Discovery Trail Society

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## Platte River Bridge Dedicated

National Trails Day is always packed with significant events, and this year one of the most important occurred in Nebraska with the dedication of the Lied Platte River Bridge.

Back in the 19th century, the railroad crossing of the Platte River was needed to connect Chicago and Denver, a key endeavor in the country's westward expansion. The famed Rock Island line opened a 2600-foot timber bridge across the wide Platte at South Bend, Nebraska, in 1893.

Trains crossed it for almost a century, until its abandonment in 1991.



Today the former railroad bridge remains a key transportation link. It is critical in making a trail connection between Omaha and Lincoln, with that 60-mile trail across the plains between those two cities expected to be completed in the next four years.

The \$2.5-million project of turning the bridge into a trail (including trail connections at each end) called for a broad coalition, and was a joint project of the Nebraska Trails Foundation, Lincoln's Great Plains Trail Network, Omaha's Eastern Nebraska Trails Network, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District. Two large private donors were the Lied Foundation and the Peter Kiewit Foundation.

Some 600 people attended the dedication.

That dedication was not even the only trail action in Lincoln that weekend—two trailheads along the MoPac (a rail-trail converted from a Missouri Pacific line) were also dedicated.

Lincoln is one of the most trail-friendly towns in the country, with more than 90 trail miles within the city limits, and 10 more miles added each year. Trails there are so popular that developers building homes and subdivisions actively seek to connect to the city's trail system because they realize that being next to a trail enhances real estate values.

## Volunteers of the Year

Each year the American Hiking Society conducts a nationwide search and presents a Volunteer of the Year award to one person in each state. Two ADT state coordinators won awards this year: Ross Greathouse of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Ron Ruoff of Olathe, Kansas.

Ross is one of the founders of the Nebraska Trails Council , a statewide alliance of runners, bicyclists, equestrians, birders, habitat groups, etc.

He was a founder of the Lincoln Track Club and chair of the Lincoln Marathon, held every May for the past 25 years. Ross has completed 21 marathons and at 64 years old can run 400 meters in 68 seconds (though it's been noted that he never mentions his age unless it's connected to a running time). He often trains by running the steps of the Nebraska stadium where the Cornhuskers play, leaving the college athletes wondering who "the old guy" is. (He denies taking part in any contact drills, though.)

He has completed 10 BRAN rides (Bicycle Ride Across Nebraska) and now is compiling a string of Tours de Nebraska, an annual biking circle of several hundred miles.

In his work for trails, he has also shown an ability to combine speed and distance. He has served as chair of the Mayor's Recreational Trails Committee and on Lincoln's Zoo, Park, and Trails Bond Issue Committee in the 1980s.

He helped found a Lincoln user group, the Great Plains Trails Network, and has served on its board since 1990. The GPTN is a political action committee, and as time went by the need became clear for a separate foundation to solicit funds that are tax-deductible for donors. So he helped found the Nebraska Trails Foundation. He served as its first president from 1989–95 and continues on its board of directors. He is proud of having helped raise \$1.7 million through this group. For information on some of this work, visit [www.gptn.org](http://www.gptn.org)

He says the only things better than trails are granddaughters, and those little footsteps coming down the trail are his reason for doing what he does!

Ron Ruoff was recognized for his Kansas trails work in 2001, which included organizing a Walk for Health for the tenth anniversary National Trails Day. The walk was in Shawnee Mission Park in Johnson County along a section of the ADT and it helped bring attention to the healthful benefits of trails. A tremendous success, the walk was publicized on local television and other media.

Ron is also active as a member of the board of directors of the ADT Society and of the Flint Hills Nature Trail. The first section of that trail opened in April, from Council Grove to the new Kaw Indian Nation Memorial. As part of that project, and as a commemoration of the Kaw tribal members, Ron spearheaded the planting of hundreds of burr oaks along the trail.

Ron says of his nomination for the award, "The fact that I have incredible taste in draperies was not mentioned." We can only guess whether he's hinting that his next goal could be a Christo-style project of draping the length of the ADT through Kansas, but we can at least be sure that the drapes would be tasteful.

### **Tahoe Rim Trail Receives Tourism Development Award**

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association received a Tourism Development Award from the state of Nevada.

The ADT follows the Tahoe Rim Trail on the California–Nevada border around the north rim of this spectacular lake's basin. Built and maintained by volunteers, the trail traverses two states, six counties, four national forests, state park land, and three wilderness areas. Open to equestrians, hikers, and in most areas, mountain bikers, thousands of people use the trail each week during the peak summer and fall months.

Designated a Millennium Legacy Trail, in 2002 and 2001 *Nevada Magazine* named it one of the "best places to hike in Nevada."

## **A Variety of Experiences**

### ***A Message from the ADTS President***

There are many ways to experience what the American Discovery Trail has to offer. A few people have chosen to hike or bicycle the entire distance between Delaware and California. More are doing sections of the trail at a time by either taking it on state-by-state or region-by-region (e.g., Cincinnati to Denver). The vast majority of users may step on the trail only in the area closest to where they live.

The ADT has something to offer all who take advantage of it. For the long distance user, the ADT offers a challenge and the adventure of a lifetime. It can take them to distant places and a wide variety of landscapes and experiences, and provide the physical conditioning that comes with constant exercise. For the section hikers, the ADT offers the goal of seeing our country personally and intimately in a way that can be experienced only under their own power and yet divided into parts small enough to fit their schedules and endurance.

For those who venture onto the ADT only in their own area, it still can open the mind and imagination by knowing that whatever trail they are standing on is connected across this vast country to different trails and to more than 10,000 cultural, scenic, and historic landmarks.

The American Discovery Trail is so much more than a physical entity. It is a gateway to learning, appreciating our natural resources, meeting new people, understanding the challenges that those who came before us faced, and recognizing new possibilities for ourselves.

I have received so much more than I have given to the ADT project. As I step down as president of the American Discovery Trail Society, it is with a sense of gratitude that this trail exists and that there are many who willingly volunteer their time and effort to make this trail a reality. I leave the ADT Society in good hands. Eric Seaborg, a member of the original scouting team for the ADT and author of a book about it, is assuming the role as president. I look forward to staying actively involved in this project that is so near and dear to my heart.

— Laurel Ibbotson Foot, President

## **Indiana State Coordinator Named to Advisory Board**

Indiana state coordinator Ron Craig has been named to the Indiana Trails Advisory Board. He reports progress in the two items below.

### **Cardinal Greenway Section**

A 10-mile section of the Cardinal Greenway trail from White River to Gaston, Indiana, opened on National Trails Day.

Host to the ADT through east-central Indiana, the Cardinal Greenway is the longest rail-trail project in the state. When completed, it will stretch 60 miles through five counties. To date, more than 30 miles have been constructed of 12-foot wide asphalt surface conducive to walking, running, biking, roller blading and cross-country skiing. An equestrian trail runs parallel to it in one 2.5-mile section, connecting trails of a nearby reservoir.

Several national and local events have been held on the Cardinal Greenway, including the 2002 Endurathon National Championship, Crop Walks, March of Dimes Walks, American Heart Walk, YMCA running and biking events, and other fund-raising events for nonprofit organizations.

For the ADT, the greenway provides a peaceful off-road route through Hoosier country.

For information and maps, call (765) 287-0399 or e-mail [droachcardinalgreenway@comcast.net](mailto:droachcardinalgreenway@comcast.net).

## Trail Grant in Indiana

The Cardinal Greenway has received a \$150,000 grant to acquire the right-of-way and develop a three-mile trail connector to the Sweetser Switch Trail. The ADT follows both trails but had to follow a road between them, so the link will be a key connection through this area.

The funding comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation National Recreational Trails Program.

## Thru-Hikers Update

ADT thru-hikers Joyce and Peter Cottrell of Whitefield, N.H., began their trek at the Atlantic Ocean on March 5 and reached mid-Missouri in mid-July. At that point, they were concerned that they would not get over the high passes in Colorado before snow and severe weather could set in, so they caught the bus to Grand Junction and headed west to east across the Colorado high country on July 19.

After crossing seven mountain passes over 10,000 feet, including 13,207-foot Argentine Pass, they reached Denver on August 21 and headed south along the Front Range. They reached Pueblo (where the southern branch of the ADT follows the Arkansas River across the plains) September 5, having covered more than 2,500 miles of trail.

They caught a bus back to Kansas City, and when last seen were headed west again. They intend to winter in the Denver area before completing their hike in 2003.

## News from Illinois

How many coast-to-coast hikers will the ADT see? Most likely, the most popular way to experience the trail will be a state or section at a time. A case in point: The River-to-River Trail was host this summer to the McDaniel family, who hiked end-to-end with children ages 16, 14, 13, and 11.

The River-to-River Trail has a new option at the eastern end that starts at the waterfront in Elizabethtown. Elizabethtown is expected to be a great trail town with places to stay and eat and unique sights.

The new trail came about thanks to the efforts of two equestrians, Sue Perina and Dave Flanders, who were named the American Hiking Society's volunteers of the year for Illinois.



## Cross-Country Bicyclist

Michael McCann is an avid bike commuter who teaches at-risk youth in a program affiliated with the public school system in Seattle, Washington. This spring Mike realized he had a whole summer free, so he decided to ride his bike to visit his brother in Washington, D.C.

Mike traveled from Seattle to Tekoa, Washington, on the Iron Horse and Milwaukee Corridor trails. Then he headed for Moab, Utah, on "various roads less traveled or the paved passage for bicyclists." From Moab to Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, he followed the American Discovery Trail corridor.

Mike left Tekoa June 26 and arrived at the Chesapeake Bay on August 19 for a reunion with his brother and parents.

Maryland state coordinator Harry Cyphers reports, “Mike is an articulate and observant traveler with a good sense of humor. He is currently compiling his copious daily notes. We plan to publish excerpts of his documentary in the near future. From our brief discussions with him, we are sure that after reading about some of his experiences, you will want to plan a trip on a portion of our wonderful trail systems.”

In the meantime, readers can share in the spirit of his trip, which benefited the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation of the United States, at his website, [mikelikebike.com](http://mikelikebike.com). A few excerpts follow:

**From Colorado:** “I climbed Schofield Pass yesterday...wow...very rocky, and very beautiful. I dilly-dallied so much in the meadows at the top, that I didn’t make it down to the city until well after dark. I tried to get a bed at the hostel, but it was full...and the closest campspot was about 10 miles away. The amazingly lovely and kind girl working the desk ended up calling a friend of hers who lives in town. Five minutes later I was on the doorstep of two more amazingly lovely and kind women who took very good care of me. This morning, they even bought my breakfast! I could stay here forever...but the trail calls.

“The never-ending kindness and generosity of the people I meet has quite possibly been the best facet of the trip.”

**From Nebraska:** “Tonight I’m spoiled with air conditioning and indoor plumbing...it’s like Christmas! Last night I slept next to an overpass and a sewage overflow puddle in lovely Lexington, Nebraska...but at least I was able to divert the sprinklers away from the tent. Tomorrow night I hope to upgrade to a drainage ditch.

“Funny thing about road kills...they don’t make the best conversational buddies. Funny thing about cows and horses...spend enough time in the sun and they make GREAT conversational buddies.

“I greatly look forward to gliding across the plains...getting every train to blow its whistle when it passes me...and pointing at everyone who drives past me, returning the same confused look they’re wearing as if to say, ‘Oh my god, you’re driving a CAR across this country?!?!?’”

### **Colorado ADT Marathon**

In its second year, a marathon on the ADT near Colorado Springs has already established itself as a premier running event.

It was designated as the Road Runners Club of America’s state championship marathon and *Trail Runner* magazine picked it as one of America’s top 20 trail marathons. It’s been accepted as a qualifying event for the Boston Marathon.

More than 250 marathoners came from 26 states as well as Austria, Canada, England, and Japan. A new event in which three runners split up the course attracted 45 relay team members.

The race day featured lots of sunshine, with the starting temperature about 60 degrees, and a noontime temperature around 80. The course begins near Palmer Lake and ends in Colorado Springs, generally following the path of the former Santa Fe railroad right-of-way. The altitude drops gradually along the trail starting at about 7300 feet and ending around 6040 feet near downtown Colorado Springs.

The course lies just east of the Rampart Range and offers views of the majestic United States Air Force Academy and fantastic glimpses of Pikes Peak and other nearby mountain scenery.

### **Conference on National Scenic and Historic Trails**

The Partnership for the National Trails System will hold the Eighth Conference on National Scenic and

Historic Trails October 17–21 in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The conference, to be hosted by the Trail of Tears Association and the Cherokee Nation, will feature workshops and field trips around the theme “Telling our Trails’ Stories—Educating the World about the National Trails System.” For information, contact Gary Werner at (608) 249-7870 or NATTRAILS@aol.com.

**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.