



MILLENNIUM TRAIL



FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

SUMMER & FALL 2003

Vol.6 No.19 & 20

Dear Trail Friends,

How quickly glorious summers in Michigan pass by. We hope that you all have had many opportunities to use the trail for your many healthy and enjoyable outdoor activities. Now it's autumn and October has to be a favorite time of year for many Michiganders.

TRAIL USE: This summer has brought the usual high numbers of Musketawa Trail users, the many bikers, roller bladers, equestrians, hikers, and bird watchers as well as a share of handicappers. We continue to meet new trail users from West Michigan as well as from other parts of our State and neighboring states as well. Have you seen Joel Mikkelson and some of his adults from the Life Skills Center on the trail with their new and special recumbent bikes. These bikes were purchased thru funds from DALMAC, allowing severely handicapped adults to enjoy the outdoors.

A recent letter from Doug in Traverse City mentions the trail and commends the excellent job done by trail volunteers. He appreciates the handsome brochure and the low cost membership—has been a member for two years. He and his wife enjoy riding rail-trails and purchasing trail logo shirts or iron on patches. I wrote Doug and remind our readers that we have colorful T-shirts, baseball caps, fanny packs, and a very nice polo shirt with our logo and at reasonable prices. Contact our secretary for information:

Don Scherenal, 5875 Beaver Creek Drive, Coopersville, MI 49404. Phone 616-837-8973

Another trail user writes that the west trail section was boring!!! I can hardly agree having ridden this section many times. It passes thru farmland, blueberry farms, has lots of trail side vegetation, small creeks and trestles, and a few wetlands, and two observation decks. Seasonal changes bring colorful blossoms and fall colors, with frequent sightings of wild game such as turkey, deer, geese, etc., etc. The scenery is certainly not spectacular but pleasant to the eyes of a perceptive observer. Some write about their preference for the east trail section although most report enjoying the whole trail. What do you think? Do you have a favorite trail section? Let us know, we would like to hear from you!!

We are getting more trail users from the East Muskegon side as they become more aware—also getting more members from this area. It will be great when the trail is extended thru the City of Muskegon onward to the Pere Marquette Park with it's nationally renowned beaches, channel, and pier on Lake Michigan. The added connection North across the Muskegon River, N. Muskegon, Whitehall, Montague, and the Hart-Montague Trail represent added challenges and enjoyment. The cities and townships along this route are working hard and are committed to making this happen.

NEW TRAIL MANAGER: Our only trail manger to date, Wes Lomax, is no longer responsible for the Ottawa County section of the trail. A new manager has been hired who we have not yet met. Wes still manages the west-Muskegon County section under a grant administered thru the West Michigan Snowmobile Council.

Now, administration and maintenance is divided along county lines. Ottawa County has a strong commitment to the trail and provides its many resources, doing a great job for which we really appreciate. Wes, now by contrast, has no none support from Muskegon County so is pretty much on his own in managing the west thirteen-mile section. We, as volunteers, are trying to give him as much support as we can. No doubt, you will miss Wes's presence on the Ottawa County stretch, but we're happy that he remains with us—has been a capable and committed trail overseer.

WETLAND OBSERVATION DECK: Have you stopped to enjoy the two new wetland observation decks just east and west of Ravenna? We're hoping for more rain to increase water levels that will attract more wading birds and other wetland animals species. These areas are especially lovely during the blossoming time of Spring and early Summer.

TRAIL PROJECTS-SIGNAGE: Three signage projects are in process and planned. The first is the four 3 x 5 foot Musketawa trail signs being made for installation at each of the four main trailheads—parking lots at Marne, Conklin, Ravenna, and East Muskegon. A \$1000 grant from the Michigan office of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and director Nancy Krupriaz is funding the signage as well as mounting platforms purposed. The signs are in process, delayed by staffing changes. Our plan was for installation this Fall, but Spring 2004 is more likely. These signs will be a nice addition and introduction to the trail.

Signage project #2 is to improve on trail safety and courtesy rules, reproducing them and installing them at various places along the trail. Trail safety is a major priority and courteous behavior not only improves our trail experience but contributes to safety as well.

The third project in the study stage is to place historical signs at significant locations on the trail, highlighting past railroad history or community sites of interest. The historical signage idea came during a recent ride on the **Ghost Town Trail** near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It is an interesting trail, with a crushed limestone base, traverses coal-mining country, two deserted coal communities and rock dumps, and travels along a mountain stream. Historical signs along the trail add to the experience and also has a very well preserved iron furnace dating to the Civil War—located near the mountain village of Vitondale.

On the same trip, we biked a short six-mile rail-trail in central Ohio near the village of Danville, the trail ending at the largest covered bridge (over 200 feet). Looking over the bridge sides, one views a branch of the Mohican River with a few fishermen along the banks and canoes gliding quietly by. A lovely site, the trail has a packed dirt base, with mountain bike tires desirable.

Do you have a favorite other trail? Write us a brief description so we can include it our newsletter.

As an added note, the recent Fall 2003 issue of **Rails-to-Trails** highlights our own area White Pine Trail from Grand Rapids to Cadillac. It is a well written article, with magnificent photography, characteristic of this magazine. It is an outstanding magazine with helpful information about rail-trails throughout the country with added information regarding trail issues and challenges. To subscribe write:

**RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY
1117 STREET N.W. 10TH FLOOR
WASHINGTON D.C. 20036
www.raltrails.org**

MISSING SIGN: Our nice sign at the Black Creek observation deck has disappeared. It recognized the Eagle Scout project by Tom Lambert of Fruitport for adding a lower deck at creek side to the upper observation deck attached to the trestle. We will replace the sign but they are costly and require added mounting time. Help us to preserve our trail signs and other trail amenities, paid for by your dues and donations, and the sweat equity and talents of our trail volunteers.

TRAIL PROJECTS-BELTING INSTALLATION: The construction grade belting installed across our wooden trestle decks needs replacing. We initially installed them to protect the wooden decks from gouging and splintering by snowmobile tread studs—they have worked and served this purpose well. But, after five years of usage they are tattered and frayed and need replacing. Thanks to Consumer's Energy in Muskegon, we have replacement belting that is wider and sturdier than that originally installed. Snowmobilers and others are needed to help Wes with the project—not an easy task, transport and install this heavy-duty material. I presume Wes will notify the new Ottawa County trail manager to do the same with the Ottawa County trestle decks. In addition to protecting the wooden decks, this belting also serves as a smooth pathway for roller bladers to cross the wooden trestles.

D.N.R. STUDY: In this regard, our last newsletter reported on a study to test the durability of various asphalt trail surfaces to snowmobile stud usage. This apparently was a preliminary study with a more substantial follow-up that will be conducted late this Fall or early Spring. Briefly, a four-mile stretch of the Pere Marquette Trail will be paved, one mile each with three different asphalt mixes as well as the standard mix. Wear patterns will be studied to determine which mix holds up best under heavy usage. Funding is provided by the Michigan Snowmobile Association, (MSA) from registration fees. Length of the study is uncertain. Perhaps results will benefit future trails, but hold little promise in dealing with our own existing damage problems.

Regarding this issue, we continue to get mail from trail users, mostly roller bladers, expressing concern over surface damage due to snowmobile stud use. A recent one was received from Frank & Carol Radosavich who came from Green Bay, Wisconsin, to ride the trail. They write: “ We skated the Musketawa Trail on two days of our vacation. It was beautiful with many people using the trail and the parking lots full. It is also a nice area. Our concern is that snowmobiles are driving down the center and chewing up, making it rough to skate on. A few more years, it will be unusable for skaters. “

Briefly in replay, this is a concern we have had over the past four to five years, with no apparent solution in sight. The research cited above may provide us with information for future use. This issue has been addressed many times at our board meetings. There is no support for change from the State and of course, the local and statewide snowmobile organizations are opposed to any trail restrictions. The MSA is a formidable group, has State representation, and economic support. Snowmobilers have contributed financial support to the Musketawa Trail and have had volunteer representation at nearly every trail project. By contrast, we see very little support or action by roller bladers most immediately effected by the surface damage. So, our hands are literally tied despite our concerns and wishes. It would be nice if snowmobilers were more trail and community use conscious, but frankly, they appear to be concerned primarily with their own trail accessibility, despite many alternate trails available throughout Michigan. (My opinion.)

TRAIL PROJECT-CABOOSE: We continue to explore the acquisition of available railroad caboose preferably or some other railroad car to place at the Ravenna trailhead for use as a trail office and historical attraction. Wes is scheduled to meet with the Ravenna Village officials to explore their views and possible cooperation. We as volunteers planned to purchase and install a section of railroad tracks and ties upon which any caboose would be placed. Several leads are being explored.

Brian Blaski, owner of the Hart-n-Hand, a very large and nice arts and crafts store in North Muskegon, has a railroad caboos, a boxcar, and another located behind and to the side of the store. He reports that it costs in the neighborhood of \$30,000 to purchase a caboos in good condition and \$30,000 to transport it to a given site. This one, he found in the back yard, out in the country, and near Kalamazoo. Hopefully, as a non-profit organization with continued searching, we might be able to obtain a railroad car more reasonably for our purpose. If you have any leads, be sure to contact Wes, or any of the board members sited below.

EQUESTRIAN USE: Wes reports more and more horsemen/women are using the trail. A letter from an equestrian, Norm Welib, expresses concern over harassment and derogatory comments they receive from bikers toward his riding group. He reports that they prefer riding on the non-paved trail shoulder and see the excitement of children at the sight horses on the trail. They recognize that horse droppings on the trail can be unsightly, but is difficult to provide pooper-scooper servicing. Should they clean up their own mess? We should all respect our fellow trail users, especially approaching horse with caution. Children or teens could be riding and from what I understand, horses can be “spooked” easily.

FALL ADOPT-A-TRAIL CLEAN-UP: I haven’t received word about this semi-annual trail clean-up that is expected of all adopt-a-trail members. Trailhead areas, especially those with parking lots, usually need added attention. The one-mile section recently adopted by the Muskegon County Teachers Credit Union deserves some notice, the west terminus of the trail and trailhead. This area shows signs of neglect and needs some cleanup work. Your president has planted dozens and dozens of trees-shrubs along this mile stretch and installed birdhouses. However, one person can’t do it all so lets get with it folks!

This section could also use some added beautification work in addition to our tree plantings. We plan to contact the Muskegon County garden club to possible get involved.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION: We happily report membership activity and contributions so far this year up to October 2003, are coming along well. We have had 104 membership renewals and new members. Of this number, 60 gave added donations ranging from \$5 (15 individuals) to \$100, (one donor). Seven donated \$10, 11 donated \$15, 13 donated \$20, 7 donated \$25, with single donations ranging thru \$40 and above. Your board sees this as strong support for the trail and for our volunteer non-profit organization. All funds, as you know, go toward trail projects, beautification, trail promotion, and your newsletter. We donate a lot of time, our tools, and our own transportation. So, we thank all of you for supporting your trail and we hope you will continue to do so. Our job is not finished and may well bear more responsibility with the limited State funds and their proposed reduction in trail involvement. Those who have not renewed can take advantage of the enclosed envelope.

WEBSITE ACTIVITY: Mark Fritsma, our computer website man, reports continued high growth in our trail website activity—generally doubling those figures obtained one year ago. May usage reflects 25,245 hits, 8,250 pages viewed, and 2,160 users. August reflects 28,530 hits and 10,082 pages viewed. September has 23,200 hits and 7,077 pages viewed. Have you seen our website? Look it over and tell us what you think or suggest any additions.

**FRIENDS MONTHLY MEETINGS
SCHEDULE FOR NEXT TWO MONTHS**

December 4, 2003, Thursday, 7:00 P.M.

January 8, 2004, Thursday, 7:00 PM

Ravenna Village Hall located at 12090 Crockery Creek Drive in Ravenna

You're all welcome to come join us-we appreciate your input and insights

Edward Holovka
President, Friends of the Musketawa Trail

FRIENDS OF THE MUSKETAWA TRAIL OFFICERS

Edward Holovka, President.....(231) 744-8133	Harold Drake, Director.....(231) 853-2338
Robert O'Brien, Vice President.....(616) 453-0897	Joel Mikkelson, Director.....(231-724-6090 (w)
Don Scherencel, Secretary.....(616) 837-8973	Oscar Reed, Director.....(231) 744-5731
Jim Schmidt, Treasurer.....(231) 733-2196	Mark Fritsma, Director.....(616) 897-2198
Wes Lomax, West-end Trail Manager..(231) 821-0553	Eldon Posey, Director.....(231-759-7929

WEBSITE: WWW.MUSKETAWATRIL.COM OR WWW.MUSKETAWATRIL.ORG

!!! FRIENDS OF THE MUSKETAWA TRAIL: 7 years & still working !!!

FINAL NOTES: As an added newsletter feature, we invite businesses and organizations supporting our trail to send us your business card which we will feature somewhere in our newsletter. Send to yours truly at the following address: 90 S. Buys Road, Muskegon, MI 49445 . Also, if you have an organization activity on the trail, please let us know. We like to hear from schools, churches, youth, sports, and outdoor groups that have special rides or activities on the trail—makes for interesting reading.

Also, thanks again to Christner & Farmer CPA PC for use of copy machine for newsletter and the guys & gals at the Life Skills Center in Muskegon for envelope stuffing.

Please feel free to send your comments regarding the trail, your experiences or interesting events to be included in our next newsletter. You may e-mail me at: D.HOLOVKA@ATT.NET or call me at the above phone number.

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Extending all the way to Big Rapids, Mich., Reed City marks one end of the 13-mile paved section of the White Pine Trail.

an older man on a fancy recumbent bike, an overall-clad cyclist wearing a black pith helmet, dog walkers, in-line skaters; and a disabled man and his mom in a two-seat tricycle.

The trail was sweet with lilac and honeysuckle, bright with marsh marigold and wild geranium. But I kept picturing it in fall—silky milkweed pods, red sumac, orange maple, brown oak, yellow poplar, green pine, white birch.

"I'd love to come back here to canoe this," Steve said, peering from the 319-foot trestle high above the swift Muskegon River.

We pedaled back to the campground, then cut to the north for a seven-mile ride to Reed City. The trail took us through alfalfa fields and on past Christmas tree farms, pine plantations and a tunnel of trees. In Reed City, the original railroad diamond marks the White Pine Trail's junction with the Pere Marquette.

SILVER LINING

One person who shares my nostalgia for old railroad towns is Jack Richards, the man Heyboer and Granse credit with helping them stay calm when the process of accessing public funds moves slowly.

The northern chapter vice-chair of Friends and a retired university dean, Richards takes the long view, perhaps because he's watched the old GR&I

White Pine Trail

change. "As a boy in Big Rapids, I remember seeing railway agents deliver freight," he says. "My wife, Diane, and I rode an excursion train to Mackinaw City. Now we're on the paved trail four or five times a week."

He also enjoys biking the 29 miles from Reed City to Cadillac, though only the final mile of that section is paved. Hard-packed cinders make the two-track easy to ride, he says. Ashton, Leroy and Tustin are the only settlements in that section of North Country. It's peaceful. The trail swoops under U.S. 131 and M 115, then curves into Cadillac to join city trails.

Richards has a positive view of the White Pine's latest challenge. He says, "I'm excited about the DNR ceasing to manage the White Pine. Whereas the DNR may put in requests for TEA-21 funds on behalf of 30 or 40 trails around the state, local communities have a vested interest. They can show more passion when they apply."

The northern Friends have stepped forward to install mile markers in unpaved areas and maintain the vault toilet at the Big Rapids depot. They're using personal garden tractors and leaf blowers to tend a non-city stretch. The towns of Big Rapids and Reed City are mowing their sections. Trail advocates also praise the support they've gotten from Congressman Vern Ehlers (R-Mich.), state legislators Doug Hart and Ken Sikkema and Speaker of the House Rick Johnson.

"This is a Band-Aid year," Richards explains. "Other places in the country manage by county, city or parish, yet the trail looks seamless to users. We certainly hope that will be true here."

Another White Pine supporter is Paul Yauk. When Yauk was manager of Michigan's state park rail-trails, he found DNR funds for the \$200,000 local match needed to pave the White Pine's final southern miles. The DNR will continue to own the trail but now, as a DNR Parks and Recreation program manager, Yauk is looking for

