



HISTORIC PRESERVATION & COMMUNITY IDENTITY

HOW DO TRAILS AND GREENWAYS PRESERVE OUR HISTORY AND CULTURE?

The migration and trading routes of Native Americans. The epic path drawn by Lewis and Clark. The dusty trails followed by the riders of the Pony Express. The northward treks made by African Americans escaping the bonds of slavery. These journeys all define the cultural identity of America — and they all happened on trails.

Trails and greenways provide a window into our history and culture by connecting people to the past. They often link and provide access to historic features, such as battlefields, bridges, buildings and canals. The preservation and highlighting of these places lets us learn about and understand the history of our nation and our communities. An embodiment of the idea of continuity, trails and greenways are an important part of preserving the past for future generations.

REMEMBERING HISTORIC EVENTS

Establishing protected trails and greenway corridors can aid in the preservation of historically significant locations and routes. Trails also provide an opportunity to physically experience places where historical events occurred. The desire to walk in the footsteps of our predecessors or stand in the exact place where a significant event occurred is a characteristically American need, indicative of a culture that values authenticity. With so much of America's history tied to natural or man-made corridors, trails and greenways often present a uniquely effective way to highlight that history.

- Under the orders of President Thomas Jefferson, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out in 1804 to find a transportation route between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean. The Katy Trail State Park in Missouri, a 185-mile rail-trail, follows part of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition path.
- In Mansfield, Massachusetts, thousands of troops on their way to various posts during World War II passed through Camp Miles Standish on the now-abandoned Old Colony Line railroad corridor. The corridor will soon be a trail memorializing those soldiers and their journey.

WHAT ARE TRAILS AND GREENWAYS?

Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features, and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas. Greenways can be publicly or privately owned, and some are the result of public/private partnerships. Trails are paths used for walking, bicycling, horseback riding and other forms of recreation or transportation. Some greenways include trails, while others do not. Some appeal to people, while others exist primarily as a habitat for wildlife. From the hills and plains of inland America to the beaches and barrier islands of the coast, greenways provide a vast network linking America's special places.



Americans celebrate Independence Day on the historic Minuteman Bikeway. (Photo: Steve Shanzian)



Equestrians enjoy the California countryside along the historic Bizz Johnson Trail. (Photo: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

- The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail serves as a memorial to thousands of Cherokee Indians forced from their homes and moved west to Oklahoma in the name of progress and protection for the United States. Thousands of American Indians died during this journey.
- Hundreds of people travel daily along the Minuteman Bikeway, a route used by British soldiers during the Revolutionary war and by Paul Revere during his historic ride to warn citizens that the British were about to attack.
- Annual wagon trains reenact nineteenth century travel along many historic trails in the Western United States, including the Cherokee Trail in Wyoming, where nine wagons, 44 horses and 52 people made a five-day, hundred-mile journey along the route.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO HISTORICAL PLACES

Trails provide walkable access to historical areas, allowing people to enjoy the outdoors while visiting historical and culturally rich places.

- Philadelphians use the Schuylkill River Trail to walk or bike to the Valley Forge National Historic Park, which served as the six-month encampment for the first Continental Army of the United States during the treacherous winter of 1777–78.
- Virginia's statewide Civil War site preservation initiative, begun in 1993, includes driving trails connecting historical sites, as well as bicycle and pedestrian facilities through historical town centers and state and national battlefield parks. More than 190 sites featured on the trails had never been interpreted prior to the initiative.

SAVING HISTORICAL TRANSPORTATION AND INDUSTRIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Trails and greenways preserve historical transportation corridors across the country. Until railroads reached the western-most states, anyone heading to Utah, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho used the Oregon Trail. The 2,000-mile trail marks the arduous route followed by thousands of pioneers. It is estimated that 1 in 10 people died while traveling this route.

For more than 100 years the railroad was the backbone of American travel and was integral to the development of countless communities. In the 1920s, the national rail system consisted of nearly 300,000 miles. Less than half of that remains today. Saving unused rail corridors and converting them to trails preserves a piece of our past. More than 10,000 miles of former rail lines have been preserved and converted to trails.

Transportation corridors such as canals and railroads are reminders of prosperity and progress. Approximately 5,000 miles of canals were built during the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States. Along with the railroads, they provided essential methods of transporting goods to and from towns during the industrial revolution. Today, people bicycle, walk or jog along many of these historical routes, experiencing the history of the corridors and the many industries that relied upon them for transportation.

- The Illinois and Michigan Canal links the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River, providing what was an extraordinarily valuable commercial route for Chicago and other towns and cities along the way. Visitors can now view the historical locks, museums and other buildings along the route.
- The C&O Canal takes visitors through the 3,118-foot Paw Paw Tunnel and past historical buildings, such as the Great Falls Tavern, originally built in the 1800s as the lock tender's house.
- In Pennsylvania, Oregon and California, unused highways have been converted into trails, including parts of the 55-mile Columbia River Highway in Oregon, most of which is designated as a National Historic Landmark.
- In a nod to the history of the railroad corridor, leaders in the development of the WB&A Trail received original 1917 railroad stock certificates from the Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Electric Railroad as gifts to reward their investment of leadership and effort on behalf of the trail.

“IF THE GREENWAY MOVEMENT CAN HELP US GET BACK A BIT OF HONEST NATURAL BEAUTY AND OUR HERITAGE OF HISTORIC PLACE, WE SHALL OWE IT MUCH.”

— CHARLES E. LITTLE,
AUTHOR OF *GREENWAYS FOR AMERICA*

In the process of preserving these historical transportation corridors, the feats of engineering and industrial advancements that characterized their development are preserved as well.

- The Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota is a National Civic Engineering Landmark. Once used by railroads to transport agricultural products, the 1883 bridge is an essential part of the Minneapolis recreational trail system used by bicyclists, pedestrians and trolley riders.
- In 1999, Sierra Club Volunteers and U.S. Forest Service employees dug out 30 beehive-shaped coke ovens along the Blackwater Canyon Rail-Trail in West Virginia. The ovens baked coal at high temperatures for shipment to Pittsburgh steel mills and other industrial sites at the beginning of the last century. Now equipped with interpretive signs, the ovens give trail users a glimpse of the state's long coal mining history.
- Featuring 58 trestles and an average grade of six percent, the Alamogordo and Sacramento Mountain Railway in New Mexico climbs 4,280 feet in a 26-mile route. Originally built to carry lumber out of the mountains, parts have now been transformed into stunning scenic multi-use trails.
- One of the most impressive engineering feats of the early 20th century is the 1.7-mile Taft Tunnel straddling the Montana-Idaho border, opened for trail use as part of the Route of the Hiawatha Trail in 2001.
- The first 22 miles of the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail are being mapped out along a railroad corridor once thought to be so technically infeasible it was known as Flagler's Folly. The corridor dates back to 1912, and many years and several hurricanes later, there is still much left to be preserved, leaving the potential for a truly unique trail.

ENHANCING CULTURAL AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Through recognition of the cultural, historical, and natural assets of places, trails and greenways can enhance a sense of community identity. By incorporating recreation, education and interaction into a single-user experience, trail and greenway systems bring a community to a level greater than the sum of its parts.

Many trails are planned, designed and constructed with this concept of community identity in mind, especially when the trail corridor is of special significance to a particular ethnic population.

- The 74-mile Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes, which opened in late 2002, traces a path through northeast Idaho's riches; from its mining history to its natural beauty to its roots as the homeland of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Tribe. A 15-mile segment at the western end of the trail crosses the tribe's reservation, and is managed by the tribe. Trailheads through the reservation are named in the Coeur d'Alene language, including one called "*hntsaqan*" — or "stopping place" — on the site where the Milwaukee Railroad system met Union Pacific tracks, and where young men boarded troop trains headed for duty in World War II.
- Along a four-mile trail converted from an abandoned North Dakota state highway, users pass reconstructed Plains Indian village earth lodges, enjoy vistas extending to the city of Bismarck and across Native American ancestral lands, and get information about Lakota leader Sitting Bull who helped defeat General George Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876.



The Prallsville Mills near Stockton, New Jersey are among many structures preserved along the 68-mile Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. (Photo: Wilma Frey)

- In the heart of Ohio's Amish Country, the Holmes County Trail has special significance to locals who value the corridor as a place where they can adhere to a tradition of non-motorized transportation without fear of accidents with automobiles. The trail system is also a key element of the area's marketing strategy to attract tourists to come experience a unique way of life.

In addition to the economic benefits of attracting tourism, many communities see trails and greenways as valuable tools in highlighting the assets that make a locale not just a good place to visit, but also a good place to live. Civic pride is a major factor in bolstering both actual and perceived quality of life, and trails can make this possible. Being conscious of the historical and cultural context in naming trails, designing signs and installing amenities only adds to these benefits.

- Acknowledging the role that author and radio host Garrison Keillor has played in creating pride and identity for his rural Minnesota homeland through his National Public Radio program, *A Prairie Home Companion*, Stearns County named its 28-mile rail-trail the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail after the name of the fictitious Minnesota town where the radio program is set. Keillor, a native of Stearns County, joined U.S. Representatives James Oberstar and Collin Peterson to inaugurate the trail in 1999.
- The city of Winston-Salem, North Carolina created the six-mile Bethabara Trail Greenway to attract visitors and to enhance the historical aspects of the Moravian village that marks the founding of the city.
- Fort Morgan, Colorado converted a highway bridge across the South Platte River to a pedestrian walkway and restored the bridge's unique antique light fixtures. The bridge is an integral part of the city's park system.

- Every year since 2000, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has selected 12 communities from across the country that provide "striking alternatives to Anyplace, U.S.A.," by virtue of the "enjoyable natural, historic, aesthetic, recreational and cultural experiences" they offer, including trails and greenways.¹ Inclusion on the list is a big honor, as well as an economic boost for the communities as they benefit from the publicity and resulting tourism.

RESOURCES

If you are interested in learning more about the connection between trails and greenways and historical preservation, contact the following organizations or your state's historical preservation officer (SHPO). A list of SHPOs can be found on the Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse Web site at www.trailsandgreenways.org.

National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036-2117
1-800-944-6847
www.nationaltrust.org

National Park Service — Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
(Mailing Address)
1849 C Street, NW, Org. Code 2220
Washington, DC 20240-0001
202-394-6900
www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/index.html

ENDNOTES

¹ "Dozen Distinctive Destinations," National Trust for Historic Preservation, http://www.nationaltrust.org/dozen_distinctive_destinations/index.asp, accessed August 6, 2003.



ABOUT THE CLEARINGHOUSE: A project of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, the Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse provides technical assistance, information resources and referrals to trail and greenway advocates and developers across the nation. Services are available to individuals, government agencies, communities, grassroots organizations and anyone else who is seeking to create or manage trails and greenways.



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