

PRESERVING HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

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 or other forms of recreation or transportation. Some greenways include trails, while others do not. Some appeal to people, while others attract wildlife. From the hills 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)

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, provide access to, and incorporate historic features, such as battlefields, bridges, historic buildings and canals. The preservation of these places lets us learn about and understand the history of our continent. They are an important part of preserving the past for future generations.

“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*

TRAILS

REMEMBERING HISTORIC EVENTS

Trails and greenways can preserve historically important places. They also provide an opportunity to physically experience places where historical events occurred.

- Thousands of people travel along the Minute-man Bikeway, a route used by British soldiers during the Revolutionary war and by Paul Revere during his historic ride to warn Americans that the British were about to attack.
- 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 Native Americans died during this journey.
- 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.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO HISTORIC PLACES

Trails provide walkable access to historic areas, allowing people to enjoy the outdoors while visiting historic 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.
- In Roanoke, Virginia, a rail-trail is currently being constructed that will link the Hanging Rock Battlefield Civil War site with the City of Salem.
- The Old Savannah-Tybee Railroad Historic & Scenic Multipurpose Trail travels in and around Savannah, Georgia, a city steeped in Revolutionary and Civil War history. Over 1,000 homes and other buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places can be visited in Savannah.

“LIKE THE RAILROADS THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER IN THE 19TH CENTURY, THESE TRAILS WILL BRING US TOGETHER IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES.”

— HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON AT THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL MILLENNIUM TRAILS PROGRAM.

SAVING HISTORIC TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

Trails and greenways preserve historic 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 travelling this route.

Transportation corridors such as canals and railroads are reminders of prosperity and progress. Almost 5,000 miles of canals were built during the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States. 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 historic transportation systems. For example, 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 historic locks, several museums, and historic buildings along the route.

For more than 100 years the railroad was the backbone of American travel and was integral to development in thousands of 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.



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

- The Bizz Johnson Trail guides travelers through California's logging country along the railroad corridor used by the Red River Lumber Company, one of the world's largest lumber companies during the early 1900s.
- The 33-mile Elroy-Sparta Rail-Trail in Wisconsin is one of the oldest rail-trails in the United States. The trail includes three long tunnels that range from one-quarter to three-quarters of a mile in length.

PRESERVING IMPORTANT PLACES AND STRUCTURES

Historic sites and structures are often incorporated into trails and greenways, preserving these important places and providing access to them.

- The city of Winston-Salem, North Carolina created the six-mile Bethabara Trail Greenway to attract visitors and to enhance the historic aspects of the Moravian village that marks the founding of the city.
- Historic sites such as the Snoqualmie Pass Tunnel along the Iron Horse Trail in Washington preserve important engineering structures. This 2.3-mile railroad tunnel was blasted out of solid rock in the early 1900s.
- The C&O Canal takes visitors through the 3,118-foot Paw Paw Tunnel and by historic buildings, such as the Great Falls Tavern, which was originally built in the 1800s as the locktender's house.

- Fort Morgan, Colorado converted a highway bridge across the South Platte River to a pedestrian walkway and restored the antique light fixtures. The bridge is an integral part of the city's park system.
- 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.

PROVIDING ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES

People are drawn to natural areas for recreation and exercise. Sites with cultural or historic value entice more visitors to stay longer. According to a National Park Service study on the economic impact of trails, the total annual revenue from trail-related expenditures for three trails exceeded \$1.2 million.¹ The study included Iowa's Heritage Trail, named one of "10 Historic Rail-Trails" by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in October 1998.

Trails and greenways provide a wealth of opportunities for people to learn about the history of places and people. By preserving transportation corridors and historic sites Americans give a valuable gift to future generations to learn about and cherish our culture.



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)

RESOURCES

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

National Trust for Historic Preservation

1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
1-800-944-6847
www.nationaltrust.org

National Park Service

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance
Program
1849 C Street, NW
Mail Stop 3606
Washington, DC 20240-0001
www.nps.org

ENDNOTES

¹ *The Impacts of Rail-Trails, A Study of Users and Nearby Property Owners from Three Trails*, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, 1992.



ABOUT THE CLEARINGHOUSE: 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. The Clearinghouse is a joint project of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and The Conservation Fund's American Greenways Program.

TRAILS AND GREENWAYS CLEARINGHOUSE ■ 1100 17TH STREET, NW, 10TH FLOOR ■ WASHINGTON, DC 20036
TOLL FREE: 1-877-GRNWAYS ■ E-MAIL: greenways@transact.org ■ WEB SITE: www.trailsandgreenways.org