

Unifying the Bay • Best of the Midwest • Rail-Trail Winter Wonderlands

# RAILSTO TRAILS

INSPIRING MOVEMENT

WINTER 2017 FROM RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

## Beauty and Strength

Michigan's developing Iron Belle Trail is a new 2,064-mile showcase of the state's outdoor heritage and vibrant communities.





## Michael Phillips

Lititz, Pennsylvania



*Each issue, we highlight a member of our national community. Special thanks to Michael Phillips for supporting America's rail-trails!*

### What I do

I'm a chemical engineer by degree, and I spent 13 years working in the oil and gas industry. I now enjoy helping on my wife's family farm, running, woodworking, rooting for the [Pittsburgh] Steelers and spending time with my wife and four daughters.

### Favorite trail activity

I use trails for biking, running and cross-country skiing; however, running is definitely my favorite. There is something therapeutic about parking at a trailhead and getting lost in nature for a while.

### How long I've been a runner

25 years (with a 10-year hiatus in the middle!)

### How trails have impacted my health

After college at the University of Pennsylvania, I stopped running for 10 years. When I moved back to the Pittsburgh area, I started using trails several times per week to lose weight and train for my first half marathon.

The biggest impact was on my mental health. Having trails as an outlet motivated me to get out before work to prepare for the day—or after work to destress and unwind.

### My greatest running accomplishment

When I was a senior in high school, I was one of the best distance runners in the state. That spring, I developed stress fractures in my right ankle and could not run. The doctors suggested I may not be able to compete in the track season, so my coach and I put together a plan. I got in the pool and trained harder than ever before. I was determined to not let this injury stop me. I ended up running four events and won a gold medal. It was so satisfying to think about everything I had overcome to get back on the track.

### Advice about running

Be patient with yourself, and set realistic goals. Anyone can be a runner if they are willing to commit to it.

### Person I admire

Martin Luther. When he nailed "The 95 Theses" to the Wittenberg Castle church in 1517, he not only changed history but risked his own life for his beliefs.

### My favorite rail-trail experience

On the morning of Jan. 27, 2015, I was training for a half marathon on the Montour Trail. It had snowed for several days; the trail was covered with a foot of snow, including 6 inches of fresh powder. I bundled up and headed out on an 8-mile run. It seemed like I was the only person out there, and the trees arched over the trail under the weight of the freshly fallen snow. It was a spectacular, tranquil and beautiful morning.

### Why I support RTC

I support RTC for my family, my friends and for the people who have never stepped foot on a rail-trail before. To be able to preserve history while repurposing old rail corridors for the betterment of the community and society is a real blessing. •

### FROM THE STAFF

#### Favorite rail-trail of all time?



Tom Sexton

Director, Northeast Region

After 25 years with RTC and experiencing several hundred rail-trails,

it's impossible to pick just one! However, from a diversity standpoint, my choice is the Schuylkill Banks section of the Schuylkill River Trail in Philadelphia. Not only does it have every type of trail user, from recreationists to commuters, but the different modes of transportation can't be beat. This is all best observed when standing on one of the cross streets above the trail. You get a beautiful view of the trail, the adjacent rail line (with active trains), the river corridor and its boats, and automotive traffic—all these modes bundled together in one harmonious flow!

### FEATURED LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Walk the Line

I have been a Rails-to-Trails supporter for many years now and greatly appreciate what the organization is trying to do. My only disappointment is that when long trips on a trail are discussed in your magazine, inevitably the mode of transportation seems to be bicycling—not walking. I would love to see a discussion or two about a long walk over several days along a rail-trail. I'm not talking about camping trips, but about long walks with comfortable accommodations like bed and breakfasts, great meals and a very light pack. Since many rail-trails tie towns together, I would think there should be plenty of them. This type of trip is something almost anyone can do—even an almost-70-year-old walker like myself!

Paul Cooke, Normandy Park, Wash.

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**Thanks Paul! We will explore ways to integrate more walking themes in future issues!**

#### Correction: Fall 2016 Issue

*In the Fall 2016 "Best Of"—10 Great Pathways to History—we mistakenly printed that the Virginia Capital Trail parallels the Jamestown River. The proper name is "James River." Our apologies for the error.*





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## Beauty and Strength

One of the most ambitious trail projects in history, Michigan's Iron Belle will link many of the state's most treasured natural and cultural resources through 791 miles of connected multiuse trails and a 1,273-mile scenic hiking byway.

By Robert Annis

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After 25 years in the music industry, Bobby Whittaker is directing his creative energies to the creation of a 25-mile rail-trail in rural Washington.

By Amy Kapp

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These awe-inspiring winter oases remind us that snow doesn't mean an end to trail season—but the beginning of new powder-powered adventures on America's pathways.

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### Destination Virginia: The Virginia Capital Trail

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By Scott Stark

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ON THE COVER: Lory Oaks and her dogs on the Rochester River Walk/Iron Belle Trail in Michigan | Photo by Tom Pidgeon Photography



**INVESTING IN HEALTHY 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITIES**

America’s economy has grown steadily since the end of the Great Recession in 2009. Yet, as new leadership takes office in Washington, many are looking for fresh approaches to economic development, job creation and wage growth. Increased investment in public infrastructure will likely be presented as a means to achieve these goals.

In the past, such investments have focused on transportation infrastructure. There is no doubt that America’s decaying roads and bridges are in desperate need of repair. But since the dawn of the interstate highway system in 1956, the vast majority of federal transportation investment has focused on roads. As a result, we have built many of our communities around cars—not people. We have created many places where it is difficult—even dangerous—to walk and bike.

If a new federal transportation infrastructure investment program moves forward, it would be a major mistake to continue to prioritize cars over people. Instead, we should seize the opportunity to create a new Active Transportation Investment Fund—thereby supporting smart investments in our trail, walking and biking infrastructure and creating more balanced transportation systems nationwide.

In the last 25 years, America has invested billions of dollars to create thousands of miles of trails. The vast majority of these trails are well loved and heavily used, contributing to the economic, environmental and public health of local areas. But we have yet to truly maximize their capacity to create healthier communities because they were conceived as individual trails, not as segments of larger connected systems.

When trail connectivity improves in urban or suburban settings, usage soars as more people can safely and conveniently reach more destinations by foot or bike. When connectivity improves in scenic rural areas with small towns, trails themselves become destinations that attract bicyclists—and their tourism dollars—from far and wide. Increased usage, in turn, is the key factor in producing even more of the numerous benefits that makes communities thrive.

The existing federal funding mechanisms that were created 25 years ago have helped build America’s incredible variety of trails. We need to protect these funding sources. But now is the time for federal policy to catch up with the evolution of the trails movement. It is time for a new Active Transportation Investment Fund that would provide funding for communities to close gaps to create trail systems that improve local and regional connectivity.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy will be actively advocating on behalf of increased trail investment as the new president and a new Congress take office in January. But our success will continue to depend on the willingness of our 160,000 members and supporters to raise their voices in support of the goal of connecting America with a national network of trails and greenways.

Happy trails!



**Keith Laughlin, President**  
 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



TOM PIDGEON PHOTOGRAPHY

**RAILSTOTRAILS**

*Rails to Trails* is the magazine of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors to build healthier places for healthier people.

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Route of the Badger Rolls Out in Racine, Wisconsin



IHTC Summit Emphasizes Potential Across Four-State Region



Capital Trails Coalition's Regional Vision Introduced to DC Metro Area



Druid Hill Farmers Market Events Focus on Community and Health



\$90 Million Allocated to Trails, Biking, Green Infrastructure in California

## What We've Been Up To

### Route of the Badger Rolls Out in Racine

In September, RTC hosted a briefing in partnership with the Wisconsin Bike Fed and the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread in order for potential partners and grassroots advocates to learn more about the vision for the Route of the Badger. This was the first public rollout of the future 500-mile-plus world-class trail network in Southeast Wisconsin and included the trail-building, business, planning, health and political communities from the region. Sign up to join the coalition at [railstotrails.org/routeofthebadger](http://railstotrails.org/routeofthebadger).

Contact: Eric Oberg, [eric@railstotrails.org](mailto:eric@railstotrails.org)

### Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition Summit Emphasizes Regional Potential

In November, partners of the Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition (IHTC) gathered at a summit in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania (just outside of Pittsburgh), to focus efforts on the next phase of project planning and development: collaborative marketing to grow the support and funding necessary to complete the network. The summit reinforced the IHTC vision and value of a 1,400-mile-plus regional trail system

that, when complete, would be the largest shared-use trail system in North America. Learn more at [ihearttrails.org](http://ihearttrails.org).

Contact: Eric Oberg, [eric@railstotrails.org](mailto:eric@railstotrails.org)

### Capital Trails Coalition Introduced to DC Region

On Oct. 13, RTC joined the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, the National Park Service, REI and a crowd of more than 40 guests and press representatives along the Mount Vernon Trail in Washington, D.C. to formally introduce the Capital Trails Coalition. The coalition—supported by REI, who has committed \$500,000 to support the development of this project—is working to complete a world-class multiuse trail network in the D.C. metro region. Learn more at [capitaltrailscoalition.org](http://capitaltrailscoalition.org).

Contact: Liz Thorstensen, [liz@railstotrails.org](mailto:liz@railstotrails.org)

### Druid Hill Farmers Market Events Focus on Community and Health

In partnership with Bikemore and the American Planning Association, RTC organized a series of events at the Druid Hill Farmers Market on the Jones Falls Trail in Baltimore to educate the community about the Baltimore

Greenway Trails Coalition. Each Wednesday in September, the RTC team was at the market talking with neighborhood residents about their walking and bicycling needs. The final event—a temporary crosswalk demonstration at a dangerous intersection into Druid Hill Park, adjacent to the market and the trail, highlighted the need for improved bike/ped infrastructure. Learn more at [railstotrails.org/baltimore](http://railstotrails.org/baltimore).

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### \$90 Million Allocated to Trails, Biking and Green Infrastructure in California

California recently announced plans to allocate \$900 million to programs specifically targeted toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions while benefiting low-income areas, supporting clean transportation and reducing climate pollution. Of that funding, \$90 million is going toward programs that support trails, including the Active Transportation Program and the Urban Greening Program. Both fund projects that help California meet its environmental and mobility goals and create healthy communities.

This is an exciting development that promotes equity in active transportation and will have

lasting implications for the role trails play in combating climate change and air pollution.

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### Hudson Valley Trail Network Named to Hall of Fame

The Dutchess Rail Trail, the Hudson Valley Rail-Trail and the Walkway Over the Hudson joined the best of the best when the Hudson Valley Trail Network was inducted into RTC's Rail-Trail Hall of Fame on Oct. 4.

Nearly 100 people attended the ceremony, which took place on the Walkway Over the Hudson overlooking a picturesque fall landscape, and more than 7,000 joined the ceremony via Facebook Live, sharing their congratulations for the trail network. The ceremony featured rail-trail volunteers and elected officials from across the region who have been central to the trail network's development, growth and maintenance.

The Hudson Valley Trail Network was selected as RTC's 30th inductee via a nationwide public vote held in honor of RTC's 30th anniversary, with the winner receiving almost 54 percent of the 19,885 total votes placed.

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FROM LEFT: DAVID SCHLABOWSKI; STEVE SHALUTA, COURTESY MON RIVER TRAILS CONSERVANCY; BRANDI HORTON; ANASTASIA TANTAROS; CINDY BARKS





PHOTO (LEFT): When complete, the 28-mile Anacostia River Trail will connect 16 D.C. waterfront neighborhoods to workplaces, schools, shops, cultural sites and parks.

## Washington, DC's Capital Trails Coalition

America's capital seeks to connect region's trails into a world-class system.

BY KATIE HARRIS

With hundreds of miles of trails on the ground in the Washington, D.C. region, some people may wonder why trail developers are ramping up efforts in the nation's capital. But that's exactly what's happening as more than 40 trail and transportation groups work together to create an equitably distributed world-class trail network.

Led by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA), and supported by REI, the Capital Trails Coalition is seeking to transform public life by providing healthy, low-stress access to open space and reliable transportation for people of all ages and abilities.

While the area has a variety of well-maintained trails—used by

tens of millions of people each year—many are disconnected, having been built to different standards by multiple jurisdictions, and with different funding streams. “The result is trail systems that function in their own right but are disconnected from other regional trails,” said Tamara Evans, advocacy director for WABA.

According to Greg Billing, executive director of WABA, the early disconnect in planning also means that cross-sector cooperation—at all levels—is crucial now to project success. “The region is incredibly complex,” Billing explained. “It comprises two states, a federal district, multiple counties and numerous cities. Accomplishing a major project like this one will require an intense focus on regional coordination and collaboration.”

While the coalition's public launch—attended by local officials including Rep. Don Beyer Jr. (D-Va.-08)—was held on Oct. 13, 2016, along D.C.'s Mount Vernon Trail, the group has been in various stages of planning over the past year.

Core spines of the network will include popular rail-trails such as the 11-mile Capital Crescent Trail, which connects Georgetown in D.C. to Bethesda, Maryland; and the 45-mile Washington and Old Dominion Railroad Regional Park trail to the west, which runs from urban Arlington to Purcellville in Virginia. They also include greenways like the 18-mile Mount Vernon Trail, which follows the George Washington Memorial Parkway from Alexandria south to George Washington's residence at Mount Vernon.

One of the first major trails to open is the Kenilworth section of the Ana-



**PROJECT UNDER CONSTRUCTION:** Capital Trails Coalition regional network

**LOCATION:** Montgomery and Prince George's counties, Maryland; Washington, D.C.; City of Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax counties, Virginia

**LENGTH:** 400+ miles (estimated)



costia River Trail, a 4-mile segment that will connect the 15 miles of the trail in D.C. to more than 40 miles of the Tributary Trails in Prince George's County, Maryland. That means that the tens of thousands of people that live in the suburbs can now safely walk or bike into the city.

"The Kenilworth to Bladensburg section is a keystone connection of the network," said Aaron Marcavitch, executive director of Maryland Milestones/Anacostia Trails Heritage Area. "It opens up the Tributary Trails system to a range of new riders. This means more business coming to Prince George's County and more interest in our natural, artistic and historic sites." Marcavitch also noted that while the trail was a boon for the region's growing bicycle tourism market, he saw the trail as a major step forward for resident connectivity.

"We are talking about so much more than just pavement on the ground," said Liz Thorstensen, vice president of trail development at RTC. "A well-connected regional trail network promises to transform public life by linking diverse communities, promoting healthy lifestyles and building sustainable local economies."

For more information, go to [capitaltrailscoalition.org](http://capitaltrailscoalition.org).



OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: TONY DEFILIPPO; COURTESY RTC. THIS PAGE: NEIL ARNOLD

**"A well-connected regional trail network promises to transform public life by linking diverse communities, promoting healthy lifestyles and building sustainable local economies."**

Liz Thorstensen,  
Vice President of  
Trail Development,  
Rails-to-Trails  
Conservancy



## 10 Marvels of the Midwest

BY SUZANNE MATYAS

Northcentral America may be famous for its vast fields and rolling plains, but its incredible trails prove that the area has plenty to offer trail users, from bustling cities and charming countryside to majestic landmarks and stunning landscapes. For experiences that are anything but “plain,” check out these 10 Midwest trail marvels, curated by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy staff.

### Michigan

#### PERE MARQUETTE RAIL-TRAIL



This smooth 30-mile route is one of the most heavily used in the state of Michigan, with many beautiful landscapes and amenities to attract trail users.

The trail starts in Midland at the Tridge, a three-way bridge located at the confluence of the Tittabawassee and Chippewa rivers, and connects to the 4-mile Chippewa Trail. Traveling north, this rail-trail immediately passes by the Dow Historical Museum and the Bradley House, a restored home from 1874; both offer tours and a look back at an earlier age in Michigan.

The path provides its visitors a scenic sampling of wildlife, forests, rivers and farmland and passes through several small towns. Two that make for great stopping points are Sanford and Coleman, where you'll find shops and restaurants. In between the towns is Veterans Memorial Park, the home of 200-year-old red and white pines, as well as Pine Haven Recreation Area.

At the end of the rail-trail in Clare, visitors can continue their journey through Michigan on the 53-mile Pere Marquette State Trail. •

**Length:** 30 miles

**Surface:** Asphalt

**Uses:** Biking, walking, inline skating, fishing, cross-country skiing, horseback riding; wheelchair accessible

### Missouri

#### MKT NATURE AND FITNESS TRAIL



This popular trail extends nearly 9 miles from the famous 238-mile Katy Trail, carrying its users north from McBaine on a former spur line of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (MKT) Railroad. The first half of the MKT goes through wooded areas and sprawling farmland while following nearby Hinkson Creek, which connects with Grindstone Nature Area and Stephens Lake Park.

Along the way, enjoy highlights such as the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial at the bucolic Battle Garden, and Forum Nature Area, a spectacular wetland filled with wildlife. As the trail approaches Columbia, it travels over several old wooden bridges that cross Branch Creek. The trail ends at Flat Branch Park in the city's charming downtown, which is filled with lots of stores and shops, and is in close proximity to the University of Missouri's historical campus.

The MKT Nature and Fitness Trail was awarded second best urban trail in USA Today's 10 Best Readers' Choice Awards in 2015. •

**Length:** 8.9 miles

**Surfaces:** Concrete, crushed stone

**Uses:** Biking, walking, cross-country skiing

Look for RTC's updated Midwest Rail-Trail Guidebook series, coming this spring! Learn more at [railstotrails.org/midwestguides](http://railstotrails.org/midwestguides).

To learn more about these and other trails, check out [TrailLink.com](http://TrailLink.com).



OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: FLICKR.COM/CAIRO XL5, CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/2.0, COURTESY COLUMBIA PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: JOHN YODER, KATIE GUERIN/RTC, MILO BATEMAN/RTC

**Wisconsin Red Cedar State Trail**

**COUNTIES:** Dunn, Eau Claire  
**ROUTE:** Menomonie > Dunnville Wildlife Area  
**LENGTH:** 14.5 miles (crushed stone)  
**CONNECTS TO:** Chippewa River State Trail  
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Dunnville State Wildlife Area; scenic Red Cedar River valley

**Ohio Alum Creek Greenway Trail**

**COUNTY:** Franklin  
**ROUTE:** Westerville > Groveport  
**LENGTH:** 22.4 miles (asphalt)  
**CONNECTS TO:** Blacklick Creek Greenway Trail; Westerville B&W system. Part of developing Ohio to Erie Trail.  
**HIGHLIGHTS:** One of the longest trails in central Ohio; Innis Park, Wolfe Park and Three Creeks Metro Park; Ohio Dominican University

**Michigan Macomb Orchard Trail**

**COUNTY:** Macomb  
**ROUTE:** Shelby Township > Richmond  
**LENGTH:** 23.5 miles (asphalt, concrete)  
**CONNECTS TO:** Clinton River Trail, Paint Creek Trail  
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Clinton River; urban landscape to orchards and scenic countryside

**Iowa Raccoon River Valley Trail**

**COUNTIES:** Dallas, Greene, Guthrie, Polk  
**ROUTE:** Jefferson > Clive  
**LENGTH:** 88.1 miles (asphalt, concrete)  
**CONNECTS TO:** Clive Greenbelt Trail  
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Ceramic/steel pergola arbor art installation (est. completion 2017), future connection to the High Trestle Trail, known for its LED art installation "From Here to There"

**Wisconsin Badger State Trail**

**COUNTIES:** Dane, Green  
**ROUTE:** Madison > Wisconsin/Illinois State Line  
**LENGTH:** 40 miles (asphalt, crushed stone)  
**CONNECTS TO:** Jane Addams Trail, Cheese Country Recreation Trail (nearby), Sugar River State Trail, Southwest Commuter Path  
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Charming small towns, 1,200-foot-long, nearly 120-year-old Stewart Tunnel—flashlights recommended!

**Indiana PUMPKINVINE NATURE TRAIL**



This trail winds for just over 17 miles through Elkhart and LaGrange counties, linking small towns, agricultural areas and one of Indiana’s largest Amish communities. The route also travels through a thick forest of maple and oak trees and along a kaleidoscope of wildflowers with breathtaking views. •

**Length:** 17.6 miles  
**Surface:** Asphalt, crushed stone  
**Uses:** Biking, walking, inline skating, cross-country skiing; wheelchair accessible

**Illinois CHICAGO LAKEFRONT TRAIL**



This 19-mile trail in Chicago provides exceptional cityscape views and travels by a multitude of iconic landmarks. In addition to the Lake Michigan waterfront, the trail passes by several museums, Lincoln Park and its famous zoo, Soldier Field, Navy Pier and a handful of harbors. •

**Length:** 19 miles  
**Surfaces:** Asphalt, concrete  
**Uses:** Biking, walking, inline skating; wheelchair accessible

**Iowa TROUT RUN TRAIL**



Creating a loop decorated with art around the town of Decorah, this trail offers unique hillside scenery, a picnic area and trestle bridge, and prime fishing. Two popular features are the Decorah Fish Hatchery and a six-foot-wide bald eagle nest maintained by the Raptor Resource Project. •

**Length:** 11 miles  
**Surface:** Asphalt, concrete  
**Uses:** Biking, walking, inline skating, fishing, cross-country skiing; wheelchair accessible



A photograph of a concrete bridge over a river. The bridge has a dark metal railing on top and several concrete pillars supporting it. The river is visible below the bridge, and there are trees and bushes in the foreground and background. The sky is cloudy. Large white text is overlaid on the image.

MICHIGAN'S IRON BELLE TRAIL

# BEAUTY AND STRENGTH

BY ROBERT ANNIS

Many states have long-distance, nearly border-to-border trails—Missouri's Katy Trail and the Ohio to Erie Trail come to mind—but from a pure mileage standpoint, the Iron Belle has them beat. The audacious plan calls for two Iron Belle trails: one multiuse path and a separate, more backcountry-inspired hiking trail, totaling 791 and 1,273 miles, respectively, running from Detroit's Belle Isle Park to the city of Ironwood in the Upper Peninsula.





A sense of excitement is building in Michigan as the Iron Belle Trail, one of the most ambitious trail projects in history, inches to completion. •

**Total Mileage: 2,064**

**Multiuse/Biking Trail Mileage: 791**

**Hiking Trail (North Country Trail) Mileage: 1,273**

**Endpoints: Detroit > Ironwood**

**More Info: [michigan.gov/dnr](http://michigan.gov/dnr)**



The McPherson Street Bridge over the Flat River in Lowell, Michigan, features a pedestrian walkway that is part of the North Country Trail and the developing Iron Belle Trail.



1,273  
MILEAGE OF THE IRON  
BELLE HIKING ROUTE

Though not directly involved, Eric Oberg, director of trail development for Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, has been monitoring the progress of the unusual dual-trail project. Both trails will offer users every aspect of Michigan, from concrete streets to white oak forests and everything in between, although the hiking trail, which follows the New York-to-North Dakota North Country Trail for much of the way, will be a little more desolate.

“Michigan has such a huge outdoor heritage, so it’s always been at the forefront of the trails movement,” Oberg said. “The Iron Belle is all about taking what’s already great about Michigan trails and making them incredible.”

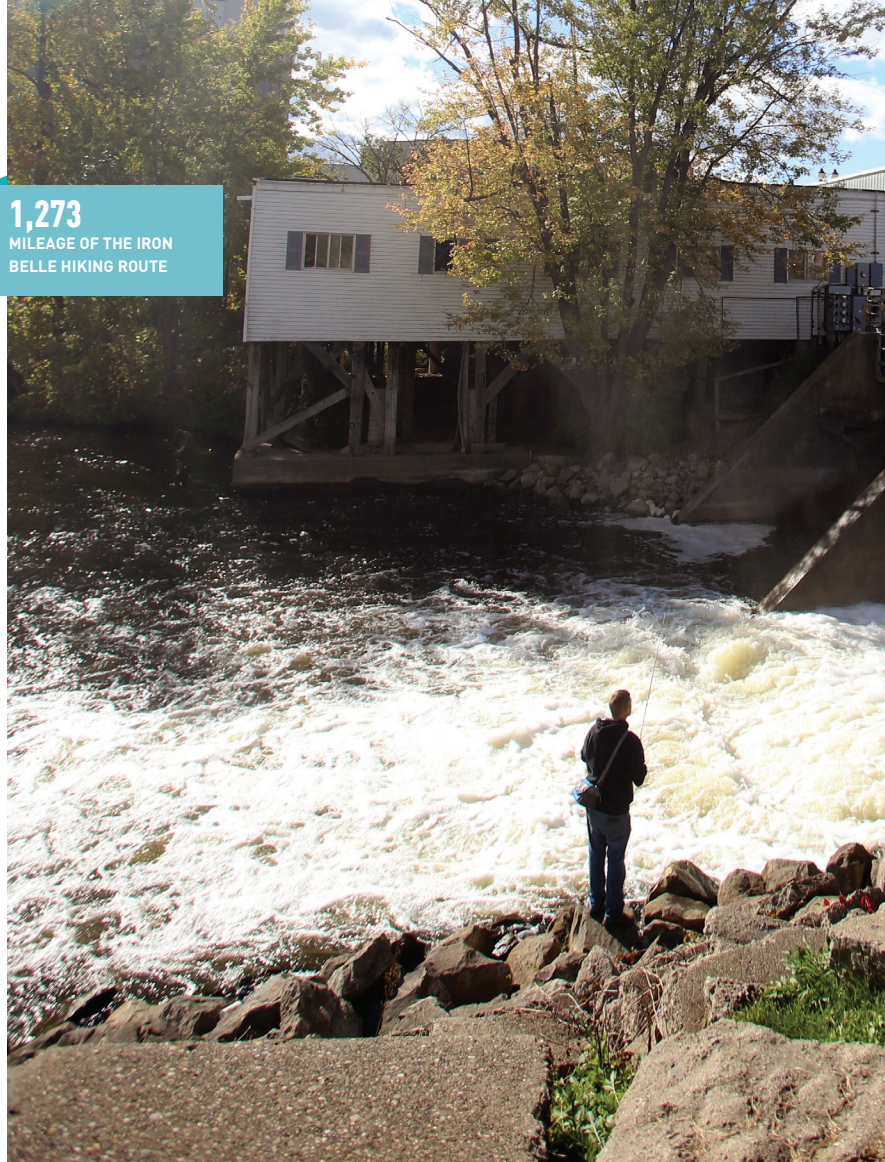
**Old Trails—New Route**

Instead of building an entirely new trail, Michigan officials decided to piggyback on existing trails, using strategic investments and expertise navigating the federal grant system to help local communities fill in the trail gaps. Trails like DuPage County’s West Branch DuPage River Trail and the Cass River Greenway that winds through Frankenmuth will keep their name and community feel, but will also have an Iron Belle designation.

The bike route heads north from Detroit, through the suburbs of Sterling Heights and through Flint, Columbiaville and Kawkawlin, where it follows beautiful Lake Huron to Oscoda. From Oscoda, the trail heads west through Huron National Forest to Roscommon, and then north again to Cheboygan and Mackinaw City, where cyclists can either take a ferry to Mackinac Island and then the Upper Peninsula (UP) or drive the bridge to the UP. From there, the trail runs hundreds of miles on the Lake Michigan coastline and through Hiawatha National Forest. At Escanaba, riders continue west to the trail’s end in Ironwood.

Hikers will take the longer, arguably more scenic route, heading west from Detroit to just outside Kalamazoo. Thru-hikers will continue on the trail north through Manistee National Forest to Mackinaw City, where they will need to cross the Great Lakes. On the other side, hikers will travel mostly along the Lake Superior coastline to Ironwood.

“[The state of Michigan and the Department of Natural Resources aren’t] trying to own or manage any of the trail,” said Kristen Bennett, Iron Belle Trail coordinator. “We’re trying to help communities go that extra mile, literally and metaphorically, to connect with one another



**“We’re trying to help communities go that extra mile, literally and metaphorically, to connect with one another along the route.”**

Kristen Bennett,  
Iron Belle Trail  
Coordinator,  
Michigan  
Department of  
Natural Resources

along the route. Some communities with a little more experience building trails have said, ‘Give us the money and get out of our way,’ while others ask for a little more hand-holding.”

Trail surfaces will change by area and amount of traffic. The Polly Ann Trail has paved surfaces through the towns of Lake Orion and Oxford, which turn to crushed limestone and gravel as the trail winds its way out of town and into more rural areas where they crisscross gravel roads nearly as narrow and desolate. As the trail leaves Oakland County, it turns to packed dirt and travels on.

**Funding Sources**

The Iron Belle is a project of Gov. Rick Snyder, who has devoted quite a bit of political capital and resources to the project in a time of budget cuts and fiscal hand-wringing. Both the hiking and the multiuse trails are more than 60 percent completed. Officials had hoped to come close to finishing them before Snyder leaves office in 2018, but Bennett believes that although significant progress will be made, completion won’t happen for another five to 10 years.

ALL PHOTOS: TOM PIDGEON PHOTOGRAPHY





While the project continues to roll on, the state has begun looking for private donors; \$160 million in donations are needed in order to receive matching dollars from the state and federal grants.

Somewhat complicating matters is the goal to have most of the new trail be American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials compliant—meaning it must be 10 feet wide with a 2-foot shoulder on both sides—in order to qualify for those federal grants. Bennett confirmed some of the new trail, including a stretch near Clarkston, can only sustain an 8-foot path due to road and drainage issues along the proposed route. In those cases, alternate sources of funding—most likely private donations and other, smaller federal and state grants—will need to be found.

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No. of days it took Chris Hillier ([hillierhikes.com](http://hillierhikes.com)) to thru-hike the developing Iron Belle

### Building Awareness

With such a broad timeline for completion, the Iron Belle hasn't gotten a lot of publicity after its initial unveiling. When asked, many of the residents and businesses using the community trails say they have never heard about the Iron Belle, but are excited at the idea.

"Business would definitely increase with more trail users," said Tanner Scheys, who works at the Rochester Bike Shop, near the Paint Creek Trail. "The crushed limestone is bad for drivetrains but great for us. I imagine we'll be selling a lot more tubes, doing more repairs."

Paint Creek Trail users account for about 60 percent of the shop's business, and that number would only grow with an influx of trail users. Surrounding businesses, including several bars, a number of restaurants and one microbrewery, would also benefit, Scheys said.

Public awareness will be raised over time as Iron Belle signage is introduced along the trail. The first signs near

PHOTO (LEFT): A fisherman casts into the Flat River near the King Milling Dam, built as part of the Main Street Bridge, a section of the North Country Trail in Lowell.

PHOTO (BELOW): Bicyclists use a small bridge spanning the Paint Creek on the Paint Creek Trail in Rochester.



## SO YOU WANT TO BIKE THE IRON BELLE?

Here are a few tips for when you decide to tackle part—or all—of the Iron Belle Trail:

- **USE WIDE, FILE-TREAD TIRES.** There are enough surface changes on the Iron Belle that you'll need a great all-around tire—one that's knobby enough to handle loose gravel and dirt but smooth enough to keep you rolling fast on paved surfaces.
- **GET LIT.** Very few spots on the Iron Belle have lights on the trail, and you don't want to be miles from the nearest town when the sun goes down and you can't see holes or dips in the trail.
- **CARRY A PAPER MAP.** Relying on digital maps or GPS files is good, until your device runs out of juice. Enlarge and print out the sections of the trail you're planning to ride, making notes of food options and services along the way. Be sure to stick them in a clear gallon-size zipper-lock bag to keep them dry in case of rain. •



# 791

Mileage of the Iron Belle multiuse/biking route

the Flint River Trail recently went up, with more along the Paint Creek Trail and the RiverWalk in Detroit coming in the near future.

About 200 miles of the UP bike route is on U.S. 2, a highway that's also designated as U.S. Bicycle Route 10 by the Adventure Cycling Association. Nearly everyone involved with the project sees the UP as the most difficult area in which to build off-road trails, but they remain confident that it will happen ... eventually.

"There are not a lot of corridors or abandoned rail lines that would make it easy to just put down trail," Oberg said. "In time, I think [Michigan] can leverage the potential success of the trails in the lower peninsula to get things done."

Until then, trail officials are working with the state Department of Transportation to ensure the road is as safe as possible for cyclists, with an 8-foot shoulder on either side of the road.

"It's not totally ideal, but that section of U.S. 2 is absolutely beautiful, bordering on Lake Michigan," Bennett said. "Riders will be able to see some of the most interesting parts of Michigan off that road."

## Impact

As public awareness increases, trail creators naturally expect usage to increase with commuters and recreational users, including a small subset that will hike or bike the entire network.

So far, only one hiker has taken on the challenge. Shortly after the trail was announced in 2013, Christopher Hillier, a veteran thru-hiker who has tackled both the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail, became the first hiker to do the length of the Iron Belle. Because the trail wasn't completed, Hillier had to be proactive, scouting trailheads and possible routes on the weekends before his epic journey.

"I met some really amazing trail angels [on the trail]," Hillier said. "Seems every little town along the way—especially across the UP—had someone there who knew about my hike. They all offered food, their company—or even opened their homes to me. The North Country National Scenic Trail is maintained by different trail chapters, each of whom is fiercely proud of their section of trail and very friendly to hikers."

## Showcasing the State

Although the sense of optimism around the Iron Belle has never been higher, there are some issues that must be worked through.

Detroit is undergoing a bicycle renaissance—Detroit Bike City's Slow Roll Ride may be the best example (**slowroll.bike**)—but some tourists might still be intimidated by cycling through Motor City. Much of the current route through Detroit is on city streets, and some people worry about the potential for crime.

Todd Scott, executive director of the Detroit Greenways Coalition, believes those potential fears are overblown. Because of the loss of population—25 percent of Detroit's residents moved out between 2000 and 2010—the city plans to transform many of the underused vehicle lanes along the Iron Belle route and elsewhere into separate, protected cycle tracks. The parts of the 8-mile Conner Creek Greenway that are off road see heavy local traffic with up to 3,000 users on a nice weekend day.

"Detroit is like every other urban setting," Scott said. "You just need to be aware of your surroundings. Most of the incidents are crimes of opportunity, just like in any other city."

According to Bennett, to combat potential crime, additional lighting might be added along the route. The RiverWalk section has its own security team, which could be extended north to other parts of the trail. "As the trail grows in popularity and more people start to use it, I think you'll actually see less crime," Bennett said. "Troublemakers seem to like places where no one is around."

Despite overwhelming evidence that trails increase property values, bring in tourism dollars and add to quality of life, officials acknowledge that some citizens remain skeptical about the trail, particularly when it's running behind their backyard or through valuable farming acreage. Many times they're fearful of their bucolic paradise being bombarded with strangers leaving trash everywhere, but there are other reasons as well, Bennett affirms.

"Much of the route is planned around utility corridors for less right-of-way and property issues," said Bennett.

PHOTO: Connor Creek Greenway by the Detroit River in Maheras-Gentry Park in Detroit



ALL PHOTOS: TOM PIDGEON PHOTOGRAPHY



**Please note:** This map represents the overall planned route for the Iron Belle Trail and does not delineate gaps and undeveloped trail segments. For detailed maps and info about the route, go to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Iron Belle web page at [bit.ly/2eDzGXX](http://bit.ly/2eDzGXX).

"We thought that working with the utility companies was going to be the hardest part, but it's actually the neighbors living around them that have offered the most resistance. We've been finding out that the people who live adjacent to these corridors have been using them as their own private playgrounds for years—hunting, building bandit trails—and they don't want to share."

According to Nancy Krupiarz, executive director of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the various agencies, nonprofits and other groups affiliated with the individual trails have also found it necessary to coordinate closely and cooperate. The National Park Service, which oversees the North Country Trail, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources had several discussions about signage, whose rules and policies would take precedence, and so on, Krupiarz said.

Even after the Iron Belle is completed, there will still be more to do, according to Krupiarz and Bennett. Many communities were disappointed when the proposed Iron

Belle route didn't go through their cities, so there will be an effort to connect them through arterial trails.

"We tell them to think of the Iron Belle as an interstate," Bennett said. "Only a few people are going to attempt the entire length of the trail. Most are going to pick a destination as a starting point for the day and do a 30- to 40-mile ride. They're not going to want to come back the exact same way, so you need these arterial trails where the riders can eventually loop back to where they came from."

Officials can't wait for the Iron Belle to be fully linked so visitors from around the country can truly experience Michigan.

"People will be able to see such a wide variety of scenery, from all of our natural attractions to [impressive manmade attractions like] Detroit," said Krupiarz. "Once the trail is completed, I think you'll see more businesses and amenities popping up all along the way. We can see this becoming a prototype for future trail systems across the U.S." For more info, go to [bit.ly/2eDzGXX](http://bit.ly/2eDzGXX).



Robert Annis is an Indianapolis-based freelance writer specializing in cycling and outdoor travel. When he's not hunched over a keyboard, you are likely to find him pedaling the back roads and trails of the Midwest or traveling around the globe.




## SAN FRANCISCO BAY TRAIL

# UNIFYING THE BAY

BY CINDY BARKS

It is a sunny Friday morning in San Francisco, and the city's most distinctive landmark is flaunting its charms. The walkway along the 1.7-mile span of the Golden Gate Bridge is packed with couples strolling hand in hand, family groups shepherding toddlers, teenagers taking selfies, grandparents pushing strollers and a steady stream of bikes.



In 2015, the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy counted more than 4.4 million bicyclists and pedestrians at three locations along the Bay Trail in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. •

In all, the completed trail will pass through 47 cities and nine counties.

About 290 of the 350 completed trail miles are separated from road traffic, while the remaining 60 miles or so consist of on-street bicycle/pedestrian sections.





Factor in the view of the vermillion-orange towers rising above, the sting of the brisk bay breeze, the din of bridge vehicle traffic and the conversations going on all around in a variety of languages, and you have a sensory experience unlike any other.

What a difference a short ferry ride can make. East across the bay, the Alameda Point trail is nearly deserted on a warm weekday morning. At a small public beach, a woman pitches a rubber ball into the water and watches as her golden retriever ambles in after it. The Oakland skyline serves as a distant backdrop as the trail meanders from the beach toward the *USS Hornet* aircraft carrier, which sits at the dock as a permanent museum.

While the peaceful scene differs vastly from the whirl of activity at the Golden Gate Bridge, the two share an important similarity: Both walkways are segments of a 500-mile trail system that will one day link the entire shoreline of the San Francisco Bay and San Pablo Bay.

#### Diverse Trail, Diverse Uses

From the northern reaches of San Pablo Bay's wine-country communities of Napa and Sonoma to the high-tech bastions of Palo Alto and San Jose to the south, the San Francisco Bay Trail ([baytrail.org](http://baytrail.org)) hugs the inlets, bluffs and wetlands, linking the distinct communities.

In all, the completed trail will pass through 47 cities and nine counties. Currently at 350 miles, the Bay Trail is about 70 percent complete, and newly finished sections are being added regularly.

To be sure, the trail reflects the differences of its communities: urban to suburban, remote wetlands to bustling ports, unobstructed seaside views to city streets and alleys. And as diverse as the trail itself is, so too are the uses it attracts.

"It means very different things to different people along the route," says Barry Bergman, manager of trail development for Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's (RTC's) Western Regional Office. For instance, many users view the trail mostly as a way to commute to work by bicycle each day. Headquarters of Google and Facebook are located along the Bay Trail south of San Francisco, he notes, attracting heavy commuting activity.

Recreation, fitness, wildlife refuges and bird-watching are among other prime uses along the trail. And for the throngs of tourists converging on San Francisco year-round, the Bay Trail serves as a scenic and convenient conduit to the city's many treasures. At San Francisco's eastern edge, the trail follows the famed Embarcadero

**"To a lot of people, assets like the Bay Trail are really what make the Bay Area special."**

Laura Cohen,  
Director, Rails-to-  
Trails Conservancy  
Western  
Regional Office

PHOTO: A beautiful section of the San Francisco Bay Trail in Tiburon, California

ALL PHOTOS: CINDY BARKS



and takes in such sights as the soaring Bay Bridge, the 1890s-era Ferry Building, the crab stands and souvenir shops of Fisherman’s Wharf, and the quirky beach scene of Aquatic Park. Keep going north and west, and the trail transitions to the forest-like path through Fort Mason, the wide-open views of Crissy Field and, finally, the Golden Gate Bridge.

Use of San Francisco’s Bay Trail is not limited to tourists, however. On a foggy August morning, I set out south on the Embarcadero from the Ferry Building and wander under the Bay Bridge toward the bustling AT&T Park district. Despite the cool mist, the Embarcadero is alive with joggers, cyclists and young professionals sipping coffee as they power-walk along the wide concrete pathway.

Laura Thompson, the longtime Bay Trail project manager, ranks the Embarcadero as one of the must-see sections of the Bay Trail. “This is the place that tourists visit from all over the world,” she says. “San Francisco’s shoreline is bustling and scenic, and it’s a great way to take in an urban stroll or bike ride along the Bay Trail.”



**Rich Railroad History**

Central to the allure of the Embarcadero is the area’s railroad past. Trains once were a common sight along the entire section, and for about a mile and a quarter, the Bay Trail follows the route of the old State Belt Railroad, passing by Aquatic Park and heading toward Fort Mason.

With embedded old rails still visible in places, the trail offers a vivid glimpse into a time when the railroad connected the Port of San Francisco with waterfront docks along the way.

According to Thompson, the Belt Railroad is only one example of key rail-trail sections included in the Bay Trail. Just a few miles northeast of the Golden Gate Bridge lies Tiburon Historical Trail, a picturesque ocean-side section in Marin County that follows the route of the old Northwestern Pacific line. On a recent visit there, I watch cyclists, joggers and inline skaters take to the old rail section that runs along the western edge of Tiburon Peninsula, culminating at the historic Blackie’s Pasture.

In all, Thompson estimates that the finished Bay Trail will take in more than 20 miles of old railbeds.

**“A 25-Year Overnight Success”**

It’s safe to say that many of the millions visiting the Embarcadero and Golden Gate Bridge don’t realize that

**“San Francisco’s shoreline is bustling and scenic, and it’s a great way to take in an urban stroll or bike ride along the Bay Trail.”**

Laura Thompson, San Francisco Bay Trail Project Manager

the urban route is a part of a 500-mile loop. Even some long-time residents are unaware.

During my visit, I meet Janet Bran, a licensed dog walker, who has gathered with fellow dog walkers on the sandy stretch of trail at Crissy Field Beach. Since 2008, Bran has regularly used the scenic section of the Bay Trail as a part of her route. “I walk in several different areas,” Bran tells me, noting that Crissy Field Beach is a favorite. But, she says, she didn’t realize the section was a part of a much larger loop.

Corinne DeBra, on the other hand, is thoroughly familiar with the Bay Trail and all its attributes. The East Bay resident has walked the entire 500-mile route once and is currently on her second time around.

Throughout her Bay Trail wanderings, DeBra has talked to countless trail users. “When I first started talking about it, nobody knew what it was,” she says. While locals liked the access the trail gave them, they seemed largely unaware of the bigger picture. That is changing, though, DeBra says, joking, “It was a 25-year overnight success.”

Bruce Beyaert, chair of the Trails for Richmond Action Committee (TRAC), can attest to that as well. Over the years, Beyaert and the all-volunteer TRAC board have advocated for trails along Richmond’s shoreline, working with the city of Richmond, the East Bay Regional Park





## TRAIL FACTS

**Long-Term Commitment:** Work on the Bay Trail has been underway for nearly 30 years—dating back to 1987 when then-State Senator Bill Lockyer authored a bill, later passed into California law, calling for planning to begin on the Bay Trail.

**Massive Mileage:** Envisioned to one day encompass 500 miles of walking and biking paths, the route currently consists of 350 miles of completed trail.

**Interconnectivity:** The Bay Trail will link the shorelines of nine counties and 47 cities.

**Recreational Link:** The trail connects 130 parks, 57,000 acres of open space, five state parks, two national parks and two national wildlife refuges.

**Population Hub:** More than 2.7 million Bay Area residents live within 2 miles of the Bay Trail. That's 38 percent of the metropolitan area's 7 million people.

**Employment Center:** 1.6 million jobs—upwards of 50 percent of the jobs in the Bay Area—are located within 2 miles of the Bay Trail.

**Shipping King:** The Bay Trail passes by the site of the Richmond Kaiser Shipyards, where 747 ships were built during the World War II effort in the 1940s. •

District and private development projects. Today, the community boasts 32 miles of completed Bay Trail—more than any other Bay Area community.

Richmond's repertoire includes the scenic and historic Ferry Point Loop and Shipyard 3 Trail, a stretch that takes in Kaiser Shipyard 3; Richmond's four Kaiser shipyards built a total of 747 ships during the World War II era. The site currently houses the 1944-vintage *SS Red Oak Victory*, a relic of Richmond's shipbuilding past.

### A Work in Progress

The Richmond story serves to illustrate the long-term efforts that have gone into the success of the Bay Trail. Born in the California State Legislature in the 1980s with a bill authored by then-Senator Bill Lockyer, the idea has persevered for nearly 30 years, with passionate trail and coastal-access advocates driving the process.

Thompson has been on the front lines for more than a decade and a half, working with the Association of Bay Area Governments since 1999 and serving as the Bay Trail project manager since 2004.

Early on, a \$7.5 million grant from the Coastal Conservancy, a state agency, "jump-started" the effort, Thompson says, and the project has since received a total of more than \$20 million in similar grant money. "We've been able to leverage those funds."

Over the years, hundreds of millions of dollars have gone into the trail, and Thompson estimates that the remaining 150 miles will cost upwards of \$150 million more.

PHOTO (LEFT): This walkway through San Francisco's historic Fort Mason area, a popular link in the San Francisco Bay Trail, features stellar city vistas as it approaches Crissy Field and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

PHOTO (BELOW): The developing San Francisco Bay Trail passes by Alameda Point, where the *USS Hornet* aircraft carrier now serves as a permanent museum.





The project is now “down to the toughest sections,” says Thompson. Consider: Bay Trail advocates must deal with oil refineries, shipping ports, airports and seven toll bridges—“all the while trying to weave our way through.”

**Collaborating for a Unified Voice**

Helping with that effort is the Bay Area Trails Collaborative—a group made up of dozens of related support organizations. Laura Cohen, director of RTC’s Western Regional Office, is chairing that multijurisdictional effort. A major goal according to Cohen: “To create a regional voice for trails.”

With a broad approach, the collaborative is focused on completing a comprehensive regional trail network of more than 1,600 miles that includes not only the San Francisco Bay Trail, but the Bay Area Ridge Trail (a 550-mile route along the ridgelines), the Coastal Trail, the Napa Valley Vine Trail and a network of multiuse paths across the Bay Area. The Bay Trail’s website ([baytrail.org](http://baytrail.org)) describes a number of these “sister trails.”

“By working together as a powerful, multisector, regional collaborative, we can leverage our collective influence and expertise to create a really world-class regional trail system,” Cohen states. “The Bay Trail is a major partner in that effort.”

**Dynamic Process**

Bit by bit, the Bay Trail is coming together, and Thompson says a number of new accomplishments are imminent. By the end of 2016, she expects the eastern span of trail on the Bay Bridge to be complete, finishing the connection between Treasure Island and Emeryville. Also, a crucial 1.75-mile link is expected soon at Breuner Marsh in Richmond, as well as the 0.6-mile Ravenswood section between the South Bay communities of East Palo Alto and Menlo Park, which will open up 80 miles of trail, including some connector routes.

Still, Thompson acknowledges that the project has a way to go, with completion of the entire 500 miles at least 10 years away.

Meanwhile, though, the completed sections offer stellar hiking and biking opportunities. About 290 of the 350 completed trail miles are separated from road traffic, while the remaining 60 miles or so consist of on-street bicycle/pedestrian sections. Although the



project’s goal is for all the trails to be separate, Thompson says the on-street sections represent areas “where it’s really not feasible.”

Ambitious and long term, yes, but those involved agree the Bay Trail’s results have been gratifying. “Fortunately, certain leaders had the foresight years ago,” Cohen says, adding, “To a lot of people, assets like the Bay Trail are really what make the Bay Area special.”

**Trail users have plenty of resources to help them navigate the route. The Bay Trail’s website offers a map that splits the 500-mile route into 24 sections, with detailed directions and explanations about each one. Audio tours also are available with the use of an app. For information, go to [baytrail.org/get-on-the-trail](http://baytrail.org/get-on-the-trail).**



*Cindy Barks is an Arizona newspaper reporter who also writes a travel and hiking blog at [nearandfaraz.com](http://nearandfaraz.com).*

# Bobby Whittaker

## Former R.E.M. Tour Manager Creates Rural Connections in Washington

BY AMY KAPP

It may be a no-brainer that Seattle-born Bobby Whittaker has always loved the outdoors, having been raised by the first American to summit Mt. Everest. It was the city's music scene, however, that led him to a rewarding 25-year career in the music business, first with Sub Pop Records, and then as a manager and tour manager with iconic bands including Mudhoney and R.E.M.

A decade ago, Whittaker read about a former rail line in rural Ferry County, Washington—a place he'd long been going to “slow down.” Now the president of Ferry County Rail Trail Partners and fellow trail advocates are on their way to completing the 25-mile “rock n’ roll” rail-trail, which is changing people's lives.

### What inspired you to get involved in the Ferry County Rail-Trail Project?

Ferry County is rich with natural features ... but it doesn't have a non-motorized path to connect the towns. I had noticed in the paper that [a] rail line was ceasing operations. I thought it would make an incredible trail, and it was an opportunity to give back.

There's nothing more positive or punk rock than giving back to your community.

### What was it like for someone new to the professional trail world?

I hadn't known about the politics and effort it takes to build a trail. I was a little naïve. I thought, “People will support it, and we'll have a trail—boom!” [But some residents] were a little apprehensive about how this trail could alter their existence and their way of life.

### How did you gain support from local residents?

We actually used Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's website information, including the Trail-Building Toolbox ([rtc.li/tools-build](http://rtc.li/tools-build)), to educate the community on the benefit of

trails. The materials were spot on: adjacent landowners fighting it—supporting it—and then becoming advocates.

### With no parks department in Ferry County, how did you manage to fund the trail's development?

We ... aggressively went after a National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program planning grant, which helped us develop a community driven concept plan ... it was a huge step. Our county didn't have the resources to work on trails, so I knew we needed this help to move the project forward.

Some of my music connections also helped us raise the project's profile. R.E.M. signed guitars. Red Hot Chili Peppers and Pearl Jam signed skateboards. Eddie Vedder donated a signed ukulele. Auctioning these things off financed a large portion of the early development.

It became our “rock n’ roll” rail-trail. That profile helped bring a lot more awareness.

### What was the most important element to this trail's development?

We have shocked people with how much we've done with so little money because of our strong partnerships. We have individuals and local businesses who donate hours of trail grading and compacting and provide in-kind materials; these things are extremely helpful for grants that require matches.

### What has been the trail's impact?

I used to own the old Republic Fire Hall, which is now an amazing brew pub. Every time I go in, someone tells me who they saw on the trail or who bought a new bike. The proprietor recently said to me, “Everybody is so excited to have somewhere to go.”•

Amy Kapp is editor-in-chief of *Rails to Trails*.

“There's nothing more positive or punk rock than giving back to your community.”

Bobby Whittaker,  
President of Ferry  
County Rail Trail  
Partners and music  
industry insider

Read an extended interview with Bobby Whittaker on RTC's TrailBlog: [rtc.li/wa-trail-rocknroll](http://rtc.li/wa-trail-rocknroll).

Read an in-depth article on the Ferry County Rail Trail, RTC's October 2016 Trail of the Month: [rtc.li/totm-ferry-co](http://rtc.li/totm-ferry-co).



## Rail-Trail Winter Wonderlands

BY LAURA STARK

When the snow hits, many trail enthusiasts stow their running shoes or tuck their bikes into the back of the garage, missing an opportunity to enjoy rail-trails in a completely different way. This winter, those who love biking may want to give fat-tire bikes a try; these specialized bikes handle like mountain bikes but have wider tires for gripping the snow. Switching to cross-country skiing or snowshoeing can be a fun option for walkers and runners; the gliding motion not only keeps legs strong, but also works arm, back and core muscles. The adventurous might try dog sledding or snowmobiling; visit local trail websites to see if these uses are permitted and to explore related clubs and other groups in your area. Here are some winter wonderland trail views to get you motivated!



Stretching 42 miles from the famed ski town of Aspen to Glenwood Springs, Colorado's Rio Grande Trail offers year-round fun. In winter, the eastern portion of the rail-trail through Pitkin County is groomed for cross-country skiing and fat-tire biking. Surrounded by snow-capped peaks and glitter-dusted pine trees, a winter excursion doesn't get much prettier.

Colorado

# RIO GRAND TRAIL

THIS PAGE: COURTESY PITKIN COUNTY OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: AMY BOUCHER, PAUL CYR

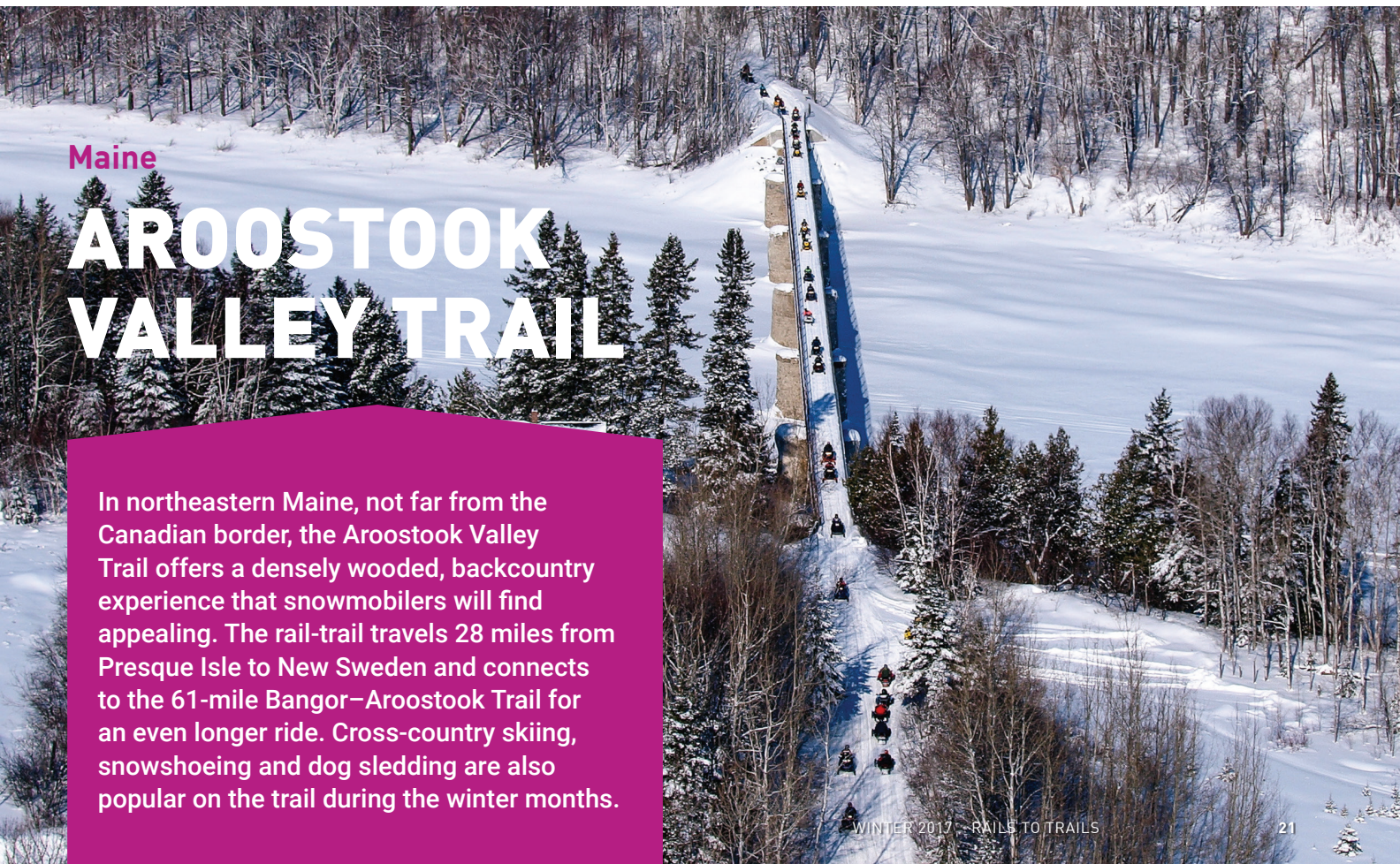




Virginia

# NEW RIVER TRAIL STATE PARK

Nestled in Virginia's Blue Ridge Highlands, the New River Trail State Park offers 57 miles of serene wilderness for cross-country skiing. Traveling from Pulaski to Galax in the southwestern corner of the state, the rail-trail winds through a rugged valley with high rocky walls on one side and steep slopes going down to the river on the other side.



Maine

# AROOSTOOK VALLEY TRAIL

In northeastern Maine, not far from the Canadian border, the Aroostook Valley Trail offers a densely wooded, backcountry experience that snowmobilers will find appealing. The rail-trail travels 28 miles from Presque Isle to New Sweden and connects to the 61-mile Bangor–Aroostook Trail for an even longer ride. Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and dog sledding are also popular on the trail during the winter months.

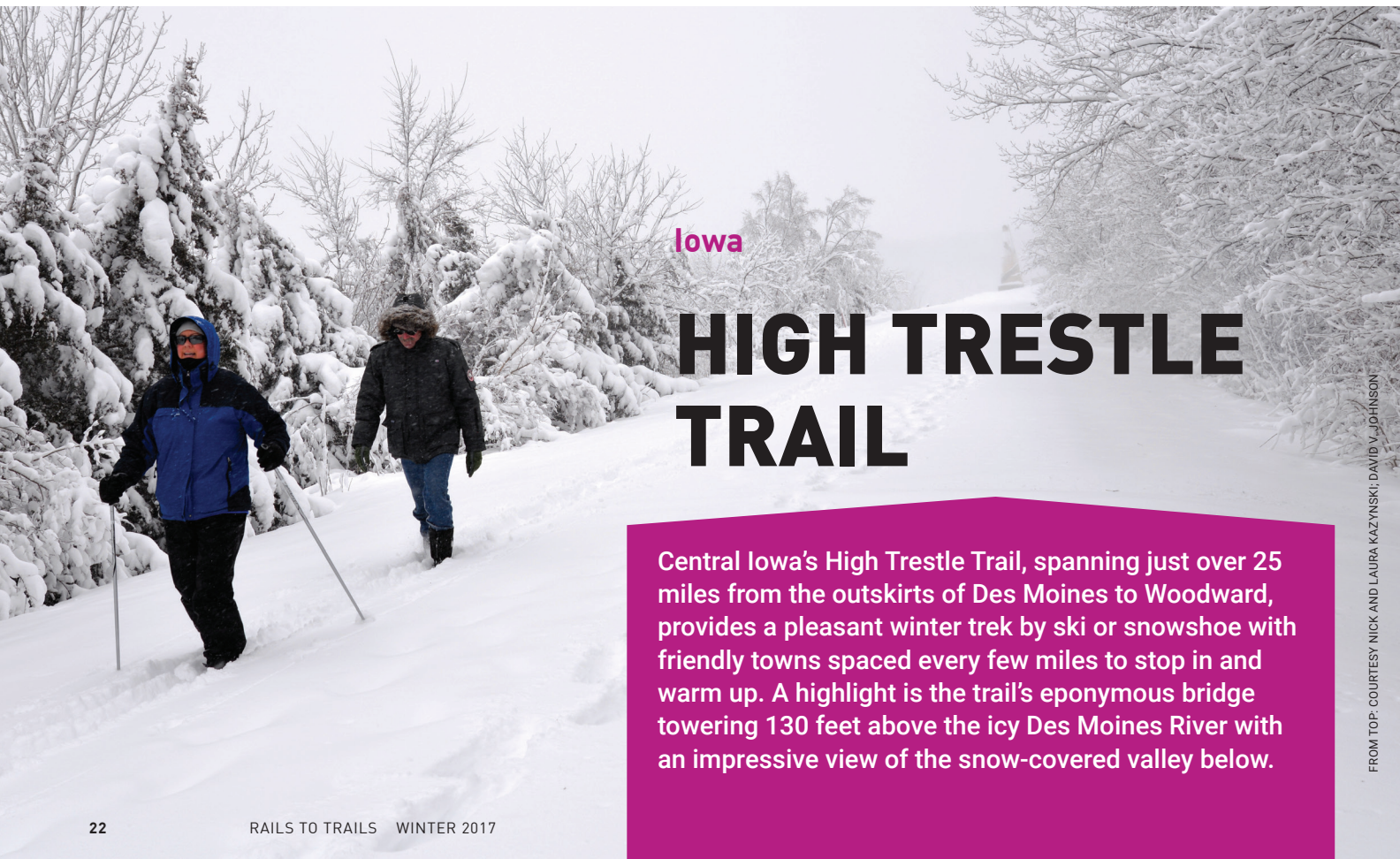




Northern Wisconsin's Brownstone Trail packs a lot of scenery into its 3-mile length. Beginning in Bayfield, the rail-trail follows the shoreline of Lake Superior along the brownstone cliffs that give the trail its name. Winding through glistening trees, it offers the perfect winter outing for a peaceful and picturesque journey on a pair of snowshoes or skis.

Wisconsin

# BROWNSTONE TRAIL



Iowa

# HIGH TRESTLE TRAIL

Central Iowa's High Trestle Trail, spanning just over 25 miles from the outskirts of Des Moines to Woodward, provides a pleasant winter trek by ski or snowshoe with friendly towns spaced every few miles to stop in and warm up. A highlight is the trail's eponymous bridge towering 130 feet above the icy Des Moines River with an impressive view of the snow-covered valley below.

FROM TOP: COURTESY NICK AND LAURA KAZYSKI; DAVID V. JOHNSON





## Wisconsin

# Former Congressman Tom Petri Named RTC's 2016 Rail-Trail Champion

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is pleased to name former U.S. Congressman Tom Petri as the 2016 Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion in recognition of his decades of support for rail-trails and active transportation infrastructure.

Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1979, Rep. Petri, a member of the Republican Party, represented Wisconsin's Sixth Congressional District for 18 terms until his retirement in January 2015 (at the end of the 113th Congress). Known for his innovative and creative solutions to government problems, Rep. Petri would go on to make an impact in transportation, student loan reform, the federal highway program, cost sharing for federal water projects, tax and welfare reform, and health-care reform.

During his time in office, he served as a senior member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee and the Highways and Transit Subcommittee.

A lifelong cyclist and early supporter of the recreational trails movement, Rep. Petri helped lead a bi-partisan effort in the early 1990s to create the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), which was included in the federal surface transportation bill of 1991 (the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, or ISTEA).

Working with both Democrat colleagues and RTC, he assisted in drafting environmental language for the bill that would allow

flexibility in eligible uses for available funds.

He would also go on to develop a close relationship with RTC in the mid-1990s and become a strong supporter of the active transportation movement.

"He was an emerging leader at that time in the trails movement and one of the most respected members of Congress," said Marianne Wesley Fowler, RTC's senior strategist for policy advocacy and a longtime friend and colleague of the former congressman.

In 2003, after RTP and Transportation Enhancements (TE) (now known as Transportation Alternatives and the largest source of federal trail funding in the U.S.) came under attack in the House, Rep. Petri helped protect TE from elimination by offering an amendment to strike the provisions defunding both programs. He also worked closely with RTC, Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.) and other trail supporters to secure the votes necessary to win the battle on the House floor. In a dramatic 327 to 90 victory, RTP and TE were saved.

"That was a watershed moment," quoted RTC President Keith Laughlin in the article *From Preserving Rail-Trails to Creating Healthier Communities* in the Spring/Summer 2016 issue of *Rails to Trails*. "It demonstrated the bipartisan support [the rail-trail movement] had in Congress and set the stage for our victories in the transportation bill in 2005."

Rep. Petri continues to support trails as a member of RTC's Board of Directors. His decades of service to the trail movement have been recognized by the American Hiking Society and the Coalition for Recreational Trails—the latter of which renamed its award program to the Tom Petri Annual Achievement Awards in 2014. •



**Since 2011, the Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champions Award honors individuals around the nation who have made significant contributions to the rail-trail movement through their work, volunteerism or support—in short, people who have gone above and beyond in the name of trails. Learn more about the program at [rtc.li/trail-champions](http://rtc.li/trail-champions).**

PHOTO: A nostalgic image of former Congressman Tom Petri biking with his daughter Alexandra (now a columnist with the Washington Post) and wife Ann (DeDe) Petri



## Illuminated Winter Trail Excursions

BY DANIELLE TAYLOR

### West Virginia

#### GREENBRIER RIVER TRAIL, FULL MOON HIKE

Cass Scenic Railroad State Park hosts its popular Full Moon Hike monthly, but the event takes on a special feel during the crisp chill of winter. Hikers meet at the park's visitors center after dark and set out on the Greenbrier River Trail with park naturalist Monica Fleming, who shares information about the trail, provides guidance on outdoor winter adventures and helps identify some of the wild flora and fauna hikers may see or hear on their 3-mile journey. The hikes usually last between two or three hours, and well-behaved, leashed dogs are welcome to join.

"In this day and age, people generally don't go more than 500 yards from where their car is parked," says Sissie Summers, program administrator for West Virginia State Parks. "It's an opportunity to venture out. It's dark [during the full moon hikes], and the shadows can be deep and the sounds might be creepy until Monica explains what you're seeing and hearing."

Those who wish to attend a Full Moon Hike this winter have three options: Jan. 12 and Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m., and March 12 at 7:30 p.m. The event is free, but participants must preregister online ([cassrailroad.com/registration\\_hikes.html](http://cassrailroad.com/registration_hikes.html)) or call Monica Fleming at 304.456.4300, ext. 111. To ensure an enjoyable hike, participants should wear hiking boots or sturdy sneakers appropriate to current weather conditions and dress in layers with sufficient outerwear to stay warm. Hikers should also bring water bottles and snacks to stay hydrated and energized for the journey. Although flashlights can be brought in case of an emergency, the hike leader strongly encourages all participants to keep lights (including phones) off to sustain their night vision and fully experience their natural surroundings along the rail-trail during the hike. •



### Minnesota

#### ROOT RIVER TRAIL, CANDLELIGHT SKI

The tiny town of Whalan, Minnesota, is home to less than 70 individuals, but roughly 100 people join in each February for the popular annual Candlelight Ski, now in its 24th year. State park employees and volunteers groom and set up luminaries alongside the Root River Trail for participants to enjoy, and skiers (or walkers if there's no snow) travel together for three-quarters of a mile to the end of the lighted portion of the path before returning to a warm bonfire near the trailhead in downtown Whalan. Community volunteers also sell chili, soup and sandwiches so participants can warm up before and after their trip.

If you're interested, this year's event takes place on Feb. 4, 2017. Attendees don't need to register in advance, but to ski on the trail, participants must have a Great Minnesota Ski Pass for the day (\$6) or the season (\$20), which can be purchased online ([dnr.state.mn.us/licenses/skipass](http://dnr.state.mn.us/licenses/skipass)) or at the event. Cedar Valley Resort in Whalan offers skis for rental ([cedarvalleyresort.com](http://cedarvalleyresort.com)) ([bit.ly/2eLfgRO](http://bit.ly/2eLfgRO)). •

FROM LEFT: COURTESY WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE; COURTESY CEDAR VALLEY RESORT





Virginia

## 400 Years of History on the Virginia Capital Trail

BY SCOTT STARK

The story of the Virginia Capital Trail, or VCT, running from Jamestown to Richmond, is the story of early American history itself, from the English colony that started it all through the war that nearly ripped the nation asunder 250 years later.

Mile Zero of the VCT (so named as it links the original and contemporary capitals of Virginia) starts just outside Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in the New World. Established by the Virginia Company of London in 1607, Jamestown was the first of the globe-spanning conquests that gave rise to the notion that the sun never set on the British Empire. Built along the banks of what the colonists named the James River, the colony promised adventure and untold riches for those brave enough to make the trek.

While the location of the actual colony is to this day an active archaeological dig site, the Jamestown Settlement, just a mile away, is a mocked-up re-creation of life 400 years ago, showcasing the lives of both the English and the native Powhatan. Visitors can explore a Powhatan village, board the trio of re-created ships that brought the original colonists over and stroll through the walled defensive fortifications of Fort James.

Throughout the site, knowledgeable costumed cultural interpreters are on hand to engage with visitors. A warning to history buffs planning on tackling both Jamestown and the trail: You just might want to set aside the better part of a day for Jamestown alone. Also of note: Colonial Williamsburg—itsself worthy of a day's exploration—is a mere 8 miles away,

though there are no dedicated trails linking it to the VCT.

Two miles of riding from the trailhead will take you to where you'll spend the next 50: alongside Virginia State Route 5, a designated scenic byway. "It's a true bike trail," says Gil Grey, a VCT trail ambassador I meet over lunch. "It's not just a painted lane; it has its own route, its own bridges. It's world-class."

Grey is absolutely right in this regard: While for the majority of its length, the trail is no more than 15 feet away from Route 5, it feels much more removed. Every intersecting road is well marked for trail traffic, and on the occasions when the trail transitions from one side of the highway to the other, the crossings have good sightlines and clear markings.

Indeed, the VCT is easily the best-signed trail I've ever encountered.

46

No. of state historical markers along the trail

PHOTO: The Virginia Capital Trail captures 400 years of history along its route from Jamestown to Richmond.



From the very start, navigating the trail is a snap, and riding it is just as easy; though nominally uphill toward Richmond, you'll be hard pressed to register the climb of some 160 feet over the course of 52 miles—an all but nonexistent 0.05 percent grade as you pedal westward. While there are local ups and downs, the paved pathway makes travel breezy, and the steady change of scenery—from forested canopies to wide-open agricultural fields—makes the miles melt away.

About 20 miles out from Jamestown, a bit shy of the trail midpoint, is Charles City. Cul's Courthouse Grille, located alongside the trail, is a favorite of bikers coming from either end and, with ample parking nearby, is a popular starting point too. Cullen Jenkins owns and operates the restaurant with his mother, having started it about six years before the VCT opened end to end. "This trail is worth its weight in gold!" Jenkins says. "We've employed five extra folks to handle the increased customer traffic."

It's here, resting on the welcoming porch outside, that I meet Cornelius Lacks, a former Marine who says he hadn't expected much in the way of the VCT, accustomed as he was to years spent in Long Beach. "I fell in love with California trails—the Pacific waves, cool ocean breeze and beautiful sunsets. How could this compare?" But Lacks says he was pleasantly surprised by the VCT. "It's relaxing. You might not have the [West Coast] sunsets, but you have historical sights, a little bit of character on the ride."

Lacks isn't kidding; there are 10 plantations open to the public along the route, some mere steps from the trail. One of them belonged to our nation's 10th president, the source of Route 5's other moniker, the John Tyler Memorial Highway. About 7 miles



outside of Richmond, the path deviates from Route 5 to accommodate the interchange for Interstate 295 before rejoining the scenic byway 3.5 miles later. If the wind is right, you'll know you're coming up on Ronnie's BBQ well before you see it. A modest roadside stand, it's "one of the best holes-in-the-wall you'll find," says Darrell Logan, son of the eponymous Ronnie. The delicious food delivers on the promise the meat smokers made a mile back, making up for the less than ritzy accommodations. "People might pass us [on the upwind side]," says Logan, "but they stop in on the way back."

As you roll into the outskirts of Richmond, the James River becomes your new companion as you glide past high-end condos and restaurants. At Great Shiplock Park, where a man-made canal starts paralleling the river, you'll cross at-grade railroad tracks at your feet while riding under elevated tracks high above. These elevated tracks are what give the VCT its rail-trail designation—in this case a rail-with-trail.

The trail ends abruptly at an imposing concrete wall looming some 25 feet overhead. This is Richmond's floodwall, designed to keep the city dry in the face of a rising James River. Portals of varying size set into the wall are reminiscent of the watertight doors in a ship's bulkhead, and indeed, they serve the same function, able to be closed

off against incoming water. Just on the other side is the Canal Walk, a funky urban path that takes you downtown.

Depending on the season, you may see canal boats with a costumed captain at the helm describing for tourists the history of Virginia's capital, including its short life as the capital of the Confederate States of America. The Canal Walk ends just outside of Tredegar Iron Works, the South's largest foundry that produced more than 1,000 cannons for the Confederacy as well as armor plating for Confederate ironclad warships. Today, Tredegar is maintained by the National Park Service as one of 13 battlefields and sites that make up Richmond National Battlefield Park. Adjacent to Tredegar is the American Civil War Museum, where visitors can dive deep into the history of our country's deadliest conflict.

The Virginia Capital Trail celebrated its one-year anniversary in October 2016, beating its inaugural year projections with more than 550,000 uses. With 400-plus years of history behind it, the trail's future looks equally bright. •

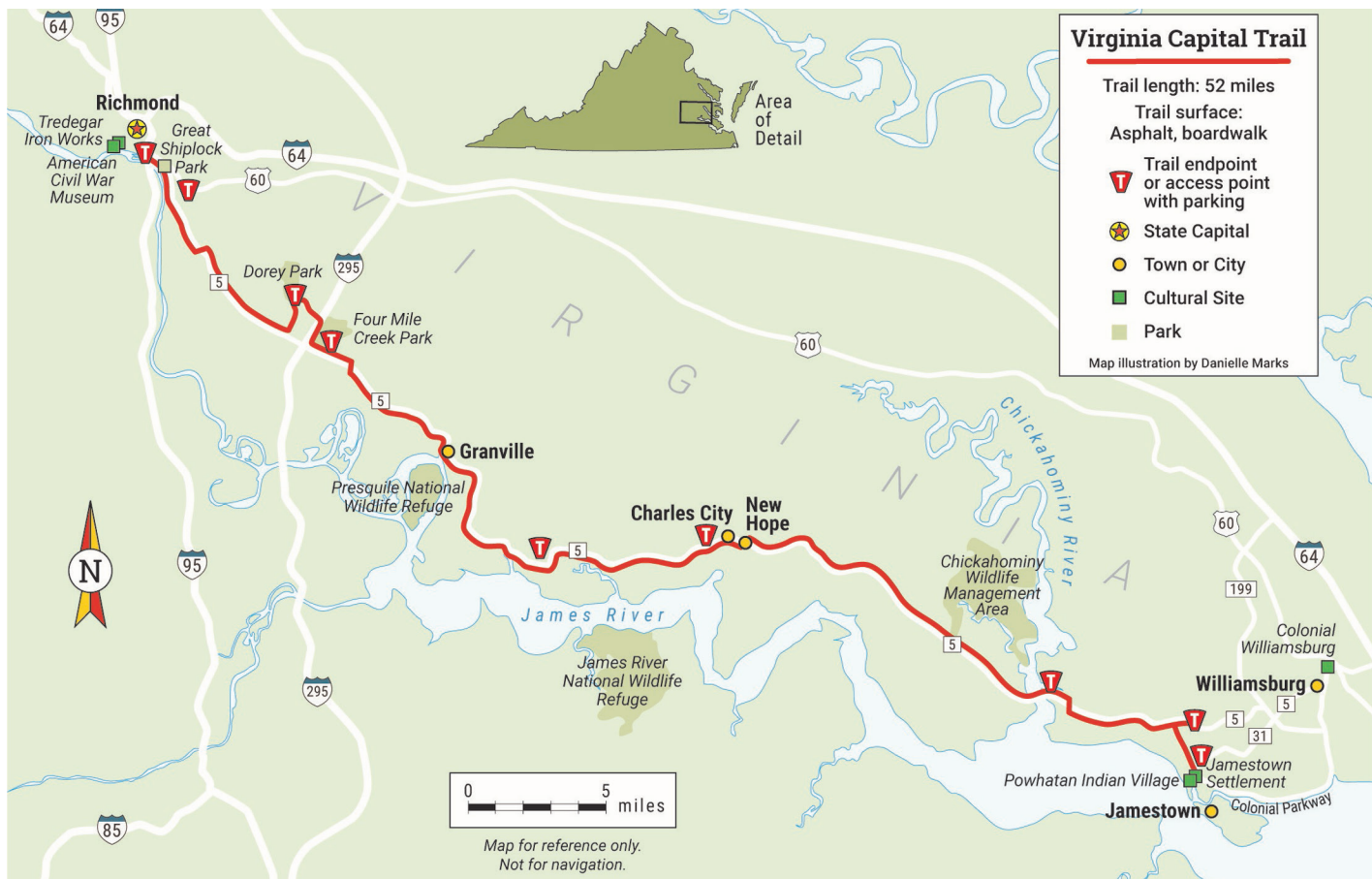


**10**  
Plantations open to the public along the route

PHOTOS: (Above) The VCT is a "rail-with-trail" that parallels and then is routed under elevated tracks in Richmond. (Right) A blacksmith in the Jamestown Settlement shapes a hinge pin.

ALL PHOTOS: SCOTT STARK





**GETTING THERE**

The Richmond International Airport (RIC) ([flyrichmond.com](http://flyrichmond.com)) is just 8 miles from the city; the Jamestown terminus of the trail is an hour's drive from there along Route 5. Free and ample overnight parking is available.

**WHAT TO SEE**

The Jamestown Settlement ([historyisfun.org](http://historyisfun.org)) is a recreation of 1600s life, showcasing both English settlers and native Powhatans. Colonial Williamsburg's ([colonialwilliamsburg.com](http://colonialwilliamsburg.com)) 301 acres tell the story of 18th-century America. The National Park Service maintains the Tredegar Iron Works ([nps.gov/nr/travel/richmond/Tredegar.html](http://nps.gov/nr/travel/richmond/Tredegar.html)) as part of Richmond

National Battlefield Park ([nps.gov/rich/index.htm](http://nps.gov/rich/index.htm)), and next door is The American Civil War Museum ([acwm.org](http://acwm.org)). Numerous plantations are accessible from the trail, including Sherwood Forest ([sherwoodforest.org](http://sherwoodforest.org)), home of President John Tyler; Berkeley Plantation ([berkeleyplantation.com](http://berkeleyplantation.com)), ancestral home of presidents William Henry Harrison and Benjamin Harrison—and site of the first official Thanksgiving; and Edgewood Plantation ([edgewoodplantation.com](http://edgewoodplantation.com)).

**WHERE TO STAY**

Historic Powhatan Resort ([historicpowhatanresort.com](http://historicpowhatanresort.com)) in Williamsburg is 4.5 miles from the eastern terminus, and Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown ([ihg.com](http://ihg.com)) in Rich-

mond and the Omni Richmond Hotel ([omnihotels.com/hotels/richmond](http://omnihotels.com/hotels/richmond)) are a mile or less from the western terminus. Edgewood Plantation ([edgewoodplantation.com](http://edgewoodplantation.com)), near the midpoint, is a Victorian B&B.

**WHERE TO EAT**

Immerse yourself in gustatory history at Colonial Williamsburg ([colonialwilliamsburg.com/do/restaurants](http://colonialwilliamsburg.com/do/restaurants)); Chowning's Tavern serves up hearty fare in an 18th-century alehouse. Cul's Courthouse Grille ([culscourthousegrille.com](http://culscourthousegrille.com)) near the midway point in a circa 1870s building offers American food at reasonable prices. If the wind is right, you'll smell delicious Ronnie's BBQ ([ronniesbbq.com](http://ronniesbbq.com)) long before you see it.

**BIKE RENTALS**

Shift Bicycles ([shiftbicycles.com](http://shiftbicycles.com)), 3 blocks from the VCT, offers sales, rentals and repairs. Also just blocks away is Adventures in RVA ([rvabikerental.com](http://rvabikerental.com)); bike pickup/drop-off is available for a fee. The Kickstand repair shop ([facebook.com/RCCKickstand](http://facebook.com/RCCKickstand)), along the trail, is run by the nonprofit Richmond Cycling Corps. Near Colonial Williamsburg, Conte's Bike Shop ([contebikes.com](http://contebikes.com)) offers sales, service and rentals. James City County Marina near Jamestown offers bike, canoe, kayak and paddleboard rentals ([jamescitycountyva.gov/2768/Park-Fees](http://jamescitycountyva.gov/2768/Park-Fees)).







*Born and raised in Colorado, Scott Stark enjoys the great outdoors and the wealth of trail options near his home in Alexandria, Virginia.*





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## A (Trail) Life Well Lived

BY LAURA STARK

From a window in his home in Confluence, Pennsylvania, Bill Metzger sees “a constant parade” of trail users along the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP). He chuckles at the memory of seeing unicycles and even a penny-farthing once from this vantage point. It’s a fitting setting as Metzger is in the midst of developing the second edition of *The Great Allegheny Passage Companion*, a guidebook that dives into both the trail experience and the rich history along the route.

“It’s a hell of a lot of fun,” says Metzger of the trail he’s been riding for more than two decades. “When we go on the trail, it’s always different: the people you meet, the wildlife you see, the change of seasons. That’s what makes it fun.”

Spanning 150 miles from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pitts-

burgh, the GAP is one of the most well known rail-trails in the country and one that Metzger helped shape. As a member of the GAP’s first board, he remembers tossing around ideas for the trail’s name with a handful of people. More than 100 names were pitched, some silly and some serious, including the Spine Line (because it would be the backbone of the regional trail system) and the George Washington Trail (as the first president fought two historic battles in the area).

Naturally, we asked him for an inside scoop on the GAP’s best sections. Metzger likes the Meyersdale area toward the southern end of the trail, as that’s where “most of the goodies are,” including the Salisbury Viaduct, Meyersdale visitor station, Keystone Viaduct, Big Savage Tunnel and Big Savage Overlook.

Another rail-trail close to his heart is Pennsylvania’s Montour Trail, which forms a nearly 50-mile semicircle outside of western Pittsburgh. Metzger, who met his wife, Pam, at a bicycling and pedestrian

advisory meeting, even got hitched on the trail in 1997.

As one of the trail group’s first members back in 1989, Metzger says fondly, “The Montour Trail Council has some of the best volunteers in the world; if somebody says they need help with something, five hands go up.”

In addition to his roles as trail volunteer, author and photographer, Metzger is also a skilled cartographer currently working for *Trains* magazine, a publication the rail fan has been reading since he was a pre-teen (he’s 70 now).

To stay active, he and Pam continue to enjoy biking despite Metzger’s having a neuromuscular disease that limits the use of his legs. In 2004, a neighbor and good friend who was an occupational therapist had recommended that he try a handcycle. Metzger remembers that first outing as “pretty cool,” and two weeks later he had a handcycle of his own. Since then, he’s put more than 24,000 miles on it and says, “I couldn’t live without the bike. It saved my life.”

Photo: Bill Metzger on the Great Allegheny Passage

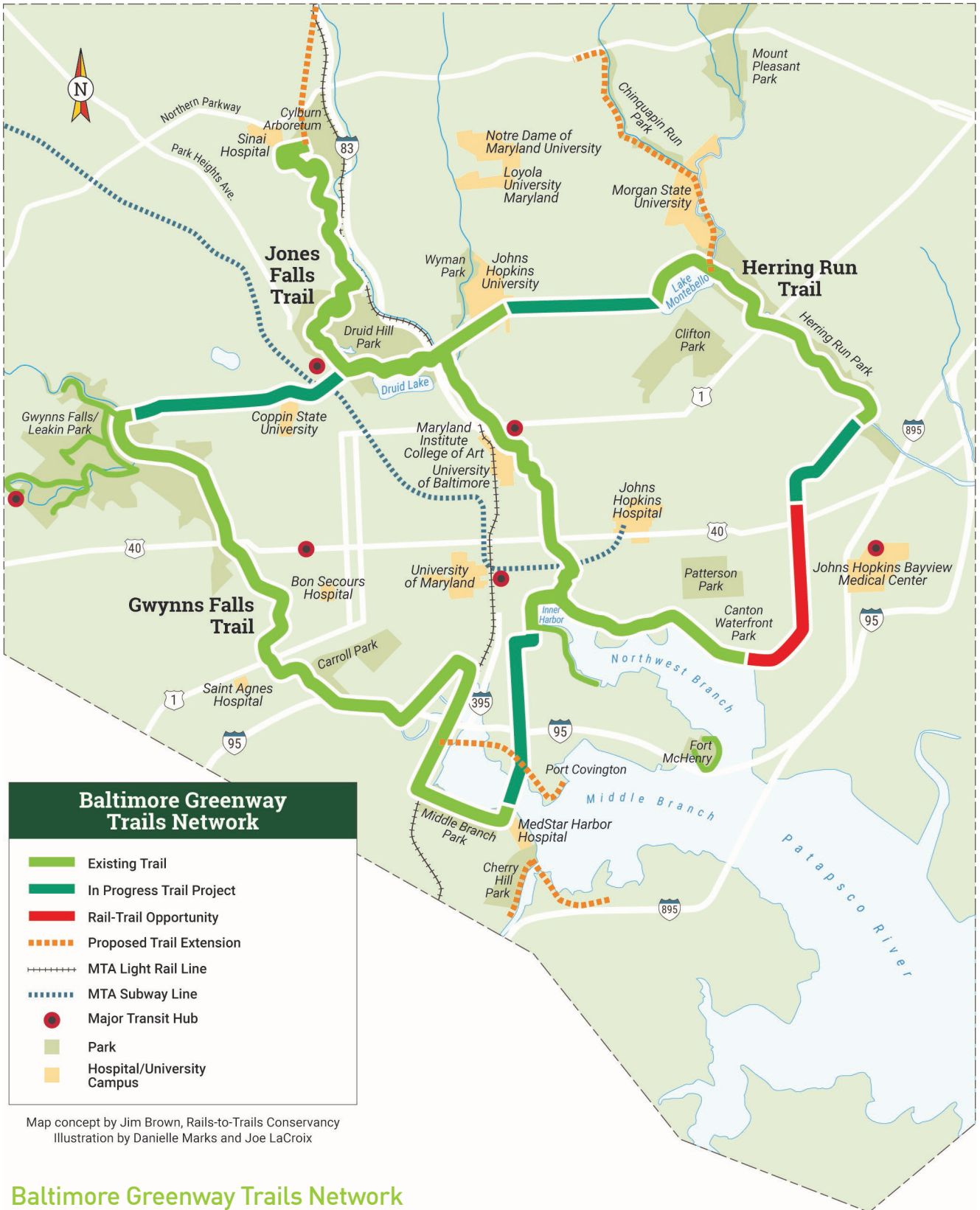


**“When we go on the trail, it’s always different: the people you meet, the wildlife you see, the change of seasons. That’s what makes it fun.”**

Bill Metzger

FROM LEFT: THOMAS K. KRAEMER, SAM BODJACK





## Baltimore Greenway Trails Network

The Baltimore Greenway Trails Network—a partnership between Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Bikemore—is a game-changing urban trail network that will link three existing Baltimore City trails to form a 35-mile loop connecting the city’s diverse neighborhoods with the downtown core. Learn more at [railstotrails.org/baltimore](http://railstotrails.org/baltimore).



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Greater Yellowstone Trails | Photo by Camrin Dengel



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