ADT Feature

Council Grove, Kansas

The Madonna of the Trail statue portrays the strength and fortitude of the early pioneers.

By Jim Shaner, Contributing Editor

The oldest restaurant west of the Mississippi River resides in Kansas. During one of my treks on the American Discovery Trail, my wife and I ate there. The restaurant was not in a well-known city or town such as Lawrence or Dodge City, but in the town of Council Grove, with a population of just over 2,000 souls.

The Hays House was built in 1857 by Daniel Boone’s great-grandson, Seth Hays, as a place to eat and drink along the Santa Fe Trail. Some of the notable people who were said to have dined there are Buffalo Bill Cody, Wild Bill Hickok, and George Armstrong Custer.

The Hays House is one of many historical sites in the town. Other places of interest date from 1849 to the mid-1900s. Built in 1849, the Pioneer Cowboy Jail was the only jail in the early days of the Santa Fe Trail. Many desperados were imprisoned there during its time.

The second oldest historical site, the Post Office Site, is very unusual. When Council Grove’s first postmaster was appointed in 1855, there was no post office building, so the postmaster simply distributed mail from a sack on the street or put it on the floor of a store for patrons to sift through.

Operated by Tom Hill, the Last Chance Store was built in 1857 along the Santa Fe Trail. It also served as a post office and polling place. Hundreds of wagon trains filled with goods stopped there on their way to trade with Mexico.

One of my favorite places is the Aldrich Apothecary on Main Street with its old-fashioned soda fountains. During the early-to-mid-1900s, sodas were considered healthful because they gave a person more pep, as in Dr. Pepper. At that time, the only place to buy a soda was in a drug store where they were created by pharmacists.

Standing for nearly 100 years is a statue of a sturdy frontier woman holding a rifle in one arm and an infant in the other. Another child clings to her long skirt. Called the “Madonna of the Trail,” she is one of a dozen such statues erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution in the 1920s along the National Old Trails Road. Her beauty does not lie in her features, as she is rather plain. Instead, it lies in the strength she exudes as a symbol of the American frontier woman.

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Trail News

Buckeye Trail Reopens an Old, Original Trail

A nationwide trail requires continuous monitoring and maintenance to keep it in usable condition. The American Discovery Trail connects a series of trails and greenways, and each trail has a caretaker to maintain it.

A prime example of this is the work done this spring by the Buckeye Trail Association in Ohio. In March, 14 volunteers from the BTA installed new stiles along a portion of the BT/ADT in Hocking State Forest that had been closed since the 1970s because the public was not following the strict rules required in a nature preserve. The stiles bookend a newly re-established trail through two state nature preserves where 3.5 miles of forested trail have replaced a 2-mile walk along a busy road.

This was a huge step in re-opening the original Buckeye Trail, with the first miles designed in 1959 by Emma “Grandma” Gatewood in the Hocking Hills. Gatewood, an Ohio farmer and a survivor of domestic abuse, gained fame as the first woman to complete a solo thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail at the age of 67 in 1955. Ohio now celebrates a day in her honor each April 27 and the new trail section was finished the day before that this year.

The BTA was instrumental in accomplishing this task by working closely with the state nature preserves, which manage the land, and the Ohio Division of Forestry, which owns the land. The BTA developed signs that describe the rules: Only foot traffic is allowed, and hikers must stay on the trail, with no camping, fires, foraging, or pets allowed.

None of this would have been accomplished without the solid relationships developed over the last decade between the BTA and local land managers at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Byron Guy, ADT Ohio state coordinator, explained that staff from the state natural resources department learned a lot from BTA about proper trail building and blazing standards that was put to use in designing the new trail.

“It was a great feeling to walk the original trail, as envisioned by Grandma Gatewood, with members of the ODNR that day. Projects like this are helping pave the way for even more corridor to be moved off-road and fully protected for generations to come,” Guy said.

The ADT Society contributed prizes to the ALDHA-West meeting raffle. Here is one of the happy winners. Photo courtesy of John Fazel

Public Relations Outreach

By John Fazel, ADT National Coordinator

I represented the American Discovery Trail Society at the American Long Distance Hikers (ALDHA-West) meeting in February. About 70 people attended, many of whom have completed the Triple Crown of the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, and Continental Divide trails. I told them about the Quadruple Crown with the addition of our American Discovery Trail that connects the other three into the new Big Four.

This year, many more attendees were aware of our trail than when California coordinator John Mercurio attended the last event before the pandemic. A few expressed interest in getting involved with the ADT in California. Several plan to assist Medicare Pastor, Mary Davison, as she finishes her hike in Pt. Reyes this fall.

New Advisory Council

The American Discovery Trail Society is proud to announce the establishment of a new Advisory Council to support our board of directors’ efforts. It consists of people of distinction who can help the ADT Society through their expertise, advocacy, networking, or financial support. Our initial class consists of three members who have agreed to serve in this capacity. We are thankful for their service.

Roger G. Ibbotson is professor in the practice emeritus of finance at Yale School of Management and chairman of Zebra Capital Management, an equity investment, index, and hedge fund manager. He has written numerous books and articles on a broad range of financial topics; serves on many boards; and frequently speaks at universities, conferences, and other forums.

Michael Muir is the founder and executive director of Access Adventure, North America’s leading innovator in therapeutic driving, which enriches the lives of people with disabilities and other underserved community members by providing outdoor recreation, open space access, education, and therapy through a working partnership with horses. He is the great grandson of America’s visionary conservationist, John Muir.

John Pennington is a partner in the intellectual property practice of Smith, Gambrell, & Russell in Washington, D.C., and an expert in trademark and intellectual property law. He has been recognized by the National Trial Lawyers Association on its “Top 40 Under 40” list. His volunteer work was honored with the 2022 “Pro Bono Service Honor Roll” of the Virginia Access to Justice Commission.

International Trails Summit

The American Discovery Trail Society was well represented at the International Trails Summit held in Reno, Nev., on April 17–20. The International Trails Summit is the premier opportunity for the worldwide community to gather, learn from each other, and showcase their trails. Sponsored by American Trails, it is normally held every two years, but the 2021 event was canceled due to the pandemic. The summit is the largest gathering of trail professionals, managers, and users, as well as tourism and business interests. This year’s event was a collaboration of American Trails and the Professional Trail Builders Association and included more than 140 sessions, including technical training workshops and field seminars.

Four ADT Society board members and state coordinators staffed a booth in the exhibit hall to answer questions and explain what our trail offers.

Making Connections…
Coast to Coast
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John Fazel, ADT national coordinator, shares information about the trail with an attendee. Photo courtesy of Lorie Van Hook
Our American Discovery Trail thru-hike was a grand adventure. Grand in both scope and experience. First and foremost, it was LONG. Longer than any of the other three major thru-hiking trails we’ve done. It was longer in both mileage and time. It was 1,700 miles longer than the 3,000-mile Continental Divide Trail, and it was three months longer than the Pacific Crest Trail.

To put the length and time of the ADT in non-hiker perspective: To drive across the country in a car from Lewes, Del., to San Francisco is 2,923 miles, and technically can be done in less than two days. The route of the American Discovery Trail is 4,756 miles, and it took us 196 hiking days to complete. That’s an extra 1,844 miles and an extra 194 days. It goes without saying that walking is a heck of a lot slower than driving. But also, the American Discovery Trail is by far NOT the most direct route from coast to coast. There are many other shorter, more direct routes to walk across the country, with many other starting and ending points.

We looked at the American Discovery Trail as a trail, a TRAIL. A trail to thru-hike like the Appalachian, Continental Divide, and Pacific Crest trails. We never looked at it as a coast-to-coast hike or a hike across the country. We set out to hike the trail. “Across the country” just happened to be where the trail went.

When we hiked the other three trails, it was never referred to as “hiking across the country,” even though the PCT and CDT went across the country from Mexico to Canada. It was simply “hiking the trail,” or in our case, “thru-hiking the trail.” On the ADT, we met non-hikers all along the way, and it seemed that no matter how much we talked about the trail, their only response was, “Wow, you’re walking across the country.” To which, our thoughts were, “Well, kind of, sort of, but not really.”

We would describe our American Discovery Trail adventure as a long string of opportunities to experience life. Opportunities to BE our life. Opportunities to make what our life IS. Some opportunities for the doing, the seeing, and the experiencing. Some for the BEING LIFE ITSELF.

These ADT opportunities were made of people, places, things, and circumstances. All placed together by the timing of the universe, the laws of physics, and the whim of Mother Nature.

Where to Stay, What to Do

Coon Rapids, Iowa, is actively promoting what it has to offer for those who enjoy outdoor recreation. The town, with its Whiterock Conservancy on the American Discovery Trail, has produced a new document listing accommodations ranging from tenting, RVing, Airbnbs, and lodging as well as outdoor activities including hiking, stargazing, camping and even “Art on the Go.”

Check it out at https://www.coonrapidsiowa.com/pview.aspx?id=35833&catid=0

How Hikers Can Lend a Hand

By Bill Gilmour, Southern Illinois Coordinator

The River to River Trail Society was pleased when a group of hikers from the Lone Star Hiking Trail Club in Houston recognized the difficulty of maintaining a long trail and the challenge of knowing where maintenance is required. Trees can fall anywhere along the trail, but it can be hard to describe where to find them. Knowing this, LSHT Club President Karl Van Scyoc captured GPS coordinates on the River to River Trail—which the American Discovery Trail follows—where trees or excessive brush affected their hike.

With this information, five members of the River to River Trail Society cleared the worst of the blockages reported within a few weeks. It would be appreciated if future section- or thru-hikers sent GPS coordinates for downed trees or trail problems. Photos of each area would help maintainers know what to expect.
Council Grove

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The interesting history at Council Grove is one more example of the reason “discovery” is a part of the the American Discovery Trail name. Seeing history onsite has expanded my knowledge about our country in a more lasting way than films or books ever could. There are historical sites all along the trail. If you are interested in seeing them, grab your hiking shoes and start walking.

A Place for Getting a Good Night’s Rest

Because the American Discovery Trail does not have a series of shelters, as the Appalachian Trail does, many users wonder where they might spend their nights. It’s often a mix of camping in national forests or state parks, asking permission to tent on someone’s property, camping in remote areas, couch surfing, occasional motels, or kind offers from trail supporters.

The Antioch United Methodist Church on Knobley Road in New Creek, West Virginia, fits this last category. The members of this small historic church along the trail just east of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area often offer our trekkers meals or a place to sleep. They are trying to build a new fellowship hall/community center that will include showers, bathrooms, and a kitchen that hikers will be able to use as part of the church’s official outreach.

The entire project is estimated to cost around $250,000 and would take one and a half years to complete, depending on fundraising. They have raised about $95,000 so far and are working on several small grants. Anyone interested in supporting this project can contact Darlene, a lay leader for the church, at 304-289-3720 or framergal@frontiernet.net.

Long-Distance Hikers on the Trail

Each year the American Discovery Trail is attracting more users. Here’s a smattering of some of the long-distance hikers out there:

Briana, also known as Rocky Mountain High on the American Discovery Trail, left Delaware in January 2022 and has hiked more than 5,000 miles of the eastern, southern, and northern segments of the ADT. She is now tackling the western one. Along the way she has brought the ADT lots of publicity in the form of newspaper articles, radio interviews, presentations, and articles she has written for her hometown newspaper. She has also performed many good deeds such as picking up litter, feeding the less fortunate, and honoring our fallen heroes on Memorial Day.

Medicare Pastor Mary, now 81, is back section-hiking the ADT. This spring she hiked most of California and sections in Utah and Nevada that she had to skip last year due to fires and flooding. She plans to hike her last ADT section to Pt. Reyes this fall.

Liam from Ireland worked in New York City the past three years but is hiking westward before returning to his homeland. He had reached Cincinnati by the end of May.

Oscar from Denmark is impressed by the friendliness of United States so far. Traveling at a fast pace he had gone from the Atlantic Ocean to Chicago by the end of May.

Blackberry Brian was also in northwest Indiana in May. He is hiking for Feeding America and giving out packets of seeds as he goes.

Ruk Runner started on the west coast. He took a break for foot surgery, but is back on the trail and in West Virginia in June. He posts short videos regularly in our Facebook group.

Benjamin “Fast Benny” Bouch is hiking the trail as a high school graduation present. Westbound, he was into Ohio in June.

Michelle, Stormin’ Moomie, just finished the eastern section of the ADT. She has followers of her journey on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.
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So Many Ways to Enjoy the American Discovery Trail!

Michelle Strong, aka Stormin’ Moomie, is flanked by David and Judith Johnson at a chance meeting on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal trail section of the American Discovery Trail in April. Michelle is thru-hiking the ADT. David and Judith are doing ADT sections by bicycle.

Photo courtesy of Judith Johnson

There are so many ways to enjoy the American Discovery Trail. Some like to tackle it in one long hike while others approach it in smaller chunks. Some stick to hiking, while others bicycle or ride horses. It’s all good!

What inspires people to tackle the ADT? For Judith Johnson, it was reading Mary Davison’s book, Aren’t You Afraid?, about her experiences on the ADT after having completed the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, and Continental Divide trails.

The Johnsons became members of the ADT Society and bought the GPX and turn-by-turn directions. So far they have bicycled Delaware, Maryland, and part of West Virginia.

They live near Maryland’s C&O Canal National Historic Park where they get out regularly for shorter bike rides. Judith says that perhaps the biggest reason for getting out on the ADT is that “being out in nature nourishes my soul and brings me peace and joy.”

Annual Meeting Invitation

The American Discovery Trail Society will hold its 2023 annual membership meeting virtually via Zoom on Sept. 23 at noon eastern daylight time. In addition to hearing informative presentations on the trail, members will elect the board of directors and attend to other business.

All members are invited. Please send a message to info@discoverytrail.org to receive information on how to attend.

Federal Employees & U.S. Armed Forces Members can designate the American Discovery Trail Society in their pledges for the Combined Federal Campaign. Contributions are tax-deductible. Simply include our five-digit code #11245 when filling out your pledge card.

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