



REC & CON-VERSATION NEWSLETTER

ExplorePAtrails.com – A New Website Powered by Trail Users

Trails exist in every corner of Pennsylvania. But have you ever looked for trail maps and way-finding information online? Chances are you got frustrated because most of this information is scattered across many websites or acquired and shared only by avid trail users and local experts.

Now DCNR, in partnership with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), Keystone Trails Association (KTA) and other trail volunteers, has developed a new, trails one-stop website, www.ExplorePAtrails.com. This is a statewide, all-trails-inclusive, user-powered trails resource that is the first of its kind in the nation with tools for searching, viewing, mapping, and sharing information on trails of all kinds in Pennsylvania.

Sharing Trails Information

In the past, trails information was shared primarily through guidebooks, paper maps, and word-of-mouth. Today, with internet blogs, online forums, and GPS-enabled iPhones, trail users, planners and builders can look to the Web for tools to access data and information. At ExplorePAtrails.com, users will find simple ways to bring many of these resources together into one centralized, community-driven work space designed specifically for collecting and sharing trails information.



Collecting Trails Data: Lessons Learned

Large-scale, statewide trail data collection is a difficult challenge and requires an extensive network of active and connected volunteer and staff trail reporters. These reporters are the eyes and ears of ExplorePAtrails.com. By clicking on the link for "Update a Trail" trail reporters can use simple dialogue boxes for uploading and sharing their latest trails information and expertise.

In 2008, funded by a grant from DCNR and the Tawani Foundation, RTC staff members and volunteers traveled 97 of Pennsylvania's rail-trails with Garmin GPS units. They collected GPS data for 1,348 miles of rail-trails, including the trail centerlines and 1,707 waypoints for trail features such as public parking, restrooms, drinking fountains, bridges, and tunnels. Then the GPS data was imported into a Geographic Information System (GIS), checked for accuracy against high-resolution aerial photography, and corrected before sharing on the Web.

This year, KTA volunteers Pete Fleszar and Tom Baumgartner used some of the same procedures to collect data for several major hiking trails such as the Mid-State Trail. DCNR staff also researched trails by contacting trail managers and digitizing data using the latest satellite and aerial photography. Together, these organizations are working to create www.ExplorePAtrails.com.

Serving Trails Information on the Web

As of August 2009, more than 5,670 miles of Pennsylvania trails have been digitized, uploaded to the GIS database, mapped, and made available for sharing on ExplorePAtrails.com—enough miles of trails to span the distance between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh more than eighteen times. Still, this is only a small fraction of the total miles of trails believed to be open and available to Pennsylvania trail users.

The power of ExplorePAtrails.com is that it allows users to search for *all* kinds of trails *anywhere* in PA and get descriptions, maps, and custom driving directions. The interactive mapping application uses Google base maps and displays locations of trail access areas and trail centerlines for each trail in the database. Other websites, which provide even more detailed trails information,

including reviews and photos, are linked to ExplorePAtrails.com.

DCNR has already used this data to locate gaps or "missing-links" in existing trail networks. The data will also be used to assess long term goals established in state and local greenway and recreational trail plans.

How You Can Help

DCNR continues to build and update its trails database and plans to have more than 10,000 miles of PA trails collected and verified before the end of 2010. To find out more about GPSing trails contact c-ketaylor@state.pa.us. To locate a trail in your area, visit ExplorePAtrails.com.

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