

Rock Island Trail at a Historic Juncture

Editor's note: *On December 18, 2014, Ameren Corporation and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources filed official notices with the federal Surface Transportation Board—Ameren stating its intent to abandon its holdings of the old Rock Island Line from Beaufort west of St. Louis to Pleasant Hill in the Kansas City suburbs and to negotiate a transfer to DNR, and DNR stating its intent to bank the corridor for future trail development—and potential future rail use—under the 1983 Rails-to-Trails Act. Active rail service will continue on the stretch from Maryland Heights in the St. Louis suburbs to Beaufort, though DNR has expressed interest in that reach if rail service is ultimately ceased.*

It was a deal that had been in the works, in one form or another, for more than two decades, and it may take that long again for a trail to be completed, but the vision of a gigantic 400-mile scenic loop combining the Rock Island and the Katy Trail through the Ozarks and along the Missouri River with links to both St. Louis and Kansas City has firmer grounds for realization now than ever before.

In celebration of this historic juncture and in anticipation of publication of the newly revised state park book in Spring 2015, Heritage publishes the essay on the Rock Island Trail written for the new book by B.H. Rucker, one of the book's co-authors.

Rock Island Trail State Park

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad was often described as "one railroad too many." The line began operations in 1852 as the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, operating trains between those two cities. It later expanded, with transcontinental aspirations, but Colorado and New Mexico were as close as it ever got to the Pacific. The Rock Island seemed to have left early but arrived late, as its expansions tended to bring it into

from St. Louis to Bland, in the eastern Ozarks. Its completion across the upper Ozarks to Kansas City required expensive construction, including an enormous trestle and bridge across the Gasconade River valley, scads of other bridges, and no fewer than four tunnels. The line opened for business in 1905, but it was competing with long-established lines that already had more direct routes between Missouri's two largest cities.

This reckless competitiveness all across the Midwest sent the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific into receivership three different times, the last being in 1980, when the business was dissolved and its routes sold to other roads in a bankruptcy settlement of mind-boggling complexity. This tangle of railroad business is of interest, of course, because of the 1983 Rails-to-Trails Act, which amended the 1968 National Trails System Act to permit the preservation of railroad corridors by long-term, interim use as hiking and biking trails.

Missouri's first project was the Katy Trail, after the Interstate Commerce Commission granted a certificate of interim trail use from St. Charles to Sedalia in 1987, and later from Sedalia to Clinton.

State park planners and trail enthusiasts never lost sight of their long-range goal: a hiking and biking trail all the way across Missouri. As it happened, the Southern Pacific Railroad acquired the Rock Island Line in Missouri during the bankruptcy proceedings, then announced its intent to abandon it. In 1993 DNR filed a for-

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Cattle mosey where locomotives once hauled freight.

head-to-head competition with well established rail lines that had more direct routes, leaving the Rock Island to build over less favorable terrain and more circuitous routes.

In 1902, the Rock Island acquired the St. Louis, Kansas City, and Colorado Railroad in order to have a route from St. Louis to Kansas City competing with the Missouri Pacific and the Missouri-Kansas-Texas railroads. However, the SLKC&C was largely imaginary, existing at the time only

President's Message by Steve Nagle:

The Gathering at Montauk

Farewell to another good year for MPA, and I hasten to welcome 2015 with all hope and conviction that a new year will bring opportunities as well as challenges—a year of strengthened partnerships and good tidings for our state parks and historic sites.

Nowhere was this spirit more evident than at Montauk State Park where we held our annual MPA members gathering November 7-9. Sunny days and mild weather added to the experience in a weekend of learning and good memories that included a visit to the headwaters of the Current River at Montauk (caddis flies and jumping trout, what a sight!); a hike up pine ridge to view the resident eagle's nest; and a shuttle over to Current River State Park with its historic gymnasium where State Park Director Bill Bryan presented a comprehensive State of the State Parks address.

A major highlight that afternoon was a chance to see the nearby, newly acquired Camp Zoe, an incredible 330-acre jewel of the Ozarks bordering crystal-clear Sinking Creek, which flows to Current River. During its sixty-year history, Camp Zoe touched the hearts of thousands of school children. Some of our members who joined us at Camp Zoe were alumni as campers and counselors. Later, Greg Iffrig and Neal Humke led a brief tour of the Roger Pryor Backcountry, which borders Zoe. Saturday evening, following dinner at Montauk Lodge, Ozark Natural Scenic Riverways Superintendent Bill Black provided a report on the park's new general management plan. That was followed by park naturalist Steve Bost's presentation of a new "Bear Aware" program, Susan Flader's update on the new state park book, complete with sample layouts,

and an eerie candlelight tour of Montauk Mill.

This is just a small sample of our itinerary, none of which would be possible without the generous and professional support from dedicated park staff and managers. Thanks to Bill Bryan, David Kelly, J.C. Kuessner, Laura Hendrickson, Montauk staff Doug Rusk and Steve Bost, Current River superintendent Jim Newberry, and so many others.

Our annual members and board of directors meetings Sunday morning included discussions of membership and UPOP reports, the budget, and three critically important resolutions approved unanimously by the board:

Resolution to extend the Arbitrary Fundraising Deadline and to Encourage the Stabilization, Restoration and Preservation of the Camp Zoe Lodge and Adjoining Stone Walkway. *The Lodge is an example of the distinct Missouri vernacular architectural genre, Ozark rock masonry; the walkway and lodge are the only remaining structures of old Camp Zoe.*

Resolution on Church Mountain – *to encourage Ameren officials to approve the pending plan for trails on Church Mountain and along Taum Sauk Creek and for DNR to work with Ameren Officials to renew the 25-year lease.*

Resolution to Encourage State Park Officials to proceed favorably to designate Big Sugar Creek Wild Area as the twelfth Wild Area in the Missouri System.

Wishing all of our dear members and friends a happy and healthy New Year!!!



MPA members visit Camp Zoe Lodge.

Save the Zoe Lodge

Camp Zoe Alumni (former campers, counselors, and staff, 1929-1986) are seeking a total of \$250,000 in pledges, ***needed quickly*** to meet deadlines established for stabilizing the Zoe Lodge prior to the planned opening of the new Zoe facilities on Memorial Day weekend, 2016. For information about the fundraising effort and pledge drive visit:

website:

www.savecampzoelodge.org

email:

info@SaveCampZoeLodge.org or

Pledge@SaveCampZoeLodge.org

phone: Melissa (Camp Zoe Alumni Group), 619.787.2275

Riverways Final Plan Released

The National Park Service released the long-awaited final general management plan for Ozark National Scenic Riverways on December 12. There will be a thirty-day period for public review and comment before the plan is signed, but there will be no further fundamental changes. The 600-page plan may be viewed at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ozarkgmp> or a CD requested from ONSR, phone 573-323-4236.

More than 1,450 people participated in four public meetings held by ONSR in January 2014 to explain and receive input on the draft plan—an unusually large turnout for such NPS events nationally, each one packed with people from Riverways communities passionately opposed to any new NPS regulations as well as with others more quietly supportive of the NPS planning process. According to tables in the plan, 3,094 written "correspondences" were received by NPS, including co-signed comments, with 12,343 individual signatures. Of these, the vast majority (74 percent) were from conservation/preservation organizations generally supportive of the plan or even stronger resource protection, with another 25 percent

identified as unaffiliated individuals, many of whom—including many from the local area—were also supportive. These are available in a separate 1,200-page document online.

The final plan is similar to the NPS-preferred alternative in the draft GMP, except for a number of specific changes likely made in an effort to assuage the harsh criticism from local political leaders and residents who opposed any new regulations or limitations on current uses. As a result, despite the preponderance of comments supporting the NPS preferred plan or the stronger alternative, virtually all the changes weakened the proposed protections. For example, instead of establishing motor-free zones on the uppermost Current and Jacks Fork rivers year-round, the plan now allows 25 HP motors except in peak season (April 1 to September 15), and instead of limiting motors to 60/40 HP below Big Spring, the plan allows 150 HP motors year-round. Many NPS supporters are dismayed that not a single stretch of the nation's first federally protected wild and scenic rivers will be free of motors, especially during peak fall colors.

Other contentious issues such as vehicular access to gravel bars, undesignated horse trails and river crossings, and undesignated roads would be resolved through development of a subsequent roads and trails management plan, likely with stakeholder involvement, though the target number of miles of new designated horse trails was increased from 35 to 45. Plans for fisheries management and communications would also be developed.

That many opponents of the draft GMP are now saying "we won" gives supporters of the plan reason to hope that NPS staff will be able to reach a measure of agreement on horse trails, gravel bar accesses, and related issues in the roads and trails plan to come, provided stakeholder workshops are equitably constituted and knowledgeable people are willing to participate.

In a sad note at year's end, ONSR Superintendent Bill Black, who was near-universally respected by all, will retire as of December 31. Let's hope he is replaced by someone who relishes the daunting challenges of the Riverways as much as he did and is as skilled at dealing with them.

MPA Honors Park Employees



L to R: Deb Schnack, Janet Price, Carl Bonnell, Connie Schmidt, Bill Bryan.

Five state park staffers were honored as Park Employees of the Year in different categories with plaques, clocks, and checks presented by MPA Vice-President Deb Schnack. The ceremony took place October 20 after an MPA-sponsored dinner at the new Camp Pin Oak dining lodge at Lake of Ozarks during a state park staff conference.

Connie Schmidt, who manages marketing and special events, was honored in the central office category for her willingness to assume yet another major task managing information technology for the entire park system.

Terry Cobb, a 19-year staffer at Arrow Rock and its three satellite sites, won in the field category for her multiple roles in budgeting and financial administration, IT, restaurant management and training, and for her willingness to step in wherever needed, from cleaning restrooms and waiting tables to offering children's programs and assisting staff elsewhere in the system.

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mal request with the ICC to secure a 197-mile segment from Owensville in Gasconade County to Kansas City, in large part to make possible a link with the Katy Trail at Windsor, thus completing a trail across the state. The Missouri Rail Trail Foundation pledged funds set aside for this acquisition through the foresight of Ted Jones, who had died in 1990. But Union Pacific, which had donated the segment of the MKT from Sedalia through Windsor to Clinton that made the link with the Rock Island possible, petitioned the ICC for the twenty-six-mile right-of-way from Kansas City to Pleasant Hill for coal trains, and the ICC approved. Though a local group was still trying to raise funds to restart rail service on the part of the line between Pleasant Hill and Owensville, DNR in 1994 signed a contingent contract with the Southern Pacific for that stretch of line.

clined to strike a deal with the state to provide for a link from the Katy Trail at Windsor to Pleasant Hill, from which a series of local trails might extend into Kansas City. Then, in the pre-dawn of December 14, 2005, the dam at Ameren's pump storage reservoir on Proffit Mountain in Reynolds County collapsed and the resulting deluge tore the heart out of Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park. The final damage settlement for the disaster included, in addition to reconstruction at the Shut-Ins, Ameren's somewhat reluctant agreement to "license" the state to construct a trail from Windsor to Pleasant Hill on its Rock Island right-of-way, but not on the railbed, along with some \$18 million in settlement funds that could be used for that purpose.

In a sort of strange stasis, a disaster in one part of the state park system had created an opportunity in

agreed in 2011 to abandon the segment under terms of the National Rails-to-Trails Act so the new trail could be developed on the current railbed after all, major obstacles remained. Decades of neglect had not been kind to the old Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific. Sizeable trees had grown up between the rails, bridges had deteriorated, and even the roadbed itself had eroded and washed out in places. But, it is a beautiful forty-seven-mile stretch of Missouri countryside. Even though it wasn't the easiest terrain over which to build a rail line in the first place, as a trail it will provide a scenic biking and hiking experience of both natural and historical significance.

A dozen or so present and former town sites exist along the route to Pleasant Hill; some can be explored, but others are so diminished that they exist only as names on the map or in the memories of old timers living nearby. Some of these small communities will benefit economically from the Rock Island Trail, just as many have from the Katy Trail. Other towns may be too far gone, with not enough of a core left to benefit from the stimulation. The pretty little town of Leeton has a small café, and perhaps a bike repair business might take root there. Chilhowee has three hundred residents, but no café; a dependable stream of trail users could support one, a benefit for locals and travelers alike.

The civil engineers who laid out the Rock Island Line from Windsor to the west were diligent in their profession, keeping the line as level as possible while crossing the fewest number of watercourses. From its intersection with the Katy Trail a short distance northeast of Windsor, the Rock Island curves in a gentle arc northward to Leeton, and from there arcs back south as it proceeds west to Chilhowee, making a twenty-mile-long, shallow S curve. The idea was to follow the high



When the Rock Island reached Windsor in 1904, it had to go beneath the existing Katy Railroad, now the Katy Trail. The underpass will serve the new Rock Island Trail.

When the dust finally settled, Ameren Corporation—an energy company—wound up owning the Rock Island rail line from Pleasant Hill east to Maryland Heights in the St. Louis suburbs, a hedge against possible problems hauling coal from the West for its Midwestern power plants. Even though Ameren had no immediate plans to run trains on the western part of the line, it still de-

another: finally the vision of a cross-state hiking and biking trail linking St. Louis and Kansas City had come within reach. It wouldn't be simple; Ameren didn't even own much of the land in the right-of-way. The state would have to bargain with dozens of individual landowners and construct new bridges and crossings as well as a safe surface for hikers and bicyclists. Even after Ameren finally

ground, first bending north to avoid the Tebo Creek's upper reaches, which flow south toward the Osage River, and then bowing back south to stay clear of the Blackwater drainage, which flows north toward the Missouri River. The strategy was not without problems. The high ground between the drainages is broken

for building a railroad through this part of Missouri. Between Leeton and Chilhowee, the abandoned, raised roadbed of the MKT can be seen running parallel and only a few feet away from the Rock Island roadbed, underscoring the Rock Island's problem of coming late to a route where a competing railroad was in place.



The Rock Island trestle spanning the Gasconade River valley, at nearly a mile long and one hundred feet high, presents a daunting challenge to park builders and eventually to those who wish to walk or ride over it.

country, and there were many small swales to cross, most containing rivulets or shallow creeks—more than two dozen of them between Windsor and Chilhowee.

The engineering solution to this problem was to raise the rail bed on earthen fills as it crossed the valleys, with culverts below to let the water pass. This allowed the rails to remain relatively level across the low spots, in much the same way as the Romans crossed valleys with their aqueducts. These fills are of varying heights and visual interest and will make for entertaining riding and hiking where they are high and narrow. With careful thinning of brush and smaller trees, users may ride or walk in dappled shade for long stretches, while still having pastoral views of picturesque farmsteads.

Adding historical interest to this portion of the trail are the occasional landscape features that resulted from extensive coal mining in the last century, one of the original justifications

Near Chilhowee, the character of the countryside changes into a more prairie-like landscape. The horizons open outward, the sky seems larger, and there are fewer swales where the roadbed crosses on fill. For the next twenty or so miles, the Rock Island bit the bullet. The larger stream crossings that were so carefully skirted east of Chilhowee became unavoidable further west, if the line was to reach Kansas City. Beginning just west of the crossroads hamlet of Denton, the route passes through many stretches of low, marshy bottomland. Although much of this bottomland has been drained and is now cultivated, trail users will still have the pleasure of many stretches where the dense forest seems to enclose the right-of-way, and bikers and hikers will pass through a dry leafy tunnel above the swampy ground while experiencing an entirely different complement of animal and plant life than on the higher ground. In these bottoms are the meander channels of numerous larger creeks with relatively

little sign of man-made activity other than the railbed itself. There is one man-made lake, the Rock Island Lake, over which the dam provides passage for the trail. Veteran trail hands may recognize this as a water supply point for steam locomotives.

In the vicinity of White Oak and Bear creeks, the route runs for nearly three miles with no road crossings. The county road builders avoided this low, marshy country, though the railroad could not. It was a difficult place to build a railroad. Within a stretch of only seven or eight miles, the Rock Island crossed successively Lost Creek, Hornsby Branch, Crawford Creek, and finally Big Creek—a civil engineer's nightmare of elevated roadbed, mushy ground, driven pilings and bridge structures crossing the same meandering streams multiple times. These lush riparian zones make for great cycling and hiking, and with only three road crossings in this whole section of the trail, a certain amount of deep woods solitude is nearly guaranteed.

After the crossing of Big Creek comes the former village of Wingate, and from there the railroad, now the trail, stays in the valley of Big Creek, running parallel to the stream all the way into Pleasant Hill. This section is low and flat, mostly cleared farm ground with a nice stand of timber along the right-of-way. The route makes one last crossing of Big Creek, and it's a dandy, crossing over the creek and under a highway at the same time. From the trailhead at Wingate west into Pleasant Hill, a pilot section of the trail is open for visitor use. Cyclists will find that Pleasant Hill is pleasant indeed—a bicycle-friendly town, with bike lanes, road separations and special signage. The Rock Island Trail State Park ends here, and from Pleasant Hill on into Kansas City, a new route will be patched together and maintained by a coalition of municipal recreation agencies and organizations.

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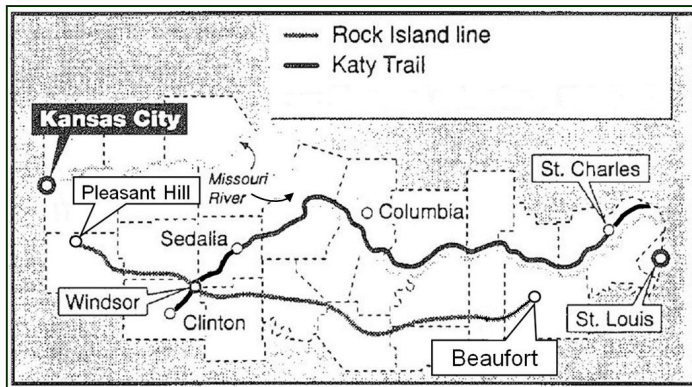
Rock Island Trail at a Historic Juncture Riverways Final Plan Released

<http://parks.missouri.org>

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As plans for the Rock Island route toward Kansas City neared resolution in 2014, Ameren unexpectedly announced its intent to sell its long-held but never-used 144-mile stretch of the

Such an acquisition, first contemplated in 1993, not only would open another highly scenic route through the Ozarks but also, with the addition of a spur to Washington, complete an



Rock Island from Windsor east through Eldon and Owensville and on to Beaufort, near Union—presumably for the multi-million dollar salvage value of the rails. When communities and organizations along the route, in partnership with the national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, sought to enter the bidding process in order to establish rail trails, DNR reiterated its interest in the line, and the coalition placed what became the winning bid. On December 18, 2014, Ameren filed official notice of its intent to abandon the line and DNR filed a request for interim trail use with the Surface Transportation Board, setting the stage for eventual transfer of the property.

eastern connection with the Katy Trail for a gigantic cross-state continuous loop trail totaling nearly 400 miles along the river, across the plains, and through the mountains. Because the challenge and expense of developing the new route through the Ozarks—including three tunnels and a mile-long, one-hundred-foot-high trestle over the Gasconade River—would be enormous, state park officials would likely partner with communities and organizations to foster local initiatives in developing certain stretches.

On the Rock Island line both west and east of its junction with the Katy Trail at Windsor, there are still engineering problems—bridges and hydrology—and right-of-way issues to be resolved. This will likely take years or decades, not to mention considerably more money than is currently in sight. Nonetheless, the time is again coming when, as the old

song says: "The Rock Island Line is a mighty good road; The Rock Island Line is the road to ride."

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Janet Price was honored in the interpreter category for her creative programming at Johnson's Shut-ins and Taum Sauk, her role in training seasonal interpreters, and her partnership with Sherwood Forest, a local church camp for inner city children.

In the maintenance and construction category, **Karl Heberlie** was honored for his efficient maintenance and skillful repair of the multiple historic buildings at the Felix Valle site, his willingness to help out with interpretation of 18th and early 19th century skills, and his friendly relationships with local businesses and visitors to historic Ste. Genevieve.

Carl Bonnell, 22-year manager at Table Rock, a small park with the second-largest attendance in the system, won the facility head category for his creative development of the park, seamless delivery of visitor services, and his recent role in gearing up for state management of the Viney Creek Recreation Area, a Corps of Engineers facility.