

***Southeastern Equestrian Trails Conference 2005 Report
Diane Ayres and Ellen Stara
High Point, North Carolina
July 14-16, 2005***

Thursday, July 14th

Trail Planning, Design and Construction
Mike Riter, Georgia Trails Education Specialist

The morning classroom session was a very condensed version of the first 3 days of Mike's Crew Leader Certification course.

Mike's Golden Rules for great trails:

1. Get permission before planning a trail
2. Never build on the fall line (the route a bowling ball would take if placed at the top of the hill)
3. Always stay on the contours so that water will cross the trail at right angles
4. Observe the 10% overall rule to keep impacts down (the average grade for a trail should not be more than 10%)
5. Never break the 50% rule so that water will not run down the trail (the grade of the trail should not be more than 50% of the grade of the hill)
6. Know the lay of the land to know where to route the trail
7. Identify all control points to take the best advantage of the property and have a better trail (these can be anything that might be either a destination, special interest or something to avoid)
8. Know who will be using the trail and design it accordingly
9. Pay attention to the flow of the trail as you lay it out (look ahead and behind frequently)
10. Design in natural grade dips to keep the trail interesting and prevent future problems

After lunch, the local Ditch Witch dealer provided an AK500 for Mike to demonstrate. Mike reviewed all the details of the machine. We then proceeded to the trail on the Uwharrie National Forest. Mike demonstrated some hand tools, then the Ditch Witch. Several of us were given an opportunity to try it.

Mike really does a great job of teaching this subject. Even though I had previously taken his entire course, it was a great refresher and I was able to learn completely new stuff about the Ditch Witch.

Friday, July 15th

On Friday morning Lewis Ledford, Director, NC Division of Parks and Recreation and recipient of the Governor's Award for Volunteerism, gave a moving opening speech about the importance of volunteers. North Carolina's State Parks are impressive. They have 175,000 acres of land, and a Park and Recreation matching program with funds of 40 million dollars a year. In his closing remarks, I took notice of his quote from Calvin Coolidge, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence".

Deborah Parker and Stefis Demetroupolos from the Florida State Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services presented information about their volunteer programs. Most of it was statistics about their accomplishments.

We also heard from The Great Smokey Mountains National Park and Big South Fork NRRRA Volunteer Programs. Again, all was statistics, rules and accomplishments. I asked what they do to motivate volunteers. They're doing pretty much the same things we are, Award patches and recognition.

The company that is in the process of renovating the trails at Pilot Mountain State Park gave a presentation about the project. They've done some great work, but expensive.

After lunch we boarded tour buses and were taken to three different locations:

1. The Sauratown Trail – A very impressive story of volunteer persistence. A group of horse trail enthusiasts had a dream to connect two state parks with a horse trail. They spent several years

meeting with private landowners along the route and succeeded in getting a 22-mile long horse trail completed on private property. What a great example of the impact a group of volunteers can have.

2. The Yadkin River Corridor Trail – This was an example of bad trail design that led to severe erosion and a requirement to completely re-route the trail on the contours of the land.
3. Jomeokee Trail – This premier visitor trail, on the upper reaches of Pilot Mountain State Park, is a hiking trail. The extreme terrain caused severe erosion over time. The makeover of this trail was done through a major capital reconstruction project. Helicopters were used to bring in stone. Masonry was used similar to the method used by the CCC, to create a sustainable and very beautiful foot trail to the top of Pilot Mountain.

Friday evening was spent at the Jomeokee Horse Camp. We were treated to delicious BBQ and Blue Grass music by a local band. The Sauratown Trails Association hosted this event.

Saturday, July 16th

Saturday morning we heard a very interesting, and moving, presentation from Dr. Carol Kline, Parks, Recreation and Tourism at NC State University. She was fascinating because when asked to do this presentation, she knew absolutely nothing about horses. Her presentation reflected some amazing data about the impact of horses on tourism. The basic message helped land managers to realize the tremendous opportunities available by having equestrian facilities.

Also on Saturday morning, a panel discussion about maintaining 300 miles of some of the most spectacular and highest elevation horse trails in the eastern US, The Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Next up was Christopher Douwes, Program Manager, Federal Highway Administration Trails and Enhancements. Christopher does a wonderful presentation every year, providing current status of highway administration legislation (Recreational Trails Program grant money), and how you can tap into that funding resource. Christopher was recently given additional responsibility for the Highway Enhancement program. He's in the process of getting horse trails included in that program. (Of all the conferences he attends, he says SETC is his favorite. He loves the horse people)

Candace Bourne, SETC Planning team member from Alabama, gave a wonderful presentation about the youth program she is developing. With the help of some Auburn college students (for their thesis) she has put together a great plan for teaching the trail riders of tomorrow about volunteerism and the importance of helping to maintain trails.

The meeting of the State Planning Team was mostly spent discussing content for SETC 2006 in Virginia. Sally Aungier has made a great deal of progress. The preliminary plan is to have the conference in Roanoke. SETC 2007 will be in Tennessee. There was also a good deal of discussion about where SETC 2008 would be. The ultimate decision was South Carolina. The South Carolina Horsemen's Council will host.

Summary

All the sessions were very well done and informative. The hotel and food were excellent. The field trips were especially interesting and enjoyable. There was ample opportunity to network with our land managers and other trail volunteers. The only things we had hoped to learn, but did not, were new ideas to get more volunteers active on the trails. CTHA is already doing as much or more than other volunteer organizations.