



NORTH CAROLINA
RAIL-TRAILS

newsletter summer 2011
(formerly *Little Toot*)

“Connecting people & communities”

VOLUME 20 | NUMBER 2



CROSSFIT LEVEL 1 COACH ANDREW POPE TAKES HIS CLIENTS TO THE DUNN ERWIN RAIL TRAIL FOR FITNESS WORKOUTS.

Photo/Nancy Pierce

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Donor Spotlight

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The Dunn-Erwin Rail-Trail

by Nancy Pierce

Walking along the Dunn-Erwin Rail-Trail, Thomas Jernigan's characteristic bemused smile widened as he came upon a group of young adults. They were tossing weights back and forth across the trail, running sideways down the trail and bouncing up and down on a big rubber disc at the trail's edge. Those exercises aren't exactly his cup of tea, but in a lifetime which includes 12 years as an advocate for this Harnett County rail-trail, Thomas has learned that health takes many forms.

In 1999 he attended a Dunn Council meeting to hear NC Rail-Trails' co-founder and President Emeritus AL Capehart propose turning the inactive 5.3-mile Dunn-Erwin Connector of the Aberdeen & Rockfish short line into a trail.

Thomas, who is no stranger to health problems, was eager to lend a hand. As a young man he suffered virus-related congestive heart failure. In 1996, he had back surgery for herniated discs, and the doctor prescribed walking as the best rehabilitation, but there were no sidewalks near where he lived and the roads edges were dangerous for pedestrians.

The Dunn Area Tourism Authority, the local Chambers of Commerce and a core group of trail advocates quickly became cheerleaders for the trail. In quick succession: Aberdeen & Rockfish donated the 5.3 mile corridor to NCRT, the corridor was federally railbanked, the trail was constructed, opened to the public in 2002 and sold to Harnett county in 2006.

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BLACK RIVER WETLAND
AS SEEN FROM THE
DUNN-ERWIN RAIL-TRAIL
Photo/Nancy Pierce

THANK YOU TO A LONG-TIME, AMAZING VOLUNTEER

Jean Middleton once told me with a laugh, "I don't even like trails." So how did this woman end up serving 20 years as a vital volunteer for North Carolina Rail-Trails? In the words of NCRT President Emeritus AL Capehart, "she is a dear friend and she helps her friends." In 1991, Jean was wrangled into folding newsletters for NCRT and she's been helping ever since. She then moved on to being assistant treasurer and then full-time treasurer and spent many years on the board of directors. If you have received a renewal notice in the last two decades it was from Jean. That handwritten note of thanks was also from her. She knows the membership list backwards and forwards and has done a fantastic job reminding us all when it is time to renew. Jean recently passed off her duties as membership coordinator to the executive director. Her impact on NCRT is immeasurable and her many hours of service will always be remembered and appreciated. Thank you so much, Jean.

The Dunn-Erwin Rail-Trail *continued from page 1...*

By any measure, just two and a half years from idea to trail opening is amazing – most rail trail conversions take much longer. But even more amazing is the manner in which the Dunn and Erwin communities have embraced the trail. "People who would not ordinarily feel safe walking outside will walk on the trail," Thomas says.

In the evenings, groups of residents from a senior community adjacent to the trail walk and bicycle down to the Black River Bridges to take in stunning views of a conservation wetland and bird habitat. Eagle Scout projects such as bird houses, benches and even a working model rail switching device adorn the trail. Twice per year, local church members gather for prayer walks along the trail.

At the other end of the exercise spectrum, Crossfit coach Andrew Pope draws up to 30 people out to the trail edges for an intense conditioning experience several weeks each year. Andrew and his wife Vondy, a dance and yoga instructor, chose their family home and a location for their businesses, X-cell Fitness and Firefly Yoga and Dance, largely because of their proximity to the trail.

At age 69, Thomas is retired as Dunn Public Works Superintendent. He spends about 5-10 hours per week as volunteer Trail Manager, a board position on the Dunn-Erwin Trail Authority. His truck bed is full of bollards and trail markers, and he is first responder to problems like erosion, limbs across the trail

and unallowed uses. In recent years his knees have weakened so exercise walking is difficult, but he still puts in 25-30 miles per week by bicycle on the trail.

On a recent scorching hot June evening, Thomas gazed out from a Dunn-Erwin Rail-Trail bridge over wetlands at the Black River headwaters. Despite the 95-degree heat, he wore long, dark sleeves and pants and a hat to protect himself from the sun to which he is especially vulnerable due to his newest health challenge, chemotherapy treatments for cancer. Recent tests show the cancer is gone and he is preparing to go on a mission trip to Haiti where he and his wife Becky will build homes. He smiles. "I've been a miracle several times over. Or so my doctor says."



"TRAIL BOSS" THOMAS
JERNIGAN AT TUBBY'S DINER
Photo/Nancy Pierce

Clearly the trail provides a place for Thomas and others to engage in a variety of health-related outdoor activities. But Thomas knows the health benefits of his 12-year commitment to the Dunn-Erwin Rail Trail go beyond physical exercise. "It's spiritual," he says. "I have an enthusiasm for life, for doing things that benefit everyone. It keeps me going."

Dunn-Erwin Q&A

- » **Where do I park?** In Erwin, park at the intersection of East H St. and South 13th Street. In Dunn (trail midpoint), park at the intersection of North Powell and Ashe Ave. or at the Dunn trailhead near Harnett Primary School.
- » **How many miles is it?** It's 5.3 miles of compacted gravel and crushed granite.
- » **Best bets for retail, food & service?** In Erwin, there is a BP gas station within a block of the trailhead for snacks and drinks. If you want more substantial food, there is a strip of restaurants directly off of the trail in downtown Erwin.
- » **Best scenic interlude?** The Black River Bridge provides a nice view of wetlands and the possibility for a wildlife sighting. The majority of the path is through woods or across expanses of country and farm land, so it's all pretty scenic.
- » **What else can I do?** Make it a full day of fun by visiting the Averbosboro Civil War Battlefield and Museum, Coats Cotton Museum, General William C. Lee Airborne Museum or paddle the Cape Fear River. Call (910) 892-3282 for information or visit www.dunntourism.org.
- » **For more information:** www.ncrailtrails.org/web/trails/dunn-erwin

UPDATE: Rail-Trail Projects

Red Line Trail, Mecklenburg County: In April, a grassroots group of citizens, planners, and trail advocates presented a concept for a Red Line Trail along Charlotte's proposed North commuter rail line to the Charlotte Area Transit's Red Line Advisory Committee. A feasibility study is in progress by volunteers, with the goal of having the 30-mile Red Line Trail included in master plans of the seven north Charlotte jurisdictions affected by the Red Line. NCRT representatives have been at the table with this group and stands ready to be of assistance.

Deep River Rail-Trail, Randolph County: The towns of Franklinville and Ramseur are working together to extend the Deep River Rail-Trail into downtown Ramseur. This long-term extension plan would lengthen the existing rail-trail from 1 mile to 5 miles.

Thermal Belt Rail-Trail, Rutherford County: Jerry Strenslund, Recreation, Cultural and Heritage Planner for Rutherford County, is organizing an Adopt-A-Trail program that will organize teams to help with trash pick-up, trail amenities and partnerships with neighboring business. They have also applied for a grant to put up an information kiosk in Spindale, mileage markers and safety improvements. Fingers crossed!

FAREWELL TO TWO GREAT INTERNS

NCRT was lucky to have two great interns during the 2010-2011 school year. Both interns completed detailed trip reports of rail-trails and uploaded them to the NCRT website. They can be found on our website in the drop down menu labeled "Find A Trail." Vanessa Fixmer-Oraiz, an environmental studies major, completed five trail reports and wrote a blog of her, often humorous, experiences on the rail-trails. Vanessa was recently awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and is off to the Philippines to continue her research on bamboo. Jordan Zentmeyer, an English major from Wilmington, began her internship in the fall semester with five trail reports and has been helping with other tasks ever since. Jordan has completed grant applications, organized a fundraising event and written letters on behalf of NCRT. Jordan has been an invaluable member of the NCRT team and will be missed. We are so grateful for all of the time and attention that these ladies have donated to us this past year. Good luck in your future endeavors, Vanessa and Jordan!

The Skinny on Rail-Trails and Health

By: Emily Clabaugh, Development and Communications Manager of BeActive North Carolina

Two thirds of North Carolina's adults and one-third of children are overweight or obese. Nationally, North Carolina ranks in the top 20th percentile of all states for obesity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating are directly tied to increases in heart disease, cancer, diabetes, anxiety, depression and other costly and preventable diseases. Trails and walkways offer a significant opportunity for regular physical activity which can lower rates of obesity and subsequent health-care costs. That is why Be Active North Carolina supports the construction of trails and rail-trails in North Carolina. Several rail-trails across the state are in close proximity to downtown commerce areas or factory districts and they are heavily used by workers who enjoy taking a break out on the trail. For example, the Thermal Belt Rail-Trail is often used by employees of the Trelborg and Tanner Companies in Spindale for lunch-time exercise. This is just the sort of employee health and wellness opportunities that BeActive NC encourages. We look forward to working together with NCRT in the future to make North Carolina a happier and healthier place to live and work.



Executive Director's Message

Summer is a hard time to exercise outside in just about any area of our great state. The heat, humidity and all-too-common ozone warnings keep many people inside. The perky ears on my dogs, Wastach and Kit, are often the only motivation I have to go outside during the dog days of summer. Hey, I wonder if that is why they are called the dog days of summer...? Just as our April newsletter examined the economic development impacts of rail-trails, this issue also has a theme: health. Focusing on the Dunn-Erwin Rail-Trail, in Harnett County, we examine how this rail-trail has changed lives by providing a beautiful and safe place to exercise. We are proud to have a guest article written by our partners at BeActive North Carolina and also to say a sad farewell to a long-time volunteer and two great interns. In this issue, you will also find project updates, and a list of upcoming rail-trail events. I hope that this newsletter will inspire you to get some exercise on a shady rail-trail and thank you so much for your continued support of North Carolina Rail-Trails.



Carrie Banks

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NCRT is a 501(c)(3) public non-profit. Your membership dues and any additional contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MET IN EARLY APRIL FOR A TWO-DAY STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT. WITH GUIDANCE FROM THIRD SPACE STUDIO, WE SPENT TWO BUSY DAYS DISCUSSING THE WORK AND FUTURE GOALS OF NCRT. STAY TUNED AS WE PUT SOME NEW PLANS IN PLACE!

Photo/Nancy Pierce

DONOR SPOTLIGHT:

Couple honors NCRT on their wedding day

photo by Catharine Carter

Using a gift registry website called the I Do Foundation (www.idofoundation.org), NCRT members Dustin Bayard and Miriam Chicurel were able to earn money for some of their favorite charities, including NCRT. NCRT will be receiving up to 10% of the gift purchase price from gifts purchased on their registry. In their own words, "We wanted to make sure our wedding celebration embodied the values we hold dear. Allowing our friends and families to learn about NC Rail-Trails and make donations is our way of giving thanks to an organization that does so much to make North Carolina a better place to live, work, and play." We are incredibly grateful that Miriam and Dustin chose NCRT as one of their recipient nonprofits and we wish them the very best.



Upcoming Events on Rail-Trails in N.C.

July 16th: Habitat Bull Moon Ride
 American Tobacco Trail, Durham.
durhamhabitat.org/volunteer/bike.html

August 13th: Tour De Elvis 5k and Cycle Tour
 Roger F Snyder Greenway, Albemarle.
 704-984-9560

September 17th: Franklinville Community Festival
 Food, bands and fun in the home of the

Deep River Rail-Trail. Call at 336-328-7350 or at rgoodwin14@triad.rr.com

September 18th: Ramseur Triathlon
 The running portion of this triathlon is still being decided, but we hope that a portion will be on the Deep River Rail-Trail. For more information or to register go to www.triviumracing.com/events/ramseur-triathlon