



NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS newsletter summer 2015

“Connecting people & communities”

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Runners on the A&Y Greenway in Greensboro: Photo © Nancy Pierce

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Atlantic & Yadkin Rail-Trail: Path to a bright future in Guilford County

Story and photo by Nancy Pierce

Kathi Coldwell loves the A&Y Greenway in Greensboro and Guilford County. The paved 7.5 mile rail-trail connects to 90 miles of natural surface and gravel trails in the Lake Brandt and Guilford Courthouse National Military Park area north of downtown Greensboro.

As a runner and Training Program Manager for Fleet Feet running store, Kathi uses the trail system to customize everything from beginner fun runs to her own long training runs. Fleet Feet and three bike shops are located within a few blocks of the A&Y, which parallels busy Battleground Avenue northwest

of downtown. Cyclists ride the A&Y out of town to access wide-open country roads.

From 1900 to 1974 the Atlantic & Yadkin Railroad carried granite from Mount Airy quarries to Sanford. The corridor from Mount Airy to just inside Greensboro was abandoned in the 1980s, and the easement reverted to adjacent property owners. In the 1990s and early 2000s Guilford County and Greensboro bought reverted properties and created the rail-trail from the Greensboro bedroom community of Summerfield southeast into the city.

The rail-trail stops a couple miles northwest of downtown. From there, the

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NCRT Board Member Harry Clapp and trails advocate Paula Davis inspect the historic trestle near the Stokesdale/Summerfield border. *Photo © Nancy Pierce*

digging a rail-trail tunnel under busy US Hwy 220 as part of its road widening project. The Town of Summerfield aims to bring the A&Y from the tunnel north through Summerfield to the next town on the A&Y corridor, Stokesdale. Summerfield Town Manager Scott Whitaker elaborated: “Development of the A&Y is key to delivering the connectivity our citizens want, but it’s more than just a local, quality-of-life amenity. It’s of regional importance since we’re at a critical point along the statewide Mountains-to-Sea Trail.”

The state’s MST master plan includes the A&Y corridor through Summerfield and Stokesdale, on to Belews Creek, then Hanging Rock and Pilot Mountain State Parks.

At the Summerfield/Stokesdale border is rail-trail eye candy: a historic wooden trestle over the marshy headwaters of the Haw River, on the abandoned corridor.

On a warm March day earlier this year, NCRT board members Harry Clapp and Nancy Pierce and Greensboro trails advocate Paula Davis hiked along the abandoned rail corridor to check out the trestle, overgrown with weeds. Paula first walked the corridor as a 20-year-old newcomer to Greensboro in 1974 - the same year the A&Y made its last scheduled run. Harry started advocating for the rail-trail in the early 1990s, after the corridor was abandoned.

Paula climbed down the bank to explore. “This makes my day” she said, remembering her West Virginia childhood exploring train trestles in coal country.

Harry, now 91 years old, stood on the trestle and gazed at the Haw River wetland. A retired railroad engineer, he’s kept an eye on the trestle over the years. He says the piles are solid enough so that, with a new deck, it would be safe for pedestrians and bicycles. This would provide a necessary link to add 12 miles of A&Y rail-trail to Stokesdale and more miles beyond.

There’s a growing demand for active recreation tourism. Perhaps someday, tourists seeking a long bike ride will flock to the A&Y as they already do flock to the 57-mile New River Rail-Trail in Virginia or the 61-mile Silver Comet in Georgia. They’ll pedal from Greensboro to Mount Airy and back for a taste of our state’s beauty, brews, food and hospitality. We have to dream.

Atlantic & Yadkin Rail-Trail continued from page 1...

railroad had remained active for just one company: Chandler Concrete. Last fall, Chandler moved and sold the property with a restrictive covenant prohibiting rail use on the easement.

Trail supporters are optimistic that the current easement owner, Norfolk Southern, will make this section of unused rail corridor available to extend the A&Y Greenway south toward downtown. This would be a huge boost to the planned Greensboro Downtown Greenway, a paved 4-mile trail encircling downtown. Most of the western section of the loop would be on the A&Y rail corridor.

Dabney Sanders is Project Manager of the Downtown Greenway, a collaborative project of Action Greensboro and the City. “Greensboro has a great trail system, but we lack connectivity to the urban core,” she says. That will soon change. Design is nearly complete, and public and private funding is 100% secured for the north, east and south sections of the loop. Some sections are already open and construction is scheduled for the rest.

Regarding the western section, the Greensboro Mayor’s office will say only that the City is evaluating its options for the railroad corridor. Greensboro Park and Recreation Assistant Trails Director Madeleine Carey is hopeful: “That rail section would complete the innermost spoke in our trail system, connect a half dozen colleges and universities, parks, 13 urban neighborhoods and our historic downtown.”

Greensboro has for years done what comes more slowly to other cities: the Parks and Recreation Department and the Greensboro Department of Transportation work together on trails. Says Wade Walcutt, Interim Parks and Rec Director: “Our vision goes beyond trails, beyond recreation, beyond transportation. Our aim is to connect the community in a way it’s never been connected before.”

One of Greensboro’s most prominent retail and restaurant developers, Marty Kotis, sees the potential. A trail fan, he bicycles with his son and checks out local trails when traveling. Kotis Development has assembled more than a mile of frontage in several sections along the A&Y corridor.

“Great destinations are the result of both public and private investment,” he says. And he intends to have a hand in making the A&Y a great destination. When the trail extends south to connect with the downtown loop, Kotis envisions raised-patio cafes to create “eyes on the trail”, fountains, performance and festival spaces, a brewery, a sprayground for kids, and bicycle rental facilities. Where others see a gritty concrete rail underpass below Wendover Avenue, Marty sees a funky trail-side amphitheater.

On weekends, lively trail-side amenities will attract residents and tourists for recreation, leisure and dining. On weekdays, Summerfield bike commuters will avoid congested highways, ride through gorgeous scenery and arrive safely downtown, fit and invigorated.

To facilitate that Summerfield-to-Greensboro bicycle commute, NCDOT is

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MEET OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Emily Herbert joined North Carolina Rail-Trails in January 2015 to serve as the organization's second Executive Director. A native and resident of Durham and alumna of UNC-Chapel Hill, Emily has deep ties to North Carolina and a keen interest in preserving the state's history and lands for the benefit and enjoyment of all. Emily holds a master's degree in nonprofit management from University of Central Florida and brings to NCRT over a decade of previous work experience in nonprofit organizations of all sizes in several fields, including land conservation, from Durham to Denmark. In her free time Emily enjoys volunteering in the community, reading long books, and spending time with her husband and young daughter.

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* 919.399.5214;
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SHOW US HOW YOU RAIL-TRAIL!

North Carolina's rail-trails are a valuable, beautiful, and fun resource for all of us to enjoy. Please share your pictures, stories, art, poems, and musings with NCRT to show "how YOU rail-trail!" We will highlight your submissions in our newsletter, Facebook posts, and website. Keep 'em coming to info@ncrailtrails.org

CAN YOU SEE THE POTENTIAL?

Let's work together to make it a reality! Is there a rail corridor in your community that would make a great trail? Contact our Executive Director, Emily Herbert, to learn what NC Rail-Trails can do to help your community achieve your trail dreams. Emily can be reached at execdirector@ncrailtrails.org or 919-399-5214

Toast to Trails riders arrive at Cloer Family Vineyards Photo © Emily Herbert



EVENTS

The **2nd Annual Toast to Trails** vineyard ride on May 16, 2015 was a huge success with 100 riders raising over \$3,300 for NC Rail-Trails and enjoying a beautiful day together on the American Tobacco Trail. Huge thanks to our sponsor and host, Cloer Family Vineyards, for the generous support and hospitality!

Check out www.ncrailtrails.org/events for upcoming events, and save the date for the **5th Annual Ales for Rail-Trails 5K Run** at Fullsteam Brewery and Ellerbe Creek Trail in Durham on October 11, 2015.

Bike parking at Toast to Trails Photo © Emily Herbert



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Want to make sure that rail corridors are preserved and rail-trails are created for public use and enjoyment today and for generations to come? Join NCRT now and invest in the future of rail-trails across our state. Already a member? Share your love of rail-trails with a friend or family member by encouraging them to join or giving a gift membership.



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