

Users Guide to the American Tobacco Trail

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[Sidebar]

ATT: A Work in Progress

Still under construction, the American Tobacco Trail currently does not have a complete set of mileposts, but some sections do have established mile markers: the fully developed portion of the Durham County section, miles 0-6.5, and the developed Wake County section, miles 18.5-22. The Durham mileposts run from north to south; the Wake mileposts travel opposite, from south to north, so that trail miles 18.5 south from Durham to 22 are Wake County trail miles 0 north to 3.5.

The reason for this was that Wake County Parks management felt that users would mistake mile markers that indicated, for instance, that Mile 20 would indicate 20 miles of completed trail ahead, when in fact much of the middle sections of the ATT still need to be constructed.

Until matching mileposts are installed all along the trailmileages shown below are approximate and are derived from railroad records and various maps.

The mileages shown for the N.C. 54 to Chatham County line section are especially uncertain, as the routing of the I-40 bridge and around the development that breaches the trail corridor there will affect them dramatically.

The trail is paved from mile 0-6.5, 7.6-8.0, and the entire Riddle Road Spur trail in Durham, a total of about 1.5 miles. It is on a railroad mostly abandoned in the early 1980s, with a portion that survived into the early 1990s.

History and Trail Features Overview

For a history of this rail line, owned by the New Hope Valley Railroad / Durham & South Carolina Railroad / Norfolk Southern Railroad-Railway / Southern Railway System / Norfolk Southern Corporation (in succession), see the TRTC website-- www.triangletrails.org/ATT.HTM. The original Durham-Bonsal segment dates from 1905/1906, the Bonsal-Duncan segment from circa1917, and the American Tobacco factory spur from circa 1925. The relocated portion of the branch [south Durham (railroad name Penny) to Bonsal] dates from 1977.

The Durham County section of the American Tobacco Trail is open from sunrise to sunset. Parking is allowed along Scott King Road under the power lines in the natural surface section of the Durham portion of the trail (south of mile 8.5). The urban section of the trail, from Mile 0 south to Mile 8.5, will be paved when complete. The rural section, from Mile 8.5 to the end in Wake County, will have a surface of granite screenings.

Many of the road crossings and trail heads on Mile 0 to 6.5 in Durham County have fixed trail maps and street names posted at crossings. There are two trail information kiosks at Mile 0, Morehead Street, and at the Southpoint Crossing

Shopping Center trailhead near Mile 6.5. These now have trail information brochures provided by TRTC and/or Durham Parks and Recreation.

All trail heads in Wake County have notice boards, fixed trail maps and free trail brochures.

Mile 0

The American Tobacco Trail begins at a large trail head just south of the former American Tobacco factory complex in downtown Durham, N.C., and under the Durham Freeway (NC 147). The parking area is accessed from Morehead Avenue and Blackwell Street. No bathroom facilities are currently available.

This portion of the former Norfolk Southern Durham Branch, three miles south to former Keene Yard (where Fayetteville Road, Cornwallis Road and Riddle Road intersect) was built by Norfolk Southern circa 1925 to reach the American Tobacco factory in what was then and now downtown Durham.

Amazingly, the branch that provided the main rail service for the complex, hauling in coal and unprocessed tobacco and hauling out finished tobacco products, did not intersect with the important Southern Railway (North Carolina Railroad) line running east-west just across Pettigrew Street from the factory. The American Tobacco complex was the Durham Branch's main customer. Business was so brisk that, for many years, a switch engine was based here to serve the factory. The factory closed in 1987, but is currently under redevelopment for mixed uses.

The trail parallels Blackwell Street, then crosses Lakewood Avenue (U.S. 15-501 Business) on a long bridge newly built for the trail. It replaced a wooden pile bridge that was a familiar sight for Durham residents driving to the many businesses, such as the Rockwood Filling Station and Yorktown Theatre, formerly located along University Drive just southwest of this point. South from this point, the trail runs just to the east of the Forest Hills neighborhood, crossing Enterprise Street and going under Apex Street.

Mile 1

The granite Mile 1 Marker is located 490 feet north of the bridge over South Roxboro Street. After multiple measurements, however, it was determined that this marker was installed incorrectly. It should actually be located some 278 feet north of the edge of the bridge. While Durham Parks staff are aware of this discrepancy, the marker has not yet been moved to its correct location. All subsequent markers are properly located.

The trail crosses South Roxboro Street on another bridge, then Otis Street. The ATT then runs due south in a valley between the houses along Atlantic Street to the east and Pilot Street to the west, crossing a small creek with a bridge.

Mile 2

The Mile 2 marker is located 420 feet south of the Fayetteville Street crossing. This crossing is controlled by a traffic light. Trail users can press a pole-mounted button to force the light to change, allowing safe crossing of this busy street.

The ATT then parallels Fayetteville Street, and later Fayetteville Road, for many miles. This is one of the most historic points along the trail. North from this point is North Carolina Central University, one of America's finest historically black colleges and universities. Founded by the Reverend James E. Shepherd in 1910, NCCU became National Training School in 1916, transferred to the State of North Carolina in 1923 and became the North Carolina College for Negroes. North of NCCU is Hayti, one of the most historic African-American neighborhoods in the South. Much of Hayti was destroyed by the construction of the Durham Freeway in the 1960s.

As you proceed south on the trail, look to your left. The parking area and business there are on the site of an African-American cemetery that holds the unmarked grave of Blind Boy Fuller (Fulton Allen), 1907-1941. Fuller was the principal figure in an historic Durham Piedmont Style blues scene that centered upon the warehouse district (now called Central Park), Hayti, and street busking at places like Five Points downtown. Fuller is considered by many to be the finest Piedmont blues artist. His lonely resting place, marked by a surviving tombstone, seems an end pulled directly from a mournful blues song. A commemorative marker honoring Fuller and other musicians is 460 feet down the trail on the left as you travel south.

From the Durham blues marker to Mile 3, the ATT runs through another valley bounded by residential areas to the east and the west, and crosses Rocky Creek. Just before Riddle Road, it crosses the entrance to the new Hillside High School, which lies just west of the trail here. Northwest of this point, at the corner of Fayetteville Street and Cornwallis Road, is White Rock Baptist Church, site of a famous visit and speech by The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Mile 3

At Mile 3, the trail crosses Riddle Road and divides. The corner of land along the trail between Riddle Road and Cornwallis Road east of Fayetteville Street, once housed the engine facilities for Keene Yard, the operating center of the Norfolk Southern Durham Branch. Structures surviving here in recent years were a caboose yard office (just south of the Cornwallis crossing), three yard tracks (between the Cornwallis and Fayetteville crossings), and the engine servicing area with a sand bin, fuel supply box, and a fuel pump house. The fuel supply box, with its pipe, survives in the woods between the trail and the Brackett Foundation Systems building. A water tank stood here during the steam engine era.

There is some parking in this area, and also great barbecue, drinks, and bathrooms at Dillard's Bar-B-Que (3921 Fayetteville Street), which is very close to the trail. Dillard's is considered one of Durham's best barbecue places.

A Branch Trail – The Riddle Road Spur

From Mile 3, a branch, the Riddle Road Spur, of the American Tobacco Trail runs east to the CSX (formerly the Durham & Southern) line from Durham to Apex, North Carolina. This was the track the Norfolk Southern used to interchange with the rest of Durham's railroads (the Durham & Southern, Norfolk & Western,

Seaboard Air Line and Southern), reaching them by using the Durham & Southern tracks into downtown.

In very early years, the branch had a passenger service, trains 200/201, which, in 1929 for example, left Duncan, N.C. ,at 1:15 p.m., arriving in Durham at 6p.m. (an average speed of less than ten miles per hour!) and then left Durham at 9p.m., arriving back in Duncan at 2a.m. The passenger service used this line to reach Durham Union Station, which was located on a site taken in the 1960s by the Durham Loop and a municipal parking garage near Corcoran Street downtown. Durham Union Station was considered the most significant railroad structure in the state and one of the most significant in the South.

The Norfolk Southern, the fifth of five railroads to enter the Durham market, was always far behind the other Durham passenger railroads and discontinued its passenger service very early. The other important stations for trains 200/201 were Farrington and Bonsal, N.C. After passenger service ended, the Durham Branch was served by a daily freight until Norfolk Southern's merger with Southern Railway System in 1974.

Spur 0

The Riddle Road Spur runs due east from Keene through a residential area, passing an access trail to Hillside High School, then crossing Alfred Street and Riddle Road (be careful here — this is a busy road with no light!) at grade [i.e. both corridors at the same level].

Spur 1

Just after Mile 1, the Riddle Road Spur crosses N.C. 55 at grade.



Riddle Road Spur at NC 55

a very busy intersection that, fortunately, has a light. Glenview Cemetery lies along the trail to the north. Just past N.C. 55, to the south of the trail and across Riddle Road, is Durham Fire Station 4, a source of emergency assistance. The trail then crosses Alston Avenue and dead-ends at the west side of the former Briggs Avenue crossing, about 1.5 miles, just before the former rail connection with the CSX Durham-Apex line.

The railroad called this point D&SC (Durham & South Carolina) Junction or Sheb [need to explain what 'Sheb' stands for, if you can]. The trackage from American Tobacco to the CSX interchange and in the Keene Yard area a short distance south of this was the last portion of the Durham Branch to survive — it was abandoned in 1993.

Back to the main American Tobacco Trail

From Mile 3, the trail crosses busy Cornwallis Road (be careful!), then it parallels Fayetteville Road closely for one mile through a mixed commercial and residential area that was once the site of the yard tracks of Keene Yard.

Just south of the Cornwallis crossing, a door or hatch that may be part of the old caboose yard office survives in the woods just west of the trail, as does a pile of railroad brake shoes. The trail crosses the new Martin Luther King, Jr., Parkway at about Mile 3.7, jogging to the west on sidewalks to cross the parkway at the light and crosswalk located at its intersection with Fayetteville Road. NCDOT dictated the trail follow this circuitous route because the trail would cross too close to the very busy Fayetteville Road intersection for safe use. While inconvenient for some trail users, this minor detour pays dividends in trail safety.

Mile 4

The trail crosses United Drive and then Belgreen Road, then turns sharply to the west, crossing Fayetteville Road (again, be careful) at grade. There is a pole-mounted traffic light activation button installed here. Use it to safely cross Fayetteville Road.

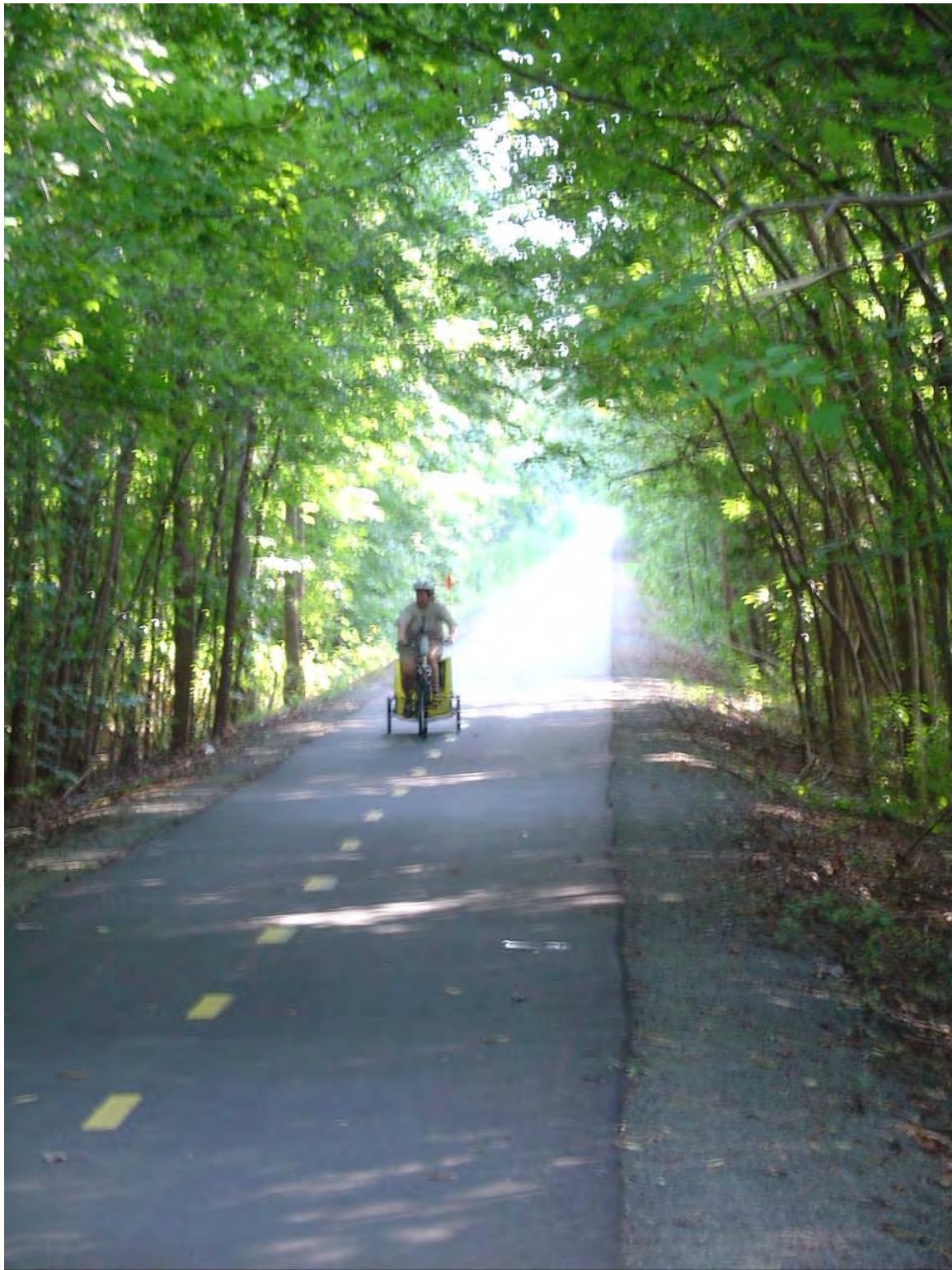
To the northwest of the trail at this point is Durham's Carolina Solite Park, once the site of a Solite Company plant that received loads of stone and clay on a siding here and used it in the manufacture of cement blocks. The Solite Company was a major Norfolk Southern customer, with a large facility on the Norfolk Southern mainline near Aquadale, N.C. The plant at Solite Park was probably the second-largest customer on the Durham Branch.

Solite Park offers parking, a picnic shelter, a playground and bathrooms. At the time of this writing, Solite Park is also the location of Tobacco Trail Bicycle Rentals, 919-796-4659, currently the only bicycle rental service located directly on the American Tobacco Trail. Operated by Sid Smith ssmith.svi@att.net the company offers all sizes of bikes and bike trailers for rental by the hour, half day and full day.

From Solite Park, the trail curves in a long southwestern arc paralleling Fayetteville Road, running past several new developments and crossing Pearson Drive and Juliette Drive at grade.

Mile 5

The trail crosses Cook Road at grade at Mile 5. At this point, it is running almost due south and still paralleling Fayetteville Road, which is about 200 feet to the east.



Near Cook Road

At about Mile 5.3, the trail enters the Woodcroft property, which was developed in the early 1980s as one of the state's first mixed-use developments. Soon after this, about mile 5.5, it crosses Woodcroft Parkway at grade. A convenience store here is another source of drinks, snacks and bathrooms.

From here to N.C. 54, the trail runs along Fayetteville Road just to the east of new houses and west of commercial properties. The railroad called this point South Durham.

Mile 6

Near mile 6, the trail crosses Dunhill Road at grade and runs on a low ridge just east of a shopping center, Southpoint Crossing, located at the corner of Fayetteville Road and N.C. 54. This portion of the trail was constructed by the builders of the shopping center, three years before the rest of the trail north of Dunhill was constructed. Thus, because it was built before the construction standards were developed for the rest of the ATT, the trail from Dunhill south to NC 54 has neither gravel shoulder nor painted center stripes.

One interesting thing to note here is this ridge north of the shopping center has been identified by The Nature Conservancy to have one of the few locations of prairie grasses in Durham.

The trail turns west and runs into Southpoint Crossing Shopping Center. The trail continues behind the shopping center, between it and a gated apartment complex to its current end at NC 54 near Ruby Tuesday, at Mile 6.5.

Southpoint Crossing Shopping Center offers a number of places to get food and drinks and use the bathroom, including a Starbucks, Kroger, Souper Salad and a sandwich shop.

There is plenty of parking in the shopping center as well, and there is a trail head, with dedicated trail parking and an excellent map of the entire Durham County section at the entrance to Southpoint Crossing off Fayetteville Road. This gravel-surfaced parking area is immediately to your right as you enter the shopping center from Fayetteville Road.

I-40 Area

From Mile 6.5 to about 7.6, the trail is disrupted by I-40, which was built after the Durham Branch was abandoned, cutting the right-of-way. A bridge across I-40 is planned, with construction expected in 2006. Before I-40 was built, the tracks crossed N.C. 54 at grade at the former Channel 28 TV station, and then turned due west through what was mostly undeveloped land with some commercial buildings.

Streets of Southpoint Mall Area

This currently unopened American Tobacco Trail resumes as a paved path on the grounds of a new residential development just to the west of the Streets at Southpoint Mall. The trail goes north 0.1 mile from Renaissance Parkway to the wooded barrier along I-40. Careful observers will spot a beaver dam that is

located near the trail in this area. This short segment is currently closed by construction.

The paved trail also runs south from Renaissance Parkway 0.3 miles, making this Southpoint Mall portion currently a total of 0.4 miles. There is no signed or permitted parking in this area: parking is for residents of the apartment complex only. The southern 0.3 miles runs past a pretty wetland and ends abruptly when it reaches the adjacent development, which currently severs the American Tobacco trail.

At about this point, the original Norfolk Southern alignment split off what is now the American Tobacco Trail to the southwest. The original alignment crossed N.C. 751 and Stagecoach Road at grade; about three miles of the right-of-way south of here is the Eagle Spur Trail (see below).

The old branch is mostly underwater, in Jordan Lake, south of this point; it went through Penny, Bland, Farrington (site of a sawmill until the 1970s), Seaforth (crossing U.S. 64 there, near the site of the present Seaforth Recreation Area on Jordan Lake) and Beaver Creek, and rejoined the new alignment in Bonsal at the site of the present New Hope Valley Railway (see below). The new line was built 1971-1973; the old Norfolk Southern was merged into the Southern Railway System in 1974.

Mile 8

At 8.0, the trail is again disrupted by a development built after the railroad was abandoned but before trail development began.

Mile 8.5 and South Durham ATT

The trail resumes at the Massey Chapel Road grade crossing, at about mile 8.5. Residents of Eagles Point subdivision have cleared a short section of the future trail north of Massey Chapel Road. It currently runs north about a hundred yards, then turns west to run along the eastern portion of the subdivision along a sewer easement to some not-very-well-maintained access steps that provide neighborhood access.

Trail users are requested by Durham Parks not to park along the busy and relatively narrow Massey Chapel Road. Access this Southern Durham portion of the trail at Scott King Road (below).

From Massey Chapel Road the ATT runs south then southeast, first through about a thousand feet of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-owned and N.C. Wildlife Resources-managed Game Lands. Though not heavily used by hunters like the Eagle Spur Trail (see below), do be careful during hunting season. North Carolina hunting seasons, in general, are open October through December. Hunting is not allowed on Sundays.

In 2001, a sewer line was constructed down the middle of the trail in this section and it was surfaced with crusher run gravel. Several manhole covers, barely maintained, disrupt the normally smooth and level trail surface. Most cyclists seem to ride on the west edge of the trail to keep out of the gravel. However, as

grass grows in over the gravel, the trail surface has become firmer and easier to walk and ride on.

From Mile 8.5 to 11, the trail is being cleared, cleaned and maintained with a nice crusher run, grass and clay surface by the Triangle Rails to Trails Conservancy (TRTC). A big part of the job is keeping the drainage ditches alongside the trail clear so that water runoff flows off the trail to nearby creeks and other drainage areas. Contact the TRTC for more information on how to help maintain this section [give contact info here].

Note that this section is considered a part of the Durham Greenway system. Trail users are subject to Durham Parks and Recreation rules.

Though new development is encroaching in this area, the trail is nicely wooded and shady during all parts of the year. Off to the west is the large Chancellors Ridge subdivision with some informal trail access paths.

[I STOPPED HERE]

Mile 9

At 9.0, the trail goes under Fayetteville Road which is bridged overhead. Immediately before the bridge, TRTC is constructing a small parking facility and trail access area on property owned by the Triangle Greenways Council. This will be completed during 2005 and will eventually be donated to Durham Parks. Again, TRTC is looking for volunteers to help with the clearing and construction of this parking facility.

At about Mile 9.3, the American Tobacco Trail crosses Crooked Creek on a high fill. The fence located here was constructed as an Eagle Scout project by Ken Langdon and his Boy Scout Troop 486 sponsored by Cristus Victor Lutheran Church. Note the gap on the west side of the fence designed to allow deer and other wildlife to cross the trail here.

Mile 10 and Scott King Road Trailhead

The wooded area continues, with the trail running due south and about 0.2 – 0.3 miles west of Herndon Road. At about Mile 10, the trail crosses Scott King Road at grade.

This area is the site of Duke Energy power transmission facilities and is adjacent to a new Durham park, C. M. Herndon Park. Shipment of power company equipment to this area by rail was one of the last uses of the Durham Branch. The railroad called this location King Scott Siding

Scott King Road is the current recommended trail access point for the Southern Durham portion of the ATT. From Durham go south on Fayetteville Road, past the Streets of Southpoint Mall, over the ATT on the bridge over the ATT described above, to the last left before the traffic light at the intersection of Fayetteville Road and NC 751. Turn left onto Scott King Road and go about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the large overhead power lines.

Park alongside the road on the wide gravel shoulders under the power lines. Please do not block the trail entrances. You'll see the yellow drop down bollards (posts) at the entrances on both sides of Scott King Road. Here you'll find a trail information kiosk and trash cans built as an Eagle Scout project by Will Renfrow of Scout Troop 461. Trail users can walk or ride approximately 2 miles north to Massey Chapel Road and 1 mile south to the undecked Northeast Creek trestle.



New kiosk at Scott-King Road

TRTC meets for regular trail maintenance at the Scott King Road intersection at 9 a.m. on the first and third Saturdays of each month. By the end of 2005, Durham Parks will also build a small equestrian and bus capable parking facility on west side of the ATT south of Scott King Road crossing

South to Northeast Creek

Like the two miles of trail north of Scott King Road, the trail south to Mile 11 (in Chatham County), is maintained as a natural grass, gravel and clay surface trail by TRTC

At Mile 10.7, the trail enters Chatham County. At about the county line, the trail enters US Army Corps of Engineers owned, and NC Wildlife Resources managed gamelands. The trail and these lands are used by hunters during several hunting seasons. Trail users are advised to wear blaze orange when using the trail particularly during early morning hours during the principal deer hunting season from November through February.

This section of the trail ends at near Mile 11 at the currently undecked and unbuilt Northeast Creek trestle. This future 180-foot long bridge is a popular destination with those using the southern Durham section of the trail. This area, though not far from the busy I-40 corridor is quiet and peaceful, and because it is

on federally owned land, should remain so for the foreseeable future. Please respect other trail users and wildlife when accessing this area.



Bridge Structure Over Northeast Creek

Chatham County

The Chatham County portion of the ATT from Mile 10.7 to Mile 15.3 is owned by the NCDOT Rail division and is currently leased by Chatham County Parks and Recreation. It is being cleared, constructed and maintained by the Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in cooperation with Chatham County Parks. Since much of this work involves heavy clearing, TRTC organizes regular workdays only during Fall and Winter months on the second and fourth Saturdays.

Use the Chatham County American Tobacco Trail at your own risk. Keep in mind that all of the trail in Chatham is very much a construction zone and that it will have an irregular surface. TRTC does not mow the section of the trail south of Northeast Creek nearly as often as the section north of Northeast Creek during the summer months so the grass, weeds and brush may be high.

Mile 11 Northeast Creek to O'Kelly Chapel Road

At Mile 11, Kitt Creek joins Northeast Creek at about the Northeast Creek rail bridge location. Unless a user can somehow cross Northeast Creek, most users will access the section of the trail south of Northeast Creek by parking on the shoulder of O'Kelly Chapel Road. Several have crossed on the sandbars east of the Northeast Creek trestle in dry periods. Replacement of this trestle and the Panther Creek trestle 2 miles south is the most difficult challenge facing Chatham County and TRTC in opening this section of the trail.

As of this writing, US Representative David Price has requested funds to complete the ATT in Durham (including the bicycle-pedestrian bridge across I-40) and the entire trail in Chatham, including both trestles in the next federal Transportation bill. This six-year funding bill has been stalled in Congress for quite some time. In 2003 it was extended at previous bill levels for another year, and may do the same next year. Right now, lack of passage of this bill is the chief thing holding up completion of the ATT in Chatham.

From the trestle the trail runs on a high built up fill through more gamelands for about a quarter mile. Shaded by a natural canopy of trees, this is arguably one of the prettier sections of the entire trail.

Then the ATT crosses between Phases I and II of the gated Rosemont development. There are some very large homes going up within sight and just out of sight of the trail here.

The final quarter mile north of the trail crossing at O'Kelly Chapel Road is a major construction zone with a very irregular surface. The trail bed was gouged out by logging equipment several years ago, then it was covered by hundreds of downed pine trees as a result of the ice storm of December 2002. To compound this, the soft clay of the trail bed itself seems to swallow gravel and all fill material.

As a result, a number of massive ruts and holes were left which TRTC has been working to fill with gravel and clay to allow trail users, maintenance and construction vehicles to access. While these holes are much smaller than they were before, and some are actually humps, this area is still considered a construction zone. Please be careful and be aware of the irregular surface.

The distance from the Northeast Creek Trestle to O'Kelly Chapel Road is about one mile.

In 2002, O'Kelly Chapel Road was paved all the way to its intersection with Lewter Shop Road. This compounded by a lot of residential development happening in the eastern part of this area has resulted in O'Kelly Chapel becoming a very busy connector from NC 751 to the west and NC 55 to the east. Please be careful when parking on the shoulder of O'Kelly Chapel Road. Plans for an off road trailhead parking facility in this area have so far been stymied by the NCDOT District Engineer.

Mile 12

The right-of-way crosses O'Kelly Church Road at Mile 12.1. South of O'Kelly Chapel is the site of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of large numbers of trees felled in ice storms over the years. TRTC volunteers along with others participating in a workday sponsored by REI in June spent over 500 person-hours cutting and clearing this stretch of trail (affectionately called the "War Zone" during the Winter and Spring of 2004). Though this portion of the trail is clear for regular trail use, the clearing and cleaning of some drainage ditches still remain. This area should be considered a construction zone.

The right-of-way crosses currently gravel surfaced dead end Pittard Sears Road (called Oakley Road on most maps) at Mile 12.9. A quarter mile south of Pittard Sears, the trail again enters US Army Corps of Engineers owned and NC Wildlife Resources Commission managed game lands and continues south on another gorgeous stretch to the currently undecked Panther Creek trestle.

Mile 13

At about Mile 13.5, the right-of-way crosses Panther Creek. This 160-foot trestle is the other bridge in Chatham County that needs to be decked. Some folks are able to cross on the sandbars near the base of this trestle in dry weather. This will be the highest and possibly the most spectacular of all the bridges on the American Tobacco Trail when complete.

Mile 14

At Mile 14.3, the right-of-way crosses New Hope Church Road. This is currently the other road shoulder trail access point in Chatham County. New Hope Church Road is also heavily traveled. Be careful when parking here.

However, the ATT is open only for the mile or so north of New Hope Church Road to the Panther Creek trestle. South of New Hope Church Road, the future trail is closed for use. Please do not enter this area. It is blocked by downed trees past Indian Creek at Mile 14.7 which Chatham County has requested not be cleared for awhile out of respect for folks who live in the area.

Developers of the Amberly and Forest Oaks developments have dedicated land to the Town of Cary for a off highway trailhead parking facility in the vicinity of New Hope Church Road. It is hoped that a trailhead parking facility here can be completed by 2006.

Mile 15

At Mile 15.3, the right-of-way/soon-to-be trail enters Wake County, still paralleling a county road, now E. Ferrell Road. Trespassing on the undeveloped portions of the right-of-way (currently mile 15.3-15.9 and 15.9-18.3) is not allowed. This portion has not been cleared and will not be cleared until Chatham County is ready to open its section.

At about Mile 15.9, the right-of-way crosses Green Level Church Road just east of the intersection of E. Ferrell Road and continues south toward White Oak Church Road. Again, this portion of the trail is not open and will not be open until Chatham opens the trail south of New Hope Church Road.

Wake County

In Wake County, the developed section of the trail is open from 8 a.m. to one hour before sunset, seven days a week. It is closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Animal waste must be removed from the trail by the animal's owner. Pets must be on a leash. Parking is only allowed in designated areas.

In August 2004 Wake County started construction of the White Oak Church Road trailhead at Mile 16.5 as well as the trail connecting it to the existing Wimberly Road trailhead 1.75 miles south. This facility will feature equestrian parking and

composting toilets rooms and is located at the intersection of the trail and White Oak Church Road.

Mile 16 or Wake Mile 5

At about Mile 16.5, the right-of-way crosses White Oak Church Road at the aforementioned under construction White Oak Church Road Parking area built on land owned jointly by Wake County and the Town of Cary. Wake's Mile 5 will start here. The trail then runs briefly along Pine Rail Lane. From White Oak Church Road, The anticipated completion date of these 1.75 miles of trail to Wimberly Road is late 2004 or early 2005.

Mile 17 or Wake Mile 4.5

At mile 17.3, the right-of-way crosses Green Level West Road in a pleasant low-density residential area. Again this trail is currently under construction with completion anticipated in late 2004.

Mile 18 or Wake Mile 3.5

At Mile 18.5, the right-of-way crosses Wimberly Road [Wake County Mile 3.5]. There is a small trailhead parking area here, which parks about 12 to 15 vehicles. Because of its size, it is not open for equestrian trailer parking, nor are there toilets. However, there is an informational kiosk with map brochures. Also the gate to this parking area is seldom locked, so trail users can be a little late leaving and not worry about getting locked in.

South of Wimberly Road, the trail enters more game lands managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. These game lands continue to Mile 18.8 [Wake County Mile 3.2.]

From Wimberly Road to the trail end at 22.0, the trail is managed by Wake County Parks and features a nice granite screenings surface which is soft enough for horses, but hard enough for most bikes and wheelchair use. There are benches scattered along the trail, and horse and bike blocks along the way, usually ahead of each bridge, which makes dismounting horses or resting on bikes a bit easier. At Mile 18.6, the trail crosses White Oak Creek on a bridge. The landscape along this section of the trail is pleasant Piedmont woodlands.

Mile 19 or Wake Mile 3.0

The Wake County 3.0 milepost is at mile 19. Just past this point, the trail passes the Cary-Apex Water Treatment plant lying to the east of the trail. At Mile 19.5 [Wake County Mile 2.5], the trail crosses Goodwin Road. No parking is allowed at this crossing.

Mile 20 or Wake Mile 2.0

At about Mile 20.0 [Wake County milepost 2.0], the trail passes under U.S. 64 in a concrete box culvert. Installation of the culvert when U.S. 64 was widened to four lanes prevented the southern section of the trail from being severed—as the northern section was, unfortunately twice, by the construction of I-40 and by sale of part of the right-of-way to a developer.

Immediately after exiting the culvert, the trail passes a golf driving range lying to the west of the trail. Trail users should watch for golf balls! The range is next to the trail for 300 yards (about 0.2 miles). After leaving this area, the trail begins to parallel a creek, Reedy Branch, on a high fill, which ends near Mile 20.5 [Wake County milepost 1.5.] The trail enters NC Wildlife Resources game lands just after this point and stays in them until it ends. The trail crosses Reedy Branch at about Mile 20.8.

Mile 21 or Wake Mile 1.0

At Mile 21.0 [Wake County milepost 1.0], the trail crosses Olive Chapel Road. No parking is allowed here. Just after the crossing, a railroad milepost, mile 16 from Duncan, survives on the east side of the trail. Soon after the old milepost, the trail, running on a high fill, passes a beaver pond on the east side of the trail. At about Mile 21.3, the trail crosses Beaver Creek on a bridge and then runs through a pretty area without road access. It then passes the Wake County 0.5 milepost.

Mile 22 or Wake Mile 0.0

The trail ends at about Mile 22, just past the Wake County 0.0 milepost, at a very nice trailhead off New Hill-Olive Chapel Road, 0.7 miles north (by road) of where the right-of-way crosses this road. This trailhead has horse trailer parking and will soon have composting toilets. There is a 0.7 mile section of the right-of-way south of here not developed or open as a trail.

The New Hope Valley Railway

The New Hope Valley Railway begins or technically ends where the active on weekend line crosses New Hill-Olive Chapel Road. From this point, just north of where the former Durham Branch crosses New Hill-Olive Chapel Road, a spot the railroad called New Hill Siding, to Bonsal, tracks are in place on the new alignment of the former Norfolk Southern Durham Branch.

This is the New Hope Valley Railway (NHF Ry), a project of the East Carolina Chapter, National Railway Historical Society, which purchased this line in 1982, along with about 2.2 miles of the old alignment northwest of Bonsal. Later, about one mile of this old alignment was subsequently sold by the chapter and abandoned.

The New Hope Valley Railway runs passenger excursions one day a month in season (usually the first Sunday of each month, May – December, with special trains for Halloween and Christmas). It stops at the New Hill-Olive Chapel Road crossing for the engine to run around the train at the siding located there.

The New Hope Valley Railway's main station, repair shops, gift shop, museum, refreshment stand and garden railway are located just off Old U.S. 1 in Bonsal, North Carolina, at what would be Mile 27. Excursion trains leave from here and run 4.3 miles north to New Hill Siding, N.C., with the engine running around the train there. The total round trip, all on the new Norfolk Southern Durham Branch alignment, is about 8.6 miles. The New Hope Valley Railway also owns a short segment of the old alignment, running about a mile northwest from Bonsal and

joining the new alignment just north of the Daisey Street grade crossing in Bonsal.

Hopes and Dreams

It seems natural that this excursion passenger service should be made available to trail users by connecting the Wake County American Tobacco Trail trail head off New Hill-Olive Chapel Road with the New Hope Valley Railway passenger service, possibly by building a passenger loading facility for the railroad at New Hill Siding, with a connector trail to the trail head and bike racks at the passenger loading facility. It is to be hoped that the Wake County government and the East Carolina Chapter will partner to do this sometime in the near future.

Here is a guide to the New Hope Valley Railway, continuing south from the end of the American Tobacco Trail using the Mile system used for the trail.

Mile 22

The New Hope Valley Railway begins, or ends just north of the New Hill-Olive Chapel Road crossing at about mile 22.7. Just south of the crossing is New Hill Siding, used by the NHV Railway crews to run their engine around the railroad's excursion trains.

Mile 23

The New Hope Valley Railway runs through the same terrain as the south end of the American Tobacco Trail—Piedmont woodlands with scattered farms and homes.

Mile 24

At mile 24, the NHV Ry crosses Little Beaver Creek.

Mile 25

At mile 25, the NHV Ry crosses Horton Road. The railroad calls this point Midway.

Mile 26

Just after mile 26, the rail line curves briefly into Chatham County, then back into Wake County as it approaches Bonsal.

Mile 27

The rail line crosses Daisey Street, with the out-of-service mile of trackage on the old alignment (paralleling Beaver Creek Road) joining the new alignment from the west just before the crossing. It then ends at Mile 27 at loading platforms just south of the crossing.

The bridges across Old U.S. 1 survive and one is used by pedestrians accessing the NHV Ry parking lot. From this point south, there was only one alignment of the Norfolk Southern Durham Branch. A wood yard in Bonsal was one of the last rail service users on the Durham Branch. The wood yard had a siding in Bonsal,

as did the railroad itself. A station once stood in Bonsal, as did a signal tower at the former crossing of the Norfolk Southern and Seaboard Air Line (now CSX) railroads.

Miles 27 to about Mile 29

Miles 27 to about Mile 29 is a rail line in use to provide rail access to the Progress Energy Shearon Harris nuclear plant, also one of the last users of the Durham Branch. For homeland security reasons, please do not trespass south of the NHV Ry parking lot, Cooper Road, and U.S. 1!

Mile 29 to Duncan

From about Mile 29 to Duncan, N.C., Mile 37.2 and the former terminus of the branch, the rail line is long abandoned, is owned by Progress Energy, and has passed to other uses, including Harris Lake. The only significant point along this part of the line was the flag stop of Burt, close to where the old right-of-way crosses Cass Holt Road.

Duncan, at Mile 37.2 and one end of the former branch, is in Harnett County and is served by an active Norfolk Southern rail line running from Raleigh to Gulf, North Carolina. The historic Duncan station, used by main line and Durham Branch trains of the old Norfolk Southern, survives as a convenience store (located at 12638 N.C. 42).

The Eagle Spur Trail

Back north closer to Durham and I-40 is the Eagle Spur Trail, which runs through the B. Everett Jordan Lake Jordan Game Lands managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. Running on the original alignment of the Norfolk Southern Durham Branch, it is actively used by hunters, especially during deer season, but also during turkey season. So be careful! Use at your own risk and wear blaze orange if you even think there may be hunting going on.

The trail is about 2.5 miles long. It is little used and overgrown so, ironically, in the late spring and summer, when hunters are not active, it is difficult to use. The winter months, when the vegetation is down, are mostly open to hunting. The best time to use this trail is probably winter Sundays and the early spring. Beware of flocks of mosquitoes in August through September. Hike it with a friend to be safe.

The Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy obtains a permit from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission about once a year to clear this trail of downed trees and brush. However, the surface of this trail is rugged with unexpected holes and ruts from erosion and age. By the will of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, who emphatically state they are “not in the trail business,” this trail is only sporadically managed, so again, please be careful and use at your own risk.

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission website is a good place to look up hunting seasons; the commission manages these gamelands, which are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Sundays are barred to hunting year-round.

Eagle Spur Mile 0

The trail begins where the Durham Branch crossed Stagecoach Road, off N.C. 751 near the Durham/Chatham County line. There is limited parking along the shoulder of Stagecoach Road here, but spaces are usually available. A barrier style gate at the trailhead blocks motorized vehicle access.

The trail crosses a tributary of New Hope Creek with a dip and a culvert (not of railroad origin). It then parallels New Hope Creek through marshy woodlands, just east of the creek. It runs due south at this point. A tiny portion of the trail, about 100 yards, also goes north from the Stagecoach Road crossing to the north boundary of the Jordan Game Lane here.

Eagle Spur Mile 1

At about Mile 1.3, the trail turns in a wide curve, paralleling a curve in New Hope Creek, to run southwest towards what was a crossing of the creek (now Jordan Lake at its very northern head). By Mile 1.5, it is running due southwest. Its closest approach to the creek, except at the former crossing, is in the center of this bend.

Eagle Spur Mile 2

The trail continues in a similar area until, at about Mile 2.3, it enters what was a causeway fill approaching the New Hope Creek bridge. Until Hurricane Fran, which seriously damaged this trail, a water tank foundation could be seen at about the beginning of the causeway, with a pipe system running to a pump house foundation near the creek, now Jordan Lake. The system must have pumped water out of the creek to the water tower.

Little can be seen of this tower foundation now. The author believes the hurricane took out all of these industrial archeology remains except for the water tank foundation, which probably survives but is probably silted over. Another flood, or diligent searching on a hikers' part, may reveal what remains of this interesting survival.

The trail ends at the shore of Jordan Lake. This area of the lake is reportedly the largest summertime roost of bald eagles in the eastern United States. There is also a wildlife observation point on this part of Jordan Lake accessible by car. The entrance is off N.C. 751 just north of its intersection with New Hope Church Road.