

WALKING THROUGH TIME: HERITAGE RESOURCES WITHIN THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL CORRIDOR

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Abstract: Parts of the Appalachian Trail (and nearly half of Vermont's Long Trail) are located on New England National Forests, and managed in partnership with the Appalachian Trail Conference, Green Mountain Club, and other volunteers. Since the Trail corridor is a linear, if serpentine, sample of northern Appalachian highland environments it's not surprising that it often runs on, over, along and/or through a variety of Heritage Resource sites reflecting the rich land-use history of the region. These sites range from Native American quarries and early Euro-American toll roads, to 19th century logging camps, settlements and mines, to historic recreation structures, CCC-erected fire towers and more recent ski areas. While there is some inherent potential for conflict between trail management priorities and historic preservation, the White Mountain and Green Mountain National Forests have been sensitive to both sets of needs through awareness, data collection and planning. Preservation of significant Heritage sites within this National Scenic Trail corridor is a baseline. We also identify the enhancement of the hiking/recreation experience through interpretation of some of these resources as a worthy and feasible goal in the near future.

Introduction

The evocative description of Vermont's Long Trail as a "footpath in the Wilderness" reflects the *recent* history and condition of much of the area traversed by both the Long and Appalachian Trails. Hidden from view and memory are many of the effects of historic activities on the landscape. People have transformed the "wilderness" into active, vital portions of the larger working environment throughout history. So as one of the authors was accurately, but perhaps unfortunately, quoted in the Burlington Free Press last summer, "It's really a footpath-through-the-re-growth" (Pollak, 1996).

The physical remains of activities within the Trail Corridors -- evidence of hunting, farming, mining, logging; travel, worship, recreation -- are largely the realm of archaeologists today. These Indian sites, cellar holes, logging camps, fire towers, abandoned travelways, and other physical, vegetative, and sometimes spiritual

"artifacts" are our guides to the past. Preservation of significant sites promotes greater understanding of the past uses and conditions of the trails' environments, and an appreciation of the lives and values of our forebears.

As Forest Service archaeologists, we wanted to share a success story about how the management of one special area -- the AT/LT corridor -- has accommodated the needs of more than one resource area and user group at the same time: in this case, the hiking, recreation and heritage constituencies. The combination of a good data base, a mutual understanding of project impacts, an awareness of pertinent laws and regulations, and a reasonably advanced planning cycle resulted in "win-win" management.

Regulation

The National Scenic Trails Act, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) were all passed in the late 1960's. Within New England's National Forests (and under Park Service administration of much of the Trail Corridor), the application of NEPA and Section 106 of the NHPA to Trail management activities appears to have been a hit-or-miss affair until the mid- or late-1980's. Certainly on the Green Mt NF, the only trail activities subject to regular archaeological review were re-routes of significant stretches of trail (i.e., instances of completely new ground disturbance). Small relocations, reconstruction, and maintenance projects were not reviewed. During the 1980's there was a push to have more inter-disciplinary environmental review (that is, compliance with NEPA) for all types of Recreation projects -- on a par with the scrutiny that Timber and Engineering projects traditionally received.

Inventory Efforts

The combination of this trend toward more environmental review of trails projects, the transfer of AT administration from the Park Service to the Forest Service, and a one-time "President's Initiative" grant, gave the authors the opportunity to sponsor and conduct an "LT/AT Corridor Inventory" starting in 1992. Our goal was to be better able to predict which projects needed field work. The Vermont portion of the survey, completed in 1993 (Lacy and Bowman, 1993), covered 200 miles -- all of the AT within Vermont, and the Long Trail north to Mt Ellen. We documented 57 historic archaeological sites, 25 locations sensitive to prehistoric use, and photodocumented 30 Long Trail shelters. Based on our methods, track record, and subsequent experience, we believe we accounted for ca. 90% of the historic sites within the corridor, and a majority of the areas sensitive to prehistoric use. Collection and synthesis of site data for the White Mountain National Forest is on-going.

Sites Types

As a baseline it is necessary to recognize, in contrast to most of our popular understandings, that the summit regions of Grey Lock (named after an Indian chief), Stratton, Killington, Moosilauke, Mt Washington and other mountains along the way to Katahdin, all the way at Trail's

End, are considered sacred and/or spiritually powerful places by the Indian groups who did and still live here (see Engle, 1993; Lacy, Moody and Bruchac, 1992). This special character is not necessarily reflected in "sites" containing artifacts, but exists as a status of "place" and is established through oral history and continued use. Other, more mundane, activities -- hunting, camping, quarrying -- commonly took place elsewhere within even the most mountainous portions of the corridor and are represented by frequent, small (with significant exceptions, such as rock quarrying locations), archaeological sites (Lacy, 1994). These sites are generally near the surface (since there is little or no soil development to cover them at these elevations) and predictably consist of stone tools and the byproducts of their manufacture (the organic materials once present having long since decomposed). Given the probable small size and buried nature of these sites, they are essentially invisible to most people, thus making them especially vulnerable to unintended impacts.

Evidence for historic (i.e., 18th to mid-20th century) land-use and settlement tends to be more diverse and visible to the uninitiated. Home- and farm-steads leave tell-tale signs such as cellar holes, barn (and other out-building) foundations, field stone piles and stone walls (now running through maturing forests), wells, drives & roads, and, on occasion, instructive landscapes and altered vegetative mosaics. In addition, the remains of more "industrial" activities are quite visible and numerous -- for example, railroad beds, mill ruins (e.g., raceways and dams) and, especially along the VT portion of the Trail, the remains of kilns for producing charcoal for the iron industry.

More recent remains reflect the evolution of recreation activities in New England, from the AMC Huts in the high elevation areas of the White Mountains (Roenke, 1991), to the CCC-constructed campgrounds on both National Forests and the even more recent proliferation of downhill and cross-country ski facilities throughout the area.

Last, but not least, the CCC-erected fire towers reflect both the social and environmental dimensions of our economic history, built to address fire concerns created by an unregulated timber industry by labor drawn from the massive ranks of the unemployed during the Great Depression.

Potential Impacts

By and large, archaeological sites inform us best if (a) as much of the "stuff" -- artifacts, features, structural evidence -- as possible is still there; and (b) the spatial relationships between all that stuff -- where it was originally deposited -- is still intact. Therefore, activities like trail relocation and construction, some reconstruction, digging new waterbars (and determining where they are aimed); borrowing soil and/or stones (e.g., from "conveniently" shaped squares?) to build steps, water bars or other trail features; creating new camping spots which have key characteristics (level, well drained spots with access to water and travelways have ALWAYS been popular); siting a new shelter or outhouse; and/or other soil disturbing activities all have potential to impact sites.

Adverse impacts to standing structures along the Trails tend toward (a) neglect and vandalism, (b) removal or elimination, or (c) ill-considered replacement of the old with the new (e.g. shelters). The frequency with which these kinds of impacts occur can be dramatically reduced if site inventories are conducted and site evaluations completed. Sites determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places ("NHRP": a legal roster of "significant" sites compiled through application of criteria established by the NHPA) generally receive management befitting their status, once recognized. Examples along the AT/LT include the known prehistoric sites along the AT; high altitude Appalachian Mountain Club Huts in the White Mountains; both the Smarts Mountain (NH) and Stratton Mountain (VT) CCC-era Fire Lookout Towers; and structural features of the Long Trail (primarily shelters, and landscape and "character" features) which are significant "by association" since the LT itself was determined eligible for the NRHP.

It is good to remember, however, that it is also true that different activities in different locations will not be equally critical. So, for example, a new outhouse in an area of low-site potential is not a problem, nor are most regular maintenance activities, even if they take place in the vicinity of a significant site. In addition, replacing components of historically significant huts and shelters, bridges or fire lookouts, with in-kind materials, methods and style makes perfect sense in cases of deterioration.

Management

The good news, and the reason for this paper, is our conclusion that with a little planning and sensitivity the Trail and Heritage communities make great partners. By understanding the nature and range of project impacts and having an inventory of sites (lacking this, a good predictive model is very useful), archaeologists can narrow the scope of their review. By being aware of the presence and fragility of archaeological and historic sites, trail managers can make their NEPA planning more timely and comprehensive (e.g., they can ensure that an historic preservation specialist is involved). Both Trail and Heritage specialists have a role to play in seeking reasonable alternatives (or palatable compromises) in cases where there is conflict between trails and sites, and first hand experience has on our Forests has shown that this is a simple matter of communication. Archaeologists have an additional responsibility to raise the awareness of trail crews, volunteers and users as to what to look for -- and why these resources are meaningful. It has been the authors' experience that it is the rare exception to encounter folks in any line of work who intentionally destroy historic sites; rather, it is a lack of awareness which leads to accidental and unintentional impacts.

Conclusion

The Appalachian and Long Trail corridors contain evidence of land-use histories documenting changing ecosystems from several thousand years ago to the Great Depression. By investing in baseline inventory data, having a mutual understanding of potential project impacts, and

implementing the NEPA planning process, both the hiking and preservation agendas can be served, as has been demonstrated on New England's National Forests.

Finally, Heritage sites are increasingly popular, and often accessible, enhancements of the recreation experience (or in some cases are destinations in and of themselves). It has been our experience that trail users frequently think it's fascinating to know about the past land-use of the area they are hiking through or camping in. Our next step is to do a better job informing Trail users and managers about what these histories tell us about the ecosystems through which the Trail passes. We are at a point where it makes sense to connect the well-developed, environmentally sensitive Trail constituency with the Heritage Tourism boom that has been sweeping the country. To this end, the senior author has received a small grant from the Eastern National Forests' Interpretive Association to develop and produce proto-type trail head posters on the Green Mountain National Forest. Please join us at NERR's 1998 poster session to see what we've come up with!

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Citations

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