

Restoring a 100-Year-Old Trail for Future Generations

Goal Is To Keep Character of Pontiac's Trail

By Karen Gould

Taking Pontiac's Trail can be an unexpected discovery. It can be traced back more than 100 years as a foot trail along the limestone ledge of the Island's West Bluff. The gravel and boardwalk path is not for horses or bikes, and it presents the fortunate hiker with a panoramic view of the Straits of Mackinac, from Round Island in the east to the Mackinac Bridge.

This summer, it is being restored.

"The trail is being reconstructed in a fashion worthy of the National Historic Landmark status of Mackinac Island," said a proud Greg Hokans, chief of development and marketing for Mackinac State Historic Parks. "It wasn't just building new fences. We want to maintain the original character of the trail."

Pontiac's Trail is on State Park property and the current thinking, said Mr. Hokans, is that the trail was built around 1887, when Mackinac Island was the nation's second national park, following Yellowstone. He speculates it may have provided access to summer cottages being built at that time along the West Bluff, although parts of the path, he said, could have been used by Indians long before that.

The 1,000-foot-long trail is at the top of the West Bluff road, just as the road turns inward from the bluff. A turnstile guards the entrance from horses and bicycles.

In restoring the trail, Mackinac State Historic Parks wants to maintain the look and feel of the original path, provide access for park visitors, and employ construction that will last for generations. The challenge is that the trail is on the side of a limestone cliff, Mr. Hokans said, and that a city sewer pipe buried under it needed to be replaced.

City and Park planners were concerned with the delicate nature of the limestone bluff, and the two parties were reluctant to bury the pipe.

"We came up with a plan to accommodate the sewer line and the trail," said Mr. Hokans. They widened the trail to 36 inches, placed the fence on the outside of the path, and kept the pipe on the outside of the fence.

Work crews coordinated by state park carpenter Larry Rickley, Sr. used 130 tons of gravel with crusher dust on the top layer of the new trail to provide stability, said Mr. Hokans. In some places, the gravel is 12 inches thick.

"In respect for the tradition of the Island, and the terrain, this was all done the old fashion way using wheel barrows and pick axes," Mr. Hokans said.

"They carried buckets of cement," he added. "They used modern materials, but traditional work methods."

No records have been found that shed any light on why the trail is called Pontiac's Trail, said Mr. Hokans. The name is

At right, before restoration work began on the neglected Pontiac's Trail, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director of Development and Marketing Greg Hokans called it "the goat path." Once completed, the scenic foot trail will be more accessible to Island residents and visitors and is engineered to last for generations. (Photographs courtesy of Mackinac State Historic Parks)

related to the Ottawa war chief who inspired the attack on Fort Michilimackinac in 1763.

When the military reservation on Mackinac Island was designated a national park in 1895, no funds were provided for the Park's operation. At that time, the nation's two national parks, Yellowstone and Mackinac Island, were under the direction of the War Department, which operated a garrison at Fort Mackinac. The Army directed that the fort commander and soldiers care for the Park and subsequently allowed them to establish land leases on the Island to earn money so roads and paths could be constructed.

It was the land platted out for leases on which many of the Island's Victorian cottages were built.

At the trail's midpoint is a 76-foot-long bridge offering one of the best views of the Straits from the Island. The bridge hangs over the west bluff and skirts along the ridge.

With a budget of \$100,000, \$52,000 coming from the Department of Natural Resources recreational trail improvement fund and the remainder from the Mackinac State Historic Parks budget, planning for the project began in January 2004 with a visit to the Island by Mr. Hokans and a structural engineer. Their goal was to check out the bridge footings. The inspection was made on snowshoes, since the snow on the trail was waist deep, Mr. Hokans said, but the shelter provided by the bridge permitted inspection of the footings with little effort.

They found the foundation had eroded and major work would be needed to maintain the bridge for several generations to come.

"The new bridge will be identical to the old," said Mr. Hokans, "but more substantial, using modern engineering methods and materials."

Enhancing the trail will be a new stairway that will lead from the trail head down to Lakeshore Road, a gift to the State Park from the Richard and Jane Manoogian Foundation.

Reminiscent of the network of stairways of the past that once existed to lead summer cottagers down to Lake Huron, the new stairs snake their way through the trees and down the steep bluff to the rocky beach below. Some of the larger rocks cropping out of the hillside were used for the footings of the old stairways that rotted away or were torn down long ago. Erosion has stripped the footings bear of the ground that once protected them.

The entire project is scheduled to be completed by September 30.



Center photo: Workers inspect their trail work, noting the location of the utility pipe on the outside of the fencing. The trail is being completed by combining modern materials with traditional methods of construction. Horse-drawn drays transport materials to the job site. Larry Rickley (left) is in charge of the reconstruction work being done by his son, Larry Rickley, Jr., and others. Also pictured is crew member Jim Cardinal.



Above photo: The 76-foot-long bridge on the West Bluff trail provides a perfect spot to photograph the Straits of Mackinac.

Pianist Adam Fellegi To Perform on Island

Concerts Slated for July 8 to July 17

Hungarian classical pianist Adam Fellegi will be performing several concerts on the Island from July 8 to July 17, the first of which will be with the Chicago Chamber Orchestra. Mr. Fellegi has performed around the world and has taught Master courses in the United States and Canada and at the Liszt and Bartok Festival in Paris.

Friday, July 8, at 7 p.m. Mr. Fellegi will perform with the Chicago Chamber Orchestra at Mission Point Theater, with proceeds to benefit the Mackinac Island Community Foundation. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children 12 and under and are available at

the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau and at the door.

The presence of the Chicago Chamber Orchestra was made possible with support from Edison Sault Electric through the Wisconsin Energy Corporation Foundation.

The Chicago Chamber Orchestra will also hold a special performance and workshop for children at 11 a.m. that morning. Classics for Kids is an educational program for children ages 3 to 12. There is no admission cost for the show, although donations are accepted.

In addition to these concerts, Mr. Fellegi will appear as a soloist Thursday, July 14, in a recital at the Inn on Stonecliffe for registered guests staying at Stonecliffe, Sunset Condominiums, and Lakebluff

Condominiums.

Mr. Fellegi will also perform a series of intimate recitals at Moondance Cottage at 8 p.m. Sunday, July 10, Monday, July 11, and Friday, July 15. Tickets for the solo recitals are also \$20 for adults, and \$10 for children 16 and under.

Moondance Cottage owner Dr. Robert Spitzer will be hosting the events, and may be contacted for more information about the cottage recitals at his Island home at 847-6151. He has been working through the winter to bring the Chicago Chamber Orchestra and Mr. Fellegi to the Island.

He says of Mr. Fellegi, "He is one of the great pianists in the world, quite literally, and I am trying to convey this to everyone who has not yet heard him."