

THE BUCKEYE TRAIL SO FAR IT IS JUST AN IDEA.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *With all its natural beauty, Ohio should have its own Buckeye Trail, Says Perry Cole. Why go out of state to take a hike? Here is his idea of a picturesque route.*

Imagine a trail extending from Cincinnati on the Ohio River to Conneaut on Lake Erie. Encompassing much of the State's Finest Scenery, such a "Buckeye Trail" would penetrate some of the most rewarding and historic land in this section of America – the foothills of the Appalachian highlands.

The trail would, at the start, border the great Ohio River, pathway of red and white adventurers for centuries. But almost at the beginning, alternate routes would seem to be desirable, so promising is the hinterland.

I would suggest one branch cutting up past Hillsboro, Chillicothe and Logan to rejoin the river loop in the Senecaville Reservoir area in Eastern Ohio. The trail then would head north past Alliance to the park areas of Northeastern Ohio and end at Lake Erie.

Before going into detail about the proposed route, let me explain some of the reasoning behind such an idea.

There is need for such a public facility where Ohio youth may have an opportunity to find inspiring recreation. It can be met without too much difficulty. First of all, there is need for a marked trail with right-of-way access through many private lands, as much as possible where shelters and other permanent structures could be located.

The trail should be as remote as possible to provide the opportunity for a different outdoor experience. It should be inexpensive to use if it is to benefit the youth who will make use of it. The Appalachian Trail has set an admirable precedent in this respect.

Here is a suggested program for getting the Buckeye Trail started:

Acquire the land and right-of-way with public funds. Right now, extensive recreational planning is being done by public agencies, and budgets are being set up.

The actual making of the trail and the erection of shelters and other necessary facilities can be done by hikers and hiking clubs as it was done on the Appalachian Trail. This would serve to keep expenses low and retain the amateur touch which has added so much to the Appalachian Trail appeal. Too much official guidance is detrimental and detracts from the charm of such a venture.

Supervision for the sake of uniformity of the Appalachian developments is done by the Appalachian Trail Conference, a volunteer amateur recreational group made up of hikers who have the welfare of the trail and of hiking at heart.

The history of the Appalachian Trail reveals that the trail came first. Individuals and clubs followed, and the developmental work on the trail was done by volunteer groups along the way. With a hiking trail available, interest in hiking increased. This lesson indicates the value of such a facility and the power of an ideal in gaining followers. It also justifies the need for such a development.

If a Buckeye Trail is to become a reality, it should be started now. It is time to make a plan and acquire the land. Even now land in the hill country is becoming more valuable with the invasion of industry into this once-remote region. The time may come when land for such a purpose will be hard to get. It would be wise to act while the opportunity still exists.

Most of the trail could be located on existing public lands. They are well scattered and contain many of the outstanding natural attractions to be found in Ohio. Competition for the use of these lands for recreational purposes incompatible with the goal of a hiking trail emphasizes the need for early action.

Now that the reasoning behind the trail idea has been explained, let's have a look at the entire route in more detail.

The southern route would follow the Ohio River from Cincinnati, possibly to Ripley, where it would leave the river to go overland through the rough hill country. It would pass through the largest of Ohio's state forests, the Roosevelt-Shawnee Forest, where deer are common and bears have been reported. Rattlesnakes and copperheads are frequent enough to make caution a valuable trait. Truly Indian country, when the powerful Shawnee tribe lived and dominated the scene, the remote area still abounds with wildlife.

The trail would cross the Scioto River at Portsmouth and angle south to Vesuvius Lake in Wayne National Forest, then east to Gallipolis and the Ohio again, upriver to Pomeroy, and east across country to Forked Run Lake. There the hiker would be cutting the top of the "boot" as he took the short cut and avoided the "great bend" of the river in Meigs County.

From Forked Run, the trail would again follow the Ohio to Marietta and the junction of the Muskingum River with the Ohio. The area is great vegetable country, barges loaded with coal and oil are frequent on the river, and the wooded ridges seem endless.

From Marietta the trail would likely lead north up the Muskingum to Lowell or to Beverly, where it would again leave the water and go overland with Senecaville Lake as the destination. Strip mining is common and hills have been piled on hills by the giant shovels uncovering the coal veins.

The inland branch, meanwhile, would extend east to Hillsboro and Rocky Fork Lake, prime muskie water, thence by Bainbridge and the beautiful Paint Creek Valley to Chillicothe and a sight of Mount Logan which appears on the Ohio seal, then east from Chillicothe to Tar Hollow State Forest where ruffed grouse drum and wild turkeys gobble.

At Tar Hollow, the trail again would divide so the rich heritage of the area could be enjoyed. The first branch would run almost due east through Vinton County, most heavily forested county in Ohio, to Zaleski State Forest and Lake Hope. From there, it would turn northeast to Burr Oak Lake near Glouster, where it would rejoin the other northern route.

The second branch of the north trail would run northeast from Tar Hollow to the Hocking caves area – an unbelievable wonderland with Ash Cave, Old Man's Cave, Cedar Falls, Conkle's Hollow and Cantwell Cliffs – then east through Logan to rejoin the alternate north trail at Burr Oak Lake. The American Youth Hostel association has a hostel at Burr Oak Lake.

From Burr Oak the trail would lead to McConnelsville via the scenic ridge route, Ohio Route 78, where distant views are common. At McConnelsville it would cross the Muskingum River, trotliner's haven and home of the giant catfish, and travel northeast to Senecaville Lake, largest and southernmost of the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District lakes. Here the more southerly route from the Ohio River would be rejoined.

From Senecaville Lake the footpath would land north through hilly land, jumping from one Muskingum conservancy lake to another – Piedmont, Clendening, Tappan and Leesville. Many of the country roads are little traveled, and most public lands offer seldom disturbed areas where the hiker could travel alone. From Leesville Lake the trail would go north out of the hills into the land leveled by the glacier.

North of Alliance the trail would border Berlin Reservoir and then Lake Milton, both Impoundments on the Mahoning River. It would continue north along Ohio Route 534 then east to another of the great reservoirs common to Northeastern Ohio, the Mosquito Creek Reservoir.

The land from the edge of the hills north is Buckeye New England. It is the Connecticut Western Reserve, and the architecture, place names and regular system of roads and towns, reveal this to the observant. While the heavy hand of industry has made quite a mark, the early Yankee influence is still there.

From the upper end of Mosquito Creek Reservoir the trail would lead northeast to the Pennsylvania state line and Pymatuning Reservoir. Bordered by an extensive state park, the lake is located in two states, Ohio and Pennsylvania. It was originally a huge bog and swamp, noted far and wide for its abundant wildlife and inaccessible reaches.

The Ohio portion of the Pymatuning lies in Ashtabula County, largest and northernmost Ohio county. In Ashtabula County are many northern plants and animals that are rare or missing in other parts of Ohio, so the Buckeye Trail would parallel the Appalachian Trail in the sense that both end in a northern atmosphere.

From Pymatuning the last leg of the long journey would follow the state line due north. It would lead past bogs with remnant tamaracks and hemlock woods and scattered native white pines. It would cross deep, cool gorges lined with ferns and other northern plants, and finally it would top out on a high hill above Conneaut, northern port city in Ohio and gateway to all the Great Lakes. With the St. Lawrence Seaway, it leads to all the world.

A few miles downgrade across the lake plain, and the trail would be at an end where the Conneaut fishing fleet comes in and the long ore boats dock to be emptied by the grasshopper-legged Hulett unloaders.

This could be the skeleton of the Buckeye Trail. Actually it should be as endless and as boundless as the energy and the imagination of those who would use it. It would touch just about every type of native Buckeye – industrious Western Ohio farmers, Ohio River boatmen, Southern Ohio highlanders, miners, loggers, frugal hill farmers who till in narrow strips to save their soil, land-loving Amish and Mennonite plain folk, Yankee dairymen, industrial workers of many nationalities, and finally the Finnish fisherman and lake workers at Ohio’s northern Conneaut outpost on Lake Erie.

In these times so reminiscent of the “Roaring Twenties”, youth should be encouraged to slow down and learn to know their native land. They need the invitation for a back-to-nature movement, for the opportunity to form real, sound friendships. Such an experience could do much to help youth retain or restore a proper sense of values.

Perhaps a Buckeye Trail could in its ideal serve as one person envisioned the Appalachian Trail – “remote for detachment, narrow for chosen company, winding for leisure, lonely for contemplation, the trail leads not merely north and south but upward to the body, mind and soul of man”.

A Buckeye Trail would provide such an environment where those who choose may aspire to a high goal and more useful life. And they can have lots of fun while they are at it.

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Photo Captions

Photo: the southern route would leave the Ohio River at Marietta, home off Mound Cemetery, burial place of many Revolutionary War soldiers.

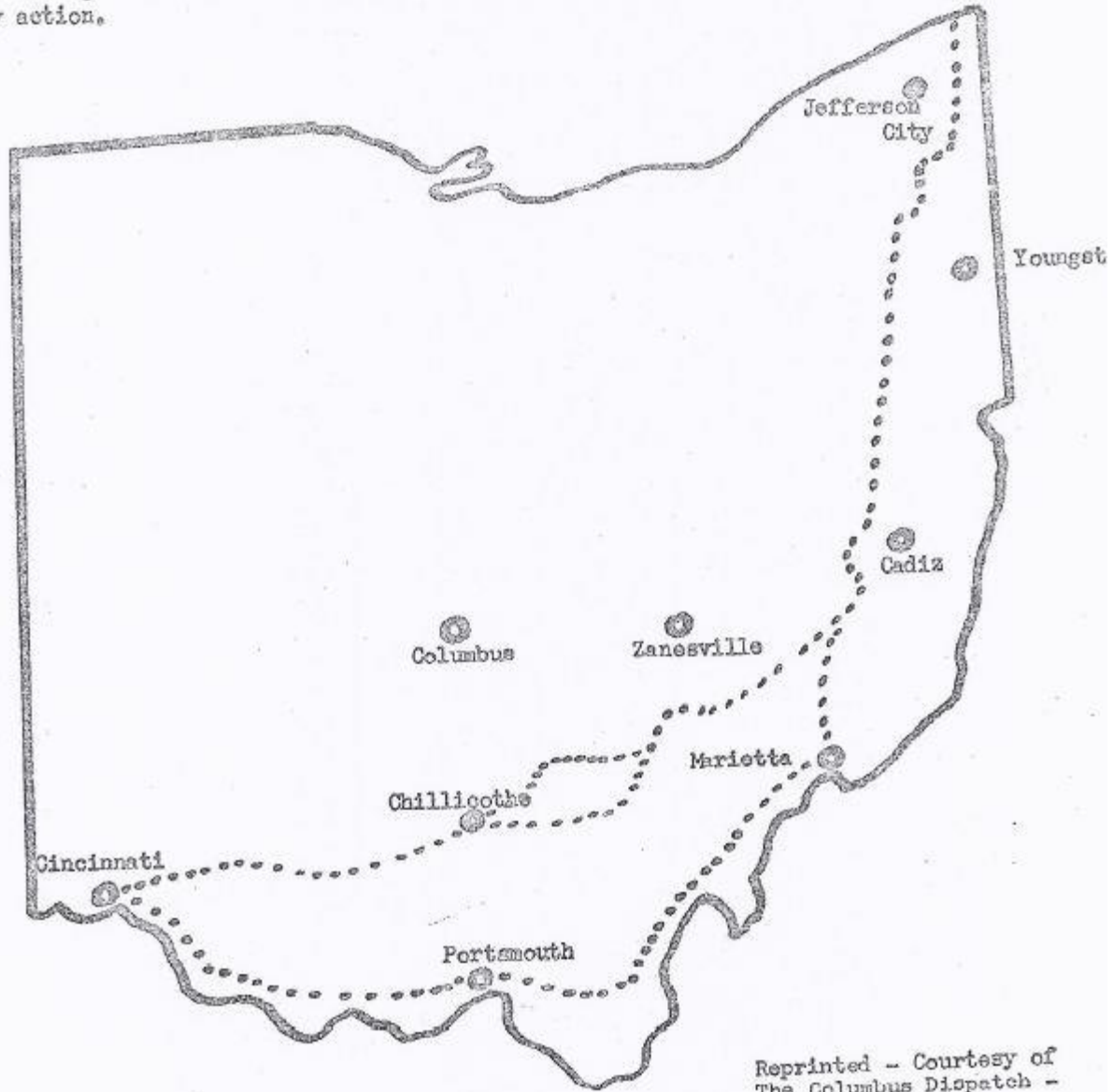
Photo: Rock House is another of the scenic attractions in the Hocking area, which boasts a variety of rock formations.

Photo: Northern trail might extend to beautiful Paint Creek Valley with its picturesque view of Barrett’s Mill near Bainbridge.

Photo: After the northern and southern routes join, the trail would pass among the conservancy lakes.

MAP: A trail could extend from the southwest to the northeast part of the Buckeye State, cutting through some of Ohio’s most scenic land.

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