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Trail Town distinction goes to Dayton

It's only the second city in Ohio to earn the designation.

Posted: 11:45 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 31, 2013



BY DEBBIE JUNIEWICZ - CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Crisp, cool air and a colorful ever-changing landscape – fall is an ideal time for hiking. And Dayton is an ideal location to go hiking.

The North Country Trail Association recently recognized Dayton as a “Trail Town,” only the second city in Ohio to receive the designation – the other being Milford. Trail Towns are hiker-friendly places, but the benefits of the designation extend to the community, as well.



The Buckeye Trail — as it winds through Dayton and the rest of the state — is designated by a series ... [Read More](#)

“These communities recognize that trails are both economic and recreational assets,” said Bruce Matthews, North Country Trail Association executive director.

The North Country Trail is the longest of the National Scenic Trails stretching 4,600 miles from North Dakota to New York. It follows much of the Buckeye Trail, a 1,400-mile trail that winds through 48 Ohio counties. Trail towns have the amenities hikers desire from accommodations and restaurants to stores where they can replenish supplies.

“Dayton is a great example of how an urban area can embrace a trail culture, providing a superb recreational resource for its citizens while benefiting its economy and the health of the environment,” said Andrea Ketchmark, North Country Trail Association director of trail development.

Have boots will travel

If someone tells Andy Niekamp to “take a hike,” he might do just that.

Niekamp wears many hats as the lead adventurer for Outdoor Adventure Connection, the Dayton Hikers organizer and a life member of the Buckeye Trail Association but the common thread is his love of hiking.

The Dayton resident has hiked the Appalachian Trail several times. He was the 7th person to complete a thru hike of the Buckeye Trail. And, in April, he set out on a 325-mile journey on the Ohio to Erie Trail from the Ohio River in Cincinnati to Lake Erie in Cleveland. The goal of his 19-day hike was to demonstrate that Ohio's bikeways can be hiked as well as bicycled.

There is rarely a time Niekamp isn't on the trails but this season is his favorite.

"Fall is a great time to go hiking," he said. "There are no bugs, it's low humidity and temperatures are cooler. It's just ideal."

Getting started

Niekamp's advice for potential hikers is simple: "Just go do it."

And what better place to get started than in a Trail Town?

The veteran hiker suggests starting with a manageable three-mile hike along a portion of the Buckeye Trail. The Buckeye and North Country Scenic trails are one-in-the-same through the Dayton area following the Mad River and Great Miami Recreation trails which are marked with blue blazes along the route.

"It's easy and scenic, not a difficult hike at all," Niekamp said.

If you are looking for more of a challenge or a more wooded area, the Buckeye Trail through Caesar Creek State Park would be ideal.

"The great part about having these trails right here in our own backyard is that you can use them to see and explore Ohio," Niekamp said. "It can be an exercise in exploration as well as an exercise in fitness."

If you want to learn more about hiking or just want some company on the trails, Fiver Rivers MetroParks offer a variety of hiking programs and the Dayton Hikers have a full schedule of hikes - with events almost daily - available on their website.

Trail tidbits

North Country National Trail

- Within a day's drive of 40 percent of America's population, and those who live near Fargo, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Detroit, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Albany can be hiking on the Trail within a couple hours.

- Longest National Scenic Trail in the United States
- Passes through 12 National Forests
- Created by Congress in 1980; already has more trail completed than the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is long

Buckeye Trail

- The first 20 miles of trail were dedicated in 1959 in Hocking County
- Covers more than 1,444 miles
- There are 26 sections to the Buckeye Trail, each named for a town or feature within the section
- The trail is identified by blue blazes, 2 inches wide by 6 inches high, on trees or poles. A single blaze marks the trail where the route is fairly straight or obvious, while a double blaze marks a turn with the upper blaze offset to indicate the new direction. A double blaze with no offset simply means pay attention - the trail route may not be obvious.

Learn more

Thru Hiking the Buckeye Trail – A 1,400 Mile Journey Around Ohio

What: Free presentation by Niekamp

When: Nov. 4, 7 p.m.

Where: Tipp City Public Library, 11 E. Main St.

Get Together at True Heights Outfitters

What: Dayton Hikers informal get together and presentation, new members welcome

When: Nov. 12, 6:30-9 p.m.

Where: True Heights Outfitters, 3170 Rodenbeck Drive, Beavercreek

Hiking the Ohio to Erie Trail

What: Free presentation by Andy Niekamp, lead adventurer for Outdoor Adventure Connection

When: Nov. 19, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Kettering-Moraine Branch of the Dayton Metro Library, 3496 Far Hills Ave., Kettering

More information

Buckeye Trail: www.buckeyetrail.org

Dayton Hikers: www.meetup.com/DaytonHikers

Five Rivers MetroParks: www.metroparks.org/

North Country Trail: <http://northcountrytrail.org/>

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