

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Buckeye Trail : History and Prospects



The Buckeye Trail, which attracts millions of hikers every year, has 1,444 miles of paths which form a loop around the state of Ohio. It goes through small towns as well as busy urban areas with museums and memorable sights. Along the way it contains areas of historic, geologic, and ecological importance.

Its origin was an article in the Columbus Dispatch (1958) “*A Buckeye Trail: So Far It is Just an Idea*”, which proposed a long-distance trail similar to the Appalachian Trail so that “youth may have an opportunity to find inspiring recreation.” By 1959 the first 20 miles were laid out in Hocking County (southeast Ohio) by the founding members of the nonprofit Buckeye Trail Association (BTA). This small group envisioned creating a trail from the shore of Lake Erie to the bluffs of the Ohio River. Over the decades the ODNR and BTA volunteers expanded the trail in sections, finally completing the “big loop” in 1980. It is the longest continuous hiking trail within one state and the longest loop trail in the world. The northernmost point is Fairport Harbor Lighthouse at Headlands Beach State Park east of Cleveland on Lake Erie and the southern terminus is Eden Park in Cincinnati.

In the early years, the decision was made to mark the trail with blue blazes, not white - which were used on the Appalachian Trail. This was because the blue contrasted with the green and brown forests and could be more easily seen when white snow coated the landscape in winter. The painted blazes are 2” wide and 6” high and visible on trees, signposts and utility poles. A single blaze marks a straight route ahead, whereas a double blaze indicates a turn, with the upper blaze signifying the new direction. Hikers can follow the blue blazes and relish views of Ohio’s natural wonders.

The Buckeye Trail Association (in existence since 1959) promotes the construction, maintenance and use of the trail system and supplements it with side trails, campsites, and other facilities. Individual membership is \$30 per year. More than managing the trail, the BTA is a social group. It distributes a quarterly newsletter, Trailblazer, and offers volunteer opportunities, activities and gatherings for members. These include Morel Fest, Challenge Hikes, Brrrr Oak Winter Hike, and TrailFest. Members can assist at work parties build shelters, upgrade paths, do trail maintenance, or repaint the blue blazes. There is an 1883 barn near Deersville where members sometimes convene. The BTA has designated “trail towns” (including nearby Milford and Loveland) which offer food, lodging and cultural events for hikers. The Association currently has a full-time executive director and an office in Shawnee.

Most Ohioans live within several hours of some part of the trail. It is made up of 26 sections; and each section has 50 - 70 miles. Use of the trail is primarily by three groups: (1) Day Hikers, (2) Weekend Warriors, who spend 2-3 days consecutively, and (3) Thru-Hikers who complete the entire loop, which takes about 3 months. Walking the trail is a worthwhile pursuit. Besides the benefit of exercise, contact with the natural world provides balm in the current era of technological activity. There is a wide variety of plant and animal life including colorful wildflowers, native ferns and trees, mammals, and birds. Scenic vistas abound at the numerous parks along the way, including Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Wayne National Forest, Salt Fork State Park and Hocking Hills State Park. Noteworthy places provide glimpses into Ohio’s past: the Miami & Erie Canal, Ft. Ancient & Serpent Mound, the James Garfield National Historic Site, and Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Hikers observe historic covered bridges, farms, old mills, dams, Native American villages, and canal tow paths. Even the names of some of the byways are enticing - Wildcat Hollow Road, Big Pine Road, and Bat Roost Road. For those who journey on the trail, there can be hazards. These include ticks, nettles, poison ivy, mosquitoes, clinging spiderwebs, snakes, and inclement weather. Yet wandering the trail is rewarding in many ways.

Recently a feasibility study was undertaken to determine if the Buckeye Trail could be designated a “National Scenic Trail”. This process will extend into 2026 and would have to be approved by the US Congress. If this occurs, the Buckeye Trail would be the 12th National Scenic Trail. It would draw more visibility to this incredible path that connects 47 counties and offers a splendid outdoor experience in Ohio.

