

HISTORY OF THE KIWANIS TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

A Story of Obstacles Overcome

The idea of building a mile long trail along the west bank of Rock River from near the Tallman House to Riverside Park first jelled in 1974 as a Bi-Centennial project for 1976. Roger Krempel, then the Director of Public Works, and City Planner, Dave Knoerr envisioned that the narrow strip of little-used City owned land held great potential as a hiking and biking trail.

This was not long after the start of the energy crisis and it was decided to promote the bicycle and walking by developing on-street bike routes and off-street trails. A plan of four City routes which are interconnected with each other and with a 212 mile County bikeway system was approved. Only two of the City bike routes and the County bike routes were signed for the bi-centennial.

The Kiwanis trail was planned as part of the Orange loop route and was not opened for public use until October 1979, more than three years late. The story that follows tells why it took so long. It is a story of the many obstacles that were overcome to provide Janesville area people with this one mile of nature trail in the heart of the City.

Typical of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that were overcome were the following:

1. "You can't build a trail on City park land without an agreement with the City pledging work by City work forces on storm sewers, entrances and brush burning."
2. "You can't get out the south end because there is no public crossing of the railroad tracks and the Public Service Commission probably will not grant a permit to build a new crossing."
3. "You can't build a trail there because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will not permit filling in the flood plain."
4. "You can't get construction equipment past that deep gorge, because it is too close to the railroad and you can't fill it up."
5. "You can't build a trail north of the gorge, because there are too many large trees and the side slope of the railroad is too steep and you would need 1,000 cubic yards of fill."
6. "There are eleven drainage courses crossing the trail which will require twelve bridges and culverts to prevent the trail from being washed out after every rain. This could cost \$100,000. and the Kiwanis Club has agreed to spend only \$7,000."

The Trail Project got a green light on November 7, 1994 when an agreement by and between the City and the Kiwanis Club was consummated. In this agreement the City agreed to...

- Designate this project as one of its objectives for the observance of the Bicentennial celebration in 1976.
- Prepare final plans and afford overall construction supervision
- Acquire a permit to build the railroad crossing at the South end and a road through the railroad tunnel near Peterson Avenue.

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- Construct the accesses from City streets to the trail
- Assist in tree trimming and brush disposal
- Grant Kiwanis permission to build the trail on City land per the approved plans
- Grant Kiwanis permission to erect trail signs.

The Kiwanis Club agreed to....

- Enlist volunteer labor from club members and other willing City citizens
- Purchase the necessary materials for bridges and culverts at a cost not to exceed \$7,000.
- Assume liability during construction through insurance
- Program and direct the work groups to complete the trail for dedication on July 4, 1976.

The second big obstacle was knocked down when, after a public hearing before the Public Service Commission on June 27, 1975, a permit was issued to build a new railroad crossing at the south end of the trail near the Tallman House. The cost of the crossing was shared by the C&NWRR and the City.

The third big obstacle was overcome on September 10, 1976 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finally issued a permit to construct the trail across a swamp at the north end, and to place fill wherever needed in the flood plain along the rest of the trail.

The fourth big obstacle was that of crossing a twenty foot deep rock gorge. This gorge was spanned with a reinforced concrete bridge on September 6, 1977. This was now open to bring in trucks of fill material and redi-mix concrete.

The fifth big obstacle was the construction of the most difficult 500 foot long section of trail. Kiwanis members completed the chain saw work June 17, 1979. City crews and local contractors placed about 1,000 cubic yards of fill material which flattened out a steep slope and made the whole trail passable to heavy equipment.

The sixth obstacle was the challenge of constructing the trail over eleven drainage courses through which all the storm water from the whole northwest side of the city must flow to the river. Two such courses were spanned with 28 foot long timbers salvaged from an old railroad trestle which once crossed the river in downtown Janesville. Eight new culverts were installed at other locations. The last big drainage course was lined with chunks of broken concrete and surfaced with ten cubic yards of concrete to permit storm water to flow over the trail.