Chessie Nature Trail
Open Meeting
12 November 2013

Photo: John Robertson
Tonight’s Program

• Introduction to Advisory Committee
• Trail Background
• Near Term Projects
• Future Initiatives
• Keeping in Touch
• Q&A
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Advisory Committee

• Established June 2013
• Advises the Superintendent of VMI with respect to establishment and implementation of guidelines for trail design, construction, use, maintenance and promotion
• Provides a balanced approach between and among various trail users' and private land owners’ interests
• Forum for continued community input in the safe and sustainable use of the trail’s natural and cultural resources
Advisory Committee

Groups Represented:

- Virginia Military Institute (VMI)
- Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC)
- Rockbridge County
- City of Lexington
- City of Buena Vista
- Private land owner
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Brief History

- Pre-1850’s to 1870’s canal system
- 1880’s to 1960’s C&O Railroad
- 1978 deeded to Nature Conservancy
- 1979 deeded to VMI Foundation, became rail trail
- 2009 deeded to VMI
  - “shall forever be used solely for recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes”
  - “shall forever be kept and maintained entirely in its natural state”
Acquisition Activities

• Trail clean up
• Environmental Site Assessment
• Recreational Trails Program grant
  – Approved for funding
  – Funding to be released upon successful environmental screening
Trail Maintenance

- VMI, with the VMI Foundation, maintains a small endowment for maintenance:
  - Annual routine maintenance
  - Storm recovery
  - Summer mowing contract
Trail Use Guidelines

The trail passes through and along private property. Please respect the rights of the property owners by remaining on the trail at all times.

- Trail is open dawn to dusk
- Pets must remain on a leash at all times
- Clean up after your pets
- Do not litter
- No Firearms
The Chessie Nature Trail is a seven-mile, year-round public access walking trail between Lexington and Buena Vista, located along the former Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad right of way. The trail has a relatively flat grade with a gravel and dirt surface. There are currently no consistent mile markers or facilities on the trail, so plan a visit accordingly. Ticks are also fairly common in this area during warmer months; be sure to wear appropriate clothing and check thoroughly for ticks after returning from the trail.

Visit our trail listing at AllTrails.com, where you can download their smartphone app to rate the trail, log your trip with GPS, and upload photos for other visitors to see! Hikers may also want to bring along a copy of the Field Guide to the Chessie Nature Trail (published in 2009 by the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council) to learn more about the history and environment in the area of the trail.
Acknowledgements and References

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Virginia Canals and Navigations Society
Washington and Lee archaeology department
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Near Term Improvements

- Improve mile markers
- Improve/new signs at trail heads
- Replace gates
- Develop official parking areas (2)
Design Concepts

• Mile markers
Design Concepts

- Trailhead signs
Design Concepts

• Interpretive signs

CANAL NAVIGATION AND THE IRON INDUSTRY
Before railroads, a watery highway for goods

Rockbridge County has been a center of the iron industry since Grant's Furnace, the first iron furnace west of the Blue Ridge, was built in 1790. The county's rivers had a lot to do with the development of the iron industry. Water power worked the bellows that financed the furnace to melt the iron ore to make pig iron. Water power also powered the tilt hammers that shaped the pig iron into wrought iron bars at forge.

Ironmasters promoted the development of river navigation and canals to bring raw materials and supplies and take their products to market. Iron from Rockbridge was taken down the North (now Maury) River and the James River as far away as Richmond. The North River Navigation Co. was chartered in 1840 to improve the North River from its confluence with the James upstream to Lexington. Construction began in 1851, and in 1857 the failing North River Navigation Co. was taken over by the James River & Kanawha Co. The system was completed as far north as Lexington by 1869 and continued to operate during the Civil War, when the remnants of Stonewall Jackson were brought home on the system for burial in Lexington.

Two floods in 1870 and 1877 extensively damaged the canal system and in 1881, the Richmond and Allegheny Railroad Co. purchased the real estate and facilities of the James River and Kanawha Co. on the North River.

The blue line shows the course of the North (Maury) River from its confluence with the James River at Balcony Falls to the head of navigation at Cedar Grove.

This marker sponsored by the Virginia Military Institute, the Nature Conservancy, the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council and the Virginia Canal & Navigation Society.

Images: Clark Nexsen
Design Concepts

• Gates (at edges of pasture)
Design Concepts

• Bollards (to impede motor vehicles)

Figure 15
Option 1 is a padlock-operable folding bollard. It folds to within five inches of the top of the concrete base. Photo by TrafficGuard Direct.

Vehicles can drive over collapsible bollards without completely removing the bollard from the ground. Courtesy of Roanoke Valley Greenways.

Left Image: Clark Nexsen
Design Concepts

• Official parking areas
Design Concepts

• Official parking areas

Images: Clark Nexsen
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Future Initiatives

• Demolish storage shed
• Replace West Pedestrian Bridge
• Replace South River Bridge
• Finish connection to Buena Vista
Demo Shed

Replace West Ped Bridge

Replace South River Bridge

Connection to BV
West Pedestrian Bridge
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Calendaring

- Walks: provide heads-up as a courtesy
- Large events: contact us to deconflict with marches
  - Portable toilets may be required
Communication

• Funnel ideas and questions through representative group
  – Check list for accuracy of contact information

• Web site form
Trail Visitor Comments

Submit comments/questions in box below.

If you are accessing this page from a QR code on the trail and reporting damages, please allow the QR code to record your GPS location for our reference.

Contact Information

P: (540) 464-7357

Physical Plant
Virginia Military Institute
Lexington, VA 24450
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