

FOX RIVER: BUSIEST TRAIL IN THE WISCONSIN

Friends of the Fox River Trail recently announced that by using trail counters, interviews and observations, the Brown County Parks Department estimates that the Fox River Trail experienced 119,000 "trips" in 2001, making it the busiest trail in the state. Over 8,300 trail passes were sold in 2001, generating \$58,000 in revenue for the County.

Friends of the Fox River Trail is a group of interested citizens dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Fox River Trail, a 13.9-mile trail beginning on the waterfront in downtown Green Bay and progressing south to Greenleaf. The trail welcomes hikers, bikers, skaters and horseback riders (in designated areas). Rules of the trail may be found at its web site, www.foxrivertrail.org.

The trail passes through the Astor Historic District in Green Bay. This 25-block district is listed on the National Register of Historic places and includes some of Green Bay's most elegant Victorian style homes. The trail also passes Hazelwood, the home of Morgan L. Martin. Built in 1837, Martin was prominent in state politics and the architect of the plan to create a passage from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River via a series of locks and dams on the Fox River.

As the trail enters the Village of Allouez, the importance of the river to industrial growth and shipping can be observed in the Georgia-Pacific Paper mill located along the west shore of the river. The trail also passes through Heritage Hill State Park with its living history collections depicting the settlement of Northeastern Wisconsin.

There are several parks and boat landings along the corridor as it passes through the City of De Pere. It is here that the first of 17 locks constructed for barge traffic on the Fox River can be observed. This is a functioning lock, which today primarily serves recreational boaters. South of De Pere, the trail takes on a more rural feeling as it passes through agricultural lands. The Niagara Escarpment can be observed in the distance from the trail. This prominent bluff formation stretches from eastern Wisconsin to Canada providing habitat to a variety of unique plant and animal species. The trail finally terminates on the north side of the small agricultural community of Greenleaf.

The Fox River Trail corridor has a rich history, beginning with the Native Americans who used footpaths to travel between their villages located along the river. The early French explorers, missionaries and traders built their posts and missions along these trails. As the area was settled, livestock and other goods were brought to market using these pathways.

Later, a military road would be built along portions of the corridor linking Green Bay to Milwaukee. In the 1860's, the Milwaukee and Superior Railway acquired the present corridor and began planning for rail service. In 1873, the Milwaukee and Northern Railway Company purchased the corridor and the first trains began making regular runs between the Green Bay and

Milwaukee markets. Trains would continue to run on the corridor for the next 116 years, as ownership passed from one railroad to another. In 1989, regular rail service was discontinued, signaling the end of one era and the beginning of another with the development of the Fox River Recreational Trail.