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October 28, 1999
Section: News

Scout develops nature trail as Eagle project
R. Cathey Daniels
for The Oak Ridger

Where in Oak Ridge can you learn about "outfall" of waste-water treatment, river cane bamboo and the benefits of a beaver dam, all in one three-fourths-of-a-mile stroll?

Big Turtle Park Greenway Nature Trail, cleared, blazed and mapped by Bryce Galen and some of his buddies from Boy Scout Troop 220.

Bryce, a junior at Oak Ridge High School, chose the year-long undertaking for his Eagle Scout project, and he's hoping it will be enjoyed by school classes as well as the general public.

"I wanted to do something that would really have a lasting impact on the community," says Bryce.

"There weren't many nature trails in western Oak Ridge -- the North Boundary Trail hadn't opened up.

"And I always enjoyed hiking as a boy, and I wanted to reflect all that in my project."

Note to teachers: Don't leave school without Bryce.

"This is a good spot to stop and reflect on the hydrologic cycle," says Bryce, pausing at possibly the sweetest spot along the trail, a point of land at the confluence of East Fork Poplar Creek and a beaver channel.

The view down East Fork Poplar is reminiscent of a "Jungle Book" illustration.

"I really like the way the trees hang over the water," says Bryce, who can converse knowledgeably about anything related to the trail, from the 47,000 cubic yards of mercuric sulfide-laced soil that was removed from the creek, to the Clemson pond leveler installed below the beaver dam to control flooding.

But for those of you who can't pack Bryce along with your field trip gear, he has written an ecological description of the trail and left copies of it in a box at the trail head.

The trail starts at the far end of the Katie Hunter Soccer Field parking lot, and is marked with six points of interest that correspond to Bryce's written descriptions, making it a convenient teaching tool or easy self-guided experience for kids.

But the trail is also just an enjoyable walk, meandering along the creek through deciduous forest, climbing hand-hewn steps and bending back beside the beaver channel to the beaver dam.

"This is a completely different environment," says Bryce of the wetland that was created by the beaver industry. "There's the tall grasses, and a whole array of songbirds attracted that wouldn't be attracted to a forest.

"It's almost an other-worldly aura that comes off the algae growth on top of the water."

The trail placement -- hidden beside the soccer fields -- lends it an accessibility Bryce hopes the community comes to appreciate.

"A wetland adjacent to a greenway -- in close proximity to a park -- should be an advantage," says Bryce, noting that not too many such places exist in Oak Ridge.

All the trail signs were handmade and painted by Bryce and his buddies, with an assist from local sign expert Bob Yarber.

To map the site, Bryce used the expertise of Sam Kitchens, a mapping master from Roane State Community College. Kitchens taught Bryce the use of GPS mapping, taking coordinates every five seconds from globally positioned satellites and recording them in computer memory.

Then, using his home computer and special software, Bryce plotted his map.

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"That was really fun," says Bryce.

Local businesses, such as 84 Lumber and Tindell's, helped out with supplies.

In addition, Bryce says Kayla Gentry of the city planning office and Josh Collins of the city Parks and Recreation Department were helpful, as well as the Greenways Oak Ridge task force.

"I presented my trail to the Greenways board and they like it so much they adopted it that night as part of the greenways system in Oak Ridge," says Bryce.

Bryce put in about 100 hours of work on the project, and took home at least three cases of poison ivy to show for it.

"At that time I didn't think it would be worth it," says Bryce. "But now, seeing people using the trail -- it's definitely worth it."

Bryce also rows with the Oak Ridge Rowing Association junior team and plays violin with the SpyreRydge String Quartet.

Bryce Galen, a junior at Oak Ridge High School and member of Boy Scout Troop 220, mapped out and supervised the building of Big Turtle Park Greenway Nature Trail, as his Eagle Scout project.

-- Photo Submitted

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