

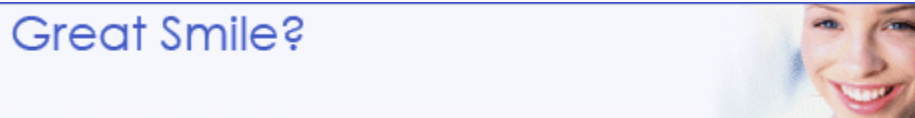


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## Loved to Death

Sunday, July 30, 2006 12:13 AM EDT  
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Last week saw much discussion about heavy use of the trails at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park by running teams from local schools, colleges and clubs. Articles and columns in the MDJ discussed the meeting held Tuesday evening with the coaches about fees, permits and scheduling. The position of the Kennesaw Mountain Trail Club (KEMOTrail Corps, Inc. a 501 C3 Non-Profit corporation) includes a number of points.

First, in-kind service is a suitable substitute for cash

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when it comes to sustaining the usability of park's trail system. Any groups volunteering service to maintain the trails make rapid, visible improvements. Work is good for maintaining personal fitness. Part of the National Park Service budget is based on the contribution of volunteer service hours. Everyone wins when users give back service.

Second, a properly developed trail system provides capacity to carry expected traffic. A well-constructed trail system encourages visitors to stay on the trails, helping preserve natural and historic areas of the park. Well-built trails require less maintenance and cause less damage to the natural environment.

Third, solutions to capacity problems may take years to implement. Cooperation between the NPS and its many user constituencies in terms of use and scheduling are a necessity.

Fourth, the community must support the bond issue for the acquisition of parkland in Cobb County on the November election ballot. More parks means more opportunities to distribute the user load currently focused on Kennesaw Mountain.

According to its charter, the purpose of the park is historic preservation. It is the second-most most visited National Battlefield Park behind Gettysburg. For the last three years Kennesaw Mountain has made the top 10 list of most endangered battlefields.



The reality is that the park is a historic and natural preserve, and also a primary recreational facility for a large and varied community of users. The current discussion is about organized running teams using the park for training. However, the trails are also used extensively by hikers, dog walkers, horseback riders, bird watchers, historians, naturalists and many other visitors.

The community loves this park. We love it to death. In 1995 the park staff numbered 21. Today it's down to 14. Only three employees are full-time maintenance staff. They do all building upkeep, trash collection and mowing. Three people have no time to work on trails.

Since the fall of 2002, a committed group of volunteers from among the diverse users of the park has done all of the trail maintenance.

The Kennesaw Mountain Trail Club has contributed more than 8,000 service hours. The Boy Scouts have completed 11 Eagle Projects with guidance from club members. Seven more Eagle projects are under way. With direction from the NPS we built a new trail, a half-mile longer than the old, dangerously eroded one, on Little Kennesaw. The club has also done a number of minor trail re-routes and built a new causeway in the vicinity of John Ward Creek. We are committing 1,800 hours as part of an NPS Challenge Grant, to build a new horse-capable bridge across John Ward Creek. And the NPS plans a new six-mile trail to provide access to previously inaccessible Union positions on the western edge of the park.

Much effort is spent closing and revegetating abandoned, unsafe trails. This effort is undermined by a few determined people who insist that the old trails must be used.

We have six certified trail crew leaders who know how to build safe, sustainable, scenic, challenging trails supporting the volume of traffic and the variety of users. We are training eight more crew leaders. We want certified crew leaders available to work with volunteer groups whenever they wish to donate their time.

The Trail Club meets monthly on the second Saturday, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., usually with five to 10 volunteers. If you want to support the park; if you want to use it as you like; if you don't want to see the park destroyed; then you should volunteer to help. NPS budgets continue to decrease. There is no more budget or manpower coming from the NPS. Pressure on the park from visitation and trampling continues to increase, as does the population of the county.

When the park was created in the 1930s people in Atlanta asked why anyone would want a park so far from the city. Recently the last piece of undeveloped land adjoining the park was sold. There is no more space for the park to grow. Today the park sees more than 1.2 million visitors a year while more than 250,000 vehicles a day pass through the park. Kennesaw Mountain's 3,000 acres are the largest green space left in metropolitan Atlanta.

The 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail sees approximately 2 million hikers a year, which compares to Kennesaw's 1.2 million mixed-use visitors per year. The wear and tear on the park is much more concentrated at Kennesaw than on the AT. In addition to the trampling effects of all the runners, hikers and horseback riders, the trails suffer from poor design, lack of capacity and water erosion from storms. The AT is supported by a network of trail clubs working in conjunction with the land managers from state and federal agencies. Kennesaw Mountain only has the NPS, the Kennesaw Mountain Trail Club and its volunteers from the community.

Richard Angeli is president of the Kennesaw Mountain Trail Club.

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