

## Visiting with visionaries: Dan Ogden and Jean Matthews

By **Dana Hendricks**, PCTA Regional Representative

**W**hen I hiked the Appalachian Trail fresh out of college in 1996, the National Trails System was something I pretty much took for granted. I didn't wonder much about the foresight and courage it must have taken to formally set aside extensive tracts of land for trails that enabled humble people like me to journey through spectacular landscapes.

As I grow wiser and ever more embroiled in complex efforts to maintain and protect National Scenic Trails, I'm increasingly impressed that the National Trails System Act ever passed. That landmark 1968 legislation, which recognized, designated, and federally protected the Pacific Crest and Appalachian trails, took more than just a neat idea. The visionaries behind it were well aware that the way would be politically arduous.

There still is a lot of resistance and controversy. That's why, in my work for PCTA, I've done a lot of research into the origins and enabling legislation of these great trails – the PCT in particular – searching for the sparks that crystallized the motivation in the right moments.

So I was floored last summer when I received a typewritten note from a 93-year-old man in Vancouver, Washington, interested in meeting leaders of the PCTA. “My name is **Dan Ogden**. In 1966 ... I was assigned the task of heading the Trails for America study.”

With anticipation, I opened my yellowed 1966 copy (pictured above) of this groundbreaking study calling for a system of trails,

which became the basis of the National Trails System Act. Sure enough, the first name under the credits was “Daniel M. Ogden, Jr., Assistant Director for Planning and Research, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, Department of the Interior, chairman.”

I called and asked if we could meet. I had a zillion questions about the founding legislation. I was particularly interested in how the vision for the National Trails ultimately became compelling for the people who made the legislation happen. When I visited with Dan in July of 2015, I found that he likes to downplay his role. “I had less to do with drawing up the ideas than I had with making things move,” he said. “I came with more political experience than most of the staff and had good connections in the Congress.”

With a Ph.D. in political science and having organized two big White House conferences on conservation (one of which featured John F. Kennedy), Ogden was a natural. He was delighted to head the trails study. Having grown up in a household that never owned an automobile, he's no stranger to the values of walking.

“I like to walk. Walked four miles a day for many years.” He remembers with fondness hiking in Shenandoah and the Columbia River Gorge and climbing peaks in Colorado. He's a big fan of the extensive system of metropolitan trails in greater Portland, Oregon, near his home. He's a believer in the value of trails for all people.

“I am very proud of my role in getting the National Trails System bill enacted,” he said. “It was part of a grand effort to save the out of doors for the American people.”



*Dana Hendricks, left, visits with Dan and Jean during PCT Days in Cascade Locks, Oregon, in late August. Longtime trail lovers were riveted by their stories.*

A little background on the political climate of his day: The post-war boom of the 1950s included a rush to build interstate highways and huge dams. Little heed was given to conservationists' outcry about pollution and unchecked development. An increasingly urban population no longer made its living in the outdoors – as a result, many sought the outdoors during their free time. But what they encountered outdoors was a scarcity of unmarred natural landscapes. As the 1950s pushed on, the concern grew that America was becoming ugly.

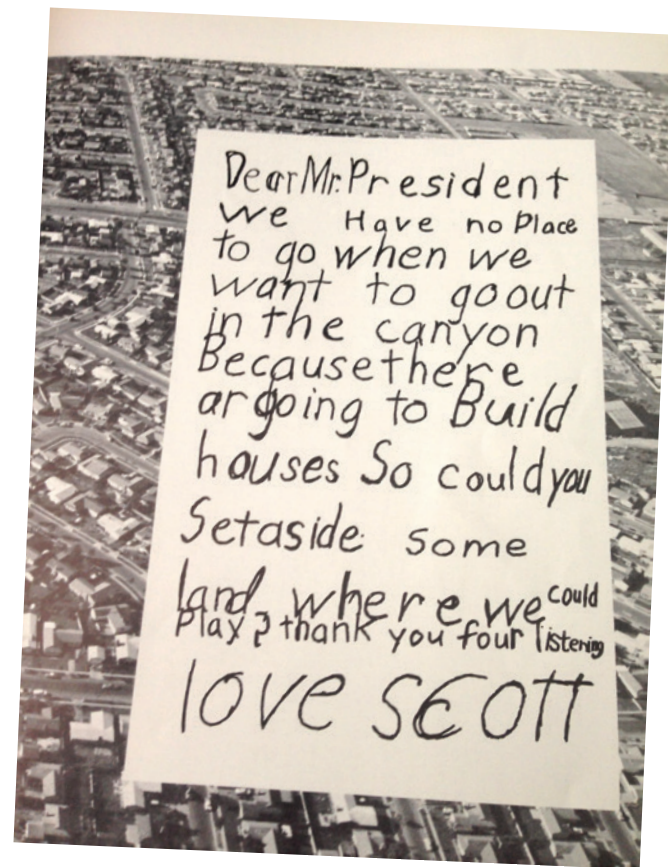
At a time when many of conservation's key messages alienated supporters of industry and progress, the importance of getting out and into nature had an appeal that crossed political lines. In 1958, Congress approved – with bipartisan support – the creation of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. Republican Dwight Eisenhower was president. By 1962, the commission presented extensive research indicating that outdoor recreation resources were needed nationwide. They found that “walking for pleasure” was among the top activities Americans enjoyed and “hiking” was projected to increase substantially.

By 1966 the ORRRC report had already spurred an incredible string of major conservation legislation. As part of the overall

vision, a trails study was commissioned. Trails for America was so well received that, in 1968, the National Trails System Act passed nearly unanimously in both houses of Congress. This seems astonishing since President Lyndon B. Johnson was wrestling simultaneously with many issues of national importance, including space travel, civil rights, the Vietnam War, draft resistance and riots. I can't help but keep wondering what kind of stars had to align to make trails rise to the top of anyone's agenda.

A lot of it had to do with Stewart Udall and his amazing team, including Dan Ogden. From 1961 to 1969, Udall was the secretary of the Interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. His 1963 book, *The Quiet Crisis*, warned of increasing pollution, abuse of natural resources and rapidly disappearing open space. Perhaps his message got traction because it kept coming back to quality of life, or simply put – quality.

“One of the paradoxes of American society is that while our economic standard of living has become the envy of the world, our environmental standard has steadily declined. We are better housed, better nourished, and better entertained, but we are not better prepared to inherit the earth or to carry on the pursuit of happiness.”



**Left:** “The Scott Turner Letter.” Jean’s response on behalf of Udall said: “Dear Scott. . . We are trying as hard as we can, President Kennedy and I, to do just what you asked—‘to set aside some land’ where you can play—not in groups with supervision, but just roaming around by yourself and finding out how you relate to the earth and the sky. . .”

**Right:** Jean holds a photograph of herself being recognized by Stewart Udall for her groundbreaking work on the Department of Interior’s annual report. President Johnson sent a memo to Udall: “Your new annual report makes me very proud. This is the kind of freshness and imagination we need so badly all through the Government.”

“The spirit of adventure springs ever anew in the hearts of Americans, young and old. In no way is it better satisfied than in the exploration of unfamiliar terrain or in the discovery of the beauties of nature. Long-distance trails can provide unparalleled opportunities for such adventure and such satisfaction.”

Dan said: “That sounds like **Jean Matthews**. She lives near here. You might want to meet her.” Jean and Dan were old friends. “I think Jean had a bit to do with finishing touches on this. She knew what Udall would like.”

Dan gave me her phone number. Once again I was starstruck at the chance of meeting another visionary. The first time I called her, she hung up on me. I had to call back and quickly explain I wasn’t asking for money. Her tone became warm, and she invited me to her house in August of 2015.

Jean (Worth) Matthews worked as an information officer and speechwriter for the Department of the Interior from 1962 to 1968. After that she went on to a highly productive career with the **National Park Service**. Sitting with her – she is 95 – you can still feel the electricity she brought to her work. She says the whole team was excited to get all this stuff passed. Of her time directly under Udall, she said: “You know every time I got a speech to do I went to Dan because he knew everything that was going on. ... My job description was to understand the Secretary’s position on all matters. And believe me that was made into a joke. Often!”

I showed her some of those inspiring passages from *Trails for America*. Was she involved? “Not that I recall. At least not directly.” As for the American Beauty message: “He (LBJ) and Udall were like ‘that’ [fingers crossed] on that beautification thing, and Udall may have given him stuff that I wrote.” When she showed me some of the words she wrote, I believed it. Wow!

Jean was the author (although she didn’t get a byline) of the Interior Department’s special report to the nation called *The Race for Inner Space*, which appeared the year after Udall published *The Quiet Crisis*. It, and the subsequent annual reports she wrote, really helped Udall unify the department around conservation. Reading these passages you can feel the resonance of the Wilderness Act, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the National Trails System Act, all of which Jean helped Udall argue in favor of.

“Who can put a price tag on the health and serenity resulting from days spent in the outdoors?”

“The tides come and go at the call of a constant moon – the trees leaf and the sap rises under the steady baton of the seasons. Something of this solid, elemental march – of seas and seasons and stars – communicates itself to the harried, hurried human being when he is able to find the time and the opportunity for outdoor leisure experiences. If these opportunities are to be part of tomorrow’s America, we must act to save them today.”

A heart-wrenching letter from a boy named **Scott Turner** came into the Interior Department and Jean answered on Udall’s behalf. *The Race for Inner Space* reported: “Scott’s letter and Interior’s reply on behalf of the President received a blaze of attention – column upon column of newsprint testified to the effect that the Nation was in sympathy with one little boy’s search for inner space.” Jean recalls receiving a note from Udall afterward, offering humble thanks and congratulations. “He said: ‘I never even read that letter.’”

There’s something about us that needs the wild outdoors, something that isn’t quite right without it. These 1960s visionaries understood this. While this inspiration and a lot of handshakes helped the early- and mid-20th century founders of the AT and PCT make considerable headway, ultimately the vision was too grand to be sustainable without national legislation. In Dan’s 2008 *PCT Communicator* article, he remarked about the “pressures of urban living” and that National Scenic Trails were meant to ensure us the “opportunity to return to the land as our forefathers knew it, to enjoy it, and to respect it in all its primitive beauty.” Similarly, Udall said: “Traveling on foot or horseback down any one of those trails provides an intense exposure to a world that would otherwise be accessible only in history books and atlases.”

I asked Dan what he thinks of the present state of National Scenic Trails. Did he ever imagine there would be 11? “Yes we did.” He says the team under Udall and Johnson always envisioned trails as an important part of the total conservation effort. What did he think of the challenges we continue to face in trail protection today? “I’m sure that back and forth goes on, it did for us too...Of course, it was the reason for making it national legislation.”



I asked Jean what she thought of the importance of the rugged primitive experience, with opportunities for solitude, that we were working to preserve along the PCT. She nodded her head, smiling. “Vignettes of the past,” she said. She fondly recalled skiing on Mount Hood as a teen. “They had no rope tows, no chair lifts, they didn’t have even Timberline Lodge. ... God, it was wonderful. You could be all alone up there and never hear another sound.”

Then she said: “You know, I’m beginning to realize that it was a really unbelievable time. It was like the flower ... you know as Buddha says when conditions are right, a manifestation occurs. And I think all the conditions had been building rightly up to that time”

I would have given anything to see all that in action. Having visited with these visionaries fills me with gratitude and reminds me how important it is to keep up the work of protecting and preserving the rare and valuable experiences they fought to make possible. 🌿

*Thanks to Steve Queen for transcribing these interviews.*