



# Development of the National Trails System Act



By **Daniel M. Ogden, Jr.**

This year, 2008, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) as a national scenic trail. In the April edition of the *Pacific Crest Trail Communicator*, **Liz Bergeron**, PCTA Executive Director, recalled the event briefly and described many efforts since then to improve the trail.

I thought it might be useful for me to tell the story of the Trails Act bill in more detail because in February 1965 I was serving as Assistant Director for Planning and Research with the new **Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR)** in the **U.S. Department of the Interior**. In that capacity I was named chairman of the “Trails for America” study, and participated in the drafting of the bill to authorize the nationwide system of trails.

The National Trails System Act was part of a much larger effort by the Johnson administration to save the outdoors for the American people. Indeed, the trail act itself was part of the “conservation grand slam” of October 2, 1968, when President **Lyndon Johnson** signed four bills into law: the National Trails System Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Redwood National Park Act, and the North Cascades National Park Act.

The drive propelling this burst of activity in the late 1960s came primarily from a 1962 report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission headed by **Laurance Rockefeller**. Among other things the report recommended the establishment of a new Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR), which would not manage lands or forests but would seek new and inventive ways to provide for outdoor recreation. The bureau was promptly established in the Department of the Interior and **Edward C. Crafts**, then Deputy Chief of the **Forest Service**, was tapped to be the director. Ed set about getting an organic act for the BOR and, more importantly, passage of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964.

At about this same time, the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC, now Appalachian Trail Conservancy) came to the Department of the Interior, fearful for the future of the Appalachian Trail (AT). Founded in 1922, at the urging of **Benton McKaye**, the AT had been built by volunteers and extended some 2,000 miles from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mt. Katahdin, Maine. About 866 miles, or 40%, of the trail was on private lands. Access to these lands had been negotiated by trail clubs with limited documentation. In some instances, there was just the memory of a handshake to seal the deal. The ATC told the BOR, “We need a national park which is 2,000 miles long and 100 yards wide.”

After Lyndon Johnson become President in 1963, Secretary of the Interior **Steward Udall** enlisted the support of First Lady **Claudia Taylor (Lady Bird) Johnson** in the pursuit of preserving natural beauty. We all worked hard to get language in a Presidential message which would call for a national trails study, and succeeded with President Johnson’s message “On the Natural Beauty of Our Country” of February 8, 1965. In that message Johnson said, “I am requesting, therefore, that the Secretary of the Interior work with his colleagues in the Federal Government and with State and local leaders and recommend to me a cooperative program to encourage a national system of trails, building up the more than hundred thousand miles of trails in our national forests and parks.”

In April 1965, Secretary Udall asked the BOR to lead the study and I, **Daniel M. Ogden, Jr.**, Assistant Director for Planning and Research for the BOR, was named Chairman. Joining me were **Theodore Swem**, Assistant Director, Cooperative Services, **National Park Service**; **Hamilton K. Pyles**, Deputy Chief, Forest Service; and **Eldon F. Holmes**, Chief Recreational Staff, Bureau of Land Management. We worked diligently with our field offices and

**Captions (l-r):** *An old trail marker embedded in a tree. Images of President Lyndon Johnson signing official documents with “Lady Bird” Johnson looking on. The smaller photo is Johnson signing the National Trails System Act of 1968. A drawing of Mount Jefferson from the 1945 The Pacific Crest Trailway, compiled by Clinton C. Clarke.*

with trail organizations across the nation to develop a well-rounded study. The AT leaders were also especially helpful in developing the administration bill.

Our report, “Trails for America,” was issued in December 1966. We recommended three types of trails: National Scenic Trails (like the AT and PCT), which would require an act of Congress; Park and Forest trails; and Metropolitan area trails. The Administration bill was promptly introduced as S 827 by Senator **Henry Jackson** (Washington) and HR 4865 by Representative **Roy Taylor** (North Carolina). Hearings followed beginning on March 6, 1967.

Our study had recommended the authorization of four national scenic trails: the AT, PCT, Continental Divide and Potomac Heritage trails. Objections from Wyoming to the Continental Divide Trail and from Senator Symington (Missouri) to the Potomac Heritage

Trail led to their being placed in the “study” category in the House version of the bill. The House-passed version also placed the PCT in the “study” category, but the Senate prevailed in conference and the PCT was authorized by the Trails System Act.

The House version also altered the categories of the trails from the administration bill. They kept National Scenic Trails, but replaced Park and Forest trails with the new category: National Recreation Trails. A fourth category was added some years later: National Historic Trails.

In closing I want to use a modification of the last paragraph I wrote for a talk given to the ATC on May 21, 1967: “All of these efforts are occasioned by one central purpose – to save the out of doors for the American people. The Pacific Crest Trail is one of this nation’s most important recreation assets. In the years ahead, as our urban population multiplies and the pressure of urban living presses ever more pervasively around most Americans, we want the Pacific Crest Trail to offer an opportunity to return to the land as our forefathers knew it, to enjoy it, and to respect it in all its primitive beauty. If hundreds of years from now American boys and girls can tramp along the Pacific Crest Trail and bless us for all that we have done to save this great wilderness pathway, all our effort and all our striving and all our work will have been worth it. No greater monument to our concern for our fellow human beings could be our legacy to the future.” 🍷