

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Take a hike

BY CHRIS BRATT



Chris Bratt

“Word is spreading that the trail is open.” Those are the words of Applegate resident Jim Clover, one of the volunteer leaders who has physically worked so hard to reopen 18 miles of the Applegate’s historic Sterling Mine Ditch Trail.

Clover, and other volunteers have formed the nonprofit Siskiyou Upland Trails Association (SUTA). The group was organized by another Applegater, Hope Robertson, who serves as president. The organization’s goal is to eventually create a dedicated community trails system that goes from Jacksonville to Ashland over old public logging roads, over other trails and over easements through private lands. For obvious reasons it is being called the “Jack-Ash Trail.” The recently reopened 18 mile Sterling Mine Ditch Trail will eventually become an added loop to the proposed much longer Jack-Ash Trail

I had the good sense to attend the Ditch Trail’s Grand Reopening Event at the Deming Gulch Trailhead (off Sterling Creek Road) on June 4, 2011. There was an outpouring of over 100 well-wishers, hikers, equestrians and bicyclists. It was a delight to see all the happy faces and listen to the sincere comments by many community and Bureau of Land Management folks, expressing the joy of working together on such a historic and positive project.

Over the past couple of decades, I had made a few attempts to breach overgrown areas along parts of the Ditch Trail. Each time I had to give it up because I never could make it through the extensive tangle of manzanita, deer brush and poison oak. At that time, crawling on my hands

and knees was the only way one could make any headway on many parts of this unmaintained trail. Those wanderings of mine usually resulted in a case of awful poison oak. But, gratefully, that is no more, unless you wander off the improved trail.

This rehabilitated trail is now very beautiful, and ready to hike, bike or horseback ride for family and friends. I’ve already taken friends there to experience this stunning area.

For those of you who like to hike or ride on less rugged trails, this one gains only 200 feet in elevation for the whole 18 miles. If you are into spending some time looking at wildflowers and plants, hearing and seeing numerous birds and passing through many different amazing habitats,

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this is the recreation spot for you. It’s also easy to get to one of the many trailheads by car since they are all right here in the Applegate and not far from paved roads. Another nice feature is that the trail is closed to all motorized use.

Let me say, reopening these 18 miles of what had become an overgrown and unmaintained trail for years was quite a collective and cooperative feat between the community and the Bureau of Land Management. The trail rehabilitation project has been a lot more than a mere physical accomplishment. This joint project had an air of friendliness and understanding that many of us in the community believe can be carried over to

more controversial and complex projects like timber sales and resource protections. In fact, if the community and public land managers can consider all forest management activities, using restoration as the number one priority, there would be a lot less controversy over achieving federal management goals.

Before you hit the trail, let me tell you about some other local or regional rambles.

Again, right here in the Applegate, another group of individuals (with the help of Siskiyou Upland Trails Association) have formed the Applegate Trail Association (ATA). These folks are working to eventually extend trails (many already in place) between Grants Pass and Jacksonville. It will ultimately hook up to the proposed Jack-Ash Trail between Jacksonville and Ashland. The heart of this specific non-motorized trail is within an upland area north of Highway 238 and North Applegate Road known by some locals as the Wellington Wildlands. The first stage of this trail proposal is on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and contains approximately seven and a half miles of upland trail and four miles of connecting routes to access trailheads lower down in the valley. There is an explanatory article on page one of this issue of the *Applegater* about this new trail proposal and how you can participate in the volunteer work needed to help it become established.

In case you didn’t know, there is an official Oregon Coast Trail that traverses 382 miles from the mouth of the Columbia River to the California border. It has

wonderful routes along the ocean and was deemed “hikable” in 1998. There are still more than 33 gaps, totaling 50 miles, where hikers must use roads or other transportation corridors not designed with pedestrians in mind. But the trail is expected to be fully connected by 2021. Oregon State Parks officials have recently released a draft of its so-called “Connection Strategy Plan” to fill these gaps in the Oregon Coast Trail. The plan, which includes short-term and long-term fixes to these 33 gaps in the trail, is available online at: <http://egov.oregon.gov/OPRD/PLANS/index.shtml>.

The final draft plan contains detailed maps of these trail breaks for interested people to check out and make written comments on before Sept. 10, 2011. Even with the present obstacles, this is a trail no one should miss visiting.

In these discomfiting times, I find it’s always good to take my dampened spirits out for a hike. It gives me back the energy and cheerfulness I need to continue facing the real and irrational fears so prevalent in our daily lives.

So I say, hit the trail. It might give you a new perspective on the importance of human aspirations like good jobs, health care and wages that have already taken a hike and fallen by the wayside.

I hope you’ll be blazing your own trail on these and other issues. Don’t forget to let me know.

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GRAPES

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Some sort of trellis system is necessary to give the vines support. It’s easiest to install the trellis before planting. Fall is a good time for incorporating organic matter into your soils. Till in well-aged sawdust, compost, or manure. Incorporate two to three cubic yards of manure or compost into the whole planting area. Adding it in the fall will ensure that it will be well decomposed by planting time.

You’ll want to plant your grapes in early spring as soon as you can work the soil. But first you have to decide what

cultivar to buy. In western Oregon, most varieties do well, but pick a variety that meets the conditions in your landscape. If you live in a cooler area, pick only early to mid-season cultivars. The Oregon State University Extension publication “Growing Table Grapes, EC 1639” has descriptions of about 40 different varieties, most of which would perform well in our area.

“Growing Table Grapes” also treats all aspects of home table grape production in much greater detail than this article.

You can download a copy at extension.oregonstate.edu—click on “Publications” and then search for “Growing Table Grapes,” or stop by the Extension office in Grants Pass or Central Point for a copy.

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