

outdoors

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2016-2017 Season



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Birth of a TRAIL

The Hoosier Hikers Council is in Brown County, hands in the dirt, making a trail

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Water, working gloves and enthusiasm are all that are required to be part of the trail-building crew with the Hoosier Hikers Council. In return, participants get to see some of south-central Indiana's beautiful scenery while sharing a Saturday with others who not only help newcomers learn how to use equipment and dig down into the dirt to build trail but also share stories, laughs and the latest wildflowers they've spotted along the pink flags staked out for the future footpath through the woods.

Most months, the crew meets on the third Saturday to carpool to the area where the trail ends. This spring, the crew is building a trail in the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill.

It's the second section of trail the volunteers are building in the Brown County preserve. When it's completed, there will be about 5 miles of trails for hiking through the woods, down into wooded glades near streams and alongside some big boulders that were dropped during an ice age thousands of years ago.

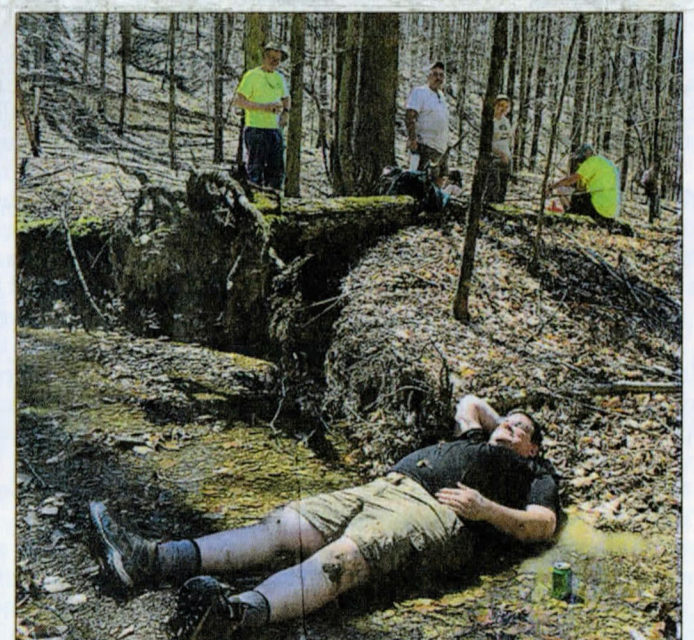
The area is also home to spotted wintergreen, a native wildflower that is on Indiana's state watch list as a plant that could become endangered.

"We wanted to highlight some of those features," said Pete Banta, a member of the Hoosier Hikers Council who often helps with trail building.

HHC members Patrick Eaton of Indianapolis and Jim Shearn of Bloomington worked with John Law-

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Volunteers, most of whom are members of the Hoosier Hikers Council, build a trail in the Laura Hare Nature Preserve in Brown County.



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Patrick Eaton cools off in the stream near the site where lunch was served to volunteers helping build a trail in the Laura Hare Nature Preserve on a recent Saturday. Other volunteers can be seen taking a break for lunch before returning to building the trail.

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TRAIL

Volunteers hard at work in Brown County preserve

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rence, assistant director of Sycamore Land Trust, to plan where the trail would go on the preserve. The thought was to highlight the woodland experience, keep hikers out of sight of other nearby properties and let them experience some of the area's best features. The first loop of the trail in the preserve has already been completed and is a little more than 3 miles long.

A day on the trail

On a warm, sunny Saturday in April, there are just more than a dozen workers out on the trail. Some have built trails for more than 15 years; for one — Sid Dasari of Indianapolis — it was his first time out. "I was interested in hiking," Dasari said. "I found the website and decided to come out."

Participants don't have to be members of the Hoosier Hikers Council to help out, but they are asked to let the trail crew know if they are coming. That's necessary so there are enough tools and food for lunch for all. And the lunch isn't just sandwiches and potato chips inhaled while lounging along the trail. In April, there was chili mac casserole with cheese and onions, corn muffins with butter and homemade chocolate chip cookies, all served near the creek meandering through the valley.

The coolers of food, soft drinks and water are carted down the trail by Martinsville resident Cindy Leffelman, who says she can't swing a trail ax because of a bad back, so she helps in another way, setting up the lunches. Melissa Calahan, wife of Hoosier Hikers Council president Timothy Calahan, makes the lunches for the volunteers to help out.

Most months, the



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From left, Timothy Calahan, Skip Hubbs, Patrick Eaton and Jim Shearn build a trail in the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill in Brown County. The volunteers have already completed one loop in the preserve.

trail crew starts working after meeting at 9 a.m. to carpool to the preserve. Lunch is at noon, and after the meal and some time to rest and converse, work continues until 3 p.m.

Walking along the hillside in the nature preserve, a couple of workers set about cutting into the hillside with special trail-building tools while another walks ahead to clear a downed tree across the trail using a chainsaw. With perspiration on his brow, Eaton stops to talk about how the crew builds trails. He explains some trails are built using a half-bench technique that

doesn't go too far into the hillside. The Hoosier Hikers Council crew uses a full-bench technique. "We take it down to mineral soil," he said, which means removing all of the trail "duff," or decomposing leaves and material that are layered on top of the hard soil.

"It takes more time, but it lasts longer," Eaton said.

"It should last about 50 years," added Shearn. "We'll monitor it and if things need fixed, we'll do it."

Members of the trail crew worked on fixing part of the Trail 9 extension in Brown County State Park, Shearn said. And they've built and fixed many other trails in state forests, state parks and preserves for various agencies where they are invited to help. Members of the Hoosier Hikers Council built the Tecumseh Trail, which they started in 1997. The trail is 42 miles long and

begins in Morgan-Monroe State Forest, ending in a forested area of Brown County not far from Lake Monroe.

"I can walk along the trail and tell you who did that part of the trail," said Skip Hubbs, who said he's also walked more than 1,400 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Hubbs, like many of the Hoosier Hikers Council trail crew, consider backpacking to be a favorite outdoor activity.

"Most of us are backpackers," Timothy Calahan said, and that helps them understand why good hiking trails are so important and need to be built properly. Calahan is proud of the crew, "and we do it without any government money — we volunteer."

"We've had to so we can make our own playground," Hubbs added.

The volunteers create a trail that is 18 to 24 inches wide, what is considered a single-track trail, wide

More information

■ The Hoosier Hikers Council has been building trails in Indiana since 1995. The mission of the group is to build, maintain and promote high-quality natural trails for hikers and runners. They are currently working one Saturday each month at the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill in Brown County. Most months, the volunteers' work day is the third Saturday of the month, but in May it will be the second Saturday, May 14.

There will be a special camping outing after the work day. For more about the Hoosier Hikers Council and the work days, go to www.hoosierhikerscouncil.org.

■ Sycamore Land Trust has many nature preserves in Monroe and surrounding counties of southern Indiana, including Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill. For more about the land trust and nature preserves where you can hike, go to <https://sycamorelandtrust.org>.

enough for one person. Metal stakes with pink flags are placed along the upper edge of where the trail is to go. One crew member goes through with a rake, sweeping leaves off the trail area so other workers can see what's there — rocks, tree roots and wildflowers. Then Phil Wilcoxson comes through with a chain saw, cutting down any trees that obstruct the path. Bonnie Wilcoxson follows in her husband's wake, using a lopper to cut side branches off trees that could poke a hiker on the trail. She also carries a first-aid kit for anyone who might need a Band-Aid or moleskin.

After the couple, other trail crew members start scooping trail duff off the soil and begin digging into the hillside. On this day, the crew created about a quarter-mile of new trail. Creating a sustainable trail that doesn't need a lot of maintenance is the goal, Banta explained. The crew builds the middle section of the trail, leaving the ends for last so people won't hike it before it's ready.

Some of the crew will be out working on other trails in south-central Indiana before the next work day at the Laura Hare preserve, moving downed trees or rebuilding trail that has eroded. "If you come in and rehab a section of trail and they can't tell that you've been there, then you did it right," said Phil Wilcoxson, with a grin.

The trail's impact

"What's so exciting about this is how much use we're getting already," said Sycamore Land Trust's John Lawrence of the trail at the trust's nature preserve.

Although the trail crew is still building the south portion of trail, the north

loop is open for hikers to use. Lawrence put up signs by the property's gate and parking lot so people know where the trail is.

"People are finding it, and a big part of that is the Bicentennial Hikers Challenge that the Hoosier Hikers Council came up with," Lawrence said.

He believes the property is worth sharing, with its wintergreen, which often grows close to the trail, as well as the "hunks of granite," or glacial erratic boulders left in the area when glaciers in an ice age thousands of years ago receded.

When the south portion of the trail opens, Lawrence knows hikers will appreciate the stone-lined cistern and the foundations that mark where an old homestead once stood. The way the trail traverses the property, highlighting the unique sites is something Lawrence credits Eaton, Banta and Shearn with accomplishing when laying out the trail. "They did all the heavy lifting of laying it out. The easy part was going out there with them a couple of times and pointing out some interesting things."

Lawrence said it was after he hiked the trail built by the Hoosier Hikers Council in The Nature Conservancy's Hitz-Rhodehamel Nature Preserve that he first thought of having them build trail at a Sycamore Land Trust preserve. "Fortunately, they were interested, so it came together."

The end result benefits the land trust, the hikers council and the people who hike the trails, Lawrence said. "If folks don't get out and appreciate it, they won't understand the importance of saving it."

Indiana hunting seasons 2016-2017

Season	Dates
Dog running (raccoon, opossum)	Feb. 1-Oct. 25
Wild turkey*	
Youth	April 23-24
Spring	April 27-May 15

* Bag limit is one bearded or male turkey per hunter
Turkey hunting hours: half hour before sunrise to sunset

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