

Documenting Dayton's trails

Trekking the Dayton, Ohio region's trails with Google technology

By Kristen Wicker
Five Rivers MetroParks

Meeting a long-distance trucker while he bikes the nation's largest paved trail network. Getting a helping hand from a Vietnam vet, who loads a kayak in the bed of his truck to portage a quarter mile around a low dam. Spotting a bald eagle perched at the edge of a lake. Answering lots of questions about that odd ball-shaped thing strapped to a pack.

These are the tales from the trail with the Google Trekker.

From mid-June through mid-October, Five Rivers MetroParks staff and volunteers from Dayton Hikers participated in Google's Street View Trekker loan program— capturing 360-degree imagery of the Dayton area's hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, water, and paved trails in Google Maps.

The project was a partnership between Five Rivers MetroParks and Outdoor Adventure Connection that will give everyone access to explore

panoramic street view-like "treks" of these trails.

"Google Trekker will create an interactive view of our trails and helps make Google Maps more comprehensive and useful for all," said Amy Dingle, director of outdoor connections for Five Rivers MetroParks. "This will help with trip planning and be a great asset to showcase Dayton as the Outdoor Adventure Capital of the Midwest."

Google is now enabling third parties to borrow its Street View Trekker and collect imagery of unique places and local communities. The technology enables visitors to connect with special places in a new and immersive way.

Dayton-area volunteers trekked hundreds of miles of trails, including:

- More than 75 miles of natural-surface hiking trails in all 18 Five Rivers MetroParks, as well as in some suburban parks
- Nine miles of mountain bike trails
- 40 miles equestrian trails
- Nearly 400 miles of paved recreation trails



Wayfinding signs on the trail

- More than 30 miles of water trails, as well as flat water paddling destinations

"We hope that showcasing the nation's largest paved trail network, along with other trails, on Google Maps will be a huge opportunity for users to become comfortable and knowledgeable with the trails," said Brent Anslinger, outdoor recreation program manager for Five Rivers MetroParks. "Hopefully, we will see increased tourism and awareness of the network."

Being on the trail with the Google Street View Trekker created lots of conversations that allowed staff and volunteers to educate the public about the Dayton region's many trail-related assets.

"The public was really interested when they saw the Google Trekker, and the project went really well," said Andy Niekamp, owner of Outdoor Adventure Connection and an avid hiker. "We were fortunate to have some dedicated volunteers. It was hard work. The pack isn't that comfy, and it's really heavy. We had to make sure we caught every section of all the trails."



Google Trekker on the Mad River Run in Eastwood MetroPark; photo by Jordan Hart

The Street View Trekker weighs approximately 40 pounds and is the size of a large backpack. It's approximately four feet in height when set on the ground and, when worn, the camera system extends two feet above the operator's shoulders. There are 15 lenses at the top of the mast, each posted in a different direction.

"I'm delighted people all around the world will be able to experience the Dayton area's trails," Niekamp said. "It was a good partnership to get it done in a short time frame."

Anslinger agreed: "This was a significant undertaking to identify and gain permission from each trail segment owner, coordinate logistics around closures or other challenges, and manage permissions and permits — all while hoping the weather would cooperate."

The data captured by volunteers now is being processed before it's added to Google Maps. This can take several months, but the hope is that it will be ready in time for the International Trails Symposium in Dayton in May 2017. Either way, Five Rivers MetroParks and its partners will be at the symposium to share advice with others looking to document their trails using the Google Street View Trekker.

"We are happy to assist with getting volunteers and staff up to speed on tips and tricks from our experience," Anslinger said.

To learn more about the Five Rivers MetroParks trail system, visit www.metroparks.org/activity-finder.

Jordan Hart shows Google Trekker to Adventure Central students



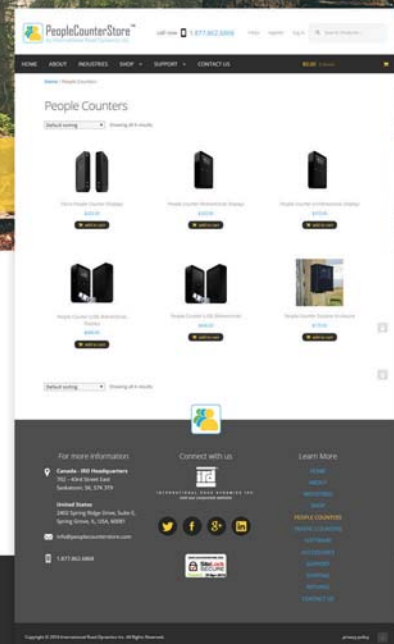
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