

Plans Afoot On The Arizona Trail

By Zay Hartigan

Patagonia LOVES the Arizona Trail. And the Arizona Trail LOVES Patagonia. What's not to love? Having a national scenic trail that runs right through the town provides great recreational opportunities and brings in revenue from travelers from all over the world. Patagonia provides the trail and its users a safe and convenient location for shuttling vehicles and horse trailers, storing bikes, and getting supplies. People who hike one or more of the 43 segments of the trail at a time, sometimes covering the whole 817-mile trail across the state in this manner, are called "segment hikers." "Through hikers" are folks that hike the whole trail (or very large chunks) in one shot. For these long haulers, Patagonia is an outstanding resource—a quaint and friendly town so small that all the services they require are within a couple blocks of each other. Our post office, library (with computers and WIFI), and businesses, including two markets, restaurants, B&B's, and a hotel cover pretty much all their needs. The only thing missing is an REI store!

But, like all great relationships, there's room for improvement. Patagonia's trailhead is three miles out of town along Harshaw Road. Coming off a path less than two feet wide onto a busy road like Harshaw is not just unpleasant, it's also dangerous. The next segment that can be called a "trail" is 17 miles out Temporal Canyon

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Photo by Lynn Davison

fic but plenty of dust. In fact, as much as trail users rave about town, they do complain about the roads. Many would rather bypass Patagonia than deal with these 17 miles of roads. It's been a long-term goal of the Arizona Trail Association (ATA) to get the trail off these roads, but bridging the gap between trailheads presents difficult obstacles.

Luckily, fate has now provided some options. Borderlands Restoration's plans for the Three Canyons property include providing recreational uses for the town and its visitors. The ATA is involved in these nascent plans. The hope is for ATA to purchase land for a trailhead and then to design, build and maintain a trail across the property. There is a strong likelihood that a mile of deeded land across Highway 82 will become part of the trail. There remains the question of how to link the town to the new trail.

The solution comes from a link

with our past. The Mountain Empire Trail Association (META) was formed in 2007 to convert the rail-bed between Patagonia and Sonoita into a trail. Phase One was completed in 2010, and everyone loves the loop trail from the bridge behind the post office north to the town limit. People use it to get to and from homes and jobs off San Antonio Road, as well as for recreation, and the high school uses it for cross-country practices and meets, as well as for biology studies as a living classroom. META's partners (the town, the county, the Nature Conservancy, and Native Seeds Search) give the trail and association high marks, as well. Now META is seeking to extend the Train Track Trail five miles further up Highway 82 to Wood Canyon Road. This would link to the new route of the Arizona Trail. The ATA plans to maintain the existing trailheads

and trails linking to the new route, creating two 15-mile loop trails from town to the national forest.

All this rerouting of the trail ties in with the ATA's desire to bypass the Mt. Wrightson Wilderness because mountain bikes are not permitted there. The existing segment of the Arizona Trail will remain as a Forest Service trail, creating another 15-mile loop starting at the Temporal Trailhead.

Many organizations and individuals are involved in planning to improve the Patagonia section of the Arizona Trail. It's a major undertaking, and there are many ways for people to help make it happen. Interested people or groups should contact Zay Hartigan (META Project Manager and AZT Segment Steward) at 394-2420 or e-mail zay@zaycom.com for more details.

