

WTA at Work

Trail Maintenance »

Trail Work, True or False

We answer questions and debunk a few myths about trail maintenance

You don't lead 100,000 hours of volunteer trail work without getting a few questions from hikers and volunteers. And when we get questions, we like to refer people to the appropriate passages in Forest Reserve Order No. 36.

What's that you say? You've never read Forest Reserve Order No. 36?

Allow us to introduce you! Written in 1906 by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Forest Reserve Order No. 36 is the first document we're aware of that provides directions for trail builders, and we still follow many of its guidelines to this day.

Here's an example. "A general system of trails for the whole reserve should first be decided upon, and those trails of greatest immediate importance should be constructed at once." Sure enough, this principle rang true as ever on our Evan's Creek Preserve project, where our volunteers are building a phased series of loop trails for the City of Sammamish.

Of course, a few things have changed since nineteen-aught-six. For instance, Pinchot's pamphlet is full of directions to men (*your men should always do this first, have your men do that ...*), and we've got

just as many women as men on our trail crews! In addition to referring back to Pinchot's early guidelines, we also consult with our partners at the National Park Service and turn to the Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook produced by the Forest Service and we've dog-eared most pages of the Student Conservation Association's trail building and maintenance manual

Lightly on the Land.

Keeping in mind the old adage that if someone asks you a question, others have wondered the same thing, we thought it'd be useful to provide answers here in the magazine to a few of the questions we're asked most often.

Why do trails need to be built? Can't trails just be "hiked in" the old-fashioned way?

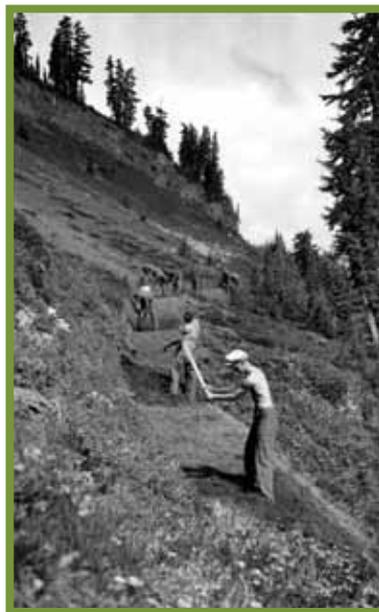
This is a commonly held notion—I used to think that many of my favorite trails were just boot-hiked in as well! Prospectors and sheep herders did develop miles of trails, but these trails are often poorly located, and they are the most difficult to maintain today. Truth is, the best trails we have today were carefully designed and built decades ago.

One of the ways I honed my own trail skills was to evaluate trails constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. (You know you're officially a trail geek when you scramble over the edge



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A CCC crew building trail in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest