

BSA Historic Trails Program

BSA Reference Materials

- Local council historic trail list and award requirements
- BSA-approved historic trails state-by-state list
- National Park Service—National Trails System, www.nps.gov/nts/
- BSA Historic Trail Award, www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34408.pdf
- BSA 50-Miler Award, www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/430-067_WB.pdf

Community Resources and Materials

- Historical society list of significant local places
- Schedule of local heritage events.
- Local “volksmarch” groups dedicated to hiking as a public fitness event.

Understanding why Scouts hike historic trails.

- Remember to file a tour and activity plan if hiking a historic trail, when distance or other factors require the plan.
- Call ahead to make sure that the trail is open for use (season, weather events, etc.), and check the hours of operation of sites that must be visited along the trail.
- Practice hiking safety and Leave No Trace principles.
- Wear proper footwear. Even city sidewalks require well-cushioned soles to avoid foot problems.
- Make sure everyone stays hydrated.
- Scheduled rest stops (like 10 minutes every hour) will reduce exhaustion and straggling. Straggling can make some Scouts feel inferior to others, and also makes proper adult supervision more difficult.
- Make sure not to litter. More than one BSA trail that crossed private property has been closed due to misbehavior by Scouts.
- Physical fitness and citizenship development are two of the three aims of Scouting. Outdoor programs and advancement are two of the eight methods of Scouting. Hiking historic trails achieves each of these aims and methods.
- Hiking can be an exciting component of a well-rounded outdoor program when properly planned and executed.

It can improve a Scout’s stamina and physical fitness. Scouts will learn local or national history in the process of hiking historic trails.

- All Cub Scout ranks and many adventures include outdoor activities that can be met by hiking portions of a historic trail. Boy Scouts must complete patrol or troop activities to earn Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class, which can include historic trail hikes.
- Boy Scouts must complete a number of patrol or troop activities—which can include historic trail hikes—to earn the Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks. Trails of increasing length can help to ease younger Scouts into the joys of hiking without overwhelming them.
- The *Hiking* merit badge can be earned by hiking several historic trails of the proper length.
- A historic trail gives purpose to a hike beyond the physical effort needed to walk, and this will heighten a Scout’s interest. Scouts will learn local or national history in the process of hiking historic trails. Since the *Hiking* merit badge requires a minimum of six hikes, historic trails can prevent boredom by providing new sites to see and different terrains.
- Historic trails usually include a colorful patch and perhaps other awards for those who answer a trail questionnaire and complete the trail. They are mementos of the event and can be an incentive for Scouts to hike historic trails.
- There is no single type or length of “historic trail.” Some examples of trails are described below.
- Historic trails can commemorate local events (e.g., battles that took place nearby or a civil rights march), include local historic sites (e.g., early public buildings and residences), or connect several sites associated with a significant person.
- Each council should have a list of BSA historic trails in the council or state, and the questionnaires required to earn any available trail awards.
- If your council has one or more BSA historic trails, the presenter should describe where each of them is located as well as the theme or highlights of each. Also, indicate whether each trail is suitable for all ages

or only older Scouts. Show an example of the patch or other award(s) available for completing the trail.

- The BSA national website maintains a list of authorized historic trails by state, which can be used to plan longer trips. The list was being updated when this topic was written, but cached versions can be found online.
- Historic trails can be found at most national battlefield parks and many national historic parks managed by the National Park Service. The NPS websites will include information about available hikes and awards. A list of nearby NPS trails will be useful for unit leaders planning historic trail hikes.
- Your city hall or local historical society may have a list of local non-BSA historic trails.
- Each council should have a list of BSA historic trails in the council or the state, and the questionnaires required to earn any available trail awards.
 - If your council has one or more BSA historic trails, the presenter should describe them to units that have not yet hiked them, and encourage every unit to try one.
 - Tell where each trail is located and describe the theme or highlights of each.
 - Indicate whether each trail is suitable for all ages or only older Scouts.
 - Show an example of the patch or other award(s) available for completing the trail.
 - Ask units that have hiked the trail to give their views on ways to make the experience a positive one.
- The BSA national website maintains a list of authorized historic trails by state. The BSA national list was being updated when this topic was written, but cached versions can be found online.
 - This list is useful when the local council does not have a historic trail within its borders.
 - These trails can be used to supplement local trails for even more variety.
 - An out-of-council or out-of-state trail can become a component of a weeklong summer trip in that area or serve as a destination of its own.

- Historic trails can be found at most national battlefield parks and many national historical parks or monuments managed by the National Park Service (NPS).

The NPS websites include information about available hikes and awards.

- A handout with a list of nearby NPS trails will be useful for unit leaders planning historic trail hikes.

The National Park Service has a system of very long-distance trails called the *National Trails System*.

- The NPS website has a map showing all 29 of the trails. Every state, including Alaska and Hawaii, either has a portion of one these trails or is near one.
- Since these trails can be 1,000 miles long, or more, there are many places to begin and end a hike. Scouts can hike any length of these trails that they desire. For hikes intended to last more than one day, look for a segment with available camping facilities.
- Many of these trails do not have a trail questionnaire, so Scouts may not receive an educational component from the trail without doing pre-hike research on the purpose of the trail and how their chosen segment fits that purpose.
- A weeklong hike on one these trails can qualify for the *BSA 50 Miler Award*. This award requires five days on the trail plus 10 hours of conservation service that can be done at home after the hike.

Some councils sponsor an annual heritage hike as part of a local heritage celebration.

- The *U.S. Grant Heritage* festival in Galena, Illinois, the *Circus Heritage* festival in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and the *Lincoln Pilgrimage* in Springfield, Illinois, are examples of such hikes organized by councils.
- These hikes occur once a year, on the date of the festival, so careful attention to the calendar is required to register and attend. Private property that is open for visits as part of the festival may not be open to visitors at other times.

Your city hall or local historical society may have a list of historic trails created by members of the society for civic pride. Feel free to use these resources even if they don't have a commemorative patch, or create a patch if you want.

- Some towns may have a heritage weekend sponsored by the town or the historical society. This festival may

include visits to local historical sites or houses on the National Register of Historic Places. Even if there is no patch, walking between these sites is a convenient way for Scouts to learn about their hometown while engaging in a patrol or troop activity.

- The city or historical society also should have a map with a list of historic sites that can be made into a permanent historic trail of your own, if there are no existing historic trails.
- Many BSA historic trails were created as Eagle Scout projects, when there were no existing local trails. Units should keep this in mind as an idea for a Scout looking for a special Eagle project.
 - See the *Tips for Creating a New Historic Trail* supplement to this topic for suggestions on how to create a historic trail. These tips were written by a Scouter who designed a trail that linked several state historical society sites with a common theme; a patch was created for trail participants.
- The BSA Historic Trail Award is not related to any specific historic trail. It can be earned while hiking a historic trail but has its own extra set of requirements that include:
 - Studying about the purpose of the trail
 - Spending two days and one night along or near the trail
 - A trail maintenance or improvement project, or participation in a public event related to the trail (such as a pageant or a reenactment)
 - Trail maintenance projects must be approved by the landowner.
- Remember to file a tour and activity plan if hiking a historic trail where distance or other factors require the plan.
- Call ahead to make sure that the trail is open for use (time of year, recent weather events, etc.), and check the hours of operation of sites that must be visited along the trail.
- Practice hike safety at all times.
 - Wear proper footwear for the terrain. Even city sidewalks require well-cushioned soles to avoid painful foot problems.
 - Make sure everyone remains hydrated.

- Match trail difficulty and length to the abilities of your Scouts. Hike shorter trails to build stamina before hiking longer ones.
- Scheduled rest stops (i.e., 10 minutes every hour) will reduce exhaustion and straggling. Straggling can make Scouts feel inferior to others, and also makes proper adult supervision more difficult.
- Practice *Leave No Trace* and *Tread Lightly!* principles.
 - Make sure not to litter.
 - Leave historic artifacts where they are, just as they were left by other Scouts who preceded you.
 - Avoid all forms of vandalism. Remember the adults who toppled a rock formation and the consequences of that action for them and for Scouting. More than one BSA trail that crossed private property has been closed due to misbehavior by Scouts.
- Your city may have a local “volksmarch” group that conducts noncompetitive public group hikes. This can be a fun way to meet people who share the joy of hiking.

What you need to know about earning the Historic Trails Award

By Mark Ray
From the March-April 2014
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Historic Trails Award
honors Scouts, Scouters
who bring history to life.



Some of the Most

memorable hikes Scouts take explore history, whether that means tracing the steps of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb at Gettysburg, hiking part of the Oregon Trail or visiting a historic site in their own community. The Historic Trails Award recognizes youth and adult leaders who not only explore history but also share it with other people.

Why have a Historic Trails Award? The award is designed to foster an appreciation of the ideals, principles and traditions that have helped make our country strong. It also connects Scouts with a local historical society or association, pointing them toward opportunities for further exploration of history.

What are the Requirements? Members of the unit must plan and participate in a historical activity involving either a historic trail or a historic site. Specifically, they must: (1)

locate and study a historic trail or site, (2) hike or camp two days and one night along the trail or near the site, and (3) work with an adult group, like a historical society, to restore and mark all or part of the trail or site.

Who is eligible? It varies for different trails. In most cases, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, Venturers, Sea Scouts and adult leaders are eligible.

Are there Nationally Approved Historic Trails? Yes. More than 300 trails have been approved. The BSA recommends that hikers use only the historic trails that have been nationally approved.

Does the Trail Work have to coincide with the Hiking or Camping Trip? No.

What if the Trail or Site doesn't need to be restored or marked? As an alternative, the unit may work with the adult group to plan and stage a historical pageant, ceremony or other public event related to the trail or site. The event should be of sufficient scope to merit coverage by the local press.

A National Park in our Council has a designated Historic Trail. Does hiking it count for this Award? Only if your unit also studies the trail and either works on the trail or conducts an event related to it.

Do we have to work a certain number of hours or mark a Trail of a certain length? No.

What recognition items are available? Individuals who complete the award may receive an embroidered emblem (No. 188) and/or a leather patch (No. 244). Many of the approved trails also offer a patch or medal for completing the trail. These can be purchased from the host council.

Is either recognition item approved for uniform wear? No. The recognition items are intended for display on things like tents, backpacks and patch blankets.

Can an individual earn the award more than once? Yes.

Who approves the award? The unit leader submits the Historic Trails Award application to the local council service center for approval.

Tips for Creating a New Historic Trail

Have you ever wished there was a historic trail connecting sites where you live? Have you ever thought about creating one? This paper is intended to provide tips that can help you make that dream a reality.

There are four primary considerations in making a successful historic trail:

- Geography
- Content
- Safety
- Property rights

Each consideration is discussed below in theory and in the context of the decision-making that went into the creation of a specific historic trail. Then two additional considerations are discussed—the BSA Historic Trail Award and handling trail awards.

Geography

In order to have a manageable trail, the sites must be close enough to each other that they can be walked or biked for the Hiking or Cycling merit badges, and so that visitors will not spend an unreasonable length of time getting from one to the other. You don't want the trail to be so long and so scattered that people give up halfway or decide not to go there at all because it is too spread out.

For example, this was a real issue when planning a trail to commemorate the 1862 U.S.–Dakota War. The war took place all over southern Minnesota, with sites in nine counties. The trail cannot encompass this geographic range and be successful due to the traveling time required to visit all the sites. At best, the trail can include only a small number of sites that are located reasonably close to each other. At least a dozen sites were researched to determine the distance between them, which led to focusing the trail on three sites that are only 10 miles apart: the Lower Sioux Agency, the Birch Coulee battlefield, and the Morton official state monuments. Their proximity enables Scouts to visit all three sites in one day of hiking so they can earn the trail patch and have the hike count toward their Hiking merit badge. An optional fourth site was included for purposes of content (see below).

Content

In addition to selecting sites that are close enough together, each one needs significant content to make the transit time worthwhile. There's nothing worse than the "We came all that way for this?" feeling when you walk or cycle between the sites. This is an essential consideration for a trail where many historically significant buildings used to be before they were torn down for a shopping center, housing project, etc. The building itself would have been interesting to see. But the new shopping center? Not so much.

When creating a trail questionnaire, be careful selecting questions about museum displays because such displays can and do change. It is frustrating to trail participants to spend time looking for an item, only to find it has been removed from view. The trail organizer should recheck the trail from time to time and update the questionnaire as needed.

In the case of the U.S.–Dakota trail, the Lower Sioux Agency Museum has an excellent and very educational summary of the causes and effects of the war. The Birch Coulee battlefield nearby is very compact, featuring many interpretive markers with information about the different ways the whites and Dakotas fought the war. The two state monuments at Morton were added partly to round out the 10 miles so the trail would qualify for the Hiking merit badge, and partly because they remind us of the prejudice against Indians that was so prevalent at the time they were erected. These three locations have the content essential for a trail about the U.S.–Dakota War.

Which sites were not selected as essential?

- Fort Ridgely was considered by both sides as the key to winning or losing the war. If the fort fell, there were no other soldiers nearby to stop the Dakotas from reclaiming more land and killing more settlers than they did. If it didn't fall, it could be used as a supply and reinforcement base for counterattacks against the Dakota anywhere in southern Minnesota—which is exactly what happened. Fort Ridgely was the site of intense fighting in two separate battles, about which there are several educational markers. There are also several monuments in the cemetery adjacent to the fort. Two of the original buildings are still standing and the foundations of the others are still there (along with photos of some the original buildings). So content-wise, Fort Ridgely State Park is right up there with the Lower Sioux Agency Museum building exhibits. But even with all that great content, the trail questionnaire is clear that Fort Ridgely should only be visited if the Lower Sioux Agency Museum is closed on a particular day, for three reasons:

— Fort Ridgely has less information than the museum on the causes of the war.

The fort is 20 miles from Morton, which is too far to be walked or biked in the same day with a tour of Birch Coulee and the outside displays at the Lower Sioux Agency.

— The narrow road between Morton and Fort Ridgely is unsafe for hiking or biking. Taking a car between the Lower Sioux Agency Museum and Fort Ridgely is also recommended because the two sites are so far apart.

- Why was New Ulm, Minnesota, eliminated from consideration? Two reasons: geography and content. New Ulm is 40 miles from the Lower Sioux Agency and Birch Coulee. That is almost an hour's drive and impossible to hike. Also, almost all of the historically significant buildings and battle sites were demolished during the last 150 years. There is a wonderful state monument and plaques on the walls of modern buildings describing what used to be there—but there is nothing that is worth driving a long way to see.
- The Etoile du Nord Trail through downtown St. Paul, Minnesota, was designed before some significant re-development projects took place along the trail. Several buildings were repurposed, making it impossible to determine their original use, and displays were moved to new locations across town. Consequently, the trail fell out of use. An update took place in 2007, with several items removed from the original trail questionnaire and several new ones added to replace them. Nearly eight years later, one more small item has been removed from view at one of the locations, so it is time for another update.

Safety

It should go without saying that the safety of Scouts hiking or biking a historic trail is a major concern. No leader wants a Scout getting hurt because a trail is poorly designed.

The U.S.–Dakota War trail includes stretches along three roads. One is a heavily traveled highway, and the other two are less-used country roads. There is also a stretch on city streets in a small rural town. The highway has broad shoulders that are safe to walk or bike along, assuming the Scouts and their leaders take the normal safety precautions — proceeding in single file, keeping to the shoulder on the proper side of the road. The country roads have narrower shoulders that are also safe to walk or bike on if the normal safety precautions are taken.

By contrast, the trail brochure advises taking a car to visit Fort Ridgely. That's partly because of the distance, and partly because the heavily traveled U.S. highway connecting Morton and Fort Ridgely has several stretches with narrow shoulders. There are tall cliffs close to the

road on one side where cuts in hillsides were made for the highway and drop-offs on the other side, making it an unsafe route for bikers and hikers.

Property Rights

Make sure that your trail doesn't require Scouts to trespass on anyone's land. The best way is to stick to public places and public roads. If the trail would need to cross private property, make sure to get the landowner's permission and include a registration process that tells you which units have gone through the property, in case of littering or other unacceptable behavior. Trails have been closed after incidents on private property, and Scouting does not need that kind of reputation, not to mention the loss of an interesting trail that took considerable effort to organize and promote.

BSA Historic Trail Award

This award requires two days and one night on a historic trail, plus either a service project for the benefit of the trail or an educational event in conjunction with another group. Some trails are good candidates for those requirements and some are not; keep this in mind when designing a trail. Key considerations include:

- Is the trail long enough?
- Is there camping nearby?
- Is there a community or historical reenactment group that performs somewhere along the trail?

The Northwest Voyageurs Brigade Trail (Voyageurs Area Council) seems to have been designed with the Historic Trail Award in mind. The trail includes three options for canoeing and portaging along rivers and across lakes used by Minnesota fur traders in the 1700s and early 1800s. A fourth route offers a 9-mile hike, and at three sites along the trail, costumed reenactors show the public what life was like in the old fur-trading days. The Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base, along one of the trail segments, is a place where Scouts can engage in reenactments.

Trail Awards

Most historic trails offer an award of some sort, usually a colorful patch. In the past, it was common for trails to offer a patch, a medal, a neckerchief, a neckerchief slide, and perhaps pins to go on the patch or medal if the trail was hiked more than once or if optional segments were hiked. Today, most trails offer only a patch.

Why is that? Medals are more expensive to make and stock than patches, and often don't sell very well due to the cost.

Pins are also expensive and can require administration. Neckerchief slides tend to get lost too easily, so parents seem reluctant to pay for something their Scout may never use.

When designing a trail patch, here are some considerations to keep in mind:

- Check with your local council service center and Scout shop manager before making plans that hinge on their involvement. They may not have the staff to check for completed questionnaires. Or they may not be willing to invest funds in the trail patch or to collect payment and forward it to the owner of patches left with them on consignment.
- How many patches should you order in the first run? To keep costs down, it may be tempting to order enough patches to earn the maximum quantity discount. But trails often take quite a while to become well known, so it may be a better use of funds to make periodic reorders than to sit on hundreds of patches for a long time.
- Who will pay for the initial stocking order and reorders—the local council or the individual who designs the trail and the patch? A council with limited discretionary funds may not be inclined to devote several hundred dollars toward the purchase of patches for a new trail that may or may not see frequent use. The Scout shop manager is under pressure from the Supply Group to increase inventory turns, and may be unwilling to invest in the patches.
- Who is going to administer the awards? This means receiving the completed trail questionnaire (if there is one), making sure the questions are answered correctly, and mailing awards to recipients (if that is an option). Will it be the local council service center? The Scout shop? The trail organizer? Staffing levels at the local council service center or Scout shop may dictate the answer.
- How will you promote the trail? Will the local council host the trail brochure (with award-ordering information) on its website? Or must the trail organizer create a website for this purpose? If the council website is chosen, the trail organizer must be vigilant to ensure changes to the site don't accidentally break

links to the brochure. If this does happen, the organizer should work courteously with the council to have the links repaired.

BSA Nationally Approved Historic Trails (Illinois and Wisconsin)

More than 200 trails have been approved for Tiger Cubs, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, Explorers, and family campers. The Boy Scouts of America strongly recommends that hikers use only historic trails that have been nationally approved. Trails that have not been approved often do not meet Scouting standards.

Each trail is different. They vary considerably in length, overnight accommodations, markings, terrain, and awards. This type of information is available from the contacts indicated.

Hikers should organize themselves so that no more than 12 nor less than 3 hike in one group with proper leadership. Groups with more than 12 members should organize into two or more smaller groups that operate independently along the trail, again with proper leadership in each group. This helps to maintain the backcountry atmosphere for everyone using the trail, offers a better opportunity for observing wildlife, and makes it easier to keep the group together. Large groups tend to become strung out along the trail.

Each trail listed has been rated by the trail operator so that prospective hikers may determine the suitability of the trail for each of the various age groups.

- If **1** appears beside the trail name, the trail is suitable for Tiger Cub dens.
- If **2** appears beside the trail name, the trail is suitable for Cub Scouts.
- If **3** appears beside the trail name, the trail is suitable for Boy Scouts.
- If **4** appears beside the trail name, the trail is suitable for Varsity Scouts.
- If **5** appears beside the trail name, the trail is suitable for Explorers.
- If **6** appears beside the trail name, the trail is suitable for family campers.

If your group has a trail it wishes to have approved, request a copy of Historic Trail Specifications and an application through your local council service center. The application needs approval by the council Scout executive, the region, and the national office to qualify as a nationally approved historic trail.

Historic Trails in Illinois

ILLINOIS

Abraham Lincoln Trail (3 4 5)

Abraham Lincoln Council, BSA
1911 W. Fairhills Mall
West Monroe at Chatham Road
Springfield, IL 62704-1596
217-546-5570

Algonquin Woods Nature Trail (1 2 3 4 5)

Boy Scout Troop 6
c/o Karl Lindahl, Trailmaster
Trinity Lutheran Church
675 E. Algonquin Road
DesPlaines, IL 60016

Belleville Historical Trail (3 4 5 6)

Troop 83, St. Clair District
Okaw Valley Council, BSA
1801 N. 17th Street
Belleville, IL 62223-6122

Blackhawk Trail (3)

Blackhawk Area Council, BSA
1800 Seventh Avenue
P.O. Box 4085
Rockford, IL 61110-0585
815-397-0210

Cahokian Trail (2 3 4 5 6)

William L. Barton Jr.
Troop 81
5806 State Route 162
Glen Carbon, IL 62034

Chief Shabbona Trail (3 4 5 6)

Snyder Watson
1515 Burry Avenue
Joliet, IL 60435
815-727-7054

Lewis & Clark Trail (2 3 4 5 6)

Lewis & Clark Trail Association
P.O. Box 385
Wood River, IL 62095

Lincoln Circuit Trail (3 4 5 6)

Prairielands Council, BSA
907 W. Marketview, Ste. 6
Champaign, IL 61826-6267
217-356-7291

Lincoln Heritage Trail (1 2 3 4 5 6)

John Washburn
2051 S. Gate Drive
Decatur, IL 62521

WISCONSIN**Milwaukee History Trail (2 3 4 5 6)**

Milwaukee History Trail
9711 West Metcalf Place
Milwaukee, WI 53222
414-461-7107

Ozaukee Historic "76" Bike Trail (3 4 5 6)

Thomas E. Weigend
11511 North East Gate Drive, 52 West
Mequon, WI 53092-2002
414-242-3759

Martyrdom Trail (3 4 5)

Martyrdom Trail Committee
P.O. Box 223
Nauvoo, IL 62354

Old Nauvoo Trail (2 3 4 5)

Spokes on the Wheel Auto Tour (4 5)
Old Nauvoo Trail
716 East Oakton Street
Arlington Heights, IL 60004

Rapatuck Trail (1 2 3 4 5 6)

Illowa Council, BSA
311 East Main, Room 607
Galesburg, IL 61401-4895
309-343-1145

Stephenson Blackhawk Trail (3 4 5 6)

Lena Community Park District
609 North Schuyler Street
Lena, IL 61048
815-369-5351

Sun Singer Trail (3 4 5)

Trail of the Fu Dogs (3 4 5)
Sun Singer Trail Committee
P.O. Box 50
Monticello, IL 61856

Ice Age National Scenic Trail (1 2 3 4 5 6)

Potawatomi Area Council, BSA
N. 12 West 24498 Bluemound Road
P.O. Box 528
Waukesha, WI 53187-0528
262-544-4881
info@pacbsa.org

Kettle Moraine State Forest - Southern Unit

S91 W 39091 Hwy. 59
Eagle, WI 53119
262-594-6200

Potential Historic Trails in our Area

- Kenosha to Galena Stagecoach Route - http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-26/travel/9710260131_1_stagecoach-erie-canal-illinois-river
- Chicago and Milwaukee North Shore Line - <http://www.northshoreline.com/>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_North_Shore_and_Milwaukee_Railroad
- Historic Greenbay Trail - https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Green_Bay_Trail&oldid=624228224
- Potawatomi Trails - <http://www.goflo.com/powwow/history.php>