

A CATS LIFE ON THE PRAIRIE

BY: BOB JOHNSON



CATS (Colorado Addicted Trail-builders Society) spent their first camp outing at Soapstone Natural Area (SNA), just south of the Wyoming border and about 45 minutes North of Fort Collins CO on June 19th 2015.



Mostly known for their CATS attacks locally on weekday evenings and some weekend jaunts; the popular trail group was asked to prepare a weekend excursion up to the prairie environs of Soapstone. There was trail to build and time was getting tight for a grand opening of such. There were some stipulations that CATS only allow ten members to participate, camp in designated areas, and practice 'Leave No Trace' principles. An agreement and plans were made months in advance.

Bison or Buffalo to some are coming to the area and a new enclosure fence is being erected to accommodate the herd. The old existing trail – Cheyenne Rim Trail in the valley (West of the South parking lot) needed to be rerouted to higher elevations and eventually closed off. This action will provide a safer route for all visitors to view the Bison and not have interaction that would be injurious to both parties. In fact, the FCNA (Fort Collins Natural Area) managers and designers arranged for the fence and trail to be constructed in order to provide a supplementary buffer for visitors. Trail building was not going as fast as needed so CATS volunteered to work onsite two full days to move the project along. The rerouted trail was designed to hug the hillsides and hold to 18" wide, for multiuse visitors. Different volunteer groups and even a trail workday held by FCNA all managed to complete about 1 .5 miles at that time.



CATS volunteers were accepted on a 'first-come' basis. It was genuinely appreciated to have those special members step up to take on this new challenge. Connie Johnson, the wife and

avid CATS member became the head cook and planned all the meals, food procurement, and preparation. Denny Auciello and Dean Sindorf carpoled together and were instrumental in camp set up, mess duties and of course – trail building.



Camping at SNA was a real treat and not to be taken lightly. Imagine the lives of early settlers as they camped on these types of lands while in route to western parts of the country. The complexity of the expanse followed by the sounds of the night was enticing as we sat around the camp lights (no campfires allowed). Star gazing was clear and extraordinary though some of us saw several peculiar unidentified

blinking objects. Later we found ourselves three hours past sitting there in our camp chairs with marks on our necks and our boots off. What the heck? We could not account for the missing time; just kidding. Bob should not have tried to signal the objects with his flashlight.

During the day, the team of four managed to whack in 249 feet of new trail at 18” bench (width). Working out there in full sun was a challenge and the progress was slower than anticipated. The terrain on the hillside was rocky and difficult to cut in a proper trail. The small piece of trail we completed provided an exemplary model for future trail groups coming out



to the project site. This was a tribute bestowed upon CATS from Todd Juhasz, the Trails

Technican of the Fort Collins Natural Areas Department.



Our visitors out there were a few horse riders, bikers, runners, hikers, a herd of dairy cows, and several ‘horny toads’ (horned lizard also). Otherwise, we were alone with our work as we enjoyed the serenity of the region.

We appreciated the opportunity and privilege to work out there for two days. The outing was a special time for our members to bond and put out quality work. The remaining new trail was completed in time by FCNA trail crews for the November 1st reintroduction of the Bison.

The CATS organization is pleased to be a partner and participant with this project and many other trail assignments with Fort Collins Natural Areas.



Figure 1 Photo - Ft Collins Natural Areas

For more information about CATS - go to our website or Facebook page. E-mail: N-CATS2@comcast.net

Website: www.trailcats.org

<https://www.facebook.com/trailcats.org>