

Greetings to the KTC Members and Supporters :

The Board Members of the Klickitat Trail Conservancy would like you to know that KTC is turning **18 years old** this Fall ! We were founded in 2002, in an all-out effort to make the Klickitat Trail a reality. At that point it was only a far-off dream for us that someday, maybe, hopefully, somehow we could have such a Trail. Meanwhile, those who were opposed to this public trail along the Klickitat River, were doing their best to destroy that hope and opportunity. We organized KTC in order to give voice and cohesion to those who wanted this Trail for everyone in the Gorge. We spoke at the several public hearings that were held in Lyle and Klickitat. We organized hikes on the Trail, so folks could actually see what the potential was, and they would get behind our efforts. We hosted the President of the national Rails to Trails Conservancy on one such hike, along with US Congressman, Brian Baird, of Vancouver. And we went to Olympia, to speak before the Board of Commissioners for Washington State Parks, to convince them that there were lots of local folks who very much wanted to see this Trail open. Our appearing in Olympia broke the dam , and this started to move the ball in the right direction. Within a few months, Washington State Parks and the USFS renewed their commitment for planning to open the Klickitat Trail. This was in large part because of the organizing of our local support group, the KTC. That is a nutshell summary of the political struggle to bring the Klickitat Trail to life.

We usually have a special Annual Celebration of the founding of KTC during October each year. It consists of KTC hosting a tailgate brunch at the Lyle trailhead, including salmon and bagels, fruit, muffins, coffee and other snacks. Washington State Parks staff, USFS staff and all our Members and Supporters are invited to attend. After the snacking tapers off, we introduce the KTC Board, other important KTC members, and Agency staff to those gathered. We usually give some version of our founding story such as above, and then proceed to tell colorful stories of working for the Trail. Then we split up into two groups, one for a longer hike from Pitt down to Lyle. The other group just goes from the Lyle trailhead up to the Fisher Hill High Trestle and back. Due to the Covid pandemic, we could not have our Annual Celebration in person this year. We still want to share with you, the story of who KTC is, and to share some of the stories of our work on the Trail.

When KTC started working on the Trail, there were numerous sections that were barely passable or not passable at all. On other sections people were

dumping numerous deer carcasses and leaving burned out vehicles and other garbage. The flooding of the Klickitat River and other streams during the 1996 floods, had eroded away some sections of the Trail, while other sections were buried in piles of rock and mud debris. In particular, State Parks did not see how a trail would even be possible in one section down river from our present Wahkiakus trailhead. It was choked with alders and brush and rock piles for several hundred yards. A small but determined KTC work crew chopped a route through the brush in a couple of hard work days, and had the basic path started where it still is to this day. State Parks was impressed !

Another similar section existed just North of Pitt. It was so thick with brush and washed out by the floods, that folks were going up onto the paved road SR 142 to get by. There are no shoulders on this road and so it was a dangerous option. KTC got permission from WSDOT, since their right of way overlapped with that of the Trail. KTC work crews had a new bypass route constructed in about 3 days.

Then there was the "Death March". The big floods had carried piles of woody debris down Swale Creek in the canyon. The debris got hung up on the abutments of several of the trestles. If there were ever a fire in Swale Canyon, we would likely lose all these wooden trestles, since the piles of woody debris would be enough to ignite the rail ties that formed the structure of these trestles. KTC to the rescue! Our Trail Boss, Jim Denton, decided we had to clear those brush piles away. We asked the Yakima fisheries people where in the Swale Creek area they wanted the brush. They told us they wanted it actually in the stream itself. The two worst trestles were at mile post 5 and milepost 7 in from the Harms Road trailhead. Seven KTC volunteers and 2 State Parks employees dug out our mountain bikes and our tools and headed in. It took a couple of hours of hard work to clean up the first trestle. We took a break and then biked two more miles into the second trestle. Two or three hours later, we had that trestle mostly clean of fire hazard. It was 3:00 and we were dead tired. We started the 7 mile uphill grind out of the Canyon, either riding or pushing our bikes with our packs and our tools. I remember that as I was riding my bike, I was actually going slower than some of the folks who were walking their bikes. It was funny how the Trail in the morning seemed almost level, but it was now very much uphill. The saving grace was that the husband of one of our crew was waiting like an angel of mercy for us with refreshments at Harms Road, as we dragged ourselves back to the vehicles.

Another famous story we like to share is that of the “Dead Hulk”. On the Trail South of Pitt, there was an old stripped down 80’s model large sedan sitting plunk in the middle of the Trail. It had no tires, the doors and hood were all thrown open, the glass was all broken out and it was full of rusty bullet holes from folks using it for random target practice. This was not exactly in line with the picture of the Trail we had in mind. So, our intrepid Jim Denton organized a work party and borrowed a flatbed trailer. With cables and chains and come-alongs, the group slowly coaxed the Hulk up onto the flatbed. The destination for the Hulk was up in the Heights in Hood River. But then it started to snow. I followed behind the flatbed truck for safety sake to keep an eye on the Hulk. We were worried that with the snow, the uphill streets in Hood River could be too slick. Jim knew an alternate, more level route. It was still sketchy, but we eventually got the Hulk to its final resting place. This was yet another long and exciting day working for the Klickitat Trail.

These work Party stories are just a few of the many stories involving many good people working as a team to make the Klickitat Trail a reality that everyone can enjoy. We hope you get out on the Trail this Fall and Winter to connect with the River and nature, and that you feel the healing spirit there. Except for our Annual Board meeting, KTC is not conducting in person board meetings right now, but we are doing work parties and working on the trail. With the determined efforts of KTC, Washington State Parks and the USFS, the Trail has survived the pandemic and should be open going forward. If you use the Trail and live in the Gorge, we would like you to consider being on our Board at some point, or consider joining one of our ongoing work parties. When you use the Trail, consider working on it a little bit as you go, by tossing rocks or branches out of the path or maybe picking up any trash you might see. If you use the Trail, then it is Your trail, and a little work will keep it in top shape for everyone to enjoy. Thank you again, to those of you who support KTC and the Trail. We hope the Trail will continue to be improved, and the support for it will grow.

The Best to you,
Barbara Robinson, KTC President, and the KTC Board