

Hello and welcome to TOC. I'm your host Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today.

As August comes to a close we are beginning to wrap-up our series on great riding trails. This episode, we take a ride down the Katy Trail in Missouri with trail manager Cassie Brandt.

We've had clients tell us how much they enjoy the Katy and listening to Cassie, you might just want to add it to your bucket list.

Before we get to the trail though, my first guest today is Laura Moulton. Back in 2011, I spoke with Laura about her then 3-month art project, Street Books, in Portland, Oregon.

Fast forward 13 years! And, Laura has sort of been kicked upstairs to an administrative position as executive director for the non-profit. Today, Street Books has expanded from one bicycle driven library to three with a set schedule, thousands of books loaned out free each year, and an incredibly inspirational story. I can't imagine you not finding this project important and heartwarming.

My thanks to Laura for joining me today. In addition to a link to "Loaners," the book she and "Hodge" wrote, I have a second link to the Librarian Summit on YouTube. If you think you'd like to start a project like Street Books in your community, log on to streetbooks.org and contact Laura. I can't think of any reason this wouldn't be welcomed in any neighborhood.

Let's take a short break and when we come back, we're headin' down the Katy Trail with trail manager Cassie Brandt. You're listening to TOC.

We are back on TOC. I'm your host Diane Jenks.

The Katy Trail is the longest rail trail in the Rails-to-Trails network, consisting of 240 mostly flat miles. Yep! Mostly flat!

Managed on a day-to-day basis by four State Parks, it's Cassie's job to make sure that the trail is monitored for problems, even offering up a lost-and-found for cell phones that seem to get left behind occasionally. Let's take a little trip on the Katy and find out what you can see, what you can do (other than riding,) and of course where you can eat and stay.

My thanks to Cassie for joining me to fill us in on all-things-Katy-Trail. We have photos of the silos with the sunflowers and a link to the Sedalia Depot on outspokencyclist.com as well as links to the website and planning maps for the entire trail. I'm thinking this should be one of our bucket list items.

My thanks to you for listening today. I really enjoyed both of my guests and hope you found the conversations interesting and perhaps even inspiring.

Remember every episode is available on outspokencyclist.com along with photos, links and a written transcript. Follow us on social media including Instagram, LinkedIn, FB, and Twitter, and by all means – subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode.

Our new YouTube channel will be live soon and, although we won't be uploading video, you will be able to listen if your favorite medium is YouTube! We'll add the link to the channel on the website too.

Next time on TOC, we'll be speaking with Bruce Donald, the CT manager for the ECG. He's got SO much knowledge about not only the CT portions of the route, but much of the Southern New England area.

I hope you are having a great riding season. And, I'm still looking for a couple more great trail suggestions – especially in outside of the U.S.

Please stay safe – stay well and remember, there is always time for a ride. Bye bye.

Audio file

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Transcript

Speaker 1

It's time for the outspoken cyclist your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more. You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at outspokencyclist.com or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host, Diane. Thanks.

Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to the outspoken cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. As August comes to a close, we're beginning to wrap up our series on great riding trails. This episode. We take a ride down the Katy Trail in Missouri with trail manager Cassie Brandt. We've had clients tell us how much they enjoy the Katie and listening to Cassie, you might just want to add it to your bucket list. Before we get to the trail, though, my first guest today is Laura Moulton. Back in 2011, I spoke with Laura about her then three month art Project, St. Books in Portland, OR. Fast forward 13 years and Laura has sort of been kicked upstairs to an administrative position as executive director for the non. Profit. Today, St. Books has expanded from 1 bicycle driven library to three with a set schedule. Thousands of books loaned out each year, and an incredibly inspirational story. I can't imagine you not finding this project important. And heartwarming. Hi, Laura. Welcome back to the outspoken cyclist. Thanks for joining me on the show today. How are you?

Speaker 3

I'm doing well. Thank you so much for having me back. It's pretty special to reconnect after all this time.

Speaker 2

It's been a long time ago. It's been almost 13 years when St. Book St. Books was first introduced. And it started out as an art project, but it was fascinating to me then, and it's still fascinating to me, especially given the growth that I've seen. So, yeah, it's way more than an art project. Now, let's talk about the original idea of the project back in 2011. What was it?

Speaker 3

Yeah. So basically I pitched an idea. I wrote a grant for a three month project that would be a mobile library, bicycle powered, and I imagined that it would be kind of June through August on the streets of Portland. And I did a an initial kind of investigatory ride around on my own bike just to see where people congregated. And where it might be most helpful to set up. And so I really was solo. For summer, I chose two places in Portland, Skidmore Fountain and the and the park blocks, near the University near PSU. And that's what I ran that first summer and Long story short, when I showed up late in August, there was a real regular patron named Keith who came and saw me again, turned in two books and turned, you know, took two new ones out. And as he left, he said, I'll see you next week. And I just realized that I'd created this portal where a library existed that did not exist otherwise, and I thought. Where Will Keith drop his? Books next week or in the fall, if I disappear, and so I. I really I think for the first time began to imagine what what would this be like to to extend the life of it. And it was focused from the beginning on people living outside who I reckoned were never invited to cool our projects or. To participate in sort of a community reads program or that sort of thing and and my guess and it was correct was that. They often didn't access the mainstream library because of impediments like no ID, no address, that kind of stuff.

Speaker 2

Wow. And look at it now. Well, we will get to that. We'll get to that. So you started with one how? As I remember, I'm trying. Remember the bike had like a little cart in front of it.

Speaker 3

Yeah, basically it was. It was. I managed to get a used Harley Trike which was basically the the box that opens at the top. And it's it's a trike. So there's the trick is behind it. Wheel on each side of the box and. And my brother helped me sort of trick it out and created a A pull out drawer inside so that I could pull it out straight and have a little kickstand underneath it and that offered a kind of bookshelf. You know, that would display like 20 books. And the advantage of that, of course, was that anyone who was sort of. Unsure about what my project was this wacky person with a rolling contraption could still kind of scope the books and see what it was at a distance and not have to come up and look down into the box. And so that's the original bike. Is that doctored

Haley trike and he helped me put. Wood trim on it and stenciled it St. books, and so it's a very cool, iconic sort of symbol of our first the first life that we had before and we we now have two other bikes. So we have three bikes total.

Speaker 2

As I remember, and this is like going back again 11 years, you had a variety of books based on a variety of. People who might have different tastes in what they read. Where did your books come from?

Speaker 3

Yeah. I mean, I think that that first summer I really just sourced books from my own house and I hit the thrift stores and I I didn't herited Louis lemurs from my grandpa when he died. And so I had some of those on there once in a while, my husband would see a photo of the operations and say, hey, I didn't get to finish that book yet. So. You know, there were once in a while it was controversial what I was sneaking from my house. But but yeah, we started that for summer and and it was a little bit DIY. I didn't know what I I figured a range of good books was going to be great because that's what I loved. And and that is what we we you know from the start it was it was great books. And all the genres that I could come. Come up with. And in the years since, we have expanded what we offer, we get a lot of donations from Portlanders and we also are very conscientious about taking requests from patrons and doing our best to fill them by the following week. And that means hitting Powells or other independent bookstores. To buy a book for someone. And so that's a huge part of our program now in a way that it was not maybe that first summer.

Speaker 2

So now with three bikes and I don't know how many books each bike can carry, how are you funding the program? The Street books program?

Speaker 3

We are lucky to have an incredible number of individual supporters from just from the city of Portland, and we also get foundation support. And so we we write a lot of grants. I have a great development person. And and that's part of why we're still going, I think after 14 years, we have expanded, we've, we've hired really stellar people. And so it it has turned into something where you know that it was grant funded initially, but a lot of us worked for a few years in there. We ran shifts whether we were going to get paid for them or not. And I think that's not a very sustainable long term business model, but but it worked at the time. I mean I think that we were we were dedicated to the cause and so it's been great to be able to. Now, this many years later, have a staff have medical benefits for anyone who works 25 hours a week or more, which is something we've really worked on hard this last couple of years. We doubled our budget in a couple of years and it was it was kind of post pandemic and truly due to the need. Down the street, you know, coming out of the pandemic. And so we have, it's been very exciting to

be able to grow and to be strategic about what it's going to take to thrive, you know, to do to do well.

Speaker 2

Let me take a moment to reintroduce you and then I want to ask you about the people who are working for you and riding these bikes with the books in them. We're speaking with Laura Moulton. This was her idea back in 2011. It was a three month Project, St. Books, great name. And it is exactly what it sounds like. Bike powered library. So where do you find the people? You're you're clearly paying them. Where do you find good people who understand, first of all, who can deal with the population because you're dealing with unhoused people? You're dealing with people who may or may not be shy or be comfortable around other people. So what kinds of people are you finding to to ride the bikes and go to these places? And there is a a schedule of where you go and when. And and so and then be able to pay them so that they can actually do this work. Take it. It's not full time for everybody.

Speaker 3

No, it's not full time for everybody and we currently run library shifts five days a week, Monday through Friday and some occasional Saturdays now with an expansion that one of our librarians. Has done and I would say with regard to the people who make up the staff at St. Books, somewhere in the neighborhood of 50% at at any given time have experienced living outside on the streets, some of them for many years. And I think that that's huge in informing. You know the library shift that they run the way that they connect with people, the space they give people who might be having a really hard time and the bonds that they forge, they meet people where they are. There are no barriers to being able to check out a book. There's no ID, there's no fines. And as a result, they have a very loyal crew. Of folks who make a point of of visiting the library every day where we show up at the same time, same place each day that we say we will, and for that reason it's. It's easy for people to find us to make a book, return to check out new stuff. And so I think that we have such a cool, diverse, scrappy library and staff right now. And and, you know, one of the the people that I have known, the longest Speaking of, you know, that first summer in 2011 is a man named Ben Hodgson. To. Came and and inspected the library that first summer and kind of busted my chops about the authors I wasn't carrying yet and we have been fast friends ever since. He and I actually Co wrote a book together called Loners, the making of a street library. It's LOANERS loaners and it's so exciting. It's done really well and we just we sold out of our first printing and we just had another 4000 printed. So that is a very exciting thing. It is a Co written project as I said and. Ben, who goes by Hodge, is an incredible writer and it is told it basically tells the story of the street library and his experience sort of coming to an Old Town and realizing he's on the streets, reflecting on the mental health struggles and the and the unwellness that he experienced for a period of time that put him there in the first place. And he is a librarian now. He he has run shifts in Old Town. In the very places where you used to sleep, and I think that he helps a lot with the voice of what

that experience is like, he managed to articulate something that is really hard, which is when you are in a mental health crisis and on the streets, it's very rare to be able to also capture that experience in writing and. Dodge did it very well. I'm happy to say a lot of our library patrons have come back to us to say. You guys. You guys nailed it. Like that's, you know, that's that's a very good book and and, you know, we make it available for free on this on the street library. And so a lot of people have been able to read it.

Speaker 2

I'd love to post it. I'd love to have a copy. Of it and I think. That it speaks to the quality of the program. You know that the program is so successful. For that population, which is. So otherwise overlooked.

Speaker

M.

Speaker 2

Just I'm. I'm just thrilled to hear about it. So do are, do you get any pushback about the titles, the books you carry? Does do people come to you and go, oh, you shouldn't carry that or we should ban that or you should carry this or, you know, it's it's a funny time.

Speaker 3

It's a very book banning time right now and I. Say not at all. I don't think. I mean I. I will say that after 14 years I have been, I'm more in an admin role than I might have wanted. When I first signed up, which is natural. The natural kind of evolution of a of a nonprofit. So I'm not. I don't have a regular weekly shift of my own. Now I try to bike down and be part, you know, part of of shifts. So if there has been pushback in the past stretch of months about some books I I might not know about it, but I will say I don't think so, and I think rather than push back, what often happens is people do a double take at at the quality of the books that we have and they they'll pause and say, man, these are actually really good books and. Back this was a couple years back, but I when Tommy oranges new book well then knew where where came out a woman walked past and did a you know, a double take and said wait a second. Are you telling me that's available today on your street library and I'm like #326 on the holds with Multnomah County Library. You know, so it was funny. We appreciated that and also it kind of blew our mind. And so I don't think so. I think people are still to this day charmed by the novelty of coming upon, you know, a bike library where the books are 100% free and and they're also, I mean, I think that. When they do a kind of double take about how good the books are, I think that's worth interrogating. Like what? Why did we think they would be garbage Y and bargain basement, right? I mean, might we have approached it as a good enough for who it's for kind of thing as a society. And so I think it's vital that. Those books are excellent and that we take requests and that we support people's reading habits, and I think that that's been a powerful part, being able to really bring good books.

Speaker 2

Oh, I can really appreciate that. That's amazing. I love it. So I noticed. Doing my little due diligence research to catch up with what you're doing that you don't only carry books in the little library bike you have some other things you have medical supplies, you have Narcan, you have a few other things. How did that come about? It didn't start out that way.

Speaker 3

Yeah, it's a great idea. I mean, it's a great question. I think you know basically we have responded to the needs on the street and and that has meant having our library operations coordinator Josh Pollock build a harm reduction program for us basically. They. The idea that if someone is suffering at a level that is sort of life threatening at the street level, they're not going to want to check out a paperback book. And so we we had to ask, what is within our bandwidth, what can we do that isn't mission creep, but that supports people. And that was just, you know, in extreme temperatures that means distributing. Water or that means distributing tents and tarps, and in some of the extra cold weather we've had in. Portland, and it also means Narcan for the the overdoses that we have seen tragically common, you know, in the last couple of years in Portland. And so it is definitely not something that first summer in 2011, I could have seen. In terms of expansion, but that's been a very vital part of our program is adding those things and we have. Are they long term sort of partnership with the county who provides some of that when it comes to supplies like like weather, high temperature and low temperature supplies and things like that? And if you're following local politics, you know that the county and the city are often in a headlock here in Portland. And, you know, there are many things. Kind of in flux, but we have just kind of quietly done our. Done our business and provided that for.

Speaker 2

People. So this is sort of a data stats question. How many books if you know? Ohh. Would you say in an average month you lend out?

Speaker 3

Man, that's a good question. I I would say it's easier for me to say that. For example, last year we something like 7500 books went out and that was from the street libraries and that was also in the form of our curated book boxes and that's to. Our community partners, so we have that's been a very cool part of our expansion with Street books is the way the numbers of people were able to touch, who we might not meet up one to one with on the street library and that we have something like 27 community partners right now who come and get books or to whom we deliver books to. And so, you know, it enhances the services that they're able to offer around the city. And that might look like a set of shelves that we keep stocked. It might look like a liaison there on site who comes and gets the books and kind of takes care of that space, that community.

Communication. But so that's it's something like 7500 last year and I think we're on on track to exceed that already this year by end of summer.

Speaker 2

Would you say the reason for exceeding that is that there are more people in need of the service?

Speaker 3

Oh yeah. I mean, I think you can look at Portland and other West Coast cities and see the incredible need see that the surge in numbers. So I think that's definitely part of it.

Speaker 2

How about children? Do you have children's books and children come to? Because I know we have these little children's libraries. People put these little boxes on their tree lawns or on their their in their yards and kids come and take books, bring them back, whatever. And to me, that's sort of like non mobile but it allows for some youngsters to get books who may not. Be able to.

Speaker 3

Yeah, we, we definitely keep kids books on our our library shifts. Fortunately, we I don't think our librarians encounter a ton of kids, but they do sometimes. And I did back in 2011. I mean those stayed with me. So I remember that pretty distinctly, but. We also have. At our headquarters, we are located inside the Saint Francis Park Apartments, which is an affordable housing complex, something like 30% of folks are transitioning out of a shelter off the streets who move in there. And so that's been a way to keep in touch with people as they get more stable and and move indoors. But we offer an on-site library. There and there are definitely kids that come hit the library who are from the apartments and and we have a a ton of books there. So that's been fun. To. To be able to offer them there.

Speaker 2

You're something that never, never occurred to me. Does anybody come up off the street and just offer money just to say I want to help support this?

Speaker 3

Yeah. And you know what I have to say more than I would say more times than not. It's someone living outside or living pretty rough at the vulnerable edges. Yeah, and it and it, you know, over time I I used to want to decline that and say ohh no.

Speaker 2

Really.

Speaker 3

You know, but I also feel like that is that is huge. People are earnest when they are touched by the work we're doing and they're anxious to support at whatever level. And so yeah, that's been we've had that happen. Yeah. No one's ever come up with like \$2000.

Speaker 2

But no, but I mean it's, you know, people, kids bust on the streets.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

Or singing. You know, I could just see somebody going. What a cool idea. How can I help?

Speaker 3

Yeah, yeah. And that happens often, yeah.

Speaker 2

Right. Which leads me to my next question. Have other communities come to you and said how do I do this? I love your program. I want to replicate it in my community.

Speaker 3

Yes, that's been such a cool experience over the last years. Basically, we have an official sort of Sister Street library in Austin, TX. It's called St. Books ATX. We actually traveled there. I think it was 2017. Or 18 to help the fellow launch it. His name is Patrick and he. Celebrated 20 years of sobriety and looked around and wanted to do something meaningful in Austin. And and he came across street books, and so he he built a library kind of in the style of the one that my brother had helped me build. And so beyond Patrick in Texas, it's been very cool to see the numbers of. Of. Places in the US and around the world actually who have come across the street books project and who have launched something similar in their own cities. And it's not always the same exact thing, but it often is. Books and bikes, and so there's a there's a very active project in Wisconsin right now by with a woman named Terry. And there's a project in Poland. There is a project in San Francisco. There are a number of projects in Australia. There was a person who took inspiration from street books and began to stalk in a kind of little Free Library capacity books in a place where unhoused people could access them and then begin to take requests and have the same kind of cool experience that we had. And last summer in July, I had a we hosted a International Street library sort of summit to highlight these projects. So I'll definitely share that link with you because it's a really cool thing and it and I think I mentioned the book. Owners at the back of the book we have a how to guide and for anyone who wants to start something like that in their own cities. And I would say. We've had a lot of interest. People can't always follow through.

They might have this initial inspiration reach out, but they also have like day jobs and families. And I think the reality of that often kind of falls on them. But but. But I think the level of interest has been really inspiring. There are so many people who look around their city and they just think. Brother, this can't go on. You know, there's gotta be a way to add some dignity and humanity to this situation. And so. That's been cool.

Speaker 2

I'll say, well, you also answered my next question, which was about do you have anything that lays out how you did it in a way that and loaners is it? And I do want to definitely make that link available to loaners.

Speaker 3

OK, that would be awesome.

Speaker 2

And to your summit, I think it would be wonderful. We've been speaking with Laura Moulton. She is the founder of St. Books in Portland, OR. I thought it was an amazing idea back in 2011 when I realized not too long ago that it's still going strong. I was thrilled to be able to contact her and be able to have her back on the program so I don't have to say good luck. You're doing great stuff and I'm really impressed if I ever get to Portland, I would love to meet up with you. I have not been there in many years. We would come for the North American handmade bike show when it was there couple of times but but that's done. They have this that is no longer. Unfortunately, all these handmade shows have sort of died, although there's another one that.

Speaker 3

Ohh very nice.

Speaker 2

I think actually is in Portland, called Maid MADE, and I think it's this week, so I'm not there. I'm here. But at any rate, yeah, yeah, maybe. Laura, thank you so much. And your work is just amazing. I'm very impressed. And I'm really happy that you're doing so well.

Speaker

Maybe next.

Speaker 3

Well, thank you so much. I appreciate you having me. And I I would just add if people want to follow our progress, have a look at our operations. We are at stbooks.org. And we're also we have an Instagram page, street dot books that is fun for people to follow. And just by way of signing off, the other thing on our website people can find is a little bit about our mission, about the work we do. And in the last couple of years, what we

focused on as an organization around systems change like looking at. Why people are in this position in the first place? How our country has disinvested in housing, you know, the West Coast all up and down suffers from a housing crisis and a, you know, cost of living crisis. And so we've done a lot of internal work on what that looks like rather than show up and just continue to do this without being curious about how people are landing, standing out on the street in the first place. It's been really good to do that internal work as an organization, so we have a little bit more if people are interested in that under our about section, there's a systemic change and a. Mission statement there.

Speaker 2

You think, given the speeches I heard last night at the Democratic National Convention from the Obamas and from the other speakers, I think it's a a, a top of the mind question about how we got here and how we're going to fix it. So I really appreciate that you're doing that. Too. It's amazing how expensive, what you're doing has become.

Speaker 3

Yeah. Well, thanks again so much for having us. And I, I look forward, I'll follow up and send you some of these things and look forward to connecting with your listeners.

Speaker 2

Great. Thanks, Laura. All right. My thanks to Laura for joining me today. In addition to the link to loaners, the book she and Hodge wrote, I have a second link to the Librarian Summit that they did on YouTube. If you think you'd like to start a project like Street Books in your community, log on to stbooks.org. And contact Laura, I can't think of any reason this wouldn't be welcomed in any neighborhood. Let's take a short break, and when we come back, we're heading down the Katy Trail with trail manager Cassie Brandt. You're listening to the outspoken cyclist. We are back on the outspoken cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. The Katy Trail is the longest rail trail in the rails to trails network, consisting of 240 mostly flat miles. Yep, mostly flat. I know ears perked up. Managed on a day-to-day basis by 4 state parks. It's Cassie's job to make sure that the trail is monitored for problems, even offering up a lost and found for cell phones that seem to get left behind occasionally. Let's take a little trip on the Katy and find out what you can see. What you can do other than just riding. And of course, where you can eat and drink. Hi, Cassie. Welcome to the outspoken cyclist. Thanks for joining me to talk about the Katy Trail. How are you?

Speaker 4

Thank. So much for having me. I'm wonderful.

Speaker 2

It's my pleasure. And how is Missouri today?

Speaker 4

You know it's it's a little overcast, but we're loving it. It's mild weather and we got some good rain yesterday that we. Needed.

Speaker 2

Yes, yes, yes. I mean California could use some of that rain, right.

Speaker 4

Yeah, we'll send it W when. We're done with it.

Speaker 2

OK. Yeah. I don't know that that's the way it works, but OK. Whatever we are that maybe we can turn things around or it can go all the way around and come back.

Speaker 4

Wishful thinking?

Speaker 2

West again, so we've. Been talking about the Katy Trail. My husband and I for a long time. We had a a good friend, actually a client who raved about it. But we haven't been able to get out there, so I want to know, starting with you, what do you do as the Katy Trail coordinator?

Speaker

Here.

Speaker 4

Yeah. So all sorts of things. You know, a long trail has lots of interesting pieces and we're very lucky in this line of work that it's never a dull day. And I think some important back story is kind of how we manage the trail. So it's a 240 mile long trail which is pretty difficult to manage out of one physical location. So we split the trail into four management sections and each of those four sections is kind of given to. Another State Park to manage, in addition to their home site. So we have 4 of what you might think of as a more traditional State Park that manage the Katie as well. So for instance, I work out of the Rockbridge State Park office and they manage the Midwest section of the Katy Trail. So the Superintendent here does Rockbridge State Park and. 1/4 of the katie's. So with four superintendents managing this massive trail, I kind of provide the support and consistency across those four sections, so I'm able to support them because they have a lot on their plate and, you know, make sure that we're kind of presenting a consistent face and a consistent look across all of those sections.

Speaker 2

So the trail travels through all four of those state parks.

Speaker 4

It does not physically enter any of those state parks.

Speaker 2

Uh-huh. Ohh interesting.

Speaker 4

Yeah. So the maintenance teams, you know will base. Themselves out of those parks. And those, you know, maintenance operations and so they might report here at Rockbridge in the morning and then they head out to the trail once they have their equipment and everything they need for the day and they'll go out on the trail and do their work day. And then, you know, generally come back to their Home Park at the end of the day.

Speaker 2

That's interesting. So we have the Ohio Erie Canal tow path that goes through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. And I'm assuming that the park takes care of what goes through its.

Speaker

This.

Speaker 2

Portion of towpath which then extends down to Akron and down toward, you know, wherever and. Then up toward. Downtown Cleveland is where it ends, so it this is kind of an interesting way of sort of maintaining the park, I guess.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

So when did the Katy Trail actually open?

Speaker 4

So it was a staged opening, you know, as you can imagine on such a big project, you can't always do it all at once. So most of the right of way was secured because we are a rail trail. So we're taking, you know, unused rail lines and making them into trails. So most of the right. Of. Way was procured in the late 80s. Big part of that, someone that we always like to shout out our kind of our parents of the Katy Trail, Ted and Pat Jones. And so Ted Jones, full name Edward Jones. If that gives you some indication, I believe he's the son of the original Edward Jones. Huge conservationists, you know, just loved promoting Missouri's natural spaces. They actually donated over \$2.2 million in the late

80s to help the Department of Natural Resources. Secure the original. Right of way for the trail. So the first section to answer your question, the first section of Katy Trail State Park opened in April of 1990, which is really cool because that actually makes the trail just a few months younger than I am. Don't do the math mix the Katy Trail, 34 years old, but I'm only 25. So you know it works out.

Speaker 2

Wow. And. And I'm only like 35. So what? Great, great.

Speaker 4

Yeah, it's great. Whatever Matthew want. So it is fun that. Yeah. Me and the Katie are are pretty close in age. So April 1990, first section about 7 miles. We worked on 126 miles. Else, in total that we were hoping to have open in 94, but Missouri had some very, very significant flooding in 93 and we follow the Missouri River for quite a quite a ways. So that damaged about 74 miles of that original 126 that we planned to have open in 94. So push this back and the bulk of the trail as we know it today, the 126 miles. Was opened by. 96 and we tagged down a few more sections and 99 we got another 33 miles that had been donated by Union Pacific and then in 2011 we added on about another 10 miles. And those were both kind of. The end. Caps so. Yeah.

Speaker 2

Well, you know, 240 miles is a long way. And I noticed when I was looking at your website, which by the way is very comprehensive. And we will. Give everybody who's listening the link to to get up to the website the the surface or I don't know the surface, but the the trail itself is not hilly. Are there no hills in Missouri?

Speaker 4

There are hills in Missouri, but I will tell you that those railroad builders in the late 1800s did what they could to make it as flat and as possible for the railroad to come through. So a lot of Earth was moved. A lot of Bluffs were dynamited off. And the cultural preservation tactics back then were a little bit looser than what we adhere to today, but it's they really did a a great job flattening it out.

Speaker 2

So the railroads probably were looking at conserving fuel. By making it a flatter route at the very interesting.

Speaker 4

Exactly. So do the work on the front end and everything will run more efficiently after that. So yeah, it's generally folks like to go. West. East because it does gradually slope down as we get closer to the confluence of the Missouri and the Mississippi. Which is close to where we end on the East End, but our high point is about 950 feet above sea

level and our low points right around 440. So a slight gradual decline spread out over 240 miles.

Speaker 2

And West to east, you'll usually get a tailwind too.

Speaker 4

That's the idea, I know.

Speaker 2

Right, right. Let me take a moment to reintroduce you. We're speaking with Cassie branch. She is the trail manager for the Katy Trail in Missouri, we've been wanting to talk about this trail since we began our Series A few weeks ago. We're doing a series of trails all summer and like this coming week, we've got the White Rim Trail in Moab, which is completely different with a gazillion feet of climbing. So this is this is really.

Speaker 4

Something something for everyone, right?

Speaker 2

Yeah, you got it. You got. I know a lot of people who would prefer this. So I wanted to know about E bikes. I want to get this out of the way because we've been talking about E bikes on every trail that we talk about are there special rules for E bikes and B are you encouraging E bikes?

Speaker 4

Yeah. So they they are allowed on. The Katy trail. As you know, the technology and adoption is, you know really increasing rapidly and we are part of the Missouri State Park system. So you know, as in all government change can be a little bit you know slow. We want to make sure we get it right and we have right now we approve class one and Class 3. So they have to be pedal assist. We don't want anything that's throttle only those are not permitted on the trail. So the maximum speed on the trail is 20 mph. And we ask that everyone keep to that, and that includes, you know, our maintenance staff that are, you know, driving trucks down the trail, someone on an ebike or someone that may actually be or thinks that they are training for the Tour de France.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I know we have that problem on the towpath with limestone and like a gazillion people.

Speaker 4

So we do allow them most of our trailheads don't have power at all. We are a day use park. So we're sunrise to sunset. So we don't provide you know lights and don't have a reason for electric at most of our trailheads. So definitely if someone is looking to bring an ebike to the Katy Trail, you'll want to do some planning ahead to make sure that you. Can charge it, you know, at. Wherever you're lodging or stopping for lunch.

Speaker 2

Right, good idea. I would think that there are places along the way where you can get lunch where you can use restroom. And stuff. Maybe those places will start thinking about offering charging. For you, but yeah, yeah.

Speaker 4

Absolutely yes. And it's, like I said, it's growing rapidly and you know, I think there's going to be a lot of adaptation and you know, infrastructure that kind of builds up around that.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I would believe so. So I mentioned surface, what is the surface of the trail?

Speaker 4

Yes, it's a. Crushed limestone. It's a pretty fine, fine material. Real in places that have had a lot of surface down and haven't had any major maintenance issues, it can get a pretty good pack on it and can be really similar to pavement. Not, you know, still not suitable for like roller skating, which you know I wish some days that I could roller skate. Down to Katy, that'd. Be fun, but yeah, really nice material. That lends itself to a lot of different styles of.

Speaker 2

Bikes. So maybe we need new wheels for roller skates so that they could roller skate on limestone. That's an.

Speaker 4

Yeah, off off road, big trail.

Speaker 2

Interest. Right. Offer. Right. Exactly. Well, no. The towpath is mainly cross limestone too. So you know you need to take care of your bike.

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 2

So I wanted to know do you do you do trail counts?

Speaker 4

In terms of like visitation, yeah, we do. We actually have trail counters at all of our trail heads generally in both directions. And then we have a multiplier that tells us, well, that's usually more for parking lot and vehicles. So on the trail, it's usually a little more clear cut, but we have a multiplier that tells us how many people we think are local on a, you know, on a given day.

Speaker 2

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 4

Going out and back and what percentage are doing multi day and going in One Direction?

Speaker 2

Yeah. So how many trail visits are you averaging a year?

Speaker 4

Yes. So we see about 400,000 visitors a year.

Speaker 2

That's less than I would have thought. Actually I would have thought because a it's flat B it's, you know, sort of mid country and I would think that maybe it would have been twice that, but it's still a healthy number of course.

Speaker

Yeah.

Speaker 4

Yeah, I think we hit 500 or very close to 500 in 2020. But yeah, we generally stay around 400,000. Really there's not a huge population centers of, you know, local user. There's the largest city on the trail is Saint Charles, across the river from Jefferson City. And then after that, I mean, I think our next biggest. Town has. Maybe 20,000 people and then the next one after that's like 5000. So we don't have a lot of the usage that you might see in trails that do access more urban areas. A lot of our folks travel to us.

Speaker 2

Let's take a short break, and when we come back, we're going to ask Cassie about some of the highlights along the Katy Trail. You're listening to the outspoken cyclist. We are back on the outspoken cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. We're speaking with

Cassie Brandt, the trail manager for the Katy Trail in Missouri. And when we left off, we were just about to talk about some of the highlights along the trail. What are some of the highlights along the trails that if people are going to, it's going to be a multi day if you're going to do the whole thing unless you're just nuts and want to do 240 miles in one day, but assuming somebody takes two or three days, maybe even four days, what?

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 2

Kinds of things might they see and highlights of maybe historical significance.

Speaker 4

Yeah. From the history standpoint, one of my favorite things on the trail is the Sedalia depot. So if anyone is a railroad enthusiast, in addition to a rail trail enthusiast, and we have a gorgeous restored depot, you know, one of the those big spectacular depots in Sedalia, MO. And so that's a must see. There's a museum there and a really nice gift shop, probably one of the better, you know, kind of Katy themed gift shops along the trail. St. Charles, MO, which is part of kind of the Saint Louis metro area, has an incredibly charming historic district as well, and the Katy Trail goes right through there, so lots of great, you know, historic buildings and shopping, dining, lodging, all wonderful there. We have a more recent. A public art installation that I think is really neat. There's some old silos right off the trail near Matson that have gotten this beautiful sunflower mural painted on them. And that was just done, I think, last summer. That's a really. Big one for me. It's so cute and we have a lot of public art along the trail. Lots of the grain silos, the whole historic grain silos have murals on them. There's an installation near Easley, Missouri, that's called boat hinge, and it's a bunch of vertical, you know, old boats that are kind of set into the earth. One of the things we hear the most is just the love of the small towns and small businesses. That have embraced serving the trail community. And I think Rocheport Missouri, which is a very small town but very well known on the Katy, is one of the highlights for most cyclists and and one of the most scenic sections of the trail really goes from about Bridgeport to Hartsburg, which is just north of Jefferson City. That section of trail you will have 100 foot. Plus Bluffs and that might be an underestimate. I don't even know they're massive and start up. As you can see, Bluffs on one side of the Missouri River right there on the other side. And it's just super, super pretty. And there's some good stretches that just have some great local, you know, bar and grills and, you know, you can have your cheeseburger and a beer. And. Enjoy. You know the company of other trail users and locals alike.

Speaker 2

How about wildlife?

Speaker 4

You know, I wish I could say that we have something, you know, really special and unique. But you know you're going to see a lot of the same stuff that you see in your backyard. We have deer, you know, it's very common to see a ball legal over the Missouri River. That's probably one of the bigger. Lights, and we occasionally get a sighting of a Mountain Lion or a black bear, but they're pretty rare, but definitely nature is using the trail as a highway when you know when we're not around. They like to use it to get from point A to point B, and I've spooked up more than my handful of or my my share of deer on the trail that just having a nice peaceful. Snack. Till they see you roll up.

Speaker 2

And then it's like, OK, we're out of here.

Speaker 4

Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2

So we, we've. Had a lot of nasty weather all over the country this year. Has it impacted the trail in any places that now I'm. I'm sure you put closures up on the site if.

Speaker

Oh yeah.

Speaker 2

There's a place that's closed.

Speaker 4

We do, yeah. We maintain an advisory map that's a, you know, very comprehensive that will tell you exactly what's going on and where. Yeah. We follow the Missouri River for over 160 miles. So throughout all of that, any water that wants to get to the Missouri River needs to go over under the trail. And so that does lead to a lot of washouts. We've had some rock slides couple of years ago, we had a bridge that pretty much just lifted up. And slowed it down and uh, you know, a couple 100 feet this year, we had staggering amounts of rainfall in July. So we did have a lot of flooding. One small town called Tree Lore actually had like. I don't even know like 10 inches of rain and in half an hour or so it was really, really intense and that washed away pretty much the entire trail. We have a trail head there. My entire trail head got washed away. There. Was a couple inches of mud in our in our pit toilets and we brought in our statewide Missouri State parks construction crew to help with. The recovery from that and it took about 3 weeks for us to be able to open the trail and the trail head back. And. That location and the local the local community, had significant damage as well. The only business in town pretty much the Bar and Grill was. Flooded with three, four feet of water and blew outside of their building. So that was a remarkable one. But every year we've got, you

know, we have washouts and dozens of downed trees and, you know, constantly keeping an eye on our bridges. We have some that have been, you know, updated to modern bridges. But a lot of them have just had replacements. On the decking and everything else is still, you know, railroad original. Also, slowly but surely we we keep tabs on that, make sure they're still safe to use and replace. You know one or two every year as as we can.

Speaker 2

Yeah, sure. So is there a best time to ride the trail? I mean, if you were to say, OK, if you're. Gonna. Plan to come to Missouri and ride the Katy Trail. This is the time I would recommend.

Speaker 4

You know, whenever you can come, we'd love to have you fall is extremely popular in Missouri. You know, obviously we have very hot, humid summers. We do have pretty mild winters, but falls falls probably the prettiest and most enjoyable time to be doing outdoor recreation in Missouri. I like getting out in the winter a little bit because I think it's really fun to be able to see through, you know, obviously we've we've got dense foliage. Most of you know all summer. And so being able to see through that and kind of get a different view of the lay of the land around the trail in the winter I think is really interesting, but definitely see most of our visitors in the spring. The ball.

Speaker 2

So let's talk a little bit about the website.

Speaker 4

So yeah, there is a shortcut that you can do, Katy Trail statepark.com, but that will just redirect to our page on most stateparks.com. So mostateparks.com and search Katy Trail or try you know that direct link Katy Trail State Park dot. Yeah.

Speaker 2

And what are the kinds of things people can actually find out on the website that will help them navigate the trail or find a place to start or find something to eat or a place to use the restroom?

Speaker 4

Yeah. I think the biggest resource for most people is going to be the trail services page and that has a breakdown of, you know, the mileage chart between trailheads. And then it also has an individual page for each trailhead with business listing. Being the state government, we do require businesses to. Reach out to. Us. That's kind of the most equitable way for us to make sure that we are not leaving someone out and giving preferential treatment. So we do leave it up to our businesses to reach out to us for listings on there. A lot of them do a good job. You know, we don't always capture

everyone, so that's definitely a good starting point. That I fully encourage people to do additional research, you know, use the tools available to you use you know your Google search and your maps. And there's also a ton of resources from. Trail lovers that aren't directly associated with us. So there's guidebooks and Facebook groups and websites, all specifically for planning your Katie trip. And I just, I love the the amount of available information out there.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I had a. Little bit of trouble finding the state.

Speaker 3

Park one because there.

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 2

Are so many?

Speaker 4

Yeah. And we don't pay for the Google ad services to bump us to the. Top.

Speaker 2

Right, exactly. No, the state park's not going to do that well. We've been speaking with Cassie Branch. She is the Katy Trail manager.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

Out in Missouri, and I think it's going to be one of the favorite trails that my our listeners are going to try and visit because a it's long, it's flat, it's a real rail trail, a lot of the trails we're talking about are not really rail trails, but people who belong to rail to rails, to trails, which is. You know a great organization and I'm sure it's highlighted in all of their information too. Yes. So I appreciate you talking with me today and talking to us about the Katy Trail.

Speaker 4

Yeah, it's an absolute pleasure and we are America's longest developed rail trail, so. Yeah, we love it. We love having people come visit and uh, yeah, always hear the love of, you know, the scenery and the kind people and the small businesses. I just always hear such glowing reviews from folks that have traveled in to ride the Katie and it's, you

know, gives you warm fuzzies. And we love to. Embrace all of them for coming out and checking out our little corner of the world.

Speaker 2

And we would love to do that. Thanks so much. I hope you have a great day and a great rest of your summer and into fall good riding season.

Speaker 4

Thank you.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Cassie for joining me to fill us in on all things Katy Trail. We have photos of the silos with the sunflowers and a link to the Sedalia depot on outspokencyclist.com, as well as links to the website and planning maps for the entire trail. I'm thinking this definitely should be. One of our bucket list items. My thanks to you for listening today. I really enjoyed both of my guests and hope you found the conversations interesting and perhaps even inspiring. Remember, every episode is available at outspokencyclist.com along with photos, links, and a transcript. Follow us on social media, including Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, and by all means subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode. Our new YouTube channel will be live soon and although we won't be uploading video, nobody wants to see that you'll be able to listen if your favorite medium is YouTube. We'll add the link to the channel on the website too as soon as it's available next time on the outspoken cyclist, we'll be speaking with Bruce Donald. The Connecticut manager for the East Coast Greenway, he has so much knowledge about not only the Connecticut portions of the route, but much of the whole southern New England area. I hope you're having a great riding season and I'm still looking for a couple more great trails suggestions, especially outside the US. Please stay safe. Stay well and remember there is always time for a ride. Bye bye.

Speaker 1

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