



Mariana Butte Trail

Loveland's Leading-edge Foot Trail

By: Bob Johnson 23 Jan 2016

What do the following three landmarks have in common: a golf course with breathtaking western views of the mountains, a driving range, and a rugged 'butte'? A new hiking trail, of course! Creation of Mariana Butte Trail [as aptly named by officials from City of Loveland's Open Lands and Open Areas] has been started and in due time, will continue around the base of the butte to form a complete loop. It is estimated the trail loop will be approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of mile in length. Had a bad day on the course? Take a hike around the butte or travel around the '20th Hole'. [The 19th watering hole is reserved for the Wapiti restaurant]. Incidentally, this all started with a vision from Steve Southard, Golf Operations Manager for Mariana Golf Course, and resident of the nearby community, of a trail that would circumnavigate the base of the butte. His vision was implemented by CATS who designed the trail, fabricated stone trail structures, cut through dense bush, installed difficult drainages and will complete the "Mariana Butte Trail" in the Spring of 2016.



Dean and Connie discussing where the trail will go

It all began with a phone call from Scott Sinn, one of the city's park planners, and an invitation to discuss building a new foot trail in Loveland. Naturally, I accepted the opportunity to present CATS [Colorado Addicted Trail-builders Society] as a viable and dedicated volunteer trail group that could construct this trail. Several meetings and site

visits later, CATS was asked to design the new foot trail [not multi-use: no horses or bikes allowed] with a 24 inch width.



Initially CATS agreed to build one piece of the trail to connect the golf course side to the adjacent subdivision on the other side of the butte. The trail design put that footage at approximately 1900 feet. CATS Design Team began planning the trail in July of 2015. With the use of a clinometer [hand held tool used to determine the

Trail volunteers on Sep 19 2015 'whacking' new trail angle/grade of direction of proposed trail] and GPS mapping the CATS design team were able to plot a maintainable bench/footpath around the butte base, part of the goal being not too close to the golf driving range (for obvious reasons), neighborhood fences, or the HOA (Home Owners Association) property lines. A good trail design results in an easy flow from one area to another and is comfortable for hikers at climbing grades of usually less than 10%; works into the natural contours of the landscape; accentuates the vistas of the surrounding landscape; and provides a safe platform to walk. Several other considerations were factored into the overall design including water erosion issues, placement of drainages, retaining walls (if needed), steps where needed, naturalizing old closed off pathways, and more. Our CATS members dedicated a total of 747 plus event hours on this project over the summer and fall to complete approximately 3,000 feet of new trail which comprises 85% of the trail; roughly \$19,183 saved to the citizens of Loveland.

The trail group in conjunction with the agency, City of Loveland Open Lands and Natural Areas, hosted two “community involvement” days which brought out interested volunteers eager to learn the basics of trail construction. Food, drinks, and handouts were available for those one day trail warriors. Volunteers on these two events assisted in completing over 500 feet of new trail.

Otherwise, a steady attendance of core members from CATS, most notably, Dean Sindorf, Jim Broderick, Lynn Formanek, Connie Johnson, Denny Auciello were out there ‘whacking’ trail on a weekly basis; sometimes in pouring rain. One event in particular, flashes of lightning pushed the group off the trail in a hurry. Special thanks go out to a local couple that lives in the neighborhood and took an



Stone steps engineered by CATS

extraordinary interest in assisting with building the trail: Paulo and Donna Alvarez. They came out many times and put in a considerable amount of labor constructing the trail.

CATS received several site visits from Scott Sinn and Marilyn Hilgenberg, Administrative/Business Manager, Open Lands and Trail Manager. The trail crew was always amenable to have city officials come out and witness 'live' trail construction. CATS also acknowledges City of Loveland Open Lands and Natural Areas for their princely donation to this CATS team.

The trail presented a quandary of challenges in keeping the balance of the trail evenly dispersed and classified as an easy to moderate hike. Stone steps were installed in one area where the grade was higher than 12%. Another problem was encountered at a



Closed trail for revegetation

crossing of a wetlands drainage ditch at fifteen feet wide. CATS debated the crossing methodology from building a wooden bridge, to installing plastic tube culverts, to stone culverts, and finally, installing stepping stones. The agency helped in our decision with keeping the trail as natural as possible.

Natural and sometimes human inflicted hardships slowed the group's production with wasp stings, cactus barbs impalements, smashed fingers, hot weather, thunderstorms, muddy conditions, and lastly – snow. Hardly an event went by that the group did not notice hikers walking in the closed trail areas, or witness signs of bikes on the trail. Perhaps it is difficult to adjust or change human behavior or old habits. The sensitivity of the area does not warrant bikes or horses on the trail. The agency (City of Loveland Open Areas) made that decision before the design phase of the trail. Hopefully former trespassers will use the new trail and let the re-vegetation area have a chance to grow.



Jim cuts in rough trail

Arguably, the whole concept of the trail was for the neighborhood citizens to enjoy a comfortable walk around the butte. There were some remnants of a social trail, but the path did not meet sustainable standards and in some areas became unsafe to walk due to extreme erosion. The butte has its own trail that sprints up to the summit [5, 270 feet] [10 feet short of a full mile] and this as well is not a safe avenue of travel.

In contrast with other trail projects, this project rates – superior in all aspects. Project members arrive to convenient parking, pull up brand new trail tools [purchased by the City of Loveland] from the basement, where the golf carts are corralled, and walk a short distance to the trail site. Conversely, CATS had it so good with restrooms within walking distance, emergency services on hand, and a full range of food/drink from the restaurant. In the trail builder world, this is Valhalla; with many facilities so close.

After each trail event, all the CATS team members strolled into the Wapiti restaurant. This quaint food serving diner is owned by the City and provides great food and drinks for not only tired golfers, but the general public. The team enjoyed wonderful appetizers, dinner meals, and was bestowed with well-deserved libations.



Last big challenge - stone step crossing

CATS certainly thank the Wapiti and all its employees for their gracious VIP treatment of CATS members at the dining place and Wapiti's donation to the group on each visit.

With the onset of spring 2016, CATS will return to finish the last piece of trail thus completing the loop trail around Mariana Butte. Plans are underway for designing a safer trail to the top of the butte. Other tie-in trails are on the drawing board to connect with parks and other trails near Route 34 and beyond.

For more information and photos of CATS construction of the Mariana Butte Trail go to <https://www.facebook.com/trailcats.org>

For information about joining up with CATS go to **Website:** www.trailcats.org
or **E-mail:** N-CATS2@comcast.net

CATS [Colorado Addicted Trail-builders Society] are a non-profit organization dedicated to 'mending trails and promoting stewardship'. In addition CATS provides training, educating volunteers in trail design and maintenance, tool safety, and crew leadership.