



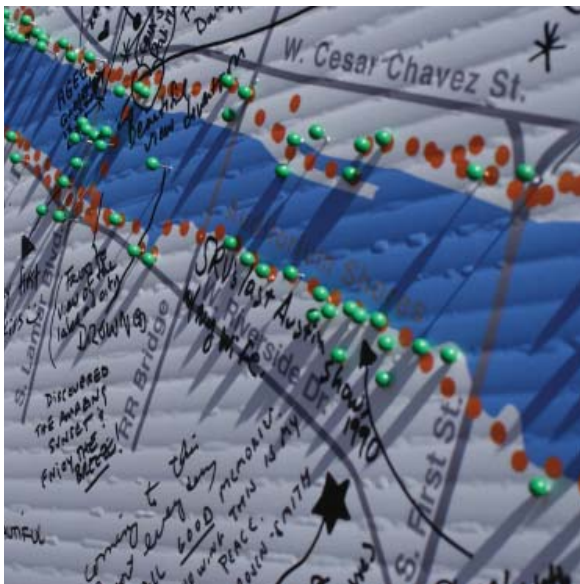
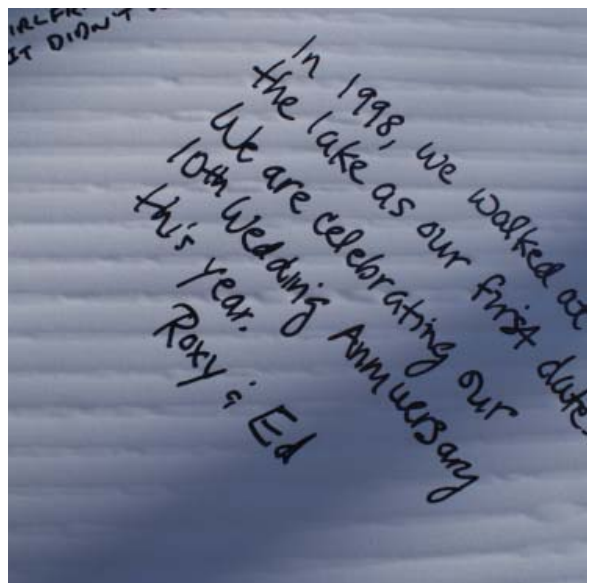
The Heron Creek Engagement Report

Trail Memories Boards

March 27, 2013



**The Trail
Foundation**



Project Overview

The Heron Creek Restroom project ran from February to March of 2012, and was comprised of an online Trail User survey and an on-site Trail Memories board installation. The primary goals of the project were to:

- Celebrate the Trail and the work of The Trail Foundation;
- Gather Trail User feedback about the upcoming Heron Creek Restroom design;
- Gather user information for future designs efforts.

Through the responses gathered on-site and on-line, we were able to develop a rich picture of how Trail Users think about the Trail, and specific ideas to guide the Heron Creek project and similar projects in the future.

What was abundantly clear throughout the process was the depth to which Austinites, and its many visitors, adore the Trail. It is not only physically, but emotionally, part of Austin's central identity, and place that people go to feel healthy and connected.

This report outlines the major findings of the Trail Memories boards and offers a selection comments that Trail Users offered.



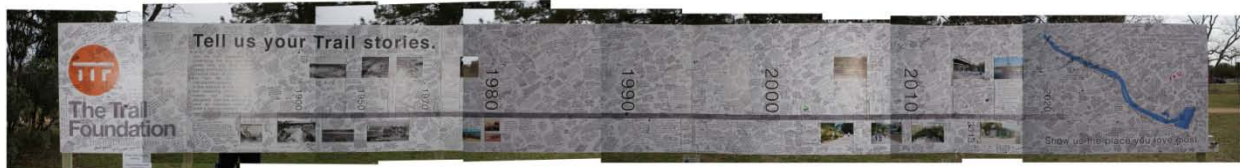
Project Concept



Project Construction



Trail Memories in full swing.



Final Product – Over 1700 responses!

Trail Memory Boards

The responses to the Trail Memory Boards were phenomenal. In less than a week over 1700 comments were gathered on site, through email, and by survey. Responses ranged from the whimsical to the sacred, from deep personal memories to reminiscences about Austin's early days. Through Trail User's answers it became overwhelmingly clear how deeply the Trail affects people's lives and how much the people of Austin identify with the Trail and feel it is their home.

The responses were examined to see patterns under the following categories:

User Categories

- Unspecified
- Child
- Walker
- Runner
- Cyclist
- Dog Walker / Owner
- Social Visitor
- Nature / Leisure Visitor
- Out-of-town Visitor
- Fisher
- Rower / Rafter / Boater
- Multiple Sports User
- Transport User
- tagging

Type of Comment

- Story / Memory
- Suggestion
- Appreciation
- Observation
- Other

Comment about

- User alone
- User + Trail
- User + Other Person(s)
- User+Others+Trail
- Other Person
- Other(s) + Trail
- The Trail

Theme

- Personal History
- Physical Health
- Trail
- Family/Friends
- Austin
- Mental Health
- Rite of Passage
- Nature
- Sacred
- Austin History
- Inspiration

The first two categories (Type of Comment, and User Category) yielded little information as the comments were predominantly either stories/appreciations and type of user was rarely explicit. But the following two categories – Comment about and Theme - were very helpful in illustrating how people engage with the Trail and what the Trail means to people.

Quote themes ranged from small personal observation about the trail to the grand moments of Austin history. In general, the quotes read as a constant interplay of peoples' individual moments meeting themes of history, community, and an overall larger sense of nature. Although some comments overlapped in themes, they were coded based on their primary emphasis. The following numbers emerged:

<u>THEME</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Personal History	419	27.2%
Physical Health	261	17.0%
Trail	196	12.7%
Family/Friends	184	12.0%
Austin	122	7.9%
Mental Health	114	7.4%
Rite of Passage	94	6.1%
Nature	57	3.7%
Sacred	55	3.6%
Austin History	21	1.4%
Inspiration	16	1.0%

As to be expected with the way the boards were staged, the primary type of response was about personal history. Other themes that came strongly forward were themes of physical health, family and friends, and the Trail itself (expressed primarily in phrases of deep appreciation.)

What was also equally astounding was the extent to which the Trail was a container for deeply moving personal experience. An entire spectrum of experiences were offered from the rite of passage of getting engaged, saying “I love you”, or the sacred nature of the relationship between User and Trail.

With the second category, we could see if peoples’ memories focused on themselves alone, themselves and someone else, or if the memories referred to someone else (or the Trail) entirely, without every mentioning themselves. Responses fell into the following patterns:

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
User Alone	98	6.2%
User + Trail	679	43.0%
User + Other Person(s)	79	5.0%
User+Others+Trail	557	35.3%
Other Person	20	1.3%
Other(s) + Trail	7	0.4%
The Trail	140	8.9%

These percentages becomes helpful in illustrating that Trail Users’ memories and identification with the Trail occurs almost equally as an individual and a collective phenomena. Users showed a deep and abiding personal relationship with the Trail while equally showing that the Trail’s strength in their lives is its ability to form and hold the memories of the User and their friends and family.

The design implications for this data show the need to balance the creation of amenities equally for groups and individuals. Such a finding could translate on a small scale with the creation of benches outside of restroom facilities to accommodate friends and family, or at a large scale with parking considerations for both individual and group vehicles.

On a deeper level, the relatively larger percentage of comments that referenced only the Trail, without any mention of the Trail User or their family and friends, speaks to the profound regard with which Austinites (and visitors) hold the Trail. It is a place where people cannot only meet their goals for health and fitness, or meet their friends socially, but it is a place that people feel drawn to in order to experience nature, elements of the sacred, and what many Users describe as “Austin itself”.

Response Categories

Personal History (27.3%)

(The number in parentheses at the end, indicates the quote number as can be found in Appendix D)

9/9/2012 Move to ATX! 9/10/2012 Came to love the trail. (321)

Chinaberry fights across the creek. Bucketfuls, yellow, hard. Ouch! Run home! Run home to grandma's home! 1960's (1166)

My daughter and I ran during the flood when parts of the trail were underwater. We saw snakes that we figured would be ok but also found fish flopping around. I tried to throw them back into the lake but unfortunately I throw like a girl and I kept throwing the fish into the Cedars instead of into the lake. I finally snagged a guy to help and I think the fish were saved despite the trauma. –Sharon (1471)

One of my favorite stories, I tell it to this day happened when I was out on the trail for a healthy trot and as I rounded a corner a man, who I would guess was in his 60's, can skipping around the corner. This brought me so much joy and still brings a smile to my face! Stayin' young at heart. (104)

I've enjoyed the Hike + Bike on Shoal Creek since I was a young girl, hiking from Pease Park to 29th st with a girlfriend; we were 8! Years old. Back then you could ride your bike, alone, safe . . . As a child we found fossils; crawdads + other treasure. Drank the water from the spring head under 29th + Lamar St. That was such a "BIG hike" for two 8 yr old little girls! Foxes, Deer, Rabbits lived in the Park. Running on the trail in High School + after college. Raddling up to the Springs on the South Wall near Red Bud Trail. Till Idie! S. Searight, 5 generation Austinite (149)

I was fat, I was broke + my partner was bottoming out on drugs + alcohol. During fights, I'd bolt out the door on my sorry trailer nearby + huff it off to Town Lake to "walk it off". Slowly the fat melted away, she went into rehab + those walks were the beginning of rebuilding my life. All is well today! (235)

Sitting on dock watching the sunset and the bats with the man who'd become my husband. Vigorous pregnancy walks a few years later - pounding the steps to try to induce labor when the baby was late - Baby in a sling, post-partem strolls. Toddler in jogging stroller, getting out to do the "balance beam" near Emily's mosaic memorial to her dead friend, kissing the top of my head from the highest point. Young boy riding his own bike on the trail for the first time, me on mine alongside him, overwhelmed with emotion. Thank you beautiful trail by the water for these unstopplable memories.(111)

Physical Health (17.1%)

I come to this trail for serenity. I have been living w/ a chronic illness for 6 years + this is the place I can release all those feelings. I love this trail! (644)

I left 101.6 lbs (so far) here! (653)

Began running here my 1st year at UT. Its been a part of self-wellness program for 23 yrs. I'm not 40 yrs old and even while living in NYC I would visit Town Lake Running Trail when traveling back to TX. I'm back in Austin for good. Thank God for "the trail!" JJ (22)

I ran off my Blue Bell here! - Carrie Schmidt (25)

I love to find the "athlete" buried in a busy and hectic life - she is there and emerges on the lady bird trail. LP (238)

Each run is a new adventure. Rain, sleet, 100 degree heat. The 5-mile loop, the 7 mile loop + the 10 mile loop, all so special. The scenery and my very special running companions Clarie + Michael Ann. I look forward to each run and when I drive by the trail I'm jealous of all the runners on the trail. (627)

First run on Town Lake Spring 1974! Still going strong! L.P. (1117)

Started running long distance here on Townlakes Hike & Bike trail 17 yrs ago while in college at UT. Have run with my sweetheart many beautiful miles & then married & have pushed all of our beautiful boys out here on the jogger! It's been amazing and feel blessed to be a part of this and for the ability of my body to be able to do all these wonderful things! :) Amanda Blanco Bajarano (1209)

The Trail (12.7%)

My friend dared me to see how many people would respond back if I said Hi to them on the Trail. 75/100 success. Love Austin! Filitsa (883)

This trail is uniquely Austin with the man playing a guitar + harmonica tune, playing dogs, + the active people on the water. The trail make my day everyday! Love, Missy 2/17/2013 (432)

My church, gym, mental strength, my passion. DDP. (487)

The most beautiful place on Earth. Araceli W (491)

The trail is the heart of Austin on Lady Bird Lake. The Trail Foundation makes it even MORE AWESOME! (606)

I'm so blessed to have this magical place to enjoy! It is truly magical! Love to all :) Antonio M. (1151)

This trail changed my life! –PMG (1532)

I love the culture differences seen on the trail...I always tell visitors to go to trail to see what Austin is about.(1628)

I think the trail is one of the great urban escapes in our country. It brings the people of Austin together outdoors and must be our most utilized public space. I'm not a religious person but thank god for Lady Bird Johnson.(1638)

Family and Friends (11.9%)

The piano's along the bridges and trails were fantastic. It was a joy to hear music, good and not-so-much, on those spring days when they were there. My granddaughter sat on a piano bench next to a stranger, they gave one another a nod, and played a duet. They walked away with a memory they won't forget. Neither will I. So glad I had my camera! (1686)

I never really knew my father growing up. When I moved to Austin for college in the 90s, my father was already living here. We developed a strong relationship while running the trails together. I don't know that we would be as close, if we didn't have that time together on the trails. (1634)

I love to bike with my mom! Joe E (3)

My kids + I have been running, loving this trail for some 24 years. Truly an ATX tradition! The Michahle family (31)

Found my best friend on the Trail. Also found myself! I love you Maj! - Anna F.(302)

Walking with my best friends, figuring out the world's problems and all our twenty-something drama! Wouldn't have made it through those times without this trail. It is a friend of mine... MJ (1272)

Running early in the morning while my 6 year old daughter followed me on her bike. Especially when it started to rain! She loved that! Most people were scrambling to their cars, her and I kept on going!~ Now, when it rains, I go run. In Honor of Mia Lauren Reyna. 01/10/1991-01/23/2010.(1721)

Austin (7.9%)

I remember I was new to Austin, and the very first time I stepped on Pedestrian Bridge, I felt like I was really a part of an amazing bustling metropolitan. To this day, I have a hard time running through Pedestrian Bridge without stopping to take catch my breath at the amazing view. (1635)

This trail is the crown jewel of Austin. I run here nearly every morning and every morning I am renewed by the beauty of it. May it last 1000 years and never get turned into condos. - NB
2/20/13 (1483)

Arrived (moved) to Austin one year ago today. First thing we did was take a walk on the Trail - 3 mile loop. We loved the experience & knew we were "home." Thank you for making the trail so wonderful. G. Darling 2-17-2013 (1157)

Began my love affair with Austin on (the) 1st trail. (1148)

This is my Austin lifeline. A place where all of the threads of a beautiful sunny ATX life intersect. It really all comes together, right here. Sacred open community. Angie
(706)

Trail is the jewel of the city. (1707)

Mental Health (7.4%)

Everyday since 1984 this is where I solve all my problems and find my happy place! Tanx,
Sara C (4)

This trail makes me cry but I keep coming back! Rocio (8)

The trail helps me start my new beginning. When I'm mad or having a bad day I use the trail and somehow things are better. Thank God for the trail and just walk it out! Mike – Tina (125)

Had many a "therapy session" on the trail with family, friends, + dogs! Great place to walk + talk! EGB (198)

The trail is a blessing for Austin. It brings together rich, poor, famous, everyday people of every age, and race. Every day I am out here, I leave behind my sorrows, regrets and anger, finding the joy in the everyday, seeing the people, animals and beauty of the trail itself. Thank you Austin! And all of you who work to keep it up and improve it! I truly love the trail! PIA (257)

This walk quiets my mind when it threatens to run into overdrive. It is remarkable how wonderfully at peace with everything you become simply listening to the sound of your tread on the ground. VID (695)

I overcame depression in 1996 due partly to walking then running this peace of heaven on earth

(1281)

When going through a very hard time in my life where I experienced a lot of losses, the trail was my saving grace. The energy of the people around the trail reminded me how good life really is and how fortunate I am. Whether it be meditating by the water along the way or going for a run, I was there everyday. And even today, I go to the trail no less than 3 days a week even though I don't live as close as I did at that time. (1713)

Rites of Passage (6.2%)

We kissed and I remembered what love feels like. (356)

Rainy misty day on the trail. 2000 . . . Heard the call of the monk paraquets. Whole tree full of green birds against grey sky, sitting in pairs cooing + grooming one another. It was a magical demonstration of caring + love to me. Just been divorced. Gave hope! (109)

I was born here. I toddled to the ducks here. I went on a second date here. I was proposed to here. This trail has been the scene for some of my life's most important + most private moments. It is the epicenter of Austin. Its life. Our life. - Jessica 2/21/2013 (117)

2/21/2012 - I moved here in March of 2012 and my roommate + best friend introduced me to this trail. One day when I was walking across the bridge "it" clicked! I realized I belonged. Most amazing feeling! Love it and the City. CMK (245)

My partner, now husband, and I were married in Iowa. While gay marriage isn't yet legal in Texas, we have a brick at Lou Neff Point instead. In Iowa you get a license. In Texas you get a cool brick at Lou Neff Point. We cherish it every time we run by. (1668)

I got the call that I'm having a boy while walking on the trail! JRB (336)

Caroline Cooper + Daniel Anthony get engaged! (344)

Quit my job. Ran Here. Felt like a bad ass. Jordan Aldridge (417)

Fave spot - Voodoo Bench / Opposom temple when the Wisteria blooms. Scatter my ashes on the sa-weet spot! (562)

We conceived our son along the trail - he's named after this area (804)

Sat at Lou Neff Point and told my boyfriend he was the first man I was ever in love with. He said "You just melt me Valerie" (870)

Nature (3.7%)

Sunshine on my shin, cool breeze from the water, birds chirping, sound of feet running, I love the quiet, loud sense of Lady Bird Lake trails. Austin Awesome! Rita A (114)

My daughter and I ran during the flood when parts of the trail were underwater. We saw snakes that we figured would be on but also found fish flopping around. I tried to throw them back onto the lake but unfortunately I throw like a girl and kept throwing the fish into the Cedars instead of the lake. I finally snagged a guy to help and I think the fish were saved despite the trauma. – Sharon (638)

Up by the Mopac Bridge, I saw a water moccasin fall from a tree branch across the shoulders of a bike rider. He was not happy! I felt very lucky it was not on me. Lucky Day. (172)

When the wind blew through the trees, it was heaven. (477)

I like this place. The best because these is duckies. (493) (child)

When I use the trail, I am always on the lookout for my favorite tree of the day. I love seeing how the trees change with the seasons and the different wildlife in the trees. I also like to ponder everything that the trees have "seen" during their lives at the trail. (1716)

Share a favorite memory of the Trail: River Trail Wildlife A slash of verdant water edged with luxuriant life, threaded by a single overused crushed granite path. Even with the human, pet and wheeled traffic crunching the trail, and splashing oars gulping the water, we count on the coots and a variety of ducks sharing the lake with three pairs of elegant white swans. Rafts of turtles floating or taking the sun on fallen trees; an occasional furry nutria munching cabomba.

A family of racoons in the hollow of the ancient cypress; cormorants perched atop, diving wings drying. White, blue and green herons fishing in the shallows; hawks hunting squirrels in the massive old pecans. And each - once upon a time -The seldom seen but never to be ignored trail rooster crowing for a full season near the paddling dock. A colony of hefty field mice harvesting some strangely soothing grass stems, ignoring feet rushing by. A dancing dark string lunging late at every passing shoe, revealed as a crossing juvenile water moccasin. Careful tail-grab-flick-toss and all are safely on our way again. A duo of intriguing black splats on cinder. Exhausted and unmoving shells no bigger than quarters, baby snapping turtles lost on a maiden trek. Scooped-rescued from trampling, life energy confirmed, and returned to the river for a renewed chance. Like the chance once given this river; returned a thousand-fold to the hands and hearts who know her. (1719)

Sacred (3.6%)

Running Town Lake Trail is my favorite form of prayer. JHS (296)

The trail is my sanctuary! (10)

Many meaningful conversations + God moments with some of my dearest friends! Rich!! MJ
(26)

I've met the Lord here on so many occasions, with friends, by myself. I've truly been blessed
by this trail. Thank you for such a sweet gift to be able to find peace in the city. – Meredith
(106)

Enriches my soul every step . . . L Bolesha (219)

I heart town lake trail! This trail brought inspiration and hope when I most needed it. Brought
me faith to never give up on any of my goals and if I ever fall to just get up and keep walking. It
also brought me closer to God. Marily (422)

My place of healing. The trees have always heard me and they have always lent me their
peace + wisdom. Ms. Kitty 2/2013 (665)

My time with God to listen for answers & to be grateful. It's my moving sanctuary. (1077)

I find the trail to be a divine inner city escape coupled with the feelings of community,
fellowship and connection to nature!

Austin History (1.2%)

People watching extra-ordinare Dennis Quaid - (side burns while filming Alamo); Mayors Will Wynn / Kirk Watson - many times! The late Ann Richards - many times! Michael Dell - once! On a Sunday AM - least it was him or atrin! + Last but not least Lady Bird Johnson with one of her daughters! - get veklemt just thinking about it! Thank you Austin + Lady Bird ! Patty Perez since '77. PS. 30 lbs of fat were left here too, Yes! (246)

In 1971, when I was asked to Chair the "Town Lake Trail Committee" I had no idea how it would change downtown Austin . . . And so many peoples lives . . . Thank you Mayor Butler Jon for asking me . . . And John all of the help of the committee members! Jo make it possible . . . been running walking or jogging 5 days a week since! Thank you Austin! Les Gage (254)

Inspiration (0.9%)

I work on my poems as I walk around this trail loving Austin . . . I had just moved back here from the Bay Area and decided to go for a walk . . . As I crossed the bridge I saw a rough looking fellow with what looked like his worldly possessions . . . As I passed him he looked at me and smiled . . . "Welcome home! he said. Amazing! Ok . . . a short one. (181)

The trail has provided me with motivation. It has made me a "runner" – Amy (912)

I always feel inspired running here! Thanks to my running buddy for getting me out here! May we run for years to come! – Bridler (1094)

Rain or shine. Happy or sad. Excited or tired. As often as is humanly possible, I run this trail. And I'm never more ME, never more INSPIRED than when I'm here. – IVY (55)

