

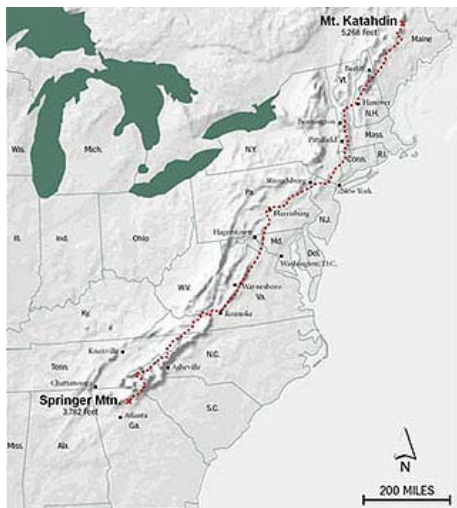
Diabetes: A Family Matter Appalachian Trail

Overview:

More than 85 years ago, Benton MacKaye imagined a footpath running along the eastern mountains, from New England to the southern Appalachians.



Volunteers built the Appalachian Trail and volunteers keep it prospering. About 30 groups of more than 6,000 volunteers do the daily work needed along the trail. Volunteers have diverse talents, interests, and experience. Some volunteers assist with program support and others spend time living in the back country to maintain and rehabilitate the trail. Still other volunteers monitor environmental concerns. If you are interested in volunteering or learning more about the opportunities then go to <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/> and obtain more information. A booklet entitled Step by Step: An Introduction to Hiking the Appalachian Trail



The Appalachian Trail is a national scenic trail. It is the longest national footpath with the latest figures showing its distance at 2,178.3 miles. Some say it would take about 5 million footsteps to walk the entire trail. The Appalachian Trail starts in northern Georgia and continues through South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and ends in Maine at Mt. Katahdin, Baxter Peak, and Baxter State Park. This trail offers unequalled ways for hikers to connect with nature and opportunities for varied hiking experiences for those with all kinds of physical abilities or experience.



Brief Description:

While some people may aspire to walk the entire Appalachian Trail, others might be content with just a day hike along the path. Many people in the Appalachian region live close enough to the Appalachian Trail that they can actually be able to hike on at least parts of the trail that are nearby. The Trail provides a unique place to increase your physical stamina and enjoy the natural scenery. If you have never considered walking on the trail, then this might be a great activity to consider. Guides are available online and information about the Regional Offices is provided to gain specific information you might need.

This activity has two main ideas. The first is to actually plan a hike along the Appalachian Trail. The second idea is to simulate a walk by using a map, counting steps, and pedometers. Both activities can be fun and increase your physical health.

Objectives:

1. Increase the physical activity of individuals, families and groups.
2. Enhance the fun that can be had through physical activity.
3. Gain an appreciation for the ways nature can enhance feelings of well-being.

Participants:

While very young children might not be able to go too far along the trail, most able-bodied persons can tolerate at least some parts of the trail. It is always good to go hiking with at least one other person, but a group of 3 to 5 might work well if you plan to hike a long ways. If you only plan a briefer hike that lasts a few hours along part of the trail, then the group can be as large as you like.

If you opt for the simulated activity, then very large groups can get involved. This can be a team activity where groups even challenge one another and compete.

Costs:

Costs for hiking the Trail are largely dependent on personal plans and needs. If you choose to purchase new hiking boots, backpack, tent, sleeping bag, and other equipment for a long trek then the cost could be quite high. However, costs for things can also be more moderate if you have less expensive taste.

If the plans are for a brief hike of just a few hours then the cost would be minimal. If you wear a comfortable pair of shoes you already have, carry a water bottle and a light snack in a day pack then it would be an inexpensive outing. If the hike is to end in a shared meal then those costs would need to be calculated.

Plans to have a competition between groups might only include the cost of a pedometer and good walking shoes.



Description of the Activity:

This activity can be nothing more than encouraging individuals to investigate the Appalachian Trail. If your community is located near a portion of the Trail then this is a logical activity to consider. Even though it may be obvious to some that this is a great opportunity for hiking and a way to explore the natural outdoors, many do not realize what rests just outside their door! Sometimes people think they have to go away for fun, vacation, and adventure. For many of those living in Appalachia, the greatest hiking place in the nation may be located close by.

As you consider an activity like the Appalachian Trail, you may want to do some work in teaching people how to set personal goals. Help them identify exactly what they want to achieve. Then be sure that the goals set are actually things that can be achieved. Decide what action steps are needed. Have participants put the goal in writing and share it with others. Identify ways to check in to see how people are doing. Once initial goals are met, then bigger ones can be planned.

Individuals could organize activities independently and use of the trail can become a usual activity for those anxious to have a regular way to increase physical activity. However, others interested in birds, flora, or just experiencing nature and the outdoors can all appreciate the wonders of hiking. Work with you local librarian to showcase some books about the trail. Encourage a local expert hiker or someone from a Regional Trail Office to come and talk to a 4H or scout troop or teen group. Find ways to encourage an intergenerational activity where mothers/daughters, fathers/sons, mothers/sons, or fathers/daughters plan a hike. This could even be something that is repeated regularly in each season. The ideas are endless for what can occur. Encourage others to think of ways the Trail and hiking can be used with families or groups.

Some groups might not actually be able to walk on the trail. For example, younger children, older persons with less stamina, or local people with disabilities may not be up to the rigor a hiking trail requires. However, a simulated experience can occur by getting a map of the entire trail or a portion of the trail. Participants can still walk indoors at a mall, on a local track, at a YMCA, in a school gymnasium, or some other place. Using pedometers can be a way to get people to aim for 10,000 steps a day. For some people that have been mostly sitting the goal might need to only be 100 steps a day as they sit in a chair and move their legs up and down in a walking motion. It is important that everyone can be involved. It is good when all can share in the reward of making an accomplishment. Small steps can be mighty big ones for some people.

Keeping daily records that are turned in weekly can enable groups to work together to meet the goal. Work with local people to plan a competition. Get the media involved. Make it fun and reward people with lavish praise and small prizes when they meet target goals. Talk with others and see how you might want to plan this activity. If it is a simulated experience, find ways to make parts of it become more real. Use photographs, walk outside whenever you can, listen to birds and enjoy nature! If you use an indoor route you may want to place markers along the way and make the path simulate the Trail in novel ways.



Activity Duration:

The length of time for the hike is based upon what the participants choose to do. Hikes could be as brief as a few hours on a trail, but could extend to a weekend, week, vacation, or summer activity. Those considering longer excursions along the trail need to prepare themselves physically for the trek.

The simulated hike on the Appalachian Trail may take several months to complete. This will depend upon how many participants there are, the frequency and distance that individuals walk, and ways miles are added to the total. Traveling the whole Appalachian Trail verses just a section of it will make a difference.

Ways to Extend the Activity:

This activity can be expanded by tying it to learning about the Appalachian Trail itself and all of the activities involved to build and maintain it. Many things pertaining to health living and physical activity can also be explored. Those interested in birding or flora or wildlife may find it enjoyable to have these ideas coupled with the hiking. Let you imagination be your guide. The important thing is to make it fun.

Get Additional Information:

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

799 Washington Street
P.O. Box 807
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0807
Phone: (304) 535-6331
Fax: (304) 535-2667

Appalachian Trail Store

www.atctrailstore.org

The Appalachian Trail has five regional offices focus on Trail management at the local level. They work closely with Trail clubs, federal, state and local agencies, and local communities. Staff members from these offices are frequently in the field.

ATC New England Regional Office

18 On the Common, Unit 7
P.O. Box 312
Lyme, NH 03768
Phone: 603.795.4935
Fax: 603.795.4936
E-mail: atc-nero@appalachiantrail.org

Area covered: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut



ATC's Kellogg Conservation Center

P.O. Box 264

South Egremont, MA 01258

Phone: 413-528-8002

Fax: 413-528-8003

E-mail: atc-nero@appalachiantrail.org

Area covered: Massachusetts, and Connecticut

ATC Mid-Atlantic Regional Office

4 East First Street

P.O. Box 625

Boiling Springs, PA 17007

Phone: 717.258.5771

Fax: 717.258.1442

E-mail: atc-mar0@appalachiantrail.org

Area covered: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia south through Shenandoah National Park (to Rockfish Gap/U.S. 250, near I-64)

The ATC Mid-Atlantic Regional Office also houses the Boiling Springs A.T. Information Center.

Southwest and Central Virginia Regional Office

110 Southpark Drive

Blacksburg, VA 24060

P.O. Box 174

Blacksburg, VA 24063

Phone: 540.953.3571

Fax: 540.552.4376

E-mail: atc-var0@appalachiantrail.org

Area covered: Virginia from Rockfish Gap/U.S. 250 south to the Virginia/Tennessee state line

ATC Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee Regional Office

160A Zillicoa Street

Asheville, NC 28801

Phone: 828.254.3708

Fax: 828.254.3754

E-mail: atc-gntro@appalachiantrail.org

Area covered: Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia

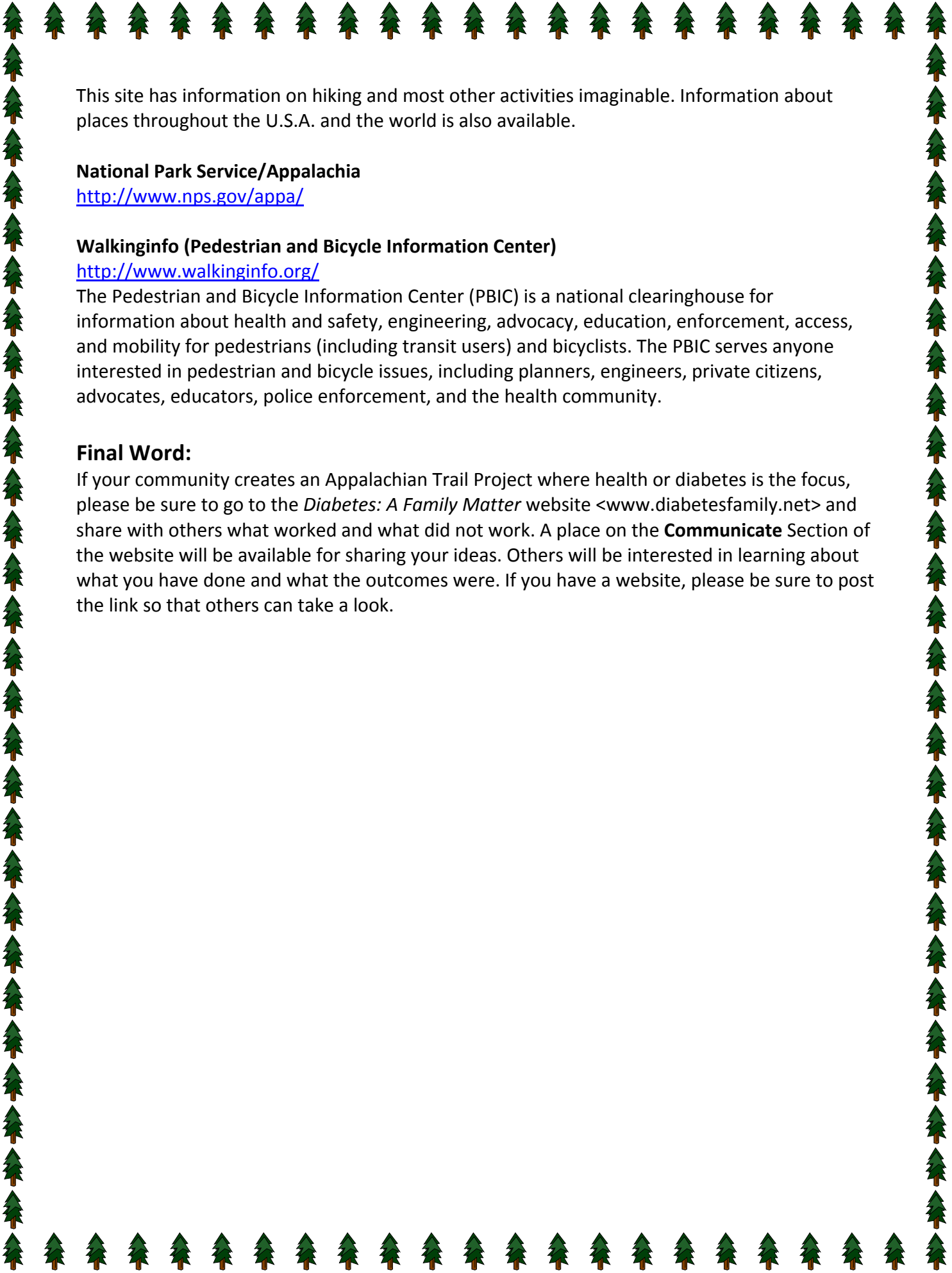
Weblinks to Explore:

American Hiking

<http://www.americanhiking.org>

Hiker Central

<http://www.hikercentral.com/>



This site has information on hiking and most other activities imaginable. Information about places throughout the U.S.A. and the world is also available.

National Park Service/Appalachia

<http://www.nps.gov/appa/>

Walkinginfo (Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center)

<http://www.walkinginfo.org/>

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) is a national clearinghouse for information about health and safety, engineering, advocacy, education, enforcement, access, and mobility for pedestrians (including transit users) and bicyclists. The PBIC serves anyone interested in pedestrian and bicycle issues, including planners, engineers, private citizens, advocates, educators, police enforcement, and the health community.

Final Word:

If your community creates an Appalachian Trail Project where health or diabetes is the focus, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and share with others what worked and what did not work. A place on the **Communicate** Section of the website will be available for sharing your ideas. Others will be interested in learning about what you have done and what the outcomes were. If you have a website, please be sure to post the link so that others can take a look.