



Ozark Trail Association
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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 October 21, 2009

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JOHN ROTH: OZARK TRAIL ASSOCIATION FOUNDER, LEADER AND FRIEND

The Ozark Trail Association was founded on constructive criticism. In 1997, John Roth called the U.S. Forest Service to complain about the poor condition of this trail in Missouri's Ozarks. Paul Nazarenko of the Forest Service suggested that Roth come and help to repair the trail.

*Our
 Mission*
 To develop
 maintain,
 preserve,
 promote and
 protect
 the rugged,
 natural beauty
 of the
 Ozark Trail



John Roth (1959-2009) on the Ozark Trail, mattock in hand: "Let's build some trail!"

In this often-told story, Nazarenko remembers that Roth showed up a day later, wearing loafers, looking like a "computer geek," but ready to work. This was the first indicator that Roth, a lifelong outdoorsman who died in an accident in July 2009, had both the energy and vision to make a difference in yet another endeavor in his life. Roth had worked in information technology for many years before starting his own successful consulting firm. During Roth's tenure, the company grew to over 30 employees and when it was sold in 1998, Roth shared the profits with them.

Based on his evaluation of the trail including downed trees, choking weeds and missing trail markers, Roth, along with John Donjoian, (founder of Gateway Off-Road Cyclists,) made a pitch to the Ozark Trail Council, a group of land stewards and private owners. The pair had uncovered a key element in the foundation for

creating a lasting trail, one which had benefited other successful trail systems in the U.S.: an enthusiastic volunteer organization. The Council agreed and Roth founded the Ozark Trail Association (OTA) in 2002 with the mission **to develop, maintain, preserve, promote and protect the rugged natural beauty of the Ozark Trail.**

Roth served as the organization's first president and began to craft a dream that the Ozark Trail would one day, when completed, extend from St. Louis to Arkansas and rival the Appalachian Trail in popularity. He dug in, beginning work with the U.S. Forest Service,

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the National Park Service, Missouri Department of Natural Resources and others on clean-up and extension of the trail. Roth also began building a base of volunteers, organizing work parties for trail maintenance and new construction. In three short years, Roth oversaw the addition of 28 new miles of trail in the Middle Fork section, closing a longstanding gap in southern Missouri's scenic Mark Twain National Forest.

On the way, Roth carved out a reputation for asking tough questions, speaking his mind on issues involving the trail and encouraging government agencies to speed their pace. At the same time, he shepherded OTA volunteers from a small handful to over two thousand strong. With the assistance of OTA members, he initiated "Mega Events" consisting of weekend trail-building with over one hundred volunteers, an evening barbeque and prize raffle, capped by a musical performance and bonfire. An OTA Adopt-A-Trail program was developed in 2006, staffed by volunteers to insure regular trail upkeep, while several volunteer recognition programs including the "Trail Builder" and "Red Jacket" awards encourage frequent participation in trail work events.

In 2008 the Ozark Trail was named a National Recreation Trail by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. For the same year, the Ozark Trail Association was honored by the U.S. Forest Service with a Volunteer Program Award for the 20-state northeastern region. The award recognized nearly 13,300 hours donated by over 500 individuals at more than two dozen work outings. Roth was posthumously awarded a 2008 Forest Service Volunteer Award for over 1000 hours he contributed to the trail that year, showing "an unprecedented level of initiative and energy," according to David Whittekiend, Mark Twain National Forest Supervisor. Until his death, Roth spent much time close to the trail on his farm near Steelville, Missouri.

In all, Roth oversaw the expansion of the Ozark Trail from an unmarked, overgrown and unused path to approximately 360 miles of well-maintained trail, stretching from Crawford to Howell Counties. Much of the trail is designated as multi-use for hiking, cycling and horseback riding, and it passes through some of the most beautiful areas of the Ozarks. Further, Roth created a crossroads for people to make connections, and inspired thousands of volunteers to join in his vision of a long-distance trail in Missouri.

Of Ozark Trail volunteers, Roth said in 2008, "Your collective work is amazing. Your achievements are stunning...thank you for making the OTA events the most rewarding experience I've had." Upon his death, an Ozark Trail Association member said of Roth: "Few people are blessed with the intelligence and other abilities John had. Fewer still are natural leaders. It is truly rare when such a talented individual applies their abilities toward a greater good." From a phone call to critique the condition of the Ozark Trail, Roth discovered a path to the heart of Missouri.

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Editor's Note: Further information about the Ozark Trail and OTA is available at www.ozarktrail.com, and high-resolution images of the OTA logo, trail maps and photos are available at www.ozarktrail.com/mediakit.php. Requests for additional artwork and photographs can be made to the Ozark Trail Association, 573-436-0540 or emailed to Abi Jackson, abi.jackson@ozarktrail.com.