

A PROPOSAL TO RESTORE PICNIC POINT AS AN URBAN NATURE PRESERVE FOR PEDESTRIANS



Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee

1234 Dartmouth Road
Madison, Wisconsin 53705-2214; (608) 238-0858
jwestman@wisc.edu

When we see land as a community to which we belong,
we may begin to use it with love and respect.

Aldo Leopold, 1966

Introduction

As the pace of life steadily intensifies, so does the yearning for a quiet place to commune with nature. Surrounded by buildings and traffic, city dwellers travel great distances to find the peace and quiet of natural sanctuaries. Fortunately, people who live on the University of Wisconsin campus and in the surrounding city have an easily accessible place in the center of Madison that could become such a peaceful sanctuary again — Picnic Point.

Prior to 1975, Picnic Point was a place where pedestrians of all ages could enjoy its flora, fauna, and scenic views. They also were reminded of the past by unobstructed Indian Mounds. When the entrance turnstile barrier was removed to comply with the American Disability Act and permit wheel chair access, the ambience of Picnic Point changed as the Main Path became a popular campus bicycle path. The Indian Mounds were covered with secondary growth that overtook much of the original flora in the area.

In recent years, a number of persons and several committees have been working to restore the campus natural areas, which extend from Muir Woods on the East to the Shorewood Hills Village limits on the West. Special attention has been devoted to restoring the original flora and repairing erosion. The research and educational potentials of the area are being developed. Most recently, the discovery of archeological artifacts from up to 12,000 years ago has stimulated renewed interest in human inhabitation of the area. Picnic Point could become a place to experience the natural world of our predecessors.

As a part of a master plan for the University of Wisconsin Campus, a plan for the campus natural areas was developed by Ken Saiki Design, Inc. The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee has the opportunity to plan the future of and, most importantly, to shape the ambience of Picnic Point — a unique nationally recognized treasure.

Vehicular Traffic on Picnic Point

There are two compelling reasons to limit the main Picnic Point Path to pedestrians. The first is to restore Picnic Point as an urban natural preserve that can be enjoyed by persons of all ages and physical abilities. The second is to insure the safety of those who use it. Unfortunately, use of the Main Picnic Point Path is now limited to bicycle riders and pedestrians who are willing and able to cope with them.

The Picnic Point Path originally was designed for pedestrians and was closed to bicycles. Although it still bears the name “Pedestrian Path” on Campus Natural Areas maps, it now is marked as a bicycle path on University Bicycle Route and the Lakeshore Nature Preserve maps.

The Picnic Point Path inadvertently became accessible to bicyclists when the turnstile was removed to permit wheel chair access in compliance with the

American Disabilities Act. Since then, the ambience of Picnic Point has changed. The Path no longer is a place where persons of all ages can leisurely enjoy nature. The shared use of the Path is hazardous for bicyclists and pedestrians, especially for children walking or riding, the physically disabled, and the elderly. As it now stands, Picnic Point in effect is closed to some pedestrians who cannot safely and leisurely enjoy one of the most treasured resources on campus.

Concern about safety issues when bicycles and pedestrians share pathways led the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) to prepare a *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*. The Guide recommends that two-way paths or trails used by bicycles and pedestrians be 10-foot wide with 2-foot shoulders on each side. This standard is required by statute in Chapter 29.11 of the American Disabilities Act. Because it does not meet these minimum standards, the Main Picnic Point Path's use by bicycles and pedestrians is hazardous for everyone. Some parts of the Path are too narrow to accommodate two pedestrians side-by-side and even a slowly moving bicycle.

The Willows Lake Shore Bicycle-Pedestrian Path is used for both transportation and recreation. In the early 1980s, the death of a young faculty member in a collision in a flat area where there is good visibility led to dividing the paved Willows Path in accordance with AASHTO shared-use standards into bicycle and pedestrian lanes. In 2004, this Path was further improved with clear demarcation and even separation of pedestrian and bicycle lanes.

In contrast, the narrow Picnic Point Path is not paved and has blind spots. Evasive action on slippery gravel surfaces can throw cyclists into bushes and trees. Riding a bicycle from the bright sun into the shade produces a temporary blind spot. The Path cannot be divided into bicycle and pedestrian lanes. Thus far, except for one, the reported accidents have not been serious, but it is only a matter of time until more are. Because bicycle traffic makes it unsafe for them, Picnic Point is regarded as "off limits" by Madison programs for children. The bicycle traffic also contributes to hazardous erosion ruts that require periodic grading repair.

Fortunately, bicyclists have access to a variety of shared-use paths that meet national safety standards emanating from the campus area, including a newly opened path through Shorewood Hills extending to Spring Harbor. This extension gives bicyclists a greater riding distance than the Picnic Point Path does. It no longer is necessary for bicyclists to rely on the Picnic Point Path for exercise or recreation. However, the routes from campus to these bicycle paths should be marked more clearly.

Background

Since 1992, members of the Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee have drawn the attention of entities responsible for Picnic Point and for bicycle and pedestrian safety to the loss of a sanctuary ambience on Picnic Point and to the hazards of mixing bicycles and pedestrians on the Main Path, where numerous minor accidents and close calls have occurred.

Campus Committee Actions

In 1992, the University of Wisconsin Department of Planning and Construction determined that the Picnic Point Pedestrian Path and the Eagle Heights bicycle path entrance to the Willows path were hazardous for both pedestrians and bicyclists. In 1994, the Department expressed its desire to discourage bicyclists from using the Picnic Point Path. Bicycle racks were installed near the entrance with a sign encouraging bicyclists to park their bikes and walk the Picnic Point Trails. Signs also were posted on the path encouraging cyclists to ride slowly and to expect pedestrians on the Path. The entrance of the Eagle Heights Path to Willows Drive was modified to reduce the speed of bicycles on that path. This was reinforced in 2009 with a stop sign. Side paths were closed to bicycles.

In 1995, the Arboretum Committee favored an outright ban of bicycles from the Picnic Point Path. Professor Don Waller, Chair of the Arboretum Committee, noted the measures that had been taken to discourage bicycle traffic on the Path and expressed skepticism that bicycles could be expected to adhere to the rules and safely mix with pedestrians on the Path. On November 9, 1995, Professor Waller stated that, "although they (the Arboretum Committee) had been firmly in favor of an outright ban from the start, they were thwarted in this path of action by a militant Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee who insisted on access for an experimental period instead. The bad news is that this period was decided to be four (4) years on the insistence of the Ped & Bike Committee. Thus, unless you can succeed in efforts to persuade the Committee to revisit the issue sooner, we will be unable to act." The recommendation of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee to conduct an experimental period of regulating bicycle traffic on the main path contravened and was adopted.

On May 28, 1998, Professor Buongiorno, Chair of the Bicycle Pedestrian Committee, reported that the Committee discussed the continued concern about safety on the Picnic Point Path but did not take action. The four-year trial period elapsed in 1999. There have been no reported evaluations of the success of the trial period of discouraging bicycles from using the Path other than that provided by the Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee. That trial period failed. Cyclists still speed and ride 2-3 abreast on the Path.

In 1999, the supervision of Picnic Point was taken over by a new authority, the Campus Natural Areas Committee. On September 29, 1999, the issue of bicycle-pedestrian safety and restoring the tranquil ambience of Picnic Point was presented by the Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee at a public hearing of the Committee with photographic documentation of the continuing hazards to bicyclists and pedestrians.

The Campus Natural Areas Committee recognized in 2001 that "the potential for pedestrian/bicycle conflicts reduces the appeal of natural areas for a majority of users. Therefore, bicycles are restricted to Lakeshore Path, Willow Drive, and Bill's Woods bike trail. On a trial basis, bicyclists are allowed to continue using the main trail on Picnic Point. Continued bicycle access to this area will be allowed only if bicyclists demonstrate a willingness to respect the

rights of pedestrians." The Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee has observed that the second trial period also has failed.

In March of 2005, the Bicycle Pedestrian Subcommittee recommended "the elimination of bicycles from the Picnic Point path until (and if) modifications are made to make joint use safe for all users. Implementation of the bicycle ban will include considerations such as bicycle parking, signage, and other related issues."

In April of 2005, the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin recognized that Picnic Point is essentially a pedestrian area. It said it would not actively oppose the removal of bicycles provided that sufficient bicycle parking is provided at the entrance to allow bicyclists to park and walk in.

On May 2, 2005, the Campus Natural Areas Committee voted 4 to 3 against banning bicycles from the main path on Picnic Point. Bicycles already are banned from other paths on the Point. A motion for continued bicycle access on the condition that "much more visible and intentional efforts be made to encourage responsible bicyclist behavior on Picnic Point" passed 6 to 1. The motion called for a new sign at the entrance, a speed limit of 5 mph for bicycles, and random ticketing and fines for violations in addition to a 18-24 month probationary period for continuing bicycle traffic. The Committee also disclosed plans for a new entrance to Picnic Point that should be designed to bar bicycles in case such a policy was adopted in the future.

If shared-pedestrian-bicycle-use best practice standards were codified in state statutes, the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee would have no choice. As it now stands, the Committee has a choice. If the Committee decides to follow the same nationally accepted guidelines that were used by the University for the renovated Lakeshore Path, such a policy would remove its implementation from the political realm of trying to accommodate the wishes of bicycle and pedestrian constituencies. The Committee could point out that it is following guidelines used by entities, such as the University of Wisconsin for the Lakeshore Path, the City of Madison, and the City of Middleton. Objections to applying national safety standards to the Main Picnic Point Path would have to be based on reasons to set aside the best practice guidelines that were applied to the Lakeshore Path.

Illustrative anecdotes and reports

The following anecdotes and reports indicate that it is not reasonable to expect bicyclists, many of whom are students annually new to campus, to exercise the high degree of caution required at peak usage times on a path that is not designed for shared pedestrian-bicycle usage.

A flavor of the traffic on Picnic Point can be gained from the following observations made on Sunday, October 12, 2008, from 2:00 PM to 2:30 PM:

- 72 pedestrians in groups of 2 to 8 and 14 bicycles were counted.
- 3 of the bicycles were speeding.
- 2 bicyclists rode side-by-side deeply engaged in conversation causing the observer to take evasive action.

The following traffic was on Sunday, July 25, 2010, from 2:30 & 2:50 PM:

- 61 pedestrians.
- 25 bicycles

- 2 dogs on leashes
- 22 people swimming at the beach from 9 boats

The following reports illustrate the hazards:

- letter to editor of Wisconsin State Journal describing cyclists as hazardous to pedestrians on the Picnic Point Path and the ineffectiveness of signs;
- jogger almost struck by bicycle at entrance to Path;
- jogger and pedestrian jump out of the way of 5 bicycles;
- jogger almost struck by two cyclists absorbed in conversation;
- parents pull young children out of way of slowly moving cyclist;
- two men on bicycles with dog on leash force jogger off the path;
- boy on a bike collides with jogger at path entrance;
- EMS responds to cyclist with head injury on Willows Path;
- EMS response to cyclist on Path who lost control and sustained head injuries;
- a group of children from the Madison Children's Museum on a nature tour had to march single file with adults shouting "keep to the right" in order to avoid bicycles; the Museum no longer uses Picnic Point.
- two young children were struck by bicycles during a Madison Metropolitan School District outing for children from the Allied Drive area. As a result, that group determined that the "it is not safe for young children to walk on trails with bikes speeding down on them. This is such a beautiful place in Madison, and we are sorry that we can no longer share it with the 90 plus children we serve from the Allied Drive area."
- EMS responds to 60-year-old woman who fell off bicycle en route to the beach and was found unconscious. Erosion of the path probably was a factor; and
- senior citizen: "I now avoid Picnic Point because of close calls with bicycles."

Recommendations

The Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee believes that the Picnic Point Path should be restored to its original purpose — a place where persons of all ages and physical abilities can enjoy natural flora, fauna, scenic views, and learning about its 12,000-year human history. We believe that the Path should be safe and enjoyable for all pedestrians, including children, families, bird watchers, nature lovers, joggers, picnickers, the elderly, and the physically handicapped. We recommend the following:

- The Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee needs to define the principles and best practices that would achieve a vision for the Campus Natural Areas that includes restoring an ambience in which the natural beauty and history of Picnic Point can be appreciated and enjoyed by everyone.
- Whether Picnic Point is a University or a public resource needs to be determined before any further planning for Picnic Point takes place.

This determination would place the interests of the citizens of the state and of our community in perspective.

- The Picnic Point Main Path should be closed to bicycles as are the other paths and the service road. This can be accomplished by signs. Because of the multiple routes of access to Picnic Point, bicycles cannot be kept out by barriers. Pedestrians on the Main Path have a vested interest in being effective monitors of violators.
- If vehicular traffic is permitted on the Main Picnic Point Path, the Path should be remodeled to meet standards for urban shared-pedestrian-bicycle-use paths as was done for the Lakeshore Path.
- Access routes from campus to the bicycle paths that meet safety standards in Madison and Dane County should be more clearly marked for University students and faculty.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

September 22, 1992 – First memorandum to Bicycle-Pedestrian Subcommittee calling attention to the hazards of allowing bicycles on Picnic Point Main Path.

October 29, 1992 – Safety hazards acknowledged by UW Department of Planning & Construction. 1st solution: slow down bicyclists.

Fall 1994 – Signs and bicycle rack installed at entrance.

August 25, 1995 – Arboretum and Bicycle-Pedestrian Committees acknowledged safety and adverse environmental impacts from bicycles on Picnic Point. 2nd solution: slow down bicyclists. They instituted a media campaign informing bicyclists of the signs encouraging use the entrance rack rather than the path, and urging them to ride slowly. This plan was reviewed in one year at which point the Chair of the Arboretum Committee agreed that the policy was a failure. However, at the request of the Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee the Arboretum Committee extended the trial to four years.

November 25, 1997 – The Arboretum and Bicycle-Pedestrian Committees were asked to evaluate the success of the present policy in 1998-1999.

September 25, 1998 – The Arboretum and Bicycle-Pedestrian Committees were asked to review the Picnic Point Path policy.

December 12, 1998 – The Arboretum and Bicycle-Pedestrian Committees were asked for documentation of their action on the Picnic Point Path policy.

July 5, 2001 – The Madison Metropolitan School District documented that two children were struck by bicycles ending their use of the Picnic Point Path.

November 26, 2001 – The Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee made a presentation to the Campus Natural Areas Committee requesting an up or down vote on closing the Picnic Point Path to bicycles.

2002 – 3rd Solution: slow down bicyclists. The Campus Natural Areas Committee adopted the following policy: “...bicycles will be restricted to Lakeshore Path, Willow Drive and Bill's Woods bike trail. On a trial basis bicyclists will also be allowed to continue using the main trail on Picnic Point and the trail circling the Class of 1918 Marsh. Continued bicycle access to these two areas will be allowed only if bicyclists demonstrate a willingness to respect the rights of pedestrians and to protect the environment by staying on the two trails.”

May 31, 2002, EMS responded to call about unconscious woman who fell off her bicycle on the Main Picnic Point Path.

April 13, 2005: Public hearing at which the heavily attended meeting was evenly divided over whether or not bicycles should be banned from Picnic Point. The Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin recognized that Picnic Point is essentially a pedestrian area. It will not actively oppose the removal of bicycles provided that sufficient bicycle parking is provided at the entrance to allow bicyclists to park and walk in.

May 2, 2005: The Campus Natural Areas Committee voted 4 to 3 against banning bicycles from the main path on Picnic Point. Bicycles already are banned from other paths and the service road on the Point. A motion for continued bicycle access on the condition that much more visible and intentional efforts be made to encourage responsible bicyclist behavior on Picnic Point passed 6 to 1.

4th Solution: slow down bicyclists. The motion called for a new sign at the entrance, a speed limit of 5 mph for bicycles, and random ticketing and fines for violations in addition to a 18-24 month probationary period for continuing bicycle traffic. The Committee also disclosed plans for a new entrance to Picnic Point that should be designed to bar bicycles in case such a policy was adopted later.

2006-2009 – Members of the Restore Picnic Point for Pedestrians Committee continued to observe frequent close calls between cyclists and pedestrians, such as on August 27, 2006, when 3 bikes took evasive action to avoid a man with two toddlers and caused a runner to jump out of the way at the intersection of the main paths and the service road.

2009 – On June 9, 2009, an initial public meeting was held on the UW-Madison campus to introduce preliminary design concepts for site improvements at the end of Picnic Point. The intent is to provide a concentrated space to accommodate larger groups than traditionally gather at the Point.

The Restore Picnic Point as an Urban Sanctuary for Pedestrians Committee once again calls for closing Picnic Point to bicycles because of the failure of four efforts to control dangerous bicycle traffic on a pathway that violates the standards established for mixed bicycle-pedestrian usage by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and by the American Disabilities Act.

Sunday Afternoon on Picnic Point August 2, 2009



Willows divided bicycle-pedestrian path



"Park bike" suggestion sign removed
(over 100 yards from entrance)



Sign over 30 feet from entrance



"Park bike" suggestion in sign



Pedestrians walking single file



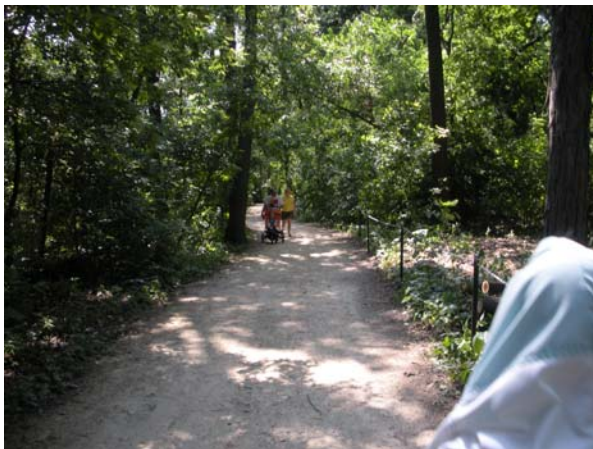
Pedestrians walking three abreast



Sign suggesting bikes ride slowly



Pedestrians getting out of the way



Family stroller keeping out of bikes' way



Pedestrians walking on widest path



"No bike" sign on service road



Woman jumping out of way (2007)