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Membership Acquisition for a Conservation Organization ...

Dear Friend,

I know two things about you. One is that you live in the Eastern half of the country. The other is that you enjoy being outdoors, in the most natural places you can find.

Because of those two things, I can guess that you harbor a certain dream, common to so many people who share your interests. And I'm writing to ask you to join with those who share your dream to protect it so that someday, it might come true.

The dream I believe you hold is to hike the Appalachian Trail from beginning to end.

Maybe you already have plans to do just that. Maybe you have already hiked parts of the Appalachian Trail and you plan to do the entire thing eventually, segment by segment.

Or maybe you've only done a single day hike on the Trail. Or haven't yet hiked its hallowed paths at all. You probably still harbor that dream ... to someday take a break from our madcap modern world of technology and material comfort and set off on your own two feet to challenge your spirit in the midst of the eastern mountains' natural and scenic treasures.

Whether you plan to hike the entire Trail from Georgia to Maine, or you just plan to enjoy some of the most glorious day hikes to be found anywhere on the globe, I'm hoping you'll join with others who love America's premier long distance footpath and the dream it represents.

I'm hoping you'll become a member of the ABC Organization.

When you do, you'll gain some important benefits. You'll receive discounts of 15-20% on the scores of A.T. maps, books, and other items we sell. Because our Appalachian Trail guidebooks and maps are the most definitive and useful, for many hikers, this one benefit makes membership indispensable. But you'll also get an ABC members-only patch, membership card, window or bumper decal, and a vote at our biennial meetings.

You'll also receive a year's subscription to the *ABC New*. This full-color magazine includes first-person accounts of life on the Trail, information about sections of the Trail and good hiking practices, and news of threats to the Trail.

You'll also gain an insider's knowledge of how the members of ABC are working to protect your dream forever.

And if you join ABC today, in response to this letter, you'll receive our 100 percent cotton Appalachian Trail diamond T-shirt depicted on the enclosed flyer.

I hope it's something you'll wear proudly, as a way of saying, "I share the dream."

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Jane Doe, of Anytown, Illinois recently spent some time on the A.T. with her father. Her thoughts about her four day hike won the 2003 Trail Days Writing Contest sponsored by the Smithville County Public Library in Smithville, Virginia.

“It wasn’t until the third day of walking through the Blue Ridge Mountains with a twenty-five-pound pack that it finally occurred to me why my father had brought me here. It wasn’t to view the hundred-year-old hardwood forests that stretched as far as I could see, it wasn’t to inhale the perfume of the rhododendron groves that formed tunnels over the Trail, it wasn’t to enjoy the music of the bubbling springs where we collected our drinking water. He had brought me to the Appalachian Trail to reinforced something he had been teaching me all my life: values of simplicity, perseverance, and faith.”

In the seventy or so years since the Trail was created, hiking it has become a treasured family tradition for so many people.

Sometimes, the dream becomes one of hoping your children or grandchildren will hike the Appalachian Trail with you. That’s one of the reasons why protecting it so important.

“As children, we were taught the values of simplicity. We spent family vacations camping, canoeing and driving across country ... As I adjusted my backpack, I was reminded once again how important it is to keep life simple, how too many commitments weigh us down, how we miss the simple pleasures of life when we let our schedules become too hectic and complicated.

“I joined my dad because I believed quiet time in the woods would give me time to meditate and reflect on life, but what I discovered was that I spent most of my mental energy telling myself to keep walking. It was not, as I had envisioned, an easy jaunt along a wood chip-covered path. At times, the Trail climbed over rocky stretches where I had to use both of my hands to keep my balance. Other times, it sloped hopelessly upward.”

Jane’s discovery that the trail is not “an easy jaunt” is one of the things that many of us love most about it. The Appalachian Trail winds along 2,174 miles from Georgia to Maine through some of the wildest and most mountainous areas of the eastern United States.

It cuts through the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina, and the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia. It goes through the Catskills in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York, and through the Green Mountains and White Mountains in Vermont and New Hampshire. When it ends in Baxter State Park in Maine, it is in the midst of one of the largest tracts of wild forest east of the Mississippi.

“Giving up would have been easy. In fact, I spent the first night in the tent planning my escape. We were due to cross a highway in the morning, and I would hitchhike back to Hot Springs and stay in a hotel while my dad finished the hike on his own. But I put on my boots, and continued, determined to finish what I’d started.”

I’ve heard so many similar stories of people who hiked one day on the Appalachian Trail and wanted to quit, and then they hiked a second day ... and never wanted to leave.

Whether it’s because we so treasure the chance to walk in solitude among the splendors of nature that can seem so far away from our everyday lives, or because we’re just determined to prove to ourselves that we have what it takes to rise to nature’s challenges and persevere, hiking on the Appalachian Trail can be addictive.

“I will never forget my A.T. experience – the many types of plant and animal life, the view from the top of the mountains, the serenity of mile after mile without a building or car in sight. But, the memory I treasure most is the sight of my dad, about fifty years ahead of me, leading the way over the Appalachian Trail, in the same way he’s guided me down the path of life for the last thirty-five years.”

It was a poorer world before the Appalachian Trail was laid out. And it will be a poorer world if the experience that meant so much to Julie, and the more than 000,000 people who hike all or part of the Trail each year, is ever destroyed.

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Because of the hard work of so many people, including tens of thousands of ABC Organization members and volunteers, all but about 00 miles of the Appalachian Trail is now on public land, protected as the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean that the Trail will stay the way it is forever. And it doesn't mean that the things we love most about the A.T., the wildness, the serenity, the quiet, are safe.

In fact, far from it.

That's why I'm writing to you today. I hope I've touched a dream you hold dear. Or maybe I've planted that dream inside you where it never was before.

Either way, if you care about the Appalachian Trail, I hope you'll become an ABC Organization member today. ABC is the primary organization with responsibility to protect the Appalachian Trail from a host of dangers that chip away at what we love most about it.

The biggest danger is keeping the wheels of development from grinding ever closer to the footpath. A large part of the Trail is inside federal or state owned parks such as Great Smoky Mountain National Park, the White Mountain National Forest, or Baxter State Park in Maine. In those places, the A.T. is relatively safe.

But hundreds of miles of the Trail pass through a narrow corridor only 1,000 feet wide!

This means development can reach to within 500 feet of the path where hikers are hoping for serenity and quiet. Working to protect the Trail from housing developments, commercial development, roads, cellphone towers, and so many other realities of modern life that would mar the sights and sounds of the Trail, is a constant battle.

For example, ABC is currently working to prevent the development of a motor sports resort within hearing – and smelling – distance of the Trail in Pennsylvania. We are working with local groups opposed to this resort that will feature high-powered automobiles and motorcycles, with all the noise and smoke that comes with them.

We aren't opposed to the creation of the resort. We just insist that there are other places to locate it that wouldn't be so close to the Appalachian Trail.

So we hope to halt this project until better alternatives can be found, and before it forever alters the experience of hiking the A.T.

And this is only one project. To protect the A.T., we have influenced hundreds of highway projects, electrical transmission line proposals, and residential and commercial developments. But we don't just say, "Not in my hiking backyard." Our strategy is to work with all interested parties in good faith to find acceptable alternatives to inappropriate development.

One long-term answer is to simply buy the land adjacent to the Trail corridor. We constantly watch for land sales near the Trail. Often, we can either purchase the land or find conservation-minded buyers willing to donate easements to protect the land from future development.

Through ABC's Land Trust our members have helped to purchase and protect more than 00,000 acres of sensitive land near the Trail.

Even if all the land near the trail were protected, there would still be dangers to the Trail.

We're fighting a constant battle to keep all-terrain vehicles off the trail, for example. We're working to educate riders about how much destruction they do to the footpath. And we're working with federal, state, and local law enforcement to prosecute those who violate the laws forbidding motorized vehicles.

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We also work to educate hikers about “leave no trace” hiking. With more than 000,000 hikers each year, the A.T. is in danger of being loved to death. So ABC “ridgerunners” traverse the Trail constantly, gently educating hikers so we can all use the Trail forever.

And we work with legislators in Washington and in the states to ensure that protection of the Appalachian Trail remains a national priority in times of shrinking budgets.

When you join the ABC Organization, you’ll be adding your resources, your voice, and most importantly, your dream to this effort.

You’ll join with more than 00,000 people equally committed to preserving the Trail. You’ll support 31 ABC-affiliated Appalachian Trail clubs, from Georgia to Maine. I hope you’ll consider joining one of these clubs. Their volunteers, with equipment, supplies, funding, and technical expertise from ABC, perform the loving task of maintaining all 2,174 miles of trail.

Each year, more than 4,000 people donate over 180,000 hours of work clearing trails, repairing and preventing erosion, maintaining shelters, bridges and water supplies, and keeping the Appalachian Trail in great shape for all. Your membership helps recruit, train, and assist these dedicated volunteers who maintain the Trail. Maybe you’ll even want to join them.

When you become a member of ABC with a membership donation of \$30 or more, you’ll support all these efforts to preserve the remarkable, and increasingly rare experience of wilderness, serenity, and peace that is the Appalachian Trail.

You’ll help protect your dream and help ensure that generations to come can enjoy it, too. Please join us today in protecting America’s premier footpath. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Signer
Executive Director

P.S. ABC is the primary source of information for those who want to find out more about the Appalachian Trail as well as those who already love it. In fact, many other hiking and outdoor-oriented organizations sell our books and maps. As a member of ABC, you will be right at the source. It’s a great feeling to walk the Trail as a member. It gives you a special pride to know you are protecting the dream of so many. Please join us as our newest member by returning the enclosed Membership Form today. Thanks!