

DIRT TRACKS



Trails Have Our Respect



T.H.O.R. IS 10 YEARS OLD!



“Where visions cease, the people perish.”

By Roxzanne Abbott

Trails Have Our Respect is ten years old this year. Thanks to the vision of one, many people have had the opportunity to know what it's like to ride among the trees.

Trails Have Our Respect, T.H.O.R., as we've come to know it, was the idea of one person. That one person was the late Tony Naikelis. According to some of the early members, Tony was a trail visionary; an experienced rider, who was ahead of his time. Because of his natural ability, he'd dream up grand ideas for building trail systems, but had to be reminded that he wasn't the only one that would be riding the trails. Little did he know how many people eventually would.

In the early days, before T.H.O.R., aside from state parks, only bootleg motor cross trails existed along with equestrian and the occasional hiking trails. Nothing in the way of proper trail building technique was used nor discussed. Many early mountain bike riders just rode what they could find. Nobody asked permission and no land managers were approached, so mountain bikers were seen as rebels and because the sport was so new, much hoopla was being made of the “damage” they were causing the trails.

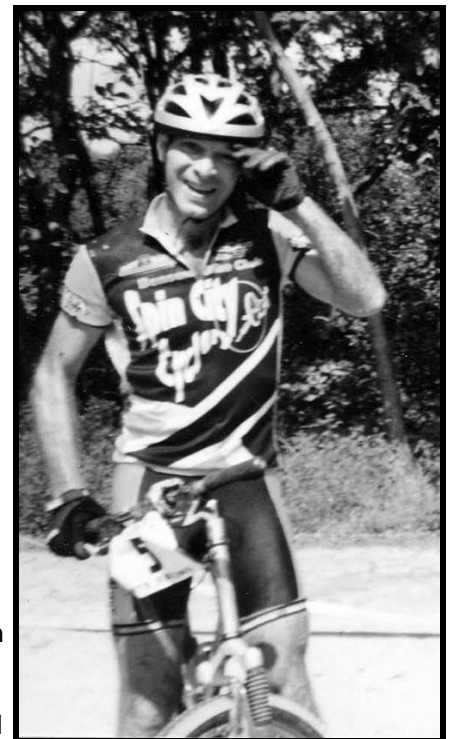
Today, we wouldn't think of creating a trail without forethought or permission. It seems preposterous but back then they had to start somewhere. IMBA, the International Mountain Bike Association, visited this area around 1997. Tony Naikelis went to one of the meetings which ignited a fire that spread easily. Fueled by the passion for the sport, mixed with the respect for the land, he had found his calling. A few of his close buddies, names we've heard many times, joined in his vision: Anne Savory, Steve Dickey, Mike Resetar, and later Kent McNeill, Gregg Shimonek, and Jesse Petersen.

But it took a while for the organization to get going. Tony got some start up money from a local sponsor which he carried around for a while. In order to get non-profit status they needed a name. Anne, Steve and Tony wracked their brains late one night after Bike

Specialties, the shop where Tony worked, had closed. Anne actually thought of the name. “There were no blogs. It was just us. We liked it and it stuck”, said Anne. But Tony was notorious for being big on ideas but lacked the focus and the organization. Enter Mike Resetar, or “Rusty” as he's known in the local bike scene. He was the man with the plan. So, together with Mike's organization, and Steve's work ethic Tony's idea of a trail care crew was taking shape.

Ten years ago, it seemed the same few did most of the work. But they never knew any different. Kent McNeill put ads in the Omaha World Herald asking for volunteers to help with Platte just to keep the trails from being closed down. Jesse “Jose” Petersen, started working on the trails there after seeing park rangers helping riders out with broken collar bones and wrists. He feared the worst for the future of riding at Platte so he took it upon himself to download an aerial view of the park and map out the loop we know today. It wasn't until after hearing about trails at Lewis and Clark that Jesse met Tony and learned about T.H.O.R. and sustainable trail design. Later Jesse became the area representative for IMBA. The T.H.O.R. family was growing.

In October of 1997 this area was hit with an early winter ice storm. Many of the trails were destroyed



Tony Naikelis

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Swanson Park Update

By Swanson Trail Leader

Trail maintenance is being well received by numerous cyclists, walkers and distance runners taking advantage of a clear trail this summer. The parking lot is always full of new faces hitting the trail. The recent Metro challenge was the first time race use of the new Tetanus Hill bypass trail. The groove is being worn in but extreme dry weather has stopped all dirt work to bench in the last two turns leading into the old trail system. Watch out those last two turns are off camber and dusty.

Bellevue parks department has dropped off a small load of



gravel for some hardening efforts of the beginning of Tetanus Ridge climb from the road crossing. Erosion has begun there and will just get worse over the next couple of years so time to curb the future problem. All effort will be made to retain the same technical climb up to the top.

Look for new trail markers this summer and a few other ideas possibly in place for the State Championship.

Dust flew as Dave handled one of the weed-whackers at Swanson. The woods was filled with the buzz of a swarm of weed whackers on one of our Trail Work Days.

Tom Winfield Photo

New T.H.O.R. Web Site

By Webmaster Tom Winfield

THOR got a new web site for it's birthday. Now users can get more detailed information about the trails and the surrounding area. Users will be able to download trail maps and directions and find out who are their area trail crew members. Photos of the trails and the trail care crew hard at work are on the PHOTO gallery. Soon to come is the THOR blog!

Keep checking back for more updates at:

www.trailshaveourrespect.org

Trail Conditions		
Branched Oak SRA	Good	
Jewel Park	Good	
Lake Manawa SP	Great shape. There are a couple short reroutes.	6/29/07
Lewis & Clark Mon	Good	
Platte River SP	Good	
Swanson Park	Primo condition. Grass & branches have been clipped. Watch the Tetanus Hill reroute.	6/28/07
Tranquility Park	Good	
Wilderness Park	Good	



Trail Work at Platte River State Park—December 18, 2001
Photo compliments of Jesse Petersen

T.H.O.R. is 10 years old!

We couldn't have done it without our volunteers! So, to celebrate, we're offering half-priced memberships—that's \$10. Sign up before September 30th and get a FREE t-shirt.

Pick up a membership application at any Psychowpath race or on our web site:

www.TrailsHaveOurRespect.org

**Our gift
to you**

T.H.O.R. is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to developing and maintaining sustainable off-road recreational trails in Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa, through partnerships with local land managers and trail users, by providing expertise, manpower and resources.

The T.H.O.R. Story

(Continued from page 1)

and this is when T.H.O.R. really got its momentum. Word got out about this trail group and as riders experienced the trails that were being built and maintained, more and more people got involved. "A six hour day wasn't unusual back then" said Gregg "Shim" Shimonek. "Most people don't realize the huge difference between Lewis and Clark (L&C) circa 1995 versus 2007. There's a huge difference. I was in awe when I got to ride something new that totally blew my mind."

Tony really had a vision for what he wanted to see. And although strategy was rarely discussed, what was being done in those first few years, the things that were really important in helping T.H.O.R. grow, a Harvard MBA couldn't have written a better road map for success: education, sustainable trail design and growing the sport of mountain biking and the time volunteer riders put forth. It was the vision of one that became a reality, due to the help of many which Tony had brought together.

Five years after the birth of T.H.O.R., at the age of 35, Tony tragically died of a fatal heart attack while swimming. It was a shock and the local bike community was rocked with sadness. His life and legacy was celebrated. He would have been forty this year. But Tony would not have wanted his fellow riders resting on their laurels. He would have wanted them to rub some dirt in their wounds and get on with it. And so, we have. In the past five years since Tony's death, thanks in large part to Mike Resetar for picking up where Tony left off, and many more countless volunteers, new trails have been built and older trails expanded or improved. By-laws are in place, funds have been raised, trail head kiosks built, trail markers made. There is now a board, a president, a website, and a membership list that keeps growing and growing every year.

Tony would be proud of us. T.H.O.R. was his vision and although most people had to wait ten years to realize the vision, he and a few others saw it all along.

Happy Birthday, T.H.O.R. Here's to ten more.

This story couldn't have been possible without the memory of Gregg Shimonek, Anne Savory, Mike Resetar and Jesse Petersen. Some of the passages are direct and paraphrased quotes from emails they sent to me.

T.H.O.R. TRAILS

BRANCHED OAK SRA
JEWEL PARK
LAKE MANAWA STATE PARK
LEWIS AND CLARK MONUMENT
PLATTE RIVER STATE PARK
SWANSON PARK
TRANQUILITY PARK
WILDERNESS PARK



Jesse Remembers A Renaissance Man

By Jesse Petersen—Platte River Trail Leader

"I didn't have much to do with T.H.O.R. in the early days. I moved from Lincoln to Murdock in 1997 and with the help of many volunteers transformed Platte from the existing "out-and-back" trail to the non-intersecting, technical race-loop we ride today. To me, bikes are only as cool as the places you ride them and the people you ride with. In 1999 I met Tony Naikelis. Tony was the thread that stitched Omaha and Lincoln riders together as a unified group. I would say that the years I knew Tony we experienced a "renaissance" of trail creation in Nebraska and Iowa. In the last 10 years we may not remember the names of those standing atop race podiums, but we should never forget the few who built (and still maintain) the local singletrack that has enabled our sport and family to grow. Happy Birthday T.H.O.R.!"

Photos of Tony Naikelis compliments of Jesse Petersen



The Trail Care Crew worked hard to improve the Lake Manawa trail ride-ability after the May storms.

Anne Savory Photo

Tranquility Park Mountain Bike Trail – The Beginning

By Dale Rabideau

In the Fall of 2003, a few guys were riding some wildcat trails around Standing Bear Lake when we were stopped by Omaha Parks and Army Corps of Engineers officials. They said bikes were vehicles and were only allowed on the paved path, no dirt! They mentioned a possible \$500 fine and confiscation of our bikes if we continued riding the dirt. We told them that we had trail plans and a bike club willing to build and maintain trails there. Since there's a big concern with soil erosion around the lake, the Parks official suggested talking to the Parks administrator about establishing a mountain bike trail down the road at Tranquility Park.

Dale Rabideau spent several days walking around Tranquility, making sketches, and envisioning a trail system. After deciding Tranquility had the environment necessary to contain a successful mountain bike trail, Dale wrote a proposal, and together with Mike Resetar met with Dale Mathre and Dennis Bryers from Omaha Parks in January, 2004. Dale and Dennis were positive towards the idea, especially when Mike pulled out several years' worth of THOR volunteer hours and locations. Mathre mentioned how important it was to have an organization behind the proposal and not just one or two individuals. They asked us to develop a plan and return.

Working from topographical maps, notes, and IMBA online trail building guides, a master plan was developed. At the first onsite inspection, only a small section of the master plan was considered for two reasons: This was the City's first interaction with both THOR and local mountain bikers. In other words, T.H.O.R. needed to prove it could deliver, and local mountain bikers needed to prove they would use the trail in a respectful and lawful manner. From experience at other parks, the City hinted at concerns about users partying, trashing the environment, and other illegal activity.

Finally, on May 21, 2004, approval was received to build the trail! With the approval process taking longer than expected, the trail would have to be constructed during the height of the growing season. Over a four week period, the initial 1.5 miles of trail was literally cut through 2-3 foot high grass and dead, evergreen undergrowth. The second Monday of July, in 90 degree temperatures, two people showed up to ride a raw trail on the official opening! During the next four months, grass trimming, tread re-shaping, and rerouting took place. By the end of the year, 202 volunteer hours were invested from conception through approval (91), building (69), and maintenance (42) on the 1.5 miles of trail.



Jeff Avey (Trail leader at Branched Oak) and Corey Godfrey discussing some trail work at Platte River SP.

Tom Winfield Photo

Dirt Tracks is published by *Trails Have Our Respect (T.H.O.R.)*. Our web site is TrailsHaveOurRespect.org. Membership application is available on the web site.



RESPECT



SPEAK



BUILD



RESPECT



RIDE

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