

## On these trails, the journey is the goal

**Whether it's on the beach or on Gaston's greenway, getting out and walking is a treasure.**

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By Joe DePriest

The first day back from vacation is a mad scramble.

Getting to the office early to dig through paperwork and e-mails doesn't take the edge off things: You're way behind - and will be for days.

On top of that, there's the issue of those extra pounds accumulated during the time off.

Not a lot, but enough to make you feel guilty.

I wish I hadn't ordered those hamburgers and fries at fast food joints headed to and from Myrtle Beach with my wife. I could have gotten chicken or a salad. And why did I ask for the largest pile of fries they had?

Then at other times there were brownies and chocolate pie and ice cream - OK stuff to eat when you're on vacation, right?

The guilt hangs heavy. But it's lightened a little by knowing I did a few things right.

Like eating lots of vegetables beside French fries. And walking.

A recent story in The Observer pointed out that government efforts to get Americans to eat more vegetables have been a big disappointment.

People know veggies are good for them. But for many life is too busy and it's easier to go another route.

"Before we want health, we want taste, we want convenience and we want low cost," the story quoted an expert.

### Early morning crowds

The place my wife and I picked for our lunch stop en route to the beach was conveniently located just off the interstate. We knew from experience the sandwiches would be tasty and the service snappy. Downing our food, we resumed our journey full and happy



Walkers enjoy the cool autumn air while walking on the Gastonia Greenway on Tuesday. The Carolina Thread Trail Governing Board recently approved trail grant applications for 13 community projects like this. PHOTOS BY ROBERT LAHSER

At Myrtle Beach, we tried to burn off some of those extra calories on the new oceanfront boardwalk. It's downtown between the Second Avenue North and 14th Avenue North piers.



Sarah Sawdy and her two children, Kendall, 3, left, and Elise, 10 months, take a morning walk on the Gastonia Greenway on Tuesday.

According to the Myrtle Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, the 1.2-mile boardwalk cost \$7 million and has about 800,000 feet of lumber.

We walked it in the mornings and afternoons; on windy and calm days; when the heat was intense and soft as sea spray.

And we enjoyed every step. Ocean-watching and people-watching never failed to please. The Myrtle Beach folks invested wisely when they built this linear park between the ocean and stores and restaurants.

Back in Gastonia, we continued our daily workouts at a local asset: the greenway along Catawba Creek.

In the past, we've usually gone there in the late afternoons. This time we joined the early morning crowds.

We arrived around 8:30 a.m. and had trouble finding a parking space. A more or less constant flow of walkers, joggers and bike riders passed by us. But it was still peaceful there in the morning coolness, surrounded by the sound of crickets and birds.

For sheer tranquility, it was almost like being back on the beach boardwalk.

### **Closer connections**

I've sung the praises of Gastonia's greenway for years. Hopefully, I'll soon be singing about others in the region.

When I got back from vacation, I learned the Carolina Thread Trail Governing Board had approved trail grant applications for 13 community projects totaling \$563,795. The projects are along the Thread Trail, a 15-county network of trails and conservation areas.

The grants will help communities with trail corridor design, land acquisition and construction. Recipients include Belmont, Cramerton, Bessemer City, Lincolnton, Shelby and the city of Kings Mountain.

Gradually, the region's trail network is growing, which is a good thing in my book. Now I know you can walk for exercise anywhere. Often, when I'm pressed for time, I'll stop at a school track for a quick mile or two.

But greenways are the best. These trails offer a closer connection with nature and community. They're a convenient, no-cost experience that can improve your health and boost the spirit. And maybe even convince you to go home and eat more vegetables.

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/10/03/1726738/on-these-trails-the-journey-is.html#ixzz11lIFKCcf>