

After 500 miles, retired city planner still hasn't reached the end of the trail

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By Alicia Banks

KINGS MOUNTAIN — If you've heard the line "And I'm gonna walk 500 miles..." by The Proclaimers, you might think Gene White is the long-lost band member.

White has walked the Kings Mountain Gateway Trail 265 times since Jan. 1, logging nearly 596 miles. With cool shade and the sun playing hide-and-go-seek with the treetops, White finds his peace here.

"This is almost therapeutic," White said. "I carry a stick with me and if it could talk, it would say, 'When you gonna quit all this foolishness?'"

White will have more trail to walk in the future. The Carolina Thread Trail Governing Board approved a trail grant of \$563,795 to 13 community projects. The Kings Mountain Gateway Trail will receive \$150,000. The money will begin Phase 3 of the trail, which will add an additional 3 miles of trail going toward I-85 South. The city of Kings Mountain Trail will receive \$16,600 and the projected Shelby Trail will receive \$15,000.

"I'm an advocate for open space and for protection of our environment," said Shirley Brutko, president of Kings Mountain Gateway Trails, Inc. "Kings Mountain needed a strong economic development."

Trail stories

A retired planning director of Kings Mountain, White can rattle off points of interest along the trail as if he were describing the clothes on his back.

Every boulder, tree, and sound has a story.

A part of the trail is loose gravel.

"This used to be a railroad," White said. "Call it rails to trails, and it's a movement all over this country."

Wearing a Kings Mountain Gateway Trail hat and shirt, White barely broke a sweat as he walked up and down the 2 ¼-mile trail.

He talked about Moss Lake as he peeked through the trees to see a corner view. The lake used to be a mine. He talked about the flat levels of the hill that cars and people would travel on to reach the hill's peak.

He pointed out the areas where people can find the best blackberries and red plums during the summer months. He teased the grasshoppers on the pavement by placing his stick near them. He even pointed at the smallest areas to set up a tent for camping.

"I'm kind of possessive of this place," White said as he laughed lightly.

Walking as a way of life

White has walked the trail in the temperatures above 95 degrees and lower than 23 degrees.

White has been living in North Carolina since 1965. He has always been a walker, and he walks the trail every morning.

"Every time I come here, I see something different," White said. "Even if it's a new vine."

When asked what his favorite part about the trail was, he said to look and listen. The nature around him was talking.

"You see that butterfly," White said as he pointed his walking stick. "That's my buddy right there."

White hasn't made any plans to stop walking. He walks to stay healthy and has lost 12 pounds this year. He finds the beauty of the trail in the shade and the breeze.

"When you get old and aged and don't have a life, this is what you can do," he said.

<http://www.shelbystar.com/news/kings-50280-trail-miles.html>