

Meet Kate Dixon - June 2010

Danny Bernstein

When was the last time you walked the MST? In the mountains, we may almost take it for granted. But have you ever walked the MST east of Stone Mountain State Park?



Kate Dixon, Executive Director of Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (FMST) and CMC member, spends a lot of time working on how to build the trail so we'll really be able to hike from Clingmans Dome to the Outer Banks.

Recently, MST volunteers worked on a two-mile section in Burlington, in Alamance County between Greensboro and Durham.

"I've put most of my own efforts where there isn't a trail. I know the needs and I'm excited about the possibilities of the MST. Five hundred miles of the trail are built. Then hikers use back roads to make connections, so every time we open a new trail like this it's a wonderful change in the trail and really enjoyable for the hikers," says Kate.

How did you get to FMST?

I was born in New Jersey. That's where I got the love of the land. My father's family lived in a very rural area around Princeton, New Jersey. My mother's family came around Lancaster, Pennsylvania with some Mennonite heritage.

As a child, I moved around a lot. I graduated from Hamilton College in upstate New York with a degree in philosophy. The book *Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity* by Frances Moore Lappe, first published in 1981, about the problems of large-scale agriculture on local economies, really moved me.

I first worked for an organization in Washington that focused on development policy and relations with developing countries. They worked on Central American policy and then moved on to Asian policies. Our small group of people were involved with the Aquino, Kim Dae Jung affair and effectively saved Kim Dae Jung's life when he went back to Korea. I learned to be creative with limited resources.

Then I got into reforestation and went back to graduate school in watershed management at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

I met my husband, Dan, in Washington and we've been married 22 years (I'm 50 years old). We came to Raleigh because Dan got a job here and I started with [Triangle Land Conservancy](#). At Triangle Land Conservancy, I was the first full-time staff person. When I left, it had 12 people, a large organization in my context. I want to build an organization, I like the start up. I became aware of the MST a long time ago because the Neuse River (trail east of Raleigh) was a priority for Triangle Land Conservancy.

Then I moved to [Land for Tomorrow](#), a coalition of conservation organizations which lobbies to protect land in North Carolina. I was looking for people who would get involved in Conservation. When I was with Land For Tomorrow, FMST was one of the members and I met Jeff Brewer, then president of FMST. Jeff is a natural leader and I really respect him. He's a delight to work with. I started with FMST in 2008.

I like to hike, run, garden, read and I'm interested in native plants. My job and my life can be one. And, very important, I like the people I work with.

What is the job like?

It's diverse. I'm best at building small organizations. I work with all those people who put in so much time with so little money. When I came in, FMST hadn't reached out to land trusts or local government. This job is the perfect mesh of everything I do. I think that the MST is a really exciting project.

Is it important for you to hike the trail?

It's really important for me and for board members to see the trail. The board should be knowledgeable about the area around them. I see myself section hiking the MST. As this point, 16 people have finished the trail - this includes Scot Ward who has done it three times. But some of our supporters may never hike the trail or maintain it. They're interested in the vision.

The vision is to be able to walk on trails from the Smoky Mountains to the coast. My goal is that camping should be available all the way. The Blue Ridge Parkway is now interested in providing camping and we can improve the situation. If we close the gap in the Smokies and a few miles trail east of Boone, you'll be able to walk 330 miles from Clingman's Dome to Stone Mountain State Park. The number of hikers will escalate so the camping situation needs to be resolved.

Who worked out the route of the MST?

The state of North Carolina worked out the trail route from trails already on hand on public land. Allen de Hart designed the route on the road. (Technically the MST on the road is officially not part of the state park - Ed.) Recently, [North Carolina State Park System](#) bought \$8.5 million of land for the trail. That land will provide about 10 miles of trail and some camp sites. It's also important because these tracts are in key locations and have really motivated local governments in those areas to increase their work on the trail.

What's happening with the effort to get a license plate?

Last year, we worked hard but unsuccessfully to get a specialty license plate. [Sen. Joe Sam Queen](#) of Haywood County introduced a bill that was approved in the

State Senate but never came up for a House vote. We're gearing up again this year to get an MST plate passed and encourage CMC members to call their NC House representatives. An MST license plate will increase visibility of the trail throughout the state and bring in incremental dollars. Five hundred miles of the MST are still on the road, and we need to acquire land, map, and construct trail in those areas.

We could use \$200,000 for a bridge for Falls Lake in Durham (shown on the right) and a possible land purchase close to Stone Mountain State Park. An MST license plate will increase visibility of



the trail throughout the state and bring in incremental dollars.

What can CMC do?

I want to tell people how excited I am about the vision and beauty of the state. I'm intrigued about places beyond the mountains. The MST became part of the North Carolina State Park system in 2000, one of the most important milestones in the life of the trail.

CMC can educate people and raise awareness about the trail. We're getting more requests from people who want to hike the trail. The MST Board just gave every CMC member a one-year gift membership in FSMT. We hope CMC members will get involved and renew their membership next year.