

Welcome to the Keokuk Rifles Trail

We are pleased that you chose to travel the Keokuk Rifles Trail. It follows as near as practical, the rail route that 70 members of the Keokuk Home Guard Unit traveled in their journey to relieve the Union Forces about to be attacked by a superior force of pro Confederate Combatants at Athens, MO. The Northern-most battle of the American Civil War was joined the morning of August 5, 1861. The enclosed packet of information will help you understand why this happened.

The route follows county secondary roads. Speeds of 35 mph are recommended. Have a great experience.

Dalton Humes, Eagle Scout

Miles Brewer, Eagle Advisor

The Keokuk Rifle Trail was first discussed with Mr. Brandenburger, the Keokuk Tourism Director, early this year, and then with the Scout Council, Troop 43, to see if they could use the Trail for a Community Enhancement Eagle Scout project.

Dalton Humes, an Eagle Scout candidate at Troop 43, and a student at Christian Academy on Hilton Rd. decided to do the Trail project. Miles Brewer is Dalton's advisor, and represented him at the Bd. of Supervisors meeting

Troop 43 meets every Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the Trinity United Methodist Church.

The Keokuk Rifles Trail

The second year of the Keokuk reenactment of the Battle of Pea Ridge, the Rock Island Railroad abandoned their trackage between Keokuk and Farmington. Many trails were being created on abandoned railroad right-of-ways at that time. A trail from the Field of Dreams and Dubuque, The Katy Trail in central Missouri are two samples. A group of people in Keokuk worked to create a trail to Croton, IA across the Des Moines River from the Battle of Athens, Mo., the northernmost battle of the American Civil War. This trail plan was never carried out. Recently, someone suggested that we could create this trail by marking public roads near the old railroad route. A map was drawn and taken to the local B.S.A. Scout Council, suggesting this trail as a project for an Eagle Scout candidate. We now have such a candidate.

Why should we create the Keokuk Rifles Trail? Enhancing tourism opportunities is always an economic plus. Making known the importance of the Battle of Athens to keeping Missouri in the union is of historical importance. The fact that a group of Home Guard irregulars from Keokuk played a key role in achieving a Union win at the Battle of Athens gives us justification to create this trail.

Some background on the battle itself: During the summer of 1861, northeast Missouri residents were choosing positions, pro Union vs. anti Union. Men were appointed to raise and train home Guard units. The pro Union leader was David Moore, a local storekeeper. For the Confederate side, the leader was Martin Green, the brother of a pro south Senator from Missouri, James Green. Both men immediately began recruiting. By August, Green was training about one-thousand men between Edina and Palmyra. Col. Moore had about five hundred.

No one knows for sure how these forces met at Athens, but this may be a reason. About three weeks before the August 5 battle, several hundred rifles with ammunition were delivered to the pro Union forces. It may be that the southerners hoped to capture these arms. When word was received on August 4, 1861, that a pro south force of about 1000 men with three cannons (one, a hollow log) was 7 miles south of Athens, the Union commander with 500 men decided to send for help. A handcar with one man headed for Keokuk. He arrived about 6:00 p.m. By midnight, Col. Belknap and 70 plus members of the Keokuk Home Guard, the Rangers and Rifles were in Croton. They had loaded their horses and gear in box cars and traveled in relief of the outnumbered Missouri pro Union forces.

The battle was joined at first light. The opening salvo by the southern cannons resulted in the disintegration of their log cannon in one blast! Some of the Keokuk Rifles crossed the river and poured accurate fire into the right flank of the enemy. After about thirty minutes, the northern forces ordered a bayonet charge and the South's line broke. They were chased about 5 miles before the Northern forces called a halt and returned to their campsite.

The Keokuk Rifles lost 3 men. The battle lasted about one hour. After a rest period, the Rifles loaded their gear and returned to Keokuk.

Maps and written guides will be available to all who travel the Keokuk Rifles Trail to inform them of our rich history.

Guest Column for Tuesday's DGC
Keokuk Rifles Trail
Miles Brewer

In the mid-80's the idea of creating hiking trails on abandoned railroad rights-of-way was quite popular. I was working with a conservation group in Burlington whose purpose was to find or create projects that would be beneficial to rural communities. Keokuk Tourism people had just began the Battle of Pea Ridge Reenactment project; so for the first time I visited the Battle of Athens site in Missouri (across the Des Moines River from Croton, IA). A search found information summarized by local historians from area newspapers of the time. I also learned for the first time of the involvement of the Keokuk Home Guard units in this August 5, 1861 action. I summarized some ideas for a trail from Keokuk by way of the abandoned Rock Island Rail Line which carried the Keokuk Rifles to the Battle site at Croton, IA which was across the Des Moines River from Athens, MO.

Very soon after my report to the Burlington group, I learned that Lee County Conservation leadership and the Lee County Board of Supervisors were pursuing the same goal. As the Trail plans progressed, Mr. Burchette, the Conservation Director, personally visited with all the adjacent land owners. It was clear that the majority were opposed to the Keokuk Rifles Trail.

I have a copy of a letter dated Feb. 11, 1993 from Mr. Jerry Kearns, a member of the County Supervisors team at that time, in which he explained that the Supervisors had decided not to go the imminent domain route. The result being the project was never carried out. At the last Trail meeting that I attended, someone mentioned that because of the historical and tourist importance of this project, we should mark the route on public roads as near the Railroad right-of-way as possible. Soon after, Mr. Burchette resigned his conservation leadership responsibilities and nothing was ever done to complete the trail...

Until 2017...Early in the year I was going through some of my "stuff" and found a folder of material about the 80's/90's attempt to establish the Keokuk-to-Croton Trail, & recalled the idea of making the trail using public roads. The Boy Scouts of America and their Eagle award requires a community improvement project. After Mr. Brandenberger of our Tourism Bureau gave a "let's try the Scout's looking for an Eagle project route" and see what happens, the Scout Council and the leadership of the local Troop 43 decided to make the project known to their Eagle prospects. In about 2 months, they had located a young man who was interested. I was appointed his advisor, and we've worked together step by step, getting the process well underway.

The purpose of this publication is to introduce everyone to the person who is going to make the Keokuk Rifles Trail happen. Dalton Humes, Troop 43 of Keokuk meets with his leaders and friends every Monday at 7:00 p.m. at the Trinity Methodist Church in Keokuk. Mr. Mike Krebill is his Senior Scoutmaster. Dalton attends Keokuk Christian Academy on Hilton Road in Keokuk, and lives in Wyconda, Missouri. His parents are Mr. and Mrs. Steve Humes.

The next phase of the project is fund raising. There will be funds needed to purchase signs, steel posts, and installation costs. After 25 years of planning, the Keokuk Rifles Trail is in good hands!

Keokuk Rifles Trail Guide

After leaving the Keokuk Tourism Headquarters location at Fifth and Main St., proceed one block toward the river. Turn right on 4th St. In one block, you have reached Johnson St. Turn right and go to the flashing red light. This is So. 7th St. Turn left and proceed about 2 miles. Watch for Ft. Madison Hwy. 61. Turn right and proceed to the top of the hill where the acceleration lane ends. You've reached Hilton Rd. Turn left and go about one mile. A left turn on a gravel road puts you on 150th Road. Proceed down to the Des Moines River Flood plain. On the left will be tank cars waiting for shipment. On the right will be the trail head for the Keokuk Rifles Trail. The sign will be near where about 70 men, their horses and gear left in about 18 box cars, to relieve the pro-Union forces at Croton, IA. Across the river from Athens, MO. The trip was about 20 railroad miles. They arrived and made camp before midnight.

From point one, proceed to Valley Road, toward the Des Moines River. Turn right at the stop. In a short distance, you will see the Rifles sign showing where the train emerged from the bluff and proceeded across on Valley Rd. where it turned north near the Des Moines River. The Railroad crossing signs are still there.

Our auto trail proceeds North on Valley Rd. for about two miles where it becomes Johnson St. Rd. Follow it up out of the flood plain. A sign will be just before the trail makes a 90 degree left turn. Follow its twists and turns through farm country. There is a stop at Carbide Lane. Turn left and follow Johnson St. several miles to a stop at a blacktop road. This is Argyle Road. Turn left, and proceed past the church. Look for the Rifles Trail sign on the right. Go about 600 ft. past the sign and watch for 340th St. on the left. This gravel road leads down to the flood plain. The railroad crossed this road at the bottom of the hill. No trace of the railroad grade is visible here because of auto road improvements. Just past this crossing is a large abandoned farmhouse on the right. Proceed on 340th St. to the Avenue of

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Keokuk Rifles Trail Guide

the Saints four lane Hwy. 27. Turn right on 340th, then left to cross. The new gravel road is called Belfast Road.

This road follows close to the river for several miles. The 1861 Railroad is on your right. Follow Belfast Road to just north of the village of Vincennes. Past the cemetery, you will make a right turn. In about mile, you'll cross the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe RR tracks. This rail line was not here in 1861, but in a later time, the rail line to Croton crossed these tracks at this point. A Rifles Trail sign marks this crossing.

The railroad is now on your left along the river to Croton. Belfast Road moves up out of the flood-plain here, and intersects Argyle Road at a stop. Turn left and proceed back down to the flood plain. Follow Belfast Rd. for several miles, and look for a conservation area called Turkey Run on the left. There is evidence of the railroad at this spot. A Rifles Trail sign marks this point.

Proceed on Belfast Rd. on to Croton. In the village, watch for a WWI artillery piece and a storage pile of cannon balls. Turn left and proceed to the barricade. The last Rifles Trail sign marks the location of unloading from the rail cars. A first aide station (Hospital) was set up near here. The riverside property is privately owned. If you would like to hike to the river and look across to the Athens, MO battle site, please call: Mr. Joe Tweedy; 319-795-7205. Tell him how many in your party and how long you will stay. You may leave a message.

If you would like to visit the Athens site, maps are enclosed. Go back to the cannon ball pile, and turn left. This road will take you to Farmington, IA - 5 miles of blacktop road. In Farmington, turn left on Hwy. 2, follow it across the Des Moines bridge and watch for the highway to Kahoka, MO, Hwy. 81. Turn left there. Follow this and watch for the Battle of Athens signs. (5 miles) It's 4 miles to the park. After you visit at Athens, follow Hwy. 81 south to Kahoka, MO, intersect Hwy. 136, and return to Keokuk.

Keokuk Rifles Trail Guide

Follow the enclosed Lee Co. map, & J62 will bring you to Hwy. 61 directly back to Keokuk. **THANKS FOR EXPLORING THE KEOKUK RIFLES TRAIL!**

Some distances measured from Keokuk Tourism Office:

To Trail Head sign - just over 4 miles.

Johnson St. Rd. - 6 miles

Carbide Train Stop - 6 miles

Argyle Road Stop - 13 miles

County Road 340 - 14 miles

Cross Highway 27, Enter Belfast Road - 20 miles

Cross Railroad tracks - 21 miles

At top of hill after crossing tracks, Belfast Rd. goes left.

Stop, Argyle Road - 22 miles

Turkey Run - 26 miles

Boat Ramp cuts through RR right of way.

It passed through about where the light pole is.

Croton stop at blacktop - 30 miles

Flag, Artillery piece, cannon balls - turn left to

last Keokuk Rifles Trail sign - 31 miles

Map Showing
Railroad



**WELCOME
TO
LEE COUNTY**

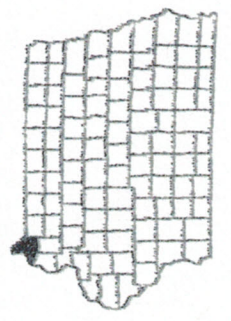
CLARK CO.

Country Road Trail

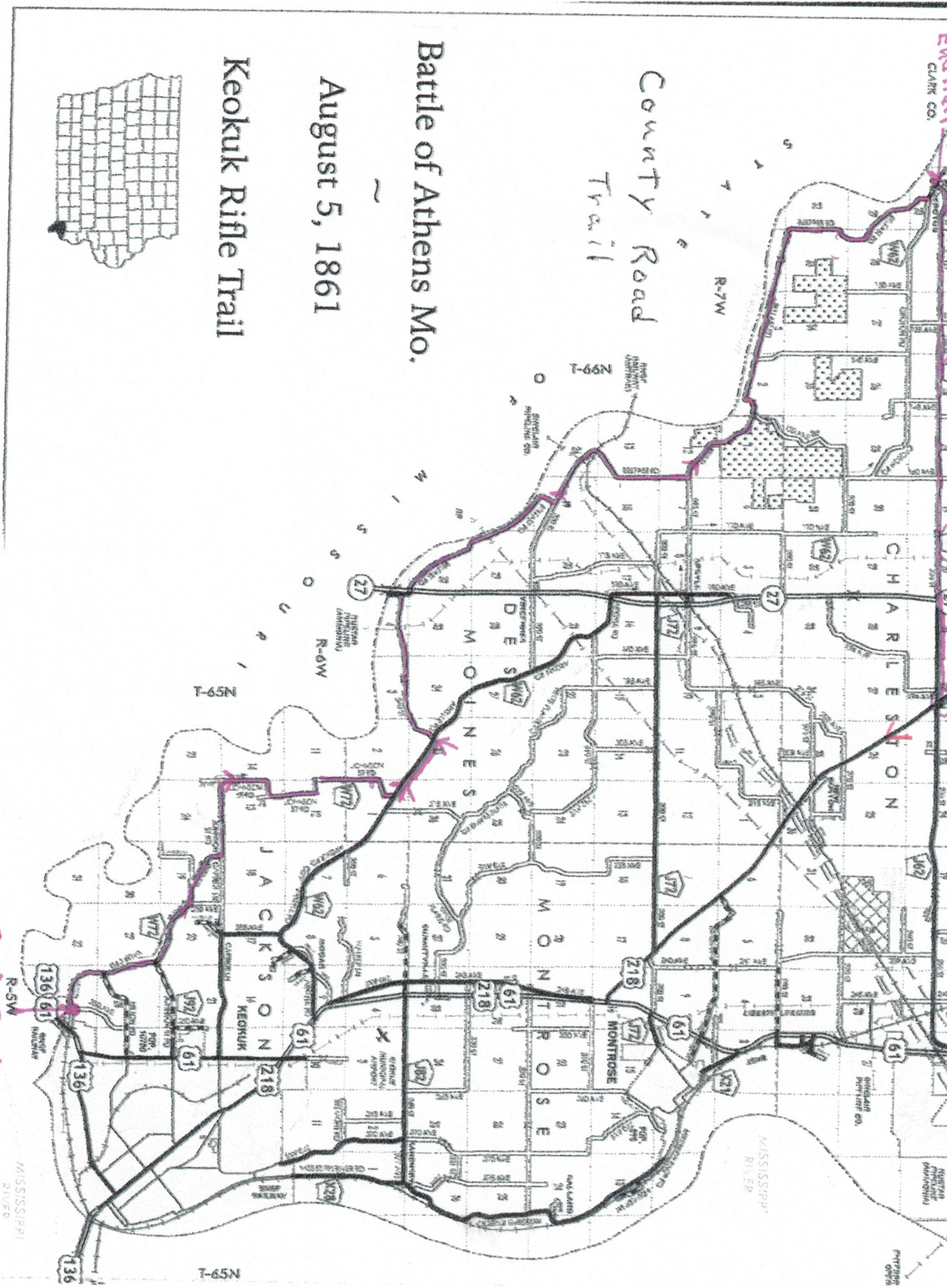
Battle of Athens Mo.

August 5, 1861

Keokuk Rifle Trail

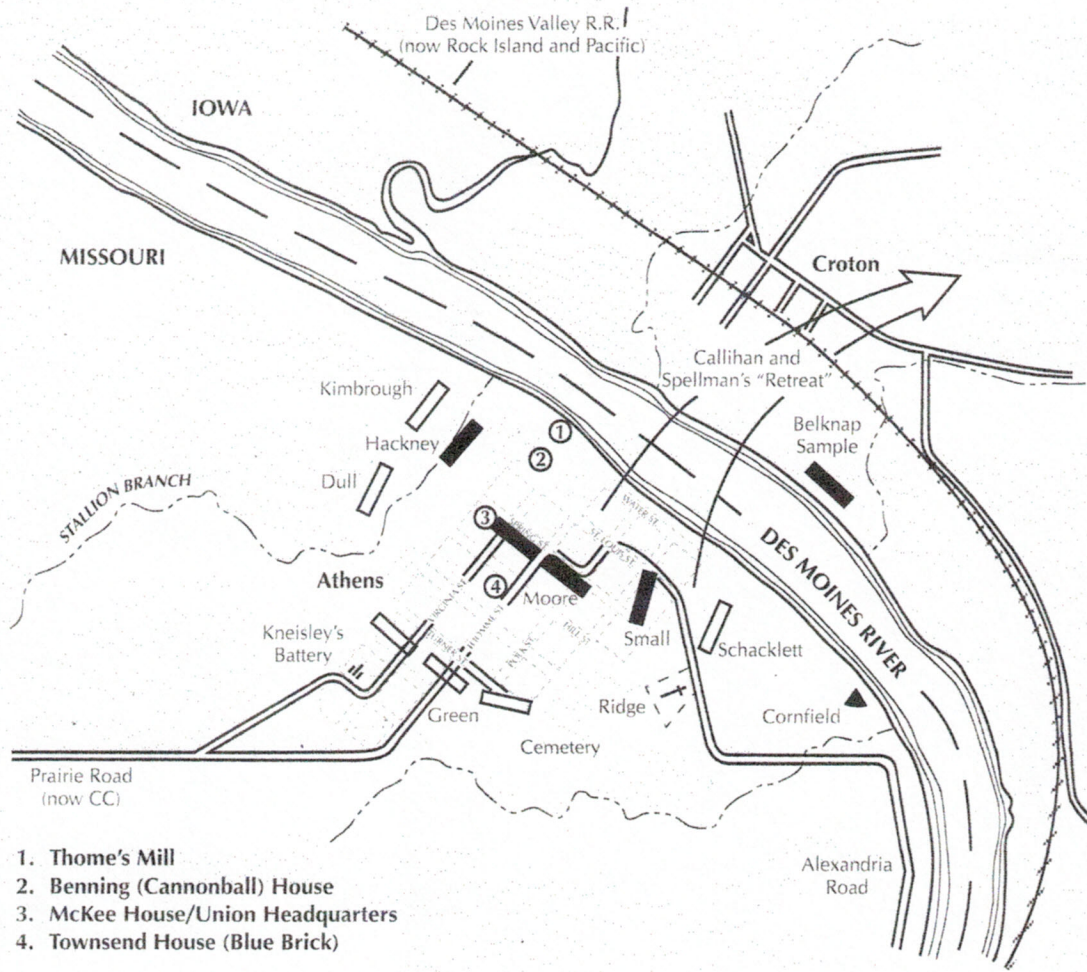


Begin Trail

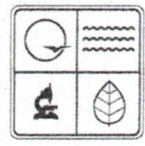


Battle of Athens

Battle of Athens State Historic Site



1. Thome's Mill
2. Benning (Cannonball) House
3. McKee House/Union Headquarters
4. Townsend House (Blue Brick)



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