

NATIONAL TRAIL OFFICIAL SEES POSSIBLE USES OF SOIL SIGNATURE STUDIES

by Mary Conrad

John Conoboy, a National Park Service (NPS) administrator in the NPS Santa Fe Trail office in Santa Fe, New Mexico, saw a press release about Abby Vanner speaking at the December KCAS meeting. The Kansas City area chapter of the Santa Fe Trail Association (SFTA) had sent the press releases.

Conoboy emailed me to inquire about Vanner's study. When I asked him if I could print one of his emails in To the Point, he answered in the affirmative.

The following is the text of an email authored by John Conoboy.

As a geologist by education, I have been advocating the idea of a study of trail ruts for years, but have not had either the money or the right person to be the lead investigator. I always felt that it needed to be an interdisciplinary study with an archeologist, soil scientist, geologist/geomorphologist, possibly a botanist, and--as you point out--trail historians.

How do ruts form and change through time? Are they disappearing, eroding deeper, staying stable, getting wider, etc.--I suspect all of these, but it depends on soil type, wind, rainfall, slope, types of land use, vegetation, soil compaction, rut depth, and so forth. How much public use can a trail rut withstand without being modified. Ultimately, I would like to come up with a way to monitor trail ruts as a way of identifying where we might need to consider how we can preserve them. What is happening at Minor Park, for example, is a lot different than what is happening at Point of Rocks in New Mexico.

When I heard about Abby's study, I was intrigued and would like to learn more. It sounds like a start.... If this is a promising approach, then we [NPS officials] might be able to craft a Challenge Cost Share project to [financially] support and expand on this research.

A BIT OF KCAS TRIVIA?

At the November meeting, some commented that this is the twenty-first year KCAS has held meetings at the Midwest Research Institute's Arthur Mag Center.

At that November meeting, many members expressed gratitude for the generosity of MRI. While remembering the number of years may seem like trivia, the provision of accommodations for a non-profit organization certainly is not trivial!