

Seniors forge new frontiers

The 33 men who recently trudged through the remote Daniel Boone National forest in eastern Kentucky, clearing a 254-mile-long hilly trail with axes and brush hooks, were neither early frontiersmen nor modern construction workers.

They were senior citizens — ages 55-76.

Like Daniel Boone, they spent three years on and off in the woods, cutting underbrush, digging out paths in side slopes, removing fallen trees, and putting up trail markers — a white diamond with a turtle on top.

They called the path through the 660,000-acre forest "Sheltowee Trace."

Sheltowee, the Shawnee Indian word for "turtle," was the name given Daniel Boone when he was adopted into the tribe during the 1760s when he roamed through this part of Kentucky.

MANY WHO worked on the trail as part of the federal Senior Community Service Employment Program were retired loggers, coal miners, farmers, and foresters, according to National Geographic News Service.

The U.S. Forest Service, one of eight federal agencies participating in the senior citizen program, employs about 3,300 older persons in national forests in 40 states.

"It's almost like the pioneers again," said Bob Strosnider, who supervised the recently completed Sheltowee project.

"The older people take a great deal of pride in the work they do. They are experienced and dependable."

"Sometimes we had to walk a couple of miles into the woods just to get to work," said 71-year-old Willie Dunn of McKee, Ky. "It was pretty hard. We'd dig down to make a trail and then dig out places to drain off the water so what we did wouldn't wash away."

A retired forester, Dunn and the others had to pass a physical before being sent into the hills — in some places

rugged — forest. There was the potential for outdoor accidents — falling branches, tripping in tangled underbrush, and snake bites — but none occurred.

The senior citizens were assisted by members of the young Adult Conservation Corps (ages 16 to 23) and the Youth Conservation Corps (ages 15 to 18). The older workers had no trouble keeping up, according to Charles Crail of the Forest Service.

"In fact we could hardly get them to stop working," he said.

BESIDES CLEARING new trails in forests in many parts of the country,

the senior citizens also help spruce up existing paths.

The older people, who must be over 55 and economically disadvantaged, each work a maximum of 1,300 hours a year (about 25 hours a week) for at least the minimum wage, averaging about \$2.95 an hour.

One of the major senior citizen projects in the five-year-old program — involving 90 persons, including a couple of husband-wife teams — was the construction of a large picnic pavilion and bike trail in a national forest in North Carolina.



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