

Special Thanks To....

Monument Committee:

- William Gilmour, Society President
- Gillum Ferguson, Society Secretary
- Mark Motsinger, Saline Tourism Board
- Marcus Owens, Society Board
- Sue Perina, Shawnee Trail Conservancy

Monument Provider:

J.W. Reynolds Monument Co., Vienna



The River to River Trail Society would like to especially thank **Herod Springs Baptist Church** for allowing us to erect the monument on their property adjacent to the trail.

www.rivertorivertrail.net

Herod Baptist Option



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Program for the Dedication Ceremony of the Monument for John O'Dell

Father of the
River to River Trail and Society
August 13, 2022
10:30 AM

Herod Springs
Baptist Church
Herod, Illinois



Program

10:30 am	Welcome	
10:35 am	Prayer	Todd Carr
10:40 am	Opening Remarks	Bill Gilmour
10:45 am	Unveiling of Monument	Marilee O'Dell Robert O'Dell Other Family
10:50 am	Family Speakers	Marilee O'Dell Mark O'Dell Cory Vela
10:55 am	John's Brother	Robert O'Dell
11:05 am	Saline Tourism Board Representative	Marty Watson
11:10 am	River to River Trail Society Representatives	Gillum Ferguson Don Monty
11:15 am	Shawnee National Forest Representative	Tim Pohlman
11:20 am	Kelly Pearson Award Presentation	Bill Gilmour
11:20 am	Closing	

Music Playing was from 2000 Zola Van Compact Disk:
River to River Trail: the Hike Through Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois

The River to River Trail

The River-to-River Trail as a concept has been part of the Shawnee National Forest since its beginning. Forest Service maps from the 1960's show the trail extending from the Ohio River to HWY 45.

John's efforts lead to the trail being extended to the Mississippi River through 3 more wilderness areas including Panther Den, Bald Knob and Clear Springs. It was also extended through Giant City and Ferne Clyffe State Parks and Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge.

John's efforts also lead to the marking of the entire trail with the lower case blue "i"s on the white diamonds shown on this page.

John's efforts also lead to the incorporation of the River-to-River Trail into the national 6800 mile American Discovery Trail.



John on an ADT Scouting Trip



River to River Trail Overview Map

Thoughts, Stories and Tributes to John Cont.

I met John on my first River to River Trail hike at Sand Cave and Bell Smith Springs, probably in 2008. My Grandfather in law had always told us about a large cave near his farm where horses and wagons could pull in and form a semi circle around the perimeter. Grandpa did that for week long campouts as a teenager and said early pioneers did the same as they made their way to new homesteads. We had gone on many hikes looking for this cave which I learned was Sand Cave. John had rented a bus for this hike which took us from one location to the next. He showed a passion for the beauty of Shawnee National Forest which I shared. He was warm and welcoming to all hikers. I had hiked all over Bell Smith Springs since I was about 16 but quickly realized John O'Dell had a wealth of knowledge and his colleagues shared his enthusiasm. He gave me 2 hiking poles that day which I still have. He didn't want them back at the end of the hike. They have saved me from many falls. I so appreciate the work and love he poured into the establishment of the river to river trail. What a treasure he left for the rest of us to love and enjoy!

Susan Durfee , Stonefort, Illinois

My first weekend hike into the Shawnee National Forest began steps away from where the John O'Dell memorial has been placed. The hike was led by John himself to the One Horse Gap area. This would have been around 2004. John and I had worked for several years promoting tourism in southeastern Illinois. I later served as a director on the River to River Trail Society. The last hike I led for the Society was to the same area John took me so many years ago.

Todd Carr, Elizabethtown, Illinois

What a special tribute to a special man, John O'Dell.

Emily Mollet

About John O'Dell

John O'Dell, Mar 21, 1934 - Nov 8, 2021

Before John O'Dell returned to Southern Illinois in 1988, to take up a position as Superintendent of Schools in Benton, the River-to-River Trail was little more than an idea. That idea had indeed been around since the 1930s, and there were even maps which portrayed a route from Battery Rock as far west as Route 45, mostly over country roads, but nothing resembling today's trail was in existence. Many had talked and dreamed, but John O'Dell acted.

It was John who, with the help of his wife Marilee, pored over topographic maps, pulled on his hiking boots, and went out on foot to mark a route for hikers and horsemen to follow from the Ohio River to the Mississippi. John sought out and enlisted the support of the Forest Service, and many like-minded individuals, in order to overcome the many obstacles that lay in the way of completing the Trail. On February 15, 1992, the River-to-River Trail Society held its first meeting at Marion, with John serving as Founder and first President. Since then, the Society has continued John's work in promoting, publicizing, and advocating for the Trail.

Early on, John conceived the idea of promoting not only the Trail, but all the scenic wonders of Southern Illinois, through a series of free guided public hikes every Spring and Fall. That series continues to this day, and has introduced hundreds of people to outdoor recreation in this area. Moreover, it was John O'Dell who wrote and published the four previous editions of the guide to the entire length of the River-to-River Trail. Without John O'Dell, there quite simply would be no River-to-River Trail, and the latest edition of the Trail Guide is dedicated to him in recognition of his tireless work for Southern Illinois.



About John O'Dell



The Shawnee National Forest

Mark O'Dell · 21 mins ·

Trail friends. Today John O'Dell passed away. He loved southern Illinois and exploring the beautiful wilderness. John is the founder of the River to River Trail and was instrumental to the river to river relay, installation of the Tecumseh statue and southern Illinois tourism. A Primitive Baptist Preacher, he shared his love of nature and being in the woods with all. You were never lost, just forging a new path! He was happy to share the experience of the woods to all and all... See more — with Christy O'Dell-Geise.



Thoughts, Stories and Tributes to John Cont.

After that long run-up and final blockbuster of a statement, John certainly had our attention. Not much more was to be revealed, however. John purposely wanted to leave us hanging. So, we said our good-byes. Not knowing if it was true or not, I later confirmed that it was true. John's brother, Robert O'Dell is the a Professor of Astrophysics at Rice University where he does research using the Hubble Space Telescope. Now how about that?

Mitch Luman, Evansville, Indiana

John had a generous and positive spirit and he cared deeply for others. When my late husband, Bill and I were working to be the first people to complete the American Discovery Trail after the scouting team worked with others to develop the route, John and Marilee hosted us in their home for a number of days as we traversed the River to River trail. I was trying to recover from shin splints and this allowed us to slack pack as I recovered by not having to carry a heavy load. Evenings were spent learning from them about how the River to River Trail was developed and getting to know these fine folks.

Later, when Bill and I served on the American Discovery Trail Board of Directors, John would also attend the meetings. He often had to drive many miles to attend them but that did not stop him from getting up super early on Sunday mornings so he could be back in time for his church service. I have many fond memories of this good man.

Laurel Ibbotson Foot



Thoughts, Stories and Tributes to John Cont.

Memory of John O'Dell

My best memory of John O'Dell recounts the first time we met and involves not trails, but telescopes! Many years ago, an astronomy friend of mine and I planned to spend the night at 34 Ranch, a horse camp down the highway south of Herod. Our plan was to use our telescopes later that evening to take advantage of the genuine dark skies of Pope County. We stopped at the general store in Herod which, at the time, John was either the proprietor, or he just worked there. My guess is that John never truly retired. He seems like the kind of person who always needed to be involved with something. The store is gone now, but it was originally located in Herod next to the Post Office.

Upon arrival, we were surprised that the store served food. Being the only place to eat nearby, we sat down at one of the provided tables. John came out and he took our order. After ordering two cheeseburgers, John disappeared outside behind the store to fire up a grill. A long time thereafter, after dinner was served and our meal finished John appeared at our table and asked what brought us to Herod. Urgently wanting to pay our bill and leave to set up our telescopes before it got dark, we briefly described to someone we later found out was none other than John O'Dell that we had telescopes—not horses—in the trailers parked outside.

John paused for a long moment and said, "My brother liked telescopes." Then he paused for another equally long moment, "Yes," he said, "My brother actually built his own telescope." The story seemed to go on-and-on. We had no clue where this long-winded man's story was going, but we listened with polite interest as John took way too much of our remaining time to describe how while growing up, his brother used his telescope to look at the stars. "Yes," John finally said in a slow methodical cadence, "my brother loved the stars." Another long pause, "My brother certainly loves telescopes. Now he runs the Hubble Space Telescope."

About John O'Dell

Obituary for Dr. John Allen O'Dell



Dr. John Allen O'Dell, 87, formerly of Harrisburg, IL, passed away November 8, 2021, at his home in Avon, IN, with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law at his bedside. John was an entrepreneur and promoter of Southern Illinois. He was an educator, preacher, business owner, and tourism director.

He is survived by his wife, Marilee; daughters, Laura Partain, Patty Neal, Christy Geise and husband Ray; Cory Vela and her husband Dr. Jose Vela-Hernandez; and son Mark O'Dell and wife Laura. John had 10 grandchildren, 4 step-grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren, and 4 step-great-grandchildren. He is also survived by his brother Dr. Charles Robert O'Dell and his wife Sally, as well as many cousins and close friends.

He was preceded in death by his son Mathew Clinton, his parents Madge and Herman, and sister Hazel Charles.



The Trail Society would like to thank the following

Donors

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Thoughts, Stories and Tributes to John

My family was privileged to know John in a different way. He was our preacher & our friend, but he treated us like family. John was an Elder in several Primitive Baptist churches for many years, until his health declined. We followed him to all of his churches. He had a way of telling stories that included his time out in the forest talking to God. John was always promoting the trail and all of Southern Illinois. After church service, he would encourage us to explore something involving the Shawnee Forest. He was always smiling and greeted us with, "Hi guys!" At the end of a phone call, or when we would be leaving after church, there was always a "Love you guys!" He loved his family, especially his wife, Marilee. He was proud of his kids and his grandkids. They meant so much to him. He had the best supporter in Marilee. Whether he was helping with the River to River Relay, church functions, the Pioneer Village in Harrisburg, the River to River Trail, etc, Marilee was always there helping him. John was an exceptional artist and author. He was always thinking of something new to do. Southern Illinois lost a great man when John passed away. John will be forever missed by my family.

Penni Smith

My name is Bill Gilmour and I first met John in 2008. He and the Society had rented a bus for a public hike to haul the group from Hunting Branch to Sand Cave. John was always there and did whatever he could for the benefit of the Society even if it meant getting lost on a hike he was leading. I also recall John showing up early, starting a fire and cooking chili for the group before one of our Halloween night hikes. Though I was only able to go on one of the bluebell hikes from his house, it was great to know John.

William Gilmour, Metropolis, Illinois



Thoughts, Stories and Tributes to John