



South Mountain Conservancy

South Mountain Reservation Stewardship, Advocacy & Public Engagement

Rahway Fairy Trail Master Plan, v.3

June 2021

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This document presents a vision to fortify and improve the Rahway Fairy Trail, an extremely popular half-mile path in the South Mountain Reservation starting at the Locust Grove parking area, that has become a regional destination, especially in this time of the coronavirus pandemic. Created more than a decade ago by local resident Therese Ojibway, and still maintained by her along with the SMC, it has been publicized on websites and in local and national publications. As a destination, the Rahway Fairy Trail has become an introduction to the outdoors for thousands of young children and their families, especially for residents of nearby towns and cities that do not have easy access to a forested landscape. Half of all the hits on the SMC's website are directed to our pages about the Rahway Fairy Trail.

Unfortunately, this popularity has had significant drawbacks. As a magnet for hundreds of people each week, the trail has suffered: the path has expanded in many places beyond recognition, vegetation has been trampled, and the soil compressed. Problems with drainage due to blocked or lacking swales to direct water from uphill have been exacerbated and a recent repaving of the parking lot did not address these underlying problems.

This document is offered to initiate a multi-year effort to improve the trail. It has been created in consultation with the Essex County Parks Department (Gary Arlio) and several landscape architects (Mike Piga, Charlie Cunion, and Leah Wener). An initial step was taken by the SMC in July 2020 with the replacement of the narrow, rickety, unsafe bridge that crossed a creek near the southern trailhead (an Eagle Scout project). The next step has been to develop this preliminary plan and seek funding. Phase 1, which we hope to implement in 2021, will focus on the southern part of the trail near the Locust Grove parking lot with the installation of fencing and restoration planting in a 200' x 35' central area where there will be a split circulation pattern.

The overall plan, diagrammed in the following pages, includes the following elements.:

1. Swale restoration and construction (French drain, perhaps) in southern area near parking and along River and Quarry Trails to address drainage issues from extensive seep.
2. Split circulation patterns in three areas (Lower Under-Cliff Lane, Fairy Heights, and Rahway Rambles).
3. Special mulch material area near Locust Grove parking leading to bridge, and possibly up to Fairy Heights.
4. Digressions, "spurs," off main path for certain fairy house exhibits.
5. Split-rail fencing at outside perimeter in several areas to deter trespassing into restoration areas and protect the vegetation.
6. Rebar stake (30") and rope barrier around interior planting areas and along parts of the trail to deter trespassing into restoration areas, with signage for public information and education.
7. Restoration plantings along edge and in the interior of the path.
8. Signage to explain restoration effort.
9. Installation of rustic benches throughout (approximately 14).

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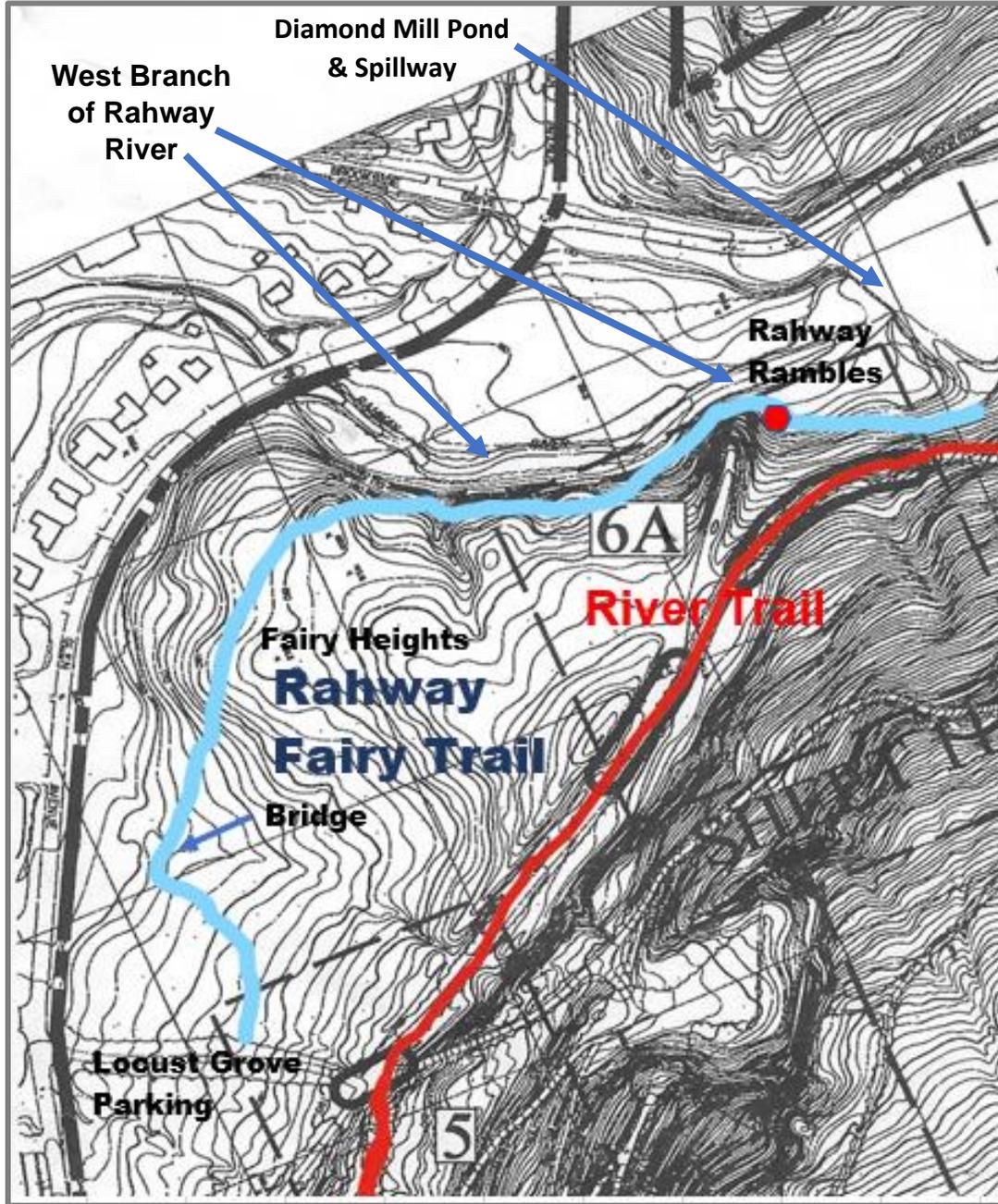
- Raised wooden pathway around old train trestle escarpment leading down via steps to rest area along Rahway River (Rahway Rambles)
- Brambles planted on abutment slope to dissuade people from going up eroded abutment, and possible terracing or jute mesh and ground cover to reinforce slope.
- Possible edge at Trail Bend at escarpment with rocks or cribbing and “live stakes” (willows, e.g.) that can reinforce eroded edge.
- Recirculation path back to River Trail from Rahway Rambles (a couple now exist).
- Possible path and educational signage to nearby regeneration site, if repaired, and up to top of railway abutment.



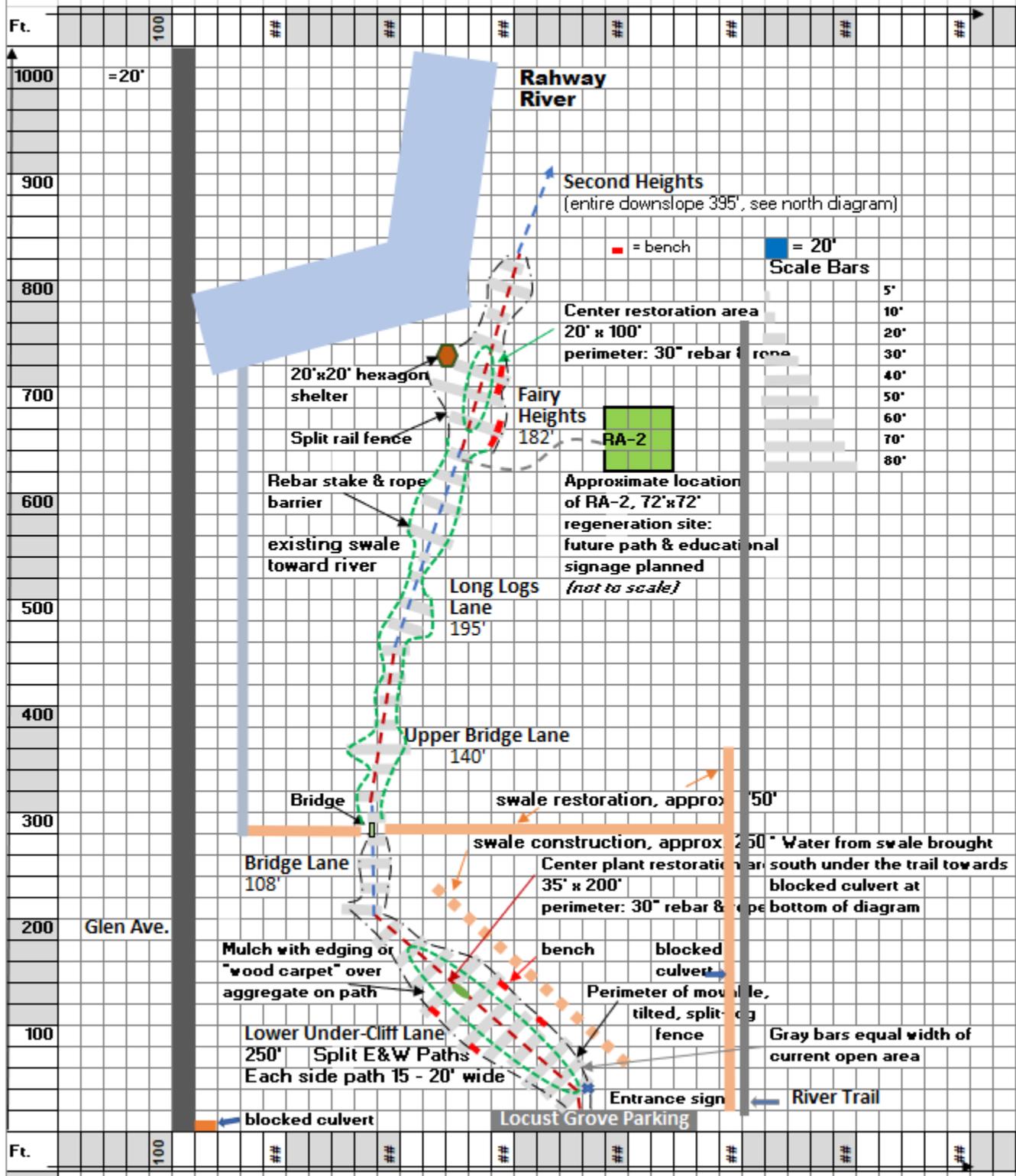
Newark 3rd and 4th Graders Canvass Fairy Trail as part of the New Jersey’s Complete Count Initiative, Oct. 18th, 2019, a 2020 Census initiative (more at www.somocon.org)

Example of an elaborate fairy house complex.

Contour Map with Southern Section of the Rahway and River Trails
(2' contour lines)

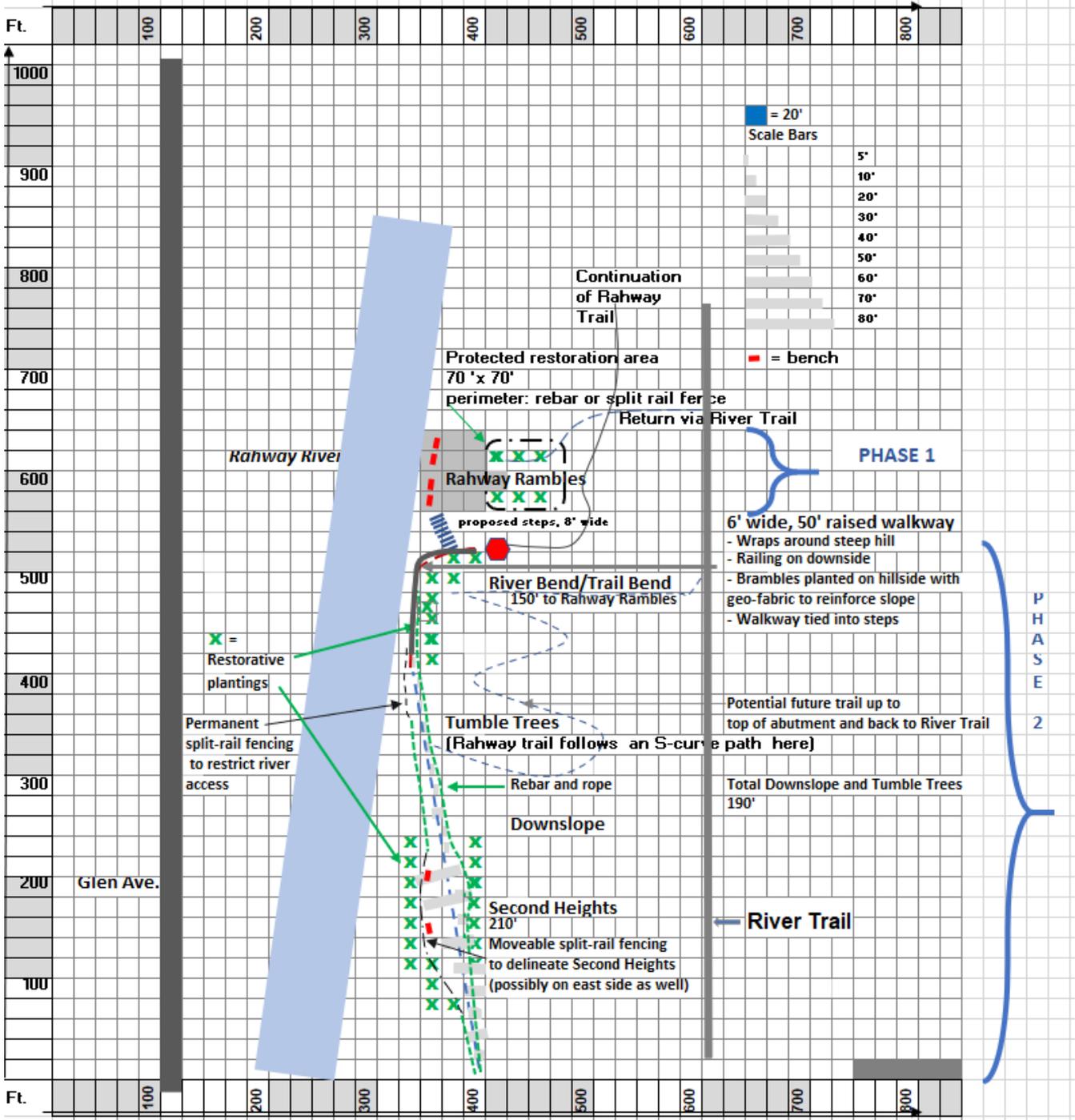


Rahway Fairy Trail Restoration Plans, South Section Diagram, v. 6



Note: River placement may not be accurate

Rahway Fairy Trail Restoration Plans, North Section Diagram, v. 5



Note: River placement may not be accurate

Design Elements

A. Rebar stakes and Rope

30" rebar with loop embedded 6", spaced 8', with polyethylene yellow or orange rope. This option creates a knee-high barrier, is inexpensive (each stake is about 2-3 dollars), movable, very unobtrusive, but a minimal impediment to crossing. Possible wooden or metal edging may be used in addition.



B. Moveable Cedar Split-Rail Fence, Signage

This fencing, used in the Mianus River Park, is also movable, visually unobtrusive, and very appealing given the rustic quality of the Rahway Fairy Trail, yet provides a strong impediment to crossing.



C. Three Interior Planting Areas

Planting Area No. 1 Lower Under-Cliff Lane, 35' x 200'

(This allows a split circulation pattern. Locust Grove parking lot in distance)

(These conceptual sketches do not include proposed plantings, split-rail fence along the outside perimeter, nor metal edging and rebar and rope barrier delineating the planting area. Conceptual design by Charlie Cunion, landscape architect, NV5.)



concept sketch depicting two-way path looking toward entrance and parking lot



concept sketch depicting two-way path merging into one-way path

Interior Planting Area No. 2: Fairy Heights Area (enclosed area will be 20' x 100')



Interior Planting Area No. 3: Rahway Rambles Area along the West Branch of the Rahway River (photo from Trail Bend part of the Rahway Fairy Trail, Diamond Mill Pond spillway is at upper left).

A 70' x 70' planted area will be developed on the right of this photo enclosed by split rail fencing in phase 1 along with repair of a nearby culvert. Phase 2 will add four benches along the river's edge. The Rahway River Watershed Association's water quality monitoring site will be here and educational signage explaining the assessments. The return trail back up to the River Trail along the right side will be improved.

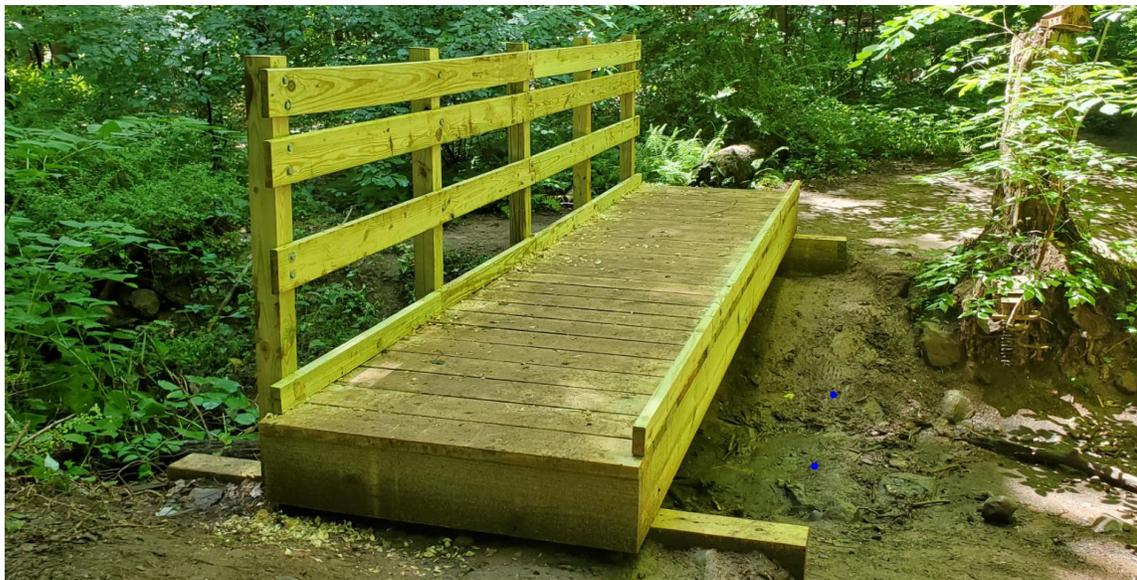


D. Rustic Benches (phase 2)

Using Mianus River Park as an inspiration, 14 rustic benches such as these could be installed in phase 2:



E. Rahway Fairy Trail Creek Bridge (constructed July 2020 as an Eagle Scout project, ramps to be added)



F. Raised Platform at Trail Bend, Phase 2

This example is eight feet wide. The Rahway Fairy Trail would likely be six feet wide and not need a railing on parts of the uphill side.



G. 20'x20' Hexagon Shelter, Phase 2

This shelter at Fairy Heights would be modeled after the shelter constructed along the Crest Drive Loop at Washington Rock, pictured. It would provide protection from rain and a resting place at one of the highest points along the trail.

