

Trail of Time Speeds Up

By Ed Grossman, Recreation Program Manager, Juneau Ranger District



“Glacial Speed” no longer equates to “slow” for those who have witnessed the dramatic retreat of Juneau’s Mendenhall Glacier. Plans for the Trail of Time and other projects near the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center (MGVC) have also picked up considerable momentum thanks to Economic Recovery dollars awarded this year under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

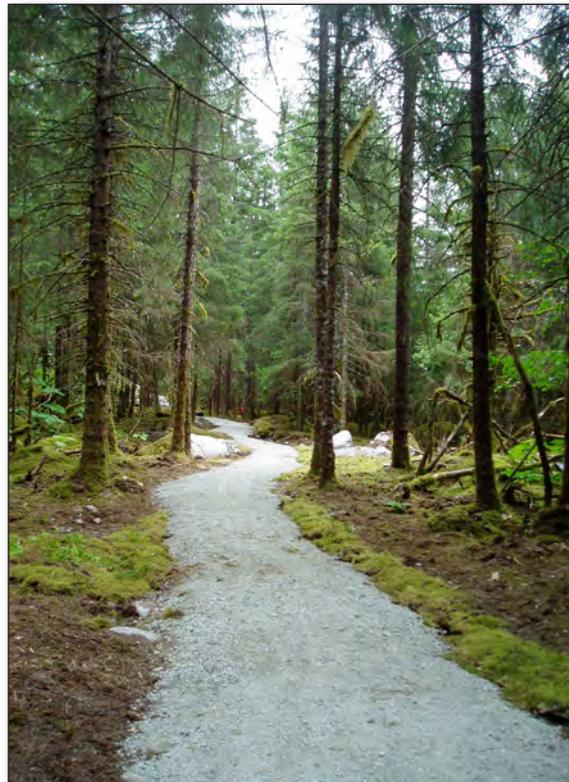
Most visitors to the MGVC area are older folks enjoying one of the many cruise ship packages offered in the Inside Passage. The Mendenhall Glacier is Juneau’s premier attraction for half a million of them. Many of these visitors are mobility limited, and plans to make area trails and facilities more accessible to all visitors have been identified for years. There has also been a considerable backlog in deferred maintenance needs for area structures. Of course, plan implementation takes investment, and until this year, most area projects have been, by necessity, tackled in phases. Economic Recovery funds are now helping us significantly shorten the time frames from planning to project completion.

There are many facets to this project. These include:

- Extensive repairs to the MGVC rock work.
- Rerouting portions of the Trail of Time to meet accessibility standards.
- Refurbishment of Cobble Shelter, the area’s first registration booth, which was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.
- Construction of an accessible ramp behind the MGVC, a glacier observation platform, and new bridge over Steep Creek.
- The production of interpretive panels highlighting a century of history, with emphasis on growing recreational interests in the area.
- Implementation of some bear/human management schemes using fencing.

As we have opened up access to new interpretive sites, where historic features have been swallowed up in post-glacial vegetation succession, even the locals are excited to learn more about the history they have missed in their own backyard.

The majority of trail work has been completed this season, and the remainder should be completed in Summer 2011. Next time you are in Juneau, hurry on up to the MGVC area for a look see. The view changes every day.



Left: Workers bring order to glacial erratics.

Right: This improved section invites hikers to the Trail of Time.

Photos by Peter Cross.