



CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY

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Trans-Catalina Trail Draws a New Crowd

Text and photos by Bob Rhein



The Thad Jones Hikers, first group on the newly-opened Trans-Catalina Trail, on the Silver Peak portion of the Trans-Catalina Trail headed east toward Two Harbors in April of 2009.

The 37.2-mile Trans-Catalina Trail (TCT) has taken the hiking community by storm. The winding, sometimes flat, and often challenging Trail is becoming one of the most popular attractions in the Island's rugged interior. At the same time, a cottage industry to serve the hikers the Trail's attracting is in its infancy.

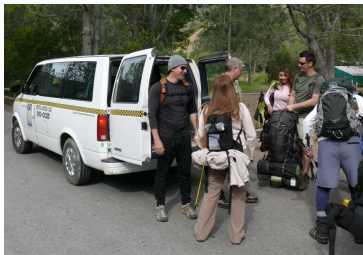
A spur off the TCT can be hiked in an hour or two, a leg in a day and the entire Trail in three to four days, offering visitors a wide variety of options. Since its opening in April of 2009, traffic on the Conservancy's website has increased 30 percent with pages related to the Trail joining the home page as the most popular. Requests for hiking permits have followed suit: In 2009, more than 9,000 of the free permits were filed with the Conservancy, compared with just 7,783 in 2008. (The permits are issued to keep track of who's in the interior for safety's sake.)

To serve the growing number of hiking groups that are making the five-legs of the TCT their destination over time or all at once, businesses already partnering with the Conservancy have begun to experiment with providing new services.

Sue Rikalo, proprietor of DC-3 Gifts and Grill at the Airport in the Sky, takes orders from hikers who would rather not pack all their food in. Sue can provide catered meals at any of the five campsites along the TCT.

Then there's transportation. Sue is teaming with Karin Hague of Catalina Transportation Services Inc., which delivers the food. Karin's business is also being called upon to ship heavy camping gear and backpacks ahead to campsites.

"It seemed very cool to give hikers an opportunity to hike from spot to spot without carrying their backpacks and tents," Hague said. "I wanted to make it easier for people to come to the Island and spend three days on the Trail."



While hiking the Trans-Catalina Trail, Renae Lindsay's hiking group opted to have Catalina Transportation Services deliver their heavy camping equipment and other supplies ahead to their campsites at Black Jack and Two Harbors.

Hague, who has historically provided taxi services in the interior, said she got the idea to offer this new service earlier this year when an adventure travel writer Renae Lindsay brought 15 thrill-seeking hikers to tackle the TCT starting at Hermit Gulch Campground in Avalon.

When Lindsay's group made the trek last April, they camped at Hermit Gulch for the night. The next morning, the group was met by one of Hague's taxi vans so they could load up all their heavy equipment. When they arrived at Black Jack Campground at the end of a long day of hiking, they found their equipment patiently waiting.

The group's luggage followed them on to Two Harbors on the next day, thanks to Hague's service. When the group finally made it to Parson's Landing - the end of the Trail (they opted out of reaching Starlight Beach, the "official" Trail's end), the taxi van was there to pick them up for a comfortable ride back to Avalon.

Catalina Backcountry, a venture by LeeAnn Human, is offering one-stop shopping to groups that don't want to be bothered with connecting all the dots. For a fee, LeeAnn will arrange for all transportation to the Island, on-Island transportation, hiking permits and Freewheeler Bike Passes, campsite catering, gear hauling, excursions, hotel reservations, etc. Her motto? "One call does it all."

Another group that is planning on hiking the TCT at the end of June is Coastwalk, a statewide hiking organization.

"This is the first time Coastwalk has hiked the Trans-Catalina Trail," said Anne O'Brien, hike coordinator. "We'll cover many miles, but still have time to relax, swim and kayak. We will tour the USC Research Center which will include a visit to the hyperbaric chamber and a look at the Center's important ocean research projects."

The group will camp at Two Harbors, Little Harbor, Black Jack and Hermit Gulch. "On the last day, there will be time for some fun shopping to load up on souvenirs in Avalon

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before departure on the Catalina Express back to San Pedro," O'Brien said. She added that on their last night in Avalon, she is looking forward to a group dinner at the Sand Trap Restaurant – an easy walk from their campsite at Hermits Gulch.

The very first organized group ever to hike the TCT was on April 4, 2009 – opening day of the Trail. Twenty five hikers, many of them members of the Newport Harbor Yacht Club, paid tribute to celebrated yachtsman Thaddeus G. Jones who passed away in July 2008. In May, 1956, after considerable planning, Thad and his good friends Steve Royce and Dick Lyon set out on their hike – but with an amazing twist.

At daybreak, off the East end, the trio jumped overboard into the water from Royce's Gloucester schooner *Coaster* (captained by Thad's brother BZ.) They swam ashore, put on their shoes and, after many false starts (and a few close calls) scaled the nearly vertical cliffs hundreds of feet to the top of the Island.

Without backpacks or water, they took off across the rugged terrain (the Conservancy does not recommend this, please note). When they got to the dirt road out of Avalon, they began jogging. From the airport to the Isthmus, they went in a straight line, over peaks and bushwacking through canyons. From the Isthmus on they used the road, but dropped down across the beaches of the coves from 4th of July to Howlands Landing. They continued on the road past Parsons Landing, and then by trail past Starlight Beach and on to the rocky outcrop of the West End. As sunset approached, BZ was waiting for them in the *Coaster* a hundred yards out to sea. They dove in, swam out, and climbed aboard.

The following year, Thad and Steve Royce did it again, off the boat, this time from the west end to the east end, taking more than an hour off their time: ten hours and ten minutes.

Now, more than 50 years later, hikers by the score are enjoying the length of the Island, albeit on a dedicated hiking trail with beautiful campgrounds and amenities such as transportation of equipment and catered meals along the way. And, who knows. If Thad Jones had the Internet back in '56, he might have consulted the TCT website, too.

For more information about the Trans-Catalina Trail – including safety information, tips and details about how to best tackle each of the Trail legs – visit CatalinaConservancy.org > Visit > Things to Do > Hiking and Biking > Hike the Trans-Catalina Trail.

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