

New map plots outdoor fun around Anchorage

REI DONATION: City's update of best places to play is the first in 10 years.

By MELISSA DeVAUGHN
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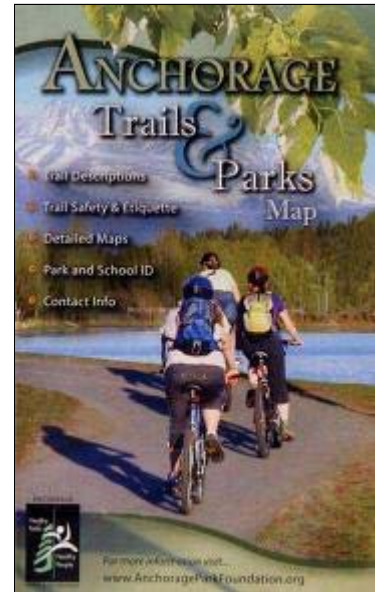
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On paper, Anchorage looks like an ideal city for those wishing to play. Cyclists can enjoy paved pathways, streets laid out in a grid and dirt paths. Picnickers have plenty of greenbelts and parks. Kids have playgrounds.

The key, however, is having that piece of paper to show you the way. Anchorage is a large city, and sometimes its best assets are hidden.

Fortunately, such a piece of paper now exists. The nonprofit Anchorage Parks Foundation, through a \$10,000 donation by Recreational Equipment Inc., has released an easy-to-read updated city map that outlines the best places to bike, hike, picnic and play in Anchorage.

Called the Anchorage Trails & Parks Map, the glossy, tear-resistant resource replaces a municipal Parks and Recreation map that is nearly 10 years old.



(Photo by EVAN R. STEINHAUSER / Anchorage Daily News)

"We hadn't had a map produced by the city since 1997, and since then lots of new trails and new parks have been made or have been renamed," said Beth Nordlund, development director for the foundation. "It was really something that was needed."

The new map has been on sale since June at REI, Anchorage Parks and Recreation outlets and public lands information centers. Nordlund wants to update the map every year or two to keep current with city changes.

"We are open to comments on this map," she said. "Maps are supposed to be living documents; they are always changing, so the more input the better."

REI employees, who approached the two-year-old nonprofit with the map proposal soon after the foundation started, said they wanted something similar to a Seattle map REI offers its customers for that city.

"The map sales have been great so far," said one REI manager, Steve Piper. "It was a much-needed thing for the community."

Piper said REI stores annually put money toward community outreach programs that match the stores' goals. Employees vote on the programs they favor, and the Anchorage map project topped the list.

The Anchorage Trails & Parks Map is not topographical, detailing elevation changes and specific

points on trails. Individual trail names in places such as Kincaid Park are not shown. Not all streets are identified.

Rather, it is an overall resource. A third of the inside of the map shows Anchorage streets and greenbelts. Major roadways are labeled and access points are differentiated in a color-coded legend showing paved trails, dirt trails, bike routes on roads and soon-to-be-constructed bike routes.

The map also designates schools, parks and other public areas for play, picnics and sports-oriented activities. On the back of the map, each location is numbered and attached to a grid showing such specific amenities as picnic shelters, play equipment, basketball courts, open playing fields, bike paths, tennis courts, ice hockey or access to water, among others.

Campbell Creek Park, for example, indicates the presence of a playground, open playing field, tennis courts and softball field. It also offers access to nordic skiing, paved trails and the creek for water activities. Every park in the city is labeled that way, giving users specific details on what can be had at each location.

Nordlund said the goal was to provide users with not just a trail map, but one that could allow them to fully appreciate what the city has to offer.

"We did have to draw the line somewhere because it will get quite junked up if you put everything (to do in the outdoors) in there," she said. "You have to figure out what it is that you want to represent clearly. You have to consider what the purpose of the map is before you do it."

Nordlund said the map also represents REI employees' vision. During the mapmaking process, she and others who worked on the project polled employees on what they thought would be most useful.

"They wanted to see bike routes and, especially, they wanted to see how you could get from your home to connect up to various trails to get to your office," she said. "We also added etiquette, rules of the road and the other thing REI likes, which is the leave-no-trace tips."

Perhaps the least useful aspect of the map is the small sections that highlight Kincaid, Russian Jack Springs and Far North Bicentennial parks. Some of the best-known dirt trails in Far North are labeled, but trails in Kincaid and Russian Jack are simply marked with red lines. None of the trails' designated uses are distinguished, either. Nordlund said that could change as signage improves in the city, but for now, the map is meant as an overall tool.

The map was made using GIS computer technology and ultimately created by graphic designers at the Anchorage firm Land Design North. The \$10,000 REI grant paid for the printing, Nordlund said. Two versions are available: a \$10 waterproof, tearproof version for those envisioning heavy use, and a \$5 tear-resistant one that might appeal to visitors or those keeping the map indoors.

"We wanted something that will be really high quality and very useful to residents and visitors alike," Nordlund said. "I wanted to make something that was so good that I wanted to have three copies -- one for my car, my office and my house, or for those people who are just on a quick trip."

Daily News reporter Melissa DeV Vaughn can be reached at mdevaughn@adn.com.