

## Meet the Boulder SharedPaths

*By: Karissa Courtney*

### *A little history on the paths*

Known as a “must visit” or “must do” while in Boulder, the Boulder Creek and the Goose Creek paths are over 80 miles of heavily trafficked trails for walkers, bikers, runners, skateboarders, scooters, and anyone else not in/on a motorized vehicle. These paths wind through the City of Boulder, taking riders and pedestrians from neighborhoods and campus, to stores, restaurants, and places of work. A thorough study still needs to be done on the exact breakdown of places people tend to go, but we can say by observation that many of the people on the paths are commuters and many others exercising.



These great paths were initially thought of by Al Bartlett over 50 years ago. He wanted a safer route for children to get to school and the Boulder Reservoir and in 1968 submitted a document to the city titled, “Bikeways for Boulder.” His daughter’s Girl Scout Troop (Troop 476) helped to ride many streets and to identify safe routes. The initial route created was from the Boulder Public Library to Scott Carpenter Park. Initially, citizens were reluctant to support an increase to the Bikeway because it was a belief that the funds would be taken from much needed road maintenance, and others viewed it as an attack on cars (Daily Camera, Taylor, Carol 2016). However, another 6-mile stretch of Bikeways was added in 1973, and by 1977, “The Boulder Bikeway Plan” outlined a network of 77 miles of cycling routes. Since then, the Boulder paths have continued to grow and attract more people.

This is evidenced by the Boulder Creek Path (a section of the Path system) being #8 on TripAdvisor’s List of Things to do in Boulder, and with over 500 reviews. Most of the reviews are positive, stating things like,

- “This path is wonderful for any visitor to Boulder”
- “A Boulder Must!”
- “A great place to walk and admire the nature”

*Real people, real path users – what do they think?*



Of those people that the paths attract, I am included! I love using the paths to run and to walk to local restaurants. In my own experience, my safety has never felt compromised while on the paths, although at times I have felt uneasy. I am a small, young woman and so the presence of homeless people, especially at night can make me feel somewhat unsafe- but this happens anywhere, not just the paths. In particular, the illumination of the paths can be somewhat lacking, so I avoid use in the dark. My female friend who I interviewed, has much the same feelings regarding the paths. She used the paths a lot when she lived in Boulder, but didn't feel safe in the dark. However, she also said that “the best

thing is that it's the quickest and safest way (aside from cars) to get around. It's also pretty because it's along the creek.” She also added that at some problematic points such as; the path narrows a bit too much, people using headphones don't pay enough attention to what's happening around them, and that the homeless people can make things a little “sketchy” if you are alone. I think that most women would agree with these statements, unless they were biking and could speed past anything that made them a little nervous.

I also interviewed another friend of mine—a male this time. He usually walks or bikes on the paths to get to CU campus, or to local restaurants close by. When asked about pros and cons of the paths, he said that they are well maintained in the winter (I assumed he meant snow removal), but a con for him is that there are some pretty dark spots at night, which make him feel uneasy. He added that an improvement that could be made, would be adding lights under bridges because he worries about bumping into homeless people sleeping under there at night. From assessing my own feelings, to talking to other people who utilize the paths, there was a common thread of safety at night, which Shared Paths could hopefully help instigate with the city.

*So what is SharedPaths Boulder?*

For those of you who don't fully know the Shared Path's history and story, this organization was started in 2017 by Graham Hill. He saw the need for stewards on the paths – people who could clean up trash, pass out bike lights, and just keep a general eye on the paths so they could inform the city should anything be amiss. Graham has a passion for safety and protecting the environment by having less cars on the road. He seeks to make the paths inviting for everyone to help curb carbon emissions by transitioning people to commuting on foot or bike. If you want to help keep the paths safe and clean, sign up to be a volunteer steward! More information can be found at [Shared PathsBoulder.org](http://SharedPathsBoulder.org)

