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Giant City State Park Nature Trails Project

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Introduction

We are a group of students in Dr. Matthew Therrell's Field Methods 433 geography class. The objectives of this project were to produce two geo-referenced maps for hiking trails at Giant City State Park in Makanda, Illinois and construct a website. Throughout the semester we worked together to complete hands-on field work. We hope this project proves to be useful to anyone that is intrigued or plans to visit Giant City State Park.

Methods

The first step in our project was determining, which trails we would geo-reference. We hiked the trails while gathering GPS coordinates at specific points of interest and geo-referenced corresponding pictures. We used a Magellan eXplorist XL to upload the GPS coordinates to Google Earth. We stopped at points of interest to take pictures and to record the GPS coordinates.

During the second step we uploaded track data recorded from the Magellan eXplorist XL to Google Earth. Once the data was uploaded to the Google Earth interface, the points of interest gathered at each picture were plotted and placed along the track. The pictures were uploaded onto a web-server. They were then placed on their corresponding points of interest along the trail making the images available for Google Earth. The same methods were then applied to Google Map with the same data gathered for Google Earth making two web-server interactive trails available for the public.

Giant City TrailBlazers Homepage



The Giant City Trailblazers' homepage is a website which houses all of the information available for the Giant City State Park Nature Trails Project. The purpose of the website is to provide users with information that we have gathered and consolidated. The website provides background information on the park and for recreational activities. There are two interactive maps: one of Giant City Nature Trail and one of Trillium Trail. Pictures of these two trails and park wildlife can be viewed on the site. Only two of the eight trails were completed for this project providing opportunities for future geography students to add additional interactive trails to the website.

Google Earth Interactive Map of Giant City Nature Trail

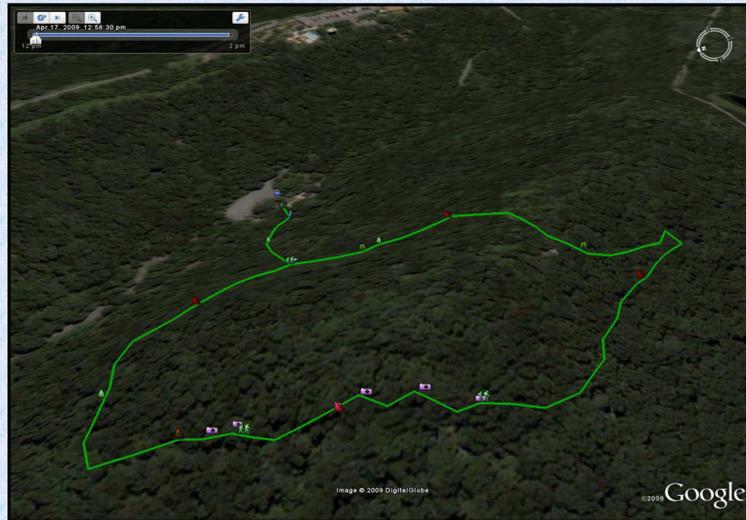


Figure 2. Giant City Nature Trail Google Earth Interactive Map

Google Earth Interactive Map of Fern Rocks Nature Preserve Trillium Trail

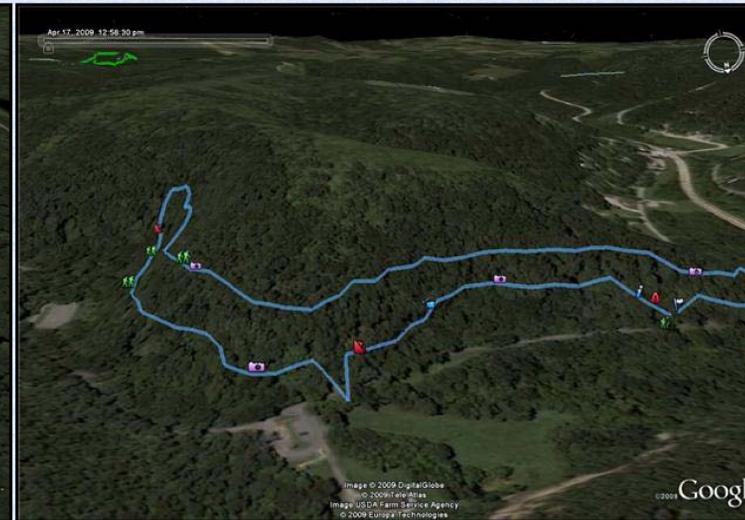


Figure 4. Fern Rocks Nature Trillium Trail Google Earth Interactive Map

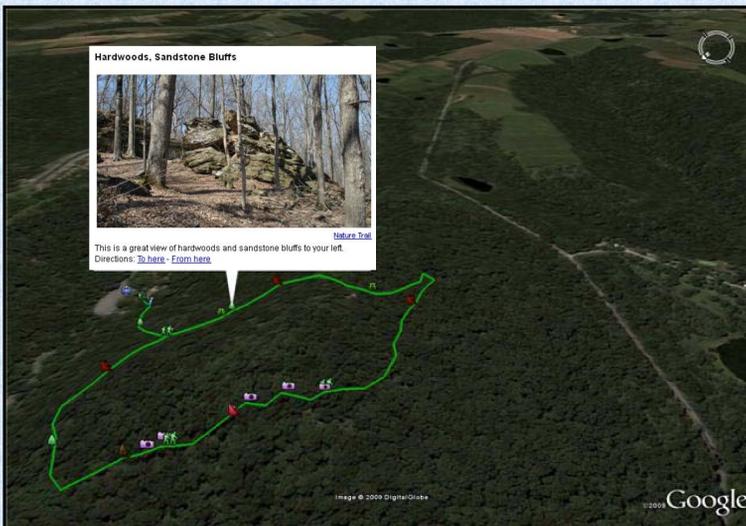


Figure 3. Google Earth allows the user to see pictures of specific points of interests along Giant City Nature Trail.

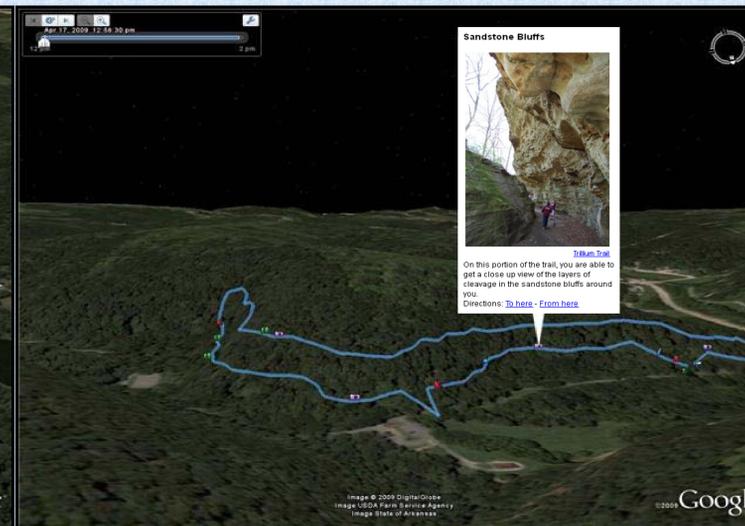


Figure 5. The user can simply click on the icon and a picture of the trail point will spring up on the user's screen.

The TrailBlazers



Figure 7. Eric Douangmany, Shawn Smith, Cari Pierce, Tariq Whitaker, Christopher Gerow, Lawrence Schwabe

Discussion

Throughout the course of the semester we interacted with nature and learned how to work together in a field type setting. We were able to apply our acquired geography skills and knowledge to our project. We hiked Giant City State Park trails several times and discovered how to effectively work a hand-held GPS unit as well as uploading GPS coordinates to Google Earth. Working with the website was difficult at first, but after trial and error we were able to plan and organize effective methods of gathering GPS coordinates with geo-referenced pictures for the interactive maps.

With the help of Dr. Therrell and the staff at Giant City State Park we were able to accomplish our objectives and complete this project. The group ambitiously planned to cover all of the Giant City State Park trails. Due to time constraints the group was limited to completing Giant City Nature Trail and Fern Rocks Nature Preserve Trillium Trail. This project provides opportunities for future geography students to add additional interactive trails to the website. The group hopes that future geography students will complete the remaining six trails. Please visit:

<http://info.geography.siu.edu/courses/433/projects/GCTB>

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Figure 6 A. Cari, Tariq, and Shawn hiking Trillium Trail



Figure 6 B. Shawn fishing at Stonefort Creek



Figure 6 C. Eric climbing a sandstone bluff



Figure 6 D. Lawrence hiking Trillium Trail