

Reuss Induction Speech by John Shank

I am truly honored to speak on behalf of Congressman Henry Reuss at this induction ceremony. Henry, and I assume from all my reading about him that he would prefer that we refer to him in the familiar, was a true conservationist/environmentalist. A conservationist because he was one before the word environmentalist was invented.

Interestingly enough, I learned, as I prepared for this talk, that he also was an internationalist, and a principal architect of the Peace Corps. This doesn't surprise me, since I was on a student exchange program to a tiny town in southern Germany with his son Chris. Back then, travel to Europe was uncommon and expensive.... we went by ship. Chris Reuss and I were fortunate that our parents recognized the value of living in and understanding other cultures.

But we are here to honor Henry for his fantastic conservation work, including, of course, the Ice Age Trail.

In the mid '60ies he chaired the House Subcommittee on Conservation and Natural Resources. This subcommittee, pushed by Henry, was able to spotlight problems caused by stream channelization, and force the Soil Conservation Service to abandon this program in the early 70ies. This committee also brought about one of the earliest attacks on water pollution. Through the Refuse Act of 1899, Reuss was able, through the federal attorney of the Western Districts, to bring action against four major polluters.... A first.

Henry loved his home state.... Wisconsin.... deeply. This meant loving its natural resources, and its terrain. This and his friendship with Ray Zillmer led to his involvement with the Ice Age Trail. To quote Tom Drought, a past president of the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation, "Ray Zillmer is acknowledged as the originator of the idea of the Ice Age Trail as well as the founder of the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation. However the late Henry Reuss can certainly be characterized as the godfather of the Trail."

To quote Paul Hayes, a past board member of the Foundation, "It was in Congress that Henry made his lasting mark on Wisconsin. Taking the idea from Ray Zillmer, a Milwaukee lawyer and outdoorsman, Henry pushed for the formation of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve in Wisconsin in 1964. His bill protected nine important natural features left behind by the great Wisconsin glacier and connected many of them by the 1,000-mile-long Ice Age Trail from Interstate Park on the Wisconsin-Minnesota border to Potawatomi State Park in Door County. Another Reuss bill elevated the Ice Age Trail to the status of a National Scenic Trail in 1980. Over the years, Henry the tireless advocate that he was, hiked portions of the Ice Age Trail with the late William O. Douglas Justice of the US Supreme Court, with Secretaries of the Interior Rogers Morton and Stewart Udall and with a number of Wisconsin's governors."

In 1980, Henry published his guidebook, "On the Trail of the Ice Age." This was the first guidebook for the Trail and used extensively by Tim Malzhan, one of the first thru hikers. Tim is now on the staff of the Foundation with the primary responsibility of building trail to the standards that Henry would approve of. I can attest to these standards for I am one of Tim's crew leaders.

Christine Thisted, our past Executive Director had a special relationship with Henry. She like others of the Foundation staff was the recipient of evening, motivational telephone calls from him. Henry referred to Christine as the "Rachel Carson of the (Hartland) marsh, a trail location in Waukesha County), and the Mother Theresa of the Ice Age Trail" Christine had planned to be here today, but was unable since she just learned that her father has been diagnosed with a very serious form of cancer.

Christine, and those who were lucky enough to get phone calls from Henry, had a firsthand awareness of his passion for completing the Trail.

Joe Jopek, our Langlade County Chapter Coordinator said, "Henry's passion for realizing a completed Trail, preferably certified (to National Park Service standards) never slackened with his retirement from Congress. Although the number of calls diminished, those occasional one or two to urge closing gaps were memorable. Henry's zeal and commitment to realize completion of the Trail, preferably certified, will be missed."

We of the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service are working diligently to realize Henry's and our dreams of a completed trail. We have 600 miles of quality footpath on the ground today and 400 to 600 miles more to go in various stages from corridor planning to flagging trail for construction. It is an exciting challenge, and yes Henry.... It will be completed!

Thank You.