

Looking for directions on the trails of life



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

We've all had to ask directions now and again. And some more than others.

Carol and I were trying out a new, unfamiliar trail one summer weekend. As we wound our way through the forest, the path snaked around a lake – but we saw no snakes, only an osprey and kingfisher (one of my personal favorites). The tranquility of kayakers and paddleboarders competed with powerboats and jet skis, but the woods seemed to absorb most sounds and sights that might distract from a quiet Saturday saunter.

We had a decent park map and the trail itself was fairly well marked with colored tags, yet we saw few signposts to assure us we were taking the intended loop. A young couple with a small dog walked by and we exchanged our delight in a beautiful day.

Her face was bright but shy. He had on a t-shirt with an American flag made out of rifles, but we sensed

nothing macho. They were pleasant and helpful when we passed them again, asking if we were on the right branch. They took the time to give us clear directions – or so we thought. Thanking them, we continued our meandering hike.

Coming to a roadway, we assumed we had gone too far and backtracked a short way to take an unmarked trail in the direction we assumed was correct. This took us into a campground where no signs were to be seen. Approaching a group of park workers, one came over to assist. He explained they were still working on trails and signs – something we already knew. His “directions” turned out to be ... lacking. The young couple appeared again as they were camping there. We explained our route and they realized they had forgotten to tell us about crossing the roadway.

We backtracked on a different trail but saw the crossing ahead. A voice called out and we looked back to see our new friend running toward us with a map. He wanted to make sure we were going in the right direction. Comparing maps we saw that we had missed the road crossing but we now saw it ahead. Thanking him we regained the trail and enjoyed an easy walk back to the trailhead and parking.

This experience, like many experiences, got me

thinking. I wondered, how often do we ask directions in our lives? Whom do we rely on to send us the right way?

It feels very satisfying to offer directions to other people. Sometimes the best feeling is when you've just come from a new place and the way is fresh in your mind to pass along to another.

In those old evangelistic days, we used to plaster our walls, cars and brains with the biblical verse attributed to Jesus: “I am the Way.” In Greek, the word “way” is the same for a “road.” If Jesus was saying he's the road, then where is that going? We assumed it was a straight highway to heaven. We believed there was only one road. Just take the Road into your heart, use the Bible for a map, and you would never need directions again.

With time and experience, the wisest among us find there are countless roads and there is no single track to anywhere. Wisdom, common sense and our inner sense of direction can be as good as any map.

I know people who do “spiritual direction” – an important counseling tradition in some circles that I respect. A clergyperson or certified guide assists a per-

See HIGHLAND, Page 2D