

# Where Am I RVA? Buttermilk Trail

Phil Riggan | Posted: Tuesday, June 25, 2013 12:00 am

With a nationally recognized trail rolling through our city, you'd think more people would be familiar with one of our most famous outdoor attractions.

The **Buttermilk Trail** is one of the oldest sections of the **James River Park System** trail and runs about four miles along the contours of the hill below Riverside Drive from just west of the 22nd Street Tower at Belle Isle to the Boulevard Bridge on the south banks of the James River.

Back in December 2012, **Blue Ridge Outdoors** named the Buttermilk Trail as the "**Best Urban Trail**."

I'll have this conversation on occasion:

Them: "Man, that is the best place to ride!"

Me: "You know why it is called Buttermilk, right?"

Them: "Er, no, why?"

With so many people being familiar with existence of the James River Park System's Buttermilk Trail -- used for dog-walking, running, hiking and especially mountain bike riding -- it would help to explain the origin of this unique name.

People who ride the most often will call sometimes use section names like Lower Buttermilk, Upper Buttermilk and Buttermilk Heights, but no matter what you call it, little Buttermilk Spring is at the heart of the name.

According to a sign posted at the spring along the trail:

## **BUTTERMILK SPRING**

*Not having refrigerators, farmer's in the 1800s stock-piled milk cans in the cool water here, before sale downtown. The big wooden holding tub has rotten away and water flow is less due to development.*

Richmond was a much smaller place then. Downtown Richmond was the big marketplace then -- likely the only place to sell for miles around at a time before bikes, automobiles or trolley cars. Can you envision the surrounding neighborhoods of Spring Hill, Woodland Heights and Westover Hills as farmland? With all of the development, many creek beds and springs have been redirected or the water sources diminished by man-made alterations to the landscape, leaving the Buttermilk Spring to nothing more than a puddle and a trickle.

Why is this important? Well, it may not be the most important information, but respecting our past

and knowing our history in Richmond is certainly important. There are many volunteers who work with the City of Richmond Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities, the James River Park System, Richmond Police Department and neighborhood watch programs to maintain the trails and keep them safe -- especially Richmond MORE, the trail-building group responsible for so many miles of Richmond's trail system. Take the time to volunteer and give back when you can.

**ALSO:** Check Terrain 360 for a much more intense visual of the Buttermilk Trail (and the rest of the James River Park System).