

6 Mile Road

Sections



The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT) is a long-distance hiking trail that stretches across eight states from Vermont to central North Dakota. Part of the National Trails System, the NCT links scenic, natural, historic, and cultural areas and allows visitors to experience a variety of landscapes.

When completed, the Trail will be the longest continuous hiking trail in the United States. The total projected length of the North Country Trail is 4,800 miles, of which more than 3,100 have already been completed. In Michigan, the NCT also serves as the hiking route of the DNR's Iron Belle Trail. Newaygo County is home to about 70 miles of the NCT.

To the North

A delightful off-trail highlight along this section is [Loda Lake Wildflower Sanctuary](#). A spur trail provides backcountry access to this 72-acre preserve, with 1.2 miles of interpretive trail and signage for identifying wild flowers, trees, and plants. The loop trail provides access to the spring-fed lake, a bog/wetlands area, a riparian marshland and boardwalk, an old farmhouse and barn foundations, and remnants of the studio of modernist landscape painter, Albert Schmidt. Originally part of a 1,000-acre private preserve, Loda Lake was sold to the Manistee National Forest during the Depression. In 1938, the U.S. Forest Service invited the [Federated Garden Clubs of Michigan](#) to help create a sanctuary for native plants and protected species. This is the only [wildflower](#) preserve in the entire country located on Forest Service land.

The NCT also passes through mixed hardwood and pine forests, with a prominent, fire-scarred [meadow](#) (from a prescribed burn) dedicated to the restoration of wildlife, endangered species, and oak savanna habitat. In 2016, the [National Wild Turkey Federation](#) partnered with the USFS and Michigan DNR to develop this 40+ acre meadow, dubbed "Chuck's Prairie" by locals. Hikers get an up-close glimpse at the emerging results of this partnership.



To the South

Highlights of this southbound section include a crossing of a pretty and reliable on-trail water source at year-round Mena Creek. Farther south, the NCT skirts a series of shallow, marshy woodland "ponds" where [wild blueberries](#) can be found in late summer. The fall colors surrounding these marsh bogs is well-worth viewing. Listen for the loud peeping of frogs (which may abruptly stop as you approach) and spot an occasional turtle on a log. The south end features delightful Second Cole Creek, an excellent lunch spot at the wooden bridge under the shade amid the aroma of a grove of [White Pines](#). There is also a great camping spot on the south side of the bridge.

Please scroll down for more detailed information.

6 Mile Road Sections

(Updated 5/1/25)

Directions to Trailhead: Take M-37 six miles north from White Cloud, turn left (west) onto paved 5 Mile Road. In one mile, turn right (north) onto Felch Ave and go past Loda Lake, where the road curves into 6 Mile Road. In one mile, a parking area is located on the left (south) side of 6 Mile Road, at the entrance to an ORV trail. The 6 Mile Road trail box register is located just north on the northbound route.

Northbound Overview & Trail Usage: The NCT wanders northward **5.5 miles** from 6 Mile to Pierce Road. This segment is totally single-track trail tread open for hiking and mountain biking. No horses or motorized vehicles are allowed. Please be aware there are no on-trail water sources along this section, so plan accordingly.

Northbound Trail Description: From the parking area, briefly hike downhill on the well-worn ORV trail and turn left (north) onto the blue-blazed NCT which immediately spills onto 6 Mile Road. Turn right (east) on 6 Mile Road for about 50 yards, then turn left (north) onto the NCT. Hikers will encounter these noteworthy waypoints:

- **In 0.2 miles:** Sign-in at the trail register box and cross sandy, two-tracked Ferris Ave
- **In 0.5 miles:** Dip down in and out of a series of interesting pocket/kettle marshes
- **In 1.5 miles:** Reach the Birch Grove spur trail which accesses Loda Lake Wildflower Sanctuary (note: Diamond Lake County Campground is three miles farther south)
- **In 2.0 miles:** Break out onto "*Chuck's Prairie*" and hike ½ miles across this USDA/MDNR/NWTF wildlife and oak savanna restoration project
- **In 1.0 mile:** Drop 130 vertical feet down a forested escarpment which is perhaps the NCT's largest elevation change in the county, so be thankful you are going **down!**
- **In 0.5 miles:** Arrive at Pierce Road at this section's end

Southbound Overview & Trail Usage: The NCT travels **8.4 miles** from 6 Mile Road to the M-20 Trailhead. This section is single-track trail tread that winds through mixed hardwood forests on gently rolling terrain open for hiking and mountain biking. Please note this is a popular route for mountain bikers riding north out of the M-20 parking area, so "***STAY ALERT!***" (and be respectful of the multi-use reality of this section). No horses are allowed. There are two excellent on-trail water sources which can be accessed toward the beginning and end of this segment. Be sure to treat or filter any water collected for consumption along the NCT.

Southbound Trail Description: To access the southbound trail, briefly hike slightly downhill from the parking area on the well-worn ORV trail and turn right (south) onto the blue-blazed NCT. Hikers will encounter these noteworthy waypoints:

- **In 0.5 miles:** Traverse gradually downhill and cross Mena Creek on a wooden bridge
- **In 1.4 miles:** Climb out of the valley and cross 5 Mile Road (Note: Disregard the NCT schoolhouse sign, which is now privately-owned and no longer accessible to hikers.)
- **In 3.0 miles:** Continue over rolling, forested terrain, cross several two-track roads, skirt a number of shallow, marshy woodland "ponds," and cross 3 Mile Road
- **In 2.0 miles:** Cross Second Cole Creek and note the nice campsite just downstream
- **In 1.0 Mile:** Arrive at the M-20 Trailhead, the end point for this section