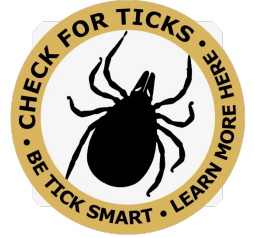


# M-20 Trailhead



## 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 highlight of this section is delightful Second Cole Creek. This is an excellent lunch spot at the wooden bridge under the shade and amid a grove of [White Pines](#). Situated one mile from the Trailhead, this creek serves as a scenic out-and-back destination point, and hikers can enjoy the cool, shallow, sand-bottomed creek. There is a great camping spot on the south side of the bridge. Further north, the NCT skirts a number of shallow, marshy woodland "ponds" and pocket marshes. Wild blueberries can be found here in late summer and the fall colors are worth viewing.



Brook Trout

### To the South

The first interesting feature lies just north of the White River in the murky [wetlands](#) and cedar swamp bordering Rattlesnake Creek (Note: don't panic at the misnomer...venomous vipers have not been seen - in recent years at any rate!). These perpetually water-saturated lowlands are crossed on 1,800 feet of puncheon-style boardwalk.

A second and most significant geographical feature is the [White River](#), which the Trail crosses on an impressive steel/wooden bridge. The White River is a state-designated "[Natural River](#)", characterized by controlled development to preserve the natural state of this 24-mile long river. Through most of Newaygo County, the White River is a slow-moving, shallow, and log-jammed body of water. The serene aura of the river makes it an appealing point for anglers and hikers to pause and soak in its beauty at the bridge crossing.



Eastern  
White  
Pine



Rainbow Trout



**Please scroll down for more detailed information.**

## M-20 Trailhead Sections

**Directions to the Trailhead:** This very popular and well-used trailhead and parking area is located on 1 Mile Road (M-20) about 2.5 miles west of M-37 north of White Cloud (an officially designated NCT "Trail Town.") The trail-specific parking lot has room for 8 to 10 vehicles and a descriptive NCT/Forest Service informational kiosk.

**Northbound Overview & Trail Usage:** The NCT travels **8.4 miles** from the M-20 Trailhead north to 6 Mile Road. The trail is single-track trail tread that winds through mixed hardwood forests on gently rolling terrain and is open for hiking and mountain biking. This is a popular route for mountain bikers going north from the M-20 trailhead, so be respectful of the multi-use reality of this section. No horses or motorized vehicles 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.

**Northbound Trail Description:** The trail passes through the parking area, so begin following blue blazes north across paved M-20. These noteworthy waypoints lie ahead:

- **In 1.0 mile:** Cross several two-track roads and arrive at Second Cole Creek with a lunch spot under the large White Pines. A good campsite is just south of the bridge.
- **In 2.0 miles:** Cross dirt-tracked Ferris Avenue and arrive at paved 3 Mile Road which goes east to the Diamond Lake area
- **In 3.5 miles:** Begin bending to the northwest, skirt several marshy woodland "*ponds*" and pocket marshes to arrive at sandy, signed 5 Mile Road (NOTE: Disregard the NCT schoolhouse sign as it is now privately owned and not accessible to NCT hikers.)
- **In 1.4 miles:** Climb, then dip steeply into a deep wooded valley where the NCT crosses an ORV trail, enters a pine forest, and crosses a bridge over year-round Mena Creek, the second water source of this section (and final water for six miles until Bear Creek)
- **In 0.5 miles:** Traverse up and out of the valley and re-cross the ORV trail and turn left (north) up the ORV trail several hundred feet to access the 6 Mile Road parking area

**Southbound Overview & Usage:** The NCT travels **4.1 miles** south from the M-20 Trailhead to Alley Lake on single-track trail tread open to hikers only. Mountain bikes and horses are prohibited south of M-20. Two flowing creeks provide reliable water sources within in the first three miles of this section.

**Southbound Trail Description:** The NCT leaves the parking area on its southern edge to the trail box register in several hundred feet. Hikers will encounter the following waypoints:

- **In 1.5 miles:** Ducking in and out of several grassy meadows, cross and parallel seasonal FS 5507 (which is also an ORV track), and soon turn left (east) to walk about 50 yards down Baseline Road before turning right (south) into a pine plantation
- **In 1.0 miles:** Cross flowing Rattlesnake Creek on a bridge and hike up-stream to cross the puncheon-style boardwalk to the higher end of the wetlands
- **In 0.5 miles:** Pass by a signed spur for the White Cloud Loop Trail that branches to the left and loops clockwise into White Cloud, and back at the junction, continue south on the NCT to cross the steel bridge over the White River
- **In 1.0 miles:** Leave the bridge and immediately turn right (southwest) to hike along the south edge of the river valley and arrive at short boardwalk over a marshy area
- **In 0.1 miles:** Cross paved Echo Drive and hike right to the Alley Lake Trailhead (NOTE: a spur trail to the parking area is scheduled for later 2023.)