

Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge FAQs

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If you have further questions, email the Allegheny National Forest Chapter of the NCTA at anf@northcountrytrail.org or post questions on their facebook page at www.facebook.com/ANFChapterNCT/.

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

1. What is the Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge?

The Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge (A-100) is a backpacking adventure where the individual hiker challenges themselves to hike 100, 75, 50 or 25 miles in 50 hours along the 100-mile section of the North Country National Scenic Trail in the Allegheny National Forest.

The challenge starts at 6:00 p.m. on Friday of the event weekend. All participants begin their challenge at 6:00 p.m. together at the north or south end of the 100 miles, depending on the year. Participants will then attempt to hike their designated mileage by 8:00 p.m. on Sunday evening.

2. Who can participate in the event?

Any person can participate in the event but they must be registered and have paid their registration fee. We will also accept walk-ins the day of the event. Walk-ins cannot take the shuttle and are not guaranteed event swag. Payment is by cash only since there is not reliable cell or internet service to be able to take credit cards.

3. What does it cost?

Check on the event webpage to get the specific cost for the current year.

<https://northcountrytrail.org/a-100/>

4. How many people have actually hiked 100 miles in 50 hours?

Since the event was first held in 2010, the number of finishers have varied from 6 to 35. Weather plays a huge factor in the amount of finishers in any given year. In general, the number of finishers is a small portion of the number that set out.

5. Are there maps available for me to use?

Yes. The NCTA has moved to free downloadable maps. Check out the NCTA's interactive map here: <https://northcountrytrail.org/.../trail-map-and-downloads/>. There you can download any portion of the maps or scroll farther down to find a link to print a high-quality PDF. If you use the Avenza maps app, the PDF map series is available here as well. The online map is updated every year with campsite changes, reroutes, etc. Parking and campsites are indicated on the map as well as side trails in the ANF. Keep in mind that the blue blazes are what really mark the trail. Maps are not always up to date. The blazes are what actually depict the pathway. Every year, the Allegheny National Forest Chapter of the NCTA is working on the trail, relocating the trail and repainting blazes. This means the prudent hiker must constantly be looking for blue blazes to insure that he or she is actually "on the trail". If you hike more than two hundred yards and do not see a blaze, you need to stop and find one. Look behind you. What do you see? Look forward. What do you see? You may need to backtrack and find the last blaze. Then move forward or take another direction. Be especially careful whenever you come to a road crossing and do not see the trail directly across the way from where you are standing. This is one way to truly get off track in just a few steps. Hiking at night will definitely require you to take special care to look for the blue blazes as you hike. They are not especially visible in low light periods.

6. How should I prepare for the Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge?

While there are many ways to prepare for endurance events, hiking with a pack similar to what you plan to carry in the event is by far, the best way to prepare for the event. If you cannot comfortably hike thirty miles in a 12-hour period with a full pack, consider doing a shorter distance than the 100 miles. Hikes of 25, 50 and 75 miles are held on the same day of the event. Many participants are long distance runners as well as backpackers. This training does give some people an edge. However, just because a person can run a marathon does not mean he or she can hike 100 miles in 50 hours. The

activities do have distinct differences. Weather conditions vary year to year and can include high heat and rainstorms. It's wise to try to train in different weather conditions if you can. Trying to get in shape for the A-100 in just a month or two will not be as effective as taking a long time to slowly strengthen your entire mind, body and spirit in preparation for a 50-hour endurance event.

7. Will I have to hike in the dark?

Twenty-five milers will not have to walk in the dark, but 50, 75 and 100-mile participants will be hiking in the dark. There is no way to hike 50 to 100 miles in 50 hours without hiking after dark. Therefore, it is essential that you do part of your training on trails, after dark, using a headlamp, hiking with all your gear and testing every aspect of your system including sleeping out for a night and then hiking some more the next day. Training in this manner gives you a very clear picture of your system and what it will feel like when you are actually participating in the A-100. A good headlamp with spot and flood light settings will give you a choice of what type of light you may want to use at any given time while on the trail. In general, a spotlight is best for focusing on blue blazes when you are tired and can't see as well. A flood light is better for general use because it gives a wider field of vision and does not make the hiker feel like he or she is moving along in a dark tunnel. Experiencing hiking in the dark is the only way to overcome any issues that this part of the adventure will create for the uninitiated.

8. What happens if I don't finish the A100 by Sunday night at 8 pm?

Nothing much. You don't finish in the allotted time. You can hike on until you finish. You can bail out and find a way back to your vehicle. You can stop where you are and say, "I hiked 78 miles in 50 hours." This is not a race. There are no record books. There is just you and the trail. Enjoy it.

9. Is there cell phone service along the trail?

Cell phone service along the trail can be limited to just the ridge lines but recently there have been improvements with cell phone coverage. It is more likely that you will find a spot where you can text, but not call.

10. What do I do if I can't make it back to where my vehicle is parked?

Hike to the next road crossing and figure out a strategy for getting back to your vehicle. Hitchhiking is not as unsafe as you might think. In the National Forest, a person with a backpack on is generally not seen as a threat. Chances are you will get a ride faster than you think. You can road walk and then call when you get a cell phone signal and arrange for a ride. Road walking is strenuous, but at least you know where you are and where you are going. Plan ahead. Don't try to do a distance that is too great for your current level of skill and preparation.

11. What do I do if I get lost?

Sit still and wait for someone to come along the trail. This way, two of you can solve the problem together. If your headlamp stops working, stop hiking, bundle up and stay put until daybreak. Hiking in the dark without a light is foolish and can be dangerous. You are never really “lost”. You are temporarily disoriented and once you STOP “Stop, Think, Observe and Plan”, you will be ready to move on safely down the trail.

For other outdoor safety tips, check out <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/alleggheny/learning/safety-ethics>.

12. What kind of shoes should I wear?

This is a personal preference, but without a doubt, running shoes, cross training shoes, any type of supportive, lightweight footwear is the preferred choice of A-100 participants. While all people are different, most benefit by wearing lighter footwear because there is less fatigue. Every ounce of weight worn on the foot must be lifted up and down with each step. Multiply this by 10,000 times in a 100-mile journey and your legs are lifting many tons. Every ounce counts. A 12-ounce pair of shoes will be 25% more efficient than a pair of 16-ounce shoes because you will be lifting less weight with each step. The numbers are pure physics. There is only one way to test this and that is to get a pair of lightweight shoes and then wear them for five miles and see how they feel. Then, put on your old traditional hiking boots and see if you can feel the difference. Maintaining dry feet is also crucial to help prevent blisters from forming. Every time you stop for a short rest your shoes should be taken off to air out and cool off your feet. Some hikers prefer lightweight shoes that allow your feet to get wet, however, they drain well and dry quickly, which they prefer over using waterproof shoes.

13. What kind of clothing should I wear?

This is also subject to personal preference. Cotton clothing is out. Polyester blends are the best for wicking moisture and still maintaining some level of insulation. Socks range from lightweight to wool blends. Wool will keep feet warm when wet, but hold moisture longer. Given the forest shadows, sunglasses are not necessary on most days. Rain gear is always prudent to carry along for obvious reasons. Test all gear before you decide that it is going in your pack. Then you will not be shocked when it does not work the way you hoped it would.

14. What kind of pack should I carry?

The number of miles you are attempting and what gear you need will determine the size pack you will carry. For the 100 and 75 milers, a day pack can be enough. This decision will depend on how you plan to get to the finish line. Some hikers are totally self-sufficient and carry everything they will need to finish, including clothes, water, food, and a minimal sleeping system. This will require a larger pack. Some hikers find clever ways not to carry everything with them and carry a small, lightweight pack. Whatever “style” you decide to go with, it is important to practice wearing the pack every day when you train for your hike. This will prepare you for the way the pack feels during your A-100 journey.

For the shorter distances, 25 and 50 miles, a larger pack can be carried to fit gear like a tent, sleeping gear or stove. Remember, a larger pack makes it possible for a hiker to carry anything he or she may want, and this can be a problem. Limiting pack volume is one way to ensure that you won't carry more than is needed.

15. What kind of gear should I carry for sleeping?

For 100 and 75 milers, a sleeping pad for laying down on is nice and serves to rest the body. A bivy sack and a light sleeping bag could work well for most nights, however, in early June it is possible for the temperature to drop into the 40s in the Forest. Hikers should be prepared for this possibility. There are shelters or lean-to's approximately every 10 miles throughout your hike. It is possible to not bring your own shelter and use the shelters along the trail. Hikers need to be prepared to share shelter space with others if they choose to not take shelter. Please check the weather before the event and make decisions accordingly.

Fifty and 25 milers have more flexibility in carrying a tent or a hammock and a sleeping bag. They have time to set up equipment and sleep longer at night than the longer distance hikers.

16. What kinds of food should I plan on eating while I'm hiking?

This varies dramatically based upon the individual's preference. Longer distance hikers will usually avoid any food that needs preparation. There is not enough time to cook, eat and hike 100 miles in 50 hours. Many people carry energy bars. Some carry summer sausage and wrap the meat in soft shell tortillas. Peanut butter and bagels will provide a lot of calories and fat. GORP is a staple food. It's a mixture of raisins, M&Ms and peanuts. You can add in other types of goodies like pretzel sticks and cheese crackers. The choices are limitless. Whatever you choose to take along, make sure that you've tested this food choice on some shakedown cruises where you're hiking 20-25 miles and dining only on your chosen foods. This will tell you if they are digestible when your body is under stress.

Again the 50 and 25 milers have more flexibility in carrying a larger variety of food and in having the time to prepare food.

17. Do I have to carry water or can I find it along the way?

Both. You can carry water along with you but you will need to get water along the way as well. To be safe, filtering or treating your water is the best way to go. *Giardia* is a parasite that can be found in any stream. It causes an intestinal disease that can last several weeks. More information about *Giardia* can be found at [About Giardia CDC](#).

There are plenty of streams and springs along the way. The only places along the hundred miles of trail where you have to go over three miles without a good water source are a few ridgelines; from Bliss Hill Rd south over Gibbs Hill, on either side of Rt 59 and the Tionesta Scenic Area. Drinking at least a pint of water an hour is prudent. This may sound like a lot of water to consume, but under the stress of hiking such a long distance, your body needs to be well hydrated.

18. Where can I camp?

Forest Service policy in the ANF states that “You may camp on National Forest land, however camping is not permitted on the shores and within 1500 feet of the timberline around the Allegheny Reservoir, except in areas designated for such use.” www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/allegheny/recarea/?recid=6143 . Otherwise, along the NCT dispersed camping is allowed. Following the “Leave No Trace” principles (see question #19), you should camp on a durable surface or an established campsite 200 feet from water. The ANF Chapter of the NCTA has marked some established campsites. These may or may not match what is shown on Forest Service maps, which can be out of date. The most up to date listing of marked campsites can be found on the NCTA interactive map for PA [PA NCT Map](#) , the PA map series pdfs [PA NCT pdf maps](#) or the campsite listing on the ANF Chapter webpage <https://northcountrytrail.org/trail/pennsylvania/anf/> .

19. What are the “Leave No Trace” principles?

The “Leave No Trace” principles are guidelines to follow in order to act responsibly outdoors, protecting our recreational areas. A list of the principles is below. Each one is explained at <https://www.fws.gov/project/leave-no-trace-principles> .

The Seven “Leave No Trace” Principles

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

20. What do I need to do to protect myself from bears?

Bears are hunted in the Allegheny National Forest so they are wary of human beings. There has never been an attack on a human by a black bear in the Allegheny National Forest area. There are many bears that do inhabit the forest, but they avoid humans because we are a threat to them. Most likely, if there would be a problem, it would involve cubs. If you do see cubs, get away from them. Momma bear is nearby and will generally try and protect her offspring.

The US Forest Service recommends, “To ward off bears, keep your campsite clean, and do not leave food, garbage, coolers, cooking equipment or utensils out in the open. Remember that bears are potentially dangerous and unpredictable - never feed or approach a bear. Use a flashlight at night - many animals feed at night and the use of a flashlight may warn them away.”

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/allegheny/learning/safety-ethics> . If you are confronted by a bear, talk loudly and make lots of noise. Stand tall. Wave your hiking sticks to make you look larger than life. If the bear attacks, do not run. You can’t outrun a bear. Fight back. If knocked down, shield your head and the back of your neck. Then, play dead.

Good information about black bears is given by the New Jersey division of Fish and Wildlife at http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/pdf/bear/bearfacts_safetytips.pdf

21. How do I protect myself from Lyme disease?

Deer ticks that carry Lyme disease are found throughout the Allegheny National Forest. Your best defense is vigilance. Wear light colored clothing to see ticks and check yourself each day. Ticks tend to be found more in damp, grassy, weedy areas. So, try to avoid that type of area for resting or camping. You may also want to do some research into treating your clothing with Permethrin, a chemical that can be applied to clothing and gear to help repel ticks and other insects.

An excellent pamphlet put out by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can be found at [Preventing Tick Bites | Ticks | CDC](#). It should answer all your questions.

22. What are the main reasons hikers do not finish the 100 miles?

- 1) Mental Attitude – Hiking 100 miles requires a person to really want to accomplish the feat. Therefore, a lack of mental commitment to the goal is the primary reason most people don't finish. Often the hiker just loses his or her intent. The goal of doing 100 miles slowly ebbs away when the reality hits that there are 50 miles to go, and the hiker has already been moving for 24 hours. When a hiker starts to doubt, the best thing to do is to not make a decision right away, rest, and maybe eat a little something. Evaluate how it's going. There is always more than one way to accomplish your goal. You may be able to finish, but not how you envisioned it. Dig deep and find your grit. You'll be so proud of yourself if you overcome!
- 2) Lack of adequate conditioning and preparation – Conditioning includes hiking on trails and not roads. It also includes carrying and being comfortable with all gear.
- 3) Injuries – Many people suffer from blisters in the first 10 miles. Once a person is injured, no matter how small, the goal of doing 100 miles might be over. Muscle injuries or falls can also cause a person to drop out.
- 4) Not hiking your own hike – The hiker tries to keep up with other hikers who may be much faster. In the process, he or she wears out quicker. It is essential to hike your own hike. Slow and steady does work. Averaging only 2.5 miles per hour for 40 hours gets you to the 100-mile mark – and it leaves you with 12 hours to sleep and rest along the way.
- 5) Night hiking – Hiking at night slows down even the fastest hikers. Therefore, it is important to practice hiking at nighttime and account for less miles covered in the dark when you plan your strategy.

23. What does it mean to “hike your own hike”?

Simply put, hiking your own hike means moving at your own pace, stopping when you want to stop, drinking when you are thirsty, eating when you are hungry and not letting others engage you in speed hiking or going longer than you think is safe and prudent.

“Hike your own hike” also means that you have to feel comfortable with the clothing and gear you use on your hike. Listen to advice from other hikers, but try out your clothing and gear and use what works for you!

24. Can my dog catch a ride on the shuttle bus?

No dogs are allowed on the shuttle buses. These are not our rules; they are set by the companies we contract to drive the buses. Dogs must have a current rabies vaccine, not be aggressive, and should be under your control at all times. They should be on a leash at the start, the various finish points, road crossings, and places with large numbers of hikers, i.e. the first few miles of the event until hikers spread out.

Be aware there are bear, deer, porcupine, skunk, etc. in the woods that your dog may tangle with and not necessarily come out a winner, so keeping them on a leash no longer than 6-8' is a great idea.

Most importantly, be considerate of other visitors. Your dog should not be running up to and greeting other hikers, since the hikers may not be comfortable with unknown dogs.