

January-March, 2019

The Magazine of the
North Country Trail Association

Volume 38, No. 1

north star



**State of the Trail:
see what everybody else is doing
Celebration in May,
at Shanty Creek in Michigan
Latest End-to-Enders, and Nathan
did it without any snow!**



Jan Stipetich, one of the NCT Navigators, stands in an area damaged by flash flooding in June of 2018. This picture was taken while the NCT Navigators did trail maintenance on December 3, 2018, on their adopted section of the NCT, part of the Chequamegon Chapter's Rainbow Lake Wilderness in Wisconsin. You can see undamaged NCT at the top of the picture. A Trail re-route has been marked and is awaiting USFS approval.

Photo: Sara Balbin

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Canyon Falls in the western Upper Peninsula along the Peter Wolfe Chapter section. Photo: Keith Meyers.



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Trailhead
Tim Mowbray
President

Greetings to North Country Trail Association and Affiliate members. I hope your New Year has started out well and that you are enjoying the change of seasons to cooler temperatures and varied activity on the Trail. It is always nice to see our trails used year-round for hiking, running, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. I was surprised to see a number of Trail users out snow shoeing and doing some routine maintenance along the Trail after the first of the year; looks like a great way to complete maintenance and stay active. We did not see any winter campers on this trip, but with cars parked in the NCTA kiosk area overnight during the weekends we know that some are out enjoying the Brule State Forest and the refreshing environment with challenging overnights in the great outdoors.

The new year has also brought us some new challenges in the form of a government shutdown. The shutdown may have some effect on the effort regarding the search for a new National Park Service Superintendent for the North Country Trail, but we hope the process will move along smoothly once we return to normal activity. A long-term shutdown could challenge our operational finances and slow some of our projects as we gear



Photo: Sue Mowbray

up for the 2019 hiking season. Let’s hope this issue is resolved quickly and that we are able to keep moving ahead with our planned trail building.

2018 was a great year for the NCTA and we hope to keep the momentum moving ahead in 2019. We came close to having our reroute legislation adopted by Congress and we gained expertise in working with staff in key legislative offices. We will continue this effort and seek to have the legislative bills introduced in the current Congress, hopeful for better outcomes. We saw continued support of our volunteers in the many building projects across the Trail. We engaged in training programs for volunteers and worked to bring in new members to keep up with the growing number of miles of trail we need to maintain.

We look forward to the challenges of 2019. The organization’s strategic plan will be updated to adapt to the changing environment and priorities for the Trail. We will work to update our website and communications with our members and to advocate for our mission to develop, maintain, protect and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a Trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

We hope to see many of you at our annual Celebration to be held in early May in Michigan. Have a peaceful and active season along the Trail. ✨



From the
Executive Director
.....
Andrea Ketchmark

Adventure Awaits

The moment I step on the Trail my mind begins to work a little differently. The unknown becomes exciting and not scary. The idea of challenge becomes invigorating and not daunting. Having no agenda becomes freeing instead of frustrating. Among the many lessons the Trail has taught me, this may be one of the most important and one that I carry with me in my daily life and into the new year.

2018 was an incredible year. NCTA launched a new Crew Leader training program and the Next Generation Coalition. We celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System Act and were almost successful with our reroute legislation in Congress. We released our new technical map series for free download. Hike 100 is still going strong and our community of users, partners and supporters is growing larger every day.

As we enter the new year, I'm excited to explore all of the new opportunities that will greet us and am trying to

anticipate where the challenges may lie. We are transitioning to a new database, have more website upgrades planned and will continue to grow our training programs for volunteers. We have a lot planned but also have some unknowns. We are awaiting the announcement of new leadership positions with our agency partners including our National Park Service Superintendent. And we're watching how political, economic and environmental changes may impact the Trail and its resources. It's important to stay vocal about how important the Trail is and what it brings to the world and 2019 will be no exception.

When faced with the unknown, with change or adversity, thinking back to time on the Trail helps bring perspective. Whether it's the excitement of not knowing what's around the corner or the elation of surviving an unexpected hurdle, the trail teaches each of us that we have the strength to take those steps.

The poster over my desk reads "wander without reason." It was a gift from our staff and it's a daily reminder that although we have many plans and goals and tasks to complete, sometimes the best journeys come from exploration without knowing exactly what's around the corner. There is no better place to experience this than the Trail and with the Trail's help we can carry this practice over into our daily lives.

In 2019 I hope you all approach life the way you approach the Trail. One step at a time and with adventure in your hearts. ✨



North Star Submission Guidelines

Without your material, we cannot have a magazine, so we eagerly request your submission of pictures and text for every issue. Please send both to Irene Szabo at treeweenie@aol.com, or 7639 Swamp Rd. Bergen N.Y. 14416.

Please **do not embed pictures within your article**, but send them separately as .jpg attachments. We will no longer accept embedded pictures. In all cases, please supply photographer's name

Front cover photo candidates: We prefer vertical format, and if digital, at least 300 dpi or greater than 3000 pixels, AND we are always looking for great cover photos! Inside pictures look much better with one dimension over 1000 pixels, too, preferably 2000.

Next deadline for Vol. 38, No. 2, is April 1, 2019.

Remember that 900 words equal approximately one page of dense text, so very few articles should exceed 1800 words in this size of magazine.

Thank you!

Your editor, Irene
(585) 494-0307

HUTCHINSON PROPERTY North Country National Scenic Trail Reaches a Milestone in October

By Mark Weaver, Then NPS Superintendent
North Country National Scenic Trail

The North Country Trail, the nation's longest national scenic trail, clocks in at 4600 miles long and traverses seven states from New York to North Dakota. Its presence is cemented via partnerships with federal, state and local public land managers, private landowners, its non-profit partner North Country Trail Association, and a number of affiliate trail organizations. But even with these partnerships, many, many miles of Trail remain unprotected.

Until 2009, the federal government could not permanently acquire Trail access in the name of the National Park Service, leaving all Trail protection responsibilities to our partners. That changed in 2009 when Congress granted "willing seller" authority, permitting federal land acquisition in the name of the Trail. In 2017 funding was secured for the first federal acquisition, this 80 acre parcel of beautiful countryside in Augusta, Michigan.

On October 13, Trail staff celebrated this first acquisition with neighbors, local dignitaries, Michigan Department of Natural Resources staff, and staff and volunteers of the National Park Service and North Country Trail Association. A group hike and a site design workshop were led by NPS staff. The sellers of the property, Ron and Grace Hutchinson, were presented with North Country Trail Association's Outstanding Landowner Award for their decades of service to the Trail.

In one short year of ownership, NPS staff have performed a property boundary survey, coordinated compliance actions, established local government support, planted 40 acres of prairie, planned a reroute of the Trail and developed a preliminary trailhead design. Stay tuned for more successes to come at the Hutchinson property, also known as the Angell Farm.

Recently the National Park Service has secured a second parcel of 200 acres in northern Wisconsin. It will soon move forward to replicate the successes achieved with the Michigan property. An additional 2500 acres are currently under negotiation with a property owner in northern Michigan.

The variety of land types, ownership, issues and conditions requires the Trail to be nimble in terms of protection alternatives and opportunities. Having the additional option of federal ownership allows the Trail to be better positioned to ensure a world-class walking and hiking experience for all. ✨



Mark Weaver, our NPS Superintendent before he retired, is addressing the group. Sitting in the front row (l-r) were Dave Cornell, Ron and Grace Hutchinson, Jan Cornell, and Andrea Ketchmark.

Photos: Mick Hawkins



We can't overstate it. This is a milestone and a turning point for the Trail.

Mark, thank you for your patience with the process and your willingness to take the risk. I know it's terrifying for a 4600-mile Trail to jump into land acquisition when you have three staff.

Chris, thank you for your vision for what to do with the property. I can't wait to see the Trail winding through native prairie.

Jane, Jeff, Mary and all of the incredible volunteers with the Chief Noonday Chapter, thank you for your excitement and ideas and willingness to assist in management in the future. With you on the ground, our NPS team of three can turn into a team of a thousand.

We have much still to be decided about the future of protection for the NCT but this parcel is a great start.

Andrea Ketchmark
Executive Director

STATE OF THE TRAIL

OVERVIEW

The mission of the North Country Trail Association is “to **develop, maintain, protect and promote** the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.”

In 2018, our dedicated volunteers carried out that mission across 7 states; helping to build new Trail, improve the miles of Trail on the ground and reach new audiences. The stories that follow in this issue are just a few of the highlights that showcase the work done across the NCT.

Please join us in celebrating these incredible achievements and looking forward to the great work to come in 2019.

2018 HIGHLIGHTS

991 volunteers contributed **66,834 hours**, representing an incredible **\$1,650,131** contribution to carrying out the mission of the North Country Trail.



Total miles of Trail off-road in 2018: **3,129**

CARRYING OUT OUR MISSION

DEVELOP

- 51 miles of new Trail constructed
- 3,319 feet of new puncheon and boardwalk installed
- 32 new bridges installed
- 22 new shelters and campsites built
- 304 new kiosks and signs installed



MAINTAIN

- 2,637 miles of Trail improved through maintenance efforts
- 7,644 feet of puncheon and boardwalk improved
- Thousands of paint blazes refreshed



PROTECT

- 24 new Easements and Agreements with Landowners along the Trail



PROMOTE

- 245 Chapter-led hikes on the Trail
- 125 outreach events hosted and attended to promote the NCT




HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2018 ACROSS THE TRAIL

NORTH DAKOTA
DAKOTA PRAIRIE CHAPTER
 The Dakota Prairie Chapter has negotiated more than 10 new easements, trail use agreements, and MOU's that permit and protect the NCT on private lands.
 See page 9



Photo: Bruce Johnson



OVERVIEW REPORT BY

VALERIE BADER

Director of Trail Development

Photo: Max Bader



MINNESOTA
ITASCA MORaine CHAPTER
 The Itasca Moraine Chapter installed new trailhead kiosks and built and installed benches at scenic locations and campsites along their Trail segment.
 See page 10



Photo: Ellie Williams

MICHIGAN
THE WEST MICHIGAN CHAPTER
 The West Michigan Chapter built 2.5 miles of new Trail this year through the Rogue River Game Area, culminating a three year project.
 See page 20



Photo: Beth Keloneva

NEW YORK
ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN CLUB AFFILIATE
 Adirondack Mountain Club completed a new 2.7 mile segment to the summit of Jones Hill in the Eastern Adirondacks.
 See page 26



Photo: Mary Coffin

PENNSYLVANIA
ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST CHAPTER
 The Allegheny National Forest Chapter managed water on their Trail segment by installing 4 new large span bridges and 16 small bog bridges.
 See page 25



Photo: Rich Glasgow

OHIO
BUCKEYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION
 The Buckeye Trail Association acquired two properties that create a critical 3.5 mile connection between two segments of the Wayne National Forest.
 See page 21

State of the Trail Chapter, Affiliate and Partner Reports follow this page >>
See the full Trail Progress Report at northcountrytrail.org.



St. Patrick's Day hike at Baldhill Creek WMA, Lake Ashtabula.
Photo: Bobby Koepplin

Sheyenne River Valley Chapter

NORTH DAKOTA - The Sheyenne River Valley Chapter held their annual meeting at the Woodland Lodge in Valley City on February 5. The Chapter Honor Award was presented by Deb Koepplin to Cassie and Witney Anderson, daughters of Clyde Anderson who sadly passed away in October. Tom Dahle, Chapter member from Bismarck, was also in attendance and presented Chapter members Bobby and Deb Koepplin, Chris Hoffarth, Becky Heise, and Luc Albert with handmade lanyards with various patches attached and a beautiful card. These special awards were given in honor of the time and talents shared in building and maintaining the Trail and spreading the word!



March 17 was our first hike of the season and we had a few new faces which were great to see! The hike was at the Baldhill Dam Wildlife Management Area and after the hike, we enjoyed lunch and green beer (for the adults only!).

There was a large contingent of North Dakotans who traveled to Ohio for the NCTA Annual Celebration / Buckeye TrailFest, including eight people from the Sheyenne River Valley Chapter. We also had many award winners again this year, with Tyler Modlin winning the Friend of the Trail Award, Daryl Heise the Trail Maintainer of the Year and Luc Albert the Rising Star!

Doosan gave us another Day of Community Service from their employees at the Sheyenne State Forest on April 25 with about a half-mile of Trail gravel armored. Thank you, Doosan! Our May hike was also held at the Sheyenne State Forest on May 5 with 20 hikers in attendance. The younger generation had a lot of fun exploring the waterfall and Mineral Springs!

On May 15 and 22, the SRV Chapter, Eagle Scout Trevan Pfennig, and his Scout troop installed signage along a new mile-long section of Trail north of Valley City and renewed some signage that had been taken out during the flood wall construction

project just south of City Park. They got to install urban signs in town and Carsonite north of town. They got to use the Carsonite starter and pounder and a paint brush to paint blazes. All together we signed or re-signed a mile and a half of Trail.

National Trails Day at Fort Ransom State Park began with a ranger led hike of 49 hikers! After lunch, 18 of us enjoyed kayaking or canoeing from the park to Fort Ransom, then a great picnic supper and campfire!

Sunday, June 10, the SRV Chapter had a productive day installing a 30-foot boardwalk with the help of Eagle Scout Trevan Pfennig, two Boy Scouts, five parents, and five Chapter members. Some new signage was installed along with some mowing and tree trimming. Thanks to Scott Tichy for having your Army Corps of Engineers staff haul in the boardwalk!

On July 7 the Chapter hiked from the iconic Karnak high bridge to the village of Sibley. We had 12 hikers despite the high temperatures. It took us a while but



Doosan Day of Community Service at the Sheyenne State Forest.
Photo: Jerry Warner

we took it slow and persevered! The kids enjoyed looking for a geocache and we left a note about the North Country Trail. The wildflowers were out in force making for a beautiful hike despite the heat.

The Chapter was finally able to complete a project we have been working on since 2009! A new NCT informational kiosk was installed in the new visitor center at Fort Ransom State Park on August 10 along with another exterior kiosk panel on local Trail segments installed at the State Park trailhead. We were also able finally to print our new Chapter brochure with mapping of our local segments.

Another workday was held on Saturday, August 18. The crew split up between Fort Ransom State Park and the Sheyenne State Forest. Cat, Luc, Chris and Marisa went to the park to mark the reroute through the park. They moved some signs and installed others. When they completed their task, they joined the others at the State Forest. Jerry, Daryl, Becky, and Mark picked up the task of continuing to armor the Trail. The Trail there gets heavy horse traffic and armoring the Trail with gravel will help keep the tread from being worn into deep ruts. We



Luc Albert helping to shovel gravel at the Sheyenne State Forest Trail armoring workday.
Photo: Marisa Hoffarth

were successful in armoring another 1/8-mile of trail and it looks great!

The upcoming year looks promising with trail maintenance and improvement projects and monthly hikes. Should be some great fun out on the Trail!

—Becky Heise

Dakota Prairie Chapter

NORTH DAKOTA -

The DPC created a 0.6-mile segment of the NCNST on the Biesterfeldt Site, a National Historic Landmark in Ransom County, where there was a Cheyenne settlement several hundred years ago. This juxtaposition of a National Scenic Trail and a National Historic Landmark is unique and special. The project required extensive background research and many interactions with The Archaeological Conservancy (the property owner who provided an easement), the North Dakota Historical Society, NPS staff, three archaeologists who had worked at the Site, the Scoville Township Board, and various neighbors of the Site. After the DPC received permission to route the NCNST across the Site, we arranged to have the Lisbon Fire Department do a controlled burn on the 40 acres of prairie on the Biesterfeldt Site, which made it easier to select a Trail route that would not have a negative impact on the surface of the Site. Trail construction involved careful route layout, mowing with a DR Brush Mower, minor tread smoothing by hand, sign installation, construction of a puncheon, and development of brochures and signs. Once the trail was built, the DPC sponsored a public presentation by an academic archaeologist about the history and archaeology of the Biesterfeldt Site that was attended by about 40 people. A week later, the DPC led an interpretive hike through the Biesterfeldt Site and along nearby roads to inaugurate the new Trail segment. Fifty enthusiastic people, including about 15 neighbors, participated in the hike on a beautiful fall day.



After years of negotiations, the DPC received permission to develop a short spur trail between the NCNST on the Sheyenne National Grassland and nearby hiking trails on the Nature Conservancy's Pigeon Point Preserve. The agreement required an MOU with The Nature Conservancy and a Letter



Ginny and Bill Newman pounding in a Carsonite post with a special sign driver. Bill, Ginny, Tom and Mary Moberg spent a weekend at Lonetree improving NCT signage, installing or repairing over 50 needed signs.

Photo: Mary Moberg

Continued on page 10



An old abandoned farmstead, a rare site in North Dakota.

Photo: Tom Moberg

of Agreement from the Sheyenne National Grassland. The DPC built 0.2 miles of spur trail (including a fence stile) and created new signs and Trail stickers to guide hikers between the two areas. We also led a Chapter hike, with interpretation by the Nature Conservancy site manager, to inaugurate and publicize this new hiking opportunity for the public.

Only about 4% of North Dakota is public land so creating a Trail route depends almost entirely on the cooperation of private landowners. As part of developing new off-road Trail segments, the DPC has invested hundreds of hours in trail protection work. The work starts with developing relationships with landowners, township boards, county employees, recreation area managers, and residents along potential Trail routes. If we are persistent and lucky, we are able to establish easements, trail use agreements, and MOU's that permit and protect the NCNST on private lands.

The DPC has developed a very active and extensive program of promotional events that reach hundreds of people in eastern North Dakota throughout the entire year. A committed core group of 10 volunteers serves as the DPC Leadership Team that meets monthly to organize and manage the Chapter's activities, which include dozens of well-organized hikes in N.D. and Minn., monthly Chapter programs open to the public, and other types of events.

—Tom Moberg



An ironic sign visible by the Trail above that farm, introducing the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area, but without any mention of the old farm in the background.

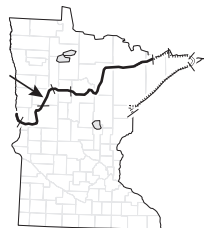
Photo: Tom Moberg

Laurentian Lakes

MINNESOTA

- The LLC was organized in 2008 and in that time has concentrated on the planning and building of trails to include signage, kiosks and other structures, writing grants, marketing monthly hikes and a million other things to make the Chapter successful. The Chapter is now switching gears a bit to concentrate on a five-year strategic plan. It will address every aspect of the Chapter's organization, administration, trail development, construction and maintenance, marketing, events and activities, and historical documents to assure continued success into the future. The Chapter recognizes the value of each volunteer and will seek their input into the plan.

—Barbara Jauquet-Kalinoski



Itasca Moraine

MINNESOTA

- The early months of 2018 were spent assessing the final route descriptions of the North Country Trail for the second edition of the *Guidebook to the North Country Trail in Minnesota*.

A small editorial team made up of Matt Davis, North Dakota/Minnesota Regional Coordinator for the North Country Trail Association, Linda Johnson, who along with the late Susan Carol Hauser were the editors of the first edition, Bruce Johnson, previous Trail Builder of the Year Award Winner, Laurentian Lakes Chapter President Barb Jauquet-Kalinoski, and Itasca Moraine Chapter President Eric Haugland. They met regularly at the Johnsons', proofreading the book. The book was published in May and can be obtained at northcountrytrail.org/shop or itascabooks.com.

The late spring prevented access to the Trail, so in its stead eight "play, clean, go" brush kiosks donated by the



Linda Johnson, Matt Davis, and Bruce Johnson in back.

Photo: LLC Chapter President Barb Jauquet-Kalinoski

Minnesota DNR to prevent the spread of invasive species were installed at trailheads in Hubbard County with Jerry and Melinda McCarty and Bruce Johnson taking the lead. Bruce Johnson also built and installed five benches at scenic trail overlooks and campsites. The Chapter's annual meeting was held at Vacationaire Resort near Park Rapids, Minn., in April and Janice Springer shared her training on the Trail the previous spring in order to hike and conquer the Camino de Santiago in Portugal and Spain that summer.

The ground was dry and brush and grass high when we could finally get out for trail maintenance. A June Trail Tune Up Day brought three new adopters to help maintain our 70-mile section of the Trail. We were fortunate there were no straight-line wind storms this year, but still maintaining the Trail through Itasca State Park, Paul Bunyan State Forest and Chippewa National Forest was a responsibility not taken lightly and was cleared, mowed and lopped through the season by dedicated volunteers. We also said goodbye to Jerry and Beth Trout, the founding members of the Chapter who moved from Hackensack to Minneapolis this summer.



One of eight brush kiosks installed to prevent spread of invasive species.

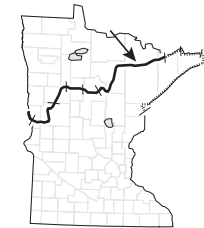
Photo: Jerry McCarty

Arrowhead

MINNESOTA

- The Chapter is scouting in between Tioga Beach Park and Hwy 6 (where the photo was taken). That is their priority for 2019 along with finishing the Prairie River Trail segment north of Grand Rapids, from the University of Minnesota's North Central Research and Outreach Center (NCROC) to Hwy 61. Interestingly, the NCROC has some of the nation's longest running forestry research and the NCT will go right through it.

—Matt Davis



ARW Chapter volunteers scouting and flagging the future NCT route near the Tioga Pit southwest of Grand Rapids. The Tioga Pit is the southernmost iron mine on the Mesabi Range.

Photo: Matt Davis

Kekekabic Trail

MINNESOTA

- 2017 and 2018 have been turnaround years for the Kekekabic Trail Chapter as evidenced by increased trail maintenance, crew leader training and outreach to the public through participation in sponsored events. We tend a 41-mile trail that is very rugged, and can be reached only by canoe in the interior. Because of this, in a good year we can actively maintain only about 15 miles.

The assistance and leadership of Matthew Davis, Regional Trail



Continued on page 12



Left: American Hiking Society group of volunteers heading out on the Kek in May.
Photo: Matt Davis

Coordinator for Minnesota and North Dakota, has been invaluable. Many organizations and key staff have been involved in the Chapter's work on the Kekekabic Trail, including the USFS Superior National Forest, the Minnesota Northwoods Volunteer Connection, the Conservative Anabaptist Service Project crew organization, the American Hiking Society, several outdoor adventure stores, the Gunflint Lodge and the Boy Scouts of America Northern Tier High Adventure Camp. Chapter members have contributed many hours of service and have been instrumental in spearheading maintenance and training activities. Our Chapter's goal is to maintain the rugged 41-mile wilderness Kekekabic Trail and to encourage increased use of the Trail for hiking and backpacking. We anticipate a very active 2019 on the "Kek!"
—Terry Bernhardt



Paddlers about to set out on the St. Croix River for the combination paddle and hike in the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, offered in partnership with the St. Croix River Association and Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters.
Photo: Phil Anderson

Brule-St. Croix Chapter

WISCONSIN -

The past year saw the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System and Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts. The Brule-St. Croix Chapter celebrated North Country National Scenic Trail Day with a unique event that commemorated both of these acts. The Chapter partnered with the Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters and the St. Croix River Association to offer a paddle, hike, and picnic in the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Participants canoed downstream on the St. Croix River from Gordon Dam County Park to Scotts Bridge and then hiked the NCT back to the county park, where a picnic lunch was enjoyed.



The Chapter celebrated National Trails Day with festivities in Solon Springs. A hike on the Brule Bog Boardwalk was led by a botanist from the University of Wisconsin-Superior and was followed by a potluck picnic. Interns from the St. Croix River Association shared information about invasive species. Other hikes during the year in the Chapter's 11 guided hike program included the second Evening Solstice hike, cosponsored by the Chapter and the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary.

The Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew and Chapter members completed the Banana Belt Road reroute. This 1.4-mile project eliminated a longer walk along an old barricaded road east of Erick Lake and now offers a more pleasant experience along a single-track trail. Chapter members also replaced three old trailhead kiosks with new structures designed by Phil Anderson, Chapter Trail Maintenance Coordinator.

Tom Hicks, the recipient of a 2018 NCTA Trail Builder Award, received the Chapter Honor Award. During his seven years of volunteer service, Tom has participated in countless outings with the Roving Trail Crew and also serves as a trail adopter.

—Mark VanHornweder

Chequamegon Chapter

WISCONSIN -

The Chequamegon Chapter's section of the North Country Trail is all certified Trail but flash flooding in 2018 (yes, a reprise of 2016) kept our trail adopters very busy this year. They worked hard just to keep the Trail passable. Only one section in the Rainbow Lake Wilderness had to be closed.



This year we did something new. The Chapter hosted six interpretive "fun" hikes under the banner "Explore a National Scenic Trail." Mary Stenberg led a hike on the Lake Owen Peninsula that featured signs erected last year showing how the Peninsula was important to Native American cultural activities like hunting, fishing, and gathering. Tom Matthiae led a group on a birdwatching hike through the Porcupine Wilderness Area and identified various bird calls and habitat types. Ellie Williams and Steve Spickerman led a hike down to the Brunsweiler River that focused on



Mary Stenberg led a Fun Hike on Saturday, May 12 that featured Native American interpretive signs that were installed in 2017 along the NCT on the Lake Owen Peninsula. In this photo she is pointing out their approximate location on the NCT.

Photo: Ellie Williams

plant identification and preservation of this area as a unique wilderness research area. Warren Irle led a hike to the Swedish Settlement, an abandoned farmstead and one-room school house overlooking the Marengo River, and discussed the hardships involved in attempting to farm in this remote region of Wisconsin. Mel Baughman, an expert in forest ecology and trail design, led a hike in the Rainbow Lake Wilderness, and explained how different species of trees and plants came to dominate because of the glacial soils and climate factors. He also pointed out where the Trail's location worked well, where it could be improved, and different techniques for preserving Trail. Finally, Katie Lamoine of the USFS led a hike through a section of old-growth forest known as the Drummond Woods and discussed how volunteer organizations like the NCTA can assist the USFS promote recreational opportunities within the National Forest. She had a good turnout, despite an October snow storm. All the hike leaders did a tremendous job. The hikes were well attended and resulted in new members and new volunteers.

—Kevin Schram



Bridge over creek that empties into the Potato River.
Photo: Unknown

Heritage Chapter

WISCONSIN

- The Heritage Chapter focused on constructing new Trail in 2018. We cleared and leveled two miles of new trail tread in the three-mile section from Upson Lake north to Foster Falls. This allowed access for the Brule-St. Croix Roving Trail Crew to construct four deck style bridges and four long sections of puncheon. We also cleared and leveled one-half mile of reroute around a wet area in the Wren Falls-Gold Mine section.



Of the seven scheduled work weekends, our June work event was a total wash-out with six inches of rain. Regardless, we were able to maintain (mow, lop and blaze) all 13 miles of finished trail. We were again blessed with excellent volunteer turnout plus additional help from Northland College interns.

We look forward to 2019 and plan to finish the half-mile remaining on the Upson-Foster Falls section. Finishing this section is key to moving the current Trail off of Hwy 122 and into the NPS proposed corridor that follows the Potato River north and then follows forest roads on to Saxon Harbor, and then on to Superior Falls at the Wisconsin-Michigan border.

—Michael Stafford

Ni-Miikanaake Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - For many years our Chapter has had a roadwalk at the western end of our segment, which is the western end of the NCT in Michigan. In 2018 we started to scout potential routes to get off the road, building on concepts from previous years. In the winter and early spring, Chapter officers Cal Kangas, Karl Jensen and Ric Olson took two expeditions to look at possibilities. On the first trip, we helped the local snowmobile club by grooming their nearby trail and took the opportunity to see a route for the western end of the Michigan NCT. The projected route will go from a highpoint, Bald Mountain, west to a scenic river gorge and then down the gorge to the bridge to Wisconsin. On the second trip, Cal and Karl hiked from the road up the gorge and investigated the route in detail. We met a local landowner who seemed amenable to having the Trail go through a corner of his property. During the summer Cal and Kenny Wawsczyk scouted the high ridge part of the trail. During deer season Cal took the opportunity to scout the trail a little further east, near another peak called Point Mountain. If the stars align, over the next few years we'll be making these vistas part of a new Trail segment.

— Karl Jensen



Montreal River Gorge. Scenic view along future NCT segment.

Photo: Karl Jensen



PWC hiker with pups by Sturgeon River on new Trail, summer 2018.

Photo: Keith Meyers of his wife Julie

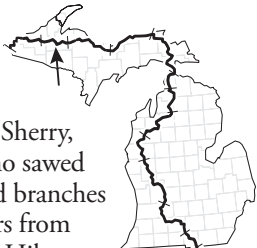
Peter Wolfe Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - The Peter Wolfe Chapter volunteers and friends feel a great sense of accomplishment this year; we worked very hard to build over six miles of new Trail east of Canyon Falls this spring! A HUGE thank you goes out to our chain sawyers, Terry Lahti, Jim Waters, Grant Fenner, Connie Sherry, Steve and Patricia Bielke, Mark Roberts and Keith Meyers, who sawed and brushed out the trail and other helpers who cut and tossed branches and started treading and benching. We also had four volunteers from the NMK Chapter to our west and seven crew from the NCT Hikers Chapter to our east, who helped one day chain saw and brush hog, and student crew members from the Superior WaterShed/GLCC. On June 2nd, National Trail Day, we had an enthusiastic group of volunteers show up to help clear on the new trail on



PWC hikers on new Trail, 2018.

Photo: Keith Meyers



the first two miles from Canyon Falls east to the Humpback Bridge on Old US 41 that thru-hikers are already using on their way to Marquette. Before now, the stretch east of Canyon Falls has been a road walk, much on busy US 41, and some on logging roads, to meet up with the Chapter Trail end at Long Lake. We still have about eight miles of new Trail needed to get it all off road going east from there.

In addition to our new six miles, we maintained all our existing 110+ miles of Trail with trail adopters and volunteers. We are always looking for volunteers to help, especially now... improving the new trail, routing/permitting the next eight miles, and to mow with our new DR mower from the NPS on the Baraga Plains area of the PWC! Ongoing logging is being done along the PWC and extra ribbons have been added to highlight the Trail where there is more planned logging.

We had an excellent speaker, Jo Oostveen, who recently thru-hiked all of Michigan's NCT, talk at our annual General Membership meeting in the spring. We have been trying to find funding to replace rotting sills on nearly 700 feet of boardwalk on our popular Canyon Falls NCT. Our board members Grant Fenner, Mark Roberts and Jim Waters designed and had produced a new PWC trifold table top display and new Chapter brochures for special events! The NCTA recently released great new interactive and printable Trail maps for the whole UP of Michigan!

Connie Julien updated our Trail segment descriptions and uploaded them to Google Docs on the new PWC webpage the NCTA made for Chapters. Mark Roberts led our popular monthly public hikes on the PWC Trail. Steve and Carol Maass set up our PWC new trifold and new brochures at two events this summer, including the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System Act and Ottawa National Forest Historical Day held at the ONF Watersmeet office and the Ontonagon Copper Fest. We replaced our eight trailside log book boxes (old ammunition boxes that were always wet inside) with regular mailboxes; hikers get a kick out of coming across a mailbox in the middle of nowhere with the flag indicating "you've got mail!"

Our Chapter and the NCT was featured a number of times in the local news this season. Please visit the PWC on the Trail and online!



New panel at Tourist Park trailhead, just north of Marquette.

Photo: Lorana Jinkerson

North Country Trail Hikers Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - As is our overall goal every year, we are very proud that we maintained every mile of NCT and the spur trails for which the NCT Hikers Chapter is responsible. Between some excellent trail adopters and our most excellent Trail Crew, led by our Trail Boss Cliff Stammer, our portion of the NCT continues to improve and get easier to maintain each year. We wish to express our gratitude to all those who helped with this effort and would like to encourage others to join us next season.



The Great Lakes Conservation Crew worked with our trail crew for a week, helping with maintenance in the McCormick Wilderness. We certainly appreciated their help.

Five new National Park Service interpretative panels were installed at Laughing Whitefish Falls Parking, the Tourist Park trailhead, Little Presque Isle trailhead, Elliott Donnelley Wilderness and Craig Lake State Park. Along with the previous two, one in downtown Marquette and the other at the MDOT Welcome Center in Harvey, we hope awareness of the Trail will increase.

Marge Forslin, our Softies Hike leader, helped a group of hikers from several Chapters complete 22 miles of the NCT in the spring and another 26 miles in the fall on the eastern end of the UP. Just one more weekend of hiking to reach the Big Mac Bridge, to take place in the fall of 2019.

We hosted NCT booths at Northern Michigan University's Health and Wellness Fair, National Trails Day, the Marquette Trail 50 Ultramarathon, and NCNST Day. We had drawings for free NCT Hikers t-shirts, gained some new members and provided lots of information to those who stopped and chatted with us. In addition, we had approximately 25 volunteers who helped set up and/or work for the Marquette Trail 50 Ultramarathon which then kindly donated \$1500 to the Chapter.

Our three General Membership meetings were interesting, starting in January with NCTA staff member Matt Rowbotham, our GIS Coordinator, sharing information about online maps, mobile apps and more, continuing in May with Jo Oostveen presenting her "Comedy on the NCT" with those of us in attendance rolling off our chairs with laughter as Jo could turn the most embarrassing moments into cute and hilarious stories. At our September meeting, Andrew Grosvenor, Director of the Marquette Trail 50 Ultramarathon, presented on trail running and fastpacking.

—Lorana Jinkerson

Superior Shoreline Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - An essential component of any trail system is the volunteer base who builds, clears, maintains and marks the trail, as well as assists hikers in planning their adventure. You know that you are doing something well when you receive thank yous and acclaims from the hikers for those efforts. With each passing year we experience an increasing number of inquiries about the Trail and for assistance in planning hiking adventures. Again in 2018 we fielded Trail inquiry from the hiker who each year has as her hiking companion a different blind person. A youth camp director from Wisconsin contacted us to assist in the planning of a camp hike in Pictured Rocks; he has already again contacted us to assist with planning a multi-day hike on a different section of the Trail in 2019. We also assisted a hiker from Sweden plan her hike. While the Trail itself is beautiful, adding to its enjoyment is the hard work of so many volunteers, to whom we give our heartfelt THANKS.

—Tim Hass



Dove and snowman
Photo: Unknown
Left: Boardwalk in the snow
Photo: Unknown

Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - The Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter began 2018 with its annual “First Hike on the First” on New Year’s Day at Tahquamenon Falls State Park near Paradise on the scenic River Mouth Trail. In late January the Chapter led a hike on the same section of the NCT for the Paradise Winter Carnival. The annual Winter Trails Day was celebrated with NCT Trail Town St. Ignace on January 6. Volunteers from our Chapter hosted a hike and a brown-bag lunch around a bonfire in the Hiawatha National Forest off Brevort Lake Road. At dusk, revelers hiked in to Straits State Park to watch the lighting of the Mackinac Bridge. The park hosted a bonfire and served hot chocolate and s’mores. The day ended with a hike on a lantern-lit trail to the parking area. Our Chapter hosted a Valentine’s hike at Tahquamenon Falls State Park, with lunch at the Falls Brewery and Pub. The park hosts a lantern-lit trail on Saturdays and offers free snowshoe rentals in February. Every March, volunteers go to Michigan State University for the annual Quiet Waters Symposium. Our display is staffed by Bill and Ann Courtois from Ann Arbor, and other volunteers. As soon as the snow left the woods, the Adopt-A-Section and Roving Crew volunteers were out clearing windfalls and other debris, and painting blue blazes. The annual Eastern Upper Peninsula Hiking Rendezvous and Dinner was held May 12. The group and guests met at the Castle Rock trailhead for a hike and visiting around a bonfire. In late afternoon, the day wrapped with an Appalachian Trail presentation by Adopt-A-Section volunteers Jeff and Joyce Feters from Sault Ste. Marie. In September, Hiawatha Chapter President Tom Walker led a “Bridge Warm-Up Hike” and offered the “Mackinac Bridge Hike” the following day. He leads this two-day annual event. The annual “Hike Between Da Falls” was held at Tahquamenon Falls State Park on North Country National Scenic Trail Day. The park supplied free bus shuttles between the two falls. Carol Wozniak and Kay Kujawa manned the Hiawatha Chapter display, and Pat McNamara was NCT Host on the bus. The three also hiked the final sweep hike for the day.



Dove and snowman
Photo: Unknown
Left: Boardwalk in the snow
Photo: Unknown



Avery Grade Project work began in early September and continued through Michigan Trails Week and into early November. Several of the volunteers camped at Tahquamenon River Mouth Campground’s group site for most of September and October. The project removed more than 900 feet of aging railroad ties and puncheon planking. It was replaced with 1000 feet of new puncheon with four-foot-wide horizontal decking. The old used materials were hauled to a site by the Richardson Avery Grade Road and toted away in a large trailer dumpster. Anyone remembering all the cold fall rains knows that neither the work site nor the camp site led to campfires and cozy lunches! They were a tough, determined, and hardy workforce. For three days a young mom with nine-month-old twins came with a visiting crew from the Boyne City and Charlevoix area! They were camped about 20 miles from the work site! It was amazing the amount of work that crew could get done in two or three hours! The completion date for the project had been posted for National Trails Day in June 2019! The Sault Naturalists joined us for the November “Trout Brook Pond” hike. The pond dam was opened, and the pond had been drained in the summer to allow for the area to return to its natural state. The year was wrapped with a hike to the Niagara escarpment and a glacial debris field. A potluck gathering was held at the Kujawa home on East Lake. An unsuspecting coyote on the lake ice was the major entertainment for the afternoon. There is already a long list of projects and dreams for 2019 including some more puncheon replacement and 16 scheduled hikes to promote the NCT!

—Tom Walker



Carp River temporary bridge repairs, awaiting a hoped-for new bridge in the Harbor Springs section.

Photo: Kenny Wawczyk



Nailing down shingles to prevent slippery boards when wet.
Photo: Shari Sanderson

Harbor Springs Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN - We in the Harbor Springs Chapter maintained 46 miles of Trail from the Mackinaw Bridge south. We have had group hikes nearly every month and provided trail support to a group of Boy Scouts who hiked our entire section during the hottest July days. Our annual picnic at former president Jim Stamm's home was well attended. Our biggest project this year, other than the constant clearing of trail from the big winds we get being next to Lake Michigan, was to install shingles on slippery boardwalks through sections 2 and 3 of our Trail. We plan to continue this project by completing more sections in 2019. The mowers in our group were very excited when the Board of Directors of our Chapter purchased a second DR mower. Now we can have a mower stored near both the north end and south ends of our 46-mile section. We also have several new volunteers to help with the tough task of mowing through our hilly terrain. We were also happy to hear that our Carp River Bridge was chosen to receive a DNR trust fund grant to be repaired or replaced. Our crews have propped it up and straightened it several times over the years but it really does need more help than that now. Two of our sections have some erosion problems and reroutes are being considered. We have established a good working



Continued on page 18

relationship with our local mountain bikers (TOMMBA) who approached us about the reroute on section 2. They have offered use of their mini-excavator to help build the new reroute if approved by the DNR.

Finally at our October meeting elections were held and we now have a new secretary, Janice Dillaha. The other officers agreed to serve for another year. We are looking forward to our “Hike to the Bridge” promotion for 2019! Our goal is to hike all of our 11 sections from Kipp Road to the Mackinaw Bridge. We hope to attract new hikers to our beautiful Trail. Also in 2019 after the Celebration in May we are going to host the Upper Peninsula “Softies.” This hiking group will complete the final leg of their second journey across the UP in October of 2019. But this spring they are going to hike with the “trolls” who live below the bridge!

—Judy Conrad

Jordan Valley 45° Chapter
LOWER MICHIGAN -

This year we were “on a mission.” The JV 45° Chapter (with assistance from our Chief Noonday Chapter friends) embarked on an ambitious schedule of 10 workdays between June and October to complete many projects in the Jordan River Valley.

Join us for Celebration 2019 (May 2-5) to enjoy the fruits of our labor and experience the beauty of northern Michigan with the many hike opportunities on the NCT and other nearby trails. One of the events planned for the Celebration held at Shanty Creek in Bellaire is a trail building workshop, during which we will build a spur trail from a rerouted trail to a viewing area overlooking the beaver pond (the reason why we rerouted the trail). Thus YOU too will have the opportunity to contribute to building a trail in northern Michigan.

—Mary Campbell



New NCT kiosk in Kalkaska.
Photo: Unknown

Grand Traverse Hiking Club

LOWER MICHIGAN - In 2018, the Grand Traverse Hiking Club continued to maintain our 106 miles of the NCT. Our trail adopters put in about 200 hours of trail work with an additional 350 hours by our mowing crew. We also rerouted the Trail off County Road 612 which had previously been a seven-mile road walk on a busy road. The new route isn't ideal since it follows gravel roads but it is a great improvement over the busy road walk.

Our trail crew not only worked on the NCT but also assisted Traverse Area Recreational Trails (TART) with construction of the Boardman River Trail. This trail, when completed, will be a 24-mile-long trail through the Boardman Valley from Traverse City to the NCT at Muncie Lakes.

In addition to working on trails, we put in another 72 hours of highway cleanup on our adopted section of US 131 at the Manistee River.

In the last couple years, we have placed six trail register boxes, constructed by Bernie Senske, at various locations along the Trail. The register sheets ask hikers where they are from (local, downstate, out of state) and their method of travel (backpacking, day hike, showshoe, running, etc.). We also have a section for comments and suggestions. One really good suggestion was to include "You are Here" maps in each box. We have done that with maps showing the map location, coordinates, and distances to the nearest point of interest in each direction up and down the Trail. Due to a planned reroute next year, we'll need to relocate one of the boxes.

Our National Trails Day celebration was held at the fairgrounds in the Trail Town of Kalkaska. Following a hike on the NCT, we had a picnic dinner provided by the Village of Kalkaska and TransCanada. Thanks to a generous donation from TransCanada we also unveiled our beautiful new panel sign and our new tool trailer to be used for the Kalkaska County area.

We are hoping to get approval and construct a reroute from Guernsey Lake to Kalkaska along the North Branch of the Boardman River in 2019. This will take the Trail into Kalkaska, one of our Trail Towns.

We are looking forward to leading some hikes on our portion of the Trail during the NCTA Celebration in May.

—Mike Schaeffer



Spirit of the Woods Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN - Three events occurred in 2018 that will continue to impact “State of the Trail” here in the Spirit of the Woods section of the NCT. The first event was a line of severe thunderstorms that hit the Manistee National Forest on August 28, 2018. The storms had pockets of intense damaging winds up to 70 to 90 mph, that broadsided the entire 80-mile length of the SPW’s segment. The most significant damage occurred within the southern 40 miles of our Trail in Lake County, Michigan. The second event started two days later with the overwhelming response of the local North Country Trail community, the U.S. Forest Service, and Kenny Wawsczyk’s (NCTA’s Regional Trail Coordinator – Michigan), call for assistance in assessing the damage on the NCT. SPW trail adopters, Chapter members, local volunteer hikers, retired USFS personnel, and the Shoreline Cycling Club (an organizational NCTA/SPW Chapter member and trail adopter) answered the call. Lines of communication and coordination quickly developed with Steve Sawyer (SPW Trail Coordinator) coordinating with the USFS, Dave Beadle (SPW Trail Coordinator and Club member), the Cycling Club, Ray Dereske (SPW sawyer), Mike Peterson (Club sawyer) and Ken Blakey-Shell (Club Vice President).

The first several days were spent locating and reporting downed trees and passing that information to the USFS. Cycling club members were the first to discover the area that was most impacted by the storm. This area was a complete blowdown of a pine plantation, which buried and obliterated just over two-tenths of a mile of trail. The Club immediately organized their members and worked for three consecutive days uncovering the Trail. Cycling club members, using bike approved sections, rode and cleared another 62 miles of trail. Closely following their efforts, on September 8th the SPW held a work day where the SPW, Club members and USFS volunteers worked together removing trees, repairing and leveling boardwalks impacted by the storm. Fittingly, one last Chapter workday was held



Aerial View of Blowdown from drone
View drone footage over and through the blowdown area at <https://www.facebook.com/shorelinecyclingclub/videos/238150413710677/>
Photo and Video: Andy Klevorn SC Club

the end of September, where SPW and Club members along with the assistance of Chris Loudenslager, NPS North Country Trail Acting Superintendent, worked and reestablished the Trail corridor and tread through the blowdown area. Shortly after that, the USFS removed additional trees, and it was reported that the more than 380 trees down were cleared, and the Trail was open. The third event, coincidentally occurring in September, was the completion of the U.S. Forest Service’s assessment of the State of the NCT within the Manistee National Forest. The assessment provides a complete rating, inventory, and snapshot of the Trail’s condition along with its appurtenances, with recommendations for increased maintenance and trail improvements. This will be used by the USFS for their long-range planning for the NCT in the Forest. The Chapter is looking forward to 2019 and will be using the assessment to focus our efforts while working with the USFS and partners to keep the Trail sustainable well into the future.

—Robert Dunning



First view of blowdown, Joanie Wiersma SPW/SC in photo.
Photo: Pam Panetta



Part of the group who attended an NCTA Trail Maintenance Leadership Training session.

Photo: Beth Keloneva

Western Michigan Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN - The Western Michigan Chapter built 2.5 miles of new Trail this year through the Rogue River Game Area. September 8, 2018, was an exciting day for us as we finished the last piece of tread, put our pulaskis back in the trailer, and recalled a cold day over three years ago when we first ventured into the game area to scope out a possible route for a trail. Roughly 100 volunteers took part in at least one of our four work days. They included 32 middle schoolers who brushed out a mile and a quarter section of trail and removed a truck load full of trash. They also included several young people from the Kent County Association for the Blind who, with a minimal amount of help, built tread across the opening for a power line. We are grateful to the Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) for the permission to build in the game area and for their steady support.

Part of the reason why this is so meaningful for us is that the game area is in Kent County, Michigan, which is the most populous county on the NCT. Building a national scenic trail through a county that is home to 620,000 people is a challenge! We have leaned heavily on the generosity of Kent County Parks, the DNR, the kindness of a local township that let us share its trail, and private landowners. We now have 32 miles of Trail and 11 miles of acceptable road walks in the county. We still have 33 miles of gaps to close that are now undesirable road walks. But we have good reason to believe that the gaps will shrink significantly in the next few years.

Another exciting event for us was that one of our long-time members, Larry Meyer, was hired by the U.S. Forest Service to do a thorough assessment of the state of the North Country Trail in the Huron-Manistee National Forest. This gave Larry a unique perspective on what trail construction and maintenance practices lead to the long-term sustainability of trails and what practices do not. His knowledge has been an invaluable resource to us in our planning and trail construction.

The WMI Chapter looks forward to trail development in Kent and Newaygo County. We feel proud of the strides we have made and know that many volunteers have helped create and develop the Trail thus far, and we are excited to carry the torch into the future. We have worked on board development and strategic plans. We also added three new enthusiastic members to our board and two volunteers who will serve as Trail Developer and Trail Manager in Newaygo County. We have a strong leadership team to lead us forth!

—Jim Bradley

Chief Noonday Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN -

Chief Noonday has been very busy in 2018 with 12 guided hikes, 15 outreach events, 12 monthly meetings including four outside speakers, and more than 12 workdays. CND added ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY to their Chapter activities, actually on the Trail next to a very busy highway. Mary Rebert finally was able to secure a section, after many years of discussions and filling out forms. This summer many workdays were held to get the Angell Farm ready for last fall's Celebration/Workshop at the first property purchased by the NPS for the NCTA. A year ago wildflowers were planted and many were in bloom for the Celebration. Attendees hiked on the new proposed route and enjoyed the beautiful view of the Kalamazoo River Valley. Neighbors, CND members, local government leaders, NPS and NCTA employees were in attendance. Lastly an NCT Christmas tree (all ornaments were made by Karine Carls) was on display at the Gilmore Car Museum for the Barry County Chamber's Festival of Trees. Votes for best tree were non-perishables for the Barry County Fresh Food Initiative.

—Jane Norton



Chief Noonday work crew in September 2018. They reconstructed a set of steps in the Kalamazoo Co. Kellogg Bird Sanctuary that connects to the NCT. Pictured L to R: Stephen Kessler, Max Sine, Bob Cooley.

Photo: Larry Pio

Chief Baw Beese Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN - The Chief Baw Beese Chapter finished the year with 62 members, 401 volunteer hours, and we held monthly trail clean up days, and six group hikes.

One important highlight is the Chapter working to establish relationships in Jonesville and Hillsdale cities to help with maintaining and marking the Trail through their city limits. Members also participated in community festivals starting with the Osseo Heritage Days and Great Mushroom Hunt; this festival takes place the second weekend in May in Osseo, Michigan. Festival goes favor the North Country Trail, as most of the Chief Baw Beese Chapter is located on State land called the Lost Nations. Hundreds of people attend this event and hunt for morel mushrooms along the NCT in Lost Nations in search of the biggest, or most mushrooms, and even the smallest mushrooms they can find. Other community festivals the Chapter attends were the Jonesville Riverfest that occurs the third weekend in May, and the Litchfield Sweet Corn Days that take place in August.

Another goal the Chapter continues to work on is fixing and maintaining an old railroad bridge located near Black Bridge Road in Jefferson Township. The Chapter's attempts in 2018 were unsuccessful; however, there are plans to continue to work with the township in 2019.

The Chapter's goals for 2019 are to continue to develop relationships with local townships and cities to place more Trail markers, and maintain existing trails. The Chapter also intends to hold more group hikes and hold informational hikes with guests such as the Southern Michigan Invasive Species Team (a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area or CISMA) to collaborate on keeping our Trail clean and free of invasive species. The Chapter also looks forward to attending the area festivals again to gain more members and awareness of the Chief Baw Beese Chapter of the NCT.

—Jessy Bigelow



Lost Nations State Land, located in Pittsford, Michigan, the Trail goes right through it. Zack Bigelow on the bridge.

Photo: Jessy Bigelow



Trail volunteers in front of the new shelter at the Imhoff Preserve in Perry County, Ohio.

Photo: Richard Lutz

Buckeye Trail Association

OHIO - It was another busy year for the Buckeye Trail Association (as it always is). This year the Buckeye Trail Association acquired two properties (one via donation and one via purchase). The Schmidt Campsite in Ross County is a quarter acre designated to be a primitive campsite for hikers to use while thru-hiking the Trail. The Imhoff Preserve in Perry County is 100 acres with a half mile of new Trail built across it with a brand new shelter built in November. This project connects two parts of the Wayne National Forest together creating a new 3.5-mile corridor. Both are now available to use for hikers of the BT and NCT.

As for trail maintenance and construction, the Buckeye Trail Crew, trail adopters, and five BTA Chapters continue to keep the Trail clear and open. The major new project due for completion for the 2019 year is the 15-mile Trail relocation in Adams County at the Nature Conservancy's 20,000-acre Edge of Appalachia Preserve System. This connects to the 15 miles of our Trail in Shawnee State Forest. Join us in northwest Ohio for Buckeye TrailFest on the Miami and Erie Canal and Maumee River May 16-19 to help celebrate the 60th birthday of the Buckeye Trail and Buckeye Trail Association!

—Richard Lutz

Who's Who Along the North Country Trail?

If you have questions about the North Country Trail, there are many different places to go for information. When in doubt, try NCTA Headquarters: If you're not sure whom to contact, your best bet is to connect with the NCTA's National Office. Staff members are listed on page 2.

North Country Trail Association
229 E Main St, Lowell, MI 49331
Toll-free: (866) HikeNCT Fax: (616) 897-6605
www.northcountrytrail.org
HQ@northcountrytrail.org

Visit our web site. Here you can join or contribute to the NCTA, browse the events calendar, explore NCTA Chapter pages, purchase maps and Trail-related products, follow links to Partner organizations, read up-to-date news items, report volunteer hours, and, of course, learn more about the Trail itself!

National Park Service: The NPS is an excellent technical resource for volunteers, agencies, partner organizations, and the media. As our official Trail administrator, the NPS sets Trail standards, determines Trail route, and provides the overall vision for the Trail.
NPS-NOCO Office
P.O. Box 228, Lowell, MI 49331
(616) 319-7906
www.nps.gov/noco

Chris Loudenslager, Acting Superintendent
Christopher_Loudenslager@nps.gov • ext. 2
cell: (616) 970-7026

Luke Jordan, NCNST Outdoor Recreational Planner
Luke_Jordan@nps.gov • ext. 1 • cell: (616) 250-6714

NCTA Chapters: For information about local activities or volunteering, contact the Chapter representative for your area of interest. We have almost three dozen local volunteer clubs scattered along the Trail that are Chapters of the NCTA. Chapters build and maintain trail, host hikes and other events, and work to promote the Trail and the Association in their areas.

Affiliate Organizations: The NCTA enters into affiliate agreements with other organizations who also envision the completed Trail. Trail Maintaining Affiliates are independent organizations who also work to build, maintain, and promote sections of the Trail. If you have questions about a section of Trail that is managed by one of these organizations, your best bet is to contact our Affiliates directly.

* Future official route of North Country National Scenic Trail pending Congressional approval.



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- 1 Lonetree Wildlife Management Area**
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mdavis@northcountrytrail.org
 - 2 Sheyenne River Valley Chapter**
Bobby Koepplin • (701) 840-0250
srv@northcountrytrail.org
 - 3 Dakota Prairie Chapter**
Mary Moberg • (701) 271-6769 • dpc@northcountrytrail.org

- MINNESOTA**
- 4 Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter**
Allan Schrodin • mwp@northcountrytrail.org
 - 5 Laurentian Lakes Chapter**
Barb Jauquet-Kalinoski • llc@northcountrytrail.org
 - 6 Itasca Moraine Chapter**
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 - 7 Star of the North Chapter**
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 - * **10 Border Route Trail Association**
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- NEW YORK**
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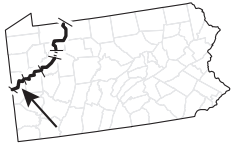
Student Conservation Association volunteers working with the Wampum Chapter on a Trail reroute in the spring.
Photo: Dave Brewer

Wampum Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA - The Wampum Chapter celebrated its 20th year in 2018 by continuing to sponsor monthly hikes on the NCT, participating in 12 community outreach events, and working consistently as we have over the years to build and maintain the North Country Trail in Beaver and Lawrence counties of Pennsylvania. The Chapter led 14 different hikes in the past 12 months, with our annual Bigfoot Search Hike in March and Pumpkin Pie Hike in October being the most popular.

We took part in the first annual Wampum Trail Town Celebration, co-sponsored our benefit hike on the NCT for McGuire Memorial organization, held a 20th anniversary Wampum Chapter summer picnic, and worked with other community organizations to preserve the 120-year-old, historic Watt’s Mill Bridge. Our volunteers also continued their yearly participation in the Great American Cleanup of Penna. and conducted a National Trails Day Hike into the Trail Town of Darlington.

In 2018 the Wampum Chapter continued its building and maintaining efforts and recruited more individual Trail Maintainers to keep our 40 miles of Trail in great hiking shape. Seven Wampum Chapter volunteers attended NPS sponsored sawyer training at Moraine State Park. On-the-Trail highlights included construction of the first mile of a new 2.5-mile



segment of NCT east of Enon Valley, Penna., a large project with six new landowners, which will involve building at least 20 footbridges. We worked all year to make improvements to the ADA Spur Trail in the Watt’s Mill area of Beaver County in conjunction with our plans to make this a recreational destination, and a Student Conservation Association crew was hosted over two weekends in the spring, working on a short NCT reroute on Cemex property and doing pathway improvement work at McConnells Mill State Park. The Chapter also assisted the Penna. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) in treating the hemlock trees against the anticipated invasion of the Woolly Adelgid pest, a project that involved two weeks of measuring and treating those beautiful trees. With the support of Lawrence County, volunteers were able to install three wooden trailhead signs, six informational panels, and 14 mileage-marker signs along 20 miles of NCT, information that has been well-received by hikers along the Trail in that county.

Weekly trail maintaining sessions were held that included tasks from mowing, pruning, and clearing fallen trees, to benching out older sections, refreshing paint blazing, and digging out several short reroutes to improve the condition of the Trail. Two of our footbridges received safety upgrades including handrail and traction improvements, and we extended the length of two others to give those structures years of new utility. Two new short footbridges were installed along the Trail in the past year as well.

The Wampum Chapter would like to appreciate all of our members, volunteers, landowners, and supporters who give so much of their time and talent to the NCT.

—Dave Brewer

Use Our Website to Plan Your Hikes!

Remember, we now have two sites for helping both hike planners and trail maintainers:

When planning your hike, read about major closures and reroutes at northcountrytrail.org/trail/trail-alerts/.

Or to report a problem, for which news our maintainers will be so grateful, visit northcountrytrail.org/trail/report-trail-condition/.

Andrea Ketchmark at HQ said, “The Trail Alerts page has allowed us to better communicate with the public about major reroutes, trail closures and storm damage along the Trail. With more than 1600 page views to date, we hope hikers are finding this information very useful in planning their hikes.”

And reporting problems using the Report Trail Condition form gets them fixed so much faster, so please use these sites both before and after your hikes.



Replacing steps and railings in McConnells Mill State Park.
Photo: Dave Adams

Butler County Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA - Our year began January 1 as we co-led with the Butler Outdoor Club a First Day Hike along the NCT in Moraine State Park. Cold weather didn't hamper the 100+ hikers participating. In February we joined Washington Trail 1753 and Jennings Environmental Learning Center to host our annual Cherry Pie Hikes. The park staff led short nature hikes, Washington Trail 1753 led short history hikes with re-enactors and we led a long six-mile hike from the 528 Bridge Parking Area back to Jennings along the NCT through the area George Washington travelled in 1753 on his trip to Fort LeBeoff. About 300+ visitors and hikers attended throughout the day.

The Keystone Trail Association Trail Care Crew spent five days working on improving the NCT near Alpha Pass in McConnells Mill State Park and two days building the base for our new Adirondack Shelter on private property near State Gamelands 95. Our local volunteers completed the construction during the next six weeks. Throughout the year we held monthly Chapter hikes and helped shuttle through hikers and weekend backpackers. We spent many days clearing blowdowns from several severe thunderstorms in the summer and an ice storm in the late fall.

—Dave Adams



Allegheny National Forest Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA - The Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge continues to be a popular event that the Chapter enjoys hosting. It is not a race; it is a challenge. Hikers test themselves against the Trail, the weather, and ultimately themselves. Every year hikers fall short for various reasons, including illness, injury and motivation, but all hikers should be proud of themselves no matter what distance they hiked. Last year 159 hikers started the Challenge. Completers of each distance included six at 25 miles, 60 at 50 miles, 10 at 75 miles and 19 at 100 miles.

In 2018, there were 189 volunteers at the 12 trail work days, where larger projects were tackled. Throughout the year, 40 Trail adopters diligently checked and made improvements on their own Trail segments. Other hikers helped out by clearing Trail as they moved through the forest or by submitting trail reports of problems they encountered.

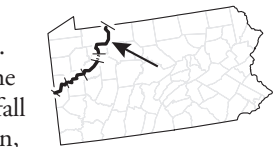
Grants from the National Park Service, Penn Soil RC&D, Allegheny Outdoor Club and Allegheny Outfitters allowed the Chapter to create and purchase informational map panels for our 13 trailhead kiosks. The panels provide information about the Trail and about the fauna, flora and history of the area. About half of these have already been installed. Three Adirondack style shelters were built or refurbished. A shelter was built about three miles north of Rt. 59 in Hammond Run. This was a cooperative effort between a local Boy Scout troop and the ANF Chapter. The Hunter Station Shelter was refurbished by an Ohio Boy Scout troop. They built a picnic table, benches and patio, cleaned the shelter and cleared brush around it. Finally, the Amsler Spring Shelter was cleaned and repainted.

Keeping feet dry along the NCT in the ANF is a challenge. In 2018, the ANF Chapter worked on water issues in two ways. Twenty new bridges were constructed; four were larger spans over small creeks and 16 were bog bridges over marshy areas. All of these walkways were covered with steel mesh which provides traction on slippery surfaces. That makes a total of 234 bridges along the 97 miles of our NCNST! Drainage issues were also addressed along the length of the Trail by constructing ditches and water bars to direct water off the Trail and clearing older ditches of debris to make them more effective. In order to avoid undrainable wet areas or overly steep slopes new trail was constructed in a few spots. Also, in several places, the Trail was sidehill benched to make a level hiking surface.



This very muddy crew worked all day on draining the Trail south of Fox’s Dam. If it weren’t rocky in any given spot, it was muddy!

Photo: Tina Toole



Following the Trail is made easier by effective blazing and signage. Twenty-five miles of Trail were blazed this spring as part of the effort to reblaze the 100 miles over four years. Also, the last 20 of 73 signs to mark trail/road intersections were placed this spring.

Besides maintaining the Trail, the ANF Chapter offers bi-monthly guided hikes. Hikes were well attended this year as many hikers had a goal of completing Hike 100 or preparing for the A-100.

— Tina Toole

Finger Lakes Trail Conference

NEW YORK - We built one new shelter and replaced another last year, improved some small bridges and puncheon, plus built some new trail up a challenging hill, where switchbacks and even a 16-foot ladder were required! Hard as it is to build and hike, this new trail replaces a hunting season closure and eliminates some roadwalk.

Several exciting preservation efforts are bearing fruit. For instance, we loaned money to the Finger Lakes Land Trust to secure two critical properties, each of which carries the Trail and one of which imposed a long road walk during hunting season. Two of the properties are now being bought by the state to add to adjacent State Forests, further protecting the Trail route, so our loans are coming back to our preservation fund AND several miles are protected!



Photo: Gary Mallow



On one of the new properties described, the Cayuga Trails Club had the opportunity to reroute the Trail onto newly protected land, so spent National Trails Day clearing new trail, building an S-curve boardwalk over a wet spot, and a bridge over a swift little stream. Above: We see Myra Schulman chiseling a place that will receive a beam for the bridge.

Photo: Gary Mallow



Our biggest efforts this year are working on major new projects for next year. First, at the end of April 2019, the International Trails Symposium comes to upstate N.Y., so we are building two new shelters of our current two styles that avoid heavy logs and a lot of labor, erecting them in the convention hall, and will have volunteers prepared to explain the benefits of these shelters over traditional designs. Then after the Symposium, they will be dismantled and reassembled out in the field at previously arranged sites. It will be a ton of work, but we hope to spread the good word of quicker, easier, safer shelters.

Yes, the NCTA will also be exhibiting at this event, since our shared Trail is nearby. The Symposium is attended by both trail enthusiasts and professionals in the field who work for both public agencies and outdoor organizations.

Second, we are gearing up to host the first ever Trail Days in Bath, a town near the Trail, centered between the Genesee River and Interstate 81, roughly equidistant among Rochester, Corning, Binghamton, and Syracuse. Steuben County Tourism is helping us immensely, as we will take over the county fairgrounds in Bath for three days of music, outdoor displays, presentations, and hikes covering the full variety of types. Our goal is to introduce the Trail to a new audience through heavy advertising in a hundred-mile circle. We have never undertaken something this big, so we're nervous but excited!

More hikers completed their end-to-end quests to hike the whole main Finger Lakes Trail (565 miles) which includes more than 420 miles of the NCT route, including an 83-year-old woman who has been working on it for two decades. Among those who finished not only our main trail this year but another 400+ miles of our branches is a man who is a state forester, and one of our partners along the Trail in the southwest part of the state. That's a first!

—Irene Szabo

Adirondack Mountain Club Affiliate

NEW YORK - 2018 was a banner year for the NCNST in New York's forested Adirondacks as the first section of new Trail on the ground was completed in the eastern Adirondacks. About 80 miles of new Trail are required to connect the 80 miles of widely disconnected existing trail segments to yield a continuous approximately 160-mile trail across the Adirondack Park. The new trail is a 2.7-mile segment to the summit of a small mountain, Jones Hill at 1882 feet, with wonderful views of surrounding mountains and lakes. This was accomplished with the help of NPS funding and through the joint efforts of the New York State Department of



Student volunteers load up for days of work on new trail. Ah, youth!

Photo: Mary Coffin

Environmental Conservation (DEC), Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) Professional Trail Crew, ADK Volunteer Youth Crew, and ADK Schenectady Chapter volunteers. The new trail is in Hoffman Notch Wilderness, one of the eight protected units in the State Forest Preserve. As Wilderness, the unit is restricted to non-motorized uses except for a narrow "chainsaw window" of a few weeks. Volunteers put in over 300 person hours with hand tools preparing the route for the ADK Procrew to do the earth work by removing extensive blowdown and side cutting. State DEC regulations prevent trail marking until trail is built down the other side of Jones Hill resulting in a road to road trail with access at both ends. DEC has committed to building a needed bridge over a stream along the Trail.

In the central Adirondacks, a nice four- to five-day backpacking route is now available from the Moose River Plains Road near Inlet to Rt. 28 in North Creek thorough existing trails in West Canada Lakes and Siamese Ponds Wildernesses. There are some connections via dirt log roads and a brief road walk near Speculator. Only the Siamese Ponds sections are marked NCNST as per State regulations.

We are very happy with the rapport developed and support from New York DEC foresters and planners. We are making plans together for a volunteer work week this summer to complete the Jones Hill project and a few other short sections on the approved route.

—Mary Coffin

Where In The Blue Blazes?

In this regular feature of North Star, we challenge your knowledge in a friendly competition to name the location of a detail or point of interest along the 4600+ mile North Country Trail. Any of our readers can submit a photo for consideration for the next puzzle, or play our game by answering the question: Where in the Blue Blazes can this location be found?

“Regarding the Mystery Photo for this month, it is at the ‘Gold Mine,’ found along the Heritage Chapter segment, within the Iron County Forest. This gold mine was a classic valuable mineral scam with the promoters claiming to have discovered gold, obtaining investment money, and then skipping town. It's my



understanding that the item shown is an old boiler that was used to produce steam to run various hoists, maybe something like a jack hammer.”

—11/20 Bill Menke, Wisconsin's Regional Trail Coordinator

“From the Heritage Chapter's section near Wren Falls. It's a heat exchanger but used just as a prop to make it look like they were ready to run tools below with steam, as part of the scheme to start a gold mine with investors' money.”

—11/18 John Pierson, Wisconsin

“The photo was taken on the NCT west of Casey Sag Road in Iron County, Wisc. The boiler is at the site of an old gold mine (so the story goes). This was a really easy one, since I took a similar photo in 2011!”

—11/21 Doug Welker, UP of Michigan

“That picture is in eastern Wisconsin somewhere between the Gold Mine Creek bridge and Wren Falls. Due to all the mine shafts around there I assumed it was some kind of steam engine used for mining. I've also seen one very similar along the FLT in New York.” (It turns out that Nathan hiked the whole NCT this past year, which is why he has seen two such abandoned boilers on our Trail. See his article on page 32.)

—11/23 Nathan Simpson



And our next mystery candidate? Can you tell our editor where on the NCT it is? Irene Szabo, treeweenie@aol.com, (585) 494-0307

Brule-St. Croix Roving Trail Crew 2018 In Review

Story and pictures by Bill Menke—
Wisconsin Regional Trail Coordinator



Upson Lake vista in fall

We always love to see what the Roving Trail Crew has done each year, and their manager, Bill Menke, shares the tales with us along with the rest of our State of the Trail submissions. Centered in Wisconsin, they have been known to work slightly east or west of their home state; it's always inspirational to read of their week-long projects of trail perfection. —Editor

Looking in the rearview mirror at the trail season that is just past, one of the first things that comes to mind is “what a privilege it is to work with such a talented group of faithful crew members.” Another thing that always comes to mind is awe of the dedication these folks have to turn out time after time in all kinds of weather and sometimes miserable working conditions. However, it seems this is the norm for our NCTA volunteers Trail wide. The camaraderie, fellowship, and skills embodied in a group of individuals who have such diverse backgrounds in unbelievable. May this never change as time marches on.

This wonderful dedication and turnout has once again resulted in another very productive and successful year for the Brule-St. Croix Roving Trail Crew. In 2018, over the course of seven crew outings, 25 different individuals contributed a total of 1971 hours, bringing the grand total up to a whopping 35,396 hours since 1997. This season, we were thrilled to welcome seven new workers for the first time ever, including one 17-year-old who spent an entire trip with us.

In threading its way across Wisconsin, the North Country Trail passes through the state’s four northernmost counties: Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland, and Iron. This year, the crew worked in all but one of them.

Douglas County: In May, the first workday of the season was spent building a 32-foot type 3 puncheon to correct a wet spot that had developed over the years. Located between the Brule Bog and Catlin Creek, this turned out to be the only work done in Douglas County for the year.

Bayfield County: Last year’s State of the Trail issue talked about the “Banana Belt” relocation project. This project replaces a segment of existing Trail that was on an old road that was originally chosen as our route because it was gated to public vehicles. However, over the years, the county forest could never keep the steel pylon barricades in place to prevent hunters and others from driving on the Trail. Eventually, we proposed and secured permission to replace the road route with a new single-track trail. The project was started in 2017 and completed in 2018. Resuming this project with the balance of the May trip and continuing through three more outings, the crew completed the 1.4-mile relocation. The new route is much more scenic than the old one was. Not only is it single-track trail, but it passes through more varied terrain with several small hills, as it wends its way past some really big red and white pines and skirts two small lakes or beaver ponds.

Interestingly, our close record keeping shows that this trail-tread-only (no structures) project required right at 1000 hours per mile. With an average amount of side hill benching, this seemed like it was a little more than we had been thinking it took to construct a mile of tread. Some of the increased time can be attributed to the new Trail having to pass through large areas of dog-haired aspen saplings, requiring extensive chain sawing and stump grubbing. One thing, however, is that it is simply not feasible to create an extensive length of trail in a short amount of time.



Top Left: Banana Belt tree hug



Top Right: Upson Foster Potato River in fall

Bottom: Banana Belt beaver pond

Iron County: During August, September, and October, the crew worked on the new segment of Trail known as the Upson-Foster segment. When eventually complete, this is going to be an outstanding addition as it parallels the premier Potato River. In places, it will be immediately adjacent to the river, offering great views, opportunities to fish or simply replenish water. It also offers a spectacular vista overlooking Upson Lake and the hills beyond.

The Heritage Chapter has been actively working to construct the tread for a couple of years (among other projects). This year, when the Rovers began work on the segment, it was to begin the construction of the 16 needed bridges or puncheon structures. The August trip was consumed with receiving two loads of lumber, cutting it to size, and moving most of it to various locations along the Trail. During September and October, eight of the structures were completed, including most of the larger ones such as a 112-foot puncheon and a 42-foot deck bridge. The remaining structures will be built in 2019.

For more details and pictures, request a copy of our Roving Trail Crew year-end newsletter. ✨



Crew Accomplishments for 2018 Include:

- 1.4 miles of Trail constructed, blazed, and signed
- 312 feet of type 3 puncheon
- One 16-foot bridge
- Three deck bridges: 26 feet, 32 feet, and 42 feet

Versatile, Strong, Durable, Easily Repaired and Affordable...

By Gary Mallow with Jim Connors
President, Cayuga Trails Club
Ithaca, New York



Connors Bridge with repairs completed.

All photos: Gary Mallow

About 15 years ago, the Cayuga Trails Club, which is headquartered in the heart of New York's beautiful and idyllic Finger Lakes region, was in the final planning stages of hosting a weekend of hiking. Hikers from across the state had already paid their registration fee to attend the Finger Lakes Trail's Spring Annual Weekend. Many were coming to explore the 90 miles or so of Finger Lakes Trail/North Country Trail that we are responsible for. In addition to the hiking, we had scheduled speakers, awards, and elections, not to mention six meals and overnight accommodations for over 120 people. My job, as a very green and nervous Trails Chair, was to make sure our section of the FLT/NCT was ready for hikers... no overgrown honeysuckle or multiflora rose, no dead-fall, no unfordable streams, mud holes, missing or faded blazes. I had checked out much of our Trail and had been in contact with our trail adopters. I thought

we were ready.

With less than two months to go before the appointed date, we had heavy rain resulting in torrents of water washing down what are usually mild and shallow streams. One of those creeks is Tug Hollow Creek in the rural town of Hector, and a primitive bridge there – actually just a large tree that had fallen across the creek – had let go. We had several hikes scheduled to cross Tug Hollow Creek. The prospect of canceling those hikes and reassigning dozens of hikers to other hikes was problematic. It was going to be embarrassing.

I asked Jim Connors, a member of our board and an engineer, if he knew of a simple, easily constructed bridge design that we could put up quickly, before the hordes descended. Jim took a look at the potential bridge site and went to work on designing something that might work. It needed to be narrow to keep mountain bikers, horses, and ATVs off

it. A narrow bridge had the additional advantage of less weight to support. The bridge had to be built of locally available materials, be durable, and of reasonable cost.

What eventually came to be known as a Connors Bridge exceeded expectations. A railing was added for safety, and something else that was innovative: the bridge would be prefabricated to the furthest extent possible off the Trail. After determining that everything fit, the Connors Bridge would be disassembled, and the parts would be carried to the site on the day of the project. Prefabricating, preassembling, and using modules minimized the amount of sawing, drilling and other work needed on the day of the build.

Because of the features of this design, the Connors Bridge at Tug Hollow Creek was built in time to save my butt. The hike weekend went off as planned. The bridge we built there worked so well that we've reproduced it in six or eight other locations. This bridge design has a good endurance record, but any bridge suffers occasional damage from trees coming down on it and from erosion. Because the Connors Bridge design is built in modules with commonly available fasteners and lumber, repairs are usually simple and, if not easy, at least they are not painful. The repair portrayed in these photos took about three hours from the time we had all our tools and materials carried into the site, until we were ready to head home.

Basic Construction

This bridge design is basically two "boxes" built from pressure treated 2 x 8s bolted together with half-inch carriage bolts. When bolted securely together, these boxes become the bridge stringers. The two boxes are joined in what will be the middle of the bridge with gussets, also made from 2 x 8s, fastened with carriage bolts. The gussets help to form a strong joint at what would otherwise be the weakest part of the bridge. At either end, the boxes



New joint closeup



Spacers beneath the deck



A new segment fits right into the original bridge frame.

are secured to the ground with carriage bolts to 4 x 4 pressure treated posts. Depending on ground conditions, these posts are sunk at least 30 inches below surface level, which is below the frost line in most years in our neck of the woods, preventing frost heaves. The handrails are built from pressure treated 2 x 4 uprights and 2 x 2 railing. We've used 1 x 6 composite decking and secured it to the bridge stringers with deck screws, but we are rethinking this part of Jim's design. Black locust is locally available, legendary for its durability, and more environmentally friendly. The deck screws might be beefed up too. But these are relatively minor considerations. The bridges we build today are essentially the same design that Jim came up with 15 years ago.

Features and Disadvantages

One of the best features of this bridge design is that it can be cut, predrilled and assembled at home in a day or two if you work without a break. After that, it's a simple matter of scheduling your project and finding enough volunteers to carry the tools and materials to the site. In fact, we've found the carry-in and carry-out to be the most time consuming parts of most projects; once you're on site, four or five people who are familiar with what needs to be done can build the bridge in a matter of hours.

Another feature that did not present itself until we had a few damaged bridges to repair is the relative ease of replacing broken parts. Sometimes it's a simple matter of unscrewing the bolts or deck screws, replacing the lumber, and screwing the repaired structure back together. Depending on age, fasteners will warp, bend, and rust. With older bridges, fasteners are likely to break when you attempt to remove them. Coming prepared with crow bars, pry bars, and claw hammers helps solve those problems. The point is that everything on these simple but elegant structures is replaceable, another wonderful design feature built in by Jim.

There are some disadvantages to this design. One is the limit to the length of span. We've worked with 16-foot spans over small brooks and gullies and had good results; the bridges will easily hold eight or 10 hikers. But our experience with longer lengths indicates that the bridges can go longer only if you add another set of 4 x 4 support posts underneath, and even then you could experience some sway side-to-side when hikers mount the bridge. Some will object to the amount of labor and materials required to place decking perpendicular to the direction of traffic. This design feature is time-consuming and labor intensive to build, compared to traditional puncheons where the boards run longitudinally along the direction of travel. However, we've found that perpendicular decking with half-inch gaps to allow rain, snow, sleet and ice to pass through provides superior footing. We believe the extra time and expense for an added safety margin is worth the effort. A final objection is cost; in our neck of the woods, this design can cost something under \$400 in materials. Some will object to that level of investment in a primitive trail bridge, but we are pleased with these bridges. Rough-cut black locust is rough enough to resist the slippery slime that builds up on treated wood, and composite decking isn't terribly slippery, either.

For detailed plans and directions on how to build a Connors Bridge, contact me at: garymallow2004@yahoo.com.



Sunset over Lake Michigan from the lower peninsula of Michigan.

This year I hiked the entire North Country Trail.

By Nathan Simpson



All photos: Nathan Simpson

I'm now one of a handful of people who have earned the right to say those words. Approximately 4700 miles in 167 hiking days, took 37 days to finish Michigan, less than a week to do Wisconsin before I exhausted the extra strength I had at the beginning. It was not a story of triumph or some transcendental experience; rather, it was a trail of awe inspiring miles. I repeatedly broke personal records for most miles in a day but it never equaled even 1% of the entire length, sometimes less than 3% in a week. I've heard it said about many long trails that if you don't have an obsessive desire to complete them you're not likely to finish. With the NCT I doubt you could even contemplate a thru hike

without an obsessive desire to finish it. I for one live my life always looking forward to the next big challenge and the very idea of hiking this trail from end to end in one year was certainly an intimidating one.

I hiked 3000 miles from Cincinnati to North Dakota and then 1700 miles from New York to Cincinnati. Starting April 7th in East Fork State Park, Ohio, the first 1200 miles in both Ohio and Michigan were so easy I barely remember them; the first part that was remotely challenging was the western Upper Peninsula where I encountered some resupply difficulties. It's staggering how little advanced planning I actually put into this thing (didn't carry a phone either), mostly just did it as I went along which made things stressful when I passed through towns because I had no idea where or if there was anywhere to buy food. The McCormick Wilderness in the UP was unpleasant to navigate since the path there isn't obvious and it's solely marked by saplings that have been cut off at about four feet high. Wisconsin was easy to get through quickly because there wasn't really anything to distract you from the hiking.

Only took 57 days to hike the 1700

miles to Duluth, Minn., and was looking forward to knocking out the Arrowhead route as fast as I could but by that point I had unknowingly badly depleted my strength just as I was beginning what I consider to be the hardest section of the entire trail. I made it through most of the Superior Hiking Trail a little slower than I wanted but still fairly quickly. Towards its end my lack of planning really became problematic because I faced over 180 miles from Grand Marais to Ely with no clue how to get food along the way. And so I didn't and instead set out to finish the Border Route Trail (BRT) and the Kekekabic Trail carrying six days of food and the overly optimistic goal of doing 30 miles per day. I didn't quite make it having run out of food a day before I reached Ely despite rationing.

The BRT was HARD, considering how worn out I was at that point (2000 miles in). If I'd encountered a trail like this in any other circumstance I would've given it up as not worth it. It was almost impossible at times and overgrown which made fast hiking impossible since I couldn't see where I was walking. There were a ton of people on the SHT, while there was no one



Nathan's foot next to bear paw prints in Minnesota.

on the BRT. Despite its condition I still have to commend the trail maintainers for that area for it must take superhuman effort to even keep it in that shape. The Kek was easier to hike and follow but I was burdened by my stupidity in not having any maps of that area, so I spent two days with no idea where I was and having to guess at every trail junction where I was meant to go. I spent hours lost and confused a few times when the trail I was following petered out into nothing.

The rest of Minnesota was a cinch after that, mostly on roads and bike paths; it was awful walking down the shadeless roads of the western part of the state

under the July sun. Not a lot of appetizing looking water there or in North Dakota, made worse by the fact that I kept running out of water treatment drops and ended up doing about 2800 miles of the trail drinking untreated water. In North Dakota that meant water from irrigation canals and roadside ditches; never got sick from it, though.

North Dakota is made for easy hiking since it is flat, level, and straight. It's also boring. There was the Sheyenne National Grasslands and areas to the east of it that were nice enough but most of the remainder was paved roads and gravel roads along canals. I averaged 37 miles per day for my last six days in the state and still felt frustrated that I couldn't do more. Every step felt like my knees would buckle and I was mildly surprised I didn't simply collapse in the middle of the road. The last few miles to the western terminus I had to stop every 50 yards or so to catch my breath since I'd lost 25 pounds and was literally on my last legs. When I saw the end of the trail I wanted to cry both from relief that I had reached this goal and from the knowledge that I still had another 1700 miles left. That was July 23rd.

After a few weeks of rest I forced myself out of my cocoon and made my way to Crown Point, N.Y., on August 11th and headed west from there. I have an almost pathological fear of cold weather, probably PTSD from almost dying in it while hiking more times in the past than I care to remember.



Top: Typical tea-colored water at Tahquamenon Falls State Park in the eastern Upper Peninsula. Bottom: The Trail follows part of the Black River Canal towpath, between the Adirondacks and the Erie Canal in N.Y.

New York was the polar opposite of North Dakota since it was cool, shady, rugged, included other hikers, and had a trail as opposed to a road. It was harder than I'd become accustomed to and with the shorter days I rarely did 30-mile days.

I think the coldest weather that I encountered on the trail was in the Adirondacks in August which were miserably cool and rainy. The Finger Lakes Trail was certainly a fine thing to hike on albeit a bit emptier of hikers than I was expecting, also the most rugged after the Arrowhead. Encountered more hikers in Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest than everywhere else but the SHT. The Allegheny was also not what I was expecting and should be renamed the Forest of Foul Odors. It was odd to be going through such a nice looking forest while choking on industrial fumes and



The Karnak railroad bridge across a wide valley and the north end of Lake Ashtabula in North Dakota. The Trail goes under the west end.

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wondering if the obviously contaminated water would make me sick. *{The fumes he refers to must be the occasional whiff of oil, since this corner of Pennsylvania was the birthplace of pumping oil from the earth, and is still dotted with small pumps outside of the National Forest, and remnants of pipelines inside. Editor}*

The road walking through eastern and southern Ohio wasn't nearly as boring as in North Dakota or southern Michigan, what with the trees, the twisty turning roads, and that you never knew what might be found over the next rise, maybe an Amish farm or an abandoned crumbling homestead. Despite the ease of walking the roads my mileage continued to fall in the waning days of October as the days became far too short for my liking.

On an NCT thru hike there is no way to take it easy; if you do you'll find yourself hiking through snow and becoming burned out from too many nights in the woods. The NCT was actually my third trail this year, since I thru-hiked the Florida Trail and most of the Natchez Trace in January and February which means that when I finally reached my original starting point near Cincinnati on October 20th I had hiked over 6000 miles for the year and spent 214 days hiking on a trail. I was knackered as the English would say. Among the three trails I was stopped by the police six times and received one involuntary ride from a Florida state trooper. Looking back on the trail as a whole it really is a thru hiker's nightmare and is probably best left to section hikers for whom it won't assume the dimensions of a seemingly never-ending ordeal. I always say that if you don't finish a hike with your body broken and mind shattered then you weren't trying hard enough. I tried hard enough, completed the challenge, but now as the trail becomes a hazy memory I must begin the search for the next challenge. It will be hard to top this one.



'Nuff said.

Why hike it? Because it is there, of course. I'm up to five and a half National



Small oil wells dot the landscape in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, sometimes in locals' front yards. And, yes, one can smell oil.

Scenic Trails now, including the four longest. I wouldn't get the fool idea into my head in the first place if there wasn't a trail there. My memory tends to emphasize the negative and even the parts I enjoyed the most have an aspect of disaster about them. I enjoyed seeing approaching thunderstorms across the prairie that I knew I couldn't possibly avoid with both excitement and despair. Being caught in such a thing with no cover visible to the horizon is unforgettable for good and bad. The Arrowhead in Minnesota was enjoyable because

besides being scenic and isolated it was so damned hard compared to everything else. I'm not Buddhist; however, the Buddha did not gain enlightenment because he had a good time. I couldn't decide to stay home like a casual hiker can because it's too hot or rainy, so I suffered through everything the trail could throw at me within reason and for that reason the feeling of accomplishment is all the greater. I take great pride in my misery.

In the end I'm afraid my vocabulary fails me because there really was some intangible quality to it all. I suppose that's why thru hikers enjoy meeting each other so much, because we don't have to try to explain. It just is. In the mind's eye every trail leaves behind a feeling and for the NCT it feels flat and endless like the trail might stretch forward to infinity and some part of you wishes that it did.

Maps: I just ordered them as I went along, picked up at post offices in towns on the trail, and didn't bother studying them until the day before I needed to use them. For the parts that weren't covered by hiking maps I took pictures of the computer screen on the NCTA's online GPS map with my camera and for most of that I was just following roads. There were only a few hundred miles where I had absolutely nothing but blue blazes to follow. Makes you appreciate the original pioneers all the more. The real difficulty was resupplying in towns that might have little more than a gas station if you were lucky; the NCTA's maps might be a little more informative about that sort of thing. One of the most enjoyable parts was the fine people along the way and their looks of stupefaction when I told them where I was going as I politely declined a lift. ✱



Top: Inside a covered bridge in Ohio in the fall, showing some of its structural members.
Bottom: Here Nathan crossed the famous Erie Canal, and so does the route of our Trail, right across the top of the lock gate holding back water.

2018 Chapter and Affiliate Honor Awards

In the fall, every trail-hosting group, whether Chapter, Affiliate, or Partner is given the opportunity to honor someone who has made a worthy contribution to the local group effort. Presentation of their NCTA Honor award is usually taken care of locally.

The 2017 CAP Honorees are:

Chapter/Affiliate Partner	Chapter/Affiliate Partner	Chapter/Affiliate Partner	Chapter/Affiliate Partner
Sheyenne River Valley	Cat Albert	Western Michigan	Jim & Gladys Hoogterp Beth Keloneva
Dakota Prairie	Ginny Newman	Chief Noonday	Eric Longman
Minnesota Waters & Prairie	Larry Larson	Chief Baw Beese	Janice Kessler
Itasca Moraine	Bruce & Linda Johnson	Buckeye Trail Association	Jimmy 'Sunny' Sunyak
Star of the North	Mark Gravelle	Wampum	Wampum
Superior Hiking Trail Association	Lisa Messerer	Butler	Dan Mourer
Brule St. Croix	Tom Hicks	Butler Outdoor Club	Paul Henry
Chequamegon	The NCT Navigators	Clarion	Susan Giering
Ni-Miikanaake	Ric Olson	Allegheny National Forest	Jeff Manelick Konstantin Pokrovski & Katarzyna Dec
Peter Wolfe	Terry Lahti	Finger Lakes Trail Conference	Marty Howden
NCT Hikers	Brad Slagle Mike Mattson	Central New York	City of Rome, Mayor Jacqueline M. Izzo Griffiss Local Development Corporation Mohawk Valley Economic Development Growth Enterprises
Superior Shoreline	Ed Bowen		
Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore	Carol Wozniak		
Harbor Springs	Dennis Fay		
Jordan Valley 45°	Denise & Jim DeKett		
Grand Traverse Hiking Club	Mike Schaeffer & Debbie Page		
Spirit of the Woods	Ray & Barb Dereske		



Jordan Valley 45° sign
All photos: Dove Day

Halfway There?

We entreat you to come to our National Celebration for the North Country Trail so you can be halfway there! Halfway where? Well, halfway between the North Pole and the Equator at the earth's 45th parallel for one but also halfway to meeting new friends, seeing new sights on the Trail, and halfway to a whole new set of experiences. You are also approximately halfway between North Dakota and New York on our monumental Trail!

The North Country Trail Association's Annual Celebration is part hiking extravaganza, part training for volunteers and part gathering of trail lovers. Members of the Jordan Valley 45°, Grand Traverse Hiking Club, and Harbor Springs Chapters have joined forces to create an experience that you will not forget, and, we hope, places a little bit of Michigan in your heart as it lives in ours. We want you to walk away having surveyed stunning overlooks, crossed beautifully wild unnamed creeks, taken in a campfire among friends, new and old, and perhaps finding a few more mushrooms.

Location

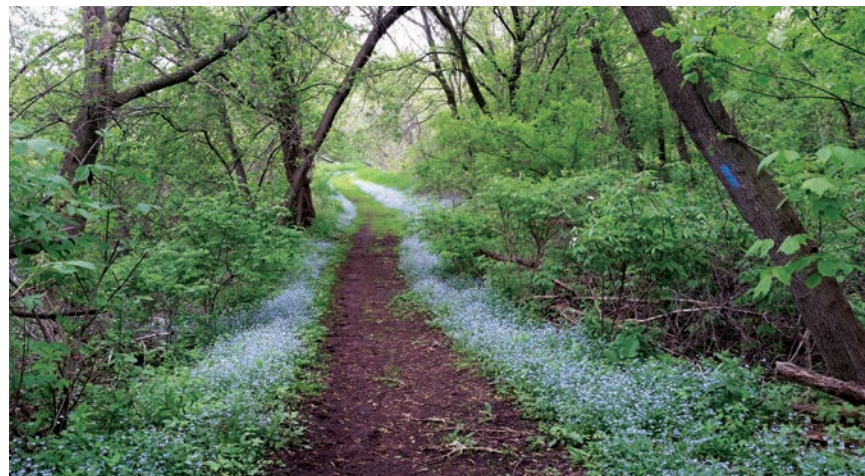
Our 2019 Celebration will have a base camp at Shanty Creek Resorts, located halfway between Traverse City and Petoskey in northern Michigan and the heart of the North Country. From here, we'll be able to explore the Jordan River Valley, the Huron-Manistee National Forest, Wilderness State Park, and a wide variety of local trails, parks, and rustic scenery.

In the iconic Jordan River Valley there are sweeping valley views, walks along flowing streams, scenic beaver ponds, and the only 45th parallel crossing on the NCT (halfway, remember?). You'll have the opportunity to hike the entire 18-mile Jordan Valley Loop (two hikes). Further south there are captivating views of the Manistee River, the awe-inspiring Valley of the Giants (trees, really big trees), the North Branch of the Boardman River, and the Sand Lakes Quiet Area. Further north the Trail Town of Petoskey is your gateway to Lake Michigan, the Bear River, and the Skyline Trail. But wait, there's more... off-NCT opportunities like Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore on Lake Michigan, Glacial Hills, Seven Bridges, we have it all for you. Nature is all around us, and it will be putting on its Spring Show, with many early spring flowers.

Hiking

Come to Michigan with your hiking boots! From our volunteer-led hikes, to self-supported hikes, to special local off-trail wild areas, we are here to get you close to nature!

Hikes will feature transportation from our Shanty Creek venue to and from the trails. Hikes will range from short strolls of a mile or so to half-day hikes of three to seven miles, and full-day hikes as long as 13 miles. We'll have a hike that is a trail building workshop, a hike with a naturalist who interprets flora and fauna, a hike with a brewery destination, and many more. Sign up for your favorite hikes when you register! There will be space limitations on most hikes, and it will be first registered, first served, so register early! We will also provide information on other hikes you may want to do on your own. There are far more things available for you to do than you will be able to on your short visit.



A patch of the Trail along the Bear River Recreation Area with carpets of forget-me-nots alongside.

Day and Afternoon Programs

Friday afternoon will be filled with a selection of programs and workshops from the basics of trail protection to backpacking technique, trail building 101, and Crew Leader training. For the trail techie, learn how to access NCTA GIS and mapping resources and for the artist, learn about trail photography with your smartphone.

There will also be both guided and self-guided tours of local points of interest such as the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery, the Grass River Nature Area, and the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.



A bit of the Trail through a carpet of trillium.



A segment of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, on Lake Michigan.



The entrance to the Valley of the Giants segment of the Trail, where the giants are trees along the Boardman River.

Evening Programs

Thursday

National Park Service Awards

Sleeping Bear Dunes - Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is a stretch of 35 miles of Lake Michigan coastline with pristine beaches, sand dunes, wildlife and trails. Listen as the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes walk us through the history and culture of the area and the significance of the park then and now.

Friday

A Night at Schuss Mountain

North Country Trail Association Awards
Gear demo and giveaway

Saturday

Keynote Speaker

A Beautiful Work in Progress - Mirna Valerio
Runner, author, speaker, adventurer and inspiration, Mirna Valerio is a force to be reckoned with. She is the author of *A Beautiful Work in Progress*, the subject of an award-winning REI Force of Nature documentary and was recently named National Geographic's Adventurer of the Year. Join us this evening to hear her speak about what trails mean to her and how together we can change the face of outdoor recreation. Q&A and book signing immediately following.

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Pre- and Post-Celebration Events

Pre-Celebration Manistee River hike/paddle

Explore bend after bend along the beautiful Manistee River first afoot then afloat. You will first walk along the scenic banks of the Manistee River surveying the banks, creeks, and water below as you wind through some of the most beautiful lands that the Huron-Manistee National Forest has to offer along the National Forest side. For the purist, there is an opportunity to follow the NCT portion of this revered loop but either way, converging downriver of the Mini-Mac suspension footbridge and Hodenpyl Dam you will now get to paddle the river you saw from above. RSVP early because there is limited availability for this event!

Post-Celebration Hike exploring the Harbor Springs Chapter section with the UP “Softies”

Experience rolling ancient dunes, quiet meadows, hidden lakes and a variety of flora and fauna. This hike will bring you through many beautiful features but is not for the faint of heart with many elevation changes. This roadwalk-free experience ends after a final three miles into the Wilderness State Park and a view of beautiful Lake Michigan’s Sturgeon Bay. There is no cost for this hike but you will need to provide your own food and lodging and a donation for trail shuttle is appreciated!



Shanty Creek Resort's Conference Center



One of many beautiful overlooks along the Trail above the Manistee River in the Huron-Manistee National Forest.

Lodging and Camping Hotel

Gorgeous views and inviting rooms await at our Celebration headquarters at Shanty Creek Resorts in Bellaire, Michigan. If you want to be in the center of program activities, hikes, and enjoy a more laid back experience consider booking a room. Shanty Creek Resorts has been very accommodating, providing us with wonderful meeting areas and some unique activities! There are queen rooms, studio rooms, and even some alpine lodges available to rent and share with your entire party or extended hiking family! There are campfire areas on the property, ski lift rides, and golf if the weather cooperates.

If staying at Shanty Creek, you must book your lodging through nctacelebration.org/lodging

Camping

If you yearn more for the rustic, there are several beautiful campgrounds in the area that will be open the first week of May, and most are located on the water with nice lake views. Some campgrounds are managed by local towns, others by the state, and still others are privately operated. Some campgrounds accept online reservations, while others are first come, first serve. Some are full-service, while others are rustic, but no matter which you choose we are planning to help warm you up with a hosted group campfire at a couple of the nearby campgrounds in Bellaire and Central Lake.

Details of the camping options will be provided in the online registration materials. In addition, we will ask about your camping intentions during the registration process. One thing to remember is that weather in early May is unpredictable in northern Lower Michigan. Although we hope for an early warm spring in 2019, temperatures can range from below freezing to warm and balmy. If there are freezing temperatures at night, some campgrounds may have limited running water.

By contrast, at Shanty Creek, room temperatures are comfortable and there is always hot water. So evaluate your tolerance level, and plan accordingly!

For detailed program information, links to lodging and to register online, visit nctacelebration.org. If you need assistance or would like to register over the phone, please call the NCTA headquarters at (616) 897-5987.

“Mac’s” Dream

By Jane Norton

Last year (2017) I hiked from the Ohio/Michigan border to the Mackinac Bridge. I had hiked many of the sections in the past, but not the total Lower Michigan in one year. As I was hiking I was always excited when I observed something new that I hadn’t seen in a year, especially if it involved the TRAIL!

Along a road walk in Hillsdale County, I noticed a North Country Trail sign with a campground! Wow! When did that happen? I decided to walk in to see if anyone was around. And there I met Mac and Ann in the garden. Mac, the owner, creator and builder of all the accommodations on site was very gracious and took me on a tour. He had built himself a cabin and an outhouse. Further down the Trail he had benches around a fire pit, a small cabin for two with a porch and two huts for sleeping inside. He then explained that anyone hiking on the NCT can stay for free! What? He does ask for reservations so he can be there in case of an emergency, be prepared with firewood, water, and make sure the cabins and outhouse are cleaned! If you are hiking the NCT you can find shelter there. How can this be?

I thanked him for the tour and went on my way. On my continued walk, I kept thinking hikers need to know about this gem. As a result, Chief Noonday Hike Committee planned a hike for 2018 in conjunction with the Chief Baw Beese Chapter to showcase this campground and a new one in Litchfield, built by the Boy Scouts, which I discovered this year.

I also decided I needed to find out what inspired Mac to build this beautiful campground. Mac has always been an “outdoors” guy, hunting, fishing, camping, and biking. As a Boy Scout, he never got involved in backpacking. It was after high school when he joined the Marine Corps he started to travel and began to backpack and hike. Later he joined the Air Force and continued to travel and hike.



The inviting entry to Mac's Campsite.

Photo: Jane Norton

He is now retired and fulfilling a dream, to walk out his front door and do all those outdoor things he loves to do. But he is finding he has gravitated to his creative side with nature in mind. Still outdoors, just in a different way. As he stated, “Besides, I hear God likes carpenters.”

He’s met hikers on the Trail (road) in front of his property and enjoys chatting with them, finding out where they are from, how far they have come and where they are headed. Often he hears, “Wish there were more campsites.” Mac decided he could help with that and that is exactly what he has done.

He is installing a “Suggestion Box” at the camp soon (maybe it is already finished as I write). He is also catering to kayaker/canoers, renting kayaks, depending on river conditions. This campground is along the St. Joseph River.

Check this campground out and you may have the chance to meet “Mac!” For reservations, email and phone information please visit www.nctkayakcamp.com. ✨



Hike 100 2019 Challenge



Anyone who hikes 100 miles on the North Country National Scenic Trail during calendar year 2019, in aggregate or all at once, will be eligible for a certificate and patch.

Starting your 2019 Hike 100 Challenge is easy:

Sign up at www.northcountrytrail.org/hike100challenge then grab a friend and head out on the NCT. You have until December 31, 2019. Get creative with your miles and be sure to share your adventures on social media with @northcountrytrail and #Hike100NCT



The Little Miami Scenic Trail is paved, with mileages marked.
 Photo: Randall Roberts

Out of the Darkness

Randall Roberts

It was announced in 2017 that there would be a 50-mile patch to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System Act to be awarded to anyone who hiked 50 miles on the North Country Trail (NCT) in 2018. As someone who has completed long distance endurance hikes, including my favorite 20, 40, and 60 miles on the Emma “Grandma” Gatewood Solstice (EGGS) hike in Ohio, my first thought was to wonder if I could do 50 miles in one day, the first day of the year. The temperature on January 1, 2018, was less than 10 degrees. That wasn't happening.

As 2019 approached, I began thinking about it again. I asked Andrea Ketchmark if the 50-mile patch would be issued again for 2019. She told me probably not. I told her that she saved me from getting frostbite. But the weather was being unusually warm. Originally, I was thinking of going from my friend's house in Milford, Ohio, and hiking to Xenia, on the Little Miami Scenic Trail, a paved rails-to-trail, or possibly doing an out and back. With no 50-mile patch, my friend Matt Patterson joked (I think), “You'll just have to do another 50 miles on January 2.” One hundred miles in two days? Could I do that? What if I started in Xenia at midnight, hiked to his house, spent the night, and hiked

back the next day? Not much different from the A-100 that many people do, but without the hills, and with places to stop along the way, like restaurants, gas stations, stores. I could do this.

As my mind began thinking through the logistics, I realized that it would be a lot of darkness. Past endurance hikes I've done were in the spring or summer with maximum daylight. This hike would be the opposite. It made me think of the “Out of the Darkness” walks my friend Bill McGovern participates in. His son took his own life years ago. These walks give people the courage to open up about their own struggle or loss, and the platform to change our culture's approach to mental health. I decided to work that into my walk. I collected 43 names of people who died by suicide. I decided I would read one name from the list every hour and do a live update for anyone who wanted to follow. As this plan came together, I saw all kinds of benefits. It gave me something to focus on, it gave me a greater sense of purpose, and it would provide live updates to friends and family who were worried about me.

As January 1 approached, I was still waiting for an announcement if there would be a 100-mile patch for 2019, but by that time it didn't matter; I was going to do this hike anyway. As Richard Milnes once said, “The virtue lies in the struggle, not the prize.”

I booked an AirBnB in Xenia right on the Trail and rested up for the day. I left the house at 11:55 p.m., celebrated the New Year with my wife via FaceTime and began my journey. The first day went as planned. I was delighted when Matt and Kim met me in Loveland and treated me to chicken fingers and a beer. Matt hiked the last nine miles with me which I was grateful for. I would have been much slower by myself. To be honest, when I went to bed at 10 p.m., I had serious doubts that I could continue the next day, but I set my alarm for 2:30 a.m. and I was out of the house and back on the trail at 3:30 a.m. for my second 50-mile hike of the year.

The last 20 miles were hard and the miles became increasingly harder. My daughter hiked the last six miles with me and that made a world of difference mentally. I was really struggling to finish, but by that time I was receiving numerous words of encouragement and prayers. The messages from people telling me how thankful they were that I was doing this and how touched they were carried my spirit and allowed me to push myself well beyond my comfort zone. I finished in Xenia at midnight on January 2, 48 hours after starting.

It's a week later, and I'm still sore and stiff, but so thankful that I had the chance to do something like this. I have grown physically, mentally, and spiritually as a result. ✨

For more information about “Out of the Darkness” community walks or how you can contribute, please visit afsp.org

To view Randall's video, visit <https://youtu.be/YUPEK-ePksw>. (It's over two hours.)



Crooked Lake

Michigan Finale

Story and photos by Rachel H. Frey



In the summer of 2017, Merv and Rachel Frey of Pennsylvania travelled from North Dakota through Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the UP of Michigan, sampling parts of the North Country Trail. We have enjoyed their accounts and pictures in previous articles, and here is their Michigan finale. —Editor

“This is going to be fun!” I said to my husband Merv.

I've always liked new adventures and Craig Lake was touted as the most remote state park in Michigan. The North Country Trail goes right through it. After hiking parts of the NCT in North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin we were going to the UP (Upper Peninsula) of Michigan. Craig Lake State Park has a seven-mile narrow gravel road leading to the parking area. Traveling carefully, we used 30 minutes to drive the seven miles. We saw a bicyclist along this road.

“Don't miss Crooked Lake,” he said. “It has a really good view and the spur trail is not very long.”

“We just want to do Teddy Lake today,” we told him.

“I've just gone over it,” said the bicyclist/trail maintainer. “It's in good shape.”

We found Teddy Lake from a short spur off NCT, but then we intended to make a loop to avoid another out and back. The trail opened on to a road but the blazes seemed to indicate a wrong

turn. Studying the map, we decided to go left, not right. We guessed correctly. Coming to another road we turned left and arrived at the parking lot before darkness fell. It was now the end of September and the days were getting shorter.

After a night at Bear Paw Inn which was close enough to the park, we rose to a glorious sunrise reflection in the lake there. Stopping to photograph a spruce grouse along the seven-mile road to the park, we started our hike from the parking lot going the opposite direction from the previous day and soon found that spur trail to Crooked Lake. The trail maintainer was right! The glassy smooth water made a magnificent reflection. We deliberately start our hikes early in the day for this reason. The early morning beauty is something that just does not happen later in the day and you never know just what you may find. Crooked Lake was one of the most beautiful spots of our entire trip! Continuing on the NCT, we headed north hoping to find the campsites that were marked on the map to determine our mileage for the day.

Continued on page 42

Several miles before that area, I came to a questionable bridge over the black water of a swamp. “Should I cross this?” I wondered. “What if this bridge collapses and I lose two months of photos in my camera? But there IS a cable.”

I started crossing the bridge using that cable, when Merv said, “There’s a moose!” I looked up and sure enough, a HUGE bull moose was coming toward us through the swamp. I retreated. Merv said, “It’s safer on the bridge.”

Forgetting completely about the safety of the bridge, I hastily walked to the other end. I snapped zoom photo after zoom photo while the moose advanced toward us. I remembered that moose have poor eyesight and perhaps he did not see us. But close was close.

“Merv,” I said. “That’s close enough. Come on!” He started crossing the bridge. We think the moose finally saw him and he went into the woods. Elated, we continued on down the Trail rather speedily. In the wilds of Michigan when we had not even been thinking of moose, we had run into one!



Top: Moose in Craig Lake
Bottom: Bridge over swamp water



Morning at Little Presque Isle

Now for those campsites. Following a trail that seemed to follow some sort of an old road much of the time, Merv spied an old fire ring, then an old latrine and also a tent site. VERY old. We decided this must be the “campsite” on the map! Retracing our steps to where we had seen the moose (no longer there, of course) we returned using the Craig Lake Loop Trail back to the parking area. There, some folks planning to canoe to an island to camp told us seeing a moose here is unusual; it was an exciting day!

Our next hike was along Lakeshore Trail at Marquette; we were more and more impressed with the vastness of Lake Superior with its astonishing wave heights. Those crashing waves reminded us of the ocean, not a lake! Some brave souls were swimming in the lake and this was the end of September! Passing a red lighthouse and a dock lined with boats, we returned via the town roads to a very windy COLD campsite. Early the next morning, we drove to the NCT along Little Presque Isle. We arrived just as the sun was coming up over Lake Superior and reveled in the early morning’s lovely lighting. The Trail there was very easy and went right along the lake. Merv continued to notice something that felt like a “stone in his shoe.” His foot seemed better on this softer trail, but we still needed to hike 42 miles of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Trail which is also part of NCT. Van Adams was traveling all the way from Pennsylvania to shuttle us on that section. Would Merv’s foot tolerate 42 miles? We did not know what type of terrain we would encounter there.



Crashing waves of Lake Superior

Meeting Van at Otter Creek Campground, we set up all our tents. It was now October 1 and 41°. Would we finally have more normal temperatures? Because of the weather forecast we decided to do the second portion of Pictured Rocks Lakeshore Trail (another “Lakeshore Trail”) on our first day. We did not know then that this is the most scenic portion of Lakeshore Trail. We oohed and ahed our way through the day. Chapel Rock, Indian Head, Grand Portal, Spray Falls, Lovers Leap... wow! This is what we came to see! We were impressed by the immensity of Lake Superior and the evidence of “wild weather” with all the fallen trees and ground erosion.

The area continually changes due to violent weather conditions. The water in Lake Superior was greenish-colored along the shoreline. We saw a tourist boat below us. Van, who was unable to hike with us due to a medical condition, took that boat tour and advised us to try it. Our second day was only nine miles and there was time to do just that. We got close-up photos from below of what we had just seen from the top the day before. Whew! Those are big cliffs! We took photos non-stop, ending with the lighthouse at Grand Island. With our hoods securely fastened, we braved the WINDY lake and returned after a most satisfying day!

Facts about Lake Superior

- Would cover the 48 contiguous states five feet deep
- Contains 10% of the world's fresh water
- Is the largest surface area fresh water lake in the world
- Has 1,826 miles of shoreline

Merv’s foot was worsening, but he decided he wanted to finish the 42 miles of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Trail; he upped the pain relievers and off we went to Twelve Mile Campground to hike south the third day. This section was the most inland with, consequently, the least views of Lake Superior. Actually, it was good it WAS inland because, despite hiking in October, an infuriating bug found us. I found the following gem about the little pest in summitpost.org.

“This tiny terror looks like a house fly but instead of a harmless little pad for a tongue this fly has a dagger. They attack in ungodly swarms, are impervious to Deet, and have the ability to bite through two layers of clothing.”

The **stable fly** bites worse than any other bug I ever encountered. They seemed to be worse near the lake, so retreating inland was a relief from the bugs. Surprisingly, we encountered a very old rusted green Plymouth in the woods as well as an old moss-covered cabin. We found a red pine with very thick needles, two in a bunch. Merv decided the next day would be his last for this year. Having had plantar fasciitis myself some years ago, I was sure that was what was wrong. The cure is rest, no hiking.

The last 11.5 miles of Lakeshore Trail left us with lasting memories of Lake Superior’s gigantic waves. We encountered a park official who told us those waves can be 30 feet high in November. We loved just watching the power in those waves. We could not even hike along the shoreline at “The Graveyard Coast” area because the waves were too high. Huge high sandy Grand Sable Banks appeared just past the Au Sable Light Station. Then in the last five miles of a surprisingly flat walk in the woods, I found a new plant. Later I identified it as curlicue plant. A noisy pileated woodpecker alerted us of his presence around Grand Sable Lake, but we did not see him. But I did snap a photo of a fussy red squirrel in the rest area. At trail’s end by the visitor center, we used my tripod for a last photo of us at the end of our most memorable trip! ✨



North Country Trail Association

229 East Main Street
Lowell, Michigan 49331

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Mitchellville gorge, along the portion of the North Country Trail hosted by the Finger Lakes Trail, outside Hammondsport, N.Y. This lovely stretch of dark hemlock woods, above a stream gorge, is white-blazed because the 400-plus miles hosted by the FLT was already white-blazed for decades before the NCT came along.

Photo: Vinnie Collins



Your Adventure Starts Nearby.

Come Visit Us!

The Lowell office is open to the public Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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The North Country Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

Our vision for the North Country National Scenic Trail is that of the premier footpath of national significance, offering a superb experience for hikers and backpackers in a permanently protected corridor, traversing and interpreting the richly diverse environmental, cultural, and historic features of the northern United States.