

July-September, 2019

The Magazine of the
North Country Trail Association

Volume 38, No. 3

north star



See all the hikers out there this season!
Girl Scouts' first taste of backpacking
An Excerpt from North Country Quest
by Joan Young

IN THIS ISSUE

Columns

Trailhead	3
Next Deadline for Submissions	9
Where in the Blue Blazes?.....	14



Faces

Meet Our New Intern, Lacie	4
----------------------------------	---



Hiking Shorts

Hiking Shorts.....	4, 5, 9, 11
--------------------	-------------



You're Invited

You're Invited!.....	8
----------------------	---



State of the Trail

Maplewood State Park Trail Relocation	10
--	----



Trail Maintainer's Spotlight

Trek The Kek!.....	12
--------------------	----



Hikes

What Does a Long Distance Hiker Look Like?	16
Ron's Story.....	18
Bill's Story.....	19
News Keeps Coming In.....	19
Joy on the NCT	21
National Trails Day	22
Taking Girl Scouts to the Trail.....	24



Trail Preservation

One History of Preservation	26
-----------------------------------	----

<i>North Country Quest</i> , an Excerpt	28
---	----

About the Cover:

This half-size set of table and chairs is just waiting for Alice to come along near Fife Lake, Michigan. Photo by Jerry Freels



Staff

Valerie Bader
Director of Trail Development
vbader@northcountrytrail.org

Matt Davis
Regional Trail Coordinator, Minnesota/North Dakota
mdavis@northcountrytrail.org

Tarin Hasper
Annual Fund Coordinator
thasper@northcountrytrail.org

Andrea Ketchmark
Executive Director
aketchmark@northcountrytrail.org

Kate Lemon
Marketing and Communications Coordinator
klemon@northcountrytrail.org

Nicole Murphy
Administrative Assistant
nmurphy@northcountrytrail.org

Bill Menke
Regional Trail Coordinator, Wisconsin
bmenke@northcountrytrail.org

Alison Myers
Administrative Assistant
amyers@northcountrytrail.org

Matt Rowbotham
GIS Coordinator
mrowbotham@northcountrytrail.org

Lisa Senneker
Financial Administrator
lsenneker@northcountrytrail.org

Kenny Wawsczyk
Regional Trail Coordinator, Michigan
kwawsczyk@northcountrytrail.org

National Board of Directors

Tim Mowbray, *President*
(715) 378-4320 · tmowbray@earthlink.net

Jaron Nyhof, *VP, At Large Rep.*
(616) 786-3804 · jnyhof1@gmail.com

Larry Pio, *Secretary*
(269) 327-3589 · ncta.secretary@gmail.com

Ruth Dorrough, *Immediate Past President*
(585) 354-4147 · dorroughcm@gmail.com

Josh Berlo, *Minnesota Rep.*
(574) 532-4183 · joshberlo@gmail.com

Mike Chapple, *Treasurer*
(574) 274-0151 · mike@chapple.org

Jerry Fennell, *At Large Rep.*
(262) 787-0966 · jeroldvfennell@hotmail.com

Dennis Garrett, *VP East*
(724) 827-2350 · dcgag@gmail.com

Cheryl Kreindler, *At Large Rep.*
(313) 850-8731 · ckreindl@ch2m.com

Derrick Passe, *Minnesota Rep.*
(763) 286-0570 · derrickpasse@gmail.com

Jan Ulferts Stewart, *North Dakota Rep.*
(701) 318-5180 · janustewart@gmail.com

Mark VanHornweder, *VP West*
(218) 390-0858 · mvanhorn74@yahoo.com

Jeff Van Winkle, *Michigan Rep.*
(616) 540-2693 · rvanwink@gmail.com

Steve Walker, *Ohio Rep.*
(330) 652-5623 · nilesprinting@gmail.com

Quinn Wright, *New York Rep.*
(716) 826-1939 · wrightquinn4@gmail.com

North Star Staff

Irene Szabo, Mostly Volunteer Editor, (585) 494-0307 or treeweenie@aol.com, 7639 Swamp Rd., Bergen, N.Y. 14416

Kelly O'Hara, Graphic Design

Lorana Jinkerson, Becky Heise, Joan Young, Tom Gilbert, Duane Lawton, Kate Lemon, Eileen Fairbrother, Jeff Van Winkle Editorial Advisory Committee

The *North Star*, Fall issue, Vol. 38, Issue 3, is published by the North Country Trail Association, a private, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization, 229 East Main Street, Lowell, MI 49331. The *North Star* is published quarterly for promotional and educational purposes and as a benefit of membership in the Association. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the North Country Trail Association.

Trailhead

Tim Mowbray, President

It's been a busy year so far with passage of the federal legislation for the reroute to include the Superior Hiking Trail, the rest of Minnesota's "Arrowhead," and a new Trail section into Vermont to meet up with a trailhead on the Appalachian Trail. These reroutes add to the already great hiking experience we see across the North Country Trail as we continue to build out the entire Trail across the northern tier of states.

The North Country Trail Association continues to work on developing financial and partner resources

and organizing volunteers with our Chapters to build and maintain the Trail and amenities for hikers. Summer is the time when many of our larger projects such as building bridges, latrines and camp sites are put in place. It's a great time to check with your local Chapter on activities in your area if you are looking for an adventure.

This is also the time of year when the board of the NCTA looks at reviewing and renewing our strategic plan for guiding our work over the next several years. Our board advocacy committee is looking at the next major legislative goal of bringing parity to the funding for all National Scenic Trails supported in part through the National Park Service. The governance committee is in search mode for future board members and working on policy and procedure refinements to keep our organization focused on accomplishing our mission. Other committees continue to focus on activity that builds the Trail, recruits volunteers and supports the organization with community and donor involvement.

We hope that you have plans to continue your participation in this year's events and activities that happen on the Trail throughout the rest of the season. We recently had a dedication in Duluth, Minnesota, for the affiliation of the Superior Hiking Trail with the NCTA family. A ribbon cutting ceremony took place and we heard from partners of the trails that became part of our organization through the recent legislation.

The NCTA continues as an amazing and great organization with all its dedicated volunteers who diligently work on and support the Trail. We have a dedicated board of directors and a great staff who work hard to accomplish our goal to keep the North Country Trail a great place for recreation and for sharing the outdoors with our families and friends. I hope to see many of you at future events and hope you are enjoying a great summer on our incredible Trail. ✨



Tim Mowbray and Charlie Gallet at the spot where the NCT and Superior Hiking Trail meet at the Minn. and Wisc. border

Photo: Sue Mowbray

Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director

I always walk away from our Annual Celebration filled with a renewed excitement for what we do and this year was no exception. It's impossible not to be after spending the weekend with hundreds of people who all came together for their love of the Trail and the work we do. We hiked, we learned trail skills, we celebrated the volunteers who make this all possible, we celebrated the passage of the North Country



Photo: Andrea Ketchmark

Trail route adjustment, we caught up with old friends and made some new, and we listened as author and adventurer Mirna Valerio shared her life story and inspired us to be more invitational, make fewer assumptions, and ensure everyone finds a home on the Trail.

Exhausted but renewed, I drove home that Sunday with a full heart, knowing that our volunteers are amazing, we are energized, and we are ready to engage more people than ever before.

NCTA's Board of Directors also meets during the Celebration and at this meeting, we adopted a new set of Core Values. Just as our Mission defines what we do as an organization, our Core Values define how we do that work and I'm proud to share the values that we've chosen.

The North Country Trail Association is guided by the following core values that represent the organization's commitment to the Trail, our partnerships and each other.

Accountability

We take ownership and responsibility for our actions, policies and decisions. We engage in wise stewardship of public and private resources.

Collaboration

We value the spirit of cooperation among staff, volunteers, all partners and landowners and are committed to building and maintaining this culture of collaboration. Service is the backbone of our organization.

Excellence

We strive for exceptional quality and safety, both in the work we do in building and maintaining the Trail and in the experiences of the users of this world class trail.

Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that everyone is respected, included and valued for their contributions to our mission and culture. We actively welcome people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs.

Accountability. Collaboration. Excellence and Inclusion. These aren't just words. They are the ties that bind us and the ideas that inspire us. Please join me in celebrating what we stand for by living every day with the Trail as our destination and our values as our guide. ✨



Meet Our New Intern, Lacie

By Lacie Tryan and NCTA Staff

Hey there! I'm Lacie. I grew up in the Upper Peninsula (in a very small town) and went to college in the Lower Peninsula. I am a graduate of Ferris State University where I obtained a degree in Music Business. I've interned with radio in Wisconsin and with a booking agency based in Florida. While on campus, I spent a summer as an Orientation Leader, coordinated the comedy show for the annual homecoming week, and spent most of my time with the campus programming board (to plan music, comedy, educational speakers, etc.). I also helped plan the Finger Lakes Trail Days festival held in Bath, New York. I work in ticket sales in Grand Rapids at Van Andel and DeVos. (So, come say hi!) Other things I enjoy include backpacking, longboarding and getting ice cream after hikes. If that sounds like a good time, let's be friends.



Photo: Derrick Shelafoe

I was first introduced to the NCT while hiking to waterfalls in the UP, soon to realize the Trail was larger than I thought! I joined the Next Generation Coalition, started going to trail work days and met some great people along the way!

This August, I will join the team at NCTA to work with our 2020 Celebration planning committee to make that event a great success.

Andrea Ketchmark: "Lacie is a dedicated trail advocate and has participated in many events along the Trail including multiple workdays in West Michigan and the 2019 Celebration in Bellaire, Michigan. As a member of the Coalition, she has been actively involved in planning events, encouraging membership, and providing valuable feedback for the NCTA. Lacie shares her passion for the Trail through social media and by hiking the Trail often." ✨



The Buckeye Trail Association's Beall Farmstead near Deersville, Ohio. It comprises 16 acres and is located on Tappan Lake which can be seen in the background. Inside the Barn are showers, bathrooms and a full kitchen.

Photo: Steve Walker.

NCTA Extended Outings Program: The Eastern Ohio Excursion

By Steve Walker

At Celebration 2019 in Bellaire, a small group of NCTA folks gathered to see what might be done to reinvigorate the NCTA Extended Outings Program. After some discussion, Steve Walker, an NCTA Board Member from Ohio, offered to take a stab at developing an extended outing in eastern Ohio using a different concept. It will be called the Eastern Ohio Excursion. It will be based out of the Buckeye Trail Association's Beall Farmstead near Tappan Lake. Camping there is not a rough experience as it has showers, toilets and a full kitchen. For those who stay there, a complimentary breakfast will be available in the morning as well as lunches to pack for hikers. There are also other overnight accommodations available nearby including hotels and bed and breakfasts.

The initial plan is to organize a multi-day event later this year, perhaps in October, that includes morning hikes on the North Country Trail and varying side trips to different venues in the local area in the afternoon followed by evenings around a campfire. Some of the side trips could include Amish country, the Ernest Warther Museum and Gardens, Schoenbrunn Village, restaurants and local wineries. Working with Steve Walker will be fellow NCTA Board Member and former NCTA President Ruth Dorrough. If you have an interest in participating, please contact Steve Walker at nilesprinting@gmail.com. ✨



Left to right: Little Cities of the Black Diamonds office (orange), current BTA headquarters (white), future BTA headquarters (yellow for now, but soon to be Sweeping Blue just like our blazes).

Photo: Andrew Bashaw.

Buckeye Trail Association Moves to Expand Headquarters

By Steve Walker, BTA President

The Buckeye Trail Association office is moving! But not far. If you've ever been to the BTA office in the Village of Shawnee, Ohio, our new location will be right next door at 129 West Main Street in 2020. For a number of years, the BTA office has occupied a single floor of a house at 127 West Main Street, Shawnee. With the recent growth of the BTA, it was apparent that this office space was becoming insufficient for the needs of the organization. At the same time, the BTA also acquired the house at 127 West Main Street that is our current headquarters. Also on that same lot is a smaller building that currently serves as the office of the Little Cities of the Black Diamonds Council.

Since then, a group of dedicated BTA volunteers, known as the 129 Project Committee, has stepped up to begin the first part of the building rehabilitation process. This first effort entails bringing the house at 129 Main Street up to a state of occupancy by the end of 2019 as our new Buckeye Trail Association headquarters.



NCTA Staff Update

By NCTA Staff

We are sad to say goodbye to our recent hire for our Director of Development, Greg McAleenan, as he has decided to leave our team for personal reasons. Greg made some great contributions to NCTA in the short time he was here and we do hope that he and his wife Karin will continue to be a part of our trail community as they are passionate advocates of our work. Rest assured, the rest of our development team including our Executive Director, Andrea Ketchmark, and our Annual Fund Coordinator, Tarin Hasper, are able to lead all of our development efforts in the meantime and are here to assist our donors, members and partners as needed. *



Photo: Susan Giering

The Trail in June

By Susan Giering, Clarion County Chapter

June is the perfect time of the year to visit western Pennsylvania. My sisters and I recently followed the NCT through the forests near Cook Forest in Clarion County, one of our favorite hikes. We began at the Fire Tower and headed toward the Clarion River where we found the Mountain Laurel, our state flower, in full bloom. What an amazing sight! Something that we didn't realize about the laurel was that it has not only white flowers but bright pink as well. Beautiful! We had a perfect hiking day, even though crossing streams became a bit of a challenge due to the abundance of rainfall lately.

This section of the NCT rivals any other trail with the hills, the views and the Clarion River, of which we are very proud. Receiving a designation as "River of the Year" for 2019 makes the Clarion a standout in our country.

Many of you will have the chance to experience our hidden treasures next August as the Clarion Chapter hosts the 2020 NCTA Celebration. Happy Hiking. *



Mirna Valerio inspires us to rearrange our preconceptions.

Photo: Dove Day

NCTA Attracts Corporate Sponsor Merrell and Brings The Mirnavator to Celebration Attendees

By Tarin Hasper

The North Country Trail attracted the attention of outdoor retailer Merrell and our partnership brought Mirna Valerio to deliver an inspirational message to attendees. Mirna is National Geographic's 2018 adventurer of the year, a Merrell ambassador, and author of *A Beautiful Work in Progress*. NCTA's Executive Director Andrea Ketchmark thought of her first when deciding what message to bring to event attendees, and who should deliver it.

"After watching her Force of Nature video for REI, I was captivated. Mirna's enthusiasm is contagious and her message of inclusivity is one we all need to hear. It just made sense to ask her to join us to discuss her experiences in outdoor recreation and how we can all do better to engage everyone in the outdoors."

-Andrea Ketchmark



Our Emily Rodriguez at the Merrell booth.

Photo: Kate Lemon

Mirna, aka "The Mirnavator," helped us gain ideas on how to be more invitational and to broaden the spectrum of humanity represented on the North Country Trail. We were inspired, ready to try new ideas, and sent her off with a standing ovation. Her book signing followed the talk, and the weekend ended perfectly the next day as she led us on a trail run.

Merrell provided the financial support necessary to bring Mirna to our event and supported the event as our lead sponsor at the Trail Champion level. But they were more than just sponsors. Attendees were also excited to "check out" Merrell footwear and take it for a test hike, which allowed a unique opportunity to sample the latest footwear on natural terrain over the course of a few days. There was no shortage of ways to test the borrowed gear with the offerings at the event: guided, interpretive, self-guided hikes, and trail runs. Where else can you try out new shoes and return them scuffed up, muddy and stinky at no cost to you?

This mutually beneficial partnership with Merrell excited our attendees with one-of-a-kind experiences and put more Merrell boots out on the Trail. It's innovative partnerships like this that merge funding with opportunities to further each other's mission to get more people outside. ✨



Trying on shoes at the Merrell booth.

Photo: Kate Lemon



Florence Hedeem from Minnesota models the unique skirt she has made with years' worth of annual Celebration neckerchiefs that the National Park Service always hands out in commemoration.

Photo: Irene Szabo

Thank you to all of the
sponsors and partners
that made this year's
NCTA Celebration
possible.

TRAIL CHAMPION

MERRELL®

TRAIL LEADERS



TRAIL BLAZERS





YOU'RE INVITED!

You're Invited!

In this new feature in the *North Star* magazine "You're Invited!" you will find listed opportunities to participate in NCT activities beyond your local Chapter. Come here to find out about events planned in the next six months and how you can participate.

You're Invited!

NCT Crew Leader Training September 7, 2019

Join the Pennsylvania Chapters of the North Country Trail Association for a Trail Crew Leader training workshop at Moraine State Park on Saturday, September 7, 2019. The training will prepare volunteers to lead local and regional Trail projects on the NCT in Penna. and beyond. Contact Valerie Bader for more details or to register. vbader@northcountrytrail.org.

You're Invited!

Long Weekend Trail Reroute Project September 27-30

Join the Jordan Valley 45° Chapter as we start work on a reroute enabled by the new Bear River Bridge approval. Camp or motel. Some meals and lots of fellowship provided. Arrive in Petoskey, Michigan, when you can; depart when you must. Save the date, celebrate NCNST Day with us. Send us your email address to be updated as plans develop: delawton@torchlake.com.

You're Invited!

The Dakota Challenge

You will hike the 433.5 miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail in North Dakota. Enjoy the beauty of the plains, the azure lakes, and the green, rolling hills close-up by hiking it. You will be surprised at how much you will observe when traversing the state at a slower pace. The Trail begins at Abercrombie, and ends at Lake Sakakawea State Park.

There are maps on the North Country Trail Association's website to help you plan your journey. You can hike the Trail in sections, or all at once.

The Dakota Prairie Chapter sponsors day hikes, backpacking and camping opportunities to help you achieve this challenge of walking the *NCT in ND*.

We currently have 19 enthusiastic hikers working on this challenge and we would love to add you to the list! A lovely patch will be awarded to you at the conclusion of your hike. This is a unique patch that few people along the 4600 miles of the NCT will ever obtain. Contact Rennae Gruchalla (rgruch@aol.com) to add your name to the list of participants. I would also encourage you to become a member of the North Country Trail Association/Dakota Prairie Chapter if you aren't already.



Bridge across south end of Lake Champlain between N.Y. and Vermont.

Photo: Dan Dorrough

Vermont Partnerships

By Kate Lemon

The North Country Trail Route Adjustment was first proposed over 25 years ago. One of its objectives has been to extend the eastern terminus of the NCT to meet the Long Trail in Vermont, which then connects with the Appalachian Trail. With the recent signing of S.47 into law – the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act – which includes language for this route adjustment, the NCTA and National Park Service are excited to begin working with many new friends and partners, including the Green Mountain Club (GMC) and the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT).

According to the GMC website, “The history of the Green Mountain Club is the history of the Long Trail. The Long Trail is the oldest long-distance hiking trail in the United States. Conceived by James P. Taylor (1872-1949) as he waited for the mist to clear from Stratton Mountain, the Long Trail took its first step from dream to reality at a gathering of twenty-three people on March 11, 1910, in Burlington when the Green Mountain Club was formed.”

“Extension of the NCT into Vermont helps support the mission of the Green Mountain Club by making the mountains of Vermont play a larger role in the life of the people,” wrote Mike DeBonis, Executive Director of the GMC. “Bringing the NCT to Vermont expands the long distance hiking opportunities, connecting local trail networks, and contributing to the state’s recreation-based economy.”

Per the MALT website, “MALT was incorporated in 1987 as the ‘Middlebury Land Trust’ with the purpose of preserving key open and scenic lands in Middlebury... In 1996, we expanded to include surrounding towns and changed our name to the Middlebury Area Land Trust, or MALT. We have created nearly 30 miles of trails to make a complete loop around Middlebury with 2 bridges that span Otter Creek, and a spur trail heading to Snake Mountain. We are working with the National Park Service and North Country Trail Association to connect the TAM with the North Country National Scenic Trail and the Long Trail.”

“This is an important step forward for the North Country Trail, MALT, and Addison County of Vermont,” shared Jamie Montague, Executive Director for MALT. “We look forward to the day when a National Scenic Trail shares a path with our local Emerald Necklace, the Trail Around Middlebury.”

Visit maltvt.org and greenmountainclub.org to learn more about each organization. ✱

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: 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 at least 1200 pixels in each direction, or more than 300 KB total. More is better. (You can find this information by right clicking on a photo file, hitting the properties tab, and then looking at the general information and the details information.)

Next deadline for Vol. 38, No. 4, is 1 October 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



Maplewood State Park Trail Relocation

By Matt Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator,
Minnesota/North Dakota

The North Country Trail Association's Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter (MWP) recently completed the second of two relocations of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT) within Maplewood State Park designed to improve the hiking experience and create more sustainable trail that will minimize erosion. This last relocation was completed by a Brainerd crew from the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI) with funding from the Friends of Maplewood State Park. The NCT was first established in Maplewood back in 2017 using existing state park trails and a new trail connection from the Cow Lake Trail to the Maplewood Church. The Park is east of Fargo/Moorhead and south of Detroit Lakes.

Almost right away, the MWP volunteers realized that the NCT route through the Knoll Loop Campground was less than ideal and needed improvement where the NCT followed the road along the edge of Grass Lake. So they designed a relocation that would take the NCT heading south from the old route to the west of the Knoll Campground and then tie back in with the NCT by Bass Lake. The Park approved the relocation and MWP Chapter volunteers finished clearing and building this relocation last fall. Hikers from the Knoll Campground can now hike right out of their campsite without having to walk on the Park road.

Another problem with the original NCT route through



A lot of careful intelligent work is required where two legs of a sidehill trail meet in a switchback turn, which requires a sturdy platform where hikers will turn almost 270 degrees.

Photo: Matt Davis

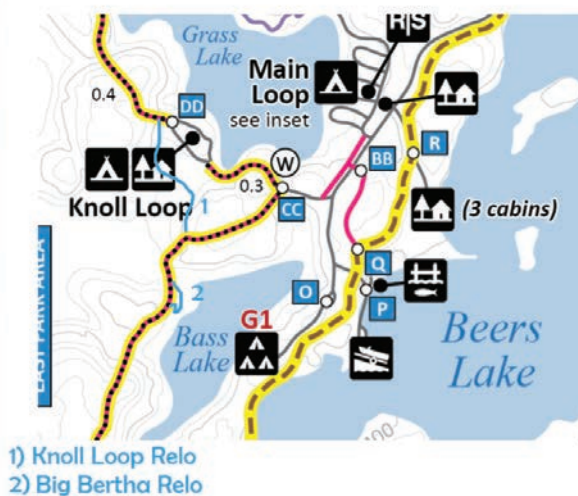
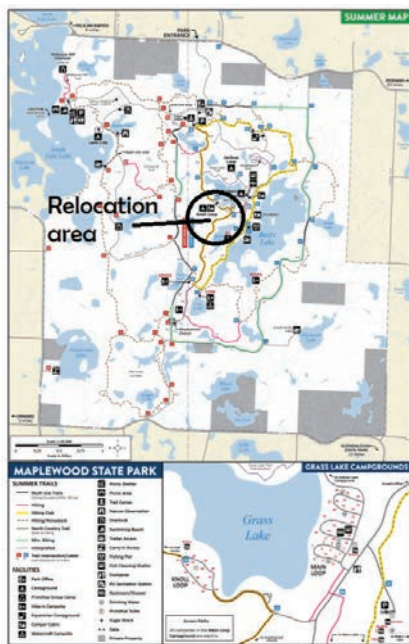
Maplewood State Park was the “Big Bertha” hill just west of Bass Lake. There, the Park trail goes straight up the fall line, is prone to erosion, and is way too steep to be enjoyed. Chapter volunteers flagged a relocation that took the NCT off the Park trail to the west by Bass Lake. The new route climbed the slope gradually using sidehill trail. Building sidehill trail involves cutting into the hillside to excavate a bench for the trail that naturally drains water off the downhill side. This is the most sustainable form of trail to build as it minimizes erosion and requires little trail tread maintenance over time.

The Park approved the relocation in early 2018 and the Chapter members cleared it last fall. This winter a new partnership was formed whereby the Friends of Maplewood State Park donated the \$6200 needed to hire a CCMI crew to work on the sidehill trail for a week for the NCTA. The

NCTA contracted with the CCMI and a crew from Brainerd worked from June 3-6 and completed the relocation. Chapter volunteers will be going out soon to put on some finishing touches.

The NCTA and its MWP Chapter would like to thank the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for approving the projects and the Friends of Maplewood State Park and the CCMI crew for their recent contributions which greatly improve the experience of hiking the NCT within the Park.

Quote from Allan Schrodin of the MWP Chapter: “This is a great improvement for hikers



1) Knoll Loop Relo
2) Big Bertha Relo





See the depth of the sidehill bench required to make this a nice usable trail along the side of a hill. This requires lots of digging, after cutting roots.

Photo: Matt Davis

in the park. A much more scenic route, much easier grade with good footing, and long term sustainability. ... Thanks to the State Park, the Friends of Maplewood, and to the Conservation Corps for all their hard work."

Quote from Don Del Greco of Maplewood State Park: "Projects like this are an excellent example of implementing trail improvements and expanding outdoor experiences and accessibility to the benefit for many outdoor enthusiasts. We are thankful for the treasured partnerships among the NCTA, Friends of Maplewood State Park, the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI), and the MNDNR – Maplewood State Park."

Quote from John Nordstrom of the Friends of Maplewood State Park: "The Friends of Maplewood was pleased to provide monetary support for the relocation of the North Country Trail at Maplewood State Park. Although just a small section of Trail was changed, it is an improvement to both the Trail and to Maplewood State Park." ✱

U.S. Forest Service presents an Award to the Chequamegon Chapter

By Mel Baughman

On May 15 the Chequamegon Chapter of the North Country Trail Association received from the U.S. Forest Service a Volunteer and Service Award in the Enduring Service category. According to Paul Strong, Supervisor of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, this is a Regional Award from the 20-state Eastern Region of the Forest Service. It honors the long term, high quality service offered by the Chequamegon Chapter in building and maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail on National Forest land. The Chequamegon Chapter was nominated for this award by Katie LeMoine, Forestry Technician-Trails, from the Great Divide Ranger District. Her nomination stated in part:

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." The Chequamegon Chapter of the NCTA maintains a 61-mile section of Trail that goes through the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest's Washburn and Great Divide Ranger Districts.

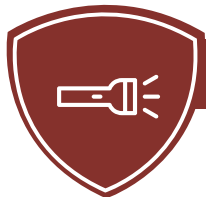
The Chequamegon Chapter contributed 1574 volunteer hours in fiscal year 2018. Volunteers spent countless hours brushing, clearing, blazing, mowing, and maintaining structures. They have worked in all types of weather and have endured and survived working during the great bug seasons of the Northwoods. Without the NCTA volunteers, the Trail would not be maintained and in the great condition it currently is in. Additionally, volunteers attended planning meetings, shuttled backpackers to their vehicles, and hosted fun hikes for the public. These hugely successful fun hikes got new people on the Trail to experience their public lands. Approximately 38 individuals have consistently dedicated their time and expertise to the maintenance of the Trail throughout the years.

A plaque signifying the award was presented by Forest Supervisor Paul Strong and received by Mel Baughman, the Chequamegon Chapter's Vice President. Others representing our Chapter at the ceremony included Sara Balbin, Jackie Kruse, Tom Matthiae, and Margie Braun. ✱



Paul Strong, Forest Supervisor, presents Mel Baughman with the Enduring Services Award. Mel, on left, was representing the Chequamegon Chapter of the NCTA for the presentation.

Photo: Jackie Kruse



Trek The Kek!

By Deb Campbell

Introduction

The Kekekabic Trail (“The Kek”) is a wilderness hiking trail that runs about 41 miles from Snowbank Road northeast of Ely, Minnesota, to the Gunflint Trail northwest of Grand Marais. The Kek runs through the heart of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). This area boasts some of the most rugged terrain in Minnesota, with ancient granite and greenstone formed 2.7 billion years ago, along with the magnetite-rich rocks of the Gunflint iron formation. The boreal forest in this area contains balsam fir, white spruce, black spruce, quaking aspen and white birch, as well as old-growth stands of jack pine, red pine and white pine.

With a cabin near Ely, I had taken several day hikes on western stretches of the Kek near Snowbank Lake, but began to get more involved last fall. And what great timing! As of March 2019, The Kek is officially part of the North Country Trail (NCT). “Now, we can celebrate the Superior Hiking Trail, Border Route Trail and Kekekabic Trail being official parts of the NCT,” said Matt Davis, the NCTA’s Regional Trail Coordinator for Minnesota and North Dakota. Also, in April, May and June of 2019, eight trail crews cleared 13 miles of the Kek, completing an enormous effort over the past few years to turn this wilderness hike back into an enjoyable trek. The clearing crews are organized by the Kek Chapter of the NCT, and what a success!

The massive clearing efforts were needed due to a number of factors. First, there was the July 1999 blowdown, affecting much of the Trail. In fact, this derecho (a widespread, long-lived, straight-line windstorm) is estimated to have blown down 25 million trees in the BWCAW. Years later, two wildfires were fueled by this blowdown (the 2006 Cavity Lake Fire and the 2007 Ham Lake Fire), affecting primarily the eastern parts of the Trail. Finally, there was another blowdown in the summer of 2016, significantly affecting western portions of the Trail. Beyond these events, the Trail needs regular maintenance every two to three years, at a minimum.

For some years, the Kek has had a reputation of being overgrown, rugged, and tough to navigate. As of June 2019, I have seen several reports of just the opposite:



A nice wide path through thickets of young trees and bushes, growing up FAST after disasters that were thorough in their destruction. Other than just getting in there, the Kek presents maintainers with this fast-growing brush.

Photo: Julie Campbell



The crew proudly shows off an open corridor they created, but look at the rocks underfoot!

Photo: Julie Campbell

“The trail was absolutely wonderful and was a delight to be on!!”

“What a gem! I was expecting bushwhacking the entire way, but not so!! It was too awesome!”

“What a completely different experience, before and after the trail has been cleared ... amazing!”

Clearing

Clearing work is best done in the spring, before plants begin budding and leafing. This is a good idea in theory, but in practice, spring weather can bring snow, cold, rain, wind and everything in between. In addition to weather, one of the challenges in clearing the Kek is trail access. Because the Trail is in the BWCAW, there are no motorized vehicles and no motorized equipment allowed. And there are only two access points, one at the east end and one at the west end of the Trail. One must either hike in or canoe in to access Trail segments. Generally, loppers, small hand saws and occasionally a two-man crosscut saw are the tools of the clearing trade.

In May of 2019, our clearing crew of eight canoed in to clear a three-mile stretch from Gabimichigami (Gabi) to Chip Lakes. We had 14 portages on our day in, and 18 portages on our day out, between our entry point off the Gunflint Trail and our campsite on Gabi. We took a longer route on the way out to avoid headwinds (and whitecaps) on some of the larger lakes. Of course, all of the portages were double portages, with four canoes and lots of gear. We saw virtually no other humans, but did call one portage “the wildlife portage,” with bear, moose, wolf and other scat quite prevalent. The wildflowers were just beginning to show, and there were some amazing vistas, since this stretch of the Trail was largely burned in 2006-2007.

A typical clearing day, Monday May 20th

The camp begins stirring around 7 a.m., and soon water is boiling for coffee and the breakfast menu is debated. Since we have a base camp, we need to pack only a daypack with lunch, snacks, water, extra layers, and loppers. By 9 a.m. we are off in the four canoes, to paddle about two miles north on Gabi to reach the Trail. We unload the canoes and begin our trek eastward to pick up where we left off yesterday. When we come to Howard Lake, we check on the mama grouse we spotted yesterday, carefully guarding her 11 eggs. She tries to act like she is hurt, running away from her nest, to lure us away from her treasures. After filtering water from Howard Lake, we move on, trying not to disturb mama



Grouse eggs!

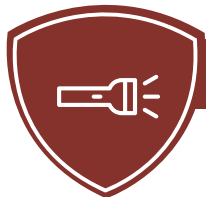
Photo: Julie Campbell



One of several great views across this vast wild area.

Photo: Julie Campbell

Continued on page 14



grouse too much. Today we clear east from Howard Lake about a mile. I prefer to walk ahead a bit, plant my backpack, and lop backwards. We try to clear a corridor about six feet wide, which often is best done on the knees, lopping close to the ground. This section of the Trail is primarily new growth, so lots of lop, lop, lopping! Our crew works steadily with some chatter, but we are all focused on our chosen sections. Soon it is time for lunch, and we find a nice clearing with flat rocks for the occasion. Everyone is in good spirits, and it's time for some stories from the morning. Today is a beautiful day, sunny and somewhere around 60, so we all seek shade for our break. We spot eagles soaring and other birds as well, and our bird expert identifies a few. Back at it soon, we continue clearing until around 4 p.m., when we start back to the Gabi campsite. We hike for about an hour, and then canoe for another 45 minutes, and arrive back at camp close to 6. Supper is first on the agenda, then cleaning up a bit. The water is way too cold for swimming, and the air begins to cool as well. The evening activity is back exercises, to strengthen and stretch a bit after a long day's work. The campfire is lit and some of us actually stay up until sunset. A few jokes and stories, but then it is into the tents for a good night's sleep, in order to start all over again tomorrow!

What a great experience, with a great group of folks! The clearing itself is rewarding, as you can immediately see the fruits of your labors. The sense of accomplishment is strong, and the team spirit is amazing. I am looking forward to hiking the Kek this fall, and already looking forward to my next clearing trip.

History of Trail and Club

The Kek was first constructed in the 1930s as an access trail for firefighting and forest management. A fire tower once stood near Kekekabic Lake. The name is derived from the Ojibwe "Keke-quabic" which means "hawk's nest on the rocks."

The Trail was built from both ends simultaneously, and completed in 1938, and only minimally maintained. Then in the 1960s, the U.S. Forest Service cleared and upgraded the Kek to a hiking trail, maintaining the Trail until 1982. In 1990, a volunteer group formed the Kekekabic Trail Club (KTC) and began coordinating trail maintenance. Since then, the trail conditions have been quite varied, mostly due to the blowdowns, fires and natural forest development and regeneration. As of June 2019, the Trail is in the best shape in many, many years.

For a great wilderness hike in the BWCA, trek the Kek!

References

The Kekekabic Trail Guide, recently updated, is available from the North Country Trail Association, the Superior Hiking Trail Association, Midwest Mountaineering and REI in Minneapolis, Piragis Northwoods Co. in Ely, Stone Harbor Wilderness Supply in Grand Marais, and The Gunflint Lodge on The Gunflint Trail.

Email

kek@northcountrytrail.org

Website

<https://northcountrytrail.org/volunteers/local-contacts/kekekabic-trail-chapter>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Kekekabic> ✨

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?



Answer for the last one:

This smiley face barn is on County Route 3 on Finger Lakes Trail Map M6, the map just west of the Genesee River, and here the trail is on a roadwalk so hikers do pass this barn. No one answered this one, nor did anybody offer a new puzzle.

By the way, this piece of trail is up for adoption. The roadwalk isn't very long and it's between some lovely sections of old forest. Contact your editor if interested.

Irene Szabo, treeweenie@aol.com,
(585) 494-0307



At the trailhead, Chapter volunteers get tools out of the Chapter trailer and prepare to start off into the woods.

Photo: Glen Van Antwerp

Trailwork

By Glen Van Antwerp

I sat with new friends at the end of a great day at the 2019 NCTA Celebration, reflecting on interesting hikes, marvelous breakout sessions, and a savory supper. Now the annual awards were being announced.

Several people at my table, and many others besides, were recognized for their contributions to the North Country Trail. I applauded their efforts but also considered my own nonparticipation. I had already hiked 900 unique miles on the NCT and had re-walked some sections many times. Yet, I had never done a lick of trail maintenance. I quietly decided to mend my ways.

A few days later, I signed on for a workday with my local Chapter, Spirit of the Woods. This brought me to a trailhead deep in the Manistee National Forest on a sunny mid-May morning. A work trailer and a small group of workers were already there.

Our crew leader gave us safety instructions and announced that we would be working on a section of boardwalk that had been damaged by winter storms and toppled trees. It was over half a mile down the trail, and although tools could be transported by wheelbarrow, replacement lumber would be hand-carried.

I picked up four two-by-fours, each of them eight feet long, balanced them on my shoulder, and confidently strode down the trail. Wow, the load was heavier than I expected. Every board was new pressure-treated lumber that was still saturated with moisture. I paused, shifted the load to my other shoulder, and proceeded more slowly.

A wood thrush darted from the forest floor and flew to a low branch. A Sandhill Crane trumpeted its haunting call from the far side of the marsh. I continued, shifting and pausing, again and again, until I finally made it to the worksite.

I dropped my load of lumber and checked on the repair

work. Our crew was carefully prying broken boards away from wood that was still usable. Some stubborn bolts had welded themselves to their timbers and required extra effort (and ingenuity) to separate everything without creating more damage.

While hiking the North Country Trail, I rarely encounter another hiker. It's rarer yet to meet a long-distance hiker, so I was delighted when a young woman with a backpack and trekking poles stopped and chatted with us. Her name was Annie and she was from Minnesota. She was a few days into a "half-thru-hike," an attempt to walk from central Michigan to Trail's-end in North Dakota.

Annie went on her way and I continued my own trekking, making multiple trips carrying new lumber to the work site and ferrying lighter, old dry broken boards out. Each step gave me new appreciation for the dedicated volunteers who make our trail possible.

The Spirit of the Woods Chapter of the North Country Trail Association is responsible for 78 miles of Trail and another five miles of spur trails. These miles include numerous boardwalks that total nearly a mile of six-inch-wide boards. All this building and maintenance, plus other Trail work, is being done by relatively few people.

My Chapter, joined by dozens of other Chapters across our eight states, depends on volunteers to maintain 5000 miles of trail. I stand in awe of these volunteers and count it a privilege to join them in their efforts. ✨



The crew installs replacement boards where needed on this long swamp boardwalk.

Photo: Glen Van Antwerp



What Does a Long Distance Hiker Look Like?

By Joan Young, Chair of the Long Distance Hike Committee

When you picture a long-distance hiker do you see a lean and fit Jennifer Pharr Davis, former Appalachian Trail speed record holder, young, nearly six feet tall with seven-league legs? Do you see lithe Andy Skurka, NCT end-to-end, winter backpacker, and first to hike the entire Sea-to-Sea Route? Do you remember Nimblewill Nomad, the white-bearded gnome, or Ruth and Dan Dorrough who finished the NCT almost exclusively by day hiking?

The truth is, long-distance hikers come in all ages, shapes, sizes, comfort needs, and even health levels.

"Some people called me crazy. Some said I would not be safe. Others knew for sure I could not do it. Maybe they were right, but I knew it was something I had to try," Deb Bohrer of Fort Wayne, Indiana, related as she told me about her attempt to hike from Croton Dam to the Mackinac Bridge. Deb suffered a major stroke three years ago which temporarily paralyzed her and left her with weakness on her right side. But she says she had to try backpacking. "I was very tired, but it felt very rewarding. It wasn't a race for me. It was a journey."

She left the trail after five days and 39 miles at the historic Birch Grove Schoolhouse near White Cloud. "This was one of the most challenging things I have ever done. I may be home now, but part of my heart was left on the NCT. Hopefully, I will be back in August." Once that hiking bug bites you, it's difficult to



Deb Bohrer

Photo: Heather Bohrer

recover.

Kim Southard and a friend, Stephanie Blake, are attempting to hike all of the NCT in New York State. She says:

"Last year I found an old bucket list while spring cleaning. One of the items was section hiking the AT. I thought, 'Why not?' As an empty nester, I decided to go for it. While researching the AT I came across a lot of info on the NCT. I was pleasantly surprised to find it was practically in my backyard." Kim is new to hiking and has been joined in her quest by Stephanie. They can't take weeks at a time away from work and family life, but they walk one weekend at a time.

"To us, it's not about how fast we can complete it; it's about the hike itself and the ability to take our time and truly enjoy



Andy Mytys (right) and John Lawton (left)

Photo: Andy Mytys

the journey." They've only begun, with a total of 36 miles, but we all start somewhere.

Long-time NCT supporter Andy Mytys and his friend John Lawton are working on completing all of Michigan, despite having full-time jobs. They are getting close. They began in 2010. He says, "Being from southeast Michigan, it was easy to drive multiple cars and self-shuttle when hiking near the state border. We targeted spring weekends, as camping options were slim. Once we moved north into state and national forest lands, our hikes shifted into the fall – no bugs, no heat, beautiful colors. We were hiking 100 new miles annually, without taking too much time off of work."

They generally hike 18-22 miles a day. Andy continued, "Overall, we've learned that the time along the NCT is extremely rewarding, even along the roadwalk sections. We enjoy hikes of four to five days minimum, as that gives us a feeling of really being away from it all. But there's no need to hike big mile days; it's just what we prefer."

Ron Sootsman, of Battle Creek, Michigan, just put in his application for the 1000-Mile completion rocker. He says, "I found the NCT during a program at work to get workers walking. Someone asked how much of the Trail I had hiked. So I created a spreadsheet to keep track of the



Kim Southard and Stephanie Blake

Photo: Kim Southard

segments.” That was back in 2008.

The remarkable thing about Ron’s hiking is that he’s pushed his wife, Linda, in a wheelchair for almost 250 of those miles. She suffers from MS, and they travel accessible trail, and sometimes trail that isn’t so accessible. The rail trails and towpaths in Ohio have been user friendly for them. Sometimes rougher trails won’t have

bridges or puncheon that are wide enough. Linda walks short pieces with assistance, or is occasionally carried. But sometimes they just have to backtrack. They even go out together in the winter. See Ron’s full story elsewhere in this issue.

Sometimes, larger groups collectively take on longer goals. The Upper Peninsula Softies have been section hiking the NCT above “The Bridge” (Mackinac) since 1993, when they began with three people, and their now larger group will complete the return trip this year. They call themselves “softies” because they don’t camp out. The Buckeye Trail has a “rolling” circuit hike going all the time under



North Dakota hiking group overlooking the Sheyenne Valley

Photo: Dan Koeck

the leadership of volunteer Jim Gilkey. In New York, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference has been organizing county hikes since the mid-nineties. One county is crossed each year. Those who participate long enough, and regularly, will complete the whole 568-mile FLT, which includes 420 miles of the NCT.

And in North Dakota, a group of hikers has been working on completing the miles in that state. Rennae Gruchalla told me, “My friend Bill asked me one day, ‘Where does the NCT go in North Dakota?’ I replied, ‘Well, except in one specific area, it follows the Sheyenne River Valley.’”

“This conversation spurred thoughts about our North Dakota landscape. I am part of the group hiking the North Country National Scenic Trail in North Dakota. This is 430 miles of rambling trail stretching through the state that I have always called home. Viewing the landscape on foot, as well as interacting with its people along the route, has impressed upon me a deeper love of the people who live, work, and play along this trail. It has also helped me become more aware of the extreme beauty the Sheyenne River Valley possesses as it winds through country and city.”

Gail Rogne is part of that same group. “At the age of 73, I am pleased to be hiking with others as we complete the North Dakota Challenge. I have enjoyed the scenery of North Dakota in

all seasons as we hike across about one half of the state. Although most of the Dakota Challengers are close to my age, it is good to see the younger hikers and share stories with them. My motivation is that I love to be outside enjoying nature, although I find I am also motivated by the other participants. I hope to be one of the hikers who completes the Challenge on September 21, 2019.”

Terry Cathcart has nearly completed all of the Upper Peninsula miles of the NCT. He says, “The walk has included day hikes with my son or a friend, jogging on a stretch that is sandy and gravel road, but mostly a series of three- to five-day solo backpacking trips. At this writing, I’ve completed the 300 miles from the Mackinac Bridge westward to Silver Lake (northwest of Marquette).” He plans to finish the UP this season.

Terry contributed some philosophy to this request for details about his hike. “When I completed my first backpacking trip from the Mackinac Bridge to Lake Superior, I had this overwhelming sense of gratitude. I found myself shedding tears of joy when I attempted to describe the experience to family and friends. The Trail is stunningly beautiful. I was thankful that such a trail exists. And thankful that there were people who



Linda Sootsman

Photo: Ron Sootsman

Continued on page 18



Ron's Story

By Ron Sootsman

imagined and created such a trail.”

Andy Mytys agrees. “The NCT is not like the hikes I go on in the Sierra Nevada, which offer sweeping vistas that engulf you. In contrast, the beauty of our trail is more nuanced. For me, this can be a sandy bottomed creek babbling in its flow, surrounded by cedars and hemlocks. Or perhaps leaning against a red pine, sitting on a soft pile of needles, taking in the smell of the forest as it’s heated in the afternoon sun.”

Currently we know of two hikers with specific long goals on the NCT. Annie Nelson started at Croton Dam in lower Michigan in May, and plans to reach Lake Sakakawea in October. Another hiker, trail name Sir Dickspatcher, is somewhere on that same plan, although I haven’t heard news of him in about a month.

Would you like to hike a longer section of the NCT but think you couldn’t really do it? All it takes to start is to leave the trailhead, and then as Andy says, “What’s next? We’ll only find out by getting out onto the Trail, putting one foot in front of the other, and opening our senses to the natural world around us.” ✱

At this year’s Celebration, there was a well-attended workshop on long-distance hiking, with panelists Joan Young, Luke Jordan, Ruth and Dan Dorrough, all of them end-to-enders, whether they did it in one hard year like Luke or over decades, as Joan did. Once attendees started asking questions, it became abundantly evident that many of them had serious plans to launch their own long-distance adventures, some of them immediately! It was heartening to learn that the bug has bitten so many! —Editor

I found the NCT during a program at work to get workers walking. Someone at work asked, “How much of the Trail have you hiked?” About that time the Chapter established a Hikers Challenge to get people seeing more of the Trail. So I created a spreadsheet to keep track of the segments traveled, and have been keeping the spreadsheet since 2008.

About 25% of the miles have been pushing a wheelchair to bring my wife Linda along. The biggest area we have been able to complete together is in Ohio where the towpath trails and Wabash Cannonball Trail have been possible to push the wheelchair. We have traveled some fairly rough

natural surface trails. We have encountered a number of places where bridges and puncheons were too narrow to handle the wheelchair. Linda has been able so far to walk with help around some of the obstacles, lifted over others and at a few we have been forced to backtrack; however, it really makes you think each time about having to backtrack long distances. There have been flat tires from thorns, trees and long grass blocking the trail, seeking cover and waiting for hard rain and lightning to pass. In winter the wheelchair has gone on packed snow; she has also been on a sled being pulled with me on snowshoes. Five or six times when I parked her at a trailhead and hiked back to get the car to pick her up she has had a conversation with police officers making sure she is OK.

I have hiked with several groups to be able to travel just one way, like the Buckeye Trail Circuit Hikers, the Fortune Bay Expedition Team and the Michigan UP Softies. My sister has also hiked with us several times leap frogging cars until one of us was done for the day. There have been many others whom we have hiked with over the years. It’s always nice to do one way rather than an out-and-back. Hiking with a local group gives me a better understanding of the Trail. ✱

Ron Sootsman is from Battle Creek Michigan, and is receiving the 1000-mile rocker and the Mackinac Bridge rocker.



Photo: Arlene Greenlee



Photo: Joni Jeffery

News Keeps Coming In...

This is by Lisa Light who has so far done over 200 miles of Michigan's Lower Peninsula... She is on the trail right now.

"I'm from Clio, Michigan. I wanted to hike all of the Lower Peninsula to celebrate turning 50 this year. My intention was to hike 500 miles. When I found the NCT in my search of hiking trails and that the LP was at least 500 miles and in my own "backyard," I decided that was the Trail I was going to do. That the NCT is one of the national scenic trails was also a draw for me.

"It's been a wild ride! First five days were just about all rain. I've seen so many different faces of the trail; hardwood forests, Cedar groves, prairie, swamps, marshes, and so many others. There is so much diversity here in the lower peninsula of Michigan. I've encountered challenges, beauty, and awe inspiring views (that Manistee River is amazing!). I've had times I thought I couldn't go on and times I thought I couldn't stop. There's been solitude, team work, trail angels, and some hustle of a city market (thanks to Cherry Street Market in Kalkaska). I've found courage, strength, determination, self-forgiveness, self-love, inspiration, and above all else peace. I'm so excited to see what the next nine days bring!" ✨

Bill's Story

By Bill Menke (trail name Onepace)

At one time, I had hopes of completing the entire Trail and joining that elite group of hikers known as End-to-Enders. In fact, when Joan Young was completing her earliest hikes, on her journey toward the end-to-end goal, we established a good natured competition to see who would finish first. That is truly history as she left me far back in the dust as she became an end-to-ender long ago, while I am still only at somewhat over 2600 miles.

While I thoroughly enjoy the beauty, satisfaction, and yes, challenges of long-distance backpacking, I have never been able to repeatedly devote enough significant time periods to knock off a lot of miles. I have been able to complete a number of hikes in the week to two-week range, and the longest hike was 21 days in New York. Many of these have been solo backpacking trips but on several of them, Dave Cornell (from the Chief Noonday Chapter) and I enjoyed each other's company and I learned a lot about "setting your own pace" from him. Thus my trail handle "Onepace." Because we walked at different speeds, we often did not walk together, but would agree to meet at a certain point for a break or at our planned campsite for the night. This procedure worked very well.

In a number of instances, bushwhacking was done in order to follow the route where the NCT was supposed to be located eventually. Mostly, this was to get into or out of a dead end segment or to connect two Trail segments that were connected by a long roadwalk. The most notable of these was in the western part of the Adirondacks when Dave and I left North Lake to bushwhack toward Horn Lake. Following compass bearings and landmarks, we thought that we could cover these few miles in only a few hours. But due to the extremely dense, dog-haired young spruce and the many, many downed logs hidden beneath them, the going was slower than we expected. Around 3:30 Dave decided that we should camp where we were and continue to look for Horn Lake the next morning. We should have kept going just a little longer as it was directly in front of us and only a quarter-mile away. We were right on course—just impatient.

My backpacking trips still provide fodder for many stories about the wonderful experiences along the Trail – the kindly post mistress who sent her son upstairs to "get this boy some apples from our refrigerator;" the owner of an abandoned winery who I thought was going to fuss at me for sitting at his picnic table in the shade but who actually had me sleep in the upstairs apartment where the renter had recently left (he knew it was going to rain that night); swimming across the Black River in the Adirondacks to retrieve a row boat (stationed there as a "ferry" boat) from the other side, etc. The tales could go on forever and they frequently get retold when in the right company!

Since the time when I completed some of my hikes, many significant upgrades to the Trail and its structures have been made. I wish I could revisit some of the areas to see these improvements in person instead of only in the *North Star*. Thank you to the many volunteers who continually strive to improve the Trail. ✨



Photo: Donna Menke



NEW 8-STATE SHIRTS



Welcome to our Trail Shop, Vermont!
T-shirts featuring the eighth state
our Trail traverses are now available
in a variety of colors, and in both
women's and men's styles. Did we
mention how soft they are?

Pick up yours today at
northcountrytrail.org/shop.



Great news.

The Better Business Bureau renewed the NCTA's accreditation after finding we again met the 20 BBB Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability. The accreditation is good for two years and it's a great way to show our donors and the public that we are transparent, accountable, and trustworthy.

– *Andrea Ketchmark*

www.bbb.org/western-michigan/business-reviews/charity-environment/north-country-trail-association-in-lowell-mi-38157305

Joy on the NCT

By Terry Cathcart, Ishpeming, Michigan, North Country Trail Hikers

There can be occasions when we suddenly and involuntarily find ourselves loving the natural world with a startling intensity, in a burst of emotion which we may not fully understand, and the only word that seems to me to be appropriate for this feeling is joy. —Michael McCarthy, *The Moth Snowstorm*

Two years ago I began my walk across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan on the North Country Trail. The walk has included day hikes with my son or a friend, jogging on a stretch of the Trail that is a sandy and gravel road, but mostly a series of three- to five-day solo backpacking trips. At this writing, I've completed the 300 miles from the Mackinac Bridge westward to Silver Lake (just northwest of Marquette).

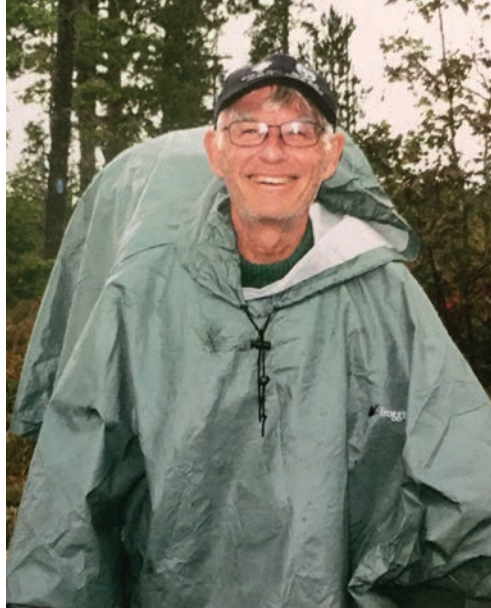
When I completed my first backpacking trip from the Mackinac Bridge to Lake Superior, I had this overwhelming sense of gratitude. I found myself shedding many tears of joy when I attempted to describe the experience to family and friends. The Trail is stunningly beautiful. I was thankful that such a trail exists. And thankful that there were people who imagined and created such a trail. I remembered that President Theodore Roosevelt and others from our past set aside wilderness areas for people like me to enjoy. I thought about how nature abhors a vacuum, so gathers all the people who give time to work to maintain the Trail, clearing windfalls, building boardwalks and bridges, putting up those blue trail markers, donating money, and working with the political powers-that-be to provide legal protection and financial support for the Trail. Deep joy and thanksgiving came from me in the form of tears.

I find spending several days in silence and solitude to be extremely stimulating. Apart from the Pictured Rocks area, so far I have encountered only one other backpacker in the 300 miles that I have walked. There is something about silence and solitude in a wilderness setting that reminds me that there is another way to live and be. There is another world to engage in besides the one that normally occupies my attention. When I am alone and in silence, I find that I am able to hear other voices, voices that are less forceful and intrusive than news reports and advertisements on the radio and TV.

The experience of silence and solitude is also related to my experience of transcendence. I am a religious man. I have long looked to wilderness settings as a place for me to encounter and engage in conversation with God. Like the story of Jesus being led by the Spirit into the desert for testing or the story of Prophet Elijah hearing a still small voice while retreating to a cave on Mount Horeb, I have found my experience walking the North Country Trail to be accompanied by a sense of being tested. This testing takes the form of wonder, awe, discovery, an immersion

in beauty, intimacy with the natural world of plants and animals, and a sense of joy and peace that I associate with the character of the God I seek to love and follow. There is a sense of testing that goes on as I compare my other life, the one I live when I'm not on the NCT, to the experience of life I have on the Trail. I like my other life, but I hope that the testing on the NCT leads me to be a better man and in particular a better steward of the earth. I hope that I am somehow formed by the voices I hear on the NCT. And I hope that I bring the joy of those days with me when I return to my other life. ✨

Note from Lorana Jinkerson of the North Country Trail Hikers: Terry is planning on completing his trek across the whole UP yet this summer.





National Trails Day

Explore A National Scenic Trail Fun Hike

The Chequamegon Chapter of the NCTA celebrated National Trails Day with an “Explore a National Scenic Trail Day” fun hike on Saturday, June 1st, in the Rainbow Lake Wilderness in the Chequamegon National Forest. We had great weather and I think all enjoyed the hike! Mel Baughman led the hike and did an excellent job with interpretation. Mel’s topics of conversation included trail building/maintenance, plant/tree ecology, animals/amphibians along the Trail and a host of other naturalist subjects. The Chequamegon Chapter will be hosting three more “Explore a National Scenic Trail” fun hikes in 2019. For more information and detailed maps, go to the Chequamegon Chapter website at northcountrytrail.org/che and click on “Newsletters and Trail Reports,” “2019,” then “Cheq. Fun Hikes.” This is a printable PDF file with a Vicinity Map.



Mel uses the USFS interpretive sign for showing where we will encounter 2018 flood damage and proposed trail re-routes that we will hike.

Photo: Vickie Swank



Frost is the Hoffarth's dog so has joined the Chapter.

Photo: Stephanie Hoffarth

Sheyenne River Valley Chapter

By Becky Heise

The Sheyenne River Valley Chapter held its usual National Trails Day activities at Fort Ransom State Park in partnership with the Dakota Prairie Chapter on Saturday, June 1.

We had over 60 hikers led by two park rangers. The weather was just perfect for the day's activities. We were lucky even to catch a glimpse of the rare “Albino Prairie Buffalo” pointed out by Head Ranger Tyler Modlin. And yes, we do have trees in North Dakota! After lunch we had 16 adventurous individuals join in the canoeing and kayaking which led into the picnic supper and refreshments provided by the SRV Chapter. The perfect evening was capped off by a campfire and wonderful fellowship (and more refreshments).

This year we were joined by Alicia Underlee Nelson, who was writing an article about the North Country Trail for “North Dakota Outdoors,” a publication of North Dakota Game and Fish. Alicia is a freelance writer and photographer who covers craft beer, travel, art, entertainment, Midwestern history and North Dakota news for Thomson Reuters, Delta Sky Magazine, AAA Living Magazine, Matador Network and numerous other publications. She also has a blog online at prairiestylefile.com where she has posted about the North Country Trail. Alicia is also available on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Yes, North Dakota has trees.

Photo: Stephanie Hoffarth



Of course, the "albino prairie buffalo" are really Charolais cattle, normally this color. Tyler is a brat.

Photo: Stephanie Hoffarth



Chief Noonday Chapter hike

Photo: Mary Rebert

2019 Chief Noonday National Trails Day Hike

By Mary Rebert

On June 9, the Chief Noonday Chapter sponsored a group hike at our Fort Custer Recreation Area Trail segment in Augusta, Michigan. Fifty-four hikers attended our celebration. Each hiker was given a granola bar that had been donated by Nature Valley. Their names were also entered in a drawing and prizes of NPS 2018 celebration scarves were awarded the winners. The hike included 28 hikers on a 10-mile stretch and 26 hikers on a four-mile hike.

How do we get such big numbers? We have a very active hike committee. Our May hike had over 70 hikers! We publish in local news periodicals, Facebook and Meetup groups. The Hike 100 Challenge has made a great impact on local hike participation. Also, we offer long and short hikes plus most of them are out-and-back so hikers can go at their own pace, with no need for shuttles. Our challenge is now to get hikers engaged in volunteering!

Brule-St. Croix Chapter's National Trails Day Activities

By Peter Nordgren

We had three activities. First, a morning of two volunteer teams visiting campsites and trailheads in the Brule area, to do cleanup: remove downed branches, lopping, restocking brochures in register boxes. Next, a potluck picnic. Last, a hike over a two mile section of NCT which was re-routed last year to improve scenic values.



BSC Chapter members Nadine Hubert, Phil Anderson, and Teresa Nelson demonstrate the size of the timber along a newly re-routed trail segment south of Iron River, Wisconsin.

Photo: Al Decker



Hikers at an open hilltop view, with the next hilltops fading away into the distance. This is typical Finger Lakes Trail topography.

Photo: Victoria Andruczyk

Taking Girl Scouts to the Trail

By Victoria Andruczyk, licensed guide, and Lindsay Cray, Girl Scouts Senior Director of Outdoor Program

Girl Scouts have existed for more than a century. We have been creating generations of strong leaders, critical thinkers and compassionate citizens. We've taught kids how to be independent, care for each other, empower themselves, to accept diversity and be inspired by a world of opportunity. We broke cultural barriers and let the kids lead the way to their own success. We did this by introducing kids to their environment and their world through lessons on everything from science to finance. We took all this, elevated it with incredible adventures in the outdoors and we did it with one critical requirement that others' organizations had never attempted: we did it all for girls.

Setting aside the cookies and craft badges, this is an organization of troops who seek sisterhood, winter camping, and some serious wilderness skills. While there is plenty of data telling us that these experiences build character, we also understand that combining outdoor adventure with social emotional learning for girls of any age is a critical stepping stone of development, particularly with girls in adolescence. With activities ranging from something as simple as a walk outside in a city park to extended trips in the backcountry, we know there are plenty of girls who like to mix it up and on some days, we are more interested in making white pine needle tea and carving a rabbit stick than in straightening our hair.

Here in western New York, the Girl Scouts have a crew of nearly 60 women volunteers, all skilled at every level of outdoors. When called, they'll happily take point on a troop trek in the woods. This year in May and June, Tori Andruczyk, 39, volunteered as the lead for multiple trips with girls along the Finger Lakes Trail where it hosts the North Country Trail, too.

On Memorial Day weekend, Tori led a group of 10 girls and five adults from Girl Scouts of Western New York (GSWNY) council on a Trailblazer trip of more than a two-and-a-half-mile hike into the backcountry of the Finger Lakes



Classic log shelter along the trail, the destination for these girls.

Photo: Alex Szuba



Photo: Victoria Andruczyk

to spend the night at the Buck Settlement lean-to on Map M14 of the FLT, just west of Watkins Glen. It was the first time backpacking for all 10 girls from three different troops. Aged 10-16 years, it was their first time getting to know each other and, with a weekend of excellent weather, meeting new people and sharing first time experiences, the forest provided a perfectly even playing field for friendships to take root.

"The hike was kind of hard, but once we got to our campsite, the trip was very rewarding," said Amber Black, age 12.

In another great evolution of Girl Scout culture, the Girl Scouts of the New York / Pennsylvania Pathways council (NYPENN) are always looking for organizational partnerships. Recently the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC) of New York agreed to provide guided overnight backpacking trips for Girl Scout Troops in exchange for assistance with stewardship projects on the trails. The inaugural trip took place on June 15-16 this year; Laura, Autumn, Ori, Maddy, Alyssa, all seventh graders hailing from Phelps, N.Y., hiked four miles, setting up camp for the evening about halfway at Hickory Hill Lean-to on Map M12, just north of Bath.

One of the best things about seeing these girls taking the lead on their own adventure is that we are giving them a chance to break the stereotypes of meek or needy. In the 2016 Outside Magazine article "Ten Ways to Raise Brave Girls," author Katie Arnold suggests that girls "adjust their attitude," explaining that girls are learning that it's cute to be scared instead of practicing bravery. In the same magazine, renowned author Florence Williams wrote a 2017 piece, *The Girl Scouts is Raising our Next Generation of Rippers*, citing a survey of more than 1000 girls by the

Oakland, California, nonprofit Girls Leadership showing that half of girls identified as "brave," compared with 63 percent of boys. "A boy is pushed to do things, but when a girl says she's scared, an adult will often intervene." She quotes Caroline Paul, a former firefighter and whitewater competitor, and the author of *Gutsy Girl: Escapades for Your Life of Epic Adventure*. "Boys are taught to persevere, and girls are told that fear will protect them. Fear has become a feminine trait."

For this group of girls, the trek to Hickory Hill meant expanding their world, not a fear of bugs and dirt. Ori Carrasquel age 12 said of her experience, "I liked learning so many new things about nature, and backpacking was fascinating."

Another major component of the Girl Scouts' outdoor initiatives is to teach role-modeling and successive leadership skills to girls as they progress in age and levels. At the Cadette level, girls ages 12-14 years look to troop leaders and older peers such as Seniors (15-16 years) and Ambassadors (17-18 years) to pass them a greater level of responsibility in expeditions. The purpose here is eventually to have girls co-leading or independently leading backcountry trips.

Troops 60123 and 60552 from the City of Rochester's Tekakwitha Service Unit did their own overnight backpacking trip to Kanakadea (Map M9, west of Hornell) lean-to between June 22-23 this year. For the five Cadettes and one Ambassador this was their leadership debut in a non-council-run backpacking trip. Most having participated in the GSWNY Trailblazer trips in the past, their previous experience culminated in this moment, heralding a new generation of backwoods dignitaries for younger Girl Scouts.

Breaking it all down, the girls know preparation comes first, and on a Monday evening the week before their trip, the girls left no stone unturned, running through packing lists, inventorying group gear and packing the meals, discussing shelter alternatives in the event the lean-to wasn't available. This fearless crew was ready.



Photo: Victoria Andruczyk

Continued on page 24



Photo: Victoria Andruczyk

They met early Saturday morning, and caravanned to the Finger Lakes Trail access point on Karr Road, west of Hornell in Allegany County. Martha, Ani, Angie, Peyton, Amber and Mary divided up the group gear and food, and started the three-mile hike to the Kanakadea lean-to. Although parts of the hike were very muddy, the variety of rolling hills, sunny meadows, and stream crossings maintained a decent workout. So how dogged were they after sun, sweat, bugs and three miles of one foot forward? Peyton Crony, 11, tells us “The hike was good and the mud made it more of a challenge. All the hard work paid off. Hope others get this experience too.”

Arriving at the lean-to in time for lunch, the girls relished the break but not for too long. The better part of their afternoon required camp chores, tents to set up, fires to be made, wood to be gathered, water to be purified, two bear bag ropes to be hung for food, trash, and toiletries after dinner. Although Angie Cheng was eventually successful in getting the first bear bag over the first branch, it was inspiring to see her fellow Scouts turn bag number two into a team effort.

As with all things provided by Mother Nature, ideal conditions are a rarity but for those of us who can't imagine life without the woods, we'll take what we can get. The Tekakwitha girls clearly felt the same despite the hills, the healthy layer of mud and a less than ideal latrine. “It was kind of hard, but really fun. The woods are quiet and the food was great. I hope other Girl Scouts get to try it!” explains Martha

Kelley, age 11. With the evening sky glittering in stars and bellies full of fire-roasted marshmallows, it became a day with memories well-earned and worth saving.

After the completion of these trips, each girl was able to complete the requirements of some outdoor badges; high adventure, naturalist, primitive trekker, eco-camper are just a few examples. More than that though, these expeditions also emphasize pride, on the part of both the girls and every adult involved. Our “Rippers” (thanks, Outside Magazine) embody the meaning of environmental stewardship, leadership and collaboration with a hands-on education. They are familiar with the natural gems like the Finger Lakes Trail and they get how all humans play a role in caring for the ecosystem. It's raising girls like these that makes all of us more confident that this next generation will be able to take care of themselves and is bound to think of new ways to help protect the environment.

Quoting Florence Williams again, “Middle school, researchers have confirmed, is a critical window not only for connecting kids to nature but for changing their brains in ways that will make them more resilient and more confident throughout their lives.” To that end, Girl Scouts USA conducted its own 2014 study including nearly 2000 Scouts, and the results were not wholly surprising: those who have monthly outdoor experiences are stronger problem-solvers, better challenge seekers. Sixty-three percent of teenagers of both sexes cite being with friends and family as the biggest motivators to getting outdoors. But the most important outcome they found? Research has shown that in single-sex programs, girls are more likely to speak up, take on challenges, and step into leadership roles.

Let us hope that other Trail hosts (Chapters and Partners) will invite Girl Scouts into the woods. ✱

Speaking for myself, had I never gone to Scout camp and learned to love the woods, my life would have turned out very different. Editor.

One History of Preservation

By Irene Szabo

Twenty-five years ago, when I was on the Board of the Finger Lakes Trail Conference and simultaneously on the Board of the Finger Lakes Land Trust, the more I learned about conservation easements, which place use restrictions on whole properties to preserve natural qualities, the more I wanted to create a trail easement. So I asked experts at the Land Trust to write a sample easement, and they and their volunteer lawyers crafted a document for us.

Unlike a conservation easement, trail easements do not forbid the landowner's uses of the property, except to forbid blockage of the defined trail route with a building, for instance. Typically the owner can still farm or log his property, even build a new house or barn, as long as the defined route is not impeded. However, a trail easement conveys hikers' passage for all time, down through subsequent owners.

Ironically, the Trail's Board was scared to hold an easement. If they held the easement, they might have to, for instance, go to court to stop a later landowner from blocking the trail. Fortunately for our first four easements, the Land Trust agreed to hold them until our board got used to the big idea. Since I owned one property the trail crossed, we placed an easement on that property. Then wonderful Bill and Ellen Garrison, extremely friendly landowners who had actually INVITED the trail onto more of their property from a less suitable neighbor's place, were the first, and so far only owners to OFFER us a trail easement out of the blue. Since their property got us from a road uphill to a big state forest with many miles of trail in it, this was a perfect place for an easement!

Later they suggested we build a shelter on their property, too, and then had it rebuilt with their own insurance when a problem child burned the first



one down, but that's another heart-warming story about the Garrisons.

Of course, subsequent easements were slow in coming, because almost nobody was "brave" enough to ask for one, so after a dozen years or so, the Land Trust asked us to transfer the first four easements to the Trail Conference. In the absence of any fireworks, the Trail Board finally agreed to hold easements themselves. In fact, a few years later, the spokesman for the nervous faction became a Vice-President for Trail Preservation and did a great job negotiating several more easements. And we even got a few that were triggered by conversations with landowners by ordinary trail workers who saw opportunities.

We kept the topic alive in our magazine readers' minds, both members AND all landowners, too, with frequent stories about easements. Yes, all 700+ trail landowners receive the *FLT News*. At least now when one of our members brings up the topic to a landowner, chances are decent that they know what we're talking about. Yes, we've been refused, but never did it cause a rift in our relations. Near as I can tell, it's harder for a young teenage boy to ask a girl for a date than it is to

An unrestricted donation can work for the Trail over and over again with smart investments.

ask a landowner if we can protect the route of our trail. No landowner has become angry at being asked.

By now, under the energetic administration of our latest VP for Trail Preservation, Dave Newman, more easements have been added, to the point that we now have 100 accomplished, with a couple more still in the discussion stage, plus eight outright property donations. So, with over 700 private landowners along the whole Finger Lakes Trail system, there are 600-some to go...

Part of our success in recent years has come about because we actually have piled up a little preservation money. Good old Ed Sidote kicked off a fund that the board decided could be used for trail improvement or preservation, principal and all. Ed's original contribution to start the fund was \$1250 worth of stocks, so the appeal became one asking for the same amount of contribution at the minimum from other members, which group has grown to 80. Some, of course, have contributed to the fund through a bequest, so we do have a few major contributions ranging from \$10,000 to one \$400,000 surprise from a quiet woman lawyer.

Now with a useful little pot of money, we can make temporary investments that are designed to repay themselves to replenish the fund, or nearly so. In several cases, we have loaned money to the Land Trust to purchase key private properties, which are then to be sold to the state's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to add land to adjacent state forests. While the state doesn't move very fast,



Bill Garrison

Photo: Jacqui Wensich

we generally reclaim our money within a few years, so lose only interest. In another case, the FLT bought a key property connecting two protected areas, then sold the residence portion to help us reclaim that money for the Sidote Fund.

Obviously, more and more of our members are becoming aware of places going up for sale, how critical they are to trail continuity, and of our organizational capabilities with respect to protecting the trail, and many of these treasures are along our shared 420-mile North Country Trail portion, too.

One such treasure was the Cobb property, 40+ acres near the ski town of Ellicottville. When we asked John Cobb if he'd consider donating the property to us, one he no longer used for a weekend getaway with the kids, he agreed! A smart cookie who had retired from the IRS, John knew he could get a tax break for the donation, AND would rid himself of the property taxes. While this property could have fetched a decent price for second homes for the ski set, our trail-permitting neighbors were grateful that we didn't put it on the market. No, as a 501(c)3 charitable organization, the FLT doesn't pay taxes there, and we even made over \$20,000 having selective logging done that impacted the trail very little.

If you are thinking about your own final dispositions, consider the North Country Trail, and to offer the most flexible gift, don't restrict spending to interest only. With the full effect of your gift to the Trail available, our NCTA staff and volunteers can protect the most Trail effectively, and as has been demonstrated above, can often be used over and over again with smart protections. ✨



View of Dog Run Valley. In regions where there is not open bare rock, the best views are often from road.

Photo: Joan Young

North Country Quest, an Excerpt

By Joan Young

After her first book, North Country Cache, chronicled the first half of her end-to-end trip on the Trail, Joan began collecting notes on subsequent hikes to finish a book on the second half, North Country Quest. This excerpt celebrates delights along rural roads as worthy walks. — Editor

A is for Asphalt

July 22- August 3, 2004

Marie and I are trudging down the Ohio road. It's the next-to-the-last day of this hike, but despite being mid-summer it's the first of our days together which has been uncomfortably hot. Not only is it hot, but this section of road is almost boring. For the first time we can see more than a few hundred feet of the road ahead. As we have walked farther and farther north the terrain has flattened a bit, and the valleys are wider. We can sometimes see a half-mile ahead before the road crests or curves out of sight.

Glancing down at the sticky black surface beneath our boots I notice the letter "A" has been spray-painted on its surface, for reasons unknown. "A is for asphalt," I quip.

"B is for bulldozer," Marie counters. We continue through the alphabet and discover we've filled almost an hour, and three more miles have slipped beneath our feet. "Let's start over and just use words that apply to this trip," proposes Marie.

"A is for Asphalt," I offer with a grin.

Almost all of this hike has been on roads. We knew this ahead of time, of course, and planned accordingly. We each brought a car and must take the time to spot one vehicle at the end point of each day's walk, and then drive the other car back to where we will begin the day. Each night we return to a base camp. With curving, hilly roads this task takes a major chunk of time.

Marie exclaimed. "I never expected to see the day when I thought that walking fourteen miles was just an incidental part of the day's activities!"

The actual asphalt was interesting too. We came to call it creative paving. Occasionally a nice even stretch of black would greet our tires or feet. Much more often we'd find varieties of patched or intermittently paved surfaces. Some pavement consisted of sparse gravel held together with a thin coating of sticky black: just one fraction more like pavement than the sections of dirt roads which were oiled to keep down the dust where they passed in front of farm homes. Old, buckled blacktop competed with splotches, strips and blobs of cold or hot patch, which might or might not have been rolled. The tops of the surfaces were rarely even.

It's not every hike on which you need to watch your footing on paved roads to keep from turning an ankle.

"B is for Berries."

First we began to enjoy the elderberries. They were not quite ripe, but we fantasized about elderberry pancakes, and even bought the pancake mix. We definitely passed up Pokeweed berries (probably poisonous), and Common Buckthorn berries (it's not named *Rhamnus cathartica* for nothing!). However, we certainly didn't pass up the blackberries. The wet summer produced luscious, juicy berries as big as our thumbs, and we enjoyed many a snack or dessert compliments of the Trail.

By the end of the hike the elderberries finally ripened. Somehow, we never did get to making the pancakes, but we did each nibble our way through a ripe umbel of near-black berries. For me each tiny, tart globe with the unique taste brought memories of jams and pies, and warm summer childhood evenings on the kitchen porch cleaning and sorting the fruits which are so small that foods made with them are always a labor of love.

■ ■ ■

"E is for Eating Out."

Despite great plans for wonderful campfire dinners at base camp the truth

was that we didn't have time to do much of it. Although we moved camp twice as we walked northward it took as much as one-and-a-half hours at each end of the day to spot and pick up the cars. We saved a bit of time occasionally by spotting for the next day the night before and leaving one car overnight, but the distance to the base camp was the same whether we were in one car or two. Thus we managed only three camp dinners, and otherwise sampled a good many local cafés for an evening meal. Several small town restaurants provided wonderful fare for under \$5.00, and a slice of pie upped the bill only a couple more bucks. We enjoyed standard B-B-Q's, special burgers, and BLT's, but also the most delicious pork chops I've had for a long time, and Marie said she had the best Greek salad she's had since her favorite diner closed.

One night, after a fifteen-mile day, the two of us downed an entire large pizza with lots of toppings.

The mysteries of the menu were two local items which everyone seemed to know by name, if not by definition, and folks were baffled when strangers asked what the sandwiches were. Both were deep fried fish on a bun. The first time we asked what a "Coleman" was, we received an odd stare, and managed to get the one-word response that it was fish. No one ever was able to tell us what kind of fish, although I overheard someone else ask what it was, in a rather nice restaurant, and they finally received the answer that it was white meat. So now you know!

The other one is a "Fish Tail." It is obviously not a fish tail, and although it was shaped into a triangular patty we never could confirm that that is how it got its name. It became something of a game to ask what these sandwiches were just to see what kind of response we would get. Two people guessed that a "Fish Tail" was cod, so perhaps it's so.

Eating out did provide us with a lot of local flavor and history. We learned many facts from waitresses and other diners about local industries, museums to visit, and civic pride in towns of only a few hundred inhabitants, and we also sampled several new flavors of ice cream well worthy of their names: peanut butter krackle, buttercrunch, cappuccino royale, and Quebec black swan silk. Black raspberry loaded with fresh berries may not be a new name, but the local interpretation of this flavor was so good we went back another day for seconds.



"F is for Farm."

The farms were pasted to the hills like squares of *papier-mâché* on a bumpy egg carton divider. We saw enterprises large and small, old and new, thriving and abandoned.

Most farms had a few goats. We asked one family if they milked them and were told that they just raised a few to sell. So we still don't know if they were used mostly for milk or meat. The goats were curious as we passed, maa-ing at us and clambering on top of their boxes to get a better look.

We saw more than a normal smattering of donkeys and mules, including one unusual mule spotted all over in large patches of gray and white.

Horses nickered greetings, and the cows politely answered my calls of "good moorning," or "good aftermooon!" while Marie rolled her eyes. Most bovines we saw were pale



A cordwood house. One of our favorite activities is watching for interesting architecture while walking along roads.

Photo: Joan Young

Simmentals or Brown Swiss, but finally to the north we began to see more black-and-white Holsteins.

It was haying season and many a windrow and newly wrapped large round bale were seen, and the fresh clean scent pervaded the warm air. Often, wire fences did not parallel the high roads but wandered randomly along the far edges of irregularly shaped hayfields which sloped away from the roadways. Below the fences, deep wooded gullies fell to streams we could not see, but surmised, or located on the maps. The cows were turned out to graze the gullies.

When we walked valleys, the reverse was true: ribbons of field curved along and sloped upwards from the road; woodlots on the hilltops were fenced and neatly trimmed of underbrush by munching livestock.

The award for most curious farm encounter goes to an animal not native to Ohio. One afternoon two llamas poked their head above their fence and batted gorgeous eyelashes at us. Mr. Llama followed us, tripping daintily along on his side of the wire. His mate lingered shyly behind. After we opened a conversation with Mr. L., he turned to the Mrs. and gave a snuffling call, as if to say, "Better come and have a closer look, Lucille, we've got quite a curiosity here!" We chatted with them as they followed us as far as the end of their fence, where we bid them a fond farewell. We had no fence to impede our northward march.

We were continually impressed with the neatness of the farms. People mow acres and acres of grass around their homes. Even abandoned houses usually had their lawns mowed by the owners or neighbors. Farms always sprout crops of rusting machinery, but the aged balers, harrows and Fords were often planted in rows as ordered as the corn. One person attributed the obsession with neatness to the German heritage of the region. Marie recalled her visit to that country where she learned that the natives even swept the Black Forest with brooms to keep it tidy.

We also took a side trip of under a mile to see a sixteen-sided barn, nicely maintained and with a new small friend, a sixteen-sided mailbox.



The 16-sided barn and matching mailbox

Photo: Joan Young



"I is for Ironweed, J is for Joe-Pye Weed."

The predominant colors of the fields were brilliant purple and dusty rose as exhibited by these two plants. That's New York Ironweed to be specific... the undersides of the leaves are smooth. Marie thought it odd that she had to come from New York, where she has lived her whole life, to Ohio to see it, but she loved the hue. Coupled with the fluffy mauve-pink of the Joe-Pye she was always awed by meadow views.

Since the cows declined to eat either plant there was plenty of color to enjoy. The other most often seen flower in bloom was a narrow-leaved wild sunflower spreading patches of sunshine among the varied purples. Along the roads, rows of Tall Campanula turned their blue faces toward us, sticking out their blue tongues. And a mosaic of white, yellow, pink and creamy water lilies carpeted many wetland spaces.



"N is for National Road."

At Old Washington, Ohio, we crossed US Highway 40 where it sported bright red-striped signs for the historic route of the National Road. We were amazed to learn, when we were able to find some additional information about the signs, that the first interstate



Joe Pye Weed, *Eutrochium* (formerly *Eupatorium*) *maculatum*, the dusty pink, growing beside dark purple New York Ironweed, *Vernonia noveboracensis*.

Photo: Joan Young

Roads into the wilderness were viewed primarily as long portages between river routes from the Atlantic to the Ohio, and thus the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. Money earned from lands sold in what was to become the state of Ohio paid for construction as far as Wheeling, West Virginia.

Before the National Road was extended farther west, long debates about the constitutionality of the federal government paying for "internal improvements" ensued. Federal funds were clearly to be used for the common defense, but many politicians, including President Monroe, were less sure that the government had any jurisdiction over construction projects. Proponents claimed the authority was implied by the power given in the Constitution to establish post offices and post roads. Monroe ultimately proposed a solution: that under the "general welfare" clause of the Constitution, the government could build roads of national dimension. In 1825 construction began in the new state of Ohio.

We searched for and found graceful "S bridges," built more economically at right angles to streamflow with angled approaches from the road. We discovered small sections of the brick-paved and stone curbed route (some still in use as county roads), mile markers, former inns, remnants of the carefully built "maximum five percent grade," a hand dug "cut" through tall hills.

And finally, within 25 miles of the NCT we located the museum which offered up details to fill in the intriguing gaps between the discontinuous remnants we had seen. In its heyday over 200,000 persons and 1.5 million tons of freight traveled the Road each year.

But by 1863 the railroads had captured most of the westward traffic, and in 1879 Harper's magazine called the National Road "a glory departed." But in a story sure to warm the hearts of recreationists the road was not quite ready to breathe its final breath. In the late 1870's the brave of heart mounted newfangled, two-wheeled contraptions that stood five feet tall, and they took to the streets. A decade later the safety bicycle lowered riders to a more prudent distance from the pavement, and allowed for easier pedaling by means of a chain and sprocket system.

highway was authorized by Thomas Jefferson in 1805, which ultimately stretched 600 miles from Cumberland, Maryland, to Vandalia, Illinois. George Washington had envisioned such a road, and travelers begged Congress to build a highway which would link them with the lands of the Western Reserve (eastern Ohio), and beyond.

Revolutionary War veterans were granted land in the Reserve, and we saw many graves of these brave men.



The National Road at Old Washington, Ohio.

Photo: Joan Young

The National Road became a bicycle trail almost overnight. In 1897 a man named Sherman Granger rode from Zanesville, Ohio, to Cumberland, Maryland, in four and a half days. Women donned knickers to take up this fascinating sport. The League of American Wheelmen was formed to advocate for better roads and the rights of such mechanical devices to be allowed safe passage.

Right around the next corner of the timeline, the automobile appeared, and with it Congressional appropriations for surfaces better able to withstand the increased use. The first brick paving of a rural road was done in Ohio, and a section of experimental concrete pavement was laid just west of Zanesville.

Almost overnight the American car-camping romance was born and bloomed; backpackers of today, despite the difference in motive power, seem to be their offspring.

These early auto travelers strapped camping gear to the running boards. They braved mud, jolts, injury, the lack of resources. They camped in the fields of friendly farmers, in schoolyards and public parks. They scratched their heads at unmarked intersections and longed for maps. Early attempts to bring order to the maze of rutted trails will look startlingly familiar to the hiker. Guide books were printed in which points of interest have the mileage from each direction noted in the left column. A section strip map was sometimes included with running commentary which might have been pulled from a contemporary trail guide, such as: "turn left at the double mailbox, pass large maple tree and continue downhill to the next intersection. Lodging, meals, laundry, reasonable rates."

Today much of the original road is covered, re-graded and paved as U.S. Route 40.

The National Road is a monument not only to the enterprising spirit of Americans, but to their wanderlust as well. It is eminently fitting that a national trail crosses this thoroughfare, but wouldn't it be wonderful if the ultimate off-road NCT route might be negotiated to follow some closed, but still existent, section of the first nationally funded transportation route?

■ ■ ■

"P is for Poison Ivy."

Marie and I are both very likely to have severe reactions to this most common of irritating plants. Unfortunately, Poison Ivy should be declared the Ohio state plant. The first campsite we checked out was quickly rejected. The PI curled with verdant green power along the pathways, around the fire rings, and even from the hard packed tent pads. Every woodland path was lined and often the treadway was even dotted with shiny "leaves of three." Vines up to four inches in diameter coiled up almost every tree, and the tendrils hung across the trail like snakes waiting to strike at the unsuspecting hiker. It would be impossible to stay out of it unless we were to choose to eliminate all off-road sections of the Trail, which we did not want to do.

Then Director of Trail Management for NCTA, Rob Corbett, an Ohio native, cheerfully informed us later, "It's a cash crop!" Apparently gardeners in Great Britain import



A grave of a Revolutionary War soldier. Exploring old cemeteries is a pastime more easily indulged along roadwalks.

Photo: Joan Young

Toxicodendron radicans to plant along their fences as a deterrent to thieves. We wanted to suggest that someone, anyone, spray the offending plant, but we concluded, only somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that if that were to happen the state might be left with huge brown and gray non-vegetated zones.

Nearly breathless at the emotions we felt about the risks we were running (trips-

to-the-hospital, and abortion-of-hike level risks), we waded into the press of waving green three-fingered spectators which lined and crowded into our route.

Recently I had read that the offending oil in the plant, urushiol, breaks down quickly in water. Yes, water, plain water, no soap, no expensive washes or special creams. In fact, the article suggested that added agents served only to spread the oil. So we tested this theory as we never had before.

After each section of off-road trail we headed for water to wash our boots, dip our hiking sticks, wade into the water up to our thighs, and wash our hands, arms and faces where we might have touched them with contaminated hands. Thanks to "L is for Lakes," and the fact that most of the off-road sections were near these lakes, we were usually able to wet down without too much difficulty.

This included one dip in Piedmont Lake that stands out in contrast to the rest of the day. At three in the afternoon we still had not eaten lunch. It was hot and humid, but we could not find anywhere to stop that was not overgrown with ivy. But just once in its meandering, the trail opened on to a tiny beach where we thankfully plunged into the water for a refreshing swim, PI wash, and lunch.

We must also confess to a few washes in not so refreshing pot-hole mud puddles. No matter, we are happy to report that the strategy was very successful. Each of us suffered only a few scattered dots of blisters... nothing more than we might expect from any summer month without ever being aware of where we had encountered the offensive plant. Water is indeed a marvelous chemical.

**143 miles this hike
Ring Mill to Zoar, Ohio
2547 total NCT miles**

*Just think; this is only about a quarter of this fun chapter, so look forward to reading the rest, with paragraphs on kids, quilt barns, gravel and glass paving, and endless dogs. Preorder at www.booksleavingfootprints.com.
— Editor*



North Country Trail Association

229 East Main Street
Lowell, Michigan 49331

NONPROFIT
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Grand Rapids, MI
Permit 340



Cliff Stammer, our NCT Hikers Trail Boss, after a day working on the trail west of Wildcat Canyon in Marquette County, Michigan. Mike says "I think this shows a truthful look of trail maintenance."

Photo: Mike Bradley



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.
229 East Main Street, Lowell, MI 49331
(866) HikeNCT • (616) 897-5987 • Fax (616) 897-6605

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.