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The Magazine of the  
North Country Trail Association

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# north star



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A winter hike in N.Y. in 1634  
Walking North Dakota  
Our old school house

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**Holiday Valley ski area near Ellicottville, N.Y. "We camped up on top by the ski lifts on our fourth day out. May 25, 6:45 a.m." The Finger Lakes Trail goes across the tops of two ski hills, the other near Cortland.**

Photo: David DeVito



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## GIVING TUESDAY

### Making Twice The Impact

Mark your calendars for December 1, 2020, the day your tax-deductible gift has twice the impact. Three Trail Community friends have joined together with a #GivingTuesday 2020 Challenge. If we can raise \$25,000 in 24 hours then **EVERY DOLLAR WILL BE MATCHED!**

That's \$50,000 to ensure our Hike 100 Challenge continues to challenge hikers and brings new members to the association. It coordinates and supports the safety of volunteers and the important trail work happening within our Chapters. It keeps trail protection in the forefront, creating a powerful voice for advocacy.

#### Can we count on YOU?

One gift, twice the impact, over 24 hours.

Join us for #GivingTuesday  
December 1, 2020.

GIVINGTUESDAY

## Trailhead

### Tim Mowbray, President

It is hard to believe this is my final article for the *North Star* and that the last two years have passed by so quickly! I hope everyone is doing well in this unsettled environment and that the Trail and the many opportunities it presents have been a positive diversion from the pandemic.

Looking back, we have had many accomplishments and the organization has grown and become more well situated as part of the National Scenic Trails system. The board has become a true governance body, the administrative staff has settled and diversified to cover the necessary duties of organizational operations, Chapter and Affiliate leadership have become excellent managers of their local areas. We have been able to improve the financial position of the association and provide more resources for trail development and maintenance. Thanks to all of you, board, staff, National Park Service, Chapters and Affiliates, volunteers and all members and donors for helping NCTA move ahead.

Members of our NCTA committees should also get recognition for jobs well done! Our Advocacy Committee has helped pass significant federal legislation that provides more resources for continuing our future development. The Finance Committee has helped develop fiscal policy and internal protocols that manage our resources; the Governance Committee has refined by-laws, developed board member recruitment strategies and organized board functions. The Executive Committee has worked with administration and external partners to help guide and grow the organization. Our Development Committee has started to engage with and expand our donor base while establishing policy to manage the gifts, grants, and bequests the association receives from the supporters of NCTA. Thanks also to our many other smaller committees that work on awards and other aspects of the association.

As we look ahead, we have developed a strong strategic plan to help guide the organization into the future. The association hopes to continue its growth and diversity to include more communities as a part of our spectacular trail across the northern tier of states. The Board of Directors and staff are extremely thankful to all the volunteers, financial supporters, elected officials, landowners, National Park Service, Affiliates, Chapters and so many others who help us accomplish the mission of the NCTA. We hope you will stay active with us in these difficult and changing times to continue the growth and viability of NCTA.

The mission of the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) 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 NCTA is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that partners with the National Park Service to unite individuals, affiliated trail groups, local Chapters, corporate sponsors and others linked in support of building and maintaining the North Country Trail and telling its story.

From the Board of Directors and staff of the association, we hope that all of you will continue to be safe and in good health as we all work to hike it, build it and love it. Thank you all for being a part of the North Country Trail family! Stay safe.



**Tim and Murphy heading out on Voyagers' section of North Country Trail.**

Photo: Sue Mowbray



# Trailhead

## Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director

As I look back over the year, I'm in awe at how much we've accomplished in the face of adversity. 2020 was a year with unprecedented challenges but we continued to meet the needs of our hikers, support our volunteers, and we even were able to grow our staff and program capacity at a time when many other businesses and nonprofits had to shut their doors. You made that happen. Thank you.

Now it's time to think about what's next and that's been one of the most challenging parts of this year, not knowing what lies ahead. It's been harder to plan and anticipate our next needs, but that challenge has made us more nimble and helped us realize that there is freedom in not always knowing what comes next as long as our mission, vision and values guide our way.

Although we don't know what 2021 will bring, we are excited about our future. This year has taught us to see the big picture and focus on the long view, to go back to our roots and to focus on bringing the Trail to the people. The Trail is getting unprecedented use. People are turning to outdoor recreation to combat stress and counteract the sedentary lifestyles we've adopted while staying at home. The stories are pouring in of hikers, new and old, who are discovering the Trail for the first time or falling in love with it all over again. They are stories of resilience and stories of hope.

Our mission is to build, maintain, protect and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail but the true nature of our mission is the WHY behind these actions. The North Country Trail can transform our lives when we need it most and millions of Americans are experiencing it firsthand this year. The benefits of the Trail can also go far beyond the individual and have very real impacts to our communities and larger society. Healthier people mean lower health care costs. Happier people mean less conflict. Trail corridors mean ecosystem buffers and wildlife habitat. Trails that get use can feed local economies. We have a hard time measuring the impact of the North Country Trail because of its immensity but you don't have to look much further than the stories of our hikers and volunteers. The Trail is our gym, our therapist, our friend, and its value is immeasurable.

So thank you for loving the Trail this year when you, the Trail and the world needed it most. With your help, it will be around for generations to come. ✨



**Andrea working from home, of course.**

Photo: Ted Bentley

# National Park Service Corner

## Chris Loudenslager, Superintendent, North Country National Scenic Trail



Great things to report from Augusta, Michigan, home of the first property ever acquired by the NPS for the North Country National Scenic Trail!

The former Hutchinson Property was acquired by the NPS in late 2018. It is just outside the town of Augusta, Michigan, a few miles north of the Fort

Custer National Cemetery and about midway between the cities of Kalamazoo and Battle Creek. The property is 80 acres, about half of which is wooded and half that had been converted to crop production. One wonderful feature about the property, beyond the fact that it hosts the NCT, is the outstanding vista afforded about a third of the way up the property (heading south to north) within the former field.

When the NPS acquired the property, the field had most recently been farmed for corn and was harvested just before it came to us. Aside from the countless remnant "corn nubs" or whatever you might call them where you are from, the field was barren, open, and at risk of erosion and rapid colonization of weedy invasive plants. Several options for what to do with this portion of the property were considered: continued farming with rights leased to a third party, replanting the field to forest, or doing something different, perhaps creating a native prairie.

In pre-settlement times, this portion of Michigan had historically been characterized by prairie and oak savannah, but following years of conversion to agriculture, settlement, development and the associated active suppression of the natural wildfires that had maintained these habitats, it is estimated that only 0.02% of the savannah originally found in the Midwest remains. While no definitive information could be found if this site in particular was ever prairie or savannah,



**Chris Loudenslager**

Photo: Mick Hawkins

the creation of a representative prairie that would be similar to what once existed was very desirable for a number of reasons. It would provide for critically important vegetation and habitat; it would be quick to establish, preventing complete colonization by invasives; it would be self-sustaining (with just a little help); it would maintain the outstanding views and the vista; and not to be judgmental or subjective, it would just plain be pretty.



Photo: Ron Sootsman



Photo: Chris Loudenslager



Photo: Chris Loudenslager

After but a few short years, the newly created prairie is beautiful and appearing more and more natural with each new season. An adjacent landowner often shares how thrilled he is to see the natural beauty of the area, all the wildlife that is finding its way there, and loves to provide updates on the incredible amount of honey he has started to produce.

But the prairie in and of itself isn't the main story; it is the backdrop for what is more important, the Trail and the people who benefit from it. When the NPS first acquired the property, the NCT was allowed to pass through it but had to follow the west edge of the property to stay out of the farmed area. While nice and shaded by the majestic hardwoods protected within the adjacent fencerow – not to mention the diversity of non-native invasives to include European Buckthorn, Autumn Olive, Tree of Heaven, just to name a few – the Trail itself was a straight-line path following the fall line of the steep hill, contrary to what we know about erosion and sustainable trails and rendering it inaccessible to individuals who might not be able to negotiate the climbing route to the top of the hill. As a part of the new

vision for the property, we're designing a new route that would wind through the prairie, allowing more access and surrounding hikers with an immersive experience with the sight, smell, and sound of the native grasses and wildflowers all around.

The first phase of this new accessible trail from the trailhead through the prairie to the vista was completed in September. While the initial construction failed to meet all the technical requirements for a universally accessible trail, it nonetheless already provides access that did not exist previously. More work will be done ultimately to meet this goal and ensure any user can make their way to the vista and enjoy the spectacular views that are rare to come by in this part of the state.

Continuing north from the vista, the Trail will be standard construction through the remainder of the prairie until it ducks into the forest. The section has not yet been built, so for now the route to the vista is only a spur, and a continuous hike through the property is still via the original route of the Trail. It is anticipated that the entirety of new trail through the property will be completed by mid-spring next year. Come check it out. It will be a wonderful hike any time but note that it seems that the diversity of wildflowers in bloom tends to peak in mid to late July. ✨



# A Complete Team

Valerie Bader

We are thrilled to welcome Stephanie and Tom to our team! For the first time in NCTA's history, we now have a Regional Trail Coordinator providing support in every one of our eight states.

The Regional Trail Coordinator (RTC) position is the Swiss army knife of NCTA staff and simply put, the public face and voice who represents the association in a region. There is often no "typical day" for someone in this position, with tasks ranging from advocacy to bridge construction and everything in between. Their work includes coordinating with NCTA Chapters, Affiliates and partners, the National Park

Service and local land managers to facilitate the planning, construction, maintenance, promotion and protection of the NCNST and building the capacity of the organization to meet the NCTA's mission. (No small task!)

NCTA Chapters and Affiliates can attest to the leadership and support they find from our existing RTCs and we're certain that we'll soon hear the same from everyone in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Vermont. Please join me in welcoming these folks to your states and I hope you see them on the Trail soon.



Photo: Michael Campbell

## Stephanie Campbell

Regional Trail Coordinator for New York and Vermont

Stephanie is responsible for trail management, and Chapter and Affiliate support.

She has a B.A. from Purdue University in Communications and a M.S. from the University of Michigan in Environmental Policy and Planning, as well as Conservation Ecology. Pursuing her passion for conservation and stewardship, Stephanie has worked in trails since 2010, beginning with the Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania and continuing with the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia, and the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail in Montana and Idaho. Stephanie is currently based out of Ithaca, N.Y., where she enjoys hiking, yoga, painting, and gardening.



Photo: Cara Moutsos

## Tom Moutsos

Regional Trail Coordinator for Ohio and Pennsylvania

Tom is responsible for trail management, and Chapter support and direction in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Tom joined the NCTA in 2020. Tom has spent 20 years in the trail/conservation/volunteer world, including leading and managing trail crews for the National Park Service and the Student Conservation Association. He is also a two-time AmeriCorps volunteer and spent two and a half years in the Philippines as a Peace Corps volunteer. He lives with his wife and three children in northwestern Pennsylvania, where they spend as much time as possible outside.



Photo: Hannah Ertle

## Heather Ertle

### Data Entry Specialist

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Heather is responsible for database support in the areas of data entry, maintenance, and reports.

Heather joined the NCTA in Lowell in 2020 as the Database Entry Specialist. She lives in Alto, Michigan, with her husband and their four children. Heather enjoys spending time outdoors with her dogs, hiking local trails, and gardening.



## Welcome Brad Slagle

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NCTA is proud to welcome Brad Slagle as the new Chair of our Advocacy Committee.

Brad lives in Marquette, Michigan, with wife Lynne, and has a son, daughter and two stepsons. Brad has a lifelong interest in the outdoors and started with the trail crew of the North Country Trail Hikers Chapter about five years ago in order to stay active. He is the retired Director of the Michigan State Veterans Home program and past President of the National Association of State Veterans Homes for almost 20 years.

"I am very grateful for the incredible community of people the North Country Trail has allowed me to be part of!"

# State Of The Trail Coming In Our Next Issue

By Irene Szabo, Editor

**N**ext deadline is 1 January 2021, and who knows what kind of time THAT year will be! But we'll lurch forward and hope for the best, scheduling our State of the Trail feature as usual in the first magazine of the new year. However, the sheer volume of submissions in recent years has made this feature unwieldy AND expensive, so we're going to have to be more strict about word count. The new limit is 350 words (with extra hugs to those who come in UNDER that number).

Save yourself space and resist the frequent urge to start with the typical observation that, "We had a very busy year!" or to tell all of us who have faced the same complications of 2020 that, "We couldn't carry out all those great events we had planned, and our trail care had to be done differently in order to avoid contagion." We know, we KNOW.

It will improve your text if you are forced to be economical with words and concentrate on the real nuggets of inspiration or cleverness your group came up with, so aim to impress us with your one or two best news items. Only one picture, please.

Think of something unique to your group. For instance, I've realized one hook for the Finger Lakes Trail State of the Trail might be this: We hired our first ever Marketing and Communications person, Christy Post, kind of gambling that her work would end up covering the cost of having her, and then gave her an impossible job. Go ahead, TRY to improve our publicity at a time when we had to cancel all of our big events for the year, two big weekends, the county hike series, and the Trail Fest. But blah, blah...

Or tell us what your priority project was for this year, and how it fared. Any new and exciting partners or members who inspired others?

If you feel you have a legitimate need for more space, contact the editor at [treeweenie@aol.com](mailto:treeweenie@aol.com) or (585) 494-0307.



## AWARDS

# National Park Service Awards

Luke Jordan



The National Park Service is celebrating the 50th anniversary of Volunteers in Parks (VIP) Program! Congress passed the Volunteers-In-Parks Act on July 29, 1970, to allow national parks to use “volunteers for or in aid of interpretive functions, or visitor services or activities.” Since then, volunteers have supported National Park units in many aspects, such as natural and cultural resources, interpretation and maintenance. In turn, volunteers have been able to give back to communities in some of the most visually captivating, historically rich, and ecologically vital locations our nation has to offer. Volunteers with the North Country National Scenic Trail are included as part of that National Park legacy. Thanks to all the North Country Trail volunteers for your hard work and dedication throughout the years!

**We'd like to recognize the volunteers who have reached cumulative hour milestones this year:**

## 10,000 hours

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Marty Swank

## 4000 hours

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Kathleen Eisele  
John Pearson

## 2500 hours

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Carol Detrie  
Tom Garnett  
Rennae Gruchalla  
Becky Heise  
Herb Hulls  
Suzanne Hulls  
Jerry McCarty  
JoEllen Sokoloski  
Matthew Williams

## 1000 hours

---

Mel Baughman  
Jim Bradley  
Eric Campbell  
Mary Campbell  
Brian Hager  
Tracy Hager  
Patrick Hayes  
Frank Lynn  
Mary Moberg  
Derrick Passe  
Kevin Schram  
Mark Wadopian  
Ellie Williams

## 400 hours

---

Terry Blackstone  
Eric Campbell  
Mary Campbell  
Mike Chapple  
Deborah Charleson  
Judy Conrad  
Robert Courtois  
Richard Glasgow  
Tina Harkins  
Steve Hatting  
Byron Henry  
James Hop  
Karl Jensen  
David Kazmierczak  
Thomas Lane  
Jill Nordin  
Tom Norton  
Richard Ostheimer  
Renee Penny  
Mark Roberts  
James Rowan  
Jan Ulferts Stewart  
Tim VanNest  
John Willis  
Gene Wimmer

## 200 hours

---

Leslie Akre  
Catherine Albert  
Luc Albert  
Tracey Anderson  
Danny Austin  
Patricia Bielke  
Stephen Bielke  
Terry Blackstone  
Dan Campbell  
Tom Dahle  
Linda DeYoung  
Steve Hatting  
Kenneth Holst  
Mark King  
Michael Loscheider  
Brian Loutzenhiser  
Kevin Mackie  
Tom Meinik  
Lou Morrison  
Hannah Mowry  
Kent Nordin  
Renee Penny  
Timothy Rockey  
Thomas Rohr  
Stephen Sondrol  
Jan Ulferts Stewart  
William Stone  
Laura Thomas

## 100 hours

---

Tracey Anderson  
Terry Blackstone  
Mike Bradley  
Dan Campbell  
Tom Dahle  
Ian Kotz  
Tom Meinik  
Renee Penny  
Thomas Rohr  
William T. Smith  
Laura Thomas  
NMU Conservation Crew

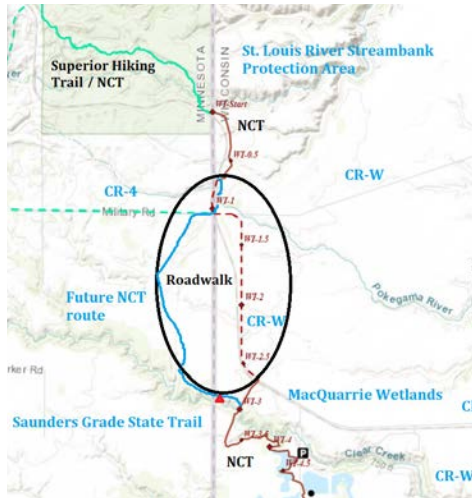




# A State Line, Railroads, Red Clay, Pipelines, and New Partnerships

By Matthew Davis

**P**atching together landowner permissions for the NCT is sometimes like putting together a very complicated puzzle with odd-shaped pieces. Sometimes the piece you need the most is missing. For the last 10 years, the Brule-St. Croix (BSC) Chapter, Bill Menke, and the Wisconsin DNR have been unable to make a contiguous off-road connection of the NCT in Wisconsin to the Superior Hiking Trail at the Minnesota border... until now. A few of the puzzle pieces are finally coming together in Minnesota!



Currently, the NCT leaves the McQuarrie Wetlands and parallels the Saunders State Trail, a former railroad bed turned multi-use recreational trail, northeast out to CR-C. The NCT is then a road walk north and west to the state line. This area is complicated because the very busy BNSF Railroad crosses right there, as trains haul taconite pellets from the Iron Range to the Great Lakes port at Superior. The only legal place to cross that railroad line is at an existing grade crossing for county roads at the state line. A short walk along the railroad's service road leads north past Enbridge's Line 3 oil pipeline to the NCT built on Wisconsin state lands (St. Louis River Stream Bank Protection Area), and that connect with the Superior Hiking Trail at the border. This is the challenging land of wet, red clay soils and steep, continually eroding ravines.

The original NPS route plan called for the NCT to head north from the McQuarrie Wetlands on lands purchased by the State of Wisconsin to the State Line at Military Road/CR-W, but there was one private landowner who was not interested in hosting the Trail or selling to the state. That left a broken connection with few options, because of the railroad blocking the route on the east and other private land blocking the route on the Minnesota side. Bill Menke and

Peter Nordgren from the BSC Chapter have been working for the last year plus with Enbridge to obtain an easement that would get the NCT off the railroad service road from the state line to the existing NCT. Enbridge owns this land as part of its pipeline. It appears that this easement may happen soon, which will address one piece of the puzzle.

In spring 2019, Peter Nordgren noticed a For Sale sign on the "White Property" just west of the state line on Military Road. He looked up the property online and contacted the realtor to see if the landowners would be interested in selling all of the parcel. The answer was no and the asking price was way out of the NCTA's price range – not that we want to own land. This 240-acre property contained two blocks and a narrow corridor that was an old railroad loop, which winds through adjacent Carlton County tax forfeit lands. We started reaching out to partners on both sides of the border to see if anyone would have an interest. Those partners included the Western Wisconsin Land Trust, Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, Minnesota DNR, and Carlton County. Greg Bernu, Land Commissioner of Carlton County, responded immediately that he was definitely interested in the White Property because it would provide access for some landlocked county tax forfeit lands. Greg said that the county could not purchase the property outright, but he sits on an advisory committee that makes funding recommendations for legacy funding in Minnesota. Because of this, he knew it would be possible to apply for grant funding to purchase the property if a conservation partner that could front the money could be found.

In late 2019, he reached out to Pheasants Forever, a national conservation group based in St. Paul, Minn. that "is dedicated to the conservation of pheasants, quail and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs." They were interested in working with us (NCTA and the county) and were successful in obtaining a \$312,650 Conservation Partners Legacy Grant ([dnr.state.mn.us/grants/habitat/cpl](http://dnr.state.mn.us/grants/habitat/cpl)) from the State of Minnesota in early 2020. The NCTA and Carlton County each contributed half of the required match (\$15,000). Carlton County will ultimately hold and manage the land.

A year later, acquisition of the parcel is nearing completion and we expect the closing to have happened in mid-October. Next, the NCTA will talk with Pheasants Forever about creating a small trailhead parking lot on CR-4. This parking is much needed as hikers on the Superior Hiking Trail who continue hiking into Wisconsin currently have no parking near the state line. We will also enter into a formal agreement with the county on hosting the NCT on "our" lands. Our thanks go out to Greg Bernu for his leadership on this project and to Eran Sandquist, Minnesota State Director for Pheasants Forever, for his diligent work making this a reality.





**Representatives of the Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter, Kalkaska Conservation District, and the Village of Fife Lake dedicate a new sign honoring the village as an official NCT Trail Town.**

Photo: Josh Kolbicz

## Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter Celebrates Trail Town Partnership

By Liz Foley

The Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter (GTHC) recently celebrated the Village of Fife Lake for five years as an official Trail Town of the North Country Trail. Along with the Village of Kalkaska, it is one of two officially designated Trail Towns along the 100-mile Trail section overseen by the GTHC in the northwestern corner of Michigan's lower peninsula.

The anniversary was marked with a commemorative panel sign in downtown Fife Lake's Lakefront Park. It was placed at the trailhead of a one-mile spur trail leading from the village to both the NCT and the Fife Lake Loop Trail, a 21-mile hike popular among backpackers across the state. The sign was funded by a grant from the Forest Area Credit Union, a local financial institution with a long history of community involvement.

The Trail Town designations are the result of an ongoing collaboration between village leaders, hiking club members, and the Kalkaska Conservation District, which provides local natural resources management services.

"A Trail Town supports hikers with services and amenities, promotes the Trail to its citizens, and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated," said Renee Penny, Conservation Specialist for the Kalkaska Conservation District. "Trail Towns are built on a relationship between a town, the Trail, and its local volunteers. Fife Lake has definitely adopted this community mentality."

With more than 160 current members, the GTHC maintains one of Michigan's most scenic sections of the NCT as it heads north through Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Wexford and Manistee Counties. On its way from Hodenpyl Dam in the Manistee National Forest to Starvation Lake in rural farm country, the club's share of Trail mostly meanders along the high banks of the Manistee River as it winds through the Pere Marquette State Forest.

Sitting almost exactly on the club's halfway point, Fife Lake is a classic Northern Michigan town of yesteryear, where summer cottages dot the lake's shore and the state's logging history is still tangible in the local museum and a small cluster of downtown buildings hailing from the late 1800's.

An offshoot of the NCT, the Fife Lake Loop shows what can happen when trail

planners get creative in designing a reroute. Ten years ago, the original NCT swung away from the Manistee River to follow the western flank of US-131, the main highway heading north through Grand Rapids from the Michigan-Indiana border to the northwest tip of the mitt. In 2010, club members began scouting the area east of the highway for a more scenic alternative. They soon discovered a treasure trove of hidden lakes, towering pines and scenic river bluffs. But it would take another year of planning and two more years of volunteer effort to actually turn the 12.8-mile reroute into a reality.

The vision was to maintain the NCT's north-south route for thru-hikers, but add a 21-mile loop trail overlapping it, strategically placed between two state forest campgrounds. South of Fife Lake the NCT follows the Manistee River through the Highbanks Rollway. North of Fife Lake the Trail heads to the Sand Lakes Quiet Area and on to Kalkaska. But at Fife Lake, hikers are presented with a third



**One of many scenic views of the Manistee River along an eight-mile section shared by the North Country Trail and the Fife Lake Loop Trail.**

Photo: Liz Foley



intriguing option, to explore a perfect weekend backpacking opportunity that conveniently circles back to their starting point.

Hikers can find food, lodging, internet service and other amenities in Fife Lake, or begin at one of the rustic campgrounds near the northern and southernmost points of the loop. The loop shares about eight miles along its southeastern edge with the NCT. To the north is Spring Lake State Forest Campground, Michigan's first. Located on the shores of Spring Lake, the rustic campground is only 1.5 miles from downtown Fife Lake. Lots of hardwoods in this section make for an especially scenic hike in the Northern Michigan autumn.

From there the NCT side of the Fife Lake Loop continues south past Headquarters Lake before following Fife Lake Creek on down to the Manistee River. The loop branches off from the NCT about a mile north of the Old US-131 State Forest Campground, a remote riverside encampment tucked deep within the trees.

To celebrate the anniversary and raise awareness of the uniqueness of this local trail system, the club hosted a "Virtual Fife Lake Hike" during the first week of August this year. Participants were invited to hike at least two miles anywhere along the surrounding trails, and then post photos of the hike on the club's Facebook page.

"Since I live right in Fife Lake it is convenient to work on the Trail and I really enjoy working with the folks in Fife Lake and Kalkaska," said GTHC Trail Town Coordinator Patty Warner. "Getting people in the community excited about the great trail that is right in their backyard helps increase the use and love of the NCT." ✱



During the Founders Circle Reception there was a happy Toast to the Trail.

## 2020 Virtual Celebration Recap

By Abby Whittington, NCTA Annual Events Coordinator

For many, our Annual Celebration is a time to look forward to visiting a new area, hiking a new part of the Trail, seeing familiar faces, catching up, and meeting new people. Being new to this Association, I too was looking forward to meeting many of you in person and exploring a new part of the Trail. But circumstances changed and morphed our Annual Celebration into a virtual experience.

We wanted to emphasize how special this event is and decided to dedicate the whole month of August to our Annual Celebration. We utilized platforms such as Zoom and Facebook to reach you, our guests, and scattered events throughout the weeks on various days and times. NCTA's Virtual Celebration 2020 consisted of seven events: Opening Ceremonies; North Country Trail Association Awards; Founders Circle Reception; Trail Management Workshop: Map Webinar; Next Generation Summit; North Country Stories: Creating Space; and An Evening with National Park Service, which included the annual NPS Awards. We had a total of 279 unique registrants for our six events that required registration, more than 2,000 views of our Opening Ceremonies on Facebook, and many views of the videos on YouTube after the events concluded. Although we weren't together in person, we were able to bring your spirit and the North Country Trail Community together online.

Over a quarter of our participants were attending their first Celebration. We are excited that we had new guests join us for our virtual Celebration. In creating this event virtual, it allowed us to reach individuals who may never have had the opportunity to attend our Annual Celebration, or they found out about us and wanted to attend and learn more during our virtual events.

A common thread throughout all of our events and feedback was connections and reconnecting. Individuals enjoyed the time connecting with new and old friends. In the craziness that is going on around all of us, it is good to reconnect and see familiar faces. We can all share in our common goal of protecting and supporting the North Country Trail.

I want to say a big thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Virtual Celebration. I have been impressed over and over again from the support we have received during this time. Celebration would be nothing without you all! If you were unable to join us for this year's Virtual Celebration, please note that all of the videos can be viewed on the Celebration website: [nctacelebration.org/celebration-videos](https://nctacelebration.org/celebration-videos)

We are busy working on upcoming Celebrations. Clarion, Pennsylvania, is looking forward to hosting you all August 4-8, 2021. Until next time, take care of yourselves and each other! ✱





## New Recruits to the Choir

By Joan Young

If you've been on social media much, you've seen stories. If you've been on the Trail much, maybe you've seen it in person. It's not pretty.

In this strange year where we are supposed to keep our distance from other people, many new-to-the-trail hikers have taken to the woods. Many of them don't know how to sing along with the music. Let me explain.

The premise of this article is that hikers should leave no trace of their passing. The whole "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints" thing. And, in modern times, the fewer footprints we leave the better! Almost everyone who reads this publication subscribes to that view. So if I suggest that you pick up after yourselves, be prepared for at least minor emergencies, or know how to solve basic problems in the woods without calling 911, you would feel that I am preaching to the choir.

But, how do we recruit new people to the hiking choir? How do we help people who may be discovering the wonderful outdoor world, as Sigurd Olson called it "the singing wilderness," for the first time? We have some responsibility to teach them the "tune," and how to "sing on key."

Let's think about some of the horror stories of the year. There's the picture that's gone viral of a stretch of the Appalachian Trail strewn with litter. There has been a news article about how the number of backcountry rescues in Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park (Michigan's Upper Peninsula) has soared by 500% (MLive). The ranger interviewed for that article reported that he saw inexperienced hikers heading into the park with grossly overweight packs, inappropriate footwear, lack of advance planning, even failing to check the weather forecast.

At the end of 2019, the Nepal government reported moving 10 tonnes of garbage and four dead bodies from the upper reaches of Mount Everest (phys.org). Some of this was newly revealed by melting glaciers, but the issue is not simply historic. Seven years ago, in an effort to shift the responsibility to those who create

the problem, Nepal began requiring a \$4,000 litter deposit per team. This would be refunded if the team returned with 18 or more pounds of rubbish. Half of the climbing teams since that time simply forfeit the deposit.

A story (not fully verified) has been making the rounds of a woman hiking in flip-flops who called 911 because her feet were hurting. Possibly untrue; certainly believable.

This year, there seem to be more than the usual number of people trying to take pictures with genuinely dangerous wildlife.

David Snoek, NCTA supporter and ski patrol member, commented to me that he wasn't looking forward to this year's season when all the people who have decided to try skiing, since they can't go to the theater, etc., will be out in the backcountry with very little idea of the precautions they should take to be safe. He referred to an article in the Denver Post reporting a huge uptick in the sale of cross-country ski equipment, largely to novices. Stores report high sales of boots and skis, but lower-than-normal sales of safety equipment.

Anecdotally, we've all noted that favorite Trail places are in some cases being "loved to death." Trash, unburied feces, toilet paper flowers, diapers, even abandoned tents full of equipment are becoming more and more common problems.

What are we to do? We want new people to discover and love the North Country Trail, but at the same time we want to protect its beauty and the surrounding ambiance whether it be mountains, forests, prairies, or rural settings. Regular North Country Trail volunteers are all too aware that there are no rangers out there checking backpacks for the list of 10 hiking essentials and a brain, or arresting people who litter.

There are actually a couple of examples of potential volunteer solutions. In the Adirondack High Peaks are 85 acres of fragile alpine



**Happy hiker, lovely woods, and a dog under control. All is well with the world.**

Photo: Modern Photographics

## 7 PRINCIPLES OF LEAVE NO TRACE

1. Plan Ahead & Prepare
2. Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

ecosystem. The Summit Steward program was begun in 1989 with a collaboration of the Adirondack Mountain Club, the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and the N.Y. Department of Environmental Conservation. These volunteer stewards seek to interact with the public one-on-one in the highly traveled areas above the timberline. Their goals are to educate people about the special alpine ecosystem and to encourage people to walk on bare rock only, maintain trails, and do research.

Within our own history, for a few years, the Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (known as the Tittabawassee Chapter at that time) created what was named the Ridge Runner program. Groups of volunteers would spend time on the Trail (mostly the popular Jordan Valley Pathway in Michigan) interacting with hikers. Their approach was low-key and non-threatening. Members recall

asking hikers if they were having a good time. Then they would provide a map if one was needed. Primary goals were to help people understand that dispersed camping in the Jordan Valley was not allowed and to ask that dogs be kept on leash.

Perhaps part of our responsibility as lovers of the NCT and other wild places is to draw novices into the choir so that the music of the forests and lakes and so many places special to us can continue to be heard.

This does not translate into being confrontational and authoritative when we encounter hikers who are acting in ways that damage the environment or may be threatening, such as having an off-leash dog.

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics suggests an approach based on the “authority of the resource.” This is a proven method used even by those who have “authority of position,” such as rangers.

Rather than calling upon our status as Trail volunteers, or as one who knows the rules for a particular piece of property, we can learn to direct the offender to the authority of the resource.

For example, if we yell at a couple for letting their dog run loose, this is likely to bring on responses such as, “He has to be tied up all the time at home. Why can’t he have some freedom in the woods?” or the leashing of the dog for five minutes, or perhaps even

**Perhaps part of our responsibility as lovers of the NCT and other wild places is to draw novices into the choir so that the music of the forests and lakes and so many places special to us can continue to be heard.**

a stonewall response with the “none of your business” attitude. However, if, perhaps, you are aware that it’s nesting season for trumpeter swans, you can suggest that roaming dogs put extra stress on the swans and may result in the loss of viable nests and native wildlife. Perhaps there is a large porcupine population and you could propose that it would be safer for the dog to be on leash.

It is also suggested that such conversations take place “shoulder to shoulder,” rather than face to face. Walking with someone and talking is much less confrontational than standing in front of them where the perception is that you are barring their passage.

The long range goal is heightening a novice’s respect for nature rather than simply threatening the person with a fine or a report to law enforcement. An excellent resource is found on the Leave No Trace website: [Int.org/research-resources/authority-of-the-resource](http://Int.org/research-resources/authority-of-the-resource).

Another example is the ongoing struggle to help backpackers understand why they cannot camp anywhere they would like along the North Country Trail. Explaining the checkerboard of land ownership and management, and how illegal camping might result in loss of passage for the Trail will usually result in a better response than just saying, “You can’t do that here.”

I’m sure most *North Star* readers will resonate with Olson when he says in *The Singing Wilderness*, “I have heard it [the music] on misty migration nights when the dark has been alive with the high calling of birds, and in rapids when the air has been full of their rushing thunder. I have caught it at dawn when the mists were moving out of the bays, and on cold winter nights...”

This year, with so many new potential music lovers taking to the Trail, let’s learn to invite them to the choir rather than threaten them for singing off key. ✨





## The Many Lives of the Birch Grove School House

By Charles Chandler



The interior of the school house turned studio

Who doesn't love a picturesque one-room school house? One that you know contains so many memories and local history? Like that white, 100-year-old Birch Grove School House sitting at the corner of North Felch Avenue and West 5 Mile Road in White Cloud, Michigan. The new owners, Margie Moran and her family, are some for sure.

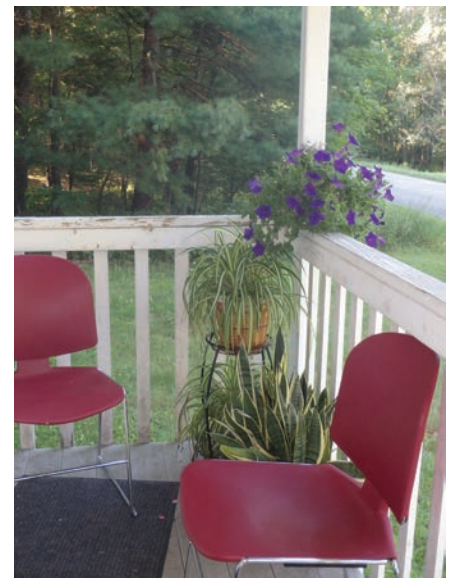
The early history of the School House when it housed students of the local farming and logging families is better told by their descendents. The history chapter that most of us hikers are familiar with begins when the beloved Genny and Art Wunch and other hikers rescued the derelict building and had it moved to its current location, where the repurposing and renovations began. The Birch Grove School House would soon become the Headquarters for the North Country Trail Association (NCTA). It is located about a mile and a half from the actual Trail. Don't know if Ginny Wunsch and crew planned it or not but the School House is located at the halfway point of that 4600-mile trail. As the NCTA organization grew, they needed more space and access to utilities and technology. They relocated to downtown Lowell and the local Western Michigan Chapter of the NCTA assumed operations and maintenance of the School House.

The School House "did well by the Chapter." This author and wife Dianne were for a time the School House caretakers. I helped maintain the building and the grounds. Dianne managed the public relations and reservations side of the operations. It was kind of like managing an Air B&B property. We took the operations seriously because the place meant so much to so many people. However, it was a case study of diminishing returns.

It was still in great shape but as we all know things change. The use and subsequent rental revenues declined while operating expenses increased, and the Chapter membership aged and participation declined. A heartfelt business decision had to be made. Many locals and members of the Chapter had concerns about what would become of our School House. Andrea Ketchmark, NCTA Executive Director, issued the following letter to the membership:

"For close to 40 years, the Birch Grove School house has served the North Country Trail community in many ways, first as the Association's headquarters, and more recently as a meeting spot for the Western Michigan Chapter and rental property for trail crews and visitors. It's been managed by the Western Michigan Chapter for more than 20 years and although it's been a source of pride for the Chapter and NCTA, it's also introduced challenges and has diverted both time and funds from NCTA's mission of building, maintaining, protecting and promoting the NCT."

On September 18, 2019, the Western Michigan Chapter of the NCTA decided by unanimous vote that they could no longer manage the







**Murdoc the flying pig, metal sculpture**

rental, maintenance, and operations of the School House, effective January 1, 2020. Subsequently, on December 7, 2019, the NCTA's Board of Directors agreed and approved a motion to sell the property in 2020.

The property did not stay on the market long. Artist Margie Moran from the Higgins Lake area had some special high school friends down here that lived on the Muskegon River and owned business in Newaygo. They had been asking her to move here so they could enjoy their retirement time together in the woods and water of Newaygo County. She thought that was a good idea and put her Higgins Lake property up for sale and started scanning realtor.com for a suitable property in this area. Margie's property sold in Higgins Lake and she bought the Birch Grove School House before the ink was dry on either listing. The big attractions to the Birch Grove School House were location and function. It was near her friends and had high ceilings, solid maple flooring, and abundant natural light from the many windows making it a perfect artist studio. As a plus, it came with tons of history, had lots of character, and Tom Birdsall, a great neighbor who loved and had cared for the old building as well.

Margie Moran is somewhat of a character herself. Soft-spoken with an easy laugh, and interesting enough, some folks have mentioned that she favors the unforgettable Genny Wunsch.

She graciously gave this

correspondent a tour while discussing her plans for the property and revealing a bit of her personal story. In her 20s Margie was a hog farmer and later took a job as a long-haul trucker to put her kids through college. She attended Kendall College as an art major and is a working artist. Stained glass and ceramics are her mediums. She mentioned her kiln should be installed within a week. She and her son, a third-generation stained glass artist, both worked in a studio in Philadelphia doing restoration work for local churches. When asked if she was related to one of our great western painters Thomas Moran, she said no, but with a laugh revealed that when her extended family gets together, her great uncles would invariably bring up one of their relatives, the infamous Chicago gangster Bugs Moran.

Her plans for the School House are to develop a working studio and provide a long-term refuge for her children. She plans to keep the building as original as possible and the upgrades in electrical, mechanical, and plumbing will be "period-appropriate" and environmentally friendly. One daughter is a hiker, another a hospice nurse, and a son lives in Washington. It appears that the children have already taken to the place.

About that family, Margie has three other kids, three adorable rescue dogs who appear to have the run of the place. They were instructed to stay in their enclosed backyard while the

company was about. That worked for most of 15 minutes and soon they were underfoot and pretending to mind Margie.

After the tour, I sat in my truck for a few minutes and looked at the School House. On reflection, it kind of looked like the same place but felt different. There were petunias in pots and chairs for sitting on the front porch. Funny dog faces in the window. Murdoc the small metal flying pig sculpture in the flower bed and new heating and air-conditioning system on the other side of the building. The inside still had some of the old cabinets but the artist touch was evident and the studio was evolving. I felt that a page had turned and the North Country Trail Association had left the building.

The Little White One Room School House has once again caught a lucky break and could be around for another 100 years. Now it has a caring committed artist and her family to watch over it. Margie has owned the School House for a month now and has had several visitors drop by with their stories. She does feel the responsibility of owning this property but also feels that she now has a studio where she can enjoy the serenity she needs to focus on her art.

Bet Ginny Wunsch and crew are smiling. Thanks, Margie. We can't wait to hear if you give the place a new name. ✨



**Maggie's dogs**





**A reproduction longhouse at Ganondagan State Historic Park, southeast of Rochester, N.Y. This is the peaked roof style, used when the bark could not be made into a long dome.**

Photo: Irene Szabo

## A Winter Hike in 1634!

By Adam Ross

Sidebars by Irene Szabo, Editor

As the weather cools and we curtail our typical outdoor adventuring, many of us curl up and read books like *The Island at the Center of the World* by Russel Shorto, about the history of the New Netherland Colony<sup>1</sup>. Before the American northwoods were logged and developed, they were the supplier of furs to a hungry Europe, and the frontier between dozens of European and North American nations seeking to capitalize on fur trade. Though canoes were famously used for transporting furs, some of the earliest settlers relied on what we now call hiking and backpacking into neighboring territory to establish relations. These settlers traversed rugged territory in regions that are now familiar to us, like Central New York. Records from the New Netherland Colony reveal accounts of minimalist trekking that let us harken back to a time when adventure was a part of business, and nature was almost undisturbed. One such account was the story of young Harmen Meyndersz Van

Den Bogaert, a Barber Surgeon<sup>2</sup>.

In its first decades, the New Netherland settlement operated more as a business outpost than as an isolated community like Massachusetts. Permanent residents were few, and their purpose as settlers was to conduct business, mostly beaver pelts, with the native people on behalf of the Dutch West India Company. Throughout the 1620s, trade had been going strong, and the Maquasen (Mohawks) defeated the Mohicans and secured the Haudenosaunee Confederacy {the Maquase, Sinnekins (Oneida), Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations} as New Netherland's closest trading partners. But in 1634, the settlers noticed a steep and unanticipated drop in supply.

Marten Gerritsen, Commissary of Fort Orange, decided to send a representative into Maquase and Sinnekin territory to find out why trade had slowed down. On December 11, 1634, and with 30 inches of snow on the ground, Harmen Meynders Van Den Bogaert set out with Jeronimus La Croex, Willem Tommassen, and five Maquase guides to visit the Maquase and Sinnekin leaders. The road to the beginning of the Maquase Country



**Interior of reproduction Ganondagan longhouse. No, there were no Plexiglas weather protectors in 1634 now covering the display sections in back.**

Photo: Irene Szabo

was one day's hike away from Fort Orange in the snow. To get there, they walked the path through the Pine Barrens that had been well trodden by Maquasen commuting periodically to Fort Orange with beaver skins to be traded for Sewant, the beaded currency that was customarily used by the

### Footwear Along the Mohawk in Winter

The trekkers definitely used snowshoes, but probably didn't think to mention it in Bogaert's account, since everybody automatically used them! While they did come in different sizes to carry different users' weights, their frames were bent wood with gut mesh "soles." To fight snow's tendency to melt on their lower legs, often moccasins and leggings were treated with pine tar or animal fat grease to aim for waterproof qualities. How these substances must have contributed to the indoor aroma overnight!



Haudenosaunee. Today, hikers in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve may visit the path they took and walk through the snowy Pitch Pines (Albanypinebush.org).

At the end of the day, they reached a bark hut left by hunters where they spent the night. The next morning, they woke before dawn to find that dogs had eaten all of their meat and cheese, and they would need to ration their food until they could find a resupply. Bogaert noted that the stretch of what we now know as the Mohawk River nearby had many islands indicating that he was near what became Schenectady, which had almost a score of islands prior to the construction of the Erie Canal. They set out promptly and were guided across the river by their guides in canoes made of elm bark, entering Maquase territory. As they stepped onto the wet sand and snow, their presence startled a group of hunters. The hunters ran away and hid from them in the bushes, leaving bags of food in the snow for Bogaert and the group to eat. After covering an impressive distance, they spent the night at a hunter's cabin near present day Fonda. Across the river was the first walled Maquase village they would reach, Onekahoncka.

In the morning, the ice was thick and they were able to get to the village by walking across the river. The village was on top of a hill and had 36 longhouses with interior doors and iron from the Dutch. They were given venison, beans, and boiled pumpkins for dinner and they spent the night in a longhouse. We also get a glimpse into their Spartan methods of trail first aid as Bogaert writes, "In the evening I made some cuts on Willem Tomassen's leg, which had swollen from walking, and then smeared it with bear's grease" (Gehring, 5). The path continuing from Onekahoncka was covered thick with snow, so Bogaert spent the next two days hunting turkeys to trade and eat while the snow melted. They left Onekahoncka with a hunter from another village whom they had met. Led by the hunter, they eventually came to his home village Canagera. It was there that they were delighted to meet a tamed bear that the town had been keeping in a longhouse. Feeling the need to show something cool to the hunter, they took out sulfur covered paper, and showed the hunter how it burnt blue. Clearly a man with impeccable tastes, the hunter took out sulfur paper that he had bought from Dutch traders and the group had a jolly time watching the blue flames. The next day they left with a guide who could lead them to Oneida territory.

They left in the morning of December 20 in heavy rain. They waded through a treacherously flooded and icy stream, soaking their stockings, boots, and clothing to freeze when they got out. They came to the village which Bogaert called Schandisse which is now believed to have been located on a 500-foot hill overlooking the Mohawk River, between the present day villages of Fort Plain and Canajoharie<sup>3</sup>.

## The Longhouses of New York's Natives

All across upstate New York, the longhouse was the basic home for several families at one time, and villages consisted of clusters of houses. People slept on the lower tier of shelves, with small central fires used for heat and cooking. Smoke rose through holes in the roof. Typically, bark was the roofing and siding material, a lot of it elm because it came off in handy big pieces. However, the museum longhouse pictured here has modern fake elm bark, since there are so few living elms left!

The time of year dictated whether the long house had a domed roof or a peaked style, because the bark could be soaked then molded to a rounded roofline earlier in the year, but had to lie flat against stick rafters if the house were being built later in the season. In the latter case, the bark would be more brittle and liable to break if it were forced onto a rounded roofline.



Two row wampum belt



A canoe would not be stored inside. The square bundle at upper left is trade goods from Europeans. Whole families slept on the lower levels among fur

Photo: Irene Szabo





## HIKES



**A log ladder to the upper level.**

Photo: Irene Szabo

In 1985, the family that owned the property allowed an archaeological dig on their property in that location. The location matched Bogaert's placement of the village on a big hill south of the Mohawk River between the Canajoharie Creek and the Otsquago Creek, and the family had known their farm contained the ruins of an old Mohawk village. The dig catalogued 183 artifacts and found cemeteries to the east and west. The presence of iron tools and gun parts as well as distinctive wampum beads told them that this site was indeed active around the time Bogaert's company got there.

High in the village that evening in 1634, they sat around the fire to thaw and dry their frozen clothes. Bogaert was given a lion skin to sleep in, and then complained about lice on his body in the morning. The group left and travelled through the oak and walnut filled woods but stopped at a small village called Osquage. They stayed the night to avoid crossing Otsquago Creek, which was over their heads because of the rain. The chief of the village was a proud member of the Oquoho, the matrilineal Wolf Clan and



Photo: Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

had just come back from a long trip. He told them that he had seen an English man speaking with the chiefs of a more southern tribe hoping to establish trade. The next morning they crossed the stream and Bogaert noted all of the thick green Juniper trees which reminded him

of the Savin trees of Europe. They walked another half mile up a big hill before coming to the village of Cawaoge where they met another tamed bear. Eager to cover more ground, they declined an offer to stay overnight and walked another mile through a sparsely wooded region before settling in at the last Maquase village they would see, Tenotoge. It was the largest of the Maquase villages at the time, and it had 55 longhouses, some of which were used as storehouses for beans and corn. In Tenotoge, they watched their hosts practice fighting with assorted clubs, axes and sticks while wearing armor made of reeds woven tightly together. They ate a mouthwatering selection of bread baked with sunflower seeds, blueberries, and nuts and then stayed in the village for a few days to wait out heavy snow. Bogaert watched a healing ritual in which Sunachkoes, or healers, lodged sticks into their throats and vomited on the ailing person. His account of it has been widely cited in anthropological literature.

After waiting out the snowstorm at Tenotoge, they headed west from the village straying away from the Mohawk River's course and leaving Maquase territory. Their destination was Sinneken territory, a small cluster of villages located near what is now southern Madison County, New York, now home to the NCTA's Central New York Chapter. They climbed higher in the hills, exposing themselves to more wind and extreme temperatures as they made their way through large swaths of oak, birch, beech and hornbeam. They spent their nights in bark huts and saw no other marks of civilization, just trees, snow and the occasional set of elk tracks. Without reference to the Mohawk River or any villages, it is difficult to know where the group was, but Bogaert notes crossing a south-flowing stream, which indicates that they had entered the Susquehanna River watershed.

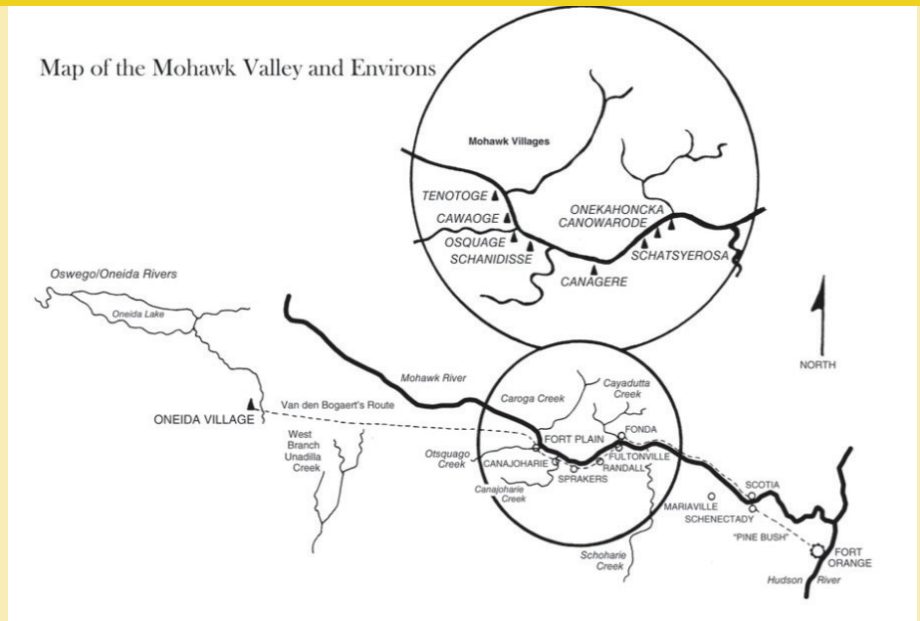
They ate the last of their food after their guides told them that they were camped not far from the first Oneida village. One guide ran ahead that evening to go to the village and alert the Sinnekens of the party's arrival, and the next morning a woman met them outside of the village with baked pumpkin. They walked through land that was flat and filled with Birch woodlots, and "land that had been cleared for sowing," foreshadowing the next three centuries. They walked past the villages and saw decorated graves before coming to the large, formidable Sinneken village. Their surroundings were surreal; like hikers on the North Country Trail in the current Stone Quarry Hill Art Park outside Canastota, they could see way out across the plateau to Oneida Lake and the Tug Hill Escarpment west of the Adirondacks, some 50 miles away to the north. With a large group of Sinnekens welcoming them, they

ceremonially entered the village, where they would negotiate with the Sinneken leaders and fulfill the purpose of their freezing hundred-mile journey.

Although Bogaert was as thorough in his account as any writer would be today, there are details left out that make it more difficult for a modern reader to relate. Bogaert did not address the logistics of carrying the food and gifts they brought, but 400 years later this question strikes our curiosity. Clearly, they relied heavily on the hospitality of the communities they passed through, sleeping many nights in villages and eating with the inhabitants. On the nights between villages, we can see that they slept in bark huts left by hunters in a culture with a vastly different concept of real estate from our own. But how did they trek through the freezing cold without our sturdy hiking boots and ski jackets? From a French explorer's description of a Maquase village, we find that the group was likely outfitted with Maquase-made snow shoes, and dragging their food on an Arocha, a sled made of bark<sup>4</sup>. They were likely kept warm by coats made of the same fur they traded for, and underclothes were either made by Europeans out of cloth or Native Americans out of

## Cold and Our Bodies

When we wonder how our adventurers managed to endure the rest of the day after they forded creeks in the winter so had soaked legs, let us consider that humans used to be more adaptable to cold than we are now. Consider that native men would often move about outside in nothing more than a loin cloth and leggings, their top halves naked! It's hard to imagine that humans have changed that much in the last four hundred years, but obviously we used to deal with winter much more easily.



**Today, Albany is at the right, where the Mohawk meets the north-south Hudson River. NCTA Central New York Chapter territory is mostly just west of the featured circle area, and Syracuse is up by Oneida Lake.**

deerskin. And any backpacker with a hand trowel knows our methods of waste disposal aren't super high-tech.

But there is an integral aspect of Bogaert's journey which continues to help backpackers in the modern world. In their trek, the kindness of the communities they passed through sustained them in the form of plentiful food and fire and shelter to warm them. It's easy to brush off these specific acts as antiquated traditions which died away with the shift from Haudenosaunee to European American culture in the region. But to say that modern Americans don't make sure travelers have a welcoming place to spend the night in their communities would be to ignore the hours of work volunteers put in to keep their campsites clean and safe. And when the temperatures soar and streams dry up, hikers rejoice at the site of a cooler of Gatorade at a road crossing. It doesn't matter if you're a fur trader or an engineer, if you're from Amsterdam or Michigan, Trail Magic has persisted into the 21st century. Learning the old stories of travelers of the American Northwoods lets us appreciate the forest and the trails from a different perspective. Reading John Krakauer or Cheryl Strayed lets us feel like we are on the trail in an amazing place; reading Bogaert's journey lets us feel like we are on the trail in a familiar place but a different time. ✨

<sup>1</sup> Shorto, Russell. *The Island at the Center of the World*. Vintage Books, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Bogaert, Harmen Meyndertsz van den. *A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634-1635: the Journal of Harmen Meyndertsz Van Den Bogaert*. Translated by Charles T. Gehring, Syracuse University Press, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "Chapter 7." *Mohawk Valley Archaeology*, by Dean R. Snow, Matson Museum of Anthropology, the Pennsylvania State University, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> 1968. *Sagard's Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons (1632)*. Edited by G.M. Wrong. Greenwood Press, New York

<sup>i</sup> Careful consideration of naming must be made when referencing Indigenous Nations. Most Indigenous names in America today have been anglicized, which undermines their Sovereignty. To combat this, writers are encouraged to refer to indigenous cultures using the names they use to refer to themselves, which is Kanien'kehá:ka in the case of the Mohawks. For consistency, I use the Dutch names "Maquase" and "Sinneken" when referring to the Mohawk and Oneida Nations respectively, because this is how Bogaert refers to them in his narrative. But when referencing the Mohawk River and Oneida Lake, I use the American names so the reader can find them easily on maps.





**NCT Sunrise and Railroad Bridge over the Sheyenne River**

Photo: Joe Baldino

## The Good People of the North Country Trail

By Joe Baldino

The Executive Director of the Finger Lakes Trail Conference realized, after he read my article about going end-to-end on the FLT, that I was a guy searching for my next trail to hike, so he introduced me to Ruth and Dan Dorrough. I'm from Rochester, N.Y., and they don't live far away, so they gave me a wonderful evening of pictures and advice after their multi-year end-to-end of the North Country Trail. Ruth gave me her North Dakota atlas that had the route mapped out for me. She warned me that the Trail was not marked well at the western end in North Dakota and that I needed to be careful. She also connected me with Tom Dahle and Karen Oby.

Tom and Karen live in Bismarck, the closest city with an airport to the western terminus of the NCT. I assumed I would hike around 300 miles to the Minnesota border between the 1st and 15th of July 2018, which would put me in the vicinity of the Fargo airport. Tom reached out to people east of him to help me.

I have never been accused of over-planning for my hiking endeavors. I subscribe to the "ready, shoot, aim" motto when it comes to preparation for my hikes. I can still hear my good friend Jacqui, the end-to-end coordinator for the Finger Lakes Trail, warning me to check the updated trail conditions website before I start, but I did not feel this was necessary. All I needed was my keen wits and ability to fly by the seat of my pants.

Even though I decided against a food-drop, my son Tyler bought me three maps from the NCTA, despite my protest that I had Ruth's atlas. Late in the evening of June 30th, I began to pack my few personal items and the humongous amount of food for two weeks into my pack, and by the wee hours of July 1st I finished. The pack was incredibly heavy. The next day I sailed through security and off to my plane, giddy as one could be. I was about to begin the biggest adventure of my life.



**The NCT in North Dakota, really challenging.**

Photo: Joe Baldino

The pilot's announcement that we were making our final descent into the Bismarck airport woke me. I looked out of the window to get my first look at North Dakota. It was not what I imagined. From years of watching spaghetti westerns I thought North Dakota was flat, dry and barren grasslands. What I saw was a flat, lush and sparsely wooded land. I also saw hundreds of small round ponds I later learned were called "prairie pot holes."





**The start of North Dakota with Tom Dahle**

Photo: Joe Baldino

I made my way to the baggage area where I met Tom and Karen. It looked like a yard sale when my pack came sliding down the baggage chute with items falling out of it. On top of that, it was soaking wet. My “expert” over-packing into the wee hours of the morning did not survive my first flight to Minneapolis, where it was raining heavily, and then my connecting flight to Bismarck. The ticket agent in Rochester was correct when he questioned the viability of my over-stuffed pack. My head lamp, tracking device, foot powder, bug spray, and some of the food did not make it. I collected up the items I could salvage and introduced myself. I looked anything but an experienced hiker who had backpacked 1000 miles. After a brief tour of Bismarck, we headed to Lake Sakakawea State Park and the western terminus of the North Country Trail.

I put on my extremely heavy pack and we took a few pictures next to the Western Terminus of the North Country Trail sign. Tom walked the first two miles with me and filled me in on the history of the Garrison Dam that we were approaching. There recently was heavy flooding in Bismarck miles south of the dam. The spillways overflowed causing substantial damage, but it would have been much worse without the dam. I asked him about getting water and he told me not to drink the water in the prairie potholes due to unhealthy runoff. He said that would be a challenge and I quickly found out how true that was. Tom also told me that the weather in North Dakota can be very aggressive and that thunderstorms with high winds and damaging hail come quickly. They had an especially heavy one a few nights before and it caused substantial damage.

Nevertheless, my first few miles of hiking in North Dakota were pleasant through some grasslands. While I was starting what was going to be a nearly 5000-mile hike I thought about the other end-to-end hikers who walked this last stretch in the opposite direction to the completion of their hike. I could only imagine what was going through their minds as they came to the end of their substantial hike. If I am not

mistaken, there are only 16 people who have done an end-to-end hike of the North Country Trail as of this writing (2018). We made it to a parking area near the dam where we met up with Karen. She gave me some bug spray and a flash light.

My goal for the first day was to walk roughly 18.5 miles to the home of Heith and Jaime Pochant, join them for dinner and then camp in their yard. I crossed the very impressive dam and began walking next to the spillway overflow river. As I was about to take the left turn to cross this river I heard my first crackle of thunder. Within minutes the wind picked up and I knew some heavy rain was coming. Fortunately, I was near a bathroom and I was able to duck into it and avoid the heavy rain and hail that cascaded down very loudly on the building. It was over quickly and I headed out to cross the spillway river. I walked up to a huge sign that read BRIDGE OUT. That flooding caused by the water over the spillway washed out the trail bridge. At that moment I heard my friend Jacqui Wensich’s voice telling me to make sure that I checked the trail conditions in advance. Oops. After a five-mile detour around the river I resumed my hike to Heith and Jaime’s house.

It was uneventful at first until I heard another rumble of thunder. I turned around to see this very black set of clouds directly behind me with thunderbolts coming out of it and hitting the ground. I was completely exposed without any cover. The roads in North Dakota form one-mile squares around people’s property and I knew that about two miles up the road I was taking a right. The thunderstorm was somewhat narrow so I made the decision to take the next right and move as far away from the center as I could. I began to walk very quickly and I made it to the first left turn. The thunderstorm was fast approaching and the wind was picking up. I began to run on two bad knees carrying a pack the weight of a small piano. I turned at the second left and saw a shed nearby. It was unlocked and I made it inside just as the skies opened up and blasted the shed with a deafening roar of rain and hail. I remained in the shed panting and sweating with my two arthritic knees screaming in pain.

When the rain stopped I left the shed and almost immediately a truck pulled up. My first thought was that this is the homeowner and he is not happy that I went into his shed. I began to frantically think of an explanation for what I presumed was an angry landowner who was going to question why I was in his shed. I cautiously approached the vehicle. The window comes down and a smiling man says, “Are you Joe?” In a state of shock, I answer yes and he responds, “I am Heith Pochant and I came to check on you. We just had a bad storm pass through here.” How did he find me in the middle of nowhere? That was my first realization, and there were more incidents to follow, that North Dakota is one of the largest and most spread out small town areas in America. People are aware of what is going on for many miles around. It was well after 7:00 and still very light out. Nevertheless,



## HIKES

with the long early detour and weather excitement, I was not going to make it to Heith and Jaime's house before dark. We agreed to meet at a designated spot and Heith picked me up and drove me to their house.

Heith and Jaime are the kind of people that you immediately feel like you have known your entire life. Jaime is a breast cancer survivor and Heith's family has farmed this land for generations. We ate venison sausage and various salads in their air conditioned shed behind the house. The salads were left over from the reunion Heith hosted for his high school graduating class of seven students. I went to bed around 10:00 and the sun still had not gone down completely. The loss of my headlamp was not that serious. That night two thunderstorms blew through that tested the viability of my tent. They brought very high winds and heavy rain. The tent and I survived and the next day turned out to be a cooler day with slightly lower humidity. Heith brought me to the exact spot where I had left off and I began day two in North Dakota.

I proceeded to hike to the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge and made it there by mid-afternoon. I was out of water and found an area to get some. Did you ever have the feeling that someone is watching you? I had that feeling as I leaned down to get some water into my filter bag. I looked to my left and no more than 10 feet from me was this very large Angus bull with a head the size of a large granite tombstone! He was snorting and stamping a front hoof and not looking happy at all. I began to apologize to him profusely and got out of there. It was not my last interaction with a bull in North Dakota, but it was certainly my closest.

I started another road walk and I made it to the road that was going to take me to the McClusky Canal. At the corner was a yellow fiberglass Carsonite stake with a North Country Trail symbol on it. I took the left and along the way I had water and a hard cider at Rick Char's house. I took a right at the canal and up on the hill next to the canal I saw another yellow Carsonite stake with a North Country Trail symbol on it. I did not realize at the time that I was supposed to walk up there and not on the canal path. By now it was approaching 7:00 and I was exhausted. I did not know where I was going camp for the night so I called Heith and he was gracious enough to pick me up so I could camp again in his yard. It was an uneventful night, but before I went to bed Heith informed me that it was going to be over 100 degrees the next day.

Day three brought me my first taste of what July in North Dakota can bring. It started hot and became much hotter during the day. I was sweating profusely and I quickly ran out of water. I left the canal trail to go to a house nearby and the homeowner Kathy gave me water and let me sit on her shaded porch to have my lunch and cool off. My very heavy pack was made even heavier due to the generosity of Heith who gave me some venison meat sticks. I quickly drank that water and



**Ben in North Dakota**

Photo: Joe Baldino

I was becoming desperate for more. It was close to 6:30 in the early evening and the sun was brutally hot and beating down on me. My arms were fried due to a lack of sunscreen. I figured, incorrectly, that my arms would be fine in the northern climate. I came to one of the few spots where a road crossed the canal and I sat down

on the bridge railing for a break. I looked up to see this cloud of dust rapidly approaching: within seconds a pick-up truck arrived and out stepped Ben wearing a pistol on each hip and a big smile on his face. He asked me if I needed anything and I immediately said water. He told me to hop in and he took me to a house to get some. Along the way he told me that he was coming back from Turtle Lake where he took the family dog to the vet for some medical care. A large branch fell on the dog when he was helping his father clean up the damage from the heavy storm a few nights back. We made it to a house where no one was home and out of desperation I filled my water bottles using the hose in the front yard. Ben drove me back to the canal and gave me an adult beverage. He told me not to tell his mother because he was too young to have it. I thought to myself, how could I possibly meet his mother in what looked like the middle of nowhere? I set off down trail feeling a little bit better, but I began to notice a feeling in my left foot like I had a pebble in my shoe.

I made it to a spot where a road crossed the canal and formed a canal lock. On the other side of the road there was not a canal, but a small gully. It looked like the sides had caved in due to a mud slide. I also noticed a yellow Carsonite stake on the hill on the side of gully. I realized that I needed to follow them moving forward and where the Trail is marked I was not supposed to walk on the canal path. On the hill on the left I saw a very nice house. It was still very light out, but it was after 8:30. My left foot was really starting to hurt and I was exhausted. I decided to ask the homeowner if I could camp in their yard. I walked up to the house and I saw a dog sleeping on the front porch. He did not get up to bark so I yelled out a hello. I introduced myself to Todd, his wife Mary



and one of their sons named Donnie.

Todd told me that it would be their great pleasure for me to camp in their backyard. They did not get much company out here. Todd told me that their other son was not home yet. He was picking up something for their injured dog. I said that must be Ben who dropped a large branch on your dog, who is now sleeping on the front porch. Todd did not even bat an eye that I knew this. He said that Mary and he saw me walking when they were out running errands and he figured we ran into Ben. They asked where I spent the previous night and I told them Heith's house. They did not know Heith who lived about 35 miles away, but they did know Rick Char who lived 20 miles away. It was another example of the small town feel of this wide open and beautiful place called North Dakota. I took a shower and tended to a very large and painful blister on my left foot. I was really paying the price for carrying a pack that was much too heavy and not replacing my foot powder. I had a great meal during which I did not let it slip to Ben's mother that he gave me an adult beverage. I went to bed when it was still light and during the night there was another violent thunderstorm.

I woke on the 4th of July to much cooler temperatures. I thanked Todd and Mary many times over and I wished their dog a speedy recovery. We exchanged phone numbers and email addresses, I took a few Advil to dull the pain in my foot and set off on day four of my journey. I walked predominately east in North Dakota and the weather as in most places comes predominately from the west. If I felt the wind blow into my left ear it was a cool wind coming out of the northwest and I came to call it nature's air conditioning. If it blew into my right ear it was from the southwest and I called it nature's heat pump. It meant a hot day ahead and a good chance of a thunderstorm. This day was definitely the latter. I stopped once along the way to get some water out of a drain pipe because I assumed it was rain water. The trail markings came and went and I eventually came to the Chain of Lakes Recreation Area. There was water everywhere in clean lakes. I interacted with many more very nice and helpful people. I got a liter of water, bacon and a biscuit from Stacey Olaner and friends and family at West Park Lake. As I was walking I ran into large trailers turned over and destroyed by the ferocity of the massive thunderstorm or tornadic event that occurred before I arrived. I gained a great deal of respect for the weather in the north central plains. I found a nice campsite near one of the lakes and it was at that point that I received the phone call. Mary was crying on the phone because their dog had died. I felt terrible for them and went to bed with a heavy heart.

My goal for day five was to make it to Route 200 outside of McClusky where I was going to meet up with Sybil Peterson and spend the night in her yard. Sybil Peterson was connected to me through Tom Dahle and her grandson Luke Peterson. Tom was Luke's Scoutmaster and like Tom and me, an Eagle

Scout. The weather was pleasant, but it was getting warmer. Getting water became a serious problem and my left foot was hurting real bad. Twice I took long side trips trying to get water. This dehydrated me more and ramped up the excruciating pain in my foot. A UPS driver I flagged down gave me his water bottle and a farmer working his pasture gave me the remaining

half of a liter of water out of his own water bottle. I was heading north at this time and I was still six miles south of where the Trail crosses Route 200 outside of McClusky. It was all I could do to make it to Route 200 and meet up with Sybil. I showered, ate a great meal prepared by Sybil and went to bed not knowing what the next day would bring.

I woke up on July 6th to the realization that my hiking trip was over. I ended it. I could barely walk on my left foot let alone carry a pack. Sybil began nursing me back to health and treated me like one of her own children. She took me to see the sights around her house and the clinic to get medicine. She cooked for me and did many other acts of great kindness. I had only been in North Dakota for six days and the bounty of goodness kept growing. I switched my return flight from Fargo to Bismarck and Sybil, of course, drove me to the airport on July 7th. When the plane took off I felt sad that my trip ended early, but excited about what I had started. I did around 85 miles. I decided to return in October around the Columbus Day holiday. It will be cooler, my pack will be lighter and my foot will be healed. I could not wait to return to North Dakota. ✨

*Joe has been back to the Trail several times since July 2018. On October 16th, 2020, I spoke to him by phone, while he was at the northernmost point of the Superior Hiking Trail in Minnesota. We will get to read some of his other adventures.*  
— Editor



**Joe with Sybil Peterson**

Photo: Joe Baldino



## Comparison of 2019 and 2020 Entries in the 45th Parallel Logbook

By Bob Haack

The Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (JV45) maintains 78 miles of the NCT in northern Lower Michigan and co-hosted the 2019 NCTA Celebration. Along the JV45 section are eight register boxes, including one where the NCT crosses the 45th Parallel. A sign at this location reads “4600 miles: Only one 45°N crossing.” The register boxes contain maps and a logbook where hikers often sign their names, number of people in their party, and hometowns, as well as any comments they’d like to make. My wife and I maintain the section of Trail where 45th Parallel register box is located. We recently made a summary of the logbook entries made in 2019 and 2020 (through September) for our Chapter and we’d like to share some updated observations here. I’ll make a few comparisons between 2019 and 2020 and in so doing assume that a similar proportion of hikers signed the logbook each year, and of those who did, a similar proportion listed their hometowns. Keep in mind, of course, that we hosted the NCTA Celebration in 2019 and we’ve all been affected by coronavirus in 2020.

The total number of distinct hikers who signed the logbook was 679 for all of 2019, compared with 438 in 2020 through September. To make a fairer comparison, consider that 105 hikers who signed in 2019 were attending the NCTA Celebration, and there were another 113 entries during October to December 2019. So, subtracting these two values from 679 gives 461 entries for January to September 2019, which is very similar to the 438 entries in 2020.

However, there were fewer U.S. states and Michigan hometowns listed by hikers in 2020 compared with 2019, which likely reflected the impact of coronavirus on travel. For example, besides Michigan, hikers from six additional states signed the logbook in 2020, compared with 14 states in 2019. Not counting those who attended the 2019 Celebration, there were hikers from six more states in 2019 compared with 2020, including California, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. With respect to Michigan hometowns, hikers listed 49 hometowns in 2020 compared with 85 in 2019 (see maps). No towns from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (UP) were listed in 2020, compared with nine UP towns in 2019 (five by Celebration attendees).

Again, to make a fairer comparison between years, consider that there were 25 unique Michigan towns listed in 2019 by Celebration attendees, and another four unique hometowns listed during October to December 2019. Subtracting these



**Michigan hometowns listed by hikers in 2019 (N = 85) and 2020 (through September; N = 49) in the logbook at the 45th Parallel in northern Lower Michigan (designated by the black stars in each map). The hometowns represented by red bubbles are for hikers who signed the logbook during March 24 to June 1 during each year. These dates represent the period when Michigan imposed a stay-at-home order in 2020 to limit spread of coronavirus. Maps made in Google Maps.**

values ( $25 + 4 = 29$ ) from 85, we’re left with 56 Michigan hometowns listed during January to September 2019 by non-Celebration hikers, which is only a little higher than the 49 towns listed in 2020.

As a result of coronavirus, Michigan imposed a stay-at-home order from March 24 to June 1, 2020. During this period only 12 hometowns were listed by hikers in 2020, and most were relatively close to the Jordan Valley area (note the red bubbles in the 2020 map). Using this same approach for 2019, and considering only non-Celebration hikers, 24 hometowns were listed by hikers in 2019 during March 24 to June 1, and they were much more widespread throughout Lower Michigan (see red bubbles in the 2019 map). But once the stay-at-home orders were lifted in June 2020, people began to travel much more within Michigan and beyond, and often found serenity and security on the NCT.

### Here are some quotes from 2020 entries.

- **April 11** Emily: Awesome day hiking. Weather and trail fantastic. So glad to live in northern Michigan.
- **April 15:** Austin: Snowy wonderland
- **April 26** Susan: JRP (Jordan River Pathway) full loop #5 for this year. (Author’s Note: Our JV45° Susan Miller went on to complete the entire 18-mile-long loop 11 times through Sept. 2020).
- **April 28** First mosquito of the year!
- **May 9** Susan: The trilliums are budding and just waiting for warm weather (as am I).
- **May 12** Ken: We should have taken an uber!
- **May 22** Annie: Just graduated high school. Celebrating with a trail run.





- **June 3** Angie: Great trail. No bugs at all!
- **June 13** Alex: 3rd wedding anniversary. 1st backpacking trip.
- **June 4** Sara: Thanks for the new boardwalks!
- **June 20** TJ: Lots of toads and lots of rain too.
- **June 25** Jason & Marcie: Mesick to the Bridge. This is a beautiful trail. It is by far the hardest we have been on since Mesick. Happy trekking.
- **June 27** Kyle: It is HOT and we are sweaty.
- **July 8** Jessica: Still hot and sweaty. 90°F but beautiful.
- **July 12** Kelsey: First time on the Jordan River trail. Loving it.
- **July 14** Quinn: First backpacking trip! Bears, brown thrasher, kingfisher, ruffed grouse, and yellow rumped warblers, Oh My!
- **July 18** Troop 157 from Holland MI was here!
- **Aug 1** Mark: Kimberly: Great trail First time here.
- **Aug 13** Ann: Thank you so much for this beautiful trail! A few blowdowns just to keep you slow enough to enjoy the area and Mother Nature.
- **Aug 16** Perry: Checked this trail off my bucket list. It was wonderful. I'm 62 and still at it.
- **Aug 28** Kurtis: Thru-hiking Michigan. Slack-packing thanks to Duane.
- **Aug 31** Helen: Awesome hike. The NCT is Amazing!
- **Aug 25** Jo: Hiking all 1150 miles of NCT from Ohio to Wisconsin – solo at 65 years old!
- **Aug 29** Jennifer: 2020 is over half way done. We can make it!
- **Sep 9** Susan: Full loop #11 this season. Feels good to be back to (almost) full capacity after 2 ½ months “rest” due to foot issues. And an absolutely beautiful day.
- **Sep 19** John: Saw bigfoot again!
- **Sep 23** Great color and beautiful day.
- **Sep 25** Kelsey: Leaves falling like a gentle rain... perfect weather.

## Advocate for the Trail at Home

By Andrea Ketchmark

**N**CTA's Advocacy Committee is composed of staff and volunteers who build relationships with policy makers to share why the North Country National Scenic Trail is important to America and its citizens, and to let them know how legislation and policy making can support this national treasure.

The National Trails and broader recreation community have accomplished some great things in recent years. With the passage of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019, our long awaited North Country Trail reroute became a reality. Again this year, the Great American Outdoors Act guaranteed full annual funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million each year, and will fund \$9.5 billion over the next five years in correcting the maintenance backlog through our National Park and National Forest Systems. Ensuring our federal partners have the budgets they need is also on our policy platform and this year we were successful in getting our National Park Service office a budget increase, which has led to more staff capacity in both the NPS office and in NCTA's Regional Trail Coordinator program. These accomplishments could not have happened without our Advocacy Committee and our national partners, but they also would not have happened without you making phone calls and sending emails to your members of Congress to let them know you care.

Even though we've had great success, the work never stops. Every year, we join the American Hiking Society (AHS) and the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS) for Hike the Hill in Washington, D.C. Although this is an important event, most of the relationship building does not happen in D.C. It happens by engaging our members of Congress in their states, in their districts and on the Trail. It happens by inviting members of Congress to our ribbon cutting events, by sharing our accomplishments and the stories from home that remind our elected officials why it's important to the people. Building these relationships doesn't mean we are always asking for support of legislation. We are often simply reminding them of this amazing trail and what it offers to the world, and giving them an opportunity once again to be grounded in something bigger than themselves, something that has the potential to bring us together in a divided world.

AHS and PNTS just announced that Hike the Hill will be held virtually in 2021. Although we'll miss the time in D.C., this is a great opportunity for us to plan more local outreach and for you to tell your stories to those who need to hear it.

Learn more about our Advocacy Committee and how to take action on our website: [northcountrytrail.org/our-work/advocacy](https://northcountrytrail.org/our-work/advocacy). ✨



*Progress continues in small increments, cementing the route of the Trail through N.Y.'s Adirondacks. One easement gets us off the road, and then volunteers gather for a trail building weekend there.*

## One Personal Dream Come True

By Joan Young



**Author, Joan Young**

Photo: Mary Coffin

Piece by little piece, a hikeable North Country Trail route is being assembled through the Adirondacks, the wild forested northern bump of New York. Since way-back-when, when there was no NCT between Crown Point and Forestport, it's been a dream of mine to participate in helping to build Trail there.

Even having a trail corridor was only a dream. But then Barbara McMartin, Adirondack legend and expert, got on board and proposed a route. Finally, Adirondack Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) units began writing the NCT into their management plans. That took another 10 years or so. Then we more or less were given a miles-wide corridor. Enter Mary Coffin, who began scouting actual routes for the Trail under rather stringent guidelines set down by the Adirondack Park Authority and New York's DEC.

However, the point of this brief article is not to give you the actual history of our Adirondack route. I'm not the best source for that information. What I do want to share is that while I was doing some visiting and Finger Lakes branch trail hiking in New York this summer, Mary Coffin posted that she was hosting a work day to begin building about two miles of Trail near Speculator, N.Y. OK, I was almost four hours away from there. But, I was not 15 hours away like normal!

**I gave that dream legs (or wheels) and signed right up!**

Six workers met in a parking lot on Saturday morning, August 22. We caravanned the short distance to Oak

Mountain Ski Resort, where Mary sanitized and distributed tools to the masked participants. The owners of Oak Mountain, Matt and Laura O'Brien, have graciously allowed the NCT passage across their property, so that we can connect with a snowmobile trail and then westward to NY Route 30. This "short cut" over the small mountain eliminates a six-mile road walk, and connects two completed sections of Trail in Siamese Ponds Wilderness and West Canada Wilderness, resulting in 76 continuous miles of Trail, almost all off-road.

This was the most fun I've had doing trail work in a long time. For one thing, the Trail maintained by my home Chapter in Michigan, Spirit of the Woods, is all long-established. We rarely get to build even a few feet of new trail. Here, we had to zig-zag our way up a serious hill. We had to make decisions about how to work our way through rock fields. Some previous route scouting had been done, but final adjustments were still up for grabs, and I got to help make some choices.

In general, the group brushed and raked a preliminary treadway, removed some roots, and attempted to tool through the renowned Adirondack duff to get down to mineral soil. Later, benching and leveling will be done.

I stayed one extra day, when Mary and I made sure we were



**ADK work week**

Photo: Joan Young

able to follow the correct snowmobile trails to complete the route from NY 30 to the ski resort. The maze-like network of snowmobile openings was impressive, but we managed to work our way through them without any errors, connecting

to the previous day's work. We flagged each corner with plastic tape (permission for actual blazing has now been received). Mary made notes of wet areas and other potential problems. Scouting new route is even more rare of a treat for me than building trail.

When we reached the Oak Mountain property, Mary nailed up a few more blazes, and we did a tiny bit of rock work... mostly for the sheer joy of doing it, rather than planned.

I feel as if I had a little weekend in heaven. This is a North Country dream coming true, as well as my little personal selfish dream. Thank you to everyone for welcoming me to the crew and letting me share in your fun! ✨





Photo: Mary Coffin

## Oak Mountain Easement Connects Two Adirondack Wilderness Areas

By Mary C. Coffin

**M**att and Laura O'Brien, owners of Oak Mountain, a three-season recreational area near Speculator, N.Y., have donated a Trail Access Easement (TAE) and permanent right-of-way to NCTA for a foot trail on their property. This TAE, when connected to an existing snowmobile trail on private lumber company property, Lyme Timber, will provide the long distance hiker an off-paved-road (NY 30) option. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NY DEC) has facilitated permission on the timber easement along the snowmobile corridor. The new Trail will be about four miles and replaces about six miles of paved road walk. The Trail is but one half mile from Charlie Johns grocery and hardware store.

Hikers will have about 80 miles of continuous wilderness trail combined with some dirt logging roads and connect Eagle Bay/Inlet to North Creek via West Canada Lakes Wilderness and Siamese Ponds Wilderness. The route

includes several lean-tos and many lakes and streams plus artifacts from old logging days and characters like hermit/guide, French Louie. Opportunities to sample the native brook trout abound in this remote area distant from the sounds of civilization. And there is an optional fire tower climb on Pillsbury Mountain with a fantastic vista of the peaks to the north. Intrigued?

Matt and Laura (below) purchased and reopened the ski center (started in 1948) about six years ago after experiences in New Hampshire ski areas. They have expanded it to include tubing, a special youth lift belt/bunny hill, frisbee golf, snowshoe and mountain bike trails, and the three-season Acorn Pub and Brewery. They host special events and weddings, even at the top of the mountain. They are bringing up their children, Madison, 8, and Tucker, 5 (left), in this small Adirondack community. Laura and Matt are do-it-yourselfers. One day when I was flagging trail they were at the top of the mountain reroofing the Ski Patrol hut. Matt runs the snow machine and groomer. They both manage the pub together. And they were most willing to permit the NCNST on their property in perpetuity.

An Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) and NCTA volunteer crew started defining the tread this summer and hopes to bench and post NCNST markers before the snow flies. Coronavirus restrictions have slowed the process a bit as we are using small volunteer groups, masked and physically distanced.

We are ever so grateful to generous landowners like the O'Briens who have provided a permanent off-paved-road, foot trail connection. ✨



Photo: Joan Young





## North Country Trail Association

229 East Main Street  
Lowell, Michigan 49331

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**PAID**  
Grand Rapids, MI  
Permit 340



**Our new NPS property in Augusta, lower Michigan, is returning to prairie flowers after only a few years without farming.**

Photo: Chris Loudenslager



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.