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north star

State of the Trail! Gratifying big bridge story in Wisconsin Buckeye Trail Loop Hike

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"I love recruiting friends to hike part of the Hike 100 with me. I started doing the 100 miles each year, the year before the NCTA put out the Hike 100 campaign. My goal is to hike all of Michigan. Keep doing the challenge. It gets people off the couch!!" - Tami Stagman, Traverse City, Michigan

Photo: Tami Stagman

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Trailhead

Tim Mowbray, President

T t's time to look ahead to the new year and to reflect on the past year as we continue to build support and hike the North Country Trail. 2019 was a year of many great accomplishments with the passage of Federal legislation, a focus on completing more sections of the Trail and new efforts at fund raising to continue our



Photo: Sue Mowbray

work. In 2020 we will begin implementing a new strategic plan for the NCTA to help guide us for the next few years in our effort to complete the Trail.

We continue to see our association strengthen its core group of hard-working staff to keep our organizational focus so we as volunteers stay on track to build, promote and protect the trail as one of the premier National Scenic Trails. The board has approved a budget for 2020 that enhances several positions from part-time to full time duties and reallocates staff time in some areas to cover duties needing more attention.

Board and Staff ended 2019 by working on a new set of strategies as outlined in our new strategic plan. We hope this plan will help guide us through the next 3-5 years and provide direction to continue our development toward completion of the trail and to help build the organization so we can continue supporting, maintaining, and upgrading the trail.

As we look ahead, we want to honor those who have helped so much over the past years. We will say goodbye to long term employees and volunteers who were significant in the success the NCTA has had to date. We will need new volunteers to pick up and take over the many responsibilities needing attention and to fill in gaps where we have not been able to give full attention to needs of a growing organization and a lengthening trail system. The challenge is there before us, but I know we will all rise to meet the needs of the NCTA and the Trail we love.

arch 5th, Congress passed legislation authorizing the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST), adding it to the company of the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails in the National Trails System. Forty years later, we have 3,200 miles of the North Country Trail Andrea with Hazel and Jasker, part of her on the ground and we've Photo: Ted Bentley mobilized thousands of volunteers in eight states. We've built a strong partner organization (that's us!) to do the work and have an incredible trail community that supports the Trail and NCTA along our journey and trail users on theirs, which is what it's all about. We have so much to celebrate. This issue of the North Star is packed with accomplishments and stories of success from 2019. We were successful in passing historic legislation that changed the route of the Trail in Minnesota and added a route in Vermont. We completed major construction projects for new sections of Trail and built large structures and bridges to improve access. We held our first ever Next Generation Coalition Summit to plan for the future. And we completed

Finally, we need to give thanks 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 the goal of continuing to grow and support the Trail and help brighten the future. We are at the beginning of an exciting new year on the North Country National Scenic Trail. Thank you to all! *

Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director



family, hiking on New Year's Day in the snow.

our technical series maps, now completely free to the public. As we head into this new year, we also say goodbye to some

Continued on page 4

Trailhead, Continued

important pieces of NCTA history. We ended our lease of the Davis Hollow Cabin in Pennsylvania and our Board made the difficult decision to give up the White Cloud School House, where our organization was founded. Although both hold a place in NCTA's heart, these decisions will allow us to focus our attention where most needed, on the Trail. Bill Menke retired at the end of 2019 after close to 20 years of incredible service to NCTA. I have no way of measuring all that I've learned from Bill over the years and I'd be so sad if I didn't know he'll still be out on the Trail with us, imparting his knowledge for years to come.

When I say "we" and "us," I do it with intention. This work is only achievable with our far reaching network of dedicated volunteers. Our Affiliate organizations and agency partners share in the vision. Our dedicated staff have the expertise needed to move us forward. And individuals, corporations and foundations support the work with funding through grants and donations. Thank you for doing your part!

In this issue we'll bring you stories about our past and highlight some major milestones over our first four decades, but we'll also focus on the future and all that lies before us. 2020 is the beginning of what will prove to be an exciting decade for the Trail and for NCTA. With a new Strategic Plan in place, we have a shared direction and energy that can take us to places we once only imagined, just as those who envisioned the NCT more than four decades ago could only imagine the things we are accomplishing today. *



Peter Wolfe Chapter member Susan Reil and her grandchildren Addie, Leela and Sunny all ready to celebrate Christmas as red plaid nation, present and future members!

Photo: Kids' mother Molly

7 PRIORITY OBJECTIVES OF NCTA'S NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

stakeholders including our Chapters, Affiliates and Agency Partners, NCTA's Board and staff met for a two-day retreat in December to consider the future of the organization and define our path to move forward into a new decade. Objectives and over the winter will develop long-term and short-term goals, measurements and action plans for each.

Trail-Related Objectives

- 1. Complete the Trail
- 2. Maintain the Trail
- 3. Protect the Trail, Viewshed and Hiker Experience
- 4. Promote the North Country National Scenic Trail

Organizational Objectives

- 5. Support Our Vital Chapter and Affiliate Community
- 6. Develop NCTA's Organizational Capacity
- 7. Increase Available Funding





National Park Service Corner

Chris Loudenslager, Superintendent, North Country National Scenic Trail



Chris Loudenslager Photo: Mick Hawkins

Treetings and a happy 2020 to one and all! With yet another year under our belt and boots, I hope everyone is as excited and full of optimism as I am for our new

I'm honored to start off the year with a grateful salute, a hearty congratulation, and volumes of thanks and praise to Bill Menke in recognition of his retirement from his long-held position as the Regional Trail Coordinator for the state of Wisconsin. Bill has long been a champion, leader, and visionary for the NCT as both the former Trail Manager for the National Park Service and as an RTC for the North Country Trail Association. Bill's contributions to the Trail will not only serve as a lasting legacy, but also as enduring examples that we can all learn from and emulate as we forge ahead into the future. So much of what we have, what we are, and who we are, can be attributed to Bill. So on behalf of a grateful organization and community, thank you very much, Bill, and best wishes to you for (another) happy retirement. We will hardly have the time to recover from celebrating Bill before we kick off celebrations for yet another huge milestone, the 40th birthday for the North Country National Scenic Trail! While there is much to say about such a momentous occasion, let the first thing I say be "thank you," thank you for being here, thank you for all your hard work, thank you for loving the North Country Trail, and thank you for sharing your love for the Trail with everyone you know.

Knowing full well that all of us will be raring to go to spruce up the Trail and get it ready for the big celebration, let the second thing I say be "work safe, and look out for each other." Friends don't let friends take risks. We love the Trail, but friends come first. Nothing is more important than our health and safety, so if you know someone is putting themselves at risk, step up, say something, and insist on a better solution. Be a part of that solution, and your example will empower others to follow your lead. And don't forget that this goes both ways: listen to what your friends and peers offer you as well!

So what other news do we have to look forward to this year? Another exciting development for 2020 will see the NPS and NCTA working together to do an even better job in protecting the natural and cultural resources that the NCT is intended to highlight along its route. This enhanced protection will come in the form of more advance project planning, additional studies and surveys, and increased consultation with other agencies and tribal governments to ensure that what we do does not impair or cause harm to the resources we all hold dear in our hearts. This has always been important, but doing this better will become our top priority for the Trail starting this year.

To help us in this new endeavor, I'm pleased to be able to announce that the National Park Service will soon be welcoming Ken Hendrickson as our new Trail Manager. Ken will be joining the NPS team in early February, and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in planning and project management. I am especially excited about his ability to connect with people and foster positive relationships, and fully expect that our volunteers and partners will enjoy getting to know him and appreciate working closely with him.

and have a great year! *

With this and so much more to look forward to on the NCT this year, I'm so grateful to be part of this team and to be able to celebrate with you! Be safe, stay safe,

NCTA's Regional Trail Coordinator **Program Evolves**

By Valerie Bader, Director of Trail Development

nyone who has ever had the pleasure of working with one of our Regional Trail Coordinators knows that they are the backbone of the North Country Trail Association's efforts in the field. From building bridges and designing trail to teaching trail skills to new volunteers and organizing meetings with partners to plan projects, this amazing team does

it all!

Bill Menke has long been a cornerstone of the Regional Trail Coordinator program. While his retirement leaves us all a little sad, (and maybe wondering just how many screws we'll need for that bridge after all) we're certain that he won't go too far. We are also quite confident that our Wisconsin Chapters and our Partners across the state are being left in very capable hands with Matt Davis. Matt is currently the Regional Trail Coordinator for North Dakota and Minnesota and upon Bill's departure, will add another 200 miles and an additional state to his region. Matt and Bill have been spending long hours together, covering the history of Wisconsin projects, the current This is Matt Davis! state of the Trail and making grand plans for the future. Matt will certainly have his



Photo: Matt Davis

hands full with the 11 Chapters and two Affiliates that he'll now be working with across three states, but spending time in the field with Partners and volunteers is one of his favorite parts of the job, so he's very eager to meet and work with all of you in Wisconsin. Make sure to give him a warm welcome!

With these changes in the Regional Trail Coordinator program, we saw an opportunity to fill a much needed gap on the eastern end of the Trail where our Chapter and Affiliates have requested additional staff support over the years. We are aiming to add an Eastern Regional Trail Coordinator sometime in mid-2020. This position will initially cover the 1025 miles from the Eastern terminus of the Buckeye Trail through Pennsylvania and New York and will coordinate with Chapters, Affiliates, partners and land managers in those states. The new Regional Trail Coordinator will support the amazing work that volunteers in New York and Pennsylvania have been doing for years and will help to grow the awareness of the NCT and the effectiveness of NCTA's programs across the eastern region.

Any of our volunteers in states with a Regional Trail Coordinator will tell you just how valuable that leadership and support has been in their work. We are excited to be able to share that experience with more of the Trail. Having more complete coverage across the Trail will also allow me (and other staff) more time to support existing efforts in Ohio and to add a deeper focus on the NCT's expansion into Vermont, cultivating strong partnerships and helping to secure the Trail route.

We are grateful to have such a strong community that supports the North Country Trail. By providing this additional staff coverage on the ground, we hope that we are able to support your work better and that together we can continue to grow our North Country Trail community. *



Board President Tim Mowbray welcomes Duane Lawton to the Board. Photo: Ruth Dorrough

Duane Lawton joins the NCTA Board of Directors

By Ruth Dorrough

uane, a retired programmer and IT manager, has been an NCTA member since 2007. Having served the JV 45° Chapter as President for five years, Duane is now the Chapter's Project Manager. He currently chairs the North Star Editorial Advisory subcommittee. He not only builds and maintains trails but hikes them as well. Recently he completed section hiking all of the North Country Trail in Michigan. Duane said that as an NCTA Board member, he looks forward to contributing more to the NCT, "a valuable national resource that we can improve and protect." *

Where In The Blue Blazes?

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

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





We did not receive any guesses on this mystery spot from our last issue. This rock stack is on East Co. Rd. A in Douglas County, Wisconsin.

Photo: Jane Nortor

You're Invited! Softies Spring Hike: May 15 - 17, 2020

Come hike with the "Softies" as they lace up their hiking boots and travel below the Mackinac Bridge for their Spring hike to finish up the Harbor Springs Chapter section. We will be hiking Friday afternoon, May 15th through Sunday, May



17th. We will be hiking from Lakeview Road Trailhead in Wilderness State Park to the Mackinac Bridge for the weekend, approximately 20 miles. The NCT passes through Wilderness State Park and follows the shoreline of French Farm Lake for about three miles. We will also be walking past a windmill farm.

There is no charge for the hike, but food and lodging are on your own. (I will be looking for a hotel to offer us a group rate as we get closer, but most of Mackinaw City is closed down for the winter.) Also, prepare your car for ride sharing and be sure you have a Michigan State Park sticker on your license plate (or get a day pass at the park) as we will be in parking lots that will require a State Park Sticker. If you are interested in joining the hike please RSVP your name, email address and a telephone number so you can be put on a list and get updated information as we get closer to the date and gather more information to share about this hike.

Send RSVP's to Shari Sanderson: sandersonshari@ gmail.com



When the Softies hikers reached the Mackinac Bridge, toasts were appropriate! Photo: Shari Sanderson



Bill holding a fawn. Covering its eyes helps reduce its anxiety. Photo: unknown

Menke Farewell

By Irene Szabo

T n many places in this issue mention is made of Bill Menke's retirement. For many of you in states other than Wisconsin, you may be wondering who he has been for this Trail to merit such a farewell... unless you've worked with him in Wisconsin or just about anywhere back when he wandered the whole Trail training volunteers and designing new paths. And if you have worked with Bill at all, you remember him fondly and with admiration.

In 1992 our first Superintendent Tom Gilbert hired Bill, a forester by schooling, as a National Park Service Trail Manager, our first for the North Country Trail, working out of the NPS office in Madison, Wisc. Even with only a slender travel budget, Bill visited many places throughout the original seven states to teach volunteers how to site a trail to make for good hiking and to avoid erosion, working in the field to demonstrate.

Meanwhile, starting in 1997, he began to work with small crews in northern Wisconsin to handle major Trail building projects, which Bill credits as helping him learn how to teach trailcraft. By 2001, he retired from the NPS, instead working

for the NCTA to perform similar training services Trail-wide. Once the NCTA started funding Regional Trail Coordinators, Bill took that job part-time for Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, later dropping the Michigan portion of his job.

So this is why many of you haven't worked with him in other states, unless you were part of the earlier version of his job. I was lucky enough to be part of one of these visits. Our Finger Lakes Trail trail boss, Howard Beye, was searching for a demonstration venue for an upcoming Bill Menke training session, so I immediately volunteered a bad trail spot in my own section. Prior volunteers had routed the trail straight down a moderately steep hillside, so of course rocks and roots were gradually being exposed by erosion right down the path. I had built a couple modest water bars made of rocks against light logs, but it still was a bad route.

On our training day Bill unleashed us at the bottom of the hill, and urged us to find a better route between the bottom and the road above. We were in a N.Y. State Forest, so a mild reroute was permitted. So we all wandered all over the hillside, mulling over possibilities, then reconvened. Of course, our suggestions were not as smart as the route Bill had designed in his head the day before, so after we fumbled for a while, he took us for a walk.

First we angled left, away from the straight steep route, as far as the nearby border of the state forest with private land beyond, taking us under a few large hemlocks and past the remnants of a split rail fence! How cool to take the trail beside such a note from the past. Its logs must have been from a wood that can last a long time, perhaps even chestnut?

Then naturally we had to veer back to the right, crossing the old trail right where sliding rocks had begun to pile up anyway between two trees, starting for us a nice flat ledge where we could cross against the slope and continue our rightward swing. Not much land was available, though, since there was a steep gully over to the right, but there was enough space for us to turn the trail uphill amongst annoying beech roots, just after a short section where a benched shelf could be dug for a tread.

Bill acted like we were discovering these trail route possibilities ourselves, but of course we were "discovering" exactly what he wanted us to see. The rest of the reroute uphill didn't involve a lot of wiggling back and forth, nor did we cross the old trail again until we were practically at the top and on flat land amidst large trees. At the end of the day, we all felt pretty smart and the reroute was roughed in, leaving me to finish details and reblaze since it was, after all, "my" section of Trail. That reroute has remained pleasant and successful for nearly 20 years since.

Bill's sure and understated guidance worked very well, and he did have a keen eye for slopes and tread possibilities. Starting with that weekend, and subsequent training walks

with Bill during future NCTA Celebrations all over the whole Trail, his teachings sank in more and more. We learned to "see" poorly sited trail which wasted hiker strength and trail builder work. Water on the Trail was to be avoided, slopes were to be civilized, and as Bill himself says, "On a long-distance national scenic trail, like the North Country NST, not only is it important that the Trail be well blazed and signed, but it is equally important that the Trail exhibit a "thread of continuity." It should exhibit similar signing, blazing, and quality of construction and maintenance from one end to the other."

He would probably like this article to end there, but let us share just a little more about this loveable and honorable man. There was a time when he was trying to walk the whole NCT, so he engaged in a good-natured competition with Joan Young, but gradually fell behind since he had to rely on vacation time for backpacking. But he, often with Dave



Cornell, walked major portions of our Trail, with a longest hike of 21 days.

Menke's lifetime has already covered vast worlds, some of which I learned only recently. He started out in Missouri, on a small farm where he helped take care of about 25 beef cattle, hogs, and hundreds of chickens while his father worked construction 50 miles' commute away. His early education was in one and two room schoolhouses until he was bussed to high school, so the early years involved riding his horse or bike or walking to school! Did you think people you know actually did these things, or just their grandparents? Surprise! Bill plans to keep working with volunteers in Wisconsin, especially the Rovers' crews, but he has other things to do, too. He and his wife Donna take individual grandchildren on special trips tailored to each one. What a wonderful thing to do! ₩

> Hike 100 returns in 2020 for the fifth year. The rules remain the same: Sign up at northcountrytrail.org and hike 100 miles on the North Country Trail during the 2020 calendar year (January **1 through December** 31). Once you log 100 miles, hop back online to submit your completion form to receive your certificate and patch.

2019 WAS ANOTHER BIG YEAR FOR THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL!

OVERVIEW

IN 2019 WE:

- Officially added new miles (and an 8th state!) and strengthened relationships with partners in Minnesota and Vermont: thanks to the passage of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act.
- Completed our Technical Series maps, creating 445 free, downloadable trail maps for the NCT.
- Trained new NCT Crew Leaders in three states, totaling over 100 new Crew Leaders since 2018.
- Hosted the inaugural "Next Generation Summit" in Michigan and grew the Next Gen Coalition to over 50 members.
- Celebrated the fourth year of the Hike 100 program, encouraging hikers to log 100 miles of hiking in the calendar year.
- Revised and updated the NCTA Trail Protection Handbook and Options for Landowners brochure, providing volunteers with valuable resources to permanently protect the NCT's corridor.
- Welcomed 21 weeks of paid and volunteer Youth Corps crews building and maintaining the Trail.

VOLUNTEER HOURS



1,058 volunteers contributed 83,300 hours of time to the North Country Trail in 2019—a total donated value of \$2,228,328.

Most importantly, we supported the work of NCTA's dedicated volunteers, Partners, Chapters and Affiliates who were instrumental in carrying out the mission "to develop, maintain,



protect and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern United States."

The stories highlighted in the following pages feature only a fraction of the dedication of the incredible North Country Trail community. Please join us in celebrating 2019's remarkable achievements and looking forward to another amazing year in 2020.

THE TRAIL AT A GLANCE



CARRYING OUT OUR MISSION



- 71.4 miles of new Trail constructed
- 5,768 linear feet of puncheon, boardwalk and turnpike installed
- 7 new campsites built
- 18 new bridges installed

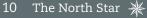
MAINTAIN

- 3,307 miles of Trail maintained by Chapters and Affiliates
- 291 kiosks and signs updated
- 7,358 feet of puncheon and boardwalk repaired
- Trail cleared



OFF-ROAD	MILES	PER	STATE
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NORTH DAKOTA	MICHIGAN	NEW YORK
256 Miles	854 Miles	430 Miles
MINNESOTA	оню	VERMONT
689 Miles	505 Miles	44 Miles
WISCONSIN	PENNSYLVANIA	
135 Miles	234 Miles	





PROTECT

- 14 new easements and agreements put in place with private landowners
- Strengthened relationships with current and future private landowners across the Trail



PROMOTE

- 155 Chapter and Affiliate-led hikes on the North Country Trail
- 170 events hosted and attended to promote the Trail

OVERVIEW REPORT BY VALERIE BADER, Director of Trail Development

State of the Trail Chapter, Affiliate and Partner Reports follow this page >>

See the full Trail Progress Report at northcountrytrail.org



Volunteers flagging trail with posts that have painted ends. Photo: Matt Davis

West end of North Dakota

NORTH DAKOTA - After a few years of the NPS and NCTA staff talking with the federal and state agency staff in west central North Dakota, we finally received permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop the NCT within Audubon National Wildlife Refuge. Audubon is a 14,739-acre refuge that dates back to 1955 and the construction of Garrison Dam and the resulting Lakes Sakakawea and Audubon

(separated by the U.S. Highway 83 causeway). The Refuge was renamed after famed naturalist John J. Audubon in 1967 since he traveled through the area in the early 1800s. Eagle Scout candidate Austin Horning from Troop 123 in Bismarck, North Dakota, took on the project of developing one third of the NCT within the Refuge and worked with a variety of partners (Friends group, BisMan Trails Advocacy Group, etc.) to develop and sign this segment in 2019. An official grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony was held in September. Hikers along the route can see a variety of grassland and wetland wildlife species and catch glimpses out onto Lake Audubon. Future trail development is anticipated in 2020 and maybe even the formation of a new NCTA Chapter in the Bismarck-Minot area. -Matt Davis

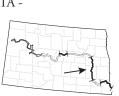


Eagle Scout candidate Austin Horning securing an NCT emblem on newly opened Trail in the Audubon Refuge Photo: Matt Davis

Sheyenne River Valley

NORTH DAKOTA -

The SRV Chapter had a difficult year with continuing heavy rains causing some of the Trail to be flooded and



hindering some work efforts.

Our 2019 Annual Meeting was held on January 19th at the Rosebud Visitor Center in Valley City with 17 in attendance. After lunch Deb Koepplin awarded Cat Albert the SRV Chapter Honor Award. Trail work from 2018 was reviewed and plans shared for work to be done in 2019. Due to the extremely cold weather, the planned hike at Lake Ashtabula was cancelled in favor of a get together at Bobby and Deb Koepplin's for games and refreshments.

The SRV Chapter courageously hiked forth for its first hike of the season on May 18th despite rain, cold, and heavy winds. We had 10 people arrive at Clausen Springs Recreation Area of whom three opted for the shorter two-mile scenic hike around the lake. The other seven shuttled to the north end of the segment to allow hiking with the wind instead of against it. We did decide to complete the hike with the previously planned picnic in the park, finding a sheltered hollow to "enjoy?" our picnic.

The National Trails Day activities at Fort Ransom State Park were held in partnership with the Dakota Prairie Chapter on June 1st. We had over 60 hikers led by two park rangers. After lunch we had 16 adventurous individuals join in the canoeing and kayaking which led into the picnic supper and refreshments provided by the SRV Chapter, capped off by a campfire. This year we were joined by Alicia Underlee Nelson, who was writing an article about the North Country Trail for "North Dakota Outdoors," a publication of North Dakota Game and Fish.

In June the SRV Chapter participated in a demonstration of three different Orec brush cutters. Two were rider mowers with one of them being four-wheel drive. The other was a flail mower with a "surrey"

attachment on which one can stand instead of walking behind it. Six miles of trail with varying types of vegetation were mowed to get a good idea of what the machines can do. The group is still unsure whether the Chapter will buy one.

On June 21st, a very special workday was held to prepare for the dedication of the Clyde Anderson Memorial campsite at the Baldhill Creek Wildlife Management Area on Lake Ashtabula north of Valley City. The Corps of Engineers installed a new picnic table which we stained. We installed three benches, a new fire ring, a plaque, and a registration box with brochures. After lunch, and before we resumed the rest of our work. Luc Albert showed us a multi-cache (geocache) that his family had



Marisa Hoffarth installs signage Photo: Becky Heise

installed at the campsite to promote the NCT. This cache route begins at the campsite, and leads hikers along the Trail providing clues to the next cache further on.

On June 29th, the SRV Chapter got together to improve some trail. Since there was supposed to be a heat index of over 100 degrees, it was decided to do some mowing, tree trimming and other lighter work instead of hauling steel fence posts and drivers over six miles of trail. We split up into two teams. Both teams got drenched but we got the work done! After a damp lunch we headed south of town where it hadn't rained. We mowed the Clausen Springs segment, fixed some fence and trimmed some trees.

Bobby and Deb Koepplin represented the SRV Chapter at the North Dakota Trails Conference held August 13-14 in Minot. Then our Fort Ransom hike was held on August 17th, beginning at the northwest corner of Fort Ransom State Park, through the park and then on to Fort Ransom for lunch. For once the weather was perfect for hiking - cool, a slight breeze and very few bugs.

On September 22nd, member Trevan Pfennig received his Eagle Scout. Trevan's project was to organize work days to install NCT signage through Valley City, educate fellow Scouts about safety while working on the trail, how to install the signage and what it means, and to help install a boardwalk on the Trail at Lake Ashtabula. After Trevan received his Eagle, he presented a Mentor Pin to the person who served as his mentor as he worked toward Eagle, SRV Chapter President, Bobby Koepplin.

Due to continuing heavy rains at Lake Ashtabula, we were forced to move our NCNST Day / Public Lands Day hike and postpone our campsite dedication ceremony. The Corps of Engineers had advised us NOT to hike on this segment so we decided to hike from Medicine Wheel Park (a different kind of public land), through Valley City, to the home of Deb and Bobby Koepplin. As we made our way along the NCT through town, we stopped to enjoy the exhibits at the Barnes County Museum and to watch the Homecoming Parade. One of our members and Rising Star Award winners, Stephanie Hoffarth, was playing in the high school band. After the parade we continued on to Koepplins' where we enjoyed a campfire, grilled hamburgers and great company. The festivities included a presentation ceremony for Marisa Hoffarth and Cat Albert who both received awards for 100 hours of volunteer service to the NCT. A special memorial plaque was given to Jane Anderson, wife of former SRV Chapter member, Clyde Anderson, who was a dedicated and much loved member of our Chapter.

On October 19-20, Jerry Warner of the SRV Chapter hosted a work weekend at the Sheyenne State Forest, armoring about 1500 feet of Trail. The State Forest is used quite extensively by horsemen which has worn a deep groove into the tread so the armoring is essential towards maintaining a comfortable hiking experience.

The SRV Chapter looks forward to much better weather, better hiking and getting more trail work done in 2020!



-Becky Heise

Dakota Prairie

NORTH DAKOTA -The Dakota Prairie Chapter (DPC) volunteers are strongly committed to all four components of the NCTA mission:



build, maintain, protect, promote. The Chapter has been adding an average of about four miles of new Trail every year, and is determined to keep the Trail well maintained even as the number of trail miles continues to grow. We are constantly looking for creative ways to handle our trail maintenance duties to simplify the work for our volunteers.

In addition to a half-dozen private landowners, the DPC has about 20 other partners including county, state, federal, and national organizations, town councils and township boards, and private businesses who support or host the NCNST. We work hard to maintain and cultivate these relationships. The Chapter's hikes and other events reach a large number of people in southeastern North Dakota. We can see a significant change in community awareness about the NCNST over the past several years. Because of activities like the North Dakota Challenge (to hike all of the NCNST in ND), some of the DPC members are interested in helping work on the Trail in areas of ND where there are no current Chapters. Our Chapter regularly collaborates with other Chapters in North Dakota and Minnesota on hikes, events and projects. Many of our members have made friends all along the NCNST and try to attend the NCTA Celebrations whenever possible.

—Tom Moberg

Minnesota Waters and Prairie

MINNESOTA - The boundaries of our Chapter are the Red River in the north by Abercrombie, North Dakota, in the west and the Otter Tail County line just south of



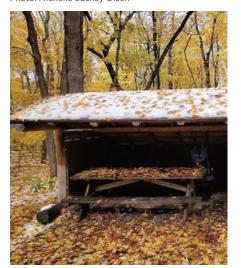
Frazee, Minnesota, in the east. Currently we have six miles of off-road Trail that we maintain in Fergus Falls, Minn., an NCT Trail Town. Our other off-road section is through Maplewood State Park. We share trail maintenance there with the Minnesota DNR. The biggest Trail news for 2019 is the completion of a major reroute through Maplewood State Park (see the July-September issue). We are so grateful to the Friends of Maplewood State Park for recognizing the value of this project and providing the funds to complete it. After the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa finished the main construction, members of our Chapter spent time blazing, blocking off the old trail and doing the final detail work on the Trail.

Our Chapter has been working hard to build over three miles of new off-road Trail in Ferber Park, the newest city park (known for mountain biking) on the northeast side of Fergus Falls. Once the necessary landowner permissions and agreements are completed, we will be able to bypass part of a busy county road walk and continue the scenic trail through Fergus Falls. Completion of all aspects of this trail is high priority for the coming year. In addition, we have tentatively mapped an off-road route to connect Fergus Falls with Maplewood State Park, a distance of about 15 miles. With very little public land available in the area we must try to work with numerous private landowners to make this reroute happen.

The MWP Chapter has informal workdays on Wednesdays. We have a small, but dedicated crew of volunteers who have been working on trail building and maintenance, construction and



Trail at Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Photo: Michelle Lackey Olser



Backcountry campsite at Maplewood State Park along the Trail Photo: Michelle Lackey Olsen

installation of benches and kiosks, identifying possible reroutes, marketing, and landowner agreements. Several of our members attended chainsaw certification training at Tamarac Wildlife Refuge this spring and those skills have been put to use cleaning up after recent storms. We enjoy the camaraderie of both being on the Trail together working or hiking and brainstorming at our monthly meetings.

After bouncing around different sites for our meetings, this year we have found a comfortable home at the public library in Fergus Falls. Another goal that we have put forward is to increase the social aspect of our Chapter such as gathering for informal get-togethers or hikes and sharing stories of our current hiking adventures.

Our regular public outings this year have included a snowshoe hike on new trail in Ferber Park, a full moon hike at One-Mile Prairie with perfectly clear skies, a beautiful sunset hike at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, a late September walk in Maplewood which coincided with peak leaf colors, and a joint hike with the Dakota Prairie Chapter through all the off-road miles in Fergus Falls. This last hike was the ideal solution to finding a suitable trail to walk during firearms deer hunting season. It was exciting to introduce our trail to 30 hikers from four different Minnesota and North Dakota Chapters. At the end of a very snowy March, we got to try out Hok ski-snowshoes on One-Mile Prairie. The snow was starting to deteriorate so we're withholding judgment until we can try them again this winter.

—Michelle Lackey Olsen

Laurentian Lakes

MINNESOTA - The Laurentian Lakes Chapter of the NCTA built and maintains Trail in Clearwater and Becker Counties, from Itasca State Park to Ottertail County. The Chapter was founded in 2007 and is responsible for 72 miles of hiking trails. Trails in the LLC cross Itasca State Park, White Earth State Forest, Greenwater Lake Scientific and Natural Area, Becker County Forest, Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, Hubbel Pond Wildlife Management Area and then crosses Highway 34 to a combination of private and public land before reaching its southern border near Frazee, Minnesota.



Guided Hikes

The Chapter offers guided hikes throughout the year. Some are annual events held in cooperation with the agencies where the Trail is located. In Itasca State Park, this included a snowshoe hike held on New Year's Day, a Lady Slipper hike in June and the Hiking Fest in August. In the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, the LLC offered hikes for the Tamarac Fall Festival in September and a hike for National Trails Day in June. LLC also offered a hike in Hubbel Pond in August. Other hikes offered included an animal tracking event in February and a hike in Vergas in July.

Events

The Chapter's annual meeting is held in January at the Maplelag Resort where members can enjoy cross-country ski and snowshoe trails as well as a beautiful lodge for the LLC business meetings, a silent auction, a featured speaker and dinner.

The Chapter's annual Joint Meeting with the Itasca Moraine Chapter was held at the Northern Pines Camp and Resort Center in Park Rapids in October. The featured speakers were a father and daughter who completed an extended hike this past summer. The Trail

A Trail Adopter Training was held in May for the many dedicated volunteers who maintain LLC trails. In addition to mowing and trimming, volunteers clear blow-downs of trees that fall in the summer storms in forested areas. To reduce the amount of time spent in maintenance activities, the Chapter investigated alternative methods for blazing and signage. Kiosks were stained where necessary and an inventory of trail structures is underway to anticipate future maintenance. A contingency fund is being developed to fund these maintenance costs.

Administration

The Board increased the number of Board meetings to six per year. A strategic plan was adopted by the membership at the January 2019 meeting to address the future of the Chapter as it transitions from a concentration on building Trail to maintenance, marketing, recruiting new members, and other factors.

An electronic "scrapbook" was produced that will be housed on the LLC page of the NCTA website. The scrapbook contains the names of volunteers who built each segment of the Trail, when they were built and pictures of the Trail under construction. Also included is historical information about the land we cross.

Star of the North

MINNESOTA - It was an easy year for members of the Chapter. No wind storms to deal with, and we were able to get all the mowing done early. With new volunteers the Trail is probably in the best shape it's been in for the past few years. One member is considering putting on a 100-mile race on the Trail in the near future. I'm hoping this will generate more local interest in the Trail. We are looking forward to starting to build new Trail to the east to connect to the Kekekabic Trail.



—Kim Fishburn

-Barb Jauquet



You've built it. hiked it, and loved it. Now you can protect it with a gift given through your will or trust. Planning for the future is important; ensure you take care of vour loved ones first, and then give the rest for the Trail. Have vou already named the NCTA in your will or trust? Let us know so you can be acknowledged as an NCTA Legacy Society Member.

Let NCTA help you with your tax obligations this year. If you are 70 years old or older, you can give up to \$100,000 from your IRA directly to a qualified charitable institution such as ours without having to pay income taxes on the money. Please contact **Director of Development** and Communications at (616) 897-5987.



The Itasca Moraine Chapter pauses during their annual Hike for Hope that Florence Hedeen started after 9/11. Pictured here are both Minnesota hikers and a couple from North Dakota, too.

Photo: Bruce Johnson

Itasca Moraine

MINNESOTA - Maintenance of our 74 miles is "all" the Itasca Moraine Chapter has to accomplish on the Trail each year, with almost all on forested public land. However, this year wind storms tried our patience, and rain in abundance coaxed the brush to grow rapidly, necessitating long hours on trail with chainsaws and loppers. Fortunately we have several sawyers who can help Trail section adopters remove downed trees.

And we used the Trail for its intended purpose, organizing our annual Hike for Hope and spring and fall equinox hikes, and many others throughout the year, all open to the public. When we weren't hiking or maintaining, we were involved in several outreach events including the "Chili Challenge" in which many organizations, churches and businesses raise money for the Hubbard County Food Shelf. Donations are sought in advance, and on the day of the Challenge, two representatives from each organization gather around the periphery of a large room, each pair serving one or two types of chili at a buck a scoop. Our Chapter serves "Hot on the Trail" chili!

Plans for 2020 include recruiting someone to welcome new members by phone, ideally, to find out more about them, such as what prompted them to join, their proximity to the Trail, and how they see themselves interacting within the Chapter. That person would also reach out to those who don't renew. As for the Trail, one of our members is presently refurbishing or replacing wooden signage to be installed this spring. Another goal will be to get our Trail section adopters to check their section of Trail more frequently, especially after high wind events, and also to evaluate the height of grass and brush incursion on Trail as the growing season progresses.

—Carter Hedeen

Arrowhead

MINNESOTA - After 10 years of existence, the Arrowhead Chapter finally celebrated the passage of the Arrowhead Reroute legislation at their March 21st meeting.



Some of the Chapter members didn't think they were going to live to see that day. Now, the hard work of developing their segment of the NCT truly begins.

A big outreach opportunity in January, the Family Fun Day at the Forest History Center, was unfortunately not successful because it was held on what turned out to be the coldest day of the winter. Maybe this year it'll be warmer than -15. The Chapter continued their efforts to improve their existing Trail within Grand Rapids, Minnesota, area in 2019 including hiring a Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa to do brushing on a four-mile stretch of Trail. On a beautiful fall day, they held a workday to sign the NCT through the University of Minnesota's North Central Research and Outreach Center. Volunteers have also been busy scouting and flagging the new NCT route across a mix of public and private lands heading southwest from the Tioga Beach city park toward the Chippewa National Forest at State Highway 6.





Two youngsters try out skishoeing at the Forest History Center in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. Photo: Matt Davis



Volunteers working on new trail by Mine Lake Photo: Stephen Booth

Kekekabic Trail

MINNESOTA - It has been quite a vear for the Kekekabic Trail Chapter hikers and volunteers! A tremendous volunteer effort over the last four years has gotten

this great wilderness trail back into good hiking shape. This year alone over 70 volunteers participated in nine clearing trips, gave just over 3300 volunteer hours and cleared more than 18 miles of the 41-mile long Kek. A huge "thank you" to all who were part of the clearing crews this past year and to the organizations and businesses providing support and lodging. The word is getting out and more hikers are back on the historic Kek Trail. Overnight permits increased by 41% from 2017 to 2018 and we expect a similar increase for 2019.

The Kek was developed during the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States Forest Service (USFS) to provide access to interior sections of the forest for fire watch protection and forest management. The Kek was repurposed by the USFS in the 1960s to be a hiking and backpacking trail. Ensuing years saw periods of neglect

followed by recovery of the trail by KEK volunteers in cooperation with the USFS starting in 1990.

The Kekekabic Trail Chapter (KEK) of the North Country Trail Association is responsible for maintaining and promoting the Trail. A small, very committed group of volunteers and supporters are the reason the Trail exists today. Currently we have a leadership board of eight people, 40 Kekekabic Trail Chapter members and operate on a budget of about \$500 per year.

KEK activities this past year, in addition to trail maintenance, included revision of the Kekekabic Trail Guide (available through the NCTA Trail Shop as well as several outdoor adventure stores), sharing information about the Kek at outdoor store events, participation in the May 31st NCTA ribbon cutting in Duluth to celebrate the federal approval of the NCT reroute which includes the Kek, clearing a reroute of the Trail by Mine Lake to avoid a section of the Trail flooded by beaver activity, and conducting a fall work camp based at the scout camp on Moose Lake near the western trailhead of the Kek.

Projects for 2020 include trail promotion, volunteer appreciation, recruitment of new crew leaders, encouraging organizations to "adopt" sections of the Trail and planning for a

new section of the Trail from the western terminus to Ely, Minnesota. We've also set a goal of doubling KEK membership and increasing the financial resources for the KEK.

Thanks to the following organizations: the USFS-Superior National Forest, the Gunflint Lodge and Outfitters, Stone Harbor Wilderness Supply, Piragis Northwoods Company, REI stores, Midwest Mountaineering, the Boy Scouts of America Northern Tier High Adventure Camp, the Conservative Anabaptist Service Project crew and the Northwoods Volunteer Connection. Trail maintenance Crew Leaders in 2019 included Terry Bernhardt, Lucie Biddinger, Eric Campbell, Matt Davis, Jason Johnson, Michael Loscheider and Derrick Passe. A special thank you to Mandy Huskey, manager at the Gunflint Lodge Outfitters, who provided invaluable assistance with our spring trail clearing trips. She is a valued partner and greatly appreciated.

—Terry Bernhardt and Eric Campbell

Brule-St. Croix

WISCONSIN -At the border of Minnesota and Wisconsin, approximately one mile of new Trail was completed this spring by the Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew (Rovers) and Chapter members. Previously, the Superior Hiking Trail in Minnesota had dead-ended at the state line, and now the new section, plus a short connecting route, extends the Trail to the first road crossing in Wisconsin. The crew also built a state line portal arch at the border to welcome hikers to Wisconsin.

Several trail structures were improved by Chapter members. The bridge on the beaver dam across Porcupine Creek, which had been impacted by recent beaver activity, was extended and short sections of puncheon were added on the beaver dam. The parking area and trailhead kiosk at MacQuarrie Wetlands were relocated per landowner request. However, the replacement of the bridge over Spring Creek, which was scheduled as the November Rovers outing, was postponed until 2020, as unseasonably cold weather forced the cancellation of that event.

The Chapter's guided hike program encompassed 11 hikes, separated into spring and fall hike series. Partnerships included an Evening Solstice hike in the Douglas County Wildlife Area, cosponsored by the Chapter and the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary, and a hike, paddle, and picnic event at the St. Croix Lake Trailhead on North Country Trail National Scenic Trail Day, cosponsored by the Chapter, St. Croix River Association, and Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters. The Chapter's National Trails Day event included trail campsite maintenance, a potluck, and a hike on



Bill Menke at the newly constructed state line portal arch at the Minnesota/Wisconsin border. Photo: Unknown



The canoeing portion of the hike, paddle, and picnic event on North Country National Scenic Trail Day, offered in partnership with the St. Croix River Association and Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters. Photo: Teresa Nelson

the Banana Belt Road reroute, which had been completed by the Rovers and Chapter members during fall 2018.

John Schrock received the Chapter Honor Award. John has served as Chapter Treasurer for many years and is a key member of the trail paint blazing crew.

As we move into the new year, the Chapter is experiencing a period of transition. After nearly 20 years of employment as the Wisconsin Regional Trail Coordinator, Bill Menke has retired, although he will continue to volunteer with the Rovers. In addition, after nine years of serving as the Chapter Trail Maintenance Coordinator, Phil Anderson will be retiring from that position. We thank both individuals for their many years of stellar service.

—Mark VanHornweder

Chequamegon

WISCONSIN -

We held five "Explore A National Scenic Trail Fun Hikes" this year with interpretive hike leaders. Originally planned trail maintenance events expanded into additional events, bringing the total to ten or more. A few of these trail maintenance events involved working with an AmeriCorps Crew. Trail maintenance involved

something as simple as moving a wilderness toilet to building bridges.

The Chequamegon Chapter again broke records for our Chapter with the largest attendance at a meeting, largest membership

Continued on next page



Presenters at the Chequamegon Chapter's first Volunteer Appreciation Potluck, Mel Baughman, Ellie Williams and Mary Stenberg, stand in front of a very appreciative audience. This Potluck was followed by a Fun Hike along the Lake Owen section.

Photo: Vickie Swank

numbers, and most shuttled hikes for a season, in 2019. The NCT Navigators, a group of women who hike the NCT almost weekly in the fall, winter and spring, once again added to our success. The Navigators' Wisconsin NCT Facebook picture/story posts almost always have a very high readership and they have gained a large following!

We continued to expand our Trail Adopters by adding several Co-Adopters this year and gained some new, very dedicated volunteers. In May of 2019 the Chequamegon Chapter received the highly prestigious USFS Volunteer & Service Award in the Enduring Service Category. The Chapter competed with other nominees from the 20-state Eastern Region for this award!

This is the year that the USFS finally started to repair flash flooding damage from 2016 (500-year flood) and then again in 2018 (100-year flood). Major repairs have started on bridges (engineered) and forest roads with contractors. While we are glad to see this progress, we are concerned about the damage caused using heavy equipment and we hope that the contractor does a good job of rehabilitating the Trail next spring. This has been a VERY wet year but at least we did not have major flash flooding again!

2020 looks to be an equally busy trail season. We hope at least to start building 8 designated campsites, complete a Rainbow Lake Wilderness trail relocation, build a wooden puncheon for flooded NCT on the approach to Copper Falls State Park, gain permanent easements for City of Mellen NCT and trail leading to Copper Falls State Park.

We plan on continuing our "Explore A National Scenic Trail Fun Hikes" in 2020 and hope to work again with an AmeriCorps Crew. Katie LeMoine, with the USFS Great Divide District, organized and procured the crew last year and plans to mount a similar effort for 2020.

—Marty Swank

Heritage

WISCONSIN - It was a very big year for the Heritage Chapter with nearly two miles of new Trail constructed and several new bridges. One bridge of 95 feet now takes the NCT across the Tyler Forks River and opens an opportunity to avoid an eightmile road walk. We began the year in May with our first ever week-long volunteer work event in

which we built nearly 0.7 miles of new Trail. Then we followed in June with HTG volunteers partnering with a crew from WisCorps to construct another 0.7 miles of Trail. In July we partnered with Iron County Forestry to construct the new 95-foot "Bill Thomas Bridge" spanning the Tyler Forks River. (See story in this issue.) And finally in the fall we constructed over 0.5 miles new Trail, finishing up the Upson-Foster section and connecting the west side of Wren Falls and the forest road network west of Wren Falls. We constructed two new campsites, one along the Potato River



Volunteers work on the Upson-Foster section in November. Photo: Mike Stafford

and one in the "scattered wildlife" area of Copper Falls State Park. In addition to partnering with those mentioned above, we are also indebted to the Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew headed by Bill Menke for constructing most of the smaller bridges and puncheon structures in the Heritage Chapter. Thank you all!

> —Michael Stafford

Ni-Miikanaake

UPPER MICHIGAN -For the Ni-Miikanaake Chapter at the west end of the Upper Peninsula, 2019 was a year of grief and renewal. In July we lost our beloved President, Cal Kangas, who in three years had brought a new level of energy and creativity to our group. Calvin died of a heart attack in July while working on the Trail. To balance this, we made progress in several ways and brought new people into the group.

We put in one mile of entirely new Trail, building a new and more direct route from the trailhead on City Highwy 519 to the Lepisto waterfall on the Presque Isle River. Continued on page 20







Morgan Grasso, Ric Olson brushing new trail near Lepisto Falls Photo: Karl Jensen

The State of Michigan will be building a 70-foot pedestrian bridge in the southeast corner of the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park (Porkies), and this will result in a large reroute of the Trail through the Porkies. We worked with young members of the Great Lakes Conservation Corps and the NCTA Next Generation Coalition to build new Trail on the way to the bridge.

With strong input from new Vice President Cathy Flory we led five hikes through parts of our trail segment, in conjunction with the Gogebic Range Young Professionals. Cathy led presentations at a local brewpub and Kiwanis group. Longtime secretary and

treasurer Morgan Grasso and Ric Olson contributed to the creation of the Lepisto Falls trail, the work on the new trails in the Porkies and many other projects. Others who made sweat equity contributions this year include

— Karl Jensen

Chuck Blakut, Alex Young, Brady Hahn, Char Herron-Jordan, Gerald Anderson and others. We now have five certified sawyers.

Next year we anticipate further work on the Porkies reroute, as it appears the pedestrian bridge will soon go out for bid. We will continue and hopefully expand our guided hikes program, and address routine maintenance on the balance of our segment. We also hope to make progress on developing about 15 miles of Trail at the west end of our segment.

Peter Wolfe

UPPER MICHIGAN -

The Peter Wolfe Chapter in Michigan's western Upper Peninsula is happy to say we maintained all our Trail miles again this year. It is always a challenge to accomplish, due to our short, wet summers (this was the wettest summer in Michigan for over 100 years) and our volunteer base lives an hour's drive from the closest trailhead! With up to 300 inches of snow each year, some of our trailheads still have unplowed snowbound access roads until mid-June and snow cover again by mid-November!

We are extremely happy to announce that we now have a new and improved trail leading to the very popular O Kun de Kun Falls and the nearby Baltimore River Bridge! Thanks to Kenny Wawsczyk, the NCTA Michigan Trail Coordinator, who helped find funding to hire a trail contractor to resurface and build boardwalk and bridges on what had been a very difficult slippery, rutty, highly used trail to the falls! More details in a separate article about this project!

Our volunteers made some awesome improvements to our trails too in addition to annual maintenance, including a reroute to avoid washouts on the Trail down the steep hill to the Middle Branch of the Ontonagon River and adding mesh to the slippery stairs on the huge suspension bridge over the river there, repairing several bridges and their steps, adding sills to about 170 feet of wood puncheon, adding metal mesh to a slippery 190 feet of puncheon and other projects.

We continue to have our popular monthly hikes on the PWC, led by Mark Roberts. And we displayed our PWC trifold poster along with our new PWC brochures, and materials from the NCTA at several events, including the Ottawa National Forest's Anniversary event, and in the local library for a month in the spring and another month in the fall. We had a great guest speaker at our Annual General Membership meeting in the spring, Alex Maier, who presented his video of his recent hike on the Hayduke Trail.



Jim Waters and Steve Maass installed wire mesh on steps to bridge over Middle Branch of the Ontonagon River. Photo: Connie Julien

This year, we purchased four 19-inch KatanaBoy Folding Silky Saws with a carry case, using an NCTA Field Grant for our volunteers to share. These saws have proved to be worth nearly their weight in gold! Even our chain sawyers love these! They are so much lighter and easier to carry and can handle most cuts except the larger fallen trees.

Next season, we look forward to a contractor replacing about 700 feet of rotted boardwalk on the very popular Canyon Falls trail. We will continue scouting and building Trail going east from there, to make an off-road PWC trail connection with the NCT Hikers Chapter's western trailhead at Long Lake. We need a bridge crossing over a new beaver-caused waterway and we need to repair another bridge and place intermittent boardwalks over wet areas along the Trail. We want to place NCT signs at all active ATV crossings of the NCT to let them know this is a nonmotorized trail.

So if you would like to have a lot of fun helping us on the Trail, let us know! We are especially in need of volunteers to mow long sections in July and August; if you can help with mowing or weed whipping on the PWC, let us know! Please visit our website: northcountrytrail.org/pwf and our Facebook page: facebook.com/NCT.PWC. Michigan.

> -Connie Julien, President Peter Wolfe Chapter

North Country Trail Hikers

UPPER MICHIGAN - "Your Adventure Starts Nearby." That's the NCTA tagline. Whenever the North Country Trail Hikers (NCTH) Chapter Trail Crew is out working, their tagline is "it's always an adventure." It was no different this year. It seems no matter how well a trail maintenance workday is planned something arises that brings a change of plans, laughter, fear or any number of possibilities. Overall, we had a great year maintaining



our section of the NCT. With a late snow melt we were unsure whether we'd get it cleared as soon as we wished but our intrepid Trail Crew and Adopters did an amazing job. We were lucky to have the Northern Michigan University (NMU) Conservation Crew help a couple of times, once in the McCormick and another west of Craig Lake. They're a great bunch of young people who love the outdoors and the NCT.

Upon working the segment east of Craig Lake in the State Park, the crew discovered the bridge over the Peshekee River askance, most likely due to heavy snow accumulation. Officially "closed," unfortunately there is no easy walk around so hikers are still gingerly crossing or possibly wading through the waters. With any luck, sometime next season we and the DNR will have the issue resolved.

Miss Heidi Hummel is serving as an NMU intern with the Chapter, volunteering 100 hours of time. We've had her busy building a couple of benches to install along the Trail.

The Marquette Trail 50 Ultramarathon which utilizes portions of the NCT for their race requested volunteers to help setup and execute the event. We had over 15 of our members help in one way or another and were pleasantly surprised that their normal \$1500 donation to the Chapter jumped to \$2500 this year. Thank you so much Marquette Trail 50 for helping promote the NCT and giving back.

Our members Mike and Kathy Bradley participated in Marquette's Haunted Hayride, an annual event in October that generates dollars for local nonprofit organizations. Mike and Kathy kindly donated \$500 to the NCT Hikers. Thank you.

Other notable events included a potluck with Annie Nelson when she came through Marquette, a booth at NMU's Health and



NMU Conservation Crew and some NCT Hikers Trail Crew members west of Craig Lake State Park. Photo: Lorana Jinkerson

Wellness Fair, several hikes including one around the lake at Craig Lake State Park, and the finale of our Softies Hike 2.0, culminating at the Mackinaw Bridge. Plans for next

season, assuming the Hiawatha National Forest approves our plan, include

building new Trail through the Rock River Canyon Wilderness. No power equipment or wheels are allowed so we will be looking for lots of volunteers. Stay tuned for more details once we get approval. Then, why not plan to join us to partake of our "it's always an adventure."

-Lorana Jinkerson

Superior Shoreline

UPPER MICHIGAN -Approximately 35 miles of the east end of our Trail are on and along "Critical Dunes" along the shore of Lake Superior. The soil here is unstable and also subject to significant erosion, contributing to hundreds of trees falling on the Trail each season or to sections of the Trail falling into Lake Superior. In addition, three miles of the Trail



Photo: Barb Isom

were destroyed in a wildfire several years ago and the burned out trees continue to fall. A major annual project is clearing several hundred trees each season. Further compounding the work is that the growth of brush encroaches upon the Trail in these areas, effectively blocking it. Removal of the trees and the brush must be done not less frequently than monthly. The leadership of our Trail Manager, Barb Isom, is to **"You are here" sign with map** be complimented for keeping the Trail open.

—Tim Hass



Piled up boards for next year's Boy Scout puncheon project

Photo: Barb Isom



John Texter with his chainsaw getting ready to do more work on some of the 600 feet of puncheon we replaced in 2019 – the 3150 Project near Naomikong Pond. Bob MacNamara is also heading to work (on the left side of the picture). Photo: Tom Walker

Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore

UPPER MICHIGAN - Hiawatha Shoreto-Shore launched 2019 with the "First Hike on the First" on New Year's Day at 1:00 p.m. Revelers skied and snowshoed along the Tahquamenon River on the River Mouth Trail. The day was wrapped with burgers at the Silver Creek Grille and Tavern.

"National Winter Trails Day" was celebrated January 5th with three linked events. The

celebration began with a brown bag lunch around a bonfire and hikes in the Hiawatha National Forest off Brevort Lake Road. Midafternoon the group and other hikers gathered at the Saint Ignace Hiawatha National Forest Office hiking the Gros Cap groomed trails and enjoying snacks and visiting with the National Forest Ranger Robert West and crew.

Matthew Ozanich, Producer of the CMU-TV show "Destination Michigan," filmed the hike and interviewed Chapter members for the show's coverage of the North Country Trail in Michigan. The coverage can be viewed at video.wcmu.org.

The event continued with a late afternoon "Stomp the Park" hike sponsored by the Straits State Park crew led by Park Supervisor, Charlie Maltby. The park provided a bonfire with s'mores and hot chocolate while the lighting of the Big Mac Bridge added entertainment and photographic opportunities. A lantern lit trail led hikers to their vehicles. The hikers wrapped the day with a late dinner at Village Inn in St. Ignace.

HSS joined Paradise, Michigan, on January 26th for their Winter Carnival celebration. The day began with a community breakfast and was followed by a hike along the scenic Tahquamenon River. Temperatures at the beginning of the hike were -16 degrees and warmed to 6 degrees above zero by the end of the hike.

The Chapter continued their annual Valentine hike at Tahquamenon Falls. The Roving Crew rented the Tahquamenon Lodge for a long weekend of hiking and camaraderie.

May 9th was the annual Hikers' Rendezvous. The day began with an afternoon bonfire and hikes of varying lengths. Late afternoon the group gathered at Village Inn for a buffet dinner and presentation of our annual Chapter award to Carol Wozniak. Jo Oostveen was our guest speaker and regaled us with humorous tales of her time on the North Country Trail and inspired us to continue our work on the Trail.

Theresa Neal at Tahquamenon Falls SP invited HSS to join her and local Paradise volunteers for a National Trails Day work effort. "Face slappers" were removed from a section of the Lower Falls boardwalk, and the crew and local volunteers moved on to clear over 10 miles of the NCT between the Lower Falls and Tahqua Trail Road, and seven miles of Trail between the Upper Falls

and County Road 500. For a giggle or two have Tom tell you about the rescue of Stan and Kay at the end of the day!

In late June our Roving Crew joined Eric Johnson and his AmeriCorps crew with clearing debris from along M-123 and celebrated wrapping Eric's project on the NCT with AmeriCorps and the park.

Roving Crew Coordinator, John Texter, launched the 3150 Project in late August and work continued through September. Over 600 feet of aging puncheon was removed and replaced with new decked puncheon. The completion of the project was celebrated with an October hike through the project area and along the Lake Superior shore. The hikers discovered that while they were working on the project, Lake Superior had claimed a nearby section of the NCT! Also during that hike we were able to cross the newly refurbished suspension bridge over Naomikong Creek. The bridge was closed 11 months earlier due to extensive damage caused by snowmobiles using the foot bridge.

Adopt a Section Coordinator Bill Courtois and his crew spent the year maintaining the Trail. Hikers reported great hiking conditions all along the HSS Chapter section of the NCT. The Roving Crew assisted with downed tree removal and refreshing the blue blazes.

The Guard Lake Project was partially completed in late fall. Hikers can now enjoy a high and dry walk in that area.

The Chapter and guests celebrated the Christmas season and wrapped the year with a five-mile hike that included the Niagara Escarpment and a potluck at the Kujawas' cabin.

Join us on our hikes and/or projects! New faces are always welcome! Bob has a tool that will fit your hand.

— Tom Walker

Harbor Springs

LOWER MICHIGAN - We are excited here in northern Michigan. We completed our 2019 "Hike to the Bridge" campaign and more! We hiked to the Mackinac Bridge and over the bridge as a Chapter, 51 miles total in the year 2019. The hikers who did all of the Chapter hikes completed over half of their Hike 100!

Each month we made the front page of our local paper, the Petoskey News Review. With the help of our local paper, flyers at the community college, Facebook posts and local chambers of commerce, we attracted well over 20 hikers each month. We even had a full moon hike in February. The snow was so deep we could barely sign in to our log box!

Our Chapter also led a post-Celebration hike through the southern half of our trail section. Next May we will again host the UP Softies to finish the northern half of our trail section before they begin their third trek across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan again in October.

We have trail adopters for all of our 11 sections except one and each section has a log box at the southern trailhead. Our dedicated volunteers are encouraged when they read the positive comments and "thank you's" that hikers write:

Nicely Kept and Marked, Well Done!

Beautiful Trail, Thank you!

Thank you for the Shingles, Great Idea!

Shari, the best segment of the trail since North Dakota! The trails are awesome!

the trans are awesome.

Awesome trail maintenance! What a treasure!

—Judy Conrad



Snowplow th Photo: Dove Day



Moonlight hike

Photo: Dove Day

Snowplow throw has nearly buried this trail register!



Trail building workshop at 2019 NCTA Celebration Photo: Duane Lawton

Jordan Valley 45°

LOWER MICHIGAN -For the Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (JV 45°) 2019 was a year to celebrate! After much trail work by members (and others thanks Chief Noonday Chapter friends!) in 2018 and early 2019, we were honored to host the 2019 NCTA Celebration to showcase our portion of the NCT and the beauty of our area. The Celebration trail building workshop even created a new spur trail for JV 45°.

For more than a decade JV 45° leaders have been pursuing a bridge over the Bear River in order ultimately to eliminate approximately 3.5 miles of road walk. Through a collaborative effort of the JV 45° leadership, the City of Petoskey and North Central Michigan College, numerous grants have been secured and the bridge is currently scheduled to be constructed in 2020. Knowing that the bridge is coming soon, the reroute planning and trail building pace picked up in 2019. Projects Coordinator Duane Lawton, along with assistance from Kenny Wawsczyk, finalized the route for the first segment of the reroute and obtained the needed permits for the many needed structures just in time for the a four-day work weekend Extravaganza to celebrate North Country National Scenic Trail Day! The Extravaganza was a HUGE success; it was a fun-filled work weekend with about 30 old and new friends (from near and far), and together we built approximately 1.3 miles of new Trail, including eight structures ranging from 12-foot-long puncheon to a 140-foot-long boardwalk, definitely something to celebrate! Dove and John Day's handsome NCTsigned barn served as the all-important Extravaganza headquarters for strategizing, socializing and eating!

In addition to our major work projects, JV 45° members and friends enjoy monthly hikes organized and led by our hike coordinator, Bob Courtois. Our Chapter members and friends are kept well informed and entertained by our amazing communications coordinator, Bob Haack, with his bi-monthly newsletter.



Extravaganza boardwalk building Photo: Duane Lawton



Lumber cutting at Extravaganza HQ (John Day and Jerry Allen in photo) Photo: Bill Courtois

Grand Traverse Hiking Club

LOWER MICHIGAN - 2019 marked the 25th anniversary of our Chapter's founding.

The highlight for this year was the completion of an 11.5-mile reroute west of Kalkaska. This new section of Trail will drop into Guernsey Lake State Forest Campground and lies south of the "old" trail. The beauty in this new section is that it follows the North Branch of the Boardman River until snaking behind the Kalkaska airport and County Road Commission. It then connects into Kalkaska, an NCTA Trail Town. Urban blazing will be finished soon to guide hikers through downtown to connect to the "old" trail at Burger King.

A portion of the new trail construction included the replacement of an old DNR split rail fence on the river totaling over 500 feet in length. In September we held a club hike and picnic to admire our hard work thus far and celebrate the reroute. We'll continue to maintain 106 miles of the NCT, which will increase by about a half-mile with this reroute.

This year was more challenging for our trail adopters since several of the hiking events at the NCTA Celebration in May were in our region. Our adopters met our requests to get out early and have the Trail be hiker-ready before May. This emphasis was two-fold, be ready for Celebration and prune trees while they're still dormant, especially oaks to prevent the threat of Oak Wilt in the region. Many thanks to our members who led the hikes and to the trail adopters who got the Trail in tip-top shape! Also, some of our members spent a lot of volunteer time assisting the Jordan 45° Chapter in organizing the event.

Our trail work is not limited to the NCT. We provided our trail building expertise to assist the Grand Traverse Conservation District and TART Trails (Traverse Area Recreational Trails) in constructing the Boardman River Trail. This trail will eventually connect the TART trail system in Traverse City to the NCT, totaling 22 miles.

National Trails Day on June 1st was a great success. We celebrated in Kalkaska with our Trail Town partners by hosting NCT hikes in the morning, a six-mile hike and a two-mile hike that both ended at Pickerel Lake State Forest Campground. Hikers and community members gathered at Chalker Park in Kalkaska for lunch provided by the Kalkaska Downtown Development Authority and TC Energy Corp.

In addition to our usual NCT work, we were part of other activities to promote our Chapter and the NCT. For the last few years, we have adopted a three-mile stretch of highway on US-131, near the Manistee River, and volunteered at the State Theater in

Traverse City. This year club members also volunteered for the State Parks 100year celebration and distributed club maps and information.

In 2020 we might lie low and perfect the 106.5 miles of Trail we maintain. There aren't any more trail reroutes planned, but we are thinking ahead and beginning to identify how to eliminate some remaining stretches of road walking.



Guernsey Lake from new NCT Reroute *— Mike Schaeffer* Photo: Patty Warner

—Mary Campbell





Spirit of the Woods overgrown Trail Photo: Robert Dunning

Spirit of the Woods

LOWER **MICHIGAN** - The Spirit of the Woods Chapter had a normal trail maintenance season in 2019, despite a very wet spring and relatively warm summer, which made for ideal growing conditions



for the vegetation along the trail. At least, that's what we thought when at the end of July, we began to hear that there were problems out on the Trail in an area called Sawdust Hole, a 1.5-mile section of the trail passing through an area also known as Leitch Bayou, on the high banks alongside the Manistee River.

Going out for an inspection it was rather obvious that we did not mow the Trail along this section as we usually do May before Memorial Day of every year. Mother Nature was going to teach us a lesson about our neglect. The native grasses along the trail had grown to over waist high and along with tree branches and colonies of invasive plant species (Autumn Olive, Multiflora Rose and Barberry to name a few) had completely enclosed and obscured 70% of the trail's corridor and tread. Wild Parsnips were also found along the trail, which has a very poisonous sap that can produce serious skin burns, a concern for users of the trail. Existing carsonite signage

Continued on page 26

Who's Who Along the **North Country Trail?**

NORTH DAKOTA

MINNESOTA

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WISCONSIN

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

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

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

National Park Service: The NPS is an excellent technical resource for volunteers, agencies, partner organizations, and the media. As our official Trail administrator, the NPS sets Trail standards, determines Trail route, and provides the overall vision for the Trail.

NPS-NOCO Office

P.O. Box 228, Lowell, MI 49331 (616) 319-7906 www.nps.gov/noco **Chris Loudenslager, Superintendent** Christopher Loudenslager@nps.gov • ext. 1

cell: (616) 970-7026

Luke Jordan, Outdoor Recreational Planner Luke Jordan@nps.gov • ext. 2 • cell: (616) 250-6714

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

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

North Dakota 1 Lonetree Wildlife Management Area Minnesota Matt Davis • (701) 388-1883 mdavis@northcountrytrail.org Wisconsin 2 Sheyenne River Valley Chapter Bobby Koepplin • (701) 840-0250 srv@northcountrytrail.org 24 Michigan Dakota Prairie Chapter Mary Moberg • (701) 271-6769 dpc@northcountrytrail.org 25 26 27 4 Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter Allan Schroden • mwp@northcountrytrail.org Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter Ohio 19 5 Laurentian Lakes Chapter Tom Walker • (906) 440-0831 Barb Jauguet-Kalinoski • Ilc@northcountrytrail.org hss@northcountrytrail.org 6 Itasca Moraine Chapter Carter Hedeen • itm@northcountrytrail.org **LOWER MICHIGAN** Star of the North Chapter 20 Harbor Springs Chapter Kim Fishburn • (612) 810-3732 Shari Sanderson • (231) 838-9744 stn@northcountrytrail.org hrb@northcountrytrail.org Arrowhead Chapter 21 Jordan Valley 45° Chapter Doug Baker • (218) 326-4030 Mary Campbell • j45@northcountrytrail.org arw@northcountrytrail.org Kekekabic Trail Chapter Friends of the Jordan River National Eric Campbell • kek@northcountrytrail.org Fish Hatchery (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Border Route Trail Association (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Roger Gordon • roger_gordon@fws.gov Ed Solstad • (612) 822-0569 22 Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter info@borderroutetrail.org gtr@northcountrytrail.org Superior Hiking Trail Association (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) 23 Spirit of the Woods Chapter Denny Caneff, Executive Director • 218-834-2700 x. 202 Bob Dunning • (779) 772-3344 dcaneff@superiorhiking.org spw@northcountrytrail.org 24 Western Michigan Chapter Beth Keloneva • (231) 215-3552 12 Brule-St.Croix Chapter wmi@northcountrytrail.org Mark VanHornweder • bsc@northcountrytrail.org 25 Chief Noonday Chapter 13 Chequamegon Chapter Kevin Schram • (715) 765-4789 Jane Norton • cnd@northcountrytrail.org che@northcountrvtrail.org Chief Baw Beese Chapter 26 14 Heritage Chapter Bruce Dziadzio • baw@northcountrytrail.org Michael Stafford • (414) 403-4575 htg@northcountrytrail.org OHIO 27 NW Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association **UPPER MICHIGAN** (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) 15 Ni-Miikanaake Chapter Ryan Bowles • (734) 308-6696 Karl Jensen • 715-952-8900 bowlesr1234@gmail.com nmk@northcountrytrail.org 28 Buckeye Trail Association (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) 16 Peter Wolfe Chapter Andrew Bashaw • (740) 394-2008 Connie Julien • pwf@northcountrytrail.org director@buckeyetrail.org North Country Trail Hikers Chapter 29 Wampum Chapter Lorana Jinkerson • (906) 226-6210 Dennis Garrett • (724) 827-2350 nct@northcountrytrail.org Superior Shoreline Chapter wam@northcountrytrail.org Tim Hass • ssc@northcountrytrail.org

Legend



PENNSYLVANIA 29 Wampum Chapter Dennis Garrett • (724) 827-2350 wam@northcountrytrail.org **30 Butler County Chapter** Dave Adams • (724) 453-1685 but@northcountrytrail.org Butler Outdoor Club (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Jan Berg • president@butleroutdoorclub.org **31** Clarion County Chapter Dave Galbreath • (814) 226-5574 cla@northcountrytrail.org 32 Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Patty Brunner • (412) 609-8422 info@rachelcarsontrails.org **33** Allegheny National Forest Chapter Mike Toole • (814) 723-4714 anf@northcountrytrail.org

NEW YORK

34 Finger Lakes Trail Conference (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Quinn Wright, Executive Director gwright@fingerlakestrail.org 35 Central New York Chapter Mark Wadopian • cny@northcountrytrail.org 36 Adirondack Mountain Club (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Wes Lampman • 518-668-4447 x.34 • wes@adk.org

VERMONT

37 Middlebury Area Land Trust (Trail Maintaining Affiliate) Jamie Montague • (802) 388-1007 • jamie@maltvt.org



End of last workday reclaiming the SPW Trail

Photo: Loren Bach

obviously had become perches for birds, who kindly obviously made Autumn Olive fruit/seed deposits there as the signs were surrounded by the bush now. The result of all this was that hikers and anglers using the trail had started creating their own paths to get through the relatively grassy flat high bank area.

Obviously, the NCT Trail corridor had to be reclaimed in its original place. To control invasive species we were looking at we would have to treat the plants chemically using a cut-stump method with an application of herbicide, something, only one member of our Chapter had any experience with. This had to be done before cold weather, so we had to enlist the help of our partners on the Trail. That's the second lesson: they are there to help you. In consultation with the USFS, our local land manager, we got permission to widen the trail to make maintenance easier in the future. The USFS trained crew dealt with the Wild Parsnips, while the NPS in Lowell loaned us brush saws to use. The Michigan Regional Trail Coordinator help marked the trail for signage. The local North Country Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area and the Manistee Conservation District provided guidance and training for us in the cut-stump application of herbicide. We reestablished the Trail's tread by gps and ground inspection and then mowing for six days to expose the trail's tread. The Chapter's sawyers and volunteers then were able to treat and widen the Trail's corridor over three days, all completed by Sept. 28th.

- Bob Dunning

Western Michigan

LOWER MICHIGAN - The Western Michigan Chapter is comprised of 136 miles of Trail passing through Kent and Newaygo Counties in Western Michigan. We are fortunate to have

two Trail Managers in our Chapter, Jim Bradley in Kent County and Steve Hatting in Newaygo. Kent County is more urban due to the metropolitan area of Grand Rapids and consequently the NCT is shared in cooperation with a number of lovely County Parks and State Game Areas, with 40% of the Trail off-road. In Kent County we are consistently making progress

rerouting trails off road working with various communities and land owners. In Newaygo County 75% of the Trail is off road and travels through the beautiful

Manistee-Huron National Forest. The NCT in Newaygo County is known for its miles of off-road Trail and attracts many long distance hikers. In Newaygo County, this past year, we have worked on upgrading tread on several sections of the Trail where erosion had taken over.

Our crowning achievement in 2019 was the start of construction of three miles of reroute in Newaygo County just west of White Cloud called the "Echo Drive Reroute." The concept for this project began in 2012. Seven years later, "in 2019 the project was funded by a generous grant from the Fremont Area Community Foundation. The NCTA staff was able to purchase all the material and pay for the Forest Service's staff time. The new trail footpath was flagged in the fall of 2019, and US Forest Service finalized the trail on September the 10th. The US Forest Service Staff and WMI members opened the woods to the worksite on September 12 making way for lumber delivery. The next day on the 13th of September construction of the 350-foot-long raised boardwalk over a charming little marsh began. The boardwalk was engineered by Forest Service staff to minimize the impact on the Alley Lake wetlands.

The three miles of the long-awaited reroute are expected to be completed in 2020. Future hikers traveling along this new reroute will enjoy a much safer and scenic section of the NCT. Most likely they will not be aware of the many years of effort and cost it took to get the NCT off Echo Drive. That is as it should be. They are there to enjoy the solitude and the serenity of their walk along the NCT as it passes through the woodlands of our County and the Huron-Manistee National Forest." Quote from Charles Chandler's article, published at www.nearnorthnow.com/leisure.

Another significant change for the Chapter was the decision to let go of the management and rental of the historic North Country Trail School House. The NCTA Board consequently voted at their December meeting to sell the School House and property. It was the original headquarters for the NCTA back in the 1970s. When headquarters moved to Grand Rapids in the early 1980s the WMI Chapter took over the operations of the School House, which was rented out to campers and hikers.

—Beth Keloneva



Picture frame for event visitors: at our info booths, we offer to take photos of visitors with their own cameras and suggest they share them on social media. Photo: Mary Rebert

Chief Noonday

LOWER MICHIGAN -



The Chief Noonday Chapter was exceptionally busy with outreach activities, experimenting with a wooden picture frame decorated with CND's web page, NCTA logo, a blue blaze and the name of the activity, such as Barry Youth Outdoors. Animal masks at this particular activity were chosen by the youth and a picture was taken with their phone or their parents' so the participant gets a picture of himself at our display, which should keep the Trail in their memory. This frame was used at nine of our 14 activities (including parades) and was very popular, very successful! The hope was that some of these pictures would make it to individuals' own Facebook pages!

Each person received a Nature Valley Granola Bar and the picture frame will continue in 2020! A pallet of granola bars was granted by Nature Valley. These bars were always at workdays, meetings, 12 hikes, and three Adopt-A-Highway trash pickups.

Our monthly meetings have been held in Barry County since the Chapter was formed, so it was suggested that meetings should also be held in our other two counties, Kalamazoo and Calhoun. A meeting was held in each county at local businesses and were well attended. This will also continue in 2020. 2019 was also used to plan a puncheon project in a perennial wet area, obtain the required permits, write and receive two grants, and the wood purchased and cut, ready for warmer weather construction.

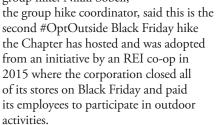
Our Adopters continued to maintain trail and received kudos in the log books by hikers, who do appreciate all the hard work we do on the NCT.



—Jane Norton

Chief Baw Beese

LOWER MICHIGAN - The North Country Trail Association's Chief Baw Beese Chapter opted for the outdoors this past November 26th, Black Friday, for an organized group hike. Nikki Sobell,



Sobell coordinated the previous year's Black Friday hike also, and hoped to increase numbers of local people from the original 10. As a hiker and outdoor enthusiast herself, Sobell adopted what she calls a "hike your own hike" philosophy where those participating hike at their own pace and distance rather than in a larger group. The good news is that this year's Black Friday event brought out 23 people and four dogs.

-Corey Murray



Trail improvements in wet area of Lost Nation State Game Land Photo: Phil McDowell



Trailhead and kiosk Photo: Rvan Bowles

Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association

OHIO - The Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association (NORTA) is a small but active group focused on maintaining and improving the Wabash Cannonball Trail, a rail-trail that the NCT follows for more than 30 miles. We have

just completed a two-year-long project to design, build, and erect seven kiosks at key trailheads with trail information, including information about the NCT in northwestern Ohio. We also completed construction of two trailheads, one of which is on the NCT route at Fulton County Road 23 near Elmira. This trailhead

includes one of our new kiosks as well as a native plant area.

In December, we created a standing committee dedicated to the NCT between the Ohio-Michigan state line and the intersection with the Buckeye Trail. The committee, led by Ryan Bowles and Marianne Duvendack, will work to improve the Trail where it is not shared with the Wabash Cannonball. Our immediate goal is to reopen a



Trailhead native plant area Photo: Ryan Bowles

-Ryan Bowles

roughly one-mile-long section in the Maumee State Forest south of Oak Openings Metropark that has not been maintained in many years.

In 2020, expect to see some trail disruptions along the Wabash Cannonball Trail section of the NCT just west of Oak Openings. Metroparks Toledo will be paving the trail from Oak Openings to OH-109, a length of about six miles, to make the trail accessible to a wider group of users. We will share information about trail closures and detours as they become available. The first mile of the improved trail will be known as Tom's Mile, dedicated to Tom Duvendack, former manager of Oak Openings Metropark and past president of NORTA, who was instrumental in the creation of the Wabash Cannonball Trail and a huge supporter of the NCT in northwestern Ohio.

The Buckeye Trail Association OHIO -

The BTA Strategic Plan (called BTA 2025) Executive Summary has been adopted by the Buckeye Trail Association and took effect on January 1, 2020. It's the culmination of almost 2.5 years of work by the BTA Board (and others) and will be the guiding document on how the



BTA will go forward through the end of 2025. It will be available as a PDF in the next few weeks and will likely be posted on our website. The larger, full document will be a living instrument and will, no doubt, have changes made to it as the years roll on.

The State of Ohio has entered into an agreement with American Electric Power for purchase of the AEP ReCreation Lands in Eastern Ohio. The announcement came on October 2, 2019, in Governor Mike DeWine's Statehouse office and the BTA was there (see picture). The parcels that the State will buy in 2020 contain that 26-mile segment of the Buckeye Trail that was at risk. From the beginning, the BTA has been one of the leading proponents in promoting this purchase. Recently the BTA met with ODNR officials regarding how they can work with the BTA to enhance the hiking experience on the Buckeye Trail in the ReCreation Lands.

The Volunteer Handbook was adopted by the BTA Board in November and will be a resource for volunteers in serving the mission of the Buckeye Trail Association. Like the full version of BTA 2025, it is a living document and will be revised from time to time as needed.

Through Richard Lutz's diligent work, an inventory of the Sections is being conducted that will help to determine the future of the Buckeye Trail.

Several Ohio communities became Buckeye Trail Towns in 2019 including Deersville and Chardon and approximately 15 miles of off-road Trail built by the Buckeye Trail Crew in the Edge of Appalachia Preserve over the last few years became a part of the Buckeye Trail/North Country Trail in September.

The BTA Chain Sawyer program continues to grow.

We have an ever expanding list of trained chain sawyers who are ready to help with that aspect of trail maintenance wherever it's needed

The Buckeye Trail Data Book, First Edition was published

in 2019 and the Guthook Guide App for the Buckeye Trail went live in 2019 allowing hikers with cell phones to track



Left to right: Richard Lutz, Andrew Bashaw, Executive Director of BTA; Steve Walker, President of BTA and member of NCTA Board; Governor Mike DeWine (front); Joe Hankins, W. Va. Director for The Conservation Fund (back)

Photo: Buckeye Trail Association

themselves when hiking the Buckeye Trail. The Buckeye Trail is one of only four dozen trail systems worldwide and only two dozen or so trail systems in the U.S.A. that have a Guthook Guide App.

In March of 2019, the BTA Board met in a special meeting to consider purchase of some buildings in our headquarters village of Shawnee (also a Buckeye Trail Town) and, after some good discussion, the decision was made to buy two lots that had three buildings on them, including our current headquarters. The 129 Project was commenced over the summer to refurbish our future headquarters building. All major structural issues have been repaired and interior work is underway. We should begin moving some BTA operations into the 129 Project during the first quarter of 2020. All plumbing, electrical and heating systems will be new with the exception of a donated 90% high efficiency furnace. All of this progress is due to the hard work of the 129 Project Committee.

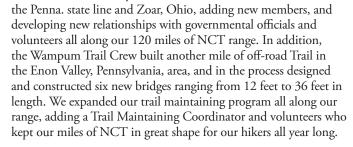
-Steve Walker



Wampum trail crew finishing up an upgrade to 70' of bog bridge. Photo: Dave Brewer

Wampum

OHIO and PENNSYLVANIA - For the Wampum Chapter 2019 was a year of different aspects and priorities, the primary one being expansion: taking on the responsibility for an additional 80 miles of North Country Trail between





30 The North Star 💥





Bridge #3 on the Enon Valley Trail Route Photo: Dave Brewer

2019 was also a year of expanded outreach as we sponsored the First Annual Darlington Road and Trail 5K and Trail Town Festival, participated in Wampum's Trail Town Festival, attended 12 community outreach events where we provided information about the NCT and gave kids the opportunity to carve their own hiking sticks, and marched in three community parades. Wampum volunteers worked with the Knights of Columbus on our annual fundraising Hike4Kidz event and conducted a Meet-and-Greet in the future Trail Town of Lisbon, Ohio. Two new parking area NCT informational kiosks and a highway sign were added along our trail range over the past 12 months to help build awareness of the Trail.

Monthly hikes were planned and conducted by our volunteers along our NCT range, including a search for Sasquatch and the serving of pie at our annual October Pumpkin Pie Hike. We also made our presence and impact on the community known by contributing many volunteer hours to the construction of a new spur trail at McConnells Mill State Park and by continuing our annual participation in the Great American Cleanup of Pennsylvania where we worked to beautify a mile of our on-road Trail route.

Finally, the past year was a year of improvements along the Wampum Chapter NCT range. A local Eagle Scout candidate provided the Chapter with a new hiking shelter at a very strategic overnighting location, and our volunteers completed the blazing of a seven-mile road walk upgrade, moving the Trail off a dangerous stretch of state highway and putting it onto quieter, back-country roads and into alignment with the future location of off-road Trail to be built. Sixty miles of current road walk in Ohio were reblazed, we completed a quarter mile reroute of the existing Trail west of Wampum, and regularly scheduled trail work sessions were held to repair and upgrade short stretches of the pathway. A mile of our NCT range in Penna. had been logged over the past winter

Continued on page 32

WAMPUM CHAPTER

North Country Trail Association

and our volunteers worked diligently over the spring and summer to get that section back into shape for our hikers.

Additionally, over the course of the year 14 existing trail bridges were either repaired, replaced, or upgraded and a major remodel to the Watt's Mill shelter area grounds was completed. Trailside benches were added at various locations along the Trail in Beaver County, including a memorial to one of our members who passed away late last year. Lastly, our members improved their skills at a Chapter sponsored First Aid training session earlier in the year, helping us prepare for the unexpected.

We'd like to thank all of our members. volunteers, members of the community, our governmental agency contacts, and community organizations for all of their contributions to the North Country Trail over the past year. We're looking forward to continuing our mission in 2020. —Dave Brewer

Volunteers from the North Face in Grove City, Penna. helping with stick carving at the McConnells Mill Heritage Festival. Photo: Dave Brewe

New Hiker Shelter on the NCT in Lawrence County Penna. Provided By Eagle Scout Candidates Sam and Sully Egbert. Photo: The Egbert Family

Allegheny National Forest

PENNSYLVANIA -Over the last year, 184 volunteers

participated at 18 trail work days. Throughout the year, 40 trail adopters diligently



checked and made improvements on their own trail segments. Other hikers helped out by clearing trail as they moved through the forest or by submitting trail reports of problems they encountered. All 97 miles of Trail were cleared of downfall at least once and lopped or brush cut. Many miles were also mowed.

The Allegheny National Forest Chapter tackled many projects this year.

> • The last eight of 13 informational panels were installed on trailhead kiosks. Grants from the National Park Service, Penn Soil RC&D, Allegheny Outdoor Club and Allegheny Outfitters allowed the Chapter to create and purchase these panels.

> • Work is progressing with getting the necessary approval from the US Forest Service to put two additional shelters along the Trail. One would be north of the Rt. 948 Cherry Run trailhead and the other south of the Rt. 321 Chappel Bay trailhead.

• An equipment shed was purchased and placed at the Marienville Ranger Station. The Chapter now has an equipment



Joe Torok and Dawn Sheilds build new bog bridges near Rt. 6 in Ludlow. Photo: Tina Toole



Mike Toole removes downfall in Tracy Ridge. Photo: Tina Toole

shed for both the southern and northern sections of the Trail.

• Keeping feet dry along the NCT in the ANF is a challenge. Volunteers spent many hours working on moving water off the Trail by constructing ditches and water bars. Several small trail relocations moved the Trail to firmer ground. Ten new bog bridges were constructed over marshy areas. All 10 of these walkways were covered with steel mesh which provides traction on slippery surfaces. That makes a total of 245 bridges, covering 3175 feet or 0.6 miles, along the 97 miles of the NCNST!

• The Chapter continued to renew blazing of 25 miles of Trail. This is an annual effort to reblaze all of the NCT miles over four years.

- Another project included the removal of some old oil well pipes crossing the Trail that were tripping hazards.
- A new staircase was built south of Fox's Dam.

Discussions with Rich Hatfield, US Forest Service District Ranger, and Valerie Bader helped establish a protocol to protect the Trail from logging activities. Various past logging areas were viewed to help establish a desired no-cut corridor along the Trail. This corridor will help minimize the impact of logging activities that have caused increased maintenance and wind throw issues and damaged the viewscape. The agreed upon no-cut buffer is a minimum of 100 feet with the ability to extend that to 150 to 200 feet based on conditions. This agreement resulted in two stands along the NCT in the US Forest Service

Cherry Run project being increased to 150 feet from the original proposed 100 feet buffer.

The ANF Chapter offers monthly guided hikes along the length of the NCNST in the ANF. They also host the popular Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge each June. The 10th annual A-100 Challenge was held with 140 participants. There were over 160 registrants. Seventeen hikers went the full 100 miles in 50 hours or less.





Bob Klasen & Jim Penley removed a large downfall and then repaired the damaged stream bank south of Kellettville. Photo: Katie Prindle

Finger Lakes Trail Conference

NEW YORK - Across upstate New York, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference offered all the usual annual

stuff, fun spring and fall weekends of hikes and programs, yet another series of hikes designed to cross one whole county on the Trail with school busses helping with logistics, plus several separate hikes in celebration of various people and events, regional meetings with trail tenders for training and information-sharing, and threw in two brand new creations this year.

The International Trails Symposium landed in Syracuse this year, so we had a major display showing the framework of two different styles of trail shelters in order to share their construction with a large crowd of trail volunteers and professionals. Those shelters were then taken down and reconstructed out in the field along the Trail.

Also, we carried out our first ever Trail Days in Bath at the county fairgrounds, with vendors who offered guests rock climbing, kayaking in a small pool, and rope work, plus info presentations, and displays from many kinds of outdoor opportunities, including great support from the staff of state parks and forests, and hikes in the local area led by our volunteers. Visitor numbers weren't as high as our aims, but for a first time event, participation was good, and everybody seemed to have a great time there. So with our partner, the Steuben County Conference and Visitors Bureau, we're happy to hold the event again in 2021! It must be mentioned that the NCTA supported this event by covering an intern to help us with publicity.

Other newsworthy achievements: our Board joined other organizations in an amicus curiae brief, or "friend of the court" petition to prevent public entities like towns from just giving away land they had previously protected for public use. Results were positive!

Continued on page 34



Last summer one of the Symposium shelters was re-built in the woods, near the west end of the Trail in N.Y. These post and beam shelters are much easier to build than the traditional style using whole logs, and safer, too! Photo: Donna Flood

Our frequent partners at the Finger Lakes Land Trust received a donation of property, thereby protecting 3000 feet of the Trail (also NCT in this spot, which is a hilltop with 30-mile views). We are also in the process of building new Trail on several properties in the middle of our trail across upstate N.Y. One will add a new mile, replacing road walk, while another gives us a permanent easement on about 1250 feet, and another mile-plus is being built as a hunting season bypass to replace another roadwalk, even though it necessarily goes straight up a steep forested hill on long switchbacks.

We have begun to support certified guides to lead youth groups on short backpacking trips over a weekend. So last year there were three such trips, taking teenage Girl Scouts to a shelter for overnight after short hikes. Yes, they cooked their food and slept outside, a first for most of them. By all reports, they loved it! This project won't make any money, but we hope that loving hiking will take root with at least a few of the kids.

—Irene Szabo

Central New York

NEW YORK - In 2019 the Central New York Chapter was supported by a membership of about 120 hikers. Chapter members have recorded over 1300 volunteer hours. We monitor, blaze and/or maintain more than 107 miles of Trail including road walks. Our 30 Trail Stewards are directly responsible for monitoring and reporting on

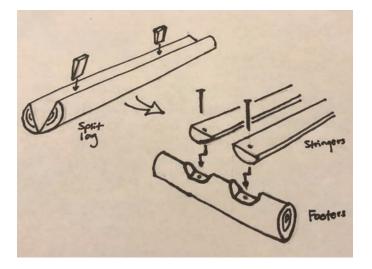


over 42 miles of off-road Trail.

The Chapter coordinates with several state, county and municipal entities. NYS Parks permits are up to date. These permits require renewal in September each year. NYSDEC Fish & Wildlife and DEC Forest permits and agreements are renewed in December. We continue to monitor these critical documents. Madison and Oneida County offices are also frequently consulted.

The Chapter sponsored and provided leaders for 17 hikes and work sessions in 2019. The work sessions involved trail reconstruction, clearing by sawyers and mowing. Recreational hikes included snowshoeing, tree identification, birding, wildflower identification, a Young Forest Initiative hike, a Trail Days fungi identification hike (led by Ed Setliff, a new member who was engaging and well received) and a hike to and from a fish survey where the Trail crosses Canastota Creek (led by Thad Yorks and the students of the Environmental Biology Program at Cazenovia College).

An ad hoc Landowner Committee, chaired by Kathy Eisele, and backed by Peg Whaley, Scott Sellers and Mark Wadopian, has taken on the task of reviewing and updating our Landowner Records and Agreements in consultation with Mary Kunzler-Larmann and Al Larmann, our previous records managers.



Split-log Bridge Sketch Photo: Steve Kinne



Split Log Construction Photo: Steve Kinne

To enhance safety and reduce hazardous sections of road-walk, reroute planning for the NCT through the City of Rome up to Pixley Falls State Park continues, albeit slowly.

At Clark Hill State Forest studies and planning continue in order to abate the main obstacle, a bridge necessary to cross Stringer Brook. This project has been complicated by retirements within NYS DEC offices, but new contacts have been established. Permit requests and the use of drones for remote survey are pending.

The Annual Meeting was conducted on Sunday, October 20 at the Chittenango/Sullivan Free Library. It was attended by 25 members and guests. Award recipients were Eileen Fairbrother (Distinguished Service Award) and Cazenovia Preservation Foundation (Honor Award). The guest speaker, Cliff Hopkins, was engaging, entertaining and informative. His presentation included pointers and demonstrations on outdoor and wildlife photography as well as the judging of photos entered into our first annual photo contest.

-Mark Wadopian

Wilderness. Photo: Mary Coffin Adirondack Mountain Club Affiliate

unsupervised volunteer work in the Adirondack Park on markers.

We have designed a brochure to promote the Trail with town supervisors, chambers of commerce and tourism bureaus in the Adirondack Park. This is helping build local support. Also, the Adirondack Mountain Club will soon be adding an NCNST page to its website to inform more people about the Trail.

Adirondack sections of the NCNST.



Members of the volunteer crew building trail up Jones Hill in the Hoffman Notch

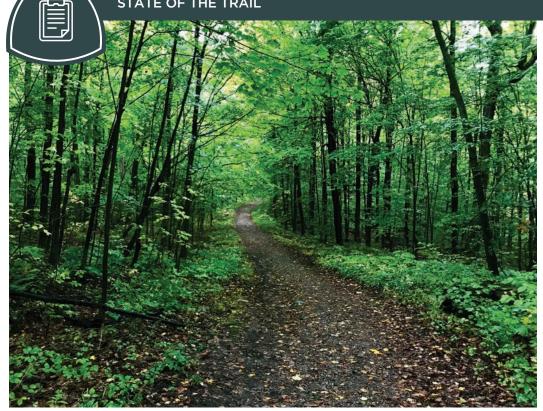
NEW YORK - This year we continued work on the NCNST in Hoffman Notch Wilderness in the sparsely populated and mountainous Adirondack terrain. Lacking funding to hire a professional crew to continue the professional work done in 2018, we set up a volunteer work week to continue Jones Hill Trail construction on the east side. It is rare for the NY State DEC to permit



Forest Preserve land. Jones Hill is a small mountain, 1882 feet, with great views of surrounding peaks. We had 18 volunteers during the course of the week. The group established tread and benching for about a mile of new trail around the side of a "hill" or small mountain to the base of the summit climb. Next year we will have a small grant to hire a professional youth crew to work with the volunteers to complete the trail to the summit and work on the more technical aspects of trail building in the mountains. Once the Trail is complete road to road, we will be permitted to post

We continue to promote the Trail Steward program BLTS (Blue Line Trail Sweeps) recruiting some by visiting ADK Chapters with a PowerPoint update on the

-Mary Coffin



"Two Roads Diverged in a Wood..." Photo: Kevin Russell

Trail Around Middlebury

VERMONT - With the Reroute Legislation finally passed in February, it was possible to make the original vision of the North Country Trail a reality by extending into Vermont and connecting to the Appalachian Trail. The National Park Service recently went through the Trail Certification process for a portion of existing trail in Vermont, officially establishing the NCT in a new state. The Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) has been working hard over the

last decade on establishing a recreational trail within their community, while keeping in mind the big picture that the NCT would one day be approved to pass through the area. More than half of this existing trail, the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM), was included in the recent Certification. The new segment is just over 16 miles long and travels along field edges and through wooded areas, includes a short spur to a waterfall, and a beautiful suspension bridge over a gorge. It adds a fantastic section to the NCT.

Heading from west to east, the NCT segment begins at Prunier Road along the "Blue Trail," the original westward extension of the original TAM. From there it heads north (clockwise) along the TAM loop across the Otter Creek Gorge, through Wright Park, Chipman Hill and Battell Woods. In the Jeffrey Murdock Preserve, a new eastward extension constructed this year leaves the TAM and heads east for another mile and a half to Middle Road. The NCT segment currently ends here. Most trailheads along the route have been marked with the nine-inch NCT emblem signs. Most of the credit for making this portion of Trail a reality goes to John Derrick of MALT.

"Having worked on this extension for 10 years I am thrilled to have this route certified as a portion of the NCT. From the first public hearings, to the visit from

NCT and the NPS in 2011, we were encouraged to build a link west toward the Adirondacks. With that completed, MALT is next working on an easterly link to the Long Trail. This trail system benefits local and long distance users."

The Certification process is the tool NPS uses to incorporate new segments of trail into the official route of the NCT. It's a simple application that should be completed by the local Chapters and land managers if they have a segment of trail intended to become part of the NCT. It gives NPS staff a chance to review each segment and ensure it is being built according to

the standards set forth in the NPS Trail Handbook, that the segment is in line with the overall intent and vision of the Trail, that the landowner or manager is in agreement about the trail being located there, and that it reasonably follows the route established in the 1982 Comprehensive Plan or any subsequent planning efforts. It serves as a recordkeeping tool to ensure that each segment of the trail that is incorporated into the NCT route meets those criteria over the long term.

For questions on the how or why of Trail Certification, contact me, Luke Jordan, at luke jordan@nps.gov.

-Luke Jordan

Submitted by Joan Young, Chair of the Long Distance Hiker Committee

Jacob Thompson Toronto, Ohio

Received central patch, Ohio and 1000 mile rockers



started the Trail because I remembered hiking a part of it as a kid and wanted to volunteer by doing trail maintenance. Then I joined a Jim Gilkev circuit hike and I was hooked. I hiked the entire Buckeye Trail, then on to finish the

rest of the NCT in

Photo: Richard Morgan

Ohio. Now I am currently working on Pennsylvania and parts of the American Discovery Trail.

Dale Painter Newaygo, Michigan

Received central patch, Michigan and 1000 mile rockers

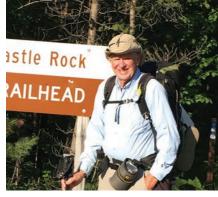


Photo: Kathy Painter

of the Trail in Newaygo County for many, many years. My first long hike on the NCT was in 2003 when I thru-hiked alone from Croton Dam to Mackinaw City. In 2010, Kathy and I backpacked across most of the NCT in the Upper Peninsula in August and September, and we made it halfway across again in 2015 before "bailing out" at Marquette due

▼he North Country Trail is like an old friend to me and my wife, Kathy. The Trail is literally in our backvard (four miles from our house in Newaygo), and I have spent countless hours running, crosscountry skiing, and hiking on segments



to incessant rain! Last year (2018), Kathy and I section hiked the NCT Lower Peninsula from Croton to Mackinaw over the course of the whole summer. For the most part, I hike and Kathy acts as support, although she has walked about 40 miles.

This summer (2019), I got the "NCT-itch" again and once again thru-hiked from Croton to the Straits, then I returned to the Straits a few weeks later and thru-hiked from St. Ignace to Ironwood (Kathy supported me from our travel trailer). Several weeks after that, I decided I might as well do all the NCT in Michigan in a single summer, so I backpacked south from Croton to Ohio.

Richard Morgan McArthur, Ohio

Received central patch, Ohio, and 1000 mile rockers



Photo: Jacob Thompson

began the journey in the fall of 2009 at Milford, Ohio. The Buckeye Trail group held an event in a park in town that weekend. I met Joan Young there that day and received an autographed book from her. Later that day, I drove down to Eden Park in Cincinnati and did

a three-mile out-and-back hike on the Buckeye Trail, my first day on the Trail.

The next day, I drove way up to the town of Pemberville and spent the entire day hiking from the town of Elmore all the way to Fremont. From then on, I hiked at every opportunity to complete the entire Buckeye Trail by 2012, over a period of 93 hiking days.

I have completed all of the NCT that ran congruent with the BT. I started again in 2014 and finished for the second time in October of 2019. I also completed the eastern Ohio portion of the NCT in the spring of this year, the Caesar Creek bypass in the spring of 2018, and completed the northwestern Ohio NCT in November of 2019. I've also completed about half of Pennsylvania and expect to finish that state next year.

Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew 2019—A Wrap on Another Season

By Bill Menke, Wisconsin Regional Trail Coordinator through 31 Dec 19



48 foot bridge completed this summer, nearing the maximum our crews can build. Photo: Bill Menke

id you catch the new name at the top of this article? Formerly known as the Brule-St. Croix Roving Trail Crew, the name was changed this year. The new name more accurately portrays the crew's work throughout Wisconsin. The original name was because the crew was sponsored by the Brule-St. Croix Chapter and included as a separate line item in their monthly reports. This is no longer the case and members of all three Chapters now participate, so the new name helps to paint a better understanding of the current situation.

Several changes took place in 2019. The number of crew outings was reduced to five, due to a variety of circumstances. We had planned to have six outings, but at the last minute canceled the November trip because of an early cold snap. During this trip, we were planning to construct a large bridge, which meant working around water and the potential for getting wet. During the week of the planned trip, the temperature got down to seven degrees one morning. Temperatures this cold make camp life tough (water jugs freeze, gloves are needed even when eating, etc.) and indeed could have caused safety issues at the work site. In hindsight, the decision to cancel was a good thing.

Nevertheless, over the course of the five outings, 29 individuals (including a record-breaking 11 new ones) contributed a total of 1692 hours of volunteerism. This wonderful dedication and turnout has again resulted in a very productive and successful year for the crew. While the Trail in Wisconsin passes through the four northernmost counties, the crew worked in only two of them this year, Douglas and Iron.

Douglas County: In April and June, the crew completed a 0.8-mile segment of Trail, including two bridges and a 96-foot puncheon. This finally provides the long awaited connection at the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. It was stymied for three years while the DNR completed a master plan for the area. For over a year of this time, the Minnesota side of the Trail was complete, causing a dead end in the

middle of the woods at the state line. With the April-June work, the Trail is open out to the first public road on the Wisconsin side.

Iron County: In July, September, and October, the crew returned to Iron County to resume work on the new segment of Trail known as the Upson-Foster segment. Picking up where we left off in 2018, the crew completed another eight small bridges and two large ones (36-foot and 48foot). Additionally, a new backpacker campsite (known as Tilted Gabbro) was constructed. It is a choice location, located on a small knoll overlooking the pristine Potato River. When eventually complete, this is going to be an outstanding addition as it parallels the premier Potato River. All of the structures needed in this new section of Trail are now done. Meanwhile, the Heritage Chapter continued tread construction and has only some minor work to complete next season. It is anticipated that the Upson-Foster segment will officially open early in 2020.

Elsewhere in this issue, you will see an article about the new and spectacular Bill Thomas Bridge, near Wren Falls, which was constructed by the county forest. A portion of the crew's Iron County work was the construction of about 0.1-mile of new Trail to connect the previous end of the NCT at Wren Falls with the new bridge. While not long, this connection included some difficult work, such as a stone stairway and having to flatten a portion of the face of a large (car-sized) sloping boulder to create a safe walking surface.

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

Looking in the rear view mirror at the trail season that is just past, one of the first things that comes to mind is what a privilege it is to work with such a talented group of faithful crew members. Another thing that always comes to mind is awe of the

CREW ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019 INCLUDE:

- 0.9 miles of Trail constructed, blazed, and signed
- 96-feet of Type 3 Puncheon
- Eight 16-foot bridges
- Four "deck" bridges on pans: 32-foot, 36-foot, 42-foot, and 48-foot
- One portal at the state border
- One campsite



The Wisconsin-Minnesota state line portal on the Trail, with Harlan Liljequist, a frequent volunteer in several states. Photo: Bill Menke

We used to carry material into work sites with a DR Powerwagon. It has served well, performing well beyond what the manufacturer intended, but it does move on wheels so occasionally suffered on steep slopes and also created ruts. This year's Yardmax tracked wagon moves better on challenging terrain, and worked well after we modified its wagon somewhat to enable loads of long lumber.

Photo: Bill Menke

dedication these folks have to turn out time after time in all kinds of weather and sometimes miserable working conditions. However, it seems this is the norm for our NCTA volunteers trail wide. The camaraderie, fellowship, and skills embodied in a group of individuals who have such diverse backgrounds is unbelievable. May this never change as time marches on. *

If you would like the full Rovers report, please email Bill Menke at bmenke466@ gmail.com



HIKES

A Hiking Spike on Ohio's Buckeye Trail By CW Spencer



Buckeye beginning and end Photo: Bonnie Spencer

T t was hard to miss the long line of hikers crossing the Little Miami River in Milford, Ohio, on the sunny afternoon of October 20. Close observers might Leven have noticed a tear coursing its way down the cheek of a hiker or two.

Those tears were most likely generated by a mixture of emotions... joy in the completion of a five-year 1400-plus-mile journey around the state of Ohio on the Buckeye Trail. And at the same time, possibly sadness that in a few hundred yards they would be finishing the trail and leaving behind those who had walked together with them such a great distance.

Earlier these hikers had compiled their thoughts and feelings. One lady wrote that this hike had gotten her out of the house at a low point in her life and connected her with like-minded people at a time when she was feeling quite alone. Wow. I started hiking the Buckeye Trail for similar purposes. Another wrote that it had been nice to hang around others and get tired and sweaty together. I can relate, especially with the sweat.

On that beautiful fall day, eight happy hikers completed what just may be one of the biggest accomplishments of their lives. I know the feeling. Bonnie and I just finished the Buckeye Trail ourselves.

It was not only a day to celebrate a special event, but a special person as well, a man named Jim Gilkey. One group member described Jim as an angel on earth, always willing to do anything for a fellow hiker. (He is capable of being devilish as well, though. More on that in just a bit.)

Another hiker said, "Jim has done a fabulous job with logistics and taking care of us all." And still another, "Jim plans well and is careful to ensure that everyone stays safe." I know Jim well. I have hiked with him many times, and I agree completely with those assessments. You'd have to walk a long way to find someone who would disagree.

Jim first heard of the Buckeye Trail in 1959 when he was in the sixth grade. He was cutting out every newspaper clipping he could find on Ohio for an Ohio history assignment. He put two articles in his folder about the newly formed trail, but then the trail was lost on him for decades after his project was graded and stored away.

About 20 years ago Jim picked up a pamphlet about the trail at the Ohio State Fair. Later he began hiking with a group in Dayton's Five Rivers Metroparks, then found a group in the Columbus area. In 2007 he became a member of the Buckeye Trail Association and went on a six-mile orientation hike led by Chris McIntyre and John Rethman. He enjoyed that so much that he continued on a sectionby-section trip around the entire trail, finishing in 2014.

Even before he finished that journey he was dreaming of another one. This one would be to lead a hike for others back around the same circuit. He wanted more people to experience the same joy Ohio had given him. He started in the fall of 2014 and finished this fall.

Jim's dream has touched many lives, more than just the seven who finished



Buckeye award to Jim Gilke Photo: CW Spencer



Buckeye Trail Association barn and campground. Photo: Bonnie Spencer



Buckeye bridge over Little Miami River. Photo: Bonnie Spencer

with him that day. Some hiked only a weekend or two in various sections of the state. Others hiked hundreds of miles with Jim but had already finished. Still others joined him more recently along the Buckeye Trail, and have many more miles to go yet. I'm sure one thought on their minds is who will step up to lead them on.

This circuit hike would not be official until hands were laid on the pole bearing the triple blue blaze at the top of the hill. You might spot it the next time you pass the Milford Trailhead on the Little Miami Scenic Bike Trail.

What do the three blazes signify? I'm glad you asked. The top right blaze directs hikers to the Williamsburg section, the top left blaze northward through the Loveland section, and the

bottom back to the southern terminus in Eden Park. To this group, it also marked the location they'd passed five years earlier with the intention of one day returning. And that day had now come, 60 years after Jim had tucked that Ohio history folder on the shelf.

The pole touching was followed by a celebration in Riverside Park. Food, speeches, and tears were abundant. It was apparent that this group had bonded closely during their five-year journey. It's no easy task taking on the entire Buckeye Trail.

It wasn't all sweat, subzero temperatures, hills, territorial dogs, ticks, and blisters, though. This group had their share of fun! They took in the great scenery and history of Ohio. They ate meals together. They hiked as pirates on National Pirate Day. Jen and Maria were dubbed The Princess Hikers because they stayed in hotels each weekend rather than tents. Towards the end of the hike that became a status symbol, even for the other ladies. And, as with most closely- knit groups, there was a prank or two. One got started by, you guessed it, Jim Gilkey himself.



Buckeye cake Photo: Bonnie Spencer

Jim finished lunch on the trail early one day and quickly became bored. The middle schooler in him surfaced: he stealthily tucked a heavy bolt he had found into George Tyo's backpack. George carried that burden the rest of the day. He carried it the next day as well, blaming the heaviness on everything except the sneaky culprit. When he emptied his pack at home, he discovered the bolt. Game on.

The next month, George slipped a railroad spike into Jim's pack. Jim's pack is so heavy anyway he hardly noticed. He carries one of everything in case one of his group needs something. I'm guessing no one would need a railroad spike, though.

After Jim discovered it, George's pack was never safe again. But a funny thing happened. Rather, didn't happen. Jim didn't remove the spike. He carried it all the way to the end. Maybe a good leader does penance when he starts trouble.

Since Jim wouldn't give his spike up, George found a duplicate to make a trophy for him. I'm sure the engraving speaks for the entire group: Thank you for carrying the load for all of us. *

First published on November 11, 2019 on cwspencer.com.

HIKES

Hiking North

By Megan Danielson



Megan and her dad Photo: Megan Danielson

To me, the North Country Trail is so much more than just a path in the woods, but an outlet for adventure, experience, and inspiration. How lucky I feel to have been able to tread upon this sacred footpath, specifically the NCT's northern Minnesota section, which follows the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT). Not only did I just tread upon it, but I spent three weeks thru-hiking it, enough time to experience the intricacies of the northern woods. Along this path I found the cool shade of a towering pine to strengthen my weary spirit. The Hermit Thrushes and White Throated Sparrows serenaded me as I looked around in wonder at their holy dwellings. There were endless flowers and plants that decorated this narrow dirt path, longing for me to stop and admire their intricate beauty, yet persuading me to explore what lay ahead. Yes, all of these wonders were marvelous on their own, but the real joy and true experience came from sharing them with someone I love. For me, that person was my dad, Philip Danielson.

Ever since I was a young girl, my family loved taking trips up the north shore of Lake Superior, and we learned to revere this special place. My parents discovered the SHT long before I was born. Dad hiked a solo trip on it before it was "cool," but our backpacking trips together didn't begin until I was about 14 years old. It took us a few trips to get our gear just right, discover how far we could hike in a day and just how well we work together. My dad and I have a lot in common. A defining trait we both share is that we are determined. Once either of us has a goal in mind, there's no stopping us until we've reached it or given our all to attempt it. This became our thing, just dad and me out on the trail. These trips were a special time for us to bond as a father and daughter and to relish the experience, but a three-week journey was something that we both dreamt of.

So in June of this year after all the fuss and preparation we were finally doing it. Stepping foot (literally) onto one of the most challenging journeys of our lives. I looked back and there was our trusty support group of my mom and sister waving us on while wishing us luck. I teared up slightly at the thought of leaving them behind and was apprehensive about the Trail before us. It seemed like an eternity to walk a path that stretched all the way to Canada. "Onward and upward!" my dad shouted, reminding me that we were ready for this and it was going to be a trip to remember, no matter the outcome.

On the Fourth of July, we chose to hike from just past Bear Lake through Tettegouche State Park to the infamous Section 13 campsite. We heard it sat atop a mountain, the only site like it on the Trail. The goal seemed absolutely attainable when we rose in the morning with fresh legs. Only 15 miles, no sweat. Although the vistas of Lake Superior were breathtaking, the trips up and down the "mountains" did exactly that, take our breath away. While we were still huffing and puffing from reaching the top of one hill, almost immediately we were forced back down to the bottom in a knee-straining



SHT sign Photo: Megan Danielson



Megan and stream Photo: Philip Danielson

rock scramble, just to repeat the same process again in a few hundred feet. The severity of the elevation change on this day inspired a new slogan for the SHT, "Straight up, straight down, no messing around." When we had about three miles left before camp, I started to feel extremely faint and like I had nothing left in the tank, wondering how I could possibly take one more step. I was ready to set up the tent right there. Thank the Lord my dad came to save the day. He made me take a break, eat a Lara bar and drink water, helping me muster up any physical and mental strength that I had left to finish the miles. Later on, when we filled on water at the base of the Section 13 hill, my dad felt the same way I had, but this time I went into survival mode and helped my dad regain his strength the same way he uplifted me. These moments were the beauty within the suffering. Ominous thunderheads showered us from above, washing the day's sweat and tears away as we mindlessly hiked, unaware of what our bodies were doing at this point. When we made it to camp at last, we mechanically set up our tent and shoveled ramen into our stomachs. As we climbed into bed that night we vowed never to repeat this same horror again, at least not for a few days. When we awoke and realized we had survived, it felt as though nothing could defeat us now, but this was not the

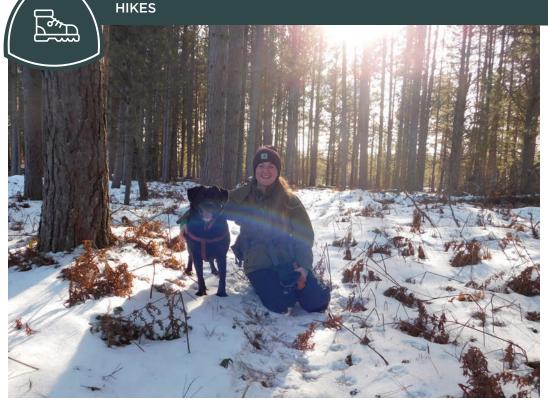


Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) Photo: Megan Danielson

last time we were humbled to realize our place amidst this mighty creation.

This soothing natural world was becoming home. Although challenging, the landscape was ruggedly beautiful and changed day by day as we hiked further north. There were times we sank into mud past our knees, enjoyed the refreshing shade of the old

growth maple forests, and were touched by the magic that the dense spruce and cedar forests possessed. The fields of wildflowers and the bare, rocky hilltops gave us the sense we were in the mountains. Another natural wonder that this Trail showcased was all of the inland rivers and streams. Some were powerful and had cut deep gorges into the rock from all the years of their relentless pounding, while others were just barely a flow hidden within the woods, each having a profound effect on us. One of our favorite spots, Beaver River, was the perfect place to swim, sunbathe, and relax before we had to hit the Trail again. Another lovely trickle was the Brule River that flowed silently down moss covered boulders. This stream provided a place of rest and inspiration to me, the traveler who decided to acknowledge its beauty. Daring to spend an extended period of time living out of a backpack taught my dad and me a lot about each other, the land, the Trail, people, and all of our surroundings. We came into the hike with expectations of making it to Canada, but because of injury and illness we had to end our journey just 15 miles shy of the border. We decided that we did not want to finish our hike in misery and dread to get it over with, but rather later on with my family and when we were excited about hiking again. We were disappointed of course, but we soon realized that it was not about how far we had gone, or that we did not reach the intended goal. It was so much more than that. The most important part of a hike is the journey, not the end goal, which is going to look different for each person. As the wise John Muir put it, "In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." *



Photo[,] Brian Bienkowsk

Finishing for a Friend

By Brian Bienkowski

T t was early February and Mo was tunneling through a foot of snow, trying to get his miles in on the North Country Trail in the Eastern Upper Peninsula.

My wife and I followed him. It was cold and drifts made snowshoes worthless. Mo plowed ahead, looking back between leaps to see if we were following. We only made it a mile that day, had a good laugh, and went home to get warm and fill our bellies.

We wouldn't have been out there that day if it wasn't for Mo, our six-year-old lab mix.

Fast forward nine months and we were back on the Trail, inching toward our goal of 100 miles.

Again, we were out there because of Mo. The only difference? Our buddy wasn't with us.

Mo showed up at my wife's (then girlfriend) house on the eastside of Lansing five years ago on a rainy morning. Along with a dog we assumed to be his brother, he was muddy, hungry, without tags and bravely hanging out in the kennel of her Alaskan Malamute.

She posted pictures, called shelters, put up flyers and, to our disbelief, no one claimed the pups. His brother found a home with a family friend. And Mo, thank goodness, became part of our family.

His early "hikes" were at small nature preserves that line Lansing's urban borders. He'd yank at the leash, raise hackles over squirrels, and bark at any human who wasn't us.

Mo made my wife and me get out and walk – in the

neighborhood, the park, the trails – whether we wanted to or not.

He was also there for my wife during times of transition and career change. He was a constant, calming influence. He made the move with her to live in a small, isolated trailer for a year-long position just outside of Alpena. She knew no one, but she had Mo, along with the cats, and the Malamute, Kobe. They'd walk and explore local ballfields, state parks and the Lake Huron shoreline. He still pulled on the leash and hated the damn squirrels. We all reunited in the Upper Peninsula the

following year, a hiker's paradise. Mo, the scrappy lab mix from the streets of Lansing, was to be a Yooper. We bought a house on the river, checked out all of the NCT trails we'd visit together and planned to give Mo the good life he deserved.

And for two years we did just that. We hiked all over Chippewa County, and most of the time Mo was along for the hike. He would push our pace, stop for pets, and sleep deeply on the way back home. He'd walk out on the big lake with us when iced over, or take a dip with us during the summer.

He was a North Country Trail dog.

When the calendar turned to 2019, we decided it was the year to do the Hike 100 Challenge.

Mo walked the Trail with us right up until the end. He was diagnosed with a terminal illness in July and made it two more months. Just weeks before his passing he was walking the Lake Superior shoreline, watching us swim and trying his best to keep up with our pace. He'd stop for pets and sleep hard on the way home.

We are proud to finish the Hike 100 this year for Mo. He loved the Trail and every time we're on it we think of him.

Where we live and hike there are bears, wolves, moose and other critters you don't want to sneak up on. We used to call out "C'mon, Mo" real loud both to wrangle our curious lab and announce ourselves to the "locals."

We've continued this. And you know what? It still works.

Brian Bienkowski is a writer and editor. He lives with his wife, Dani, and a handful of four-legged friends in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Gruchalla presents McLeod Museum with Cheyenne Indian Lodge Model

By Mattie Richardson-Schmitz

Previously published in the Ransom County Gazette.

n Tuesday, November 12th, Ed Gruchalla and members of the Dakota Prairie Chapter of the North Country Trail Association presented the McLeod Museum with a hand built Cheyenne Indian lodge model to display at the museum.

In 2018 the Archaeological Conservancy and the North Country Trail Association created a segment of the North Country National Scenic Trail through the Biesterfeldt Site.

This unique partnership provides a special opportunity for visitors to experience a National Historic Landmark and a National Scenic Trail at the same location. This is the only place on the nearly 5000-mile trail that this occurs.

This quiet area was once a bustling village with hundreds of Native Americans living in earth lodge dwellings. The village was protected by a large ditch and by the embankment of a curve in the Sheyenne River. A year-round spring provided water for the village.

On the surrounding prairie and along the river, the residents cultivated gardens and hunted wild game. The circular depressions in the prairie surface are locations where earth lodges once stood. Many of these are still visible.

Since there are no lodges physically remaining on the site, people hiking on the North Country Trail through the Biesterfeldt Site can travel five miles east to McLeod and view the earth lodge model located at the museum.

"After we decided to move the Trail close to the site, we studied the site and our research showed how little was known about this large Cheyenne village that contained up to 700 tribal members in the 1700s," said Gruchalla.

"No researchers had any pictures of what a dwelling would look like. We decided to make a model so we could take pictures to put on an interpretive kiosk planned for the site.

"It followed that what would we do with it? I contacted the museum in McLeod which was open to the donation. Since it's only five miles from the site to McLeod, we will advise visitors to see both the site and the model at the museum. It seems like a good marriage and hope all is well and the dwelling has found a happy home."

Gruchalla says the model took him almost a year to complete, but it kept him occupied during a time he was facing some health issues, and he enjoyed constructing the model

"I miss it already and am planning on a visit in the near future," he said about his realistic model.



Ed Gruchalla, member of the Dakota Prairie Chapter of the NCT, is pictured with the model of the Cheyenne Indian lodge that he built to help visitors to the Biesterfeldt site and trail visualize what the lodges looked like. The lodge will be displayed at the McLeod Museum.

Photo: Mattie Richardson-Schmitz



The lodge model is accurate and very detailed, right down to the fire ring inside of the lodge (which even lights up!). Photo: Dan Koeck

The model is 48 inches in diameter and constructed with a variety of different materials. Unlike the earth lodges south of Mandan, which were covered with sod, the Cheyenne lodges were covered with animal skins, so Gruchalla added these, complete with small stitching.

A part of the lodge is cut out so that visitors may see inside. Gruchalla has done great work making the model look true to life and historically accurate. The details are amazing, right down to the tiny fire (that actually lights up) in the center of the lodge.

The model will help those visiting the site and area to envision accurately just what these lodges looked like and what living in one might have been like long ago. *

Continued on page 48

TRAIL MAINTAINER'S SPOTLIGHT



O Kun de Kun Falls Photo: Connie Julien

O Kun de Kun Trail

By Connie Julien, Peter Wolfe Chapter President

The Peter Wolf Chapter in the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan had a celebration this fall with a ribbon cutting on October 26th at our O Kun de Kun Falls trailhead! For years, this very popular trail to the O Kun de Kun Falls has needed to be rerouted and resurfaced. The condition of the trail was getting worse each year with wide, slippery patches in the wet clay, hikers making many new side trails to avoid those spots. There were also numerous stretches of big tree roots exposed from all the foot traffic wearing the dirt away over the years.

The previous NCT Trail Manager with the National Park Service, Jeff McCusker, came here and helped us stake out a reroute for the trail to try to keep it to a 12% grade or less. Then our Peter Wolf Chapter arranged to get a pile of gravel from the Ottawa National Forest, and the NPS provided \$1,000 for turnpike materials, and we started holding volunteer workbees to move wheelbarrow loads of the gravel onto this slippery clay trail. But even with a couple power wheelbarrows, and even a day with a group of strong young students from Michigan Tech helping, and even with a widely advertised Forest Service Volunteer Day, we found we could get only 50, maybe 100 feet of trail graveled in a day that ended with volunteers exhausted, and most of us stretched beyond our limits and not anxious to try this another day! So after a couple years, and getting less than 500 feet of trail graveled out of a 1.3+ mile trail, which gets steep at the

bottom, we came to the conclusion we simply could not do this with just shovels and wheelbarrows, especially since most of our volunteers live over an hour's drive from this remote trailhead.

So we turned to the NCTA, and with help from Kenny Wawsczyk, NCTA's Michigan Trail Coordinator, funding was found that could be routed through Ontonagon County. The Trail was studied, a revised route and surface was engineered, permits were obtained, and a contractor was chosen to do the job. Turned out that the contractor also had a tough time trying to work with their equipment on the Trail, in one of our wettest summers in a hundred years or so, and with a long wait for the ordered timbers to arrive. The contractor installed seven sections of boardwalk totaling 575 feet and five bridges totaling 120 feet plus a great amount of aggregate. The Trail is now much more accessible, so many more folks can now enjoy it and check out the falls and the huge suspension bridge over the Baltimore River near the falls. However, this is not an officially accessible trail; there is too much elevation change to try for that.

The engineer organized a grand ribbon cutting event that included representatives from local, state and national government and agencies, the media, our PWC board, Chapter members, fans of the NCT, and hikers of all ages. It was a beautiful fall day for a hike that was thoroughly enjoyed by all! The local newspapers published wonderful articles to tell their readers about this great Trail improvement, and a videographer, Kristin Ojaniemi, filmed the new Trail and the event which has been airing on the Upper Peninsula's PBS "Discovery" Program. You can view her documentary on YouTube.



Can you spot the shoe lost on the Old O Kun de Kun trail? Photo: Bill Sanders



Tree roots on OLD O Kun de Kun trail. Photo: Connie Julien

This project was funded in part through grants from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, the Iron Belle Trail Program, the U.S. Forest Services Challenge Grant Program, the National Park Service and the Ottawa National Forest. The Peter Wolfe Chapter would like to give a HUGE THANK YOU to all involved in making this possible! *



O Kun de Kun hikers, on new trail. Photo: Connie Julien



Ribbon Cutting at O Kun de Kun Falls trail, October 26, 2019. From Left to Right: Stacy Preiss – Ontonagon County Clerk, Luke Jordan – Outdoor Recreation Planner, NPS for the NCNST, Linda Jackson – Forest Supervisor – Ottawa National Forest, Connie Julien – President Peter Wolfe Chapter – NCTA, Jack Bergman - US House of Representative from Michigan, John Pepin – Deputy Public Information Officer – Michigan DNR

Photo: Carol Maass



O Kun de Kun boardwalk, on new trail. Photo: Connie Julien

Massive Bill Thomas Memorial Bridge Completed in Wisconsin

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By Bill Menke, then Wisconsin Regional Trail Coordinator



n ill and Bethany Thomas loved to search out new scenic B areas to visit and places to hike. In the early 2000's, they heard about the beauty of Wren Falls on the Iron County, Wisconsin, segment of the North Country NST and set out to visit it. This was at a time when the Wren Falls site was not as widely known as it is today and when the almost 1.5-mile-long woods road providing the nearest access was a real "bear" of a road. After failing on a first attempt to find the falls, they persevered and on a subsequent trip found and fell in love with the site.

Sadly, at the young age of 60, Bill passed in 2012. As Bethany contemplated a way to provide some kind of memorial for him, she happened to be present at an NCTA event and heard discussion of our desire to construct a large bridge across the Tyler Forks River near Wren Falls. This bridge would provide access to a large chunk of Iron County Forest land west of the river (the river is far too swift and rugged to simply wade across in this area). It would open this isolated area for us to construct over four miles of Trail between the falls and the Iron-Ashland County line.

When Bethany heard about these dreams, she knew she had found the appropriate memorial project and volunteered to make a very significant contribution for the bridge. Working with David Cowles, former NCTA Director of Development, a way was found to donate the construction money and hold it until the project was ready to go.

Now the story of the bridge becomes somewhat more convoluted. Many aspects of completing the North Country Trail become an exercise in patience and perseverance. This one is no exception. Long time members of the Heritage Chapter have been talking about the need for a bridge across the Tyler Forks for decades. For a fact, I know that it was being discussed as early as 1992, when I began working for the NPS. Through the years, we have dealt with at least four different Iron County Forest administrators, always searching for a way to make this project happen.

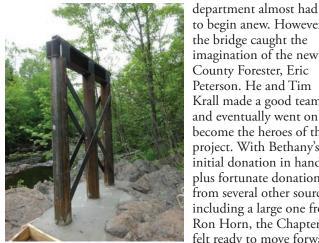
This is a large bridge, not the kind of project that volunteers could undertake. At 112 feet in length with deep, swift water below, it would simply be too unsafe and too large for volunteers. Drawing on experience with other large bridges, I always felt that it would cost at least \$200,000 for an agency, such as the National Park Service or the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, to design, advertise, and contract with a reliable firm in order to get this structure built.

Finally, a few years ago the stars began to align. On a visit to the site with Joe Varius (the third in the series of Iron County Forest Administrators), Recreation Technician Tim Krall happened to be along. Tim is one of those kinds of people who has gained many practical skills through many years on the job. He had previously supervised the construction of a large bridge at the county operated Saxon Harbor Marina on Lake Superior. During this trip, he mentioned to Joe that he felt that the county could construct this bridge at a relatively low cost by using their own personnel. When I heard the dollar figure he was batting around, I immediately told them that we could raise that amount of money and would be happy to contract with them and allow them to keep some seasonal employees employed for a longer period.

A few more years passed and Joe Varius moved on to another job. Therefore, our task to deal with the forestry

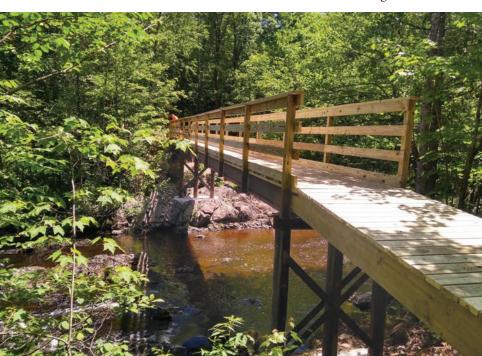


Steel beams Photo: Bill Menke



Steel beams embedded in concrete to support one end of the bridge. Look in the shadows under pictures of the completed bridge to see this critical work. Photo: Bill Menke

and other administrative duties, while Tim Krall managed the on-site work. We are told that this project became Tim's swansong as he is planning to retire and saw this as his last large project. During periodic visits to the site, it was amazing to see the innovative techniques used by the county staff. First, they cleared and dozed a 400+-yard road to the site in order to bring in a large generator, concrete mixer, welder, and very large tracked backhoe. A jackhammer was used to drill



The finished bridge. See the support beneath? Photo: Bill Menke

to begin anew. However, the bridge caught the imagination of the new County Forester, Eric Peterson. He and Tim Krall made a good team and eventually went on to become the heroes of the project. With Bethany's initial donation in hand, plus fortunate donations from several other sources including a large one from Ron Horn, the Chapter felt ready to move forward and contracted with the department to complete the project.

Forest Administrator

Peterson managed the

permits, tracking of finance

The memorial plaque Photo: Bill Menke

large, deep holes in the solid boulders to hold the eight-inch diameter steel pipe upright supports, which were eventually filled with concrete. Next, anchoring a long cable on the far side of the river, and hooking it to the backhoe bucket, they were able to stretch the cable taut. They could also change the angle of the cable by raising or lowering the bucket, thus making it easier to roll buckets of concrete and eventually the heavy steel beams across the span.

Following the project's completion, this road was so thoroughly obliterated that we quickly gave up on the idea of using it to haul some minor supplies to the bridge with our

> Powerwagon. It was impassable. In the end, the price exceeded the initial contract, due primarily to the price of steel and some unforeseen site complexities. Nevertheless, the final price paid for this fantastic bridge was still only \$28,000 - a bargain for sure.

We are thankful for Bethany's foresight and initial donation as well as subsequent donations from Ron Horn and others. We are thankful for the partnership with the Iron County Forestry Department and the skills of Tim Krall. Without all of them, this bridge would not be reality. We look forward to the official opening for this bridge that will provide hikers, recreationists, hunters and anglers using the North Country NST a safe and lasting crossing of the Tyler Forks River. 💥



The Next Step

By Kathy Chillemi 've always loved the Adirondack Mountains. Beginning with day L hikes as a kid, then overnights at state campgrounds, and then finally - discovering backpacking, the Adirondacks (ADKs) found their way into my heart and have never left, muddy shoes, blackflies and all. I've hiked on trails throughout the ADKs and several years ago was introduced to the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) in New York State. The Adirondack Mountain Park region of New York is a place of wonder and an integral part of the NCNST. Hundreds of miles of trails throughout the park are our entry to the forests, lakes, mountains, rivers and streams, with more miles of trail planned and developed each year.

ADKs was memorable for a lot of reasons, not least because it was a long time ago and I was woefully ill-equipped with an old canvas pack and the wrong boots. The overgrown trail, although very beautiful on the first weekend in October, was poorly marked and hard to follow. My friends and I spent a lot of time looking for the next marker while trying to stay in sight of the last one we passed. Since that first trip I've hiked and packed into this trail numerous times. It's now well-marked and well-maintained. Someone has been paying attention, thank goodness.

My first backpacking trip in the

...which leads me to this: how was it possible to spend so many years walking Adirondack trails and not think, "How did this trail get here?" Who was the first to walk this path, who cleared the way? I confess, I took the existence of those trails for granted for far too long.

Years and many trail miles later, I've been fortunate to become a part of one group of volunteers with the Onondaga Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club who help plan, build and maintain trails, and specifically portions of the NCNST. It started when I casually signed up for a maintenance hike for the Little Woodhull Lake Trail in the Adirondack Park near Forestport. I didn't really know what to expect.

This section of the NCNST is an old trail that was adopted by the ADK Onondaga Chapter and is being reclaimed by side-cutting vegetation, clearing blow-downs and posting markers. I learned about loppers, small saws and witch hobble. "So that's how it's done," I thought on that first trip. It's the last time I took any trail for

granted. On one recent work hike, volunteers removed more than 20 large blow-downs from the Trail, using saws, hatchets, loppers and muscle. Sections of this trail are still being cleared and marked and soon, this beautiful part of the forest will be officially available for hikers.

The ADK Onondaga Chapter also sponsored a week-long trail building event this past August for the NCNST Jones Hill section of Trail near Schroon Lake. I learned that typically the actual building of trails in the ADKs is done by professional crews like those with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), with volunteers stepping in later to maintain it. On this occasion, with the guidance of a DEC Forester, Trail Supervisor, and interns, plus volunteers from several ADK chapters and local organizations, 1.5 miles of Trail were cleared, including removal of blow-downs and benching where necessary. Crews carried the heavy hand tools into the forest each day, using them to remove years of leaves and organic material down to dirt and rock, ensuring the proper angle and clearance for good footing. By the end of the week, there was a wonderful section of Trail that looked like it had always been there.

Maintenance and building work on the NCT throughout New York State is a continuing process. Ultimately, there will be over 700 miles of Trail, starting from the state's southern border with Pennsylvania, moving east and north through the Finger Lakes Region, Central New York and the Adirondack Park to the Vermont border. There are many dedicated volunteers who donate their time and labor to ensure the trails remain accessible to all of us.

I discovered something else: anyone can play a part. It's said that the NCNST is probably one of the least well-known National Scenic Trails but that's changing, thanks to the efforts of the North Country Trail Association and affiliated volunteer groups across eight states and 5000 miles.

As I write this, it's fall, and people are enjoying the changing colors. It's a spectacular time of year in the Adirondacks, although each season has its own beauty. But they may be missing the best parts of New York and the NCNST, those you can see only when you stop the car, step away from the parking lot and onto a trail. It's not an exaggeration that the NCNST in New York has something for everyone, from easy walks in the woods, to more challenging mountain paths.

And if you're intrigued by the thought you could someday walk on a trail and think to yourself, "I helped make this," I hope you'll take that next step and have the chance to find out for yourself. It's worth it. $\frac{1}{2}$



Little Woodhull Lake Trail Photo: Kathy Chillemi

CALL FOR NOMINEES! 2020 NCTA ANNUAL AWARDS NOMINATIONS

By Larry Pio, Chair of Awards Committee

The awards ceremony is held each year during the annual NCTA Celebration. **Nominations for 2020 awards will be accepted through May 1, 2020.** Nominate at northcountrytrail.org. Email Larry Pio (nalcoman1@aol.com) with questions. Anyone can make a nomination. Descriptive detail is necessary to include in the nomination submission to allow the Awards Committee to compare nominees adequately.

Boots on the Trail	Outreach
Vanguard	Communicator
Frailblazer	Rising Star
Thomas L Gilbert Lifetime Achievement	Sweep
Distinguished Service	Friend of the Trail
-	Outstanding Private
Frail Builder	Landowner
Frail Maintainer	Blue Blazes Benefactor
Leadership	
	Trail Protector

For full descriptions of the award categories, visit northcountrytrail.org.





North Country Trail Association 229 East Main Street Lowell, Michigan 49331 NONPROFIT U. S. POSTAGE PAID Grand Rapids, MI Permit 340



The group hike at Tahquamenon Falls in February, 2019. Our Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore hikes draw people from all over Michigan plus some from Ontario, Canada. Many who have never heard of the NCT join us and become members and volunteers.
Photo: Tom Walker



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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 trailwide 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.