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The Magazine of the
North Country Trail Association

Volume 39, No. 2

north star



**Protecting Lands for National
Scenic Trails**

Dub Does North Dakota

This Summer's Versions of Life

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Connie Julien's house on the first day of spring, in the western upper peninsula of Michigan.

Photo: Connie Julien

About the Cover:

Young hiker Alizabeth on the Mullen Rd. trail in Yankee Springs Park, Michigan. "My two-year-old set the pace for over a mile." – Allison Zink

Photo: Allison Zink

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Trailhead

Tim Mowbray, President

The novel Coronavirus known as COVID-19 is affecting almost every aspect of our lives these days. Like so many around the world, hikers need to adapt and do our part to help reduce the spread of this terrible illness. I'm sure many of you have wanted to travel to your favorite spot along the Trail to see spring bring the outdoors back to life as the snow melts. However, for now, we will have to look ahead in the coming months and hope we can get back to normal.

During these difficult times we want you to know that the North Country Trail Association is continuing its work and adapting to these trying times, even without the ability to meet in groups as a board, Chapter, or to adventure out on the Trail with our friends. We are finding ways to carry on via electronic communication through our phones and email and we continue to hold virtual meetings via our computers.

From recent information put out daily by the CDC it looks as though our normal routine will be delayed at least a few more weeks if not months. Even with this concern our committees and staff are continuing to prepare for the hiking season ahead. At the Association level we are working to maintain the financial integrity of the organization and keep our vital staff in place without imposing severe financial hardship.

Board and staff ended 2019 by working on a new Strategic Plan. This plan will help guide us through the next three to five years and will provide direction to continue our development toward completion of the Trail and to help build the organization so we can continue to support maintaining and upgrading the Trail. Work on this plan will continue as we see this Coronavirus pandemic recede over the coming months.

We all need to continue being thankful to all the volunteers, financial supporters, elected officials, landowners, the National Park Service, Affiliates, Chapters and so many others who help us accomplish the mission of the NCTA. We hope you will stay active with us in these difficult and changing times to continue the goal of growth and support of NCTA.

From the Board of Directors, we hope that all of you will continue to be safe and in good health as we all work to stop the spread of this disease. Thank you all for being a part of the North Country Trail family! ✨



Picture taken near the Trail in Solon Springs, Wisconsin

Photo: Sue Mowbray

Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director

Always look for the helpers. These wise words from none other than Mr. Rogers have helped guide me in the past two months as we struggle to understand and adapt to a new world.

From the medical professionals on the front lines, to grocery workers keeping us fed, to all of you, I'm so grateful to say our community is full of helpers. I've watched as our volunteers are reaching out to one another to stay connected. Funders are stepping up to ask us what we need. Hikers are keeping it local to prevent the spread. And the positivity shared with each other is off the charts.



Andrea working from home, of course.

Photo: Ted Bentley

NCTA has responded to Coronavirus in the following ways:

- We worked hard to keep our community updated online and through regular calls with our Chapter and Affiliate Leadership.
- We worked with our volunteers to cancel and reschedule events across the Trail, making contingency plans as needed.
- We worked with our Federal and State agency partners to provide the best advice to volunteers and trail users.
- We secured funds to support the backlog of work ahead.
- We encouraged hikers to keep it local and expanded our Hike 100 rules so people can **#hikefromhome**

If we look around, there is much to take from this struggle. We've adapted to new ways of communication. Conference calls are now family affairs so everyone can juggle kids and home and work and life all at once. We've had to ask hikers not to hike and volunteers not to work, but the response has been overwhelmingly positive. There is a powerful message in your willingness to adapt. We'll do what we have to do to keep each other safe and there is nothing more inspirational than that.

There are a few things I hope we can carry beyond this time. Let's continue to care for each other's health and safety, support each other's work, and plan together to respond to our needs so we can bounce back strong. Thank you for being the helpers. ✨



National Park Service Corner

Chris Loudenslager, Superintendent,
North Country National Scenic Trail



Chris Loudenslager

Photo: Mick Hawkins

A year ago this week, I opened my article with the statement, “It has been a wild few months for the National Park Service.” At the time, there was no way I could predict how trivial those challenges will feel today in comparison to what we, and all the countries of the world, have been faced with this year. It is my hope, but perhaps it is wishful thinking, that by the time this edition of the *North Star* goes to print the heartache and hardships posed by the Coronavirus will be behind us. While we have all been deeply impacted by the epidemic in one way or another, it is my sincere hope that none

of you has suffered permanently from this terrible disease. I would also wish to offer each of you my sincere thanks for the patience, adaptability and cooperation you have demonstrated during this incredibly difficult period, and for the individual sacrifices you have made to help the larger team get through this together.

Unity for the greater good is a powerful ideal and am I proud to be part of an organization that so wholly embodies the premise of individuals uniting and giving of themselves to achieve something that could not be accomplished otherwise. We will get through this, and the Trail will get through this for we are a strong and committed team who is dedicated to working together to get the job done, no matter what it is. There is little question that the coming year will require a great deal of continued flexibility and adaptability as we crawl out of the Coronavirus shadow, and begin assessing and addressing trail needs that would have normally been attended to had this been a normal spring. Please, please understand that getting this work done will take a measured, patient approach: while we’re all eager to roll up our sleeves and get ‘er done, this will be more a marathon than a sprint and we must pace ourselves. This is most critical for your safety, which always comes first, but secondly, also to ensure that the work we do is quality work. As we begin to recover, we must also maintain the spirit of unity and working together for the greater good: If you need assistance to address critical projects or needs you cannot meet, please make those needs known. If you are able to provide assistance to others, please answer the call. And as always, please consider the “big picture” of the entirety of the Trail: while every project is important, some must be completed this year due to funding or permit deadlines, when others may not. Staff time and resources will need to be allocated strategically this summer.

Thank you all for everything you’ve done to help get us through this crisis, and for everything I know you will do to help us get things back to normal. Your dedication is recognized and greatly appreciated. Work safe, stay safe, and continue looking out for each other. ✨

NPS News



Ken Hendrickson

Photo: Christina Catanese

Ken Hendrickson is the newest addition to the National Park Service, North Country National Scenic Trail office, having joined the team as Trail Manager in February. Ken has a background in natural resource management, planning, landscape architecture, and environmental science. Over the past 20+ years, he has worked in the non-profit, private, academic, and government sectors. He has a history of success in managing a variety of initiatives and building coalitions between

state, local and federal government agencies, and volunteer groups. Ken’s first experiences in managing trail development were in North Central Pennsylvania, and he has also worked internationally (in the Czech Republic and Panama) and in Alaska. Ken has a BS in Geology and Environmental Geoscience from Clarion University of Pennsylvania as well as a BLA and MLA in Landscape Architecture from the Pennsylvania State University.

When not working in the NOCO office, Ken enjoys a variety of outdoor activities and woodworking projects, especially woodcarving and restoring and working with historical woodworking tools. Ken has been a hiker and backpacker since early childhood, and the first backpacking trip that he and his wife Christina did together was on the NCT in Pennsylvania. They plan to explore more of the NCT together. Ken is excited to be joining the NCT Team to steward and advance the Trail across its full length. ✨

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A Truly Tax Free Offer

By Pat Allen and Nancy Brozek

Your love for the NCT can provide big tax benefits for you. If you are 70½ years old or older, you can take advantage of a simple way to benefit the North Country Trail Association. 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.

Plan to make your required minimum distribution in 2020 through a qualified charitable distribution (IRA charitable rollover) gift to satisfy all or part of that requirement. Your gift will be put to use today, allowing you to see the difference your donation is making for the Trail. Plus, you pay no income taxes on the gift. The transfer generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so you benefit **even if you do not itemize your deductions.**

Pat Allen shares why this option is important to her.

“My year-end task is to look over my IRA funds to anticipate the Required Minimum Distributions I must take. Because I’m in my 80s, it is both a pleasure and a challenge to make the distributions. I have my funds in stocks and I have arranged to reinvest my dividends. It’s like adding a bit of yeast (\$) to the dough.

Though I have taken these distributions for years, the fund I was recently looking at has still grown. I am planning to transfer appreciated shares to the North Country Trail Association directly in 2020 to cover my required distribution. It will save me some taxes. My brokers’ office sends me a note to remind me to take the distribution and they also send the shares I choose to my charity.

If you are faced with this task, I suggest you consider this option too. The NCTA is a 501(c)(3) eligible charity, but always check with your advisor as tax rules can change.” ✱

Nancy Brozek is the NCTA Director of Development and Communications, and Pat Allen is a local member who was the Executive Director years ago.

NCTA Launches New Website

By Kate Lemon

After over a year of planning and development work, North Country Trail Association (NCTA) staff are so pleased to share the fresh face of northcountrytrail.org with you: The new website officially launched mid-March. It has been redesigned to elevate the North Country Trail to that of other National Scenic Trails’ online promotional presence. The functionality has been significantly improved as well, to provide our Trail community the resources they need to help build, maintain, protect and promote the North Country Trail.

An excerpt explaining the need for this upgrade, from the North Star Vol. 38, No. 4:

“In late 2016 with input from surveys, webinars and market research, the website was completely restructured by NCTA staff to update content and to host new Chapter web pages. (Previously, many Chapters had freestanding websites of their own. This content was transferred to northcountrytrail.org for easier and more centralized management, and improved branding consistency.) Intensive editing and reorganization enhanced both the website experience for visitors and the management process for staff and Chapter Leadership. However, over time, updates to WordPress – the content management system that our website was created within – began to cause limitations to the layout and design of the site, as well as technical support and updates for it. Maintenance became much more difficult and overall function of the website suffered.”

But with this new custom-built solution and very competent web developers behind the scenes, those technical difficulties are no longer an issue. The NCTA extends many, many thanks to the direction and content contributions from our Chapters, Affiliates, Partners, staff and Board members, as well as Lake Effect Digital - the web development company. This major project was a major success because of you!

Website questions and page edits should be directed to NCTA Marketing and Communications Coordinator Kate Lemon at klemo@northcountrytrail.org. Technology is always evolving so we’ll keep adding and updating; we will continue to meet demands as the times change. ✱

The Guide to Hiking the North Country National Scenic Trail in Minnesota is available in paperback and soon as an e-book.

You may remember that the volunteers of the North Country Trail Association in Minnesota self-published a revised guidebook for Minnesota’s 840 miles of the NCT in 2018. They have updated it again this winter to reflect Congress’ enactment of the Trail’s Arrowhead Reroute last March and added in new Trail. All this new information will be reflected in the forthcoming e-book version due out this spring. Buy your copy today and get out on the nation’s longest hiking trail across Minnesota in 2020! It will be available wherever you buy e-books, including Amazon, Apple, Barnes & Noble, and Kobo.

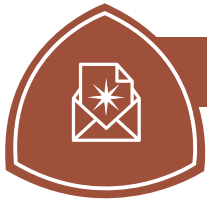


Photo: Tom Distefano

NCTA Celebration 2020 Update

By NCTA Staff

In light of the uncertainty of our ability to travel and gather in large groups in the coming months, the NCTA's Board of Directors made the difficult decision not to hold our Annual Celebration, planned this year for Clarion, Pennsylvania. Celebration is a pillar of the Association's work and absolutely nothing beats hiking together on the Trail, spending time around a campfire, and sharing meals and stories.

We especially want to thank our 2020 planning team led by Susan Giering and Dave Galbreath of the Clarion County Chapter, who have put in an incredible amount of work. We hope to share much of it with you throughout August, as we'll still bring you exciting content and ways to get involved even if we can't all be in Clarion.

Alternative Plans

Although we will not meet in person this year, we have reenvisioned the event in a virtual environment, so we can still bring our volunteers their awards ceremonies, workshops and presentations, and even our Founders Circle reception. This will enable us to share the love with the entire NCTA community and will allow more participation than ever before. August will be transformed into Celebration Month.

Both National Park Service and NCTA awards ceremonies will be held online for an entire week. NCTA trail management staff will develop online workshops. We will also offer Celebration presenters an online platform during August.

While the event will look different, there is still opportunity to bring us closer together, celebrate our work and keep us excited for the future. We hope to see you there. Please stay tuned to NCTA communications channels, including nctacelebration.org, for updates. ✨

You're Invited!

We have no typical group hikes or multi-party projects to list this time, for obvious reasons. Hope remains high for this department of the next issue. Meanwhile, please take a day hike locally, alone or with your immediate family, but postpone any long-distance hikes. The NCTA has temporarily changed the rules of the Hike 100 Challenge to include all miles – meaning off-NCT, too! Count your treadmill steps, laps around the house and dog walks when you **#hikefromhome**. If you are a trail maintainer, the same social limitations apply and we recommend you check with land managers beforehand (and reference northcountrytrail.org/the-trail/trail-alerts), but by all means do get out there and tend the path. Call to check on Trail friends to be sure they are okay, write that article you've been meaning to send to the *North Star* or your Chapter newsletter, and stay connected to the Trail you love on social media. In fact, if your income is not affected by the virus pandemic, remember that many members may be unable to donate to our Trail normally this year, so you're invited to donate extra now at northcountrytrail.org/donate.

John and Cyndi Woollam have issued a Challenge Grant in which all gifts and memberships, including renewals, will be matched up to \$30,000. Will you help us meet this Challenge?



Tackling the 2020 Hike 100 Challenge from Home

By Emily Rodriguez

This spring, at a time when many of us are usually dusting off our gear and are eager to spend more time on the Trail, we suddenly found our lives turned upside down. Instead of planning the first backpacking trip of the season or maintaining a section of Trail, we were encouraged to stay home for the health and safety of our communities. Birthdays were celebrated over video calls, our kitchens doubled as an office or as a classroom for our children (or both), and waves of uncertainty and fear left us feeling overwhelmed and confused. Nonetheless, as the panic eventually subsided and transformed into acceptance and hope, our Trail community served as a beacon of positivity while we all adapted to our new reality.

The Hike 100 Challenge, now in its fifth year, has encouraged thousands of Trail users to complete 100 miles on the North Country National Scenic Trail and earn a collectible certificate and limited-edition patch. Whether you walk, snowshoe, run, ski, day hike or backpack the 100 miles, the rules have remained the same and any NCT miles count. However, as physical health and mental health awareness became more important than ever during these stressful times, the North Country Trail Association announced a temporary change to Hike 100: During the month of April, all miles would count toward the Challenge, and thus the campaign to #hikefromhome was born. Participants were encouraged to stay home or as local as possible and log miles in their backyard, around the house, on the treadmill, and during neighborhood walks while adhering to local guidelines.

In the weeks following the announcement, Hike 100 participation soared. By mid-April, nearly 600 people joined the Challenge, bringing 2020 participation to a record-breaking 2,800 people from 33 states and four other countries and territories. In the wake of adversity and confusion, stories of creativity and optimism started to surface; those who previously felt isolated and restricted now felt a new sense of motivation, adventure and connectedness. Many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work on the Challenge during these uncertain times and made it a goal to complete all 100 miles in April. Others shared stories of exploring trails close to home or even their backyard, places that we often overlook or take for granted.

Canceled thru-hike? Keep calm, hike on, and wash your hands.

One story emerged of a hiker who was forced to postpone her thru-hike plans on the NCT and subsequently took advantage of the rule change to train and explore close to home. Kasey “Peeps” Robbert, a native Michigander who now resides in Lakewood, Colorado, aspires to complete an end-to-end hike of the NCNST in a

single season, a feat that is not for the faint of heart.

Kasey first caught the hiking bug while backpacking in the Smoky Mountains during a college spring break and in 2005, she thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail. Upon returning to work at REI’s flagship store in Denver, she discovered the NCT through REI’s Volunteer Vacations program brochure. In 2011, Kasey took the leap and participated in a trail building project hosted by the Spirit of the Woods Chapter in Michigan. During this experience, she met Joan Young, the first female to hike the entire Trail, whose own thru-hiking story inspired Kasey to hike the entire Trail.

Kasey originally had her eyes set on achieving her thru-hike this year while simultaneously completing the Hike 100 Challenge along the way. With a start date and location set for April 22 on the Long Trail in Vermont and a goal of reaching the western terminus in North Dakota by the end of October, travel arrangements from Colorado to the eastern terminus of the Trail were made. It was decided that she and her husband Michael would pass through Michigan to drop off supplies and visit NCTA headquarters in Lowell before making one last stop in Boston where Michael was set to run in the Boston Marathon.

As the date approached, however, the pandemic caused the Boston Marathon to be postponed until September and Kasey started to consider rerouting her hike to go west to east instead of east to west. Soon after, schools, businesses and even some of our public lands were closed indefinitely. As an oncology nurse, Kasey could not bear the thought of leaving her fellow healthcare workers in the middle of the pandemic so she ultimately decided to postpone her hiking plans until 2021.

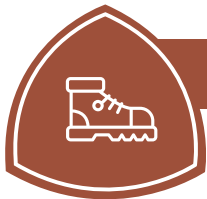
While disappointed by the drastic change of plans, she was thrilled to have the opportunity to complete her Hike 100 Challenge close to home



Hike 100 safe hiking

Photo: Kasey Robbert

Continued on page 8



and set her sights on completing all 100 miles during the month of April. As an additional challenge, Kasey made it a goal to complete at least half of her miles by her birthday on April 13. By the close of the 13th, she had accomplished a 12-mile hike to celebrate the occasion and brought her total mileage for the month to 60 miles, well on her way to completing 100.

Like many other hikers, she's doing her best to stay positive and make every hike from home an adventure. After some reports of mountain lions on the streets of Boulder, Kasey has been on the lookout for big cats while urban hiking. And finally, despite the distance from the NCT, she's already dreaming of the days spent hiking along Lake Superior, exploring remote areas of Minnesota, and being amazed by Ohio, North Dakota, and the rest of our beloved North Country Trail.

Learn more about the Hike 100 Challenge. Sign up today or submit your completion form at northcountrytrail.org. ✨

At the time of publishing, Kasey has already finished her 100 miles in Colorado!

#hikefromhome has been extended into May, as long as your state has stay-at-home orders in place. —Editor



Hike 100 in Colorado

Photo: Kasey Robbert



Sugar Bay in the Allegheny Reservoir.

Photo: Lynda Chudy

Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge Part II: “Getting Lost”

By Lynda Chudy

The late fall issue of the *North Star* included an article entitled “Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge Part I: A Speed Dating Version of a Thru-Hike.” The title and content of that piece was inspired by the opening remarks of Kyle Robb, USFS Trails Technician for the Allegheny National Forest. The Part I article addressed only one half of one of Robb’s comments on the hiking challenge that awaited, the insanity. Robb continued in the opening address to state that, in the midst of the insanity, don’t forget to “get lost” (figuratively speaking). He clarified this by reminding participants to take in the breathtaking beauty and peaceful surroundings of the Allegheny National Forest while on the journey.

The thought of “getting lost” had not been considered; it seemed a very foreign idea and took great thought. As someone always on the move, going places, laser focused, driven, and definitely not a skilled multitasker, how was it possible to “get lost?” I chuckled as I remembered how many times I was so focused on the task at hand, for instance, trail maintenance and training hikes, that I missed what was right there. To stop and take pictures when a hike or trail maintenance had a time deadline was almost frustrating. Yet each time I was forced to do so by companion hikers it was worth the effort. Yes, it takes effort to refocus. So how do you combine the two concepts, driven insanity and getting lost?

In this case, it was by being forced by circumstances to step out of A-100 as a participant to become support and gear (SAG) crew and self-proclaimed, unofficial event reporter. This was an intense initiation to what I’d been missing. The hours spent with Sharon Rosenthal at the Sugar Bay crossing (her husband Mike’s first SAG stop) were some of the best ever spent in the forest. Yes, that was hours as this was the 10-mile mark for the beginning of the A-100. Standing in one spot for that length of time is definitely not something on most bucket lists. However, maybe it should be. Sharon identified birds, plants, peepers. The sunset unfolded minute-by-minute in soft shades of mauve and was followed by the creatures and sounds

of the night. Small pin points of light flashed as fireflies danced in the night air. The air became cool with the breeze from the water. The sound of water licking the shoreline edge could be heard along with the splash as fish jumped to grab a bite of dinner or maybe dessert. Every minute was filled with something new for the senses. Have there been sunsets, cool breezes, etc. in the past? Absolutely. Had there been purposeful thought behind the experiences? No. This time, Robb's "get lost" was the focus and what a difference!

Okay, now that we know what we may be missing, the question is still how to meld the two seemingly opposite approaches to the A-100? Event participants with speed and distance goals tell you that they spend both the night and days watching the trail and their feet so they don't slip or trip. Traveling quickly during the day does not allow for looking around at the passing scenery and there is no scenery beyond the fringes of the light from the headlamp at night.

So let's go back to "Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge Part I: A Speed Dating Version of a Thru-Hike." Is it possible to plan for a 50-hour thru-hike instead of 100 miles? The event does offer transportation for 25, 50 and 75-mile hikers. Again you can plan your gear, food, water, shelter and stopping points based on only traveling during the day. Test your pack weight and choices to see if what you have could go for a longer, true thru-hike distance. Plan a pace that isn't crazy mileage for a day. What mileage would you want on a thru-hike? What pace allows you time to bathe in the beauty, sights and sounds of the forest, to "get lost?" The journey is yours.

Donald "Mick" Davies spent 14 years as Camp Ranger and then Supervisor of Property for Elk Lick Boy Scout Camps. Years ago, while we were walking in the woods together he said to me something I understand only now: "If you are moving faster than a tree you may just miss something." So, if you watched your feet for 50 hours or less during an A-100 you might just want to slow down and immerse

yourself in the flip side of this event. Or better still come back to the Allegheny National Forest to see what you missed and enjoy the moments of moving slower than a tree. Come alone, bring family and/or friends. Whether you can find company or not, you will still have an experience worth writing about. ✨



I walked right past this doe while doing trail maintenance. Reed Renshaw physically stopped me and turned my shoulders to show me the view that day.

Photo: Lynda Chudy

Happy trails!
Muddy Sneakers

The Allegheny National Forest Chapter rescheduled the 2020 Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge out of concern for the health and safety of all participants and volunteers. The Challenge traditionally held the second weekend of June is now scheduled for August 21-23. The event is postponed rather than canceled in order to afford those looking for a chance to burn off some pent up energy from staying at home a chance to do so...we hope! And, for those not feeling quite so fit after couch sitting, there is the opportunity to view new landscape at a slower pace, remembering that in the outdoors, "if you are moving faster than a tree you may just miss something."



Minister Creek hikers walking along the creek.

Photo: Tammy Veloski

Minister Creek Backpack Trip

By Tammy Veloski

Seven Butler Outdoor Club members and friends headed out to Allegheny National Forest for an overnight backpack trip on the Minister Creek Loop Trail in late October. The main Minister Creek Trail is blazed in gray diamonds. The northernmost section of the trail shares tread with the North Country Trail where it is blazed in blue. Most of the trail cuts through open forest. The beech trees in the understory made for a colorful backdrop against the hemlocks. The group enjoyed a pleasant 3.5-mike hike to the Triple Forks area. Camp was setup and wood gathered before the rain moved in for the rest of the day. We had close to an inch of rain overnight, but it ended by daybreak.

On the return section of the loop, we encountered a creek crossing where the bridge had been washed out previously and never replaced. With the higher water, the group opted to cross the creek after removing our boots and socks. This was a



Autumn colors

Photo: Tammy Veloski

better option than having our boots filled with water. Along the way, we passed the Minister Creek Valley overlook. It was still beautiful despite being past peak fall leaf season. After scrambling down through some large boulders, we joined back up with a spur trail leading back to the parking area and headed for home. The Minister Creek Loop Trail is a good option for a relatively easy backpack, about 6.5 miles total over moderate terrain. Good place to test out your backpacking gear without having to put in high miles to get to your camp. The area also contains a small family campground near the trailhead. The loop can alternately be done as a day hike. ✱



Photo: Tammy Veloski



Huge rocks are frequently part of the forest in Pennsylvania.

Photo: Tammy Veloski



Campsite

Photo: Tammy Veloski



Minister Creek crossing

Photo: Tammy Veloski



At the famous Jordan Valley 45° Chapter marker.

Photo: John Schmitt

Completion of the North Country Trail

By John Schmitt

First and foremost, I want to thank my wife, Marge, for shuttling me on day hikes on much of the North Country Trail (NCT). Without Marge's support and assistance, it would have been much more difficult to complete the NCT.

Hiking the entire NCT over the last several years has been an amazing experience. I completed the Trail on November 6, 2019, at about 10:40 a.m. at the junction with the Long Trail in Vermont which is the new NCT eastern terminus.

Now I will continue onto some statistics. I recorded my hike as 4708 miles. This is longer than the normal mentioned 4600 miles due primarily to the addition of Vermont and the recently defined road walk connectors in the Adirondacks. These road walks add many miles compared with the eventual Trail in the designated Adirondack swath. (Besides, the Trail is continually having little changes in distance due to development of the route). In addition to the 4708 miles, there was also an additional 200+ miles due to in/out hikes, side trips to scenic views, side trails to parking/lodging, and missed turns and then searching for the Trail. For the most part, the Trail was completed in nine years (2011 to 2019). I did complete the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) section in 1998/1999 and again during the 2011 to 2016 time frame.

Of the 4708 miles, 1239 miles were done as backpacking trips, three trips from the western terminus in North Dakota to the north end of the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) in Minnesota, two overnights in Wisconsin, a practice backpack trip in Ohio's Wayne National Forest with night hiking, and the Allegheny 100 Challenge. Thus 3469 miles were done on

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The Mississippi River near its source in upstate Minnesota still requires a bridge, but it's no longer miles across.

Photo: John Schmitt



Visitors are often surprised to see pelicans on inland lakes in North Dakota.

Photo: John Schmitt

day hikes. Day hikes ranged from less than a mile (a small section at the north end of the Mackinac Bridge) to over 35 miles (50 miles during an Allegheny 100 Challenge). A total of 244 days were hiked to complete the Trail. Average speed was 2.5 miles/hour which includes breaks. Due to other priorities, there were no new NCT miles hiked in 2017. The hottest day was approximately 105° F in Ohio. The coldest was a windy 10° F day also in Ohio. (This excludes a windy, -10° F day on the FLT that was done for training). The wettest day was during Hurricane Irene in central New York. This was almost matched by a major rainstorm in the Adirondacks just before finishing in November 2019. I was just ahead of a major snow storm while backpacking the Border Route Trail in October 2019.

I have very much enjoyed hiking across the NCT. The day hiking has allowed me to experience more of the countryside around the Trail. Marge has seen much more of what the various areas have to offer. In Ohio, Marge became a member of the Ohio Historical Society. She was able to visit many historical sites while I hiked. Marge also became very familiar

with Michigan, especially the Upper Peninsula, as well as the North Shore of Minnesota. Since both of us are now retired, we could spend more time on the various trips during 2019. Some highlights are the shipwreck tour at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore (Michigan), Apostle Islands National Lakeshore (Wisconsin), Isle Royale National Park, iron and copper mines, many lighthouses, the Adirondacks of New York, and the Middlebury, Vermont area. Maybe Marge will write an article sometime reflecting her experience as the support person.

The NCT itself has been a combination of forests, fields, hills and mountains, shorelines, muddy areas, paved and unpaved road walks, sand, rocks and everything in between. There have been many spectacular views and enclosed green corridors, waterfalls, Great Lake shorelines, wilderness areas, very remote rural areas and metropolitan Cincinnati and Dayton. The Trail twists and turns at times regardless of forward progress. One such area in southern Ohio heads approximately 10 miles due east even though I was westbound. The Trail can also be very straight such as western Ohio where the Trail is largely bike, canal and rail trails.

When asked, "what is my favorite section of trail," I have difficulty answering. I have thoroughly enjoyed the entire Trail. North Dakota was interesting for its wide open spaces including Sheyenne National Grasslands and the experience of hiking alone with almost every day above 90° F with little shade. There was an abundance of water fowl and many cattle. Mannequins of a preacher and wedding couple (why?) were observed in one prairie pothole (pond). The Trail has a spur (future main Trail) to North Dakota's only waterfall. The waterfall was interesting, but not nearly as spectacular as many other waterfalls along the NCT.

Minnesota had agricultural land on the west side, Chippewa National Forest and other forests with many beaver, Mississippi River, iron mines and bike paths, the Superior National Forest and Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, urban Duluth, and rocky ridges along Lake Superior, in the eastern half.

Wisconsin had the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest including a wilderness area I crossed with snow under foot, Brule State Forest and St. Croix Scenic River, and amazing waterfalls at Copper Falls and Pattison State Parks.

Michigan goes on and on: agricultural land, state game lands and cities on the south end, Manistee, Hiawatha and Ottawa National Forests and many state forests, Lakes Michigan, Huron and Superior, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Mackinac Bridge, many waterfalls, Trap Hills, and abandoned iron and copper mines.

Ohio had agricultural areas, Amish farms, churches with tall steeples, canal historical areas, Hocking Hills, East Fork, Beaver Creek and many other state parks, Wayne National Forest, views of the Ohio River, and very remote rural road walks, some of which were closed to traffic due to snow.

Pennsylvania was a mix of state game land and forests, state parks, small towns, and the Allegheny National Forest which

is the site of the Allegheny 100 Challenge. It gets really dark at night with so little civilization around.

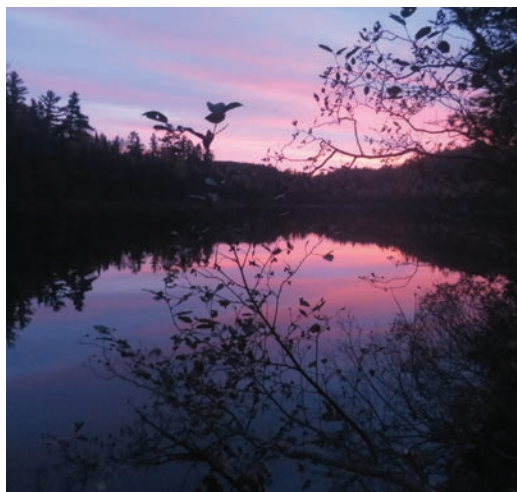
New York (my home state) has the rural Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) across the Alleghany Plateau in the southern tier. Ridges are north to south while the Trail is primarily west to east so there are plenty of ups and downs. There are also many state parks and forests, spectacular views and waterfalls, agricultural lands and small villages. Central New York has canals, small towns, art in the woods, and Labrador Hollow and Nelson Swamp State Unique Areas. The Adirondacks have several wilderness and wild forest areas with some trails difficult to follow.

Vermont is the newest addition and shortest distance. It starts with Lake Champlain and agricultural areas. Hills, creeks, and waterfalls are around Middlebury. This is followed by a mountain ridge in Moosalamoo National Recreation Area and finally ending at the Long Trail in the Green Mountains and a four-mile walk along the ridge, across Worth Mountain to the trailhead at Vermont 125. Unfortunately, views were limited from the ridge due to the spruce/fir forest rather than the leafless hardwoods of lower elevations when I hiked through. It felt like mountain hiking seasoned with a little ice on the Trail and gropple (icy snow) in the air.

In retrospect, I would say that I like the Finger Lakes Trail section the best. The FLT has hills, views, waterfalls, forests, rural agriculture, small to medium sized towns, and best of all it is relatively close. I can go hiking on it without a lot of travel time.

Although it is easy to complain about areas that were not well maintained, this

was a very small percentage of the Trail. Most of these were recent blowdowns from major storms. A couple of notable areas were in southern Ohio near Burr Oak State Park, and near Grand Rapids, Minnesota, just west of Minnesota 6. The Minnesota area had been largely cleared in 2017, but I was too early in 2018 for the last four-mile stretch



Sunrise on the Border Route Trail, looking toward Canada. This is so remote and far between roads that one must backpack.

Photo: John Schmitt

to be completed. The volunteers along the NCT do an amazing job of building and maintaining the Trail. Although I hike with little fanfare, I did meet many maintainers/builders along the way. Some of the bridges and boardwalks were quite amazing. Unfortunately, there were a few bridges washed out or heavily damaged. I did meet a few trail crews including the Border Route Trail crew near Magnetic Rock, the NCTA North Country Trail Hikers Chapter crew in Craig Lake State Park, and the NCTA Heritage Chapter with summer interns building Trail in Copper Falls State Park.

What will I do next? I have not fully decided. I would like to tour North Dakota and western Minnesota with Marge since this is an area that I backpacked alone. I would also like to hike on sections that have changed since I hiked through. North Dakota continues to get Trail off road. Wisconsin has made considerable off-road Trail on the west side. Michigan has a new more scenic route through the Porcupine Mountains under development. Pennsylvania has reduced road walk considerably. The permanent route through the Adirondacks is slowly being built. It will also be interesting to see how much of the current route in Vermont as suggested by the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) will be part of the final designated route of the NCT. I will continue to hike and maintain part of the NCT/FLT in New York and maybe become more involved in other trail maintenance/activities. ✧



Whitefish Bay on the east end of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where the Trail first bumps into Lake Superior then turns west.

Photo: John Schmitt



John reaches the eastern terminus in Vermont on 6 November 2019.

Photo: John Schmitt



The McCluskey Canal, which the route of the NCT follows for many miles in the middle of North Dakota.

Photo: Matt Davis

Dub: I hiked North Dakota

By Winford C. Bludworth, Jr., trail name rubadubdub

On April 21, 2018, I flew out of Salt Lake City at 7:45 a.m., changed planes in Dallas/ Fort Worth after a long delay, flew to Bismarck, North Dakota, and arrived late. I took city busses to Motel 6. My daughter, Sunshine, had looked up on the computer where the Latter Day Saints' Church is, but she had not put in church leaders' names or phone numbers. No one in or around the motel could tell me where the address was, but they were guessing that it was far away. There was no other church nearby either, and city busses did not run on Sunday. I had hoped to go to church then get a ride from someone at church out towards the western end of the trail. I gave up on all of that, so Sunday I stuck my thumb out. Tons of traffic, but all just zoomed by. After three and a half hours a 55-year-old bachelor picked me up. He took me about 55 miles on highway 83 to where I was to turn off and go 15 miles to Lake Sakakawea State Park. After we had talked a lot, he decided to go the 15 miles out of his way to take me to the state park. At about the 9 mile point we passed a restaurant. He said that that was a good restaurant, so we ended up having lunch there on me. He took me right to my campsite. He was a cool fellow.

On April 23, Monday, I hiked about one spur mile to the Visitors Center which opened at 8 a.m. I met Michelle, whom I had called many times from Salt Lake in my preparation for the hike. She was super nice and helpful. She said that if I had gotten there a week earlier I would have had to contend with lots of snow on the ground; now there were just some drifts around that I never even touched. Then I got on the western end of the trail. The weather was mostly cloudy but no rain.

The first two miles were good grass trail. Michelle had also said that the trail would be muddy, yet on my whole hike, I had to contend with only a little mud. Then I hiked 13 miles of paved roads, followed by 3 miles of gravel road. I had a restaurant lunch and a restaurant dinner along the way. A county sheriff stopped and checked me out on his computer. I had a good time resting and talking to him in his car. I camped in Audubon National Wildlife Refuge.

On April 24 first I hiked 5 gravel road miles, then I followed the McCluskey Canal service road the rest of the way. The weather was great. Mornings were cold

and sometimes frosty, and the first several days were cool. It was a total of 20.5 miles that day. I stopped in the town of Turtle Lake and had an early dinner and bought groceries. Lots of farm land and nearly flat, lots of frozen water, and endless birds, particularly Canada geese and ducks. A farmer stopped and talked to me, said that only a few people had hiked the whole trail. He said that he would be surprised if I saw another long-distance hiker the whole hike, and I never did. I camped in some trees by the side of the trail.

On April 25, Wednesday, I hiked 20.5 more miles along the canal to a camp site on Hecker's Lake. These lakes were mostly all frozen, but I found a good place to pump water. The wind blew like crazy all day. I spent a lot of time securing my tent out in the flat open. I didn't want the wind to break a pole or worse.

On April 26 there was frost on the tent in the morning. Great weather, clear, windy and hot. It was my third day in a row to go 20.5 miles along the canal and past lakes to the town of McCluskey and a motel. I hitched a ride with an old man, did grocery shopping.

On April 27 I started hiking from the motel at 6 AM. I had to hike 2.5 miles down the highway to the canal.



Dub with grandkids on NCT in Ohio 2009

Photo: Harry Blutworth (Dub's brother)

Great weather except strong face winds. I followed the canal 18 miles to its end, then I entered the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area and hiked 6.5 more miles to a free and nice campground. 27 total miles for the day, my longest day.

On April 28, Saturday I started hiking at 7am. I hiked 16 miles through the wildlife area and saw a father and teenage son fishing. My plan had been to hitchhike into Harvey, spend two nights at a motel, and go to church Sunday. The trail went down to a road. I followed the road a ways to cross a river on a bridge. I was walking down that road section and a woman came along in a car and stopped to talk. She was associated with the NCT. I asked her to take me to town because I was afraid that I wasn't going to make it. I said I wanted to go to church the next day, and she said she would pick me up in the morning at my motel and take me to her church, and after church she would take me back to where she had picked me up and I could hike back to my motel.

On April 29, Sunday, church was supposed to be at 10 AM; however, the lady never did show up. After 10:30, the desk clerk took me back to where she had picked me up. I finished the Lonetree 7 miles, and it was still early, so I hiked the new Rockford Canal to highway 52, then I hitched a ride back to the motel. The guy who gave me the ride back to the motel gave me some left-over pizza from a funeral he had attended the day before. So, I hiked 12.5 trail miles that day without a backpack.

On April 30 I had good cool weather. No one would give me a ride back to the trail, so I hiked 4+ spur miles down the highway to the trail, then 17 trail miles along the canal. This canal walking was great! It was along a gravel service road with no cars and great views of the farm country. I hardly ever saw a house all day. I found a great place to stealth camp, I think on private property, but I had no other choice. No one ever saw me, and I leave no trace. I seldom remember to make note of dangers when I set up camp, but I notice the dangers after I am all set up. There was a dead tree here that could have fallen and crushed me, but it didn't. Just in case, I wrote in my journal that I love all my children and grandchildren. It

rained during the night.

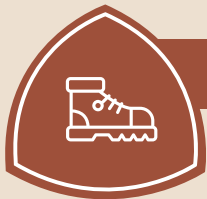
On May 1, the rain was over before I took my tent down. It was really cloudy, windy, and cold all day. I was careless and broke a tent pole while taking my tent down. I hiked 17.5 miles along the canal, then 3.5 miles along the highway into New Rockford. I checked into a motel. Everyone in New Rockford was really nice and helpful. The sheriff even took me in his police car to the grocery store and back to get supplies. I repaired my tent pole while watching TV. 21 total miles that day.

On May 2, Wednesday, the weather started out clear, then it rained. After the rain it cleared up and got warm. It was all road walking this day, but the farm country was great. The farmers had started putting in their crops the day before. They were hot at it this day, with huge tractors pulling machinery at least as wide as my house. One farmer came off his field in his pickup just to talk to me. He was really friendly and nice and encouraging. I asked people in a house if I could pitch my tent in the trees right by their house, and they were happy to have me do it. I hiked 22 miles that day.

On May 3, I hiked 21 miles down the same road, all day, to the town of Binford. It was mostly paved, great country, good weather, and not so much wind. What wind there was, came from my rear and helped me along. I stopped in McHenry and had a roast beef sandwich and a candy bar. That meant that I would be carrying food that I didn't eat. All that pavement made it a killer day for me, but it was a great adventure, with great people. As I entered Binford there was a road construction company by the road, large buildings, and trucks all over. It was just that time of day when people were getting off work. A guy was just coming out of the construction company on his big Harley Davidson motorcycle. In younger times, I rode a 1947 Harley knuckle head for years. I flagged him down. I asked him if there was a chance that there was a motel in Binford. He said there was not, but that the city had some cabins in the city park that they rented out in the summer; however, they weren't open yet. He said for me to go into the office and see Ken Gilbertson, who is one of the brother owners of the company, and also the city mayor. Ken was great! I would vote for him for mayor any time.

Ken called Donna Lorentzson who was in charge of the park and cabins. Ken took me in his pickup to the park where we met Donna and her Mother, Ethel. Two more great North Dakotans. They opened one of the cabins for me. It was really nice, with electricity, bunks, mattresses, sheets, pillows, blankets, table, chairs etc. The water in the park and restroom wasn't on yet, but there was a porta potty on the rodeo grounds right by the park. They usually rent the real nice cabins for a cheap price of \$30, but since the water wasn't on yet they charged me only \$10, and they seemed all excited to have me there. What great people! I went and had a taco salad at the nearby cafe run by a really nice, cute couple with a cute one-year old boy. When I was walking back to my cabin after the cafe dinner, the mayor and one of the city councilmen were out filling potholes in the streets. I had a

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HIKES

great night and slept well in that cabin.

Friday was hot and sunny. I hiked 17 miles on paved and gravel roads through farm and ranch country. There were farmers out with their huge machinery planting mostly wheat I think. I hiked to the town of Cooperstown, and checked into a motel, did laundry, grocery shopping, then ate a restaurant dinner in motel. Everyone in Cooperstown was super also.

On May 5, Saturday, I had breakfast in the motel cafe then started hiking. The weather was good until the last. All paved and gravel road walking. Three different people stopped and talked to me. As I was walking along, two really cute little girls, (all little girls are really cute), came out onto the road out of nowhere. It was a real shock, but it was also a real joy. Then their mother showed up looking for them. I hiked 15 miles to where the trail leaves the road and follows Lake Ashtabula for 34 miles. Some big dark clouds developed, a little rain and one big thunder burst. I have been in a thunder storm before where I could feel static electricity going thru my hair, and I know of people getting struck by lightning and dying right after having that experience. I panicked and set up camp early. I had reached my destination but it was early. I could have easily gone further

May 6 was Sunday. On my long trail hikes, I try to be in town on Sunday and go to church or take a day off and sit tight with my tent in the wilderness. It wasn't working out very well on this hike. I was in the wilderness now. According to my plan, if I sat tight this Sunday, I would end up in the wilderness the next Sunday also. If I hiked this day I could be in Lisbon the next Sunday and go to church.

The weather was great, cold when I got up, but quite hot in the afternoon. All well marked trail along the lake and river, through open grasslands with occasional cattle grazing fences to cross. After 11 miles, the Trail went right down Lake Avenue in Dianne Hatcher's summer resort place at Sibley Crossing. I asked a man if there was a store here. He said there was. I got all excited at a chance for a cold pop and maybe some ice cream or something. I walked a little further and saw two little girls. I asked them where the store was. They said I will see it but it wasn't open yet for the season. I was crushed. Then I saw another man whom I asked about the store, but he said that it wasn't due to open until the next week. He said the owner was right over there and maybe she would open it for me.

Things and people had been great all along on this hike, but now they were going to get really super great. Dianne opened the store for me and I bought pop, ice cream and candy. She



Another view of days' worth of walking along the McCluskey Canal, originally a project to irrigate some dry prairie for agricultural purposes.

Photo: Matt Davis

told me that a group of NCT people was coming in later that day to spend the week doing day hikes on the Trail. I told her that I was hiking on to the west Ashtabula crossing campground. She said that



Dub's cabin at Binford. This is the pre-season \$10 cabin Dub rented overnight in Binford, a place he raved about for its friendliness.

Photo: Dub

if I wanted, when the group came in, she would ask them if they would like to meet me, and if they said yes, she would come get me and bring me back for dinner and camping with the group. She also offered to take me back to west Ashtabula in the morning. I said that would be great, so I did not set up camp until late in the evening in case she came for me. So I hiked 6 more miles to west Ashtabula for a total of 17 miles that day.

Ending here for now, with another installment planned for the next issue. —Editor ✧

Last sentence now says "another installment planned for the next issue." However, our first issue of this year became too large, so Dub's story was saved for another day, which disappointed him monstrously in January. Here we have it now, but Dub suddenly died in February, so I regret hugely that he never saw his story in print. Our readers will have to let us know if they would like to see his second installment finishing North Dakota. —Editor.



Juniper Rock: The must-see, spectacular view from the Juniper Rock Overlook

Photo: Vickie Swank

Hearing the Words “Thank You”

By Mary Stenberg

Everyone likes to hear the words “thank you.” As a member of the NCTA Chequamegon Chapter and an active volunteer for the past 12 years, I have heard those two simple words hundreds of times. It is amazing to me how nearly every hiker we meet out on the Trail during maintenance and workday events expresses their gratitude for the work we do to keep the North Country Trail in tip-top shape. Expressions of appreciation by those who use our hiking trails are what keep member volunteers like me working.



Trail Box: Directional sign and trail register box at the connector trail near Beaver Lake Campground in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

Photo: Mary Stenberg

During the 2012 hiking season, the Chequamegon Chapter installed a series of 11 trail register boxes, strategically spaced, along the 70 miles of Trail our Chapter maintains in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Inside each register box are pocket-sized maps, pencils and sharpeners, and a tablet for hikers to write comments about their hiking experiences. It is very interesting and gratifying to read what hikers from all over the country, write about hiking the North Country Trail. Over the past eight years numerous tablets with hundreds of comments written by hikers have been collected. A majority of those written comments say “THANK YOU.” Here is a sampling of the comments taken from one trail box located at Juniper Rock Overlook near the Marengo River and Swedish Settlement just south and east of Grand View:

- 8/4/17: We hiked to the Swedish Settlement as part of our WITC Hiking Course. It was great. We saw 2 snapping turtles. One was missing a leg – we hope stubby makes it. Thanks for maintaining the trail. (Jane, Sue, Sue & Abby)
- 8/6/17: First time – perfect day for both me and my chocolate lab. Beautiful trail. Backpacker Magazine was right!! Thanks. (Warren, Wausau)
- 8/25/18: Beautiful day for a hike! Loved the Marengo River Shelter last night. Overview beautiful. Met NCTA Volunteers – Thanks for all you do! (Melanie & Ed, Snowshoe & Stubs, Sun Prairie, WI)
- 8/3/18: Hiking from Mellen to Solon Springs, 2nd night. Very reminiscent of the mountain range it once was. This trail is beautiful. Thanks for your hard work on its upkeep. Going to the overlook now. The view from the overlook is amazing! (Maddelyn)
- 10/6/18: I’ve been around here for 50 years, but this is the first time here. Awesome!!!
- 6/3/19: Best kept trail ever. (From Tennessee Crew – Love it.)

Wisconsin offers hikers spectacular waterfalls, varied terrain, long vistas, and the ancient Penokee Mountain Range. The Chequamegon Chapter builds and maintains the portion of the premier hiking trail that begins on County Highway A, just south of Iron River, Wisc., ending in Copper Falls State Park near Mellen. New members are always welcome, but you do not need to be one to hike on the Trail. Hiking is free and open to everyone! For more information, visit northcountrytrail.org/che. ✨



Protecting Lands for National Scenic Trails A History: 1968–2009

By Tom Gilbert, Former NPS Superintendent, North Country National Scenic Trail

The first thing you need in order to develop a trail is land on which to build it. The authors of the National Trails System Act, originally enacted in 1968 (Public Law 90-543), were acutely aware of this reality. So they included rather potent authorities for securing the lands needed for our National Scenic Trails (NST).

As originally passed, the Act authorized the administering Secretary (Interior or Agriculture) to map a right-of-way for the trail, publish notice of this route selection in the *Federal Register*, and then encourage state and local governments to work with landowners, organizations, and individuals to provide the necessary trail right-of-way by cooperative agreements. If permissions and agreements did not succeed in getting the access needed, then they should attempt to purchase the lands or easements across the lands.

The Act went on to state that if state and local governments had not accomplished this task within two years after the *Federal Register* notice, then the administering Secretary should undertake the work of trying to secure the needed lands by agreement or purchase, including the use of eminent domain (condemnation), if necessary. Two limits were placed on the use of condemnation: (1) not more than 25 acres per mile of trail (an average 200-foot-wide corridor) could be acquired by condemnation and (2) no lands along the Pacific Crest NST could be acquired by condemnation.

During the 30 years (1981-2011) in which I led the National Park Service (NPS) efforts to establish the trail, I often wondered how our work to establish the trail would be different if these potent authorities were applicable to the North Country NST. But they were stripped away when the Trail was authorized in 1980.

I also would chuckle whenever I thought about the fact that the framers of the National Trails System Act expected state and local governments to be so excited about creating these trails that they would secure all the lands needed within two years. Thinking about “what might have been” is fruitless, because it didn’t happen. Here is what actually happened.

Permanently protecting all of the Appalachian Trail (AT) lands was one of the primary purposes for establishing the National Trails System. The Act authorized appropriation of a totally inadequate amount – \$5 million – to accomplish the job. Ten years later, almost nothing had been done by the NPS to start acquiring land for the AT.

The AT partners and supporters persuaded Congress to pass a potent amendment to the Act to force the NPS to begin the work. In March 1978, Public Law 95-248 expanded the amount of land that could be acquired by condemnation from

25 to 125 acres per mile of trail (an average 1,000-foot-wide corridor) and it authorized \$90 million – \$30 million each year in 1979, 1980, and 1981 – to purchase trail lands. It included another ridiculously unrealistic time goal – Congress wanted the acquisition work completed in three years.

The three-year goal was not met. When I retired in 2011, there were still a few parcels remaining to be acquired for the AT. One of the reasons the work took so long is that the vast majority of the purchases were done on a willing seller basis. Condemnation was rarely used.

Later in 1978, Congress passed Public Law 95-625, a comprehensive package of amendments to the Act that had many implications for land acquisition. The amendments created the new category of National Historic Trails (NHT) and the first five additions to the system since the original 1968 Act: the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, Iditarod, and Lewis and Clark NHTs, and the Continental Divide NST. Unlike NSTs, NHTs are not intended to be continuous footpaths so an uninterrupted corridor of land is not needed. Consequently, the federal land acquisition authority for these trails was significantly limited: “...direct Federal acquisition ... shall be limited to those areas indicated by the study report or by the comprehensive plan as high potential route segments or high potential historic sites.”

Additionally, because senators from western states were strongly opposed to more federal ownership of land in their states (where four of these trails are located), the authorization of appropriations for these trails stripped away any federal authority to acquire lands by stating “no [federal] funds may be expended for the acquisition of lands or interests in lands” for all five new trails.

The devastating impact of this language meant that, even if a state wanted to purchase trail lands



Tom Gilbert at the Ashland, Wisc., Celebration
Photo: NCTA





Author Tom Gilbert, our original National Park Service Superintendent, and Bruce Matthews, our previous NCTA Executive Director for 10 years.

Photo: NCTA

with grants it receives from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), it was prohibited from doing so. It also meant the USDA-Forest Service could not spend funds to acquire private lands within a National Forest boundary that might be needed for a trail.

Even though the Continental Divide Trail was established as a NST, necessitating a continuous corridor or right-of-way on the ground, it was subjected to the same acquisition limitations as the NHTs. However, this was not the only way the Continental Divide Trail was treated like a NHT in this law.

The 1978 amendments also added subsections 5(e) and 5(f) to the Act, laying out for the first time a requirement to prepare a comprehensive management plan for each trail. Subsection (e) listed the requirements for a NST management plan and subsection (f) for a NHT management plan.

The wording is generally similar, but the glaring difference is that NST plans must contain a plan for acquisition of lands needed for the trail while NHT plans do not have to contain any plan for acquisition of lands. Rather awkwardly, subsection (f) for NHTs specified that the plan for the Continental Divide NST would be prepared according to historic trail requirements rather than subsection (e) requirements for scenic trails. There would be no federal plan for acquisition of lands for the Continental Divide NST. This created a precedent that was then unfortunately replicated for the North Country NST.

Another provision of the 1978 amendments deleted the ridiculous “within two years” goal for state and local governments to acquire the lands for a trail.

On March 5, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed Public Law 96-199 amending the National Trails System Act by authorizing the North Country NST. Following the pattern set for the Continental Divide Trail, the North Country Trail

was explicitly excluded from the scenic trail management planning requirements and placed under the historic trail planning requirements. It was also listed with the previous five trails in the language that prohibited spending funds to acquire lands.

However, in this law Congress revised the wording of that restriction. In place of “no funds may be expended” was a much wordier restriction: “No funds may be expended by Federal agencies for the acquisition of lands or interests in lands outside the exterior boundaries of existing Federal areas.” This was a small but very important change because it now allowed states to spend federal LWCF grant money to acquire lands for the trail and it allowed the Forest Service to acquire private inholdings for the trail. Nevertheless, it still left the NPS with no authority to purchase private lands for the North Country NST.

In another set of comprehensive amendments to the Act in 1983 (Public Law 98-11), Congress added three more NSTs: the Potomac Heritage, Natchez Trace, and Florida. There were two features in these amendments that affected the land acquisition authorities for NSTs.

First, each trail was given a different level of land acquisition authority. The Potomac Heritage NST received the prohibition on federal agencies spending funds to acquire lands like the Continental Divide, North Country, and Ice Age NSTs. For the Natchez Trace NST, the full authorities of the original Act, including condemnation, were left intact. A new level of authority was established for the Florida NST. The administering agency – the USDA-Forest Service – could purchase any lands needed for the trail if done “with the consent of the owner thereof,” i.e. from a willing seller. Only condemnation was prohibited. This was an important signal that the opposition of politicians to federal land acquisition for the trails was easing.

The real “game changer” of the 1983 amendments, however, was the shift to “willing seller” acquisition authority for the Florida Trail. When Congress authorized the Nez Perce NHT three years later, it again imposed a total prohibition on federal land acquisition, but it would be the last time.

Beginning with the next authorized trail, the Santa Fe NHT in 1987, new trails were given “willing seller” acquisition authority like the Florida Trail. This included the Trail of Tears NHT (1987), Juan Bautista de Anza NHT (1990), California NHT (1992), and Pony Express NHT (1992). With this new pattern, the federal administrators and partner organizations of trails with no federal acquisition authority began to wonder if a successful argument could be made for amending the Act to bring those nine trails up to the level of having “willing seller” authority. This discussion was facilitated by the fact that these players were now gathering for periodic conferences beginning in 1988 in

Continued on page 20



Former Michigan Senator Carl Levin and Bruce Matthews, together at a new Trail dedication.

Photo: NCTA

Wisconsin, 1991 in Oregon, and 1993 in Missouri.

In the early 1990s, the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) expanded its outreach to members of Congress. Senator Carl Levin became very interested in the Trail. He came to an annual meeting at The Shack Country Inn in Jugville, Michigan, and became an annual participant in National Trails Day events on the Trail in Michigan. While meeting with him at The Shack, I explained the roles of the NPS and its partners in administering and managing the Trail. When he heard that we could not purchase lands for the Trail, while the NPS had a robust program acquiring all AT lands, he exclaimed, “Why isn’t the scenic trail in my state as good as the Appalachian Trail?” I explained the legislative history (which you have just read) and our collective aspiration that the trails with no authority could be brought up to the “willing seller” level of authority Congress was now conferring. He committed to doing something to rectify that inequity.

He began working on the matter and reached out to colleagues in other states who hosted portions of the nine National Scenic and Historic Trails with no acquisition authority. I believe the first bill to propose that legislative change was introduced in 1996 or 1997. With the support of the NCTA and corresponding organizations for the other eight trails, plus the Partnership for the National Trails System, Senator Levin and his colleagues introduced bills in each Congress.

While this coalition of interests continued to press for a willing seller amendment, a new approach to provide federal funding for trail land acquisition was pioneered in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) was one of the most active state partners among all the states traversed by NSTs and NHTs, spending significant amounts of state funds to acquire lands for the Ice Age and

North Country NSTs and supporting the efforts of the trails’ volunteers.

The WDNR, Ice Age Trail Alliance, and NCTA worked together to take advantage of the language that no longer prohibited federal funds granted to others from being spent to acquire trail lands. These partners worked to get a special \$2.5 million federal LWCF appropriation included in the Fiscal Year 2000 federal budget, along with language directing the NPS to grant these funds to the WDNR: \$2 million for the Ice Age Trail and \$500,000 for the North Country Trail. The state had to match this money with state funds and purchase lands or easements.

The NPS granted these funds and the WDNR accelerated its purchases of lands for the two trails. In subsequent years, Congress appropriated additional funds for the Ice Age Trail and approved language authorizing the NPS to grant the funds directly to other units of government and even to a trail organization or land trust. Language requiring a nonfederal match was also dropped and NPS granted 100 percent of the purchase price for a few acquisitions.

“ When he heard that we could not purchase lands for the Trail, while the NPS had a robust program acquiring all AT lands, he exclaimed, ‘Why isn’t the scenic trail in my state as good as the Appalachian Trail?’ ”

While willing seller bills failed to be enacted, Congress continued to authorize more NHTs with willing seller authority. Curiously, the Selma to Montgomery NHT (1996) was given the full authorities of the original Act, including condemnation if needed.

Finally, on March 30, 2009, the change so long sought was achieved. As part of an enormous law entitled the “Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009,” the National Trails System Act was amended in several ways. Three more NSTs and one NHT were authorized. Importantly to our subject, a sentence was added to the authorizing paragraph for each of the nine trails with a total prohibition on federal land acquisition. It reads: “No land or interest in land outside the exterior boundaries of any federally administered area may be acquired by the Federal Government for the trail except with the consent of the owner of the land or interest in land.” The language in section 10(c) prohibiting federal agencies from spending funds to purchase lands was removed.

Willing seller authority was a significant expansion of the federal role in those nine trails. The NPS could now purchase critical lands for the North Country Trail, assuming Congress appropriated the necessary funds. When I briefed the NPS

Midwest Region leadership about this change, the regional director was aghast at the thought of purchasing parcels of land scattered across seven states. Who would take care of those lands? I explained that when the NPS purchased the first few parcels for the AT, they were scattered across 11 states! The work has to get started somewhere. I also explained the arrangement whereby the Appalachian Trail Conservancy is carrying out many of the land stewardship functions that would normally be handled directly by NPS staff in more traditional park areas.

I saw no reason to fear the future since the AT partners had already successfully gone down this trail. I did

offer one recommendation, which I still believe is very important. Whenever appropriations for land acquisition along the North Country Trail are made by Congress, I believe those funds should be accompanied by the granting authority that began in Fiscal Year 2000 for the Ice Age and North Country Trails in Wisconsin. This would permit ownership and stewardship of those lands to be with entities that are physically closer to those parcels. I would advocate for the language that allows granting of funds even to nongovernmental entities, like the NCTA, and allows such grants to cover up to 100 percent of the purchase price. ✱



Dove Day and snowbuddy

Photo: Tom Walker

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?



“The object in the picture looks like something I’ve seen in Pennsylvania north of Route 59 about a mile, give or take. I can only guess that it is some kind of feeder or maybe a sample collector.”

Bill Lallman from Corry, Penna.

Jim Bradley of Michigan took the picture, and HE recalls taking it about eleven miles south of Route 59, near the south end of Kinzua Bay. Jim thinks it is a corn shucking machine made from a heavy wooden wire spool. See the corn cobs scattered about on the ground? But what are the chances of two such thingumbobs only a dozen miles apart on the same trail?

We suspect all of us will remain mystified forever.

The Hidden Life of Trees A Book Review

By Jim Bradley

The author of *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben, manages a forest in the Eifel mountains of Germany. He has compiled over 20 years of experience into an insightful and delightful look into the life of a forest behind the scenes, those things that we don't normally see as we walk through. I was astonished to learn many things. For instance, most of the biomass of a forest is underground in the form of fungi and these fungi convey nutrients from one tree to another; healthy trees even supply nutrients to sick or injured trees. Trees can produce poisons that deter attacking insects; when an attack occurs, they emit chemicals that warn other trees of the invasion. Also, the air in coniferous forests has few germs: the trees emit chemicals that are antibiotic. And there is much more.

Wohlleben explains much about the life of trees. Trees are not soloists in the forest orchestra; they have intricate relationships with other species as well as their own. They communicate with other trees and they solve problems. They have enemies, can get sick and experience stress. Wohlleben explains their life cycle and shows how it differs from ours. For trees, 100 years is not a long time. He concludes with some helpful guidance on how we should treat trees.

While most readers have loved this book, some have not. These readers see Wohlleben as going overboard in attributing human-like qualities to trees. He speaks of trees as talking to each other, being motherly, and having feelings and intelligence. For example, Wohlleben describes using chemicals to warn other trees of an insect invasion as talking. I don't share this negative reaction; if one doesn't take such terms too literally, they explain a lot about trees.

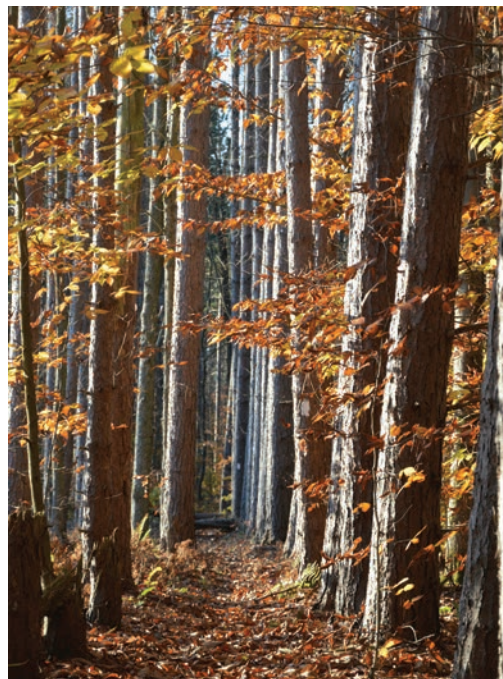
The Hidden Life of Trees is readable and has lots of engaging examples. Anyone who loves being in the woods will be enriched by it. ✱

The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben, Greystone Books, Ltd., 2016. Originally published in German by Ludwig Verlag, Munich, 2015; English translation by Jane Billingham. 245 pages + foreword, two introductions, a note from a forest scientist, endnotes, and index. ISBN 978-1-77164-248-4. Hardback. \$24.95



Maybe a black birch. Both black birch and black cherry exhibit this black potato chip bark when older, but the horizontal lenticels evident here seem more like black birch to me. Or if we could break a twig we'd smell spearmint if editor is right.

Photo: Patty Mishkar of Michigan



On the Finger Lakes Trail, a red pine plantation on state forest land, where eroding abandoned farms of the 1930s were bought up and quickly planted into rows of red pine (called Norway pine further west on our trail). Here a new generation of young hardwoods is coming up as the pines age out and admit more sunlight to the forest floor.

Photo: Warren Johnsen



On a piece of trail in upstate N.Y. that used to be mine to tend, the stump of a cut white oak had grown four new trunks, a not uncommon next generation called coppice growth. This one almost always held water in its "bowl," so any dog of mine knew to check there for a drink. Here Jacqui's dog Mina takes one.

Photo: Jacqui Wensich



The tulip tree leaves are like a broad green 5-6" wide green handprint. A very pretty 2-3" wide blossom ends the season as a noticeable seed pod. Joan Young took pictures of the tulip's handsome shape, same tree in both summer and winter.

Photo: Joan of Michigan



And if trees really do feel for one another, these who seem to grow right out of rock must elicit great waves of arboreal sympathy! Along the Finger Lakes Trail/North Country Trail in N.Y.

Photo: Lynn Anderson

When a settler cleared trees to make a pasture or a farm field, sometimes one good tree would be left standing. Because this tree grew up without competition for light from other trees, it could grow a nice full crown of branches atop a short fat trunk. When that same field was later abandoned, as happened to so many hilltop rocky farms in upstate N.Y. along the Finger Lakes Trail, the next generation of trees that grew up surrounding the "wolf" tree all grew straight and tall, aiming for the sparse sunlight, and of course crowded. These two are both by Jacqui Wensich, are probably red oaks, and the one with huggers is near Sugar Hill fire tower.

Photo: Jacqui Wensich



**North Country
Trail Association**

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Mark's children Jasper 4 and Acadia 2. Erick Lake campsite on the Brule-St. Croix Chapter's section of Trail.

Photo: Mark VanHornweder, June 2019



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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.
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The North Country Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

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