

January–March, 2021

The Magazine of the
North Country Trail Association

Volume 40, No. 1

north star



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Another of Joe's North
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What Logs Sound Like

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Taken during a hike on the NCT in Yankee Springs Recreation Area.

Photo: Christopher Van Wyk



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The *North Star*, Winter issue, Vol. 40, Issue 1, is published by the North Country Trail Association, a private, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization, 229 East Main Street, Lowell, MI 49331. The *North Star* is published quarterly for promotional and educational purposes and as a benefit of membership in the Association. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the North Country Trail Association.

Trailhead

Jaron Nyhof, President



Photo: Unknown

You'll be well into 2021 when you read this, but I'm writing it on New Year's Day and looking forward to a fresh beginning following a year that was unlike any other. I'm hopeful that as the new year goes on, we'll gradually begin to resume more and more of the activities we each loved to do before the pandemic restricted us, both on and off the Trail. Things like having gatherings in person, and even a Trail-wide celebration August 5-8, 2021, in Clarion, Pennsylvania, maybe even shaking hands, exchanging hugs and seeing folks smile and laugh where their face masks used to be.

In this hopeful and happy mindset, I'm also longing for a more positive public discourse where we can enter into conversations believing the best about one another, and respecting and thinking well of people who are not like us, or who may see a few issues differently from us, but whom we value and even like nonetheless. Deep down I think we all long to be about higher ideals; about things that inspire, things that make the world a better place, and things that last. The "why" of what we do.

I know I'm going out on a bit of a limb with this fluffy talk in my first ever *North Star* piece. But I feel relatively confident I'm safe in expressing these types of thoughts in this forum because I think most *North Star* readers are a little like me in being idealists at some level. Why else would they spend their free time getting bitten by mosquitos, sweating, developing blisters, and breaking their backs to build or maintain trail they may not see again recreationally for months, years, or maybe even ever? Or spending time wrangling difficult schedules and people to pull together a Chapter meeting to work through things as mundane as Chapter bylaw amendments? Or spend hours writing, calling and visiting

landowners in the hope of developing a relationship that could someday result in securing permanent easement protection for a piece of trail? I think it's because every person reading this is motivated to do the things they do, and to be part of this trail community, because they value being part of something bigger than themselves, giving back, paying it forward, making the world a better place, stewarding the environment, building and caring for community, leaving a legacy, or some combination of these things or another dozen I could list that just scratch the surface of our aspirations.

The longer I've volunteered with the NCTA, and the more involved I've become, the more I've been amazed at how many skills, talents and capabilities are necessary to pull off this audacious idea of creating the longest National Scenic Trail in America. It takes trail builders, of course, but also land owners, event planners, accountants, marketing and social media experts, technology experts, engineers, financial experts, artists, carpenters, writers, photographers, historians, volunteer coordinators, trail angels, political advocates, extraordinary administrators, even lawyers, and the list goes on. We have an incredibly skilled and talented staff, of course, as does our National Park Service partner and our Affiliates, but the sheer size of the Trail, and the volume, magnitude and variety of the things that need to be done, creates the reality that our mission will not be accomplished without all of you and the skills and resources that you bring. So thank you! Thank you for being such an amazing group of dedicated, humble, selfless, hardworking, diversely talented idealists! And yes, practical, get 'er done folks as well, because ideals require action to become reality.

Knowing this is who you are, I'm excited for our future, and I want to challenge us to have big ideas and big goals for this year and the years to come, at every level. Your Board of Directors has been focused on the big ideas in the strategic plan for some time, and those efforts continue. As you've likely read or heard, we also expanded on some of those ideals recently with the formation of the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (JEDI for short) this past December and the approval of a statement of our position on those issues.¹ These are difficult and sensitive issues on all sides, and I commend Board member Jo Swanson for stepping into the gap to help us tackle them, and the Wampum Chapter for taking the initiative to develop a statement that was not only the basis for the one that was adopted for the entire organization, but pushed us to make progress in this important area. We've got a good start, but we've only just begun. It is my hope that our community can believe the best about one another, respect one another even where there are differences of opinion, and realize that there is more that brings us together than separates us.

I'd also like to give a shout out to the new Central Flyway Chapter, representing a group of members who have taken

Continued on page 4

Trailhead

Jaron Nyhof, President (continued)

the buffalo by the horns (it is in North Dakota, after all) to start an entirely new Chapter covering a new segment of the Trail. This is a great example of how ideals backed by action result in progress.

This is your Association, your community. Would you join me to indulge in a little dreaming about who and what the Trail and Association can be, and your part in making that happen? I'd love to hear your ideals, before, during and after they've become reality, and to see what we can accomplish together in 2021 and beyond.

As for my "why," it's honestly a little of a lot of the things I've listed above, but the one that seems to be growing in importance as I get older is a desire to leave a legacy. I want to spend my time, talent and treasure on things that matter, things that make a difference and that last. When I walk on the Trail, it clears my head and frees my soul like few other things as I take in the beauty of this world, the myriad stars in the night sky, and my very tiny and finite place in time and space. It's been particularly therapeutic in the midst of this pandemic to get away from it all in this way. And as a father, I want that same opportunity for my children, the opportunity for them to enjoy nature, clear their heads, restore their souls, and think big, audacious thoughts about how they'll make their lives matter, too. The progress on the Trail has been amazing already, to be sure, and we're standing on the shoulders of giants. May those who follow us feel the same.



1. The North Country Trail Association *{insert Chapter name here}* values just, diverse, equitable, and inclusive trail experiences. We are committed to these principles for everyone's enjoyment of the North Country National Scenic Trail. We strive to better include those who experience barriers to trails by prioritizing equitable solutions to ensure all can connect to and care for the Trail in a way that is meaningful for them.

Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director

What a year! In the pages ahead, you'll read about what 2020 meant for the North Country Trail and the NCTA. You'll read about how the Trail provided space, peace of mind and grounding to millions of people when it was needed most. You'll be reminded of the tireless efforts and dedication of our volunteers. And you'll learn that even in the midst of the endless limitations that the coronavirus brought to our lives, we were still able to accomplish great things.

Like the rest of the world, the daily lives of NCTA staff, volunteers and partners shifted and so did our priorities. We put on fewer in-person events but brought people together virtually. We avoided group hikes but did more hiking alone, in small groups, or with family. We put a hold on our bigger trail projects and instead focused on general trail maintenance and made sure the Trail was blazed to show the way to all who were seeking solace on its path.

These are not random accomplishments; they are a testament to our community coming together to make sure good things happen in a year that had many struggling to find good things. More people than ever completed the Hike 100 Challenge, we reported more volunteer hours than ever before, built a new Chapter in North Dakota, and we were able to keep thousands of miles of the Trail maintained and blazed while it was facing record use. You made that happen!

In turn, we heard your stories about what it's meant to you to have the Trail in this time of need. The North Country Trail is more than just a trail and 2020 showed us just what that means and why it's so important that we do this work.

We don't know what 2021 will bring but I know we'll continue to make progress on the Trail and with the priorities laid out in our Strategic Plan. We'll focus on improving how we work by rallying around our volunteers, providing more training opportunities, building a better leadership program and connecting our peer-to-peer network across eight states. We'll revamp our Next Generation Coalition program to support our emerging leaders and encourage action. We'll focus on some major project areas across the Trail, including Minnesota and our extension into Vermont. And I hope we'll be together more in person, on the Trail and around the campfire.

We learned a lot about ourselves this past year. That we are stronger than we ever thought and that our community comes together when it matters most. Whatever the coming year brings, never forget what's important: enjoy the hike, celebrate the wins, gather with those you love. This is why our work matters. ✨



Andrea working from home, of course.

Photo: Ted Bentley



National Park Service Corner

Chris Loudenslager, Superintendent,
North Country National Scenic Trail

As I sit down to write this evening, I am both inspired and excited by the promise of the opportunities and accomplishments that I know the coming year will bring to us and the North Country Trail. 2021 will, in many ways, mark a year of new beginnings. We will begin to benefit from new staff we never had in the past, and start to implement new programs and processes that will better serve our volunteers and protect our beloved Trail and resources.

In addition to these changes we had elected to make, there will also be some significant changes in the coming year that are being prescribed to us from the agency level. This will be a lot to take on in one year, but I'm confident we can do what we need to do and make great things happen, just as we've proven ourselves capable of over the last 40 years.

Something that I would want everyone to know and understand as we talk about change is that even before I was selected as Superintendent for the North Country Trail, I recognized and understood the importance of consistency and continuity in how we do business so that it will be easy for everyone to know what is expected of them and to know whom to contact when they had questions or needs. More than anything, I want to keep things simple, and keep things the same. However, despite my intent and desire to keep things simple and easy, these changes and when they are to take effect are beyond my control. As we roll with the changes in 2021, I will appreciate your patience, understanding, and adaptability as we incorporate these into our operations along with all the other new initiatives and programs we had already chosen to pursue.

The big change coming will be associated with the way we have traditionally managed our volunteer program. In 2019, we marked the tragic loss of two volunteers as a result of underlying health issues, one while building trail in the upper



Chris Loudenslager

Photo: Mick Hawkins

peninsula of Michigan, and one leading a hike in Minnesota. After a review of our program by the regional and Washington offices following these incidents, we must implement new measures to more accurately document who is serving as National Park Service volunteers, better describe the work that volunteers may elect to do and ensure that each person has made an informed decision about the type of volunteer role that is best suited to them.

Another change that we will need to adjust to will be additional requirements associated with our chainsaw program. Many will not be aware of this, but until this year the National Park Service, as an agency, did not actually have an official, documented chainsaw policy. In the past, we relied on our own policy that had been mostly developed internally to meet our own unique needs and circumstances. While the new NPS chainsaw policy that we must now follow is not a great fit for a long-distance trail, for the most part, the only new requirement for current and future sawyers is the need to complete the "Trail Safe!" online safety training, which we've been promoting and recommending for all anyway. The other changes are related to who is authorized to provide chainsaw instruction, and the mandate that all sawyers must be working with at least one other person who is also First Aid and CPR certified, and is able to provide emergency assistance if needed. Other changes relating to the new NPS chainsaw policy may yet emerge, but for now, these are the ones we need to prepare for.

While change in and of itself can be problematic in concept, it is not difficult to recognize that these will provide for better protection and safety of all our volunteers and ultimately benefit the Trail. And I will never hesitate to do what must be done on your behalf. So we'll continue to do what needs to be done and we'll do it together, understanding that the only constant in life is change and acknowledging that as our Trail grows and matures, our programs and processes must in turn grow stronger and evolve as well. If your surroundings haven't changed, you haven't gotten anywhere. ✨



NCT trail maintenance project in September 2020, east of Muskallonge Lake State Park.

Photo: Chris Cuevas

Partnership Spotlight: SEEDS

By Jennifer Flynn and Kate Lemon

“We believe that maintaining access to public lands through trail maintenance and development is critical to supporting individual and community health,” wrote Jennifer Flynn, EcoCorps Program Director with SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers.

SEEDS work on the North Country Trail in Michigan has been paired with other public lands projects. For example, according to Jennifer, “In 2019 an EcoCorps crew from Saginaw traveled to work with the Manistee National Forest staff to construct a boardwalk outside of White Cloud. We worked in 2020 to complete that project.”

This year, SEEDS worked with the NCTA Spirit of the Woods Chapter to

improve Trail in both the Manistee National Forest and on private land. Jennifer described that as a unique opportunity for their crews to understand federal-level planning (U.S. Forest Service), mapping tools and systems, and “the unique techniques to support the trail maintenance in that area as it is a popular mountain biking section, as well as heavily traveled by foot.” This work will continue into next spring. SEEDS also had a crew work on the NCT in the UP, from the mouth of the Two Hearted River to Muskallonge Lake.

“Our work on the North Country Trail and collaboration with the NCTA has significant meaning for our EcoCorps staff who complete the work and the community-based volunteer groups receiving the additional support,” wrote Jennifer. “The work supports a national treasure that can be appreciated from so many local communities and so many trail and outdoor enthusiasts who visit from afar. We’ve found, particularly this year, that trail use is high and the demand on volunteer groups was also high. We were happy to be able to support their efforts. The more our staff are able to experience these treasures and meet the committed local volunteers, the more we see care for public lands exponentiating!”

We deeply thank all SEEDS staff and volunteers for their partnership and support of the Trail and the mission of the NCTA. We also thank the National Forest Foundation and National Park Foundation, as EcoCorps work and collaboration with the NCTA is currently funded through them. ✧



SEEDS trail maintenance project on the NCNST in Michigan.

Photo: Joe Jaczkowski

NCTA Welcomes Holly Visser, Member and Donor Relations Coordinator

Holly joined the NCTA team in late 2020, as we strive to enhance how we connect with our members and donors. She is responsible for helping steward relationships with our members and supporters. She comes to us with a long background in community engagement and event planning in the West Michigan athletic community. An avid runner, on both road and trail, you will likely meet her along the Manistee River as a favorite training location. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, and serves her community as a yoga instructor. Connect with her at hvisser@northcountrytrail.org.

Celebrating Marty Swank's 10,000 Hours Milestone

By Nicole Loiseau, Volunteer Program Manager, NPS



Photo: Vickie Swank

Each year, hundreds of volunteers share their unique talents and skills to enhance trail conditions and provide safe and memorable experiences for hikers. Since 1998, Marty Swank of the NCTA Chequamegon Chapter in Wisconsin has contributed 10,000 hours to the North Country National Scenic Trail. Marty has served as the Chapter's President and now he's the Communications Liaison/Webmaster, composing

newsletters, trail reports, local publications, and social media posts. You can also find him in the wilderness helping to maintain the Trail.

He was drawn to volunteering due to his love of nature, the woods, and animals, and his experience has left long-lasting memories. "There have been very close encounters of the animal kind including the giant frog attack while canoe-packing in the Porcupine Lake Wilderness, surviving a major wind event while camping and doing trail maintenance, and the building of the two-log bridge across Porcupine Creek," Marty said. "The longest lasting memory will probably be of all the people that I have met along the way and call friends."

"10,000 volunteer hours is an incredible accomplishment," said Superintendent Chris Loudenslager. "Marty embodies the spirit of volunteerism and demonstrates tremendous dedication for the benefit of the Trail and its users. Thank you so very much, Marty!" ✨



A Minnesota Moment

By Carter Hedeon

Here in the land of 10,000 lakes, the wetland in the picture is about four miles, by the NCT, east of the south entrance to Itasca State Park, headwaters of the Mississippi River. While out lopping at midsummer this year, I looked east from the Trail, and was impressed by the way things lined up for a photo, and took it from a few feet off the Trail. One can see in the distance tall pines, towering over aspen now regenerating following a clear-cut of a few years back. Although the photo does not suggest a hilly terrain, that is actually the predominant landform found here, a glacial moraine, dotted with marshes, ponds, lakes and rivers. When the Trail was laid out, care was taken to show off these water features while winding among the hills, and taking care to keep the Trail free of flooding possibilities, save for occasionally being collateral damage from beavers doing what beavers do.

Trail Register Data from the North Country Trail in the Dakota Prairie Chapter Trail Range

By Tom Moberg, Trail Development Coordinator; NCTA Dakota Prairie Chapter



Sheyenne National Grassland Trailhead July 2020

Photo: Tom Moberg

Have you ever heard someone ask, “Well, how many people use the North Country Trail?” For NCT volunteers, that question can be both annoying and embarrassing since we may not be able to give an objective numerical answer. Sometimes we just wave our hands and try to explain why we don’t know the answer. But for a variety of reasons we really would like to know how many people use this wonderful trail that we work so hard to build and maintain. The NCTA Dakota Prairie Chapter (DPC) finally has some good numerical data about Trail use, and the results were quite surprising.

When the DPC was chartered in 2013, only 28 off-road miles of the North Country Trail (built by the U.S. Forest Service) existed in the Chapter’s 100-mile Trail range in southeastern North Dakota. Even the on-road routes had not been well defined. Few people in the area seemed to know anything about the NCT. Since then, the DPC has added almost 40 off-road and urban Trail miles, and mapped and signed the on-road segments. The DPC has also developed a robust year-round program to promote the NCT with frequent organized hikes, publicity events, Chapter meetings, public programs, and media coverage. It seemed like Trail awareness was growing, but we had no good way to actually measure Trail use.

Somewhat belatedly, we began installing registers at key Trail access sites to help us measure usage. In 2017 we installed two registers, added two more in 2018, and put in two more in 2019. We now have two full years of Trail use data from six locations.

The DPC trail registers are located so that almost anyone hiking somewhere on the 55 miles of mostly off-road Trail between the west side of the Sheyenne National Grassland and Colfax, N.D., will pass at least one trail register. Each register consists of a 4x4 post with a shelf holding a waterproof box that contains a “Rite in the Rain” notebook and pencils. Signs encourage hikers to write the date, their name, their hometown, and comments about their hike in the notebook.

At the end of each calendar year since 2018, DPC volunteers have picked up the register notebooks, read the entries, scanned the pages as a record, and replaced the notebooks in the waterproof boxes. In December 2020, the 2019 and 2020 data from the six registers were also entered into a spreadsheet and summarized. As one might expect, there is wide variability in the quantity of written information that may range from just a date and a hometown to full details about the hikers, their dogs, and their perspectives on the hike and the Trail. The penmanship is also highly variable.

For the 2019-2020 data, on average each register entry represented about two people. Most entries were from April through November, but there were entries from every month of the year. The comments were almost all positive and appreciative.

The Sheyenne National Grassland, which hosts 31 miles of the NCT, allows equestrians and cyclists to use the Trail so some of the register data represents horse and bike riders. However, based on the comments, it seems as if most people signing the registers were hikers.

The data for “hometowns” provided some information about the geographic distribution of the register signers. For 2019 and 2020, the signers came from 142 cities in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and two Canadian provinces. About one-third of the



Sheyenne National Grassland Trailhead June 2018

Photo: Tom Moberg

people who signed the registers were from North Dakota, while almost three dozen other states had much smaller representations. Of the hometowns represented, about one-quarter of the towns were in North Dakota and one-quarter in Minnesota.

The data summaries are undercounts since not all Trail users write in the register notebooks. There are several ways we can improve our Trail use data. Better signs at the register sites and kiosks might encourage more users to sign the registers. When DPC group hikes pass a trail register, the group doesn't usually stop to sign the notebooks. In the future, the group hike leaders will be asked to make a register entry with the total number of hike participants to improve the accuracy of the count. And as we develop more off-road Trail miles and new Trail Towns, we will add several additional registers.

The following table summarizes the collected register data from the six sites for 2019 and 2020. The summary data are the Number of Entries in the notebooks and the Number of People represented by the Entries. Totals are given across all Sites for each year (Row Totals) and for both years combined (Column Totals). For example, in 2019, there were 18 register Entries representing 28 People at Site 1, the Sheyenne National Grassland (SNG) West Trailhead. And in 2019, the Totals across all six Sites were 237 Entries representing 494 People. A quick way to get a general sense of the usage changes from 2019 to 2020 is to examine the right-hand column (Row Totals).

Since there were relatively few hikers on the DPC Trail segments when the Chapter started, it was very surprising to see that there were almost 1,500 Trail users in 2019-20. It was exciting to note that the total number of both entries and people in the trail register data essentially doubled from 2019 to 2020.

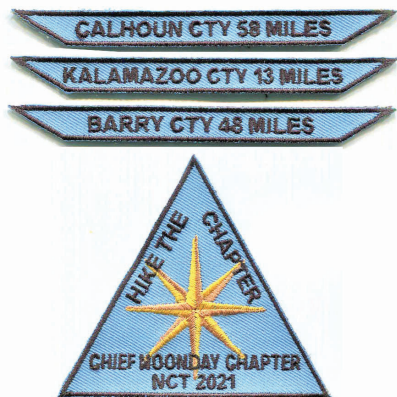
It is too soon to call this growth pattern a trend, but it is certainly dramatic. This type of change has apparently been observed on hiking trails all over the country this year and may be related to the pandemic. It would be interesting to compare this NCT usage data with other areas of the country. In the long run, the growth is probably also related to new off-road Trail segments, consistent marketing efforts, improved road and Trail signage, better trail maintenance, cooperative landowners and partners, and a growing interest in long-distance hiking in North Dakota. ✨

YEAR	DATA	SITE 1: SNG WEST TRAILHEAD	SITE 2: SNG MIDDLE TRAILHEAD	SITE 3: SNG EAST TRAILHEAD	SITE 4: EKRE TRAILHEAD	SITE 5: BERG CAMPSITE	SITE 6: WALCOTT TRAILHEAD	ROW TOTAL
2019	No. of Entries	18	61	96	39	17	6	237
2019	No. of People	28	138	206	69	38	15	494
2020	No. of Entries	40	88	197	65	53	11	545
2020	No. of People	89	172	411	104	131	15	958
Column Total (2019-2020)	No. of Entries	58	147	293	104	70	17	691
Column Total (2019-2020)	No. of People	117	310	617	209	169	30	1452



Hike the County Challenge

The Chief Noonday Chapter of the North Country Trail Association covers a total of 119 miles in three different counties. Our challenge will be for people (dogs too, we guess) to hike the Trail through one, two or all three of the counties during 2021! There is no charge – simply “register” and report your progress.



If you don't know about the NCT or our Chief Noonday Chapter, the entire Trail is 4,700 miles long, traveling through North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Vermont. Our Chapter in Michigan is responsible for 119 miles. The Trail is identified along the route by blue blazes posted on trees, telephone poles or posts. If you are new to the Trail check northcountrytrail.org for maps and other information.

Calhoun County covers 58 miles. The Trail is mostly level walking, with much of it on country roads but also through nice towns: Homer, Albion, Marshall, and Battle Creek.

Kalamazoo County has only 13 miles. It may be short but it's scenic! It travels through Augusta and the new National Park Service property, Augusta Prairie. (Yes, the NCT is part of the National Parks System!) The Trail in Kalamazoo County has lots of “off-road” Trail passing through forested areas.

Barry County, as the Trail heads north toward Kent County and on up to the UP, has 48 miles. These miles are made up of a nice mix of scenery and country roads. The Trail passes through Prairieville and Middleville.

Leaving Hillsdale County, the NCT enters Calhoun County at Anderson Road and S. County Line (or N. Elm Street). Leaving Calhoun County and entering Kalamazoo County is on Armstrong Road off of M-96 about two-tenths of a mile from the Veterans' Hospital.

Kalamazoo County ends at 39th Street and Baseline Road about 1.5 miles north of Kellogg Bird Sanctuary. Barry County continues northward to Kent County at N. Wood School Road and 108th Street SE.

While not yet formalized, recognition is planned for various categories – Oldest? Youngest? Furthest from home? First for each county? Hike with a pet? Completed by hopping on one foot?

Registration would be appreciated. For specific questions or to register, simply send an email to hikethecounty@gmail.com. As you complete each county send your name (and create your own “hiker name” if desired), address, email and phone to receive your patch.

We know that hikers are honest people and we will accept your word as you complete each county. We would welcome one or two unique pictures from each county that you complete, possibly to share on Facebook or our newsletter. Comments on your adventures can be shared, as well as entering notes on the various sign in sheets at kiosks along the Trail. If you find problems (downed trees, impassable sections or unclear directions) during your hikes please let us know at northcountrytrail.org/the-trail/report-trail-conditions and our volunteers will do their best to respond.

The North Country Trail (NCT) is 4,700 miles long and is administered by the National Park Service and built and maintained primarily by volunteers. The Chief Noonday Chapter, with 200+ members, takes care of 119 miles of the Trail. In most years we have monthly Chapter meetings, often with speakers or round table discussions. We also have monthly Chapter hikes and workdays on major projects such as building boardwalk or improving Trail. We would encourage you to join our Chapter and join our hikes and help maintain the Trail! Find out more with a search for Chief Noonday Chapter on Facebook or through northcountrytrail.org/cnd. ✱

This page is a flyer handed out to prospective hikers.



In 2019, Kim Reed and Diana Hurd celebrate completing their 50 mile challenge.

Photo: Tina Toole

A-100 Hiking Challenge: June 11-13, 2021

The NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter will hold the annual Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge (A-100) June 11-13, 2021. The event challenges hikers to traverse 25, 50, 75 or 100 miles along the North Country National Scenic Trail through the beautiful Allegheny National Forest in 50 hours, beginning at 6:00 p.m. on a Friday and ending at 8:00 p.m. the following Sunday.

The A-100 is an unsupported endurance event with no timekeepers, no aid stations, and no finish line other than the one hikers set for themselves. Those who pre-register will receive a one-year membership in the North Country Trail Association, shuttle service to the start of the hike and a T-shirt.

In 2021, the A-100 will run from south to north. Cost for participants will be \$70, and there will be a lottery to register. Details about the lottery and more information about the A-100 can be found on our event page at northcountrytrail.org/events/a-100.

We hope progress in the fight against the coronavirus allows the 2021 A-100 to take place in the traditional manner. However, if circumstances dictate that we cannot do so, please look for modifications and/or cancellation to be posted on our event webpage and our ANF Chapter Facebook page: facebook.com/ANFChapterNCT. ✨



North Star Deadline

The next deadline for material for your magazine is 1 April 2021. Send .jpgs of high resolution and text to **northstar@northcountrytrail.org** because HQ has decided to bring magazine editing in house for the future, and your old editor is retiring. I've been at this for almost thirteen years so maybe now I'll get to write some articles, and not have to fix your punctuation, split infinitives, and incomplete sentences, ha!

**Irene Szabo, treeweenie@aol.com
Bergen, N.Y.**

On behalf of the North Country Trail Association and from me personally, I cannot thank Irene Szabo enough for her editorial guidance and dedication to the **North Star** these past 13 years, and for her incredible commitment to the North Country Trail that has a much longer history. If you have a moment, please join us in thanking her.

**Kate Lemon,
NCTA Marketing and
Communications Coordinator**



Call for Nominees: **2021 NCTA Annual Awards**

By Larry Pio

With the NCTA Celebration being held the first week of August 2021, **we will open up for nominations beginning January 15 and ending May 1**, to get all the awards ordered by late May. We have many volunteers, and others, who should be recognized for their activities on behalf of our Trail, and this is our big chance to do just that.

Please don't get discouraged if your nominee didn't receive the award last time, and submit them once again, with maybe a little more information. The Committee is allowed to select three nominations in each category for recognition, except for Trail Builder and Trail Maintainer, which now have up to five recipients. I have noted with almost 40 Chapter and Affiliate entities possibly having a nominee in each category, it would take 13 years to honor one from each Chapter / Affiliate. So, beat the rush, and get your nomination in this year.

Who are you thankful for in your local Chapter, state or region? Who is someone special in their commitment and enthusiasm for the NCT, volunteering their time, money, materials and energy to further our mission, but also meeting the criteria for one of the following award categories?

Nominations are due by May 1 and can be completed online at northcountrytrail.org/members/awards, via the e-mail form sent to all Chapter, Affiliate and partner leaders, or by sending the following information to **Nalcoman1@aol.com** or **awhittington@northcountrytrail.org**: Chapter/Affiliate/Partner name, award category nominated for, nominee's name, address, city, state, zip, phone and email. Also, your name, address, city, state, zip, phone and email. Include a one- to two-page statement that explains the reason why this person should receive this particular award.

Anyone can make a nomination but be sure you give the NCTA Awards Committee enough detail to adequately compare your nominee to others in the selected category. Give us details, examples or stories to support your nomination.

To make your nomination more complete, get help from others, even from the nominee, to give a complete picture of your nominee's contributions.

Categories

BOOTS ON THE TRAIL

A volunteer who regularly leads hikes that are well advertised and promoted to the public (non-NCTA members) as a way of building NCTA membership and support for the Trail. A nominee would typically lead more than one hike per year,

and make them interesting by sharing their knowledge with groups or being helpful to new hikers, or organize and lead a whole series of hikes like cross-county or even cross-state events, over a three-year period or more.

VANGUARD

A legislator or other public official whose leadership, actions and advocacy have substantially benefited the North Country Trail over a Chapter/Affiliate/Partner's area or larger, not just a short segment.

TRAILBLAZER

A business or foundation for far-sighted vision and support, demonstrated by significant contributions to the Trail or the NCTA.

THOMAS L GILBERT LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

An individual, in recognition of 15+ years of true dedication, exceptional service and outstanding contributions toward the dream of the North Country Trail, or the success and growth of the NCTA, not just local service. Service may be performed in a voluntary or paid capacity.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

An individual, in recognition of exceptional volunteer service in furthering the goals of the NCTA, and outstanding contributions toward the dream of the North Country Trail. Individual should have made a significant commitment and accomplishments over eight years or more. Not more than one of these awards may be granted each year to an individual who is not a member of the NCTA or an Affiliate.

TRAIL BUILDER

A volunteer whose work in trail planning, landowner negotiations, layout and design, and/or construction, have resulted in the development of outstanding new Trail or facilities over a three-year period or more.

TRAIL MAINTAINER

A volunteer who has demonstrated exceptional dedication or achievements over a three-year period or more in maintaining or restoring preexisting Trail segment(s).

LEADERSHIP

A volunteer who has demonstrated exceptional leadership over a three-year period or more leading to significant local achievements or highly successful events.

OUTREACH

A volunteer whose efforts to build coalitions, partnerships or other forms of local support have contributed significantly to the ongoing success of the Trail.

COMMUNICATOR

A volunteer, for exemplary work in promoting the Trail or the NCTA through a communications medium (newsletter, web site, brochure, etc.) or personal contacts over a three-year period or more.

RISING STAR

An NCTA member between the ages of 8 and 25 who has made significant contributions to the Trail and seems likely to continue, and whose dedication to the Trail and the NCTA sets an example to other youths and shows exceptional promise.

SWEEP

A volunteer, for tireless work and achievements behind the scenes on behalf of the Trail or the NCTA over a three-year period or more.

FRIEND OF THE TRAIL

An employee of a unit of governance or organization whose leadership, accommodations and active collaboration have substantially benefited the North Country Trail or the NCTA, not working solely in the capacity of an NCTA member.

OUTSTANDING PRIVATE LANDOWNER

A private landowner whose leadership, accommodation and active collaboration have substantially benefited the North Country Trail.

BLUE BLAZES BENEFACTOR

An individual or household demonstrating vision and generosity through significant monetary or in-kind contribution(s) to the North Country Trail or the NCTA.

TRAIL PROTECTOR

A volunteer working to protect the Trail by gaining permission to build Trail, and additionally, gaining easements to protect our Trail, over a three-year period or more.



IT WAS A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

NCTA volunteers in all eight states faced restrictions on travel, events, group projects and trail construction. With extra time on their hands, resilient Chapters and Affiliates still managed to get out on the NCT in record numbers. We saw a shift to individual trail maintainers and Adopters, families working together on the Trail and small groups doing socially distant projects. We may have hosted fewer group hikes this year; but we painted thousands of blue blazes, attended hundreds of virtual meetings and events and stayed connected to the North Country Trail.



Photo: Mary Coffin

THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS HIGHLIGHTED HERE ARE A TESTAMENT TO THE STRENGTH OF OUR VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY AND THE DEDICATION OF THESE INDIVIDUALS TO THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL.

VOLUNTEER HOURS ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT

CATEGORY	HOURS
Maintenance	61,797
Administration	16,532
Interpretation	7,334
General Mgmt.	3,152
Training	2,027
Natural Resource Mgmt.	210
Cultural Resource Mgmt.	34

**91,086
HOURS**

**988 VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTED 91,086 HOURS
A TOTAL DONATED VALUE OF \$2,477,539**

Photo: Bobby Koeplin



**IN 2020 WE BUILT
51 MILES OF NEW TRAIL
AND ELIMINATED
20 MILES OF ROAD WALK**

Photo: Tom Moberg



Photo: Becky Heise



Photo: Connie Julien



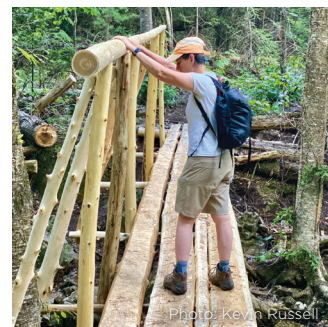
Photo: NORTA



Photo: Larry Larson

DEDICATED TO THE NCTA MISSION

The mission of the North Country Trail Association is to **develop, maintain, protect and promote** the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern United States.



3,160 MILES OF OFF-ROAD TRAIL



IN 2020 NCTA CHAPTERS HELPED TO CARRY OUT THIS MISSION WITH THESE EFFORTS:

DEVELOP

- Installed 3,247 feet of boardwalk and puncheon
- Built 40 new bridges
- Installed 38 new signs and kiosks

MAINTAIN

- Maintained 3,171 miles of NCT
- Blazed 275 miles of NCT
- Repaired 19 bridges

PROTECT

- Secured 17 new permanent easements
- Connected with over 100 private landowners who host the NCT on their property

PROMOTE

- Hosted 135 events, hikes and meetings virtually to remain connected while socially distancing



WE DID IT TOGETHER!

NCTA Chapters and Affiliates had 71 meetings with agency partners, including the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, State DNR offices, and county and local land managers.

OVERVIEW REPORT BY

Valerie Bader, Director of Trail Operations

Chapter and Affiliate reports follow this page >>

See Full Trail Progress Report at:

northcountrytrail.org/our-work/trail-management

**Railroad gravel delivery**

Photo: John Derick

Middlebury Area Land Trust

VERMONT - One of our bigger gravel projects started last fall when I contacted ECI Construction who does all the work in railroad right-of-ways in Vermont. We needed to get gravel to a remote part of the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM). The rail tracks run past this area. So ECI said, "Sure, sounds like a good way to support the TAM." All donated. So they put a rail-wheeled dump truck on the tracks and an excavator and ran a mile along the tracks, and unloaded 40 yards of gravel on the side of the tracks. In February when the ground was frozen we had a skid steer move the gravel 900 feet across a field to the trail side. This was donated by Ploof Construction. In April volunteers and staff from Middlebury Land Trust (MALT) started moving it with wheelbarrows down the trail. The gravel was put over fabric three feet wide and later was covered with wood chips. The chips serve as a softer surface for the many runners who use our trails.

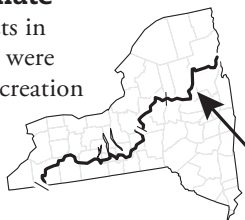


—John Derick

Adirondack Mountain Club Affiliate

NEW YORK - The two biggest projects in the Adirondack Mountains of New York were finalizing the Oak Mountain Ski and Recreation Area Trail Access Easement (TAE) and completion of a 30-foot bridge in Hoffman Notch Wilderness.

Once the Oak Mountain easement was finalized, masked volunteers began to flag, establish trail and mark a one-mile new section of NCNST. This new section



connects with a snowmobile trail on private lumber company property that we also were given permission to mark. This four-mile new Trail section replaces a 5.5-mile walk on paved road near Speculator. It also connects two other wilderness areas (WAs), West Canada Lakes WA and Siamese Ponds WA, resulting in a nice 75-mile backpack in some of the most remote Adirondack areas.

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) Professional Trail Crew supported by an NCTA Field Grant constructed a 30-foot bridge in Hoffman Notch Wilderness as part of the Jones Hill section project. It was constructed completely of native materials using only non-motorized hand tools like cross-cut saws, axes and chisels. DEC Forester and ADK senior staff identified the species and diameter of trees to be used for the project and obtained the permits. Three 14-inch-diameter cedar trees, and one 16-inch-diameter hemlock were used. The ADK Pro Crew felled the trees then removed branches, peeled bark and bucked the logs into the appropriate lengths, chiseled notches, attached them together and added a cedar handrail. They completed this bridge in just one week, an incredible feat. Typically, it takes two weeks to complete a bridge of this style.

The Adirondack area benefitted from the NCTA State Volunteer Council's Marketing and Promotion Committee's statewide NY NCNST brochure that was sent to 14 municipal and tourism organizations to promote and raise awareness of the Trail across the state. We plan to build on this in 2021 when personal contacts are permitted.

For the first time in NCTA history, N.Y. and Vermont have an RTC who came on board this fall and is already taking the initiative to help us with our objectives.

—Mary Coffin

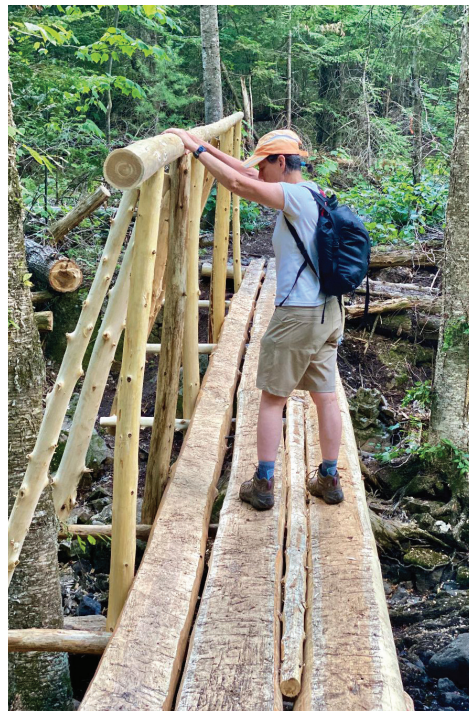
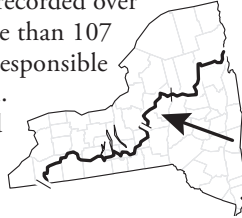
**The natural materials bridge, built without power tools.**

Photo: Kevin Russell

Central New York Chapter

NEW YORK - In 2020 the Central New York Chapter continues to be 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 responsible for monitoring and reporting on over 42 miles of off-road Trail.

This year the Chapter is pleased to welcome a newly assigned NCTA staff, Regional Trail Coordinator, Stephanie Campbell. We look forward to her insights and expertise in advancing the goals and growth of our program.



New steps completed

Photo: Unknown

Whaley, Scott Sellers and Mark Wadopian, took on the task of reviewing and updating our Landowner Records and Agreements.

Studies and planning continue on the Clark Hill State Forest reroute to abate road walks. The necessity of a bridge to cross Stringer Brook has caused delays. Our planning committee, spearheaded by Steve Kinne, has maintained NY DEC contact and continues to pursue this goal. Permit requests and the use of drones for remote survey are pending.

Another reroute section between Mt. Pleasant Cemetery and Canastota Creek is under consideration to circumvent a section frequently washed out by heavy rain and spring thaw.

The Annual Meeting was conducted via Zoom. It was attended by 24 members and guests and well received, albeit restricted by the constraints of this medium and a short planning window.

The Chapter sponsored numerous hikes and work sessions in 2020. Unfortunately, our coronavirus containment response resulted in postponement or cancellation of many public-access events. The work sessions, however, were conducted, albeit on a restricted-participation format (only two or three workers per crew and strict prevention measures observed).

Some recreational hikes took place prior to the restrictions, included snowshoeing, tree identification and birding. Unfortunately, the wildflower identification, Young Forest Initiative hike, fungi identification hike and a star gazing outing along the Trail had to be postponed until precautionary measures are lifted.

The ad hoc Landowner Committee, chaired by Kathy Eisele, and backed by Peg

—Mark Wadopian

Finger Lakes Trail Conference

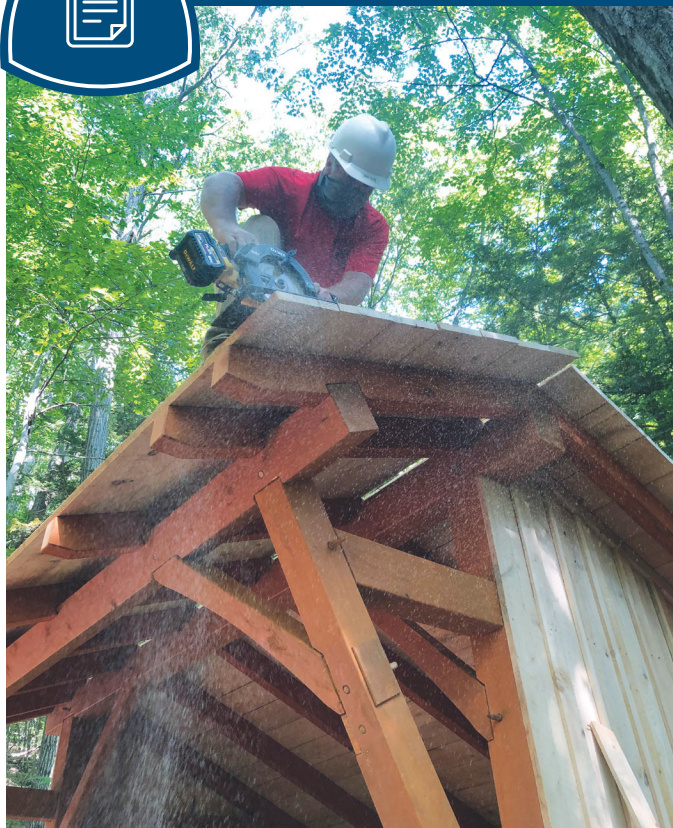
NEW YORK - The Finger Lakes Trail Conference began the year with a new focus on marketing,



by hiring its first ever Director of Marketing and Communications, Christy Post, who started work on January 1, 2020. Christy is primarily charged with elevating the profile of the Finger Lakes Trail across New York State through events, publications, social media, and strategic partnerships, all of which is intended to grow memberships and giving to the FLTC. Though the coronavirus made for a very different year from what anyone had envisioned, having a marketing director in place at the same time as a pandemic drove scores of new people to the trail led to significant increases in the number of new memberships in the FLTC in 2020, more than double that of recent years!

This was due in large part to the great success with FLT50, a new hiking challenge launched in May, very like the NCTA's Hike 100. As of the beginning of December, more than 330 finishers had logged over 22,000 miles on the FLT, and hikers have continued to submit miles through the end of the year. Regular and long-standing group hikes, such as the popular County Hike Series hosted by the FLTC, and the FLTC's regular member-focused Spring and Fall Weekend Events were cancelled in 2020, but the FLTC was able to host three large trail work projects, known as "Alley Cats" in reference to the trail's span from Allegany State Park in the west to the Catskills in the east, including the construction of two new lean-tos and some new off-road trail in Solon, New York. Two other accomplishments of note in 2020 were the acquisition of a key parcel of land which guarantees permanent access for the FLT to the east side of Hoxie

Continued on page 18



One of two shelters built by FLT Alley Cat crews this year, this one the divine style designed by our uber-volunteer, Rob Hughes. Notice the mortise and tenon joints, with pegs for fastening, not nails or screws.

Photo: Christy Post

Gorge State Forest, and a successful campaign to raise more than \$11,000 to purchase an ATV for Alley Cats and other major trail projects. We had worn out the previous gift of an ATV from a member!

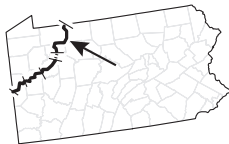
—Christy Post

Allegheny National Forest Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA -

In 2020, the volunteerism of our trail adopters, trail walkers and work day attendees allowed our 97 miles of Trail to be kept in great condition. Even with restrictions, we were able to:

- Remove downfall along the length of the Trail. In many areas, we cleared several times!
- DR mow or brush cut two thirds of our miles! We now have four Stihl brush cutters and have the goal of cutting all the miles by the end of next year. That will save us from endless lopping of seedlings, especially beech. Our plans are to brush cut those seedlings every four to five years. In between, we'll continue to cut back briars and perennials.
- Clear countless drainages and repair drainage in many places along the Trail.



Mike Toole cutting slab lumber with the Alaskan Sawmill. The slabs were then cut into smaller lengths to use as the tread boards on the Spring Bridge.

Photo: Tom Tefft

- Erect two new shelters, bringing us to a total of seven of nine planned shelters.
- Identify and mark one campsite.
- Rebuild the Spring Bridge south of FR 449.
- Install five new bog or box bridges.
- Repair railings or boards on over 10 bridges.
- Repair two informational kiosks.
- Rebuild two staircases.
- Install a dozen Carsonite post trail markers.
- Paint blaze the southernmost 25 miles of trail.
- Create seven small reroutes to alleviate drainage issues.
- Build two new switchbacks to reduce the grade of the Trail.

The pandemic unfortunately caused us to cancel guided hikes and our premier event, the Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge. The one hike we had before the closures, our First Day Hike, was very well attended and led to a romance and marriage of two special Chapter members! We are hopeful that 2021 will be a better year and allow us to bring more outdoor enthusiasts together.

—Tina Toole

Butler County Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA -

The Butler County Chapter co-sponsored with Trail Affiliate Butler Outdoor Club the First Day Hike at Moraine State Park with 500+ participants. The weather was above freezing resulting in two very muddy hikes; the groups were split to hike out and back from McDaniels north to the Link Road shelters and south to Burnside Road.

Our annual Cherry Pie Hike was held February 23 at Jennings with 300+ participants enjoying cherry pie after hiking the seven-mile long hike, or shorter history or nature hikes throughout the morning.



We cleared downed trees and trimmed overgrowth on the NCT between Burnside Road and the Old Stone House. We explored a potential northern route northeast of Leonard Road in Gap 16 and encountered 12+ tree stands, numerous deer camps and ATV trails so we will pursue a more southern route.

Continued trail clearing and maintenance throughout the year. Partnered with the Cranberry Township Sunrise Rotary Group; we spoke at one of their Zoom meetings so they helped maintain trails on one Saturday in September. Also Boy Scout Troop 31 in West Sunbury helped to maintain trails in State Game Lands 95 near West Sunbury and held a weekend campout at our Tamarack Trails shelter.

We established a new Chapter meetup group which had 137 members by year's end.

The North Trails Library partnered with our Chapter to hold a virtual hike and a scavenger hunt along our trail near West Sunbury. Fourteen families and 37 individuals participated in the hike over a three-day weekend. We installed a new trail information bulletin board in the library and donated a number of

hiking and outdoor books and NCT brochures.

Our Slippery Rock Watershed AMD, Education and Recreation Grant was funded for \$25,000 to replace six 20-year-old bridges, improve 2000 feet of wet, muddy trail and replace 600 feet of boardwalk in State Game Lands 95 in northern Butler County.

—David Adams



Brian mowing with the DR mower

Photo: Dave Adams

Wampum Chapter

OHIO and PENNSYLVANIA - Despite the challenges of the year the Wampum Chapter found ways to move forward, both in western Penna. and along our newly acquired range of NCT miles in eastern Ohio.

Pennsylvania saw a new 2.5-mile reroute of the NCT through the woods east of Enon Valley completed after four years of work building 10 new unique foot bridges. Elsewhere two bridges were constructed along existing NCT, and two older 32-foot bridges were upgraded. Mile markers now grace the route of the NCT



from the state border through Beaver County, and two bat boxes were installed.

To the west, our volunteers worked on our newly acquired NCT range from the Ohio line to Zoar, reblazing the entire 84 miles of Trail through the woods and along the road walks. Working with Beaver Creek State Park, a 1.25-mile reroute was designed and built that eliminated a mile of road walk at the eastern end of the park. Further east, the Sheepskin Hollow area was one of maintenance emphasis, and a mile of Trail to the west of the park was rehabilitated and reopened after being logged recently.

Outreach became a challenge with all our community events cancelled, but we found ways to spread the word about the NCT and solicit support through social media and by building partnerships with local businesses and recreational entities. The Chapter created a new Facebook page, PA NCT Hikers Forum, that allows hikers in our area to communicate, share experiences, and coordinate their own small group outings.

Diversity of trail users was a focus for the Chapter and we worked to create relationships with groups that traditionally do not consider visiting the NCT. A Diversity Committee was created and worked regularly over the past 12 months to find ways to invite more people onto the Trail, and a statement of diversity was developed as guidance going forward.

The Wampum Chapter would like to thank our volunteers, landowners, and the community that our range of NCT traverses for another great year of accomplishment. We are enthusiastic about moving forward in 2021!

—Dave Brewer



Photo: Dave Brewer



The Buckeye Trail Association

OHIO -

The Buckeye Trail Association began the year in better shape than ever. The six-year Strategic Plan was started on January 1st and our finances were proving to be strong. Hope was high.

The coronavirus came along in the early spring. Very quickly, our Executive Director, Andrew, developed a Covid-19 Policy and took the necessary steps to cancel all BTA membership events through May, but as the year went on, all BTA signature gatherings ended up being canceled. This became the year when we all had to celebrate together separately. That's most of the bad news. Below is some of the good news for 2020.

With so many activities canceled, it was decided to look inward and see what could be done. We started with the Finance Committee adjusting the 2020 BTA Budget to prepare for any contingencies. Andrew quickly applied for a Payroll Protection Program grant through the Cares Act. The Campbell Soup Foundation grant previously announced was changed to allow the funding to be used to keep the doors open. With all that and careful monitoring by the Finance Committee, it looks like we'll finish 2020 in good financial shape, as our donors kept up their customary generosity.

Although some Buckeye Trail Crew work parties were canceled, several did happen. Related to this was the successful refurbishment of 44 miles of forested Buckeye Trail in Eastern Ohio by AmeriCorps NCCC Members.

Our social media game was upped in 2020 and we used it to grow membership recently. There are now very active Strategic



Plan Working Groups covering Marketing, Membership and Social Media.

Using our operational software suite, eTapestry, a fully functional Volunteer Form was launched in October that will allow volunteers to enter their hours more easily. Tallying of these hours will help us to secure grant funding in the future.

At the beginning of the new year, Richard Lutz, already a BTA fixture for over eight years, will start his full-time job as BTA Director of Trail Development.

—Steve Walker

Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association

OHIO - Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association (NORTA) is a small but active Affiliate focused on maintaining and improving the Wabash Cannonball Trail, a multipurpose rail-trail. Within NORTA, we have a recently-formed committee focused on the NCT in northwestern Ohio, about half of which is coincident with the Wabash Cannonball. Our major accomplishment of 2020 was hosting our first NCT workday. We reblazed six miles of Trail



and reopened 1.5 miles of Trail in Maumee State Forest that had been abandoned from lack of maintenance. The workday had seven attendees, including a high school student and two college students. We are proud to be engaging the next generation of trail volunteers!

Our goals for the next year are to continue reblazing our entire section and to focus on establishing new trail in the Oak

Blazing in the Maumee State Forest

Openings region, a globally rare ecosystem consisting of prairies and oak savannas, which are sparsely forested areas with an average density of only six oak trees per acre. The NCT passes through the largest remaining oak openings ecosystem in the Midwest, in Oak Openings Metropark, home to more than 180 rare plant and animal species including more than a third of all rare species found in the entire state of Ohio.

—Ryan Bowles



Photo: Richard Lutz



Photo: Georgia McDowell

Chief Baw Beese Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN -

The east branch of the Saint Joseph River travels south through the Lost Nation State Game Area in southern Michigan. The NCT crosses the river four times along the 7.5-mile stretch through the game area. Winter snowmelt and spring rains often carry the log bridges downstream. Since the Michigan DNR will not allow constructed bridges, log crossings are the best way to help keep hikers' boots dry. We have now raised the height of the logs and pinned the ends to keep them in place. This coming spring we'll find out if our work was successful.



—Bruce Dziadzio

Chief Noonday Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN -

As with all Chapters, CND did the best we could in 2020. One focus was getting our sawyers certified, both new and previous sawyers. Luckily a new member is very capable with an axe. In one section he removed 13 downed trees. We now have six certified sawyers and three members were trained in CPR/First Aid.



Another project was to install puncheon in a very wet area, funded partly by an REI Grant with materials purchased and cut to length in 2019. The spring rains brought depths of 24 to 36 inches of water; by late summer the water was 12 inches when the project was finally started. Many volunteers worked on their own between established workdays. The 230 feet of puncheon in two different sections were completed and branded with NCT symbols.

The NPS managed the rerouting of Augusta Prairie (the first property purchased by the NPS for the NCTA) by working with CND volunteers, planning workdays and providing materials. A solid surface now winds through the Prairie to the Vista (wheelchair accessible) where three benches will be installed next year. The Trail continues through the Prairie, marked with Carsonites as NCT until it meets the wooded section where customary pathway was built, waiting until spring 2021 to build structures to allow a dry hike. Our volunteers were happy to be with other members to actually work on trail building, even wearing masks. CND was also able to do two trash pickups for Michigan's Adopt-A-Highway program along our section of Trail.

—Jane Norton



Trail volunteers with new boardwalk

Photo: Bob Cooley



The boardwalk over the leather leaf marsh on the new Western Michigan reroute.

Photo: Beth Keloneva

Western Michigan Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN

- The Western Michigan Chapter is comprised of 141 miles of Trail passing through Kent and Newaygo Counties in Western Michigan.



We are fortunate to have two volunteer Trail Coordinators, Jim Bradley in Kent County and Steve Hatting in Newaygo, who work with our NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, Kenny Wawsczyk.

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. In Kent County 40% of the Trail is off road, so we strive to make progress in rerouting more off road while working with various communities, parks, game areas and land owners.

Continued on page 22



In Newaygo County 75% of the Trail is off road and travels through the beautiful Huron-Manistee National Forest.

Our Chapter's crowning achievement for 2020 was the opening of a new 3.71-mile reroute off Echo Drive just west of White Cloud. The new reroute was at least eight years in the making from vision, to layout, to approval from the National Park Service, the Huron-Manistee National Forest Service and the NCTA. The reroute was funded in part by a generous grant from the Fremont Area Foundation as part of the Iron Belle Trail initiative. The grant went to support the NCTA and the U.S. Forest Service for materials and labor. The Forest Service staff and crew were instrumental in helping our local Chapter volunteers finish the Trail this year. We could not have completed 3.71 miles of hand-built new Trail so quickly without their generous support!

The new route is located in the Huron-Manistee National Forest. It winds through pine plantations, beautiful woodlands and boasts an over 600-foot-long raised boardwalk through a leather leaf marsh. After it crosses Echo Drive to the north, you are charmed by another shorter boardwalk through mixed hardwoods. In about one mile you end up at the iron foot bridge that crosses the White Pine River.

—Beth Keloneva

Spirit of the Woods Chapter

LOWER
MICHIGAN

- The Spirit of the Woods Chapter was fortunate to have several EcoCorps SEEDS crews work on our part of the NCT in the Manistee National Forest this year. Working with EcoCorps, 16 crew workdays were ultimately scheduled, to start to address issues cited in the USFS's recently completed Assessment of the NCT within the Forest. Over four months of the sometimes extremely hot



SEEDS crew on a lunch break.

Photo: Sue Crawford

summer and across 40 miles of our 78 miles of the Trail, their crews focused on clearing the Trail corridor, creating new water diversions, repairing erosion, removing exposed roots, and other needed maintenance on the Trail as noted in the Assessment.

The Chapter was fortunate in that the SEEDS crews were originally scheduled to work on the NCT in the upper peninsula of Michigan, but coronavirus restrictions forced them to postpone and head our way. Fortunately for them and the Trail, they ultimately did make it up to the UP. The Chapter will now pick up where they left off.

—Bob Dunning

Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter

LOWER
MICHIGAN

- Michigan's coronavirus shutdown order prompted our DNR to ban trail work on state forest lands. We confined ourselves to collecting location reports of downed trees.

Our state shutdown order was lifted in late June. Then we got to work. The trail adopters got out, downed trees were



cleared and our mowing teams took care of overgrown sections that had developed through July. Refreshing blue blazes is a continuing project.

Finishing touches were completed on an 11-mile reroute of the NCT between Guernsey Lake and the Trail Town of Kalkaska. Our reroute shifted away from a two-track road to an actual trail, following the course of the North Branch of the Boardman River. This has created a much more scenic and interesting addition to our part of the NCT.

Initial work on another reroute east from Baxter Bridge, along the south side of the Manistee River, continues. When completed this will shift the NCT away from another extensive set of roads to an actual trail. It will be providing a 40-mile loop if we maintain the old route.

In September the NCTA sponsored a sawyer class from which we graduated or renewed nine sawyers' certifications.

Our Chapter conducts regional work on feeder trails as well. In October a bridge was built on the Boardman River Trail near Mayfield. In cooperation with our DNR we also maintain four of their hiking/skiing trails in the area. On the Muncie Lakes Pathway, near the NCT, we constructed a reroute of a half-mile portion of the trail necessitated by high water levels. We felled a few trees and employed a stump grinder and a rototiller to bench in the new trail.

The bright side of 2020 was that more hikers than ever were using our segment of the NCT. Our Chapter added 10 new hikers to our Chapter's 100 Mile Challenge and many more to the NCTA Hike 100 Challenge.

—Several GTHC members
contributed to this article.

Jordan Valley 45° Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN - 2020 was a MUDDY MESS! This was certainly not the year we anticipated back in January 2020. Like many endeavors both on and off the Trail, many of our plans were delayed and modified. When Michigan Iron Belle Trail grant dollars were frozen for an extended period during the State's budget uncertainties due to the coronavirus, our collaborative project for a bridge over the Bear River was on hold as the construction season came and went, but the contract was awarded in late 2020 for spring 2021 installation.

So while our construction season was not what we anticipated, some JV 45° work days occurred although fewer and farther between (both for the events and the participants!) to reduce the muddy boots. The work days resulted in the construction of more than 250 feet of puncheon along or near the Bear River in the Petoskey area and the extension of 30 feet of puncheon to address trail flooding and washout due to road work along Cascade Road in the Jordan Valley. We look forward to a more active Trail construction season for 2021!

—Mary Campbell



Harbor Springs Chapter

LOWER MICHIGAN - 2020, what a year! But here in the north part of the lower peninsula of Michigan we still feel we accomplished a lot! During a couple workbees we put shingles down on about 2000 feet of puncheon and boardwalk to avoid falls when



they are wet and slippery.

We

had two group hikes in January, one being a moonlight hike with a campfire and bean soup at the end as well as one in February. Our March and April hikes were canceled but starting in May we resumed our monthly hikes, changing it up a bit. We masked up, socially distanced and did out-and-back hikes with no car spotting.



Dave and Karen Hill completed our entire Harbor Springs Chapter Section and earned the new patch that we have produced for those completing our 46 miles.

Photo: Judy Conrad

We also awarded at least 10 people with our Chapter Patch. Anyone who completes our 46-mile section earns a patch.

Since ours is the last

section before the Mackinac Bridge, several of the people earning the Harbor Springs Chapter patch had already completed all of the Lower Peninsula! What an accomplishment!

We are also very proud of our Chapter President, Shari Sanderson. This year she completed the upper peninsula of Michigan and is getting close to completing the Lower Peninsula, too. She has hiked over 1000 miles on the NCT to earn her Long Distance Hiker Award! Congratulations Shari and thank you for all you do for our Chapter!

—Judy Conrad



Photo: Shari Sanderson



Here volunteers are working on one of the puncheon. Ironically no one's mask shows in this view, but they were there!

Who's Who Along the North Country Trail?

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

North Country Trail Association

229 E Main St, Lowell, MI 49331

Toll-free: (866) HikeNCT Fax: (616) 897-6605

www.northcountrytrail.org

HQ@northcountrytrail.org

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

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

NPS-NOCO Office

P.O. Box 228, Lowell, MI 49331

(616) 319-7906

www.nps.gov/noco

Chris Loudenslager, Superintendent

Christopher_Loudenslager@nps.gov • ext. 1

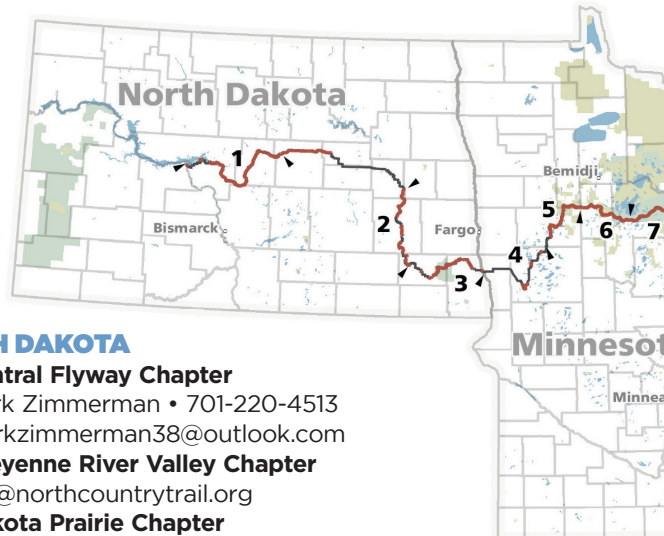
cell: (616) 970-7026

Luke Jordan, Outdoor Recreational Planner

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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.



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3 Dakota Prairie Chapter

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4 Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter

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5 Laurentian Lakes Chapter

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6 Itasca Moraine Chapter

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17 North Country Trail Hikers Chapter

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18 Superior Shoreline Chapter

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- 23 Spirit of the Woods Chapter**
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- 26 Chief Baw Beese Chapter**
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VERMONT

- 37 Middlebury Area Land Trust** (Trail Maintaining Affiliate)
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**Pat and Bob MacNamara**

Photo: Bill Courtois

Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - The 2020 challenges started in January when a major ice storm caused thousands of trees to fall on the Trail. Where a tree didn't fall, the top snapped off or large branches fell and obstructed the Trail. Usually we clear obstructions after the snow melts as they are hidden under two to four feet of snow that we have from January through March. This year John Texter, HSS Chapter Vice President and Roving Crew Coordinator, and the crew cleared obstructions all winter long and then again in the spring after the snow melted. When the restrictions were enacted, the crew hiked all of our portion of the NCT, using hand tools to clear debris and a path around the larger blockages to make the Trail at least walk-able. Large obstructions were noted and later cleared with chainsaws when allowed. We had a hike-able trail by mid-June! It was good that we did, as we had more people hiking the NCT than ever before, based on reports we received from hikers in our area.



HSS President Tom Walker organized and promoted 16 hiking events in 2020. The virus changed how we approached these; during the tightest of restrictions we asked participants to just get out on the Trail on the day of the scheduled hike. Later we held "yo-yo" hikes to prevent carpooling to the starting point. We saw lots of new faces at these events. During our February event, members of the JV 45° Chapter joined us for a weekend of hiking and camaraderie.

We have 36 trail adopters who hike their section of the Trail three or four times a year, clearing debris and "face slappers" and reporting obstructions and conditions that need further attention. Our Roving Crew and some of the adopters continued refreshing the blue blazing where needed. Bill Courtois does a wonderful job coordinating our adopters.

We were able to complete tread work on a reroute by Guard Lake, added gravel to the Trail by East Lake Road and build another 24-foot section of puncheon near Lynch Creek. Kay and Stan Kujawa are found working on trail maintenance or construction most days.

—Tom Walker

Superior Shoreline Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - Due to injuries which precluded our main sawyer from working most of this year we had, with the help of Jennifer Flynn and Kenny Wawsczyk, and an awesome group –

Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS) – clear and mark a tough section of Trail. Also through U.S. Forest Service using Superior Watershed group, a long needed puncheon was installed over an underwater section. We also acquired three new adopters who are much needed!

—Barbara Isom



North Country Trail Hikers Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - Our September Board elections brought us four new Board members: Felicia Hokenstad, Nancy Kreft, Lynn Meister-Thomas and Michael Sekely. Their enthusiasm and new ideas have already been put to use. They have all jumped right in and are already serving on committees.

With the new National Park Service Project Planning Process, Michael Sekely, Brad Slagle, Lynn Meister-Thomas and Lorana Jinkerson worked diligently to organize and work together with Kenny Wawsczyk to get eight projects ready for submission.

Nancy Kreft, Felicia Hokenstad, Zoe Rudisill and Brad Slagle are currently working

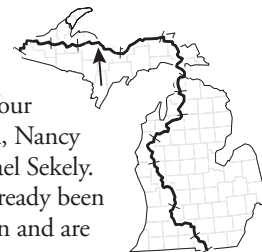


Photo of young man playing accordion at NCNST Day "Celebrate Walking in Marquette"

Photo: Lorana Jinkerson

on our Trail Crew Committee reviewing a Trail Crew Survey we conducted in the fall and making adaptations to our current Trail Adopter and Trail Maintenance Crew guidelines. We look forward to their report in late winter and implementing their ideas next season. We certainly could use a few more volunteers.

Our limited Trail Crew in 2020, led by Cliff Stammer, conscientiously worked to maintain all of our current Trail miles and received compliments from various hikers who came through. Thanks go to Cliff and his crew.

Judi and Fred Mouser became super Trail Angels with at least six long distance hikers taking them up on their willingness to host and/or shuttle them to and fro all within a one-month time period. Yes, there were long distance hikers out there this year enjoying, not only the NCT Hikers area but the whole UP and more. Heading east were Denali, Odin, Brian, Insignificant Hiker and Heather, and heading west was Rue.

Our North Country National Scenic Trails Day "Celebrate Walking in Marquette" event was well received with at least four new members joining as well as multiple local merchandise sales and donations made. We were even graced with a young man who pulled out his accordion and played us a tune, including improvising a short ditty about the NCT. How fun!

—Lorana Jinkerson

Peter Wolfe Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - The Peter Wolfe Chapter in Michigan's Western Upper Peninsula, is happy to say we maintained all our 100+ Trail miles again this year. It is always a challenge to accomplish, due to our short, wet summers (the UP had over nine inches more rain by the end of September than our average rainfall by then). But



trail work was especially challenging this year due to coronavirus precautions delaying trail work this spring, work that we normally do before the biting bugs and heat of the summer. So a HUGE thank you goes out to our hardworking trail volunteers who scrambled to get the Trail ready for the record number of hikers on the PWC this summer!

We had a well-attended virtual annual meeting this spring, which included PWC member Keith Meyers, showing us his beautiful new book of photos taken on our PWC hikes! He shares a portion of the sales from his book with the PWC, so contact the PWC for the link if you would like to purchase a book.



Boots on the Trail award-winner Mark Roberts leads a public group hike on the PWC last summer

Photo: D. Keith Meyers

Some of our summer's accomplishments: we added hardware cloth mesh to slippery boardwalks, a rotting bridge deck was replaced, we put up directional signs and replaced some puncheon sills. With ATV riding becoming more popular, we are having to place NCT signs at the new active ATV crossings of the NCT to remind riders this is a non-motorized trail.

We also conducted an inventory of needed trail improvements including trail structures, suggested reroutes, benching, etc. This was done in part for the new requirements by the NPS and also as a request from the Ottawa National Forest (ONF) for this inventory of the 84 miles of our PWC on the ONF.

If you would like to have a lot of fun helping us on our remote trail, let us know! We especially need volunteers to mow miles of trail in July/August, or weed whipping, or general maintenance on the PWC, just let us know! Visit us here: northcountrytrail.org/pwc.

Ni-Miikanaake Chapter

UPPER MICHIGAN - The Ni-Miikanaake Chapter entered 2020 hoping to recover from the tragic death of our President the year previously. The pandemic blindsided us like it did everyone. After we got permission to lead properly distanced walkthroughs, we held a few work sessions and visited areas in need of attention.

We had a work session in the Black River area which was highlighted by the presence of several potential members. Some of these members-to-be also came to other walkthroughs.

Most notably we held two walkthroughs and trail-scouting sessions at the site of the future Montreal Gorge trail segment. Kenny Wawczyk, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, was kind enough to lead our group on a scouting expedition in early September where we found a route emphasizing the high ground. Our members and others who joined them seemed to be experienced trail builders, so we cleared some brush as well as improving the flagging. We returned to this route in late September, further building the Trail. The group particularly enjoyed



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the views from the top of the gorge. We also made progress in getting the necessary permissions for this new trail.

We have found a significant level of local enthusiasm for this project. This area has long been a favorite of locals “in the know,” but the idea of an organized trail to the site appears popular.

Our long-time treasurer Ric Olson led a blazing training session in October. He kindly offered a mini-trail on his own property, and a group of us “brushed up” our blazing skills. We blazed a bit in the Porkies later that month.

Two of our long-term members have offered to adopt a Trail segment, and another, Geral Anderson, returned to his long-adopted, lengthy segment in the eastern part of our section. We are hoping to find “parents” for other parts of our segment. We anticipate further trail adoptions in 2021, as well as more work in the Porkies as a long-awaited pedestrian bridge may be completed.



Charlie Blakut

Photo: Karl Jensen

Heritage Chapter

WISCONSIN - The Heritage Chapter like every Chapter was affected by the coronavirus crisis. Most of our members come from other parts of the state, so with recommendations by the state not to travel too far, the number of people who could help dramatically dropped.

When the state initially closed the Trail going through the Chequamegon Chapter's section, their members helped to complete the spring maintenance.

We were blessed to have two local Chapter members, Joe Kravetz and Bethany Thomas, who worked well over 300 hours each, mowing, sawyering, building ramps, lopping, clearing obstructions, building tread, and maintaining equipment.

With them taking the lead for trail maintenance, when we started having our work weekends, we were able to continue advancing the Trail. The Rovers crew was able to build several puncheons and a 20-foot bridge while an additional mile of Trail was also built.

We have identified several sections where we are going to use old logging roads to avoid many of the road walks that are in our Chapter.

Another one of our goals was to complete the ramps for our bridges for our Foster Falls to Upson Lake section. This was completed and we hope to get this section of Trail certified in 2021.

— Kevin Steffens



Trail building by the Heritage Chapter



Ellie Williams blazing

Photo: Mary Stenberg

Chequamegon Chapter

WISCONSIN -

For the Chequamegon Chapter, the hardest part of 2020 was giving up our group hikes, our Chapter-wide projects, and saying “no” to shuttle requests from the growing number of people who wanted to backpack on the NCT in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. We did get some help with shuttles from the Bear Country Store in Drummond, Wisconsin, and we are grateful for the help. The good news is that our volunteers have, so far, stayed healthy and are anxious to resume group activities in the summer or fall of 2021. We are also considering “vehicle shuttles” in 2021 to promote backpacking while still protecting our volunteers. Instead of moving hikers, we will move the hiker's vehicle to their destination. We also plan to create a database for chainsaw work that is accessible to all our six certified sawyers.

It is important to note that coronavirus did not stop our dedicated trail adopters. They continued to maintain the Trail, mostly with



members of their own household. We have 43 people, plus or minus a few, who maintain about 70 miles of certified Trail. They continue to be the backbone of the Chequamegon Chapter. To assist them, we have organized blazing crews, pairs of people who hike and blaze to the exclusion of other activities, at least while they have a bucket and brush in hand.

— Kevin Schram

Superior Hiking Trail Association

MINNESOTA - The Superior Hiking Trail Association is more grateful than ever for the dedication and support of our volunteer community. Most of our volunteer projects were cancelled in 2020, but we were able to hold small trainings and launch two Trail Stewardship Teams. Several contractor-led projects were completed, including a much-needed boardwalk across Sawmill Creek Pond near Finland. Another success was the official opening of a reroute at Pincushion Mountain near Grand Marais and a reroute in Duluth to avoid a slope formerly known as the 138 Steps. Behind the scenes, SHTA published a databook and created a new full-color map set.

In so many ways, 2020 was a year of change. SHTA is enormously thankful for the work of previous executive director Denny Caneff and is excited to welcome Lisa Luukkala as its new executive director.

Whew!

— Jo Swanson
Trail Development Director



The boardwalk across the Sawmill Creek Pond, before (left) and after (right).

Photo: Superior Hiking Trail Association



Hiker at Thomas Lake Bridge on the Kekekabic Trail. Photo of Mackenzie Hogfeldt and dog Jack.

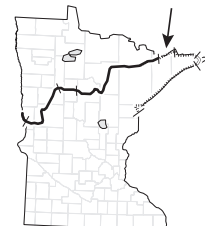
Photo: Derrick Passe

Kekekabic Trail Chapter

MINNESOTA - The use of the 41-mile-long wilderness trail, located in the Superior National Forest, has increased each year since 2017. There were at least 350 visitors and 167 overnight permits issued during 2020. This was due in large part to the maintenance of the trail by volunteers and enhanced communication about the condition of the trail and its wilderness features.

A total of 13 crews and 43 volunteers provided maintenance on about 24 miles of the trail during the late summer and fall. The trail is considered to be in good condition overall with some brushy areas that will be cleared in 2021. Paul and Kelly Kautz provide a good overview of the trail with photos based on their October hike at Kekekabic Trail YoYo 2020 Journal (hikingdude.com).

The year 2020 marked the 30th anniversary of the recovery of the trail by volunteers working with the USFS. The trail, originally developed by the USFS and the CCC for fire watch and forest management purposes, was neglected during the 1980s and became much more difficult to hike. As described in "The Kekekabic Trail Experience at 30 Years," published in Minnesota Trails, the KTC, first as a club and more recently as a Chapter of the NCTA, has continuously maintained the trail since 1990. See the article at issuu.com/minnesotatrailsmagazine/docs/minnesota_trails_fall_2020.



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Led by KTC member Derrick Passe, work has continued on planning an extension of the trail corridor for the NCT from the western trailhead to Ely, Minnesota. Initiatives for 2021 include adding to the equipment resources for the volunteer crews, providing information and maps to 50 or more resorts and outfitters, initiating an Adopt the Trail program, and increasing the use of social media to promote the trail.

The KTC thanks crew leaders Lucie Biddinger, Eric Campbell, James Caneff, Nicole Halgrimson, Paul Kautz, Jimmy Marty, Stephen Morrison, Keith Myrmel, Derrick Passe, Charlie Soqui and many other volunteers. Thank you also to organizations and business partners including Midwest Mountaineering, the Gunflint Lodge and Outfitters, Piragis Northwoods Company, Stone Harbor Wilderness Supply, REI stores, and the USFS-Superior National Forest. A special thanks to Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, for the many ways he has supported the KTC.

— Terry Bernhardt and Eric Campbell



Trail crew taking a break on the Kekekabic Trail. Photo of Sothea Nhem, Bob Day, Kevin Schram and Norm Meeks.

Photo: Sothea Nhem



Mowing crew

Photo: Matt Davis

Arrowhead Chapter

MINNESOTA - The Arrowhead Chapter was active during 2020 with the final two scouting and flagging days for the Tioga Beach to Highway 6 project on bitterly cold but sunny winter days. We also held one pre-coronavirus outreach event, Chapter meeting in February at Itasca Community College in Grand Rapids featuring Denny Caneff talking about the Superior Hiking Trail Association's Trail Renewal program. The Chapter hosted a trail maintenance group workday in late July and three socially distanced and masked Chapter meetings in a Park in Grand Rapids in June, July, and August. We even looked at potential route maps north of Grand Rapids with Cavour Johnson by flashlight during the late August event. We are looking forward to starting the clearing (and construction?) of the Tioga Beach to Highway 6 new trail project and growing the Chapter this year!



—Matt Davis

Itasca Moraine Chapter

MINNESOTA - By the time of the spring equinox we were ready to say goodbye to winter, and soon found ourselves back in maintenance mode, starting with clearing downed trees from the Trail, the product of frequent strong wind episodes lasting much of the summer. Following that, the usual problem of brush leaning into the Trail from winter's snow, combined with an overly exuberant and seemingly never ending light seeking growth, made for repeated lopping sessions. Making lopping easier this year was our use of a battery powered hedge trimmer, which although very helpful, does have its limitations.

Another focus was on blazing, and we found that adding a person dedicated to blazing, to the mowing and lopping group worked very well. In our case his name is Byron Knapp, and we are grateful for his dedication to this often neglected job.

Many will be glad to know that the book "Guide to Hiking the North Country Trail in Minnesota" is now available as an e-book.

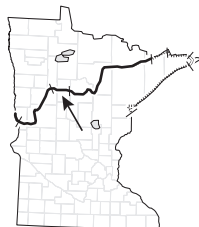
A true first for our Chapter is the construction of a trail shelter, with construction started late this October at the already developed Amikwik campsite. With the offer of an RDO-Lamb Weston Grant, Bruce Johnson headed up the project, planning the materials list, obtaining the lumber, etc. Materials were moved 1.2 miles to the site by various means, a Power Wagon being the only motorized device. Lumber was strapped on wheel barrows, and 4 x 8 sheets of oriented strand board were strapped to a canoe/kayak cart, and all were pushed, pulled and carried to the site. By day's end, the floor was in place and tarped for the winter, a collaborative effort of about a dozen folks.

—Carter Hedeon



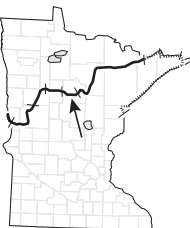
Carrying materials down the Trail in order to build our first shelter.

Photo: Carter Hedeon



Star of the North Chapter

MINNESOTA - We'd planned on having a weekend work trip by staying at a Forest Service campground; however, the Forest Service didn't have the personnel to open it during shutdowns. Since many of us have to drive three hours each way to work on the Trail I didn't want to ask people to drive back and forth each day so it was canceled. Fortunately we got reports from locals who hiked the Trail to let us know if there were any problem spots. We were able to get people out quickly to fix them. We had a section of puncheon and one small bridge that were too narrow for the mowers. We were able to fix those so that when it finally came time to mow we had no problems. We got grant money for a new brushcutter which has made clearing brush so much faster. It's going to really be put to use next spring. Brush, and sometimes wild raspberries are often our biggest problem on parts of the Chapter's Trail. Still looking for people to adopt sections of trail.



—Kim Fishburn



Snowy picture taken on October 24th. "We tried to squeeze in one last work trip since we couldn't do one in May."

Photo: Phil Nimps



Laurentian Lakes Chapter

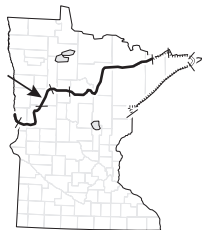
MINNESOTA - The Laurentian Lakes Chapter switched gears this year, not only because of the coronavirus, but to move from an emphasis on building Trail to planning for long-term maintenance. To accomplish this task, the Chapter created a "Trail Inventory." It includes a description/photo of each structure (puncheon, boardwalk and bridge), signage (mileage, interpretive, boundary, road and trail crossings), kiosks, campsites (number of tent sites, fire ring, water source) and benches. Once this is completed, the LLC Board can plan for future costs of maintaining these items. An Infrastructure Replacement Fund was produced for this purpose. The Chapter is studying alternative ways to conduct the annual maintenance of the Trail as well.

In an effort to secure additional volunteers, a Volunteer Fair was planned for late spring. Because of the coronavirus, the program was moved from an in-person event to a Zoom meeting. The Chapter will appoint a Volunteer Coordinator to meet the individual needs of volunteers, such as when they can volunteer, how much time they're able to give, and training.

Other activities the Chapter is working on include the creation of additional signage, producing a revised Chapter brochure to include a new map, planning for a new campsite near Hubbel Pond, installation of benches, construction of new kiosk roofs and replacement of damaged signs. Temporarily all events and monthly hikes were cancelled. Board meetings continued via Zoom.

Sadly, a couple of members resigned from active membership due to health issues. It's always difficult to say goodbye to those you've worked with for years but we're also grateful for having the opportunity to do so.

—Barb Jauquet



PWLC provided the snowshoes and Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, brought the skishoes. After working with the Hok skishoes the last couple years, at least two of our members have purchased them and are anxiously awaiting the snow.

In trail news, we obtained the final easements to complete the Trail through Ferber Park. There are now 2.45 new off-road Trail miles starting at the parking lot in the park and ending at County Highway 111. We diligently worked in small groups to cut and grub out shrubs, fix some grades and create a pleasant alternative to a busy road walk. Next spring we will finish some tread work and add a picnic table or bench at a resting spot next to the slough. There are still easements needed to connect this section to previous off-road segments and discussions for those are ongoing. No trail work was done in Maplewood State Park due to state park pandemic rules.

In August, two of our members resurrected the Blue Blazes column in the Fergus Falls Daily Journal. Our articles cover the NCT and hiking gamut from interviews with local hikers to adventures on distant sections of the NCT and run about every two weeks. Our goals are to bring more attention to our local trail, recruit Chapter members and volunteers, and encourage hiking in general.

Finally, after our state lockdown ended, we resumed our monthly meetings outside in the pavilion across the street from our normal library meeting location. This worked well with a large space and picnic tables placed throughout.

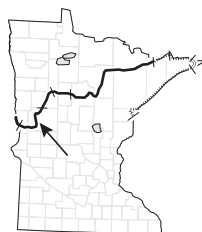
—Michelle Lackey Olsen



Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter

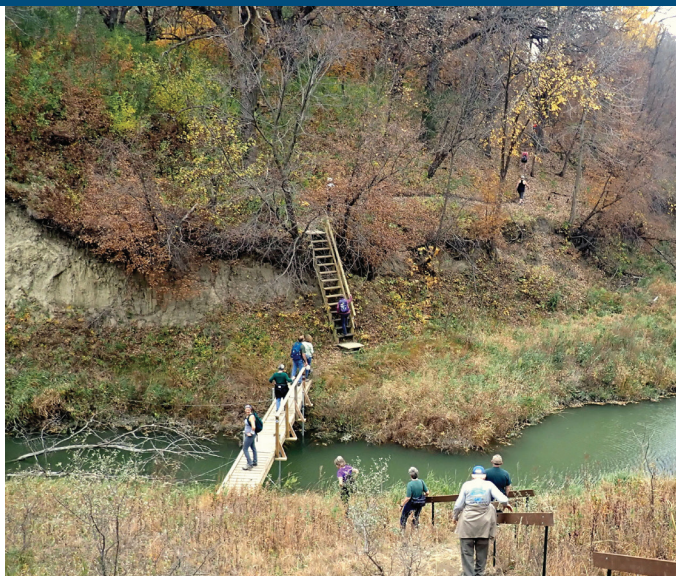
MINNESOTA -

In February we held a winter event at Prairie Wetland Learning Center (PWLC) in Fergus Falls where participants could learn about and practice using snowshoes and skishoes (Hok) on the NCT that goes through the PWLC. The weather cooperated and about 40 people, including lots of kids, took part. We had our NCT information booth set up and served light refreshments.



MWP chapter mowing in Ferber Park, Michelle mowing

Photo: Larry Larson



To avoid a road walk, the Trail needs to cross the Big Ditch, which is beset by shifting soil and periodic raging floods. So the facilities built by the Chapter must resist all sorts of natural dangers.

Photo: Tom Moberg

Dakota Prairie Chapter

NORTH DAKOTA -

The DPC was very successful with trail protection activities including obtaining five signed trail easements and one agreed-upon easement awaiting a landowner signature. The easements cover 3.5 miles of off-road Trail on beautiful bluffs and prairie in the “Big Bend” region southeast of Lisbon, N. Dakota. This area has one of the highest known concentrations of Native American archaeological sites along the Sheyenne River as well as other interesting historical and geological features.

Early in the coronavirus season, the DPC organized several hikes using a “Hike Together, Apart” theme where participants hiked alone but met afterwards on Zoom to socialize and talk about the hike. In other years, the Chapter held “Hike Every Mile” events in which participants would hike different segments of the 100-mile DPC Trail range while covering every mile in one day, and then gather in person for a Chapter party. These events were popular and we decided we needed to make it happen in 2020. So we applied the “Hike Together, Apart” approach to a “Hike Every Mile” event in which individuals hiked every section and later celebrated together (on Zoom). It was a fun 2020 alternative.

One challenge in building a “national scenic” Trail is to help hikers perceive and appreciate the natural, cultural, historic and scenic features of the area. One way we do that is to provide interpretive information along the Trail, usually in kiosks of various types. The current DPC trail signage is limited, somewhat dilapidated, and doesn’t meet the “world class” standards of a National Scenic Trail. This year, we launched an ambitious effort



to create a comprehensive, consistent, and effective signage system along our entire Trail range. During phase one in 2020-21, we plan to build the first seven kiosks containing interpretive, mapping, and navigational panels at major Trail access points. Eventually, we hope to create at least 18 standard design kiosks with panels that present information, maps, and images about local cultural, historical, and environmental features.

—Tom Moberg

Sheyenne River Valley Chapter

NORTH DAKOTA -

SRV Chapter held its annual meeting in February to share upcoming events and trail work plans. Little did we know what was coming! Despite the virus, we found ways to have fun and get work done!

National Trails Day was celebrated differently this year with some going camping, hiking, and kayaking as usual; some working on the Trail, mowing and installing a new registration box; some took the time to help friends complete their Dakota Challenge.

Our first workday was in June with a prospective Eagle Scout, Connor Pfennig, and his Troop. Connor had previously hiked our northernmost segment, inventorying signage, boardwalks and fence crossings, and noting maintenance needs. To stay socially distant we separated into groups, building three stiles, installing sign posts, pruning trees, and repairing a boardwalk. In July we pruned, mowed, installed signage and cleared trees at seven segments. In August, we mowed, pruned, cleared thickets, and installed signage at three segments. An interpretive panel was placed at the National Scenic



Daryl Heise works on a trail register during National Trails Day.

Photo: Becky Heise

Byway’s Riparian Restoration Site. SRV was represented at the July 4th parade at Fort Ransom. In July we took part in a program at Medicine Wheel Park

Continued on page 34



overlooking Valley City with the University and Valley City Parks and Rec. We gave an NCT presentation and shared brochures. For NCT Day, a hike was held at the Biesterfeldt Earth Lodge National Historic Landmark.

In July we were again unsuccessful in holding our dedication of the Clyde Anderson primitive campsite at Baldhill Creek. Three inches of rain left the trail impassable, forcing us to move the picnic and dedication service to Baldhill Dam. Maybe next year!

NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Matt Davis and SRV members hiked the Lake Ashtabula segments October 6-9th to inventory the condition of the Trail there and note any maintenance needs. His notes will be in our 2021 work plans.

On October 30th, North Dakota Parks and Rec Director Andrea Travnicek joined us to hike the Sheyenne State Forest. We shared trail history along with past and planned projects. Andrea promised help with contacts and networking to get some projects completed! What a year!

—Becky Heise



Goose decoys

Photo: Glee Mayer, Central Flyway Chapter member

Central Flyway Chapter

NORTH DAKOTA - Central Flyway Chapter was launched in fall of 2020. Fostered by the interest and passion of NCT members in the other North Dakota Chapters as well as local hiking enthusiasts, the decision was made to organize a Chapter in western North Dakota.

The Chapter started strong with the completion of rerouting nine miles of Trail in the Audubon Wildlife Refuge, from gravel road miles to a mowed trail through the beautiful tall prairie grass and wetlands of the refuge. Now hikers will have a better opportunity to experience the wonder of tens of thousands of migratory birds in season as well as many other birds and animals that make the refuge their home.

The Chapter hosted a unique self-guided hike over the Christmas holidays. Titled the “12 Days of Christmas Hike,” the two-mile hike highlighted the 12 Days of Christmas theme as well as the 12 gifts of wildlife along the Trail, along with a “selfie” spot for a picture with the Six Geese a-Laying sign.

The State of the North Country Trail in western North Dakota is strong and growing stronger thanks in a large part of the new Central Flyway Chapter and the local interest in hiking the Trail. Looking forward to more hikes and trail upgrades in 2021.





Spring Creek Bridge replacement finished

Photo: Bob Leedle

Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew 2020—Wrapping Up a Challenging Year

By Bill Menke

The Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew did not escape these challenges. For starters, the first scheduled trip of the season was cancelled due to statewide stay-at-home restrictions. By the time June rolled around, these had been lifted. The crew implemented several new procedures, like a foot-operated hand washing station for camp, and one person with mask and gloves preparing and serving all food, wearing of masks whenever separation could not be maintained, mostly while commuting separately from camp to the job site. As crew leader, I was happy and thankful for how well the crewmembers adhered to these safety practices. Moreover, I am more thankful yet that the crew made it through five work trips without anyone getting sick.

Over the course of the five outings, 24 individuals (including five new participants) contributed a total of 1,903 hours of volunteerism. This wonderful dedication and turnout has again resulted in a very productive and successful year for the crew.

The crews' biggest and most difficult accomplishment for the year was the replacement of the Spring Creek Bridge, southwest of Solon Springs. The old, 30-foot, laminated beam bridge was constructed in 2008. In the last decade, climate change has led to a number of intense rainstorms and the bridge has been overtopped with floodwater on several occasions. A testament to its sound construction is that it has never moved off of the supporting boulder filled cribs. However, the cribs themselves had been undermined by swift floodwaters and they were failing beyond further repair. At this point, a decision was made to build a new and higher replacement.

So, in June and July, the crew built the largest bridge it has ever built. The new bridge is a 40-foot clear span A-Truss, with 32-foot ramps on each end. It is elevated almost three feet higher than the old bridge utilizing Abutment Pans

manufactured by Custom Mfg. (the same company where we obtain bog pans). Not only are these pans sturdy and well anchored, but they also allow us to elevate the bridge as high as we want without the very difficult task of finding and hauling enough boulders to fill the old style cribs.

In September, the crew moved west to the Wisc./Minn. border and built 0.3 miles of new trail along the north rim of Clear Creek. This includes two 16-foot bridges. In addition, we built a new "Clear Creek Campsite." On the east end, this new section connects with previously built Trail that parallels the Saunders Grade for a short distance and then passes through the MacQuarrie Wetlands complex. On the west end, it ends about 200 feet short of the Minnesota border, where it is poised to extend another 2+ miles through a recent acquisition for the Trail and reach MN-CR-4, where it will re-enter Wisconsin and follow mostly existing trail northward to the final entry to Minnesota.

In October and November, the crew returned to Iron County to begin constructing trail structures on the new segment of Trail known as the Wren West segment. This segment utilizes the new Bill Thomas Bridge to cross the Tylers Fork River and then is under construction westward for almost four miles to another crossing of the Tylers Fork. As in past years, the Heritage Chapter is constructing the tread and the Rovers are handling the structures. This is another remote area, with poor access, that necessitates our using our tracked hauler to move materials over a mile. During the two outings, the crew built 72 feet of puncheon, a 20-foot bridge with 16-foot ramps, and a new campsite. ✱



Storm Sivak, left, along with other troop members, attaches a siding board to the Cherry Run Shelter

Photo: Mike Toole

ANF Constructs New Shelters

By Tina Toole

Two new shelters were added to the 97 miles of NCT in the Allegheny National Forest in 2020. That brings the total number of shelters to seven, leaving two more to be built to reach the goal of a 10-mile gap between shelters. The new shelters include the Cherry Run Shelter, located about 1.5 miles north of the Route 948 trailhead, and the Chappel Fork Shelter, constructed about one mile south of the Chappel Bay trailhead. Arranging the materials for the building of both shelters was Jeff Manelick, Allegheny National Forest Chapter Trail Coordinator. He arranged the milling of the hemlock and prefabrication of the shelters by an Amish builder, along with buying all the hardware and roofing metal.

The Cherry Run Shelter was a joint project between the ANF Chapter of the NCTA and Boy Scout Troop 8 of Warren, Penna. Eagle Scout candidate Storm Sivak of Warren coordinated the building project. United Refining Company provided funds for the shelter materials.

The Chappel Fork Shelter was built over two days by the ANF Chapter. One day was dedicated to preparing the site and setting the foundation while the next involved carrying building materials to the site and erecting the shelter. Funds for building this shelter came from a generous bequest made to the Keystone Trail Association (KTA) from Rick Hiemenz, former U.S. Forest Service Civil Engineer. He loved the Allegheny National Forest and hiking. Those passions led him to become active with the KTA. He left a generous contribution to KTA upon his death to be used to improve trails here and throughout Pennsylvania.

On a lovely November afternoon, approximately 30 people, wearing masks and physically distancing, attended the dedication of the Chappel Fork Shelter to Rick Hiemenz. Members of the KTA and former coworkers of Rick's spoke at the memorial service, honoring his work on Pennsylvania's trails and in the Forest Service. Bob Merrill, Vice President KTA, noted that "Rick had made the largest donation ever to KTA in the amount of almost \$400,000. This donation is allowing KTA to start a Grants-to-Clubs program supporting KTA member clubs as they fund trail related projects. His donation also led to the Keystone Trails Endowment Fund. This is a critical step in securing KTA's future as a state wide voice for Pennsylvania's hikers and local trail clubs." Other speakers talked about his concern for the forest and his work on trails. Afterwards, light refreshments were served outdoors at the Kinzua Point Information Center. ✧



Bob Merrill, KTA Vice President, speaks at the ceremony dedicating the Chappel Fork Shelter to Rick Hiemenz. Other speakers, also in the photo, left to right, include Tina Toole, ANF Chapter President, Wanda Shirk, former KTA president and Linda White, FS Recreation Planner.

Photo: Mike Toole

New NCTA Chapter Reaches the Trail's Western Terminus

By Matt Davis



Atop Teepee Ring Hill in Lonetree Wildlife Management Area

Photo: Matt Davis

Since the formation of the North Country National Scenic Trail in 1980, there has not been an established Chapter for the Western Terminus of the Trail at Lake Sakakawea State Park, not that it has not been attempted! There was a very small but short lived Chapter in the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area over a decade ago, and efforts to start a new Chapter percolated within Bismarck and Minot for the last four years. The existing, non-canal sections of the NCT in west-central North Dakota have been maintained by the state park, the two other North Dakota Chapters via special work trips, or by volunteer crews (for example, American Hiking Society Volunteer Vacation). Very little work has been done along the McClusky Canal segment over the last 40 years.

The recent undertaking of three Eagle Scout projects to construct Trail in the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge provided the final impetus and motivation to establish a Chapter. The core group of volunteers leading the effort were Tom Dahle, Glee Mayer, Tim and Tammy Bohan, Greg Van Vleet and Mark Zimmerman. Another small group in the Harvey area realized that there is work to be done there to improve the NCT so that more people come to their community to use it and patronize their businesses. The Central Flyway Chapter combines these local efforts.

The new Chapter will be responsible for approximately 135 miles of the North Country Trail, between the Western Terminus within Lake Sakakawea State Park, and the east end of the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey. Lake



Along the new NCT in Audubon National Wildlife Refuge

Photo: Matt Davis

Sakakawea State Park has served as the starting and ending point for many thru-hikers, and now, the Central Flyway Chapter looks forward to building on the partnerships with the state park, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other government agencies, communities near the Trail, and dedicated hikers and outdoor enthusiasts in realizing the great potential of this segment of the North Country Trail.

Hundreds of thousands of waterfowl cross the Central Flyway for each spring and fall migration. The beauty of the rugged shorelines of Lake Sakakawea and Audubon, and wide open vistas across the open prairies are part of the lure of this section of the North Country Trail, hence the inspiration for this Chapter's name.

Members are eager to officially join the other two active North Dakota Chapters in building, maintaining, promoting and protecting the North Country Trail. The Chapter will also collaborate with various outdoor organizations to cultivate a culture of hiking in the region. Organizations such as the Bis-Man Trails Advocacy Group, Scouts, birders, Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park's hiking program, and others in Bismarck-Mandan, Minot and Harvey will make the hiking community possible. The Chapter looks forward to a grand ribbon cutting and Trail dedication in the spring of 2021.

Continued on page 38



Along the McClusky Canal just north of McClusky, North Dakota. The sign says Boats must operate at only idle speed. The NCT is on the road in this spot.

Photo: Matt Davis

Please stay tuned for details and if you're interested in getting involved, please contact Matthew Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator for North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin: mdavis@northcountrytrail.org. Learn more about the Chapter at northcountrytrail.org/fly. ✱

The Good Old Cross-Cut Two-Man Saw

By Dan Dueweke

Reprinted with permission from the Jordan Valley 45° Chapter newsletter



Photos: Dan Dueweke

It started with an email and many pics of fallen trees on the Jordan River Pathway. Bob Courtois had hiked the section following our November gales and found the trail blocked by tangles of jack-strawed blowdowns and waist-high trunks difficult to climb over or crawl under. Looking out at dry ground and a sunny prediction for the following day, I

quickly teamed up with Bob for a “logout” before snow made it difficult to access the trail.

The Jordan River Valley has a lot of logging history with prominent places like Deadman’s Hill and Landslide Overlook. So in the spirit of yesteryear, I left my chainsaw home and brought an axe and crosscut saw for the day’s adventure. Not just any old wall hanging *objet d’art* but a real, sharp, log sawing blade set up for two sawyers to pull. Like any old-time logging effort, we had to carefully size up our trees to make as few cuts as possible, lacking gasoline, a 2-cycle engine, and horsepower. Each cut was preceded by placing poles beneath the logs to act as skids for moving the big sections. Only then did the sawing begin.

Each pull of the saw put fifty sharp teeth to work severing wood fibers and peeling out little curls known as “noodles” from the kerf. As we got into the rhythm of the cut, each tooth vibrated like a little tuning fork and soon the saw was “singing” -- a sound that was much more common in the Jordan Valley a hundred years ago. Absent the engine noise



Photos: Dan Dueweke

of a chainsaw though, we heard every snap and pop of wood fibers being released and could see the kerfs slowly close, giving us time to drive wedges into the gap and prevent the saw from being pinched.

Late into our hike we came to the worst tangle of the day and of course on the steepest slope of the trail. The blown over trees were still attached to their root

wads and crisscrossed over the trail. One had come to rest on the upturned roots of the tree in front of it and hung airborne over the valley below Landslide Overlook, the entire tree bowing down from the weight of the crown. This was



Photo: Dan Dueweke

the ultimate tensioned tree and too dangerous for two sawyers to cut, so it was single bucked from a safe position. It started crackling LOUDLY with the first saw stroke and then gave a sudden POW like a rifle shot that echoed beneath the Overlook. Splitting under its own weight it dropped into the valley and the release cut was less dramatic.

Finishing up in the deepening shadows of this short December day we had cleared all the trees that Bob had located leaving the trail clear until the next storm! ✱



A Trail Crew of One

By Dan Dueweke

Having several miles of Trail to maintain in the Jordan Valley and no second person to accompany me with my chainsaw, I set the motorized Stihl aside and started north from Pinney Bridge with a sharp axe and a pruning saw. Passing through the campground and over the first few rolling hills there was not much to clear, just a few branches and small trees easily dispatched with the folding saw. But as I got deeper into the forest, the larger trunks and leafed-out crowns blocked the Trail in many places. Fortunately, most of the fallen trees were soft-grained basswoods, maples, and poplars, which chopped easily and quickly. The more hills I climbed, the more I appreciated the light carry weight of the axe and was glad not to be lugging a chainsaw, gas and oil, chaps, etc.

Given the Jordan Valley's history of logging at a time when there were no power tools, my use of an axe felt a bit "old school," and with each swing, the thunk of steel into tree trunk was like an echo from the past. Large chips littered the Trail, their light sapwood color distinct from the dark earth of the treadway. Turning around at Jordan River Road, I was happy that my walk back to the truck would be easy strides with only the weight of a couple hand tools secured to my pack and my hands free to swing. ✱



Photo: Bob Courtois



Photo: Dan Dueweke



People from Michigan show you where they are from by pointing to their hands. Barb (left) and Lisa (right) demonstrate their accomplishment of hiking the NCT through the entire state of Michigan from the Ohio line to the Wisconsin Border.

Photo: Libby Whittington, Barb's daughter.

Both Hands Full (October 2020)

By Lisa Snook

In October of 2018, Barb Whittington and I completed a life-altering trek through the Upper Peninsula (the UP) of Michigan, hiking the NCT. It was with true joy that I wrote an article for the *North Star* magazine detailing our experiences while backpacking and day hiking the 500+ miles through the remote natural beauty of Upper Michigan on the North Country Trail. However, during our last few trips to complete the UP hike, Barb and I not only felt the exhilaration of the accomplishment but also an underlying feeling of regret that it would soon be over. It was like so many things in life; we couldn't wait to complete it but at the same time, did not want it to end. When we contemplated going back to some of our favorite places in the Upper Peninsula as was the plan, Barb suggested that we instead start from the other side of the Mighty Mac (the Mackinac Bridge) and head south on the NCT to complete the Lower Peninsula hike. Initially, I was not in favor. How could hiking the lower peninsula of Michigan possibly match the beauty and solitude we experienced while hiking the Upper Hand of Michigan? I reluctantly agreed but almost immediately realized as we set out that the Lower Peninsula's NCT was just as spectacular as the UP.

As we began our Lower Peninsula NCT adventure, our circumstances changed. I worked only occasionally and Barb was less involved with her endeavors as well. We now could travel less and hike for longer periods of time therefore

covering more territory. We are much smarter now than before about our gear and our abilities. The initial novelty and excitement we felt while backpacking in the Upper Peninsula had been replaced by feelings of confidence and a better sense of presence. I was raised in the working culture of a Mennonite family where my only real family vacation had been one week a year spent at a northern Michigan cabin in Manistee County. I have fond memories of the crisp, clean air and the smell of the northwoods. It was a pleasure to revisit those memories as we made our way south through the dark sky wilderness area and the Manistee National Forest.

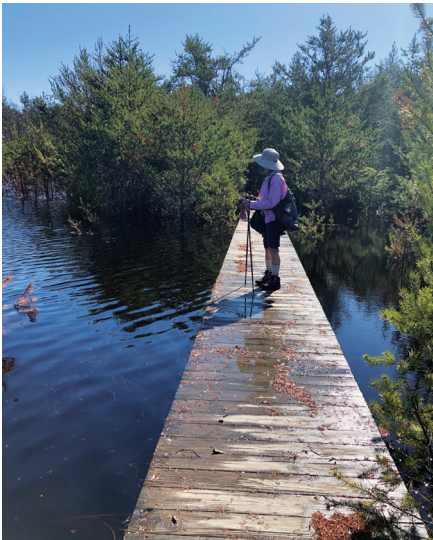
In the Upper Peninsula, we encountered very few humans on the Trail. As we headed south in the Lower Peninsula, I have to admit that I was not looking forward to having to share the Trail with others. We had been so spoiled by the solitude and natural beauty of the UP; I assumed that we would meet many more people and somehow the hike would not be as meaningful. There were indeed a few more people on the trails as we headed south but it was not at all what I had anticipated. Everyone we met was a pleasant addition to our trail stories. It is odd how while on the Trail hikers can connect and share experiences while still maintaining privacy and anonymity. We met an official from Mackinaw City while visiting a local beach after a long day on the Trail. His expertise and insights made the area much more meaningful to us. While walking the Trail northbound south of Petoskey, we saw a lone hiker and shared a few words. Later we read a post at one of the local Chapter's sign-in boxes regarding the hiker's long distance trek. We took bets that that was the same hiker we had just seen. We ended up crossing paths with her again since we were staging cars and were able to hear more of her story regarding her long distance solo hike experience. While hiking along the high banks area of the Manistee River we came across a large father and son group of bird hunters who shared their camp provisions with us.



Barb with dog Jake looking out at the gorgeous fall colors from the High Banks Rollaway in the Manistee National Forest.

Photo: Lisa Snook

Throughout our trip, we have fallen into a relaxing division of responsibility. Mine is to plan and map, and Barb adds her expertise in the woods pointing out medicinal and edible plants and tracks of animals and people. During our hike through the Manistee National Forest, Barb told me that there had been someone walking just ahead of us with a cane. As we entered the



Top: Barb crossing the Dead Horse Marsh in Newaygo County

Bottom: Barb and Lisa enjoying a cool weather hike on the NCT near Kingston Lake in the Upper Peninsula.

Photos: Lisa Snook



Barb and Lisa celebrate as they end their adventure at the NCT headquarters in Lowell, Michigan

Photo: Libby Whittington

parking lot I realized again that she was right. We spoke to the gentleman, an NCT supporter and retired educator. It turned out we had quite a lot in common, especially the love of the Trail. After meeting these and many other wonderful people and finding great additions to the Trail put there by those who take great care of the Trail we all love, I felt a bit guilty for my initial reluctance to share this magnificent resource that is the North Country Trail. Barb and I had been able to begin our trek with the solitude we both needed and end our Michigan hike meeting some pretty awesome people.

Although hiking with Avenza maps and good cell service had made a significant change for our hikes in the Lower Peninsula, it was not without its challenges. We had prepared and appreciated the trail alert posted about the Dead Horse Swamp flooding in Newaygo County but were surprised by a relatively long section of water over the tops of our boots some miles south of there. To us, it only added to the experience and made us appreciate the next boardwalk area.

When March 2020 came and we

were all in lockdown mode, I was not sure that we would be able to stay the course and complete our hike this year as planned. Since hiking was one of the safest things to do outside the home, we continued our hike a bit later in the season than normal but with a new sense of gratitude and commitment, gratitude for each breath of clean, fresh, forest air and the commitment to see this trek through since tomorrow is not a guarantee.

I sincerely enjoyed the challenges of the Trail. What made the Lower Peninsula come alive for me was our connection to the Trail and our renewed focus on enjoying the people we met along the way. Once again I'll say that the natural beauty, solitude and the joy of the Trail are difficult to put into words and must be experienced to get the full effect.

Our hearts and both hands are full. The story does not end there though. Our plans now are to hike the NCT in Wisconsin and to finish hiking the Superior Hiking Trail in the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota, now a part of the North Country National Scenic Trail.





TALES FROM THE TRAIL: The Good People of the North Country Trail

By Joe Baldino

Chapter 2: October 6-10, 2018

As October approached I began to get excited about my return trip to North Dakota and putting behind me the sting of cutting my July hiking session short. We were having a pleasant fall in western New York. I was following the weather in North Dakota and it looked reasonable with daytime highs in the 50s and 60s. I contacted Tom Dahle and Karen Oby, booked my roundtrip flight to Bismarck and eagerly anticipated my return to the spot on Route 200 outside of McClusky where I ended my first visit to North Dakota in July. (*See Vol. 39, No. 4 of the North Star.*)

My excitement was tempered some when I received an email on October 5th from Heith Pochant in Coleharbor. His email read in part that winter was coming early and they already had very wet heavy snow and cold temperatures. Overnights will be downright miserable. If I was still intent on coming to hike, he said that I will be ok if I am prepared. Heith finished by saying that North Dakota can be brutal at times in many different ways and he wanted to make sure that I was prepared. He wished me good luck.

Brutal just begins to describe the weather in North Dakota. In July it was 90 to 100° and the weather over the five days of my next trip will be challenging on the cold end with wind chills in 20s. I told Heith that the brutal weather is positively balanced by the incredible warmth and generosity of great people like him.

My plane landed in Bismarck and I met Tom Dahle and a friend of his, Tom Hager, in the baggage area. The Toms got to know each other as Scout leaders and hiking enthusiasts. When we left the terminal I was hit with a blast of cold air that threw me back. I have spent my entire life in western New York so I understand cold weather, but when I left North Dakota in July it was 100 degrees and when I returned three months later it was 30 degrees and felt like 20 with the wind chill. I asked the Toms if the weather in North Dakota is anything other than 100 or 30 degrees. Tom Hager said yes, it is 70 degrees for two weeks in June. You have to love that North Dakota humor. We made it quickly to the spot I left off at on Route 200 outside McClusky. I posed for a few pictures with the Toms and I set off following



Baldino (right) with Tom Dahle, starting his October hike.

Photo: Tom Hager

one of the three maps I purchased from the North Country Trail Association. I also had the trusty atlas that end-to-enders Dan and Ruth Dorrough let me borrow

I was walking next to a canal so as long as I keep it on my right side I would be ok directionally. I was also walking above the canal path on the bank following a few scattered yellow Carsonite trail markers. I was very excited to be back in North Dakota and was walking at a good pace. My trouble started when it looked like the canal was bending to the left. I looked around for a Carsonite blaze at the turn but I did not see one. I checked my map and for some inexplicable reason I felt that it showed me going straight and not turning left, so that is what I did. As I was hiking I ran into a couple and I asked them if I was heading towards the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area. They told me I was heading towards McClusky. Undeterred, I continued heading in the direction I was and very soon I saw the water tower of McClusky looming in the distance. My heart sank so I turned around headed back.

I made it to the wrong turn spot relatively quickly but darkness was rapidly approaching. At the first crossroad I came to in the advancing darkness I saw some lights. At the first house a young boy answered that his parents were not home, but the neighbors were home and he felt that they would help. I knocked on their door in the pitch dark and they said it would be ok for me to camp in their yard. I was amazed at how hospitable they were to a complete stranger who knocked on their door unannounced in the pitch dark. The next day I shared breakfast with them and headed off.

I arrived at the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area (WMA) very quickly. The Trail was well marked through prairie grasslands so I was able to make up some lost time. It ran along some beautiful segments of the Sheyenne River. Along the way I met

some pheasant hunters and ended up in a very nice campsite with a bathroom, but not any potable water. It was next to Sheyenne Lake, but the water did not look drinkable even if it was filtered. By my calculations I covered nearly 23 miles and I was close to being back on schedule. I camped next to some hunters who had a water cooler that I was able to get water from the next day.

My third day in North Dakota involved a significant amount of pleasant walking in the Lonetree WMA. There were a few isolated wooded sections followed by mowed, well-marked Trail through beautiful rolling prairies. My love for North Dakota and its terrain continued to grow. This section was a welcome change from my canal walking that preceded it. I am not a fan of miles and miles of straight walking with a very little change in the scenery.

My next destination was the Rockford Canal but this stretch was not as long as the McClusky Canal. I arrived there near dark and followed some Carsonite blazes in a gully next to the canal. This was very tough and at times treacherous hiking because in the gullies there were potholes covered by the tall grass that could break your ankle. I carefully walked until I arrived at a main crossroad when it was pitch dark. The

walk in the gully was very challenging and I was concerned about how things were going to go tomorrow.

Before I could worry about that I had to find a place to camp. I began to walk up the highway and as I did I heard a truck behind me that was pulling out from a road near the canal. It was pulling a trailer with large round bales of hay.

The driver Dennis quickly became one of



More of McClusky Canal

Photo: Matt Davis

the inspirations for my subtitle, “the good people of the North Country Trail.” I asked if I could camp in his yard and he said that he did not live here. He farmed a piece of land where we were. He called a man who lived near the canal and inquired if I could camp in his yard. We headed that way and I heard the man speaking on the other end. “He is from New York. I am not comfortable with that. I have to say no.” I laughed. You have to watch those crazy New York people! Dennis gave me the use of his field and I took it. He brought me to a spot next to a large combine that he unlocked for me to sit in to get out of the cold. I set up my tent and went into the combine. Dennis came back with bottles of water and bananas. It was at that point that Tom sent me a text informing me of an impending snow storm. He urged me to end my hiking trip the next day at Route 30 outside of Hamburg where he would pick me up with Karen and they would bring me back to their house to spend the night.

I got an early start the next day. I was to follow the New Rockford canal for 19 miles to Route 30. I followed the yellow Carsonite markers with fidelity so it was not an easy walk the entire way on a canal path. It was only on the canal path occasionally. At times the grass became quite deep and gnarly. As I approached Route 30 I focused on the road ahead of me and not my feet below me. I picked up my pace and the grass wrapped itself around my ankle like a rope. I was pulled down and smacked my elbow on the ground with such force that I thought I broke it. I found out the next day when Tom took me to the clinic that it was sprained. A second hiking trip to North Dakota and yet another injury. Tom also took me for a tour of the North Dakota Capital so we made the best of my lost hiking day. Two hiking trips cut short. One by an injury and the other by an impending snow storm. Nevertheless, I hiked 153 miles over nine days in 2018. It was not the start I hoped for, but a decent start nevertheless. North Dakota



Top: Along the McClusky Canal. A precious Carsonite Trail marker

Photo: Matt Davis

Bottom: Prairie flowers

Photo: Connie Burns

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The charming Valley City State University footbridge is part of the Trail through Valley City.

Photo: Becky Heise

land for all of the kindness that people in North Dakota had shown me along the way. I began gearing up for a return trip in May 2019.

Chapter 3: July 5-13, 2019

At the beginning of January I had both of my knees replaced and due to aggressive physical therapy I was cleared by the doctor to resume normal activities in the middle of February. I was preparing to return around Memorial Day weekend to resume my hiking when I developed a problem with my left foot that sidelined me longer, yet another hurdle. I was finally able to return on July 5th for the first of two nine-day hiking trips. I had one big problem. How was I going to get from the Jamestown, N.D., airport to the spot on Route 30 where I left off? My next great trail champion, Jerry Warner, entered the picture. Jerry received my contact information from Tom Dahle and he had emailed me in May 2018 and offered me his assistance. I took Jerry up on that offer and asked him to find me a ride. He was unsuccessful. Jerry lives in Fort Ransom, which is a significant distance from Jamestown down in the southeast corner of the state. He agreed to pick me up and bring me to my starting point, but accepted only a nominal amount of gas money. I was deeply indebted to him. My positive and supportive interactions with Jerry were just beginning. I walked 11.5 miles and stealth camped at the 63rd Street bridge on the canal right of way.

The next day I headed to New Rockford. The canal Trail had ended and I began what would be a substantial road walk that ended at the Sheyenne River Valley. New Rockford was a good sized town that had a convenience and general store and a campground with running water, toilet and showers. Had I arrived there late in the day it would have been a good place to camp, but it was only mid-day and I needed to get some more miles done. I left town and headed down a gravel road. I met Jerry and he gave me a National Guard koozie and some water. He recommended I camp in Larry's yard. He was positive that Larry would agree with that. I headed off and shortly thereafter Jerry passed me on his ATV. He was going to check with Larry for me. When he came back he told me Larry was ok with me staying in his

yard. This system for finding a place to stay worked better than booking.com! When I arrived at Larry's house he was ready for me. We had a great conversation and I told him that I was heading to McHenry tomorrow. Larry went into intimate detail for me about the hamburgers served at the bar in McHenry. I went to sleep with thoughts of delicious hamburgers dancing in my head.

It was 23 miles to McHenry and it was getting what I call North Dakota hot. What drove me forward and took my thoughts off the heat were my hamburger fantasies. I know that I speak for many hikers when I say I thought a lot about food when I hiked long distances over many days. I finally made it to town and I took my first left. I saw a man unloading suitcases out of his car. His name was Steve. I asked him if I could camp in his yard and he said yes. I asked Steve if the bar in town served delicious hamburgers and he said that it did. He said that people come from miles around to enjoy them. I said that I need directions for how to get there. He said that directions would not be necessary. I asked why. Because they are closed on Sunday. The loud hissing sound that I heard was the air escaping from my balloon. Closed. That is not possible, but it was true. I told Steve that I was heading to Binford the next day. He said that they had a café and it is closed. I was already feeling discouraged. He mentioned that they had a bar that he thinks serves



Typical trail companions: yes, the Trail takes hikers among the beef.

Photo: Joe Baldino



This BNSF Railway bridge over the wide Sheyenne River valley is named "Karnak." These hikers are on the Trail where it goes beneath the trestle, but they are part of an August annual Celebration. Joe walked here in October. Your retiring editor is the last hiker on the right, and one of her dogs appears ahead, looking as if she has visited the river.

Photo: Unknown

food. I was not feeling overly optimistic on the food front.

It was a short very hot and humid walk to Binford. I saw some notes on Dan and Ruth's atlas about the Binford Town Park having camping accommodations. I arrived at the park and called the number on the bathroom door. A very nice woman arrived and she informed me that it cost \$7.00 to camp. She asked me if I wanted to take a shower which would cost me an additional \$1.00. I set up my tent and proceeded to have the best \$1.00 shower of my life! As I was heading to the bar for some dinner I heard thunder and I looked out over the horizon and saw a large mass of very black clouds. They looked very similar to the ones that I saw before some major thunderstorms blew through the year before. I passed by the closed Binford Café and into the bar just before a major thunderstorm hit. A patron in the bar said that it was nothing to worry about, but the bartender looked a little nervous. The wind was howling and the rain came down in sheets. It ended relatively quickly and did not do much damage. I had a pizza, still no hamburger, and discussed my hiking adventures with the other patrons. I informed them that

I was heading to Cooperstown tomorrow. They told me to stay at the Coachmen Inn where they served the best ribeye steaks in the area. After my previous disappointment I was not going to get my hopes up. One of the patrons gave me a ride back to the park where I found my tent flattened with three inches of

water on it. To my surprise, nothing was wet inside! Kudos to my son Tyler for doing a great job of water proofing for me.

It rained nearly the entire way to Cooperstown. At one point I stopped at a church and sat in the covered entranceway to get out of the rain. At another spot a police officer pulled over and asked if I was ok. I explained that I was hiking on the North County Trail. He said that he was the sheriff of the entire county. Just him. I made it to the Coachmen Inn in the late afternoon. I got cleaned up and headed down to the restaurant. I was not disappointed. They had a salad bar to die for and the big ribeye steak was everything that I was told that it would be. My food fantasies had finally come true! I got a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed.

My day started with a huge country breakfast then I headed to the Sheyenne River and Lake Ashtabula. I looked forward to the end of the long road walk. I thought back to the Lonetree Wildlife Management Area and the pleasant walk I had in there. I was expecting more of the same hiking along the right of way of the Sheyenne River and Lake Ashtabula. I arrived at a sign at the trailhead that said North Country Trail so I was in the correct

place. All I saw was high thick grass and a lot of it. I made the first of many calls to Jerry Warner over the course of this and my other trip to North Dakota during the month. I asked him if I was in the correct place and he said I was. He said track along the river the best that I could and I would not get lost. He said that there was a campsite on the other side of the railroad trestle. From where I was standing I could not see the railroad bridge.

Due to the recent heavy rains the grass was growing very quickly and they had little opportunity to cut it. In many spots the grass was up to my chest. I could not see my feet. There were postholes caused by the cattle that could snap my ankle. I felt like I was hiking with my eyes closed. In many spots the water was over my ankles. Did I mention the mosquitoes? With every step I stirred up more of them. They were so thick I could cut them with a knife. I literally had to put bug spray up my nose and in my ears. They wreaked havoc on my eye lids. I finally saw the railroad bridge; walked for what seemed like hours and the bridge was not getting any larger. The campsite was out of the question. As it was getting dark I went up a small hill to a flat spot, followed by 1000 mosquitoes, quickly set up my tent and dove in to get away from them.

I woke the next day to the most amazing sound. There were cows snorting, grunting and mooing all around me. If a movie was being made of my adventure an aerial shot would show a solitary tent surrounded by 100 Angus cows. I quickly packed up and got out of there. I did not see a bull, but I was not taking any chances. I finally made it to the railroad trestle and pushed past it. Jerry was correct. The campsite was very nice. To my delight, there were spots where there actually was a trail.

I came to a marker that showed the Trail going down a hill through some

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very deep grass. I made the bad decision to go a little right of the marker because the grass was not as deep. My first step was right into a barbed wire fence. I cut my leg badly in two places. I did the best I could to tend to my wounds and carry on. I knew my leg was going to need some medical attention. After a nice mowed walk through a wilderness area I resumed my hiking through the usual mosquito infested and flooded grass lands. At an especially muddy point the bottom of one of my shoes tore off. To make matters worse the two directional challenges that I faced and the injury to my leg had sucked up a significant amount of precious time. It became completely dark as I walked into a thicket. I busted through and miraculously I was standing in a campsite in the West Ashtabula campground. If this was a movie that symphonic music would start playing.

I woke the next day in need of assistance on two levels. I needed my leg fixed and a new pair of shoes. I quickly met Tom and he told me that he was heading to Valley City for some supplies. He took me to a shoe store and urgent care. This was three trips to North Dakota for me and three trips to urgent care. I needed to break this trend on my return trip. Tom and I had an excellent meal at the trestle golf course. It was the least I could to buy Tom lunch. There is this very impressive railroad trestle that starts on a hill on one side of Valley City and travels to a hill on the other, way high in the air. I got a late start and I continued my hiking through chest high grass followed by strolls through the back yards of lake cottages as the Trail followed the right of way next to the water. I arrived in the dark and camped at what I thought was Katie Olsen's landing. I was completely out of mosquito repellent. That certainly was not a surprise.

The next day the homeowner of the property and a neighbor stopped by. I apologized for camping on his property. The owner did not seem too upset about it. He asked me if I needed anything and I said water and bug spray. His neighbor returned with water and he gave me a large aerosol bottle of deet infused bug spray. The Trail continued to be a tough mosquito infested walk. I had new shoes and my leg felt better and it was not so wet so things were going relatively well. However, it was getting hot and this made the walking more challenging. I made it to the Baldhill Dam after an extended period of time. On a long road walk. I crossed under the railroad trestle and into Valley City. I walked down Central Avenue past the shoe store where I bought my shoes and I arrived at the entrance to Medicine Wheel Park at 10:20. This was the end of this visit to North Dakota. I called an Uber driver Jerry Warner recommended to me and I sat down on a bench to wait for him. He was going to take me to a hotel near the Jamestown airport. I was very tired and satisfied. It was some of the toughest hiking I had ever done and I completed 143 miles. ✱

Glen's Still Hiking!

By Glen Van Antwerp



Photo: Bruce Van Antwerp

I wish I could hike like Gail Lowe. In 2014 she became the first woman to walk the whole North Country Trail in a calendar year. Carrying a 30-pound backpack and trekking up to 35 miles a day, she started in March and finished in November. She was in her mid-60s.

That same year, and at a similar age, my friend Steve and I began hiking Michigan's portion of the NCT. We made occasional trips, carrying light packs and positioning vehicles so we could day hike without backtracking. After seven years of trying we still haven't finished all the NCT miles in Michigan.

The year 2020 was especially frustrating. We had more than 1100 miles behind us and meant to knock off the final 139. We planned and trained well, mapped out several trips, and completed the first of them. Then I broke my ankle and had to take the summer off.

Early autumn found us (with my brother Bruce along) adding new NCT miles – westbound at the western end of Michigan's beautiful upper peninsula. Bright yellow and red leaves decorated the trees and carpeted the Trail. Thousands of fungi, in all shapes and colors, filled the woods. We finished the rugged Trap Hills and made it halfway through Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park. So far so good.

On what was supposed to be the last hiking day of the trip, we missed a turn and went two more miles by mistake. Going on would be too much. We returned to my truck with 10 miles hiked but no mileage gained. Talking it over, we decided to stay another night and walk an extra day. Bad choice.

As a cancer patient worn down by years of treatment and still recovering from a broken ankle, my endurance wasn't



Photo: Bruce Van Antwerp

what it used to be. That next day I hardly noticed as we walked through lovely woods cut with pretty rivers and cascading streams. I watched for rocks, ruts and roots as I stumbled slowly along.

Soon it was late afternoon. As Bruce had no light with him, he hurried ahead while daylight lingered. Darkness closed in as Steve and I neared a state park rental cabin, some three miles short of Steve's truck. We stopped to ask the cabin's campers if I might stay overnight and hike out in the morning. They graciously agreed.

I gave my light to Steve and he plunged on, catching up with Bruce along the trail. They continued into the night. As one found a blue blaze, he would stand by it while the other walked back and forth to find the next one. Progress was painfully slow by flashlight and complicated by cold rain that began to fall.

They walked until 2:30 a.m. but only gained two more miles. Then they turned and trudged back, deciding that I could not walk out alone. By 5:30 a.m. they had used up their lights' batteries. Finding shelter under a large

evergreen tree and marching in place to keep warm, they stayed until dawn. Then they set out again and shortly reached the cabin.

Despite an all-night adventure, Steve and Bruce were still strong and cheerful. Good thing. They had to push and pull me across frequent steep ravines as I struggled down that rugged trail. I love the woods and I love to walk, but I was never happier to reach the truck as I was that day. We immediately canceled our next and final trip.

A strange and wonderful series of events followed. First, I went from walking 50+ miles in a few days to not crossing a room without a walker. Then, my doctors concluded that I should stop chemotherapy for a time. This led to another treatment that could actually cure my incurable cancer. I am walking again and looking forward to someday finishing my last 50 Michigan NCT miles. I am not Gail Lowe but I hope to still hike my own hike. ✱

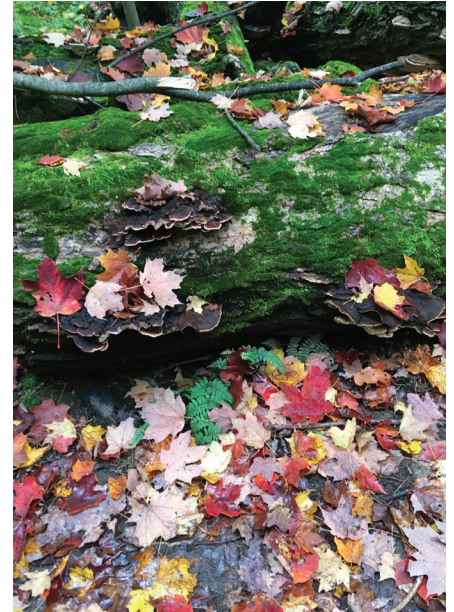


Photo: Bruce Van Antwerp



Photo: Bruce Van Antwerp



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Taken during a hike on the NCT in Yankee Springs Recreation Area.

Photo: Christopher Van Wyk



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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.