

# north star



## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

Long Distance Hiker Recognition

Celebrating Irene Szabo

NCTA Chapter Commitment  
to Justice, Equity, Diversity,  
and Inclusion

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"Covid brought us outdoors even more than usual last year. The Hike 100 Challenge was our way of incorporating gym class, since we had chosen to homeschool in the midst of covid." Kyle Visser, age 9.

Photo: Loretta Visser



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# TRAILHEAD

Jaron Nyhof,  
President



Photo: Unknown

As I mentioned in my last Trailhead article, it takes an incredible array of people and talents to make the North Country National

Scenic Trail a reality. It takes each of you, individually and personally. It also takes all of us working together, most often in a network of groupings and assemblies that carry out the many specific tasks necessary to accomplish our mission - bodies like work crews, affinity groups, Chapters, Affiliates, committees, boards, NCTA staff, and National Park Service staff.

As a trail community, we are nearly by definition made up of passionate trail blazers - people who are undaunted by the sheer magnitude of building and maintaining nearly 5,000 miles of trail through the wilderness, wrangling all manner of nature, and fighting through both natural and man-made obstacles to accomplish their objectives. Being a trail blazer requires a certain level of inner strength, independence and confidence, and it is not for the faint of heart.

So, what happens when you assemble a bunch of trail blazers in subgroups around particular tasks or objectives for which each member has a passion, and then ask them to all work together for the sake of the big picture goal? Well, sometimes it's magical and inspiring. Dreams are born; dragons are slayed; and fairy tales are written. But other times, honestly, it can look a little

like herding cats. Now don't get me wrong, I like cats (though I'm more of a dog person) and their wild versions are beautiful and dominant forces of nature, but while they are very effective individually and in small groups, they decidedly don't do large groups very well.

To be clear, I am not calling you a cat, I am not trying to be critical, and I definitely do not want a cat fight. I do, however, want to encourage all of us and the subgroups with which we're involved to always keep the big picture of our entire mission across all eight states in mind so that we can appreciate and support all of the bodies that make us who we are, and all of the objectives around which each of them are focused. Any given obstacle to accomplishing our mission is not just one group's problem, it's all of our problem, and the way to solve it is not to be frustrated with or disparage the group that is primarily tasked with it, but to support, encourage and come alongside them in their efforts. When we're talking about our trail community, "they" is "us" and "we" are "them."

*I think we can all be encouraged, and perhaps even inspired by being part of something larger than ourselves that is making a lasting contribution to the world.*

Our strength is in the uniting force of our mission and purpose. As we all focus on that and our piece of it, while respecting and appreciating the importance of the other pieces of it and those who make them happen, I think we can all be encouraged, and perhaps even inspired by being part of something larger than ourselves that is making a lasting contribution to the world.

Perhaps the Trail itself is our best and most constant reminder of what I'm trying to say. The Trail seamlessly connects the places and communities through which it winds. Each mile, place and story connected to those in either direction. It connects the Middlebury Area Land Trust in Vermont to the Central Flyway Chapter in North Dakota, and all the places in between. It connects the work crew on the ground with the Advocacy Committee member in front of her computer screen, virtually meeting with congressional and federal agency members to secure funding for that work. It connects the sage grandmother with a diverse troop of young hikers she is leading, with knowledge and wisdom being passed down from one generation to another. It even connects the independent sawyer clearing a path on the Kekekabic with the National Park Service, working with the Forest Service for chainsaw training resources and providing a Volunteers in Parks safety net. We're all in this together, and let's keep that in mind the next time we're frustrated

with one of those "other" groups, and let's adopt a perspective of unity and singularity of purpose worthy of the longest National Scenic Trail in the country that binds us together. I'm grateful to be part of a community with so

many strong trailblazers, especially when I see the power and impact of each or our strengths magnified and enhanced by working shoulder to shoulder. Thank you to each of our volunteers, and to each of our "groups." We need you, we appreciate you, and we couldn't do it without you! ✨

# TRAILHEAD

**Andrea Ketchmark,**  
Executive Director



Photo: Ted Bentley

Spring has arrived in the North Country. The sun rises a little earlier than it did a month ago and the birds welcome it with song. Foragers can be seen scanning the forest floor for the elusive morel and hikers are emerging from a dark winter, dusting off their boots and backpacks, getting ready to hit the Trail. Helping us notice the subtle changes around us, and within us, may be one of the most important benefits of the trail experience. As we walk, we are able to quiet our mind and awaken our body. We notice the world around us and can tune out the noise of everyday life to find the voice that matters most. It should be no surprise that research is backing what nature lovers have always known; spending time outside is good for us.

Studies have shown that healthy,

active outdoor recreation helps combat obesity, depression, diabetes, and other ailments that plague our society. Hiking helps you:

• Experience and sustain weight loss and lower cholesterol levels,

- Immediately decrease tension and anxiety due to release of adrenaline,
- Reverse in the negative effects of osteoporosis by increasing the bone density,
- Significantly reduce your risk of heart disease,
- Reduce the dependency in Insulin for Type I Diabetics and completely reverse the course of Type II Diabetes,
- Restore focus and increases creativity, and
- Boosts your immune system.

It's that miracle cure we've all been searching for and it's here and free for you to use.

One of the few upsides of the past year is that more people have sought solace in the outdoors and are reaping the rewards of that time outside. In a recent survey, the Outdoor Industry Association found that

58% of participants reported that they started or resumed walking or hiking on a regular basis due to the pandemic. What was most telling is that they reported being "inspired to re-evaluate their priorities and focus on what is important. Outdoor activities are a cost-effective antidote that can serve as the social fabric that brings kids, families and communities together safely, and can be a powerful part of making long-term positive life changes." (outdoorindustry.org)

This is a strong reminder that we don't just build a Trail, we provide a social service that gives people the opportunity to tap into that deeper voice. It provides an opportunity to improve your health and brings people and environment together. The key to finding the balance between healthy people, a resilient climate and economic prosperity, can be found in trails. It starts right here, with us. Let's work together to make the world one that we don't just live in, but one we thrive in. ✨

**References:** [americanhiking.org/resources/health-benefits-of-hiking](http://americanhiking.org/resources/health-benefits-of-hiking); [webmd.com/balance/ss/slideshow-health-benefits-nature](http://webmd.com/balance/ss/slideshow-health-benefits-nature); [mentalfloss.com/article/70548/11-scientific-benefits-being-outdoors](http://mentalfloss.com/article/70548/11-scientific-benefits-being-outdoors)



## What are your North Country Trail plans this spring?

Are you taking on the Hike 100 Challenge?  
Is your dog taking on the Hike 100 Challenge?

Learn more, sign up, or tell us you finished at [northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge](http://northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge).

# NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CORNER



## Chris Loudenslager

Superintendent, North Country National Scenic Trail



Photo: Mick Hawkins

Hello everyone and happy spring.

Like all of you, I was hoping that by this point we would be beyond the coronavirus pandemic

and talking about it as “remember last summer” history, rather than making it a point to say that we are still at risk and need to remain cautious. But here we are, so I encourage all of you to stay the course and continue to do what must be done to protect yourselves and others. Thank you very, very much for being so careful and adapting your work and how you do things so successfully in the last year. Your efforts and diligence is what has allowed the North Country National Scenic Trail to remain “open” to the public during a period when hiking and outdoor recreation was one of the few opportunities available for people to get out and have some fun. Perhaps more than ever, the importance and

value of the North Country Trail and the rest of the National Trails System is receiving the recognition and appreciation we justly deserve.

In another salute to all of you, I'd like to provide an update and big thumbs up for your outstanding contributions to the Trail's new planning and compliance program. Last December, the National Park Service asked the NCTA Chapters to begin reporting their upcoming trail projects on an annual basis so that we can review the projects and ensure that we meet our need to comply with the laws and policies that are in place to protect the incredibly important natural, cultural, and historic resources that may be present along the Trail. Your response was incredible: We received detailed reports for 107 different planned projects, above and beyond those that would be considered routine maintenance. After an initial review conducted by NPS and NCTA staff, roughly 50% of these projects were identified as projects that were ready to be pursued this year; and as of April, 32 projects have been evaluated and given the green light to proceed. As just one example of the importance of this new program,

through this process and the information you provided, the NPS was able to plan for five different archeological surveys this season where new Trail construction is being planned. Because of your help, we can ensure that irreplaceable resources along 25 miles of future Trail will be protected, and share in the confidence and pride that they will be protected because of our actions. The initial rollout of this new program has been even more successful than I had hoped it would be in its very first year, and your cooperation and contributions are sincerely appreciated.

So yes, despite the array of challenges and changes we've faced in the last year we have accomplished much, and we are poised to accomplish even more. Even when the going is tough, you continue to demonstrate the spirit of the North Country Trail with your motivation, drive, and stamina to keep moving forward and go the extra mile. Thank you for your great work and dedication to the Trail, I'm mindful and grateful of all you do each and every day. ✨

## NEPA on the North Country Trail

By Steph Liguori

Have you ever seen a bald eagle's nest high in the trees while hiking on the North Country Trail? Or paused to watch the dynamic life in a wetland? Or perhaps learned about a cultural or historic site? Steph Liguori, the National Park Service's new NEPA Specialist, delights in seeing these valuable resources while on the Trail.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law that was enacted in 1969. Under NEPA, federal agencies evaluate how their actions might impact natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources. A NEPA review is typically a



**Steph is new to the National Park Service, after working as a NEPA Specialist in the private consulting industry previously. In her free time, she enjoys hiking and camping, exploring her new state of residence (Michigan), and playing roller derby (when not on “pause” because of coronavirus).**

Photo: Steph Liguori

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

## NEPA continued...

documented analysis that determines what resources may be present in an action area, how an action might impact those resources, and what protections could be implemented to prevent significant harm to those resources. NEPA is an overarching national policy that considers all laws, regulations, and/or permitting that would apply to a proposed action. For example, a NEPA analysis may consider the impacts of a proposed action under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, or various state and local wetland protection practices.

Since the National Park Service is a federal agency and the congressionally designated administrator of the North Country National Scenic Trail, Steph will be evaluating certain proposed trail construction projects from a NEPA perspective.

"I am looking forward to working with the NCTA and its Chapters during project planning to provide some assurance that new trail projects are protecting and preserving the resources that make the North Country Trail so valuable and special to present and future generations," provided Steph.

Steph's responsibilities under the NEPA process could include identifying the potential for resources' presence, such as endangered species and cultural sites. They could include discussing potential impacts with other agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Historic Preservation Offices, and Native American Tribes. Or they could include identifying resource protection measures, such as wetland-crossing permits. The extent of a National Park Service NEPA review could depend on who the landowner is, what resources are present, and the scope and size of a trail project.

"Steph's expertise will help NCTA Chapters ensure that planned projects have met all of the necessary requirements prior to beginning work," explained Valerie Bader, NCTA Director of Trail Operations. "This step will ensure that the Trail and its vital resources are protected and managed in the best way possible."

Depending on the level of NEPA review, there could be opportunities for the public to comment and provide input on a NEPA document. As the NEPA program grows, Steph will be uploading North Country Trail NEPA documents that are available for public review on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website: [parkplanning.nps.gov](https://parkplanning.nps.gov). ✨

## Annual Celebration 2021: Virtual

By Abby Whittington



Photo: Provided by NCTA Clarion County Chapter

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) staff work with one or a few local Chapters to host Celebration in a different location each year. This event spans multiple days and offers participants opportunities to explore the North Country National Scenic Trail in unique ways. Celebration allows for networking with

fellow trail enthusiasts from North Dakota to Vermont and beyond. Skills workshops and volunteer training are offered, as well as evening presentations. Everyone is welcome to celebrate what makes our Trail Community special.

On behalf of the North Country Trail Association Board of Directors, the difficult decision was made to move our 2021 Annual Celebration from an in-person event to virtual. The online event will be held August 4-18. Celebration was originally slated to be held in Clarion, PA. Volunteers there have been planning this event for the past three years. My sincerest gratitude goes out to the NCTA Clarion County Chapter for taking on this endeavor and working with the unknowns, especially after last year, when we had to initially postpone until 2021. I send a very special "thank you" to Dave Galbreath and Susan Giering for taking on the leadership of planning. We wouldn't have made it without them! We will be honoring Clarion during Virtual Celebration for all their hard work and dedication to the North Country Trail Community.

We hope you will join us as we gather in a virtual setting in August to celebrate our accomplishments, dedication, and continued support we have for the Trail. Please stay tuned to [northcountrytrail.org/celebration](https://northcountrytrail.org/celebration) for registration, schedules, and additional information. It will be updated regularly. We are looking forward to another successful Celebration! ✨



# You're Invited

## NATIONAL TRAILS DAY

Trailwide  
June 5, 2021

Led annually by the American Hiking Society (AHS), National Trails Day is the nation's largest celebration of trails. "Together we can care for our hometown trails and advocate for equitable inclusion outside." Contact your local Chapter to learn what North Country Trail events are happening in your region: [northcountrytrail.org/contact/chapters-affiliates](http://northcountrytrail.org/contact/chapters-affiliates). Register events at [americanhiking.org/national-trails-day](http://americanhiking.org/national-trails-day).

## TRAIL MAINTENANCE WITH AMERICORPS NCCC CREW

Lake Ashtabula, ND  
July and August 2021



An AmeriCorps National Civilian Conservation Corps (NCCC) crew will tentatively

be aiding the NCTA with basic maintenance on the 35 miles of the NCT along Lake Ashtabula. Work will include signage, fence stile repair, mowing, and treadwork. Contact NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Matt Davis at [mdavis@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:mdavis@northcountrytrail.org).

## NCTA ANNUAL CELEBRATION

Virtual  
August 2021

Join fellow trail enthusiasts for engaging speakers, skills workshops, storytelling, and more this August. Visit [northcountrytrail.org/celebration](http://northcountrytrail.org/celebration) for information and schedules.

## BRIDGE BUILDING

Butler County, PA  
Summer 2021



The NCTA Butler County Chapter is seeking volunteers to move bridge materials

to the building sites. Contact Chapter President Dave Adams at [davenjean@zoominternet.net](mailto:davenjean@zoominternet.net) or [but@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:but@northcountrytrail.org).

## REMOTE TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Upper Peninsula, MI  
Summer 2021



Plan a road trip, visit some remote sections of Trail, and assist Chapter

volunteers in the Upper Peninsula on various projects. From standard maintenance to building new Trail, they'd love to have some eager outside help to support the great work they're doing. Some work dates have already been scheduled, but let us know when you're available and we may be able to get a tool that fits your hand. Contact NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Kenny Wawsczyk at [kwawsczyk@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:kwawsczyk@northcountrytrail.org).

## ADIRONDACK VOLUNTEER TRAIL WORK WEEK

Hoffman Notch Wilderness, NY - Jones Hill Section  
August 26-30, 2021

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) and North Country Trail Association (NCTA) are offering a volunteer work week on the Jones Hill section of the NCNST in Hoffman Notch Wilderness August 26-30, 2021. No prior skills are needed: An ADK Professional Trail Leader will provide training on Day One. Volunteers are to provide their own food and lodging. Schroon Lake Village offers many lodging opportunities. Limited complimentary camping is available on a first come, first serve basis. Join like-minded trail folks and become involved on the ground floor of this project (literally) while soaking up the Adirondack ambience. Participate in one or two days, a weekend, or for all six days. Space is limited. For details and the application, contact Mary Coffin at [maryccoffin@gmail.com](mailto:maryccoffin@gmail.com).

## AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY VOLUNTEER VACATION

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, MN  
September 12-18, 2021



The Volunteer Vacation Crew will canoe into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) to clear a remote

section of the Border Route Trail / North Country Trail using hand tools. Register online this summer at [americanhiking.org/volunteer-vacations](http://americanhiking.org/volunteer-vacations).

# NCTA Chapter Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)

By Sr. Lyn Szymkiewicz

To paraphrase a letter from Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director, and Tim Mowbray, former Board President, “Inclusion is a core value of the North Country Trail Association. We are committed to ensuring that everyone is respected, included and valued for their contributions to our mission and culture. We actively welcome people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs. But without justice, equity and diversity, it’s too easy to listen to the same voices and consider ourselves inclusive simply because we allow an open exchange of opinion. To truly be inclusive, we have to address the inequities and injustices that have led to the trail community being a white community. The work starts with us.”

This spring, the NCTA Wampum Chapter of eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania began an earnest effort to take responsibility for this Association-wide commitment to JEDI. The Chapter teamed up with experts and planned multiple virtual sessions to explore these issues in regards to the North Country Trail Community.

The first session was held in March. Kimberly Refosco, of KEC Consultants and the Pittsburgh network for Outdoor Afro, invited 25+ participants to explore the outdoors from a perspective of diversity. Kimberly started her company KEC Consultants to “work with organizations to offer professional development trainings with their staff in diversity, equity, and inclusion, helping teachers and volunteers to be mindful of the social and cultural differences among different demographics.” Outdoor Afro is a nonprofit organization that connects people to nature experiences to change the face of conservation, and celebrate and inspire Black connections and leadership in nature. Kimberly herself organizes and leads experiences like hiking, fishing, and kayaking, and she manages Outdoor Afro’s representation on social media.

Kimberly began the first session by reminding the group that we now live on land that was once tended to by Native Americans and, in western Pennsylvania, was Osage territory. Respecting the outdoors from the story it holds is elemental. All of those who have lived on the land and tended to it prior to our claiming it as “place” have imparted care, enjoyment, and the stories of their lives, families, and communities.

The NCTA JEDI statement declares that we are committed to principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for everyone’s enjoyment. What the evening and Kimberly’s presentation pointed out was that everyone has a different experience of accessing and feeling comfortable in the outdoors and using the trails. Some of these experiences have to do with a response to the first thing people may see, like recognizing someone’s skin color before anything else. These same biases and reactions can happen in the simple difference between women and men. While most men may not ever have to consider how to be safe when walking to their car, most women go through

a long list of how they need to prepare to get to their car safely. Just because I may not have had a difficult encounter on the trail that does not mean that is the same for everyone else. “It shouldn’t have to happen to you for it to matter to you” was a quote worth remembering from the presentation. If we truly desire to make our trails safe for all people, no matter the barrier they experience because of race or gender or ability, then it is listening to and trying to understand those whose different experiences will help us make our trails that much more enjoyable.

Kimberly took some time to talk about the vocabulary associated with justice, equity, diversity,

## NCTA Diversity Statement

The North Country Trail Association 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.

and inclusion. She also offered personal experiences and stories that demonstrated how thought processes and decision making of people of color differ. Most of these processes become ingrained through systemic racism that is often unconscious. When out on a hike that Kimberly may have planned, people of color often ask, “Do you feel safe on this trail?” The starting point of feeling safe in any common space is often associated with privilege. If one is a part of the dominant culture of privilege then the perceived safety is the highest for them. It’s assumed. But even women in the dominant culture find themselves in a pecking order that diminishes their safety factor. Consider Black, Latinx or Asian cultures. In every other environment of the culture, they find themselves threatened. So why would that not be true for their experiences in the outdoors?

Questions at the end of this first presentation were thought provoking and showed that participants were thinking through the experiences people of differing groups might have:

- If someone has had a bad experience one time in the outdoors and it was enough to impact them so that they do not want to try it again, how can a Chapter deal with this?
- The North Country Trail is both on-road and off-road. Would the experiences of a hiker on each of these be a bit different and why?

The more we can offer hikes with people coming from diverse backgrounds and experiences of safety and success on the trails, the more chance we have of normalizing the experience for all hikers to have a safe, enjoyable experience outdoors.

“The leadership from the Wampum Chapter has been inspirational and helped guide some of the North Country Trail Association JEDI Committee’s goals,” wrote Jo Swanson, Trail Development Director for the Superior Hiking Trail Association and NCTA board member. “As we work through our initiatives, I am continuously impressed by the dedication of fellow NCTA board members and the incredible NCTA staff. This is challenging but crucial work and we hope it will result in everyone feeling welcome on the North Country Trail.” ✨

Stay tuned to North Country Trail Association communications channels as Kimberly’s additional sessions are covered, including developing authentic relationships to utilize the NCTA and acceptance of gender and ability concerns. Visit [outdoorafro.com](http://outdoorafro.com) to learn more about the organization, and [pnts.org/new/resources/diversity-and-inclusion-resources](http://pnts.org/new/resources/diversity-and-inclusion-resources) for a robust diversity and inclusion resource library curated by the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS).

## Remembering Arlen Matson

Arlen Matson, founding member of the NCTA Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter, passed away in early April. He received an NCTA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011.

“Arlen loved being in nature and surrounded by God’s creation. His favorite hobbies included camping, hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing, biking, backpacking, fishing and photography. Arlen’s passion for the outdoors was integral in his founding of the [NCTA Grand Traverse] Hiking Club [Chapter], and pivotal roles with the North Country Trail. He assisted in numerous grant writing proposals for the Trail, along with blazing and maintaining parts of it. He was a talented poet and published author of the book *The Adventures of Anderson*.” (Except from Arlen’s Obituary, provided by the Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home.)

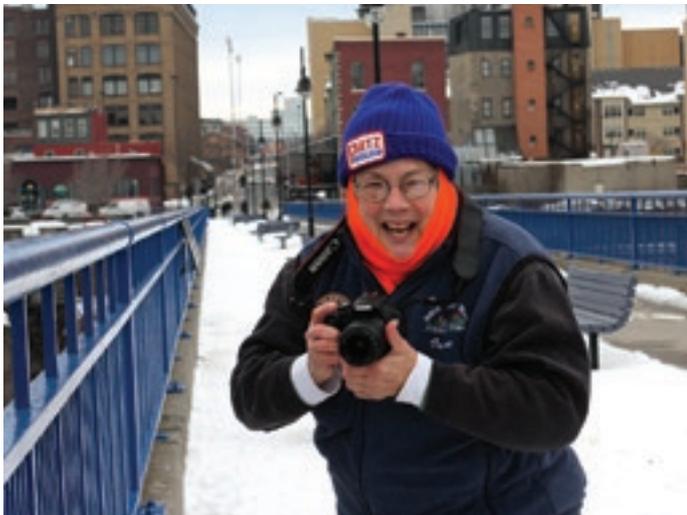
“We have so much to remember about his caring about the outdoors, trails and founding the hiking club that brought us all together,” wrote June Thaden. “His joy in building new trail and renewing parts of old trail was an inspiration. Brings smiles to me, remembering times on trail work days. And so many are carrying forward his efforts with wonderful results. What a legacy Arlen has created.”

**“The leadership from the Wampum Chapter has been inspirational and helped guide some of the North Country Trail Association JEDI Committee’s goals...”**

**— JO SWANSON**  
TRAIL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR FOR THE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL ASSOCIATION AND NCTA BOARD MEMBER

# How Did I Get Here? A Retiring Editor Tries to Remember.

By Irene Szabo



**Irene takes photographs from a footbridge that crosses the Genesee River in downtown Rochester, NY.**

Photo: Annette Dragon

I'll confess that editorial work was never on my list of things to do before I died, but somehow I did just slither into it when an opening began to appear. Back in 2007 I was becoming more active with the North Country Trail Association. I even went from being on the Board of Directors to playing Executive Director for a fat half-year, during that unnerving time when we fired one executive director then had to search for a new one. I didn't have to do much during that time, because our staff at the time knew what they were doing.

I worked for myself at my own business then, in Western New York. Didn't even realize I'd gotten into the habit of talking aloud to myself, working alone from home. So during my occasional week in Lowell, next-desk staff member Jennifer Tripp frequently had to ask me if I was muttering to her or only to myself. During that time, she did much of the work on *North Star*, even though the official editor was Werner Veit. When Jennifer did leave for a trail administration job in the far west, I guess I was available, so gravity and the prevailing winds gave you this editor for the next 13 years. And that was the beginning of 10 wonderful years with Bruce Matthews at the helm as our real Executive Director, not me.

Of course I should have known I'd grow up to be an editor at last. I can't endure a grammatical or spelling error anywhere. I have even corrected price placards in supermarkets! I keep a pen in the bathroom, where I get a lot of my reading done, where it is easy to see which magazines need a proofreader more than others do, once the witch with the pen gets done. In fact, I wear a tooled leather double-holster belt, with space for both red and black pens. Ha!

Our magazine has changed a great deal since the late 1990s too, in ways that have nothing to do with me. The earliest issue I can find at home is from 1999, printed on stuff closely related to newspaper, with very few and very fuzzy color photos. Wes Boyd was Editor then. I found one issue from December of 2000 that lists no editor at all, but after that Werner Veit appears in print as Editor. Back then apparently nobody credited photographers, but by 2005 many pictures included credits. No credits gives me the yips! Paper was improving, as were the pictures. Joan Young's collection of *North Stars* is apparently more complete than mine, so she was able to tell me that the paper from 1997 to the mid-2000s varied back and forth between newsprint and something a stage or two better. Also, our first glossy cover was in 2010, even before we had glossy inside pages.

In the December issue for 2006, Tom Gilbert did a timeline for our history, so we learn there that the *North Star* wasn't even a magazine until 1997, and published its first color then. In 2000, "After 12 years and 50 issues, Wes Boyd hands off the editorship... to NCTA President Werner Veit, retired President of Booth Newspapers."

Paper and printing have continued to improve, so that now it's high-gloss and reproduces pictures very well. The cost of producing such a classy looking magazine has risen but not nearly as much as the quality has. The printing process has improved too, reducing the work for our layout person. Before I was involved in any of this, I learned from the previous editor of the Finger Lakes Trail News, Jo Taylor, that layout included further complications required by the machinery and paper. The magazine had to exist in eight-page increments, because big sheets of paper were cut up into four two-sided pages. However, the torture didn't end there. Color cost enough more that we would have only, say, eight pages with color pictures on them per issue. But because the big sheets of paper were folded just so and then cut by the machine, the logic as to which page numbers got color didn't seem sane. For instance, Jo tells me, in a 32-page issue, she had color on pages 1, 8, 9, 16, 17, 24, 25, and 32, so she had to be careful

to get the really noteworthy pictures on those pages. Fortunately, color today has become affordable enough that we just go for color everywhere. However, the magazine must exist in four-page increments to utilize the current paper, so there are anguished nights near the end of some editing times when we need just one more page! Or worse, one fewer...

Jo does layout and intelligence for me on the Genesee Valley Greenway's newsletter, so we went through this dilemma recently: We had about 11 pages of material. She tried to squish

it into eight pages, but too much was getting the axe. So now it's a leisurely 12-page edition. She also proofreads the Finger Lakes Trail News for me, which we couldn't live without. I've always been grateful that both trail organizations were willing to pay somebody else for layout. Yes, I'm continuing as Editor for the Finger Lakes Trail Conference's magazine. But the *North Star* includes a few issues that require so much editing that I get pretty tired, now that I'm way older than I used to predict our editor should be. I need my afternoon

naps. The State of the Trail and the awards articles require days of additional editing!

Since Kate Lemon is 50 years younger than I am, she's welcome to those two issues, even though I'll miss the rest of it. Besides, NCTA Headquarters wanted to bring the editorship in-house anyway.

All of this lovely improvement in the last 25 years, yet now there are people who want to receive their magazine online! No room for a computer monitor in my bathroom. ✨

## The Legacy Begins with You

By Nancy Brozek



Photo: Timothy O'Brien

Park Service, with the clear mission of building, maintaining, protecting, and promoting the Trail. This mission would be funded in part through memberships.

And with that, a legacy was created. A legacy that celebrates its 40th anniversary with a membership of nearly 4,000 who support the work of 29 Association Chapters covering more than 4,700 trail miles across eight states. Think of the thousands of boots that have hit the Trail throughout the years. From volunteers to hikers, children to adults, urban lifestyles to country living, countless memories have been and continue to be made.

That small group of volunteers made a lasting impact that is working in your life today. Is it time you pay that legacy forward? Do you want future generations to experience the same joy you have found on the Trail? Consider a little planning today, leaving a legacy so your cherished values live on.

What legacy do you want to leave the world? In 1981, a small group of volunteers gathered in White Cloud, Michigan to create a legacy for the North Country National Scenic Trail. The Trail itself was just a year old after being congressionally recognized in 1980 as an official member of the National Trails System. The newly created Association would serve as a major nonprofit partner with the National

Options include:

- A bequest to the NCTA in your will or trust,
- A designation to the NCTA in your retirement fund,
- A designation to the NCTA in your life insurance policy, and
- An outright gift of life insurance cash value through a policy that is no longer needed.

Leaving a legacy for the North Country Trail not only puts good into the world, but there is a quoted axiom in the world of "planned giving." It is said that legacy donors outlive their life expectancies. Perhaps it is because these donors are more grateful, more optimistic, more future-focused. Or in the case of our Trail Community, simply realizing the health of body, mind, and spirit only a good hike on the North Country Trail can bring. ✨

For more information, contact NCTA Director of Development and Communications Nancy Brozek at [nbrozek@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:nbrozek@northcountrytrail.org) or visit [northcountrytrail.org/giving-membership/ways-to-give](http://northcountrytrail.org/giving-membership/ways-to-give).

# Celebrating Irene Szabo

After 13 years, Irene Szabo has retired as Editor of the *North Star*. We can't thank her enough for her work, but we're going to try. The following is a compilation of memories and celebration from various friends and colleagues.



Irene and Lois Judd pose in front of the Fraker Mill Bridge on the Wabash Cannonball Trail (shared pathway with NCNST) west of Toledo, OH.

Photo: Lynda Rummel

## Lynda Rummel

Irene was President of the Finger Lakes Trail Conference's (FLTC) Board of Managers when I first went on the Board. She ran a rather loosey-goosey ship, with her own style and personality on full display, and that appealed to me greatly. At that time, she was personally maintaining multiple sections of Trail, so she was very active on the FLTC's Trail Management Committee.

Irene and I became pals when the two of us took over the trail management training function for the FLTC around 2005. For the next 15 years, we prepared workshops for trail maintainers that we held twice a year, alternating years between the western and the eastern parts of the state. To

do this, we often had to meet up so we could drive together, and then spend the night before the meeting in some cheap motel with her dogs, sipping her bourbon and eating a traditional Friday night fish fry dinner. In the mornings, we'd eat a rustic breakfast at the local diner before providing coffee, donuts, and cider-mill cider to 20 to 30 trail maintainers in the basement of a church or town hall in some small rural village, putting on our show. Walking into the restaurants together was always a treat, since we delighted in the looks the locals gave to us two trail builders dressed in red buffalo plaid before it became fashionable.

Together we hauled piles of Carsonite posts, trailhead signs, and decals out to our maintainers and told them how and where to use them. We demonstrated tool use and the DR Mower, discussed the fine points of New York's recreational use statute and anti-trespassing laws. We reviewed types of permissions including trail access easements, and covered whatever else we knew they had to know before they could be effective ambassadors for the Trail.

Driving to and from these workshops meant spending hundreds of hours with Irene watching for trains, or train tracks, or abandoned train tracks, or the faint hint of an old track... And listening to stories of her adventures on the NCNST and with the NCTA Board. Her passion for the Finger Lakes Trail and the NCNST convinced me to write stories about trail building for the Finger Lakes Trail News. She encouraged me to write articles that were informative and educational while also entertaining, especially about the history of the land I put the Trail on. And to this day, whenever and wherever I'm hiking, I still look at land the way she taught me to look at it: What stories does it tell? I will be forever grateful to her for teaching me how to look at the land and read its tales.

## Mary Coffin

I have known Irene since she was Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC) President, and we closed the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) Main Trail - also NCT - gap in Central New York (FLT map M-20) with proper pomp and circumstance. Irene has served many roles for FLTC and NCTA: Board of Directors, Trail Management Team, Awards Committees, and cheerleader. Irene was also the interim NCTA Executive Director for a short time. Current members know Irene as Editor for both the *North Star* and *Finger Lakes Trail News*. She has authored many articles in both magazines and is most willing to include volunteer generated articles, a characteristic of both magazines. What few know is Irene is a pretty good artist as well. I send Irene best wishes for her retirement from *North Star* editorship. What will you do with your spare time? Chase down antique train engines and cabooses? Does Irene get to edit this?



**Irene and Ruth Dorrough share a laugh at NCTA Celebration 2016 in Fargo, ND. Ruth and her husband Dan had just completed their final hiking miles of the entire NCNST.**

Photo: NCTA

### **Ruth Dorrough**

If it weren't for Irene, I would never have heard of the North Country Trail or experienced the great people and places along the Trail.

If it weren't for Irene, I would never have walked the entire North Country Trail.

To our chagrin,

Irene "outed" us to an entire NCTA Celebration gathering announcing, "Dan and Ruth are going to hike the whole Trail!" That put the pressure on us to live up to the billing.

If it weren't for Irene, I would never have served on the NCTA Board of Directors.

If it weren't for Irene, it would have taken me half the time to write the Trailhead columns for the North Star. I wrote each one envisioning her intense scrutiny as she read it. I reviewed and revised each one carefully to ensure that I met her standards.

If it weren't for Irene, I would never have had the opportunity to say, "Of all the trail magazines I receive, the Irene-edited *North Star* and the *Finger Lakes Trail News* are my favorites. They are like getting letters from friends."

### **Bruce Matthews**

**NCTA Executive Director, 2007-2017**

My first encounter with Irene Szabo occurred during my 2007 interview for the job of NCTA's Executive Director. When she fixed me with that no-nonsense gaze and asked me to describe my hiking boots, I knew this was her key screener question. Somehow finding the presence of mind to reply, "Which pair?" got me over that hurdle and into a relationship I count as one of my most cherished among all those developed during my subsequent tenure at the NCTA helm.

Did we disagree? From the placement of a comma to the viability of a print *North Star*, hell yes! Some years more than occasionally. But with Irene, there is never, ever a question about where her heart lies. There is a place there, in her very large heart that is forever Nelson Boundary Mark Blue (or Finger Lakes Trail White, if you prefer), completely dedicated to all things hiking, hikers, and trails. And by golly, you better not cross that!

Irene Szabo is one of a kind, and our North Country Trail community is indelibly blessed that she chooses to dedicate her considerable talents, indefatigable energy and unyielding focus to advancing our cause and community.

And she is still my friend.



### **Tom Moberg**

Irene deserves a huge amount of thanks and good wishes for her long standing and important service to the NCTA and the Trail. In working with Irene, I learned that among

the things that are very important to her are the North Country Trail, trains, and good photos. So here is a photo I took that shows a Red River Valley & Western train along the North Country Trail near the little North Dakota town of Colfax, as a tribute to Irene.

### **Joan Young**

I first met Irene via telephone when I was interviewing her for a former column featuring volunteers called *Heart and Sole*. She said that she was drawn to follow "any little opening in the woods that might be a trail." I knew right then we were going to be friends! That summer at the 2001 NCTA Conference in Butler, Pennsylvania, we actually met. Astonishingly, we discovered we had both been at Senior Girl Scout Roundups, although not the same one (1962 and 1965). We each still knew our Roundup ID number by heart. She loves trees. I love herbaceous plants. We were both crazy about our dogs. Oh, and we were and are huge fans of the North Country Trail. She has become a close friend. As editor, we'll miss her tight rein on commas and split infinitives. Thank you, Irene!



**Irene's talents are endless. Here, she paints blazes for the Finger Lakes Trail Conference.**

Photo: Dan Dorrough

### **Andrea Ketchmark**

From the bottom of our hearts and boots, we thank you, Irene. You leave behind you a legacy, dedicated to channeling passion for the Trail into great storytelling. I hope you enjoyed the journey. We certainly did.



# A Boy Scout's Hike 100 Challenge

By Simon and Dani Jaklin



Photo: Provided by the Jaklin Family

**In 2020, Boy Scout Troop 346 of Negaunee, Michigan chose to trek the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore rather than head to scout camp due to coronavirus concerns. One of the Scouts, Simon Jaklin, and his family were then motivated to continue hiking the North Country Trail and pursue the Hike 100 Challenge. This is an interview with Simon. Following that is an addition from Simon's mom, Dani Jaklin.**

**NCTA:** Could you expand a bit on the Scout hike of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore?

**SIMON:** We did beginner hikes that were only three to five miles carrying our packs. We felt the practice hikes were going to prepare us, but they weren't near what the 50-miler was. We were not prepared for what we had coming. We thought it was going to be easy and we could finish it up quickly to swim and play every night, but we were proven wrong by trail conditions. We did an additional hike the day before starting Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore to make sure we got our 50 miles for the Boy Scout 50-Miler Award.

Traveling an hour to Munising, the Troop started the trek at Munising Falls Visitor Center and hiked out five days later at the Grand Sable trailhead, then all the way

to the Grand Marais pavilion. The first seven miles were very muddy and really tested my abilities. At the time, I was sure I would never look back at this hike as a fun accomplishment because the Trail was hard and my pack was heavy. But now I am glad we went. And I can look back at what a great accomplishment it was. The weather was great. The Trail was quiet except around the parking lots at Miner's Castle and the Log Slide. Miner's Castle was full of out-of-state tourists that were not masked or social distancing, so we kept our distance. We had to carry our own gear, food, and water. I was able to get to know what our Troop strengths and weaknesses were, and the people more personally. Everybody would have their own weaknesses or difficulties along the Trail but no one judged others because most of the time they too were going through the same thing.

**NCTA:** Where did you hike your additional miles to reach 100?

**SIMON:** My family did a lot of hiking in Marquette County by Lake Superior, and we also went to Pipe Falls and that was one of my favorite trips.

**NCTA:** Why was that your favorite hike during the Challenge? Which were your other favorite miles and why?

**SIMON:** Pipe Falls was my favorite because the Trail was good, and it was a nice time to go hiking and be outside with the beautiful fall colors. I loved hiking at night around Sugarloaf Mountain and Wetmore Landing by Little Presque Isle, and using the trail reflectors to navigate. That was one of my favorite parts of our 100 miles. The reflectors are so cool and I love night hikes now.

**NCTA:** Which miles were the most challenging, mentally or physically?

**SIMON:** I was glad to see the AmeriCorps workers putting in boardwalks in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and saving us from some of the ankle-deep mud, because



Photo: Provided by the Jaklin Family

for the first seven miles we had sheer mud with no way around it and I was glad to get on some wood.

**NCTA:** Now that you've finished a Hike 100 Challenge, do you have other North Country Trail plans this year?

**SIMON:** My family and I hope to do our 100 miles this year as well, and hopefully coronavirus won't get in the way of any of our plans. Our family would like to travel along the NCT and camp.

We didn't even know the Hike 100 Challenge for North Country Trail was available until we got done with our 50 miles with the Scouts. We wondered if there was a badge or something for completing our 50 miles on the NCT and then found out there's one for 100, so my family decided to shoot for that.

Even knowing what I know about long hikes, I would do it again. I cried, I laughed, I was mad, and I was sad, but the one thing I really remember was Mr. McCollum said, "You only remember the happy things," and that's true. Sure, you remember the sad things and the bad things, but when you think about it you just think about the happy things.

**DANI JAKLIN:**

We had some excellent leadership from Scoutmaster Lee Ossenheimer and Assistant Scoutmaster Mike McCollum with Troop 346 for the hiking adventure. The Scouts picked up spare garbage all along the Trail and cleaned up the campsites. With the parks closed, many patrons had left their garbage behind. The Scouts carried out their own garbage and the garbage from day travelers, as well.

I enjoy hiking and participating in Scouting activities, but usually my husband Jeff is the one to immerse himself into the week of Scout Camp. Having the opportunity to be part of a long hike was an amazing experience with some talented youth. It was a taxing journey, as all good adventures are, and will be a great memory.

Hiking in the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore proved tricky because we had to have permits to camp. It was important to reach the campsite and use the designated areas. One night there were extra campers in the area, and late arrivals found it difficult to find appropriate tent and eating sites away from other hikers. (Coronavirus certainly put a different spin on group camping sites. Obviously we would previously have enjoyed the fellowship and stories of other hikers, but with a pandemic, everyone politely kept to themselves and respected the space available.) But knowing how hard some of the trail conditions were, we couldn't fault those that didn't reach their destination before nightfall.

Our satellite data (when available) from Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore showed our true trail had zigzagged



Photo: Provided by the Jaklin Family

additional miles from the documented trail. Some days felt very long, but the weather was phenomenal, the bugs were low, and once we were out of the mud, the trail was great. We were so glad we started in the mud and ended in sand because mentally, that would have been a grueling finish otherwise.

Without a pandemic, our family would not have had the time to hike 100 miles on the North Country Trail. We typically fill our days with roller derby (Dead River Derby and North Country Bruisers) and camp in short spurts as weekends allow. We are fortunate to live in an area where the Trail is so close. Getting into the woods, exploring areas we hadn't been, and sharing the experience together were some great moments of 2020. We had such a great journey that we signed up to hike another 100 miles in 2021.

Because of our long hike, we learned about and were able to meet Rue McKenrick when he traveled through [Michigan] this summer on his American Perimeter Trail quest. That was a great experience. After listening to his stories, our family started exploring ideas of a thru-hike one day.

The North Country Trail is a beautiful opportunity for all ages and abilities. It has been a constant in our backyard and quietly persevering with the dedicated enthusiasts that lovingly care for it. We hope to find out more about maintenance and offer our time to see that it continues for other families to enjoy. Simon was recently elected Assistant Senior Patrol Leader for Troop 346 and is looking forward to finding some service hours on the NCT this summer. ✨

*Editor's Note: Read about Rue McKenrick and the American Perimeter Trail, a 12,000-mile loop that circumnavigates the continental U.S. using existing trails, at [americanperimetertrailproject.weebly.com](http://americanperimetertrailproject.weebly.com). Learn more about the Boy Scout 50-Miler Award at [scouting.org/awards/awards-central/50-miler](http://scouting.org/awards/awards-central/50-miler).*



Resting outside of White Cloud.

Photo: Rob Schuitema

## Adventure Time: Quarantine Challenge Accepted!

By Rob Schuitema

Saturday, March 14, 2020. Michiganders had just experienced one of the craziest Friday the 13th's and everything was shutting down. My wife Faune and I started making our plan. We made lists, moved to remote learning and work, and figured out menus. Then Faune laid out the whopper of all plans.

"I have a crazy idea," she said. "Let's hike 100 miles during quarantine. With the kids."

"You're right, that is crazy!" was my response. "Let me get this straight. You want to hike 100 miles in what, like, a couple of months? With our kids? Our kids? Ha!" (It can be challenging some days to get our kids out of bed, let alone to the trail.)

She countered, "What if we invite the Wirts kids to go with us?"

Interesting. We could tempt their competitive nature. The Wirts kids are our quarantine bubble kids and best friends with our girls - similar age, similar interests, with a bit of sibling-like rivalry. "That's genius," I replied.

On Sunday, March 15 we put our plan into motion, and asked our neighbor and best friend Megan if her kids would go hiking with us. Her response was "Yes, take them away!" with a bit of a smirk. Game on.

Why not, right? Get everyone together, outside, and maybe, just maybe, be active. Plus, we are blessed to have the North Country Trail pretty much all

around us. We live in Grant, Michigan, just south of the Manistee National Forest and some of the best stretches of the NCT (in our humble opinion). We hiked almost everything in Newaygo County and were super jazzed to hike Lake County in early May. All within 30-45 minutes from home. Why not take advantage of it?

We definitely have our favorites: Rogue River State Game Area, the stretch from Nicolas Lake to Sterling Marsh, the prairie south of Poplar in Croton, and everything around White Cloud. I indulged in making playlists, we ate snacks, we saw sites, and we hung out together. Not a bad way to spend a quarantine. There is nothing better than the ride home when you're tired and completely satisfied. The "eating an apple with the windows down, jamming to music" kind of satisfied.

We spent the spring traveling, hiking, swapping stories, sharing our thoughts and concerns, talking about school, politics, racism, ex-boyfriends, friends who may not be friends anymore, and more. It was fun, heavy, and very therapeutic, as the trail often is.

Blake, our resident teenage boy, has an amazing grasp of useless knowledge. Cora and I learned a lot. It was usually the three of us at the back of the line, keeping an eye on things. We did have to remind Blake often not to let logic and reason get in the way of a good story. Especially when there is an uprooted stump that is clearly Shrek's home and that we are definitely in his swamp! His swamp! And we must proceed with caution.

Faune, Raven, Cyanne, and Luna the Trail Dog would lead the pack and navigate, and possibly "spill some tea" if there was any juicy gossip. We hiked, ate sack lunches, and looked for bridges, boardwalks, bodies of water,



**Nutmeg the Cat, enjoying the view from Nicolas Lake to Leaf Lake.**

Photo: Rob Schuitema

and bears. We saw flowers, snakes, cool trees to climb, and one time, someone's long-forgotten dirty underwear.

Then the day finally came, and it came exactly two months to the day we started: We completed our 100-mile quarantine challenge! Yes, take that coronavirus! We did it by walking our longest mileage - 10 miles - from 16 Mile Road through Sterling Marsh.

It was a pretty warm day, with Cora carrying our cat Nutmeg, and with ticks. More ticks than we wished to see. We celebrated our accomplishment by doing a tick check, picking a couple off, to which we screamed, and jumped in the car. Okay, maybe not the way you want to end an epic journey but still pretty incredible. It was one of the proudest moments we had as parents and as hikers. It was magical. From there, more unbelievable accomplishments were achieved throughout 2020. But that's a story for another day. ✨

## A Trail for All Seasons and Ages

By Susan Giering



**Harper, age 6 from Middlebury, VT, shows her love for the NCNST. According to her mom Brandi, "The Trail goes right behind our house, and our kids both love the idea that they can theoretically walk the NCT from Vermont to their grandparents' house in Pennsylvania."**

Photo: Brandi and Michael Corbett

While enjoying the abundant snowfalls of Vermont, our granddaughter Harper took a break from snowshoeing to pose along the North Country Trail near her home. She is very aware of our commitment to the Trail and wanted to do her part to share the joy.

This picture really caught my eye and got me thinking about the expanse of the North Country Trail, especially with the 2019 expansion into Vermont. There is now greater access from the North Country Trail to other trail systems like the Long Trail, Appalachian Trail, and the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM).

I feel that this quote from an article by Joan Young, "New Recruits to the Choir" in Issue 39.4 of the *North Star* really exemplifies Harper and her family's lifestyle as they spend time in the outdoors:

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

This was especially true this past spring when schools were closed. It gave them opportunities to explore many new and exciting outdoor spaces. For those of us who are constantly hiking and improving the trails, we need the pause and think about our responsibility to pass along our passion to the next generation. ✨



# NCT Long Distance Hiker Recognition and Essays

Compiled and edited by Joan Young

In 2012, a program was developed to provide a modest award and incentive to people who hike a large number of unique miles on the North Country Trail. Many hikers love patches, so a central patch and rockers were designed to give to those people who hike either [at least] one complete NCT state or 1,000 unique miles. In addition, those who complete the entire NCT under muscle power are given a certificate, and an outer rocker. Those who hike (including snowshoeing or skiing) the entire Trail are said to complete an end-to-end (E2E) hike. If some portions are bicycled, an end-to-end trip rocker is awarded.

To date, 53 people have been recognized as NCT Long Distance Hikers. We know there are other people who qualify for these patches,

but have not applied for them. There are currently 19 known E2E hikers. Two people have completed E2E trips.

Now that Vermont has joined the NCT states, the easiest way to become an NCT Long Distance Hiker would be to hike those 60 miles! Of course, some of those are among the most rugged on the entire Trail. Pennsylvania and Wisconsin each have just over 200 miles. Michigan and Ohio are for those with great determination. Nevertheless, many people choose to complete the NCT miles in one of these states first. A few people have a mix-and-match 1,000-mile rocker, without completing any one state. What's your goal?

To see the complete list of NCT Long Distance Hikers and find out how to apply for recognition, visit [explorenct.info/NoCoLo](http://explorenct.info/NoCoLo). There are also links to



known essays, journals, and more by these hikers.

Below are the partial essays of 11 individuals who have recently been awarded patches, though not all of their accomplishments are recent.

**To read their full essays, visit [northcountrytrail.org/blog](http://northcountrytrail.org/blog) and stay tuned to @northcountrytrail social media.**

## Doug Boulee, Grand Rapids, MI Central patch + Michigan, Wisconsin, and 1,000-Mile rockers



Photo: Joan H. Young

As one of those “turning 50 things,” I decided to return to the world of backpacking. A goal of hiking 50 birthday miles in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore was set. During a training hike on the Manistee River Loop, for the first time I found a North Country National Scenic Trail

emblem. Returning home, a visit to the NCTA website completed my discovery of this fantastic pathway that has been followed ever since. As of May 20, 2012, the states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota’s Superior Hiking Trail have been completed with 1,650 miles under foot. Each section of the Trail continues to bring on a new and fantastic journey. Beyond the hikes are very rewarding days building and maintaining pathway alongside a great number of like-minded folks.

## Rachel Brag, Kindred, ND Central patch + North Dakota rocker



Photo: Provided by Rachel Brag

My record of North Dakota hiking includes the following: Started May 4, 2019 and finished June 6, 2020. My fastest hike was 12 miles in three hours. My longest day was 50K in one day with Glee Mayer: 31.2 miles between 5:57 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. It was mind

over muscle fatigue. My hardest day was in August 2019 when I twisted my ankle doing trail scouting for a new off-road walk. Two days later I hiked 10 miles in a pocket gopher mound area and it was hot. I had to be extra careful not to twist it again. My next challenge is Minnesota. I started in 2020 and am almost half done! I'm addicted to the NCT!

## Rennae Gruchalla, Fargo, ND

Central patch + North Dakota and 1,000-Mile rockers



Photo: Gail Rogne

It was a beautiful, warm March day. The sky was a brilliant azure blue. It was early in the morning, and on the Trail out, there was a deep dip that was covered with ice. I easily walked over it. I meandered on for another two miles before turning back. I didn't think about the fact that

it was now much warmer. The ice still looked solid. But as I got to the middle, I heard "crack, crack, crack," and down I went. Water covered me up to my waist. I had no idea it would be so deep. My car fob and cell phone happened to be in the front pocket of my windbreaker. Soaked to the brim, I waddled out of the water, and trudged the 1.5 miles back to my car. Needless to say, my husband was not very happy with me hiking alone, AGAIN!

## Susanne Klein, Warren, PA

Central patch + Pennsylvania and 1,000-Mile rockers



Photo: Provided by Susanne Klein

I moved to Pennsylvania from California at the end of 2013. I belonged to hiking groups that would conquer different mountains. Even though I continued to hike when I arrived in Pennsylvania, it was always the same trails, and even though some were tough

and beautiful, it was never very challenging for me. At the end of December 2014, I was handed the North Country Trail brochure, and this changed my East Coast experience tremendously. In my first thousand miles, I've seen less-traveled parts of New York, Ohio, Michigan (both Lower and Upper), and Wisconsin. Last year my goal was to finish Pennsylvania. This year, with my newfound hiking buddies, our goal is to start North Dakota, and I am so looking forward to that trip and adventure.

## Lou Ann Fellows Johnson, Buena Vista, CO

Central patch + North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New York, 1,000-Mile, 2,000-Mile, and 3,000-Mile rockers



Photo: Carolyn Hoffman

I started out to hike the NCT in March 1978 because I was one of the original five recruited to hike the proposed route. Three men dropped out, and Carolyn Hoffman and I finished the Trail in October 1978. We decided to ride bikes in Ohio because the proposed route was mostly

paved roads. Unfortunately, I missed a third of Ohio and all of lower Michigan, recovering after a serious bike accident. I later rejoined Carolyn and the NCT in upper Michigan and backpacked the rest of the way. We started out on snowshoes in New York and hiked several weeks before we camped on bare ground. We had icy sleet in Pennsylvania that froze on our parkas, and heat, humidity, and mosquitoes in Minnesota. By the time we got to the North Dakota badlands we were being snowed on again. It was quite an adventure and I'm proud of my role in helping get the NCT declared a National Scenic Trail.

## Glee Mayer, Minot, ND

Central patch + North Dakota rocker

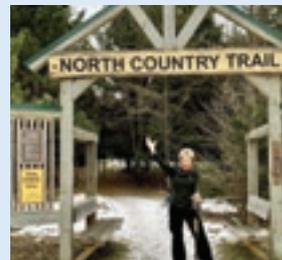


Photo: Rennae Gruchalla

I completed the Dakota Challenge on June 6, 2020. The Dakota Challenge requires you to hike every mile of the North Country Trail within the boundaries of the state of North Dakota. It took me just over a year to complete the 444+ miles. Finishing this challenge

gave me a whole new appreciation for my home state of North Dakota. As a result, I researched origins of areas I hiked in that were new to me, and found it to be fascinating why they were settled. Even more interesting was who settled them. As a result of completing this hike across my state I have become involved in trail building and maintenance, and we have created a new Chapter in North Dakota (the Central Flyway Chapter). I am extremely thankful for all the NCT hiking enthusiasts and promoters that have done the work and provided me with this wonderful hiking opportunity.

**Michelle Olsen, Evansville, MN**

Central patch + North Dakota and 1,000-Mile rockers



Photo: Gail Rogne

Mary Oliver, the poet, asked, “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” I heard her and replied “I will walk.” And I will live close to life, where in my slow travels, I will see, smell, touch, hear and occasionally taste what life on the Trail offers

up. In 2016, the North Country Trail signs that we were seeing registered in our brains as something to check out. As you know, once the NCT bug bites, you are helpless to resist! I became involved in my local Chapter, Minnesota Waters and Prairie, in August 2018. Pushing myself to complete this goal has gradually transformed my body. No, I haven't really lost weight or left all my aches and pains behind. But I feel stronger, more confident, and more able. I feel incredibly lucky to have fairly good health and the ability to keep going 5, 10, 15, or 20 miles. I know that I could lose this ability any day and want to take full advantage of it while I can. Thanks North Country Trail for giving me goals, friendship, health and never-ending opportunities!

**Randall Roberts, Strongsville, OH**

Pennsylvania rocker

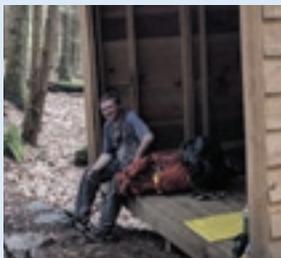


Photo: Matthew Petersons

My first hike in Pennsylvania was on November 11, 2017. In 2018 I made sure to spread out my hikes over the four Chapters to qualify for the Hike PA 50 patch. My hikes that year included a 25.5-mile hike and 48 miles in the Allegheny National Forest for the A-100 Challenge. In

May of 2019, I did a three-day backpacking trip from Rockland Tunnel to State Game Lands 63 and another backpacking trip from the Route 66 trailhead back to State Game Lands 63 in June. This allowed me to finish Pennsylvania when I completed the northern half of the A-100 on June 8, 2019. My total unique mileage so far is 1,336. I've already started New York but I also plan to hike some Michigan miles this year in the Chief Noonday [Chapter] area.

**Doug Seaney, Eastport, MI**

Central patch + Michigan, 1,000-Mile, and Mackinac Bridge rockers



Photo: Joan H. Young

In my youth I was in Boy Scouts, and our troop did a lot of hiking. I was definitely in it more for the hikes than for the merit badges or rank. I first discovered the North Country Trail in autumn of 1999. I believe I joined the NCTA in 2001. I was busy with life and four kids, but in

the back of my mind, I wanted to hike all of the upper peninsula of Michigan. On May 17, 2003, I set out from St. Ignace, heading to Tahquamenon Falls, foolishly thinking that 90 miles was no big deal. Even with all the route-finding challenges, the sore ankle and cold nights, I was hooked! Seventeen years later on October 3, 2020, I finally finished all of Michigan, both upper and lower peninsulas. Total number of hiking days in Michigan was 76 days on the Trail. I'm not sure if I will hike the entire Trail, but have hopes to continue on to Wisconsin in 2021.

**Brian Tanzman, The Villages, FL**

End-to-End Hiker #19



Photo: Heather "Steady" Werderman

Day 156, Mile 2,863 for 2020: I finally finished the entire NCT! In 2020 I hiked from North Dakota to Piqua, OH and I completed the eastern 2,000 miles to Piqua in 2018. Given that the Trail doesn't follow a mountain range I was surprised how enjoyable the NCT is. It was

also a bit impressive how good the Trail conditions were. So for that, thanks to all the volunteers and the NCTA. Also The trail keeps getting longer! The NCT completes my eighth of the 11 National Scenic Trails.

**Merri Carol Wozniak,**  
**Sault Ste. Marie, MI**  
Central patch + Wisconsin,  
1,000-Mile, and Mackinac  
Bridge rockers



Photo: Cathy Lloyd-Langley

I have always loved being in the woods. I grew up out in the country in a small

neighborhood with lots of wooded areas to roam. When I officially retired, my sister asked, “What do you want to do?” My reply: “Hike the NCT.” Along the way I met Cathy Lloyd-Langley on the NCTA Community Facebook page. We realized we both were planning to hike the lower peninsula of Michigan. Over the first three years, I traveled below the Bridge quite often. 2020 brought us to the Ohio border. Just before coronavirus, on March 7 [2020], I reached my 1,000 miles. Cathy called me late Thursday night. She had been in a car accident and wouldn’t be able to come. My last 15 miles! I prayed: “Lord, you inspired me to hike. You inspired me to make 4,600 my goal. I agreed to do this only with your help.” Late Friday afternoon Tina messaged me that she would hike with me. That evening, Cathy texted me that if she didn’t have a headache in the morning that she would be there. And she was.



## Hike the Hill 2021

By Andrea Ketchmark

Every year, the North Country Trail Association joins hundreds of other trail advocates in Washington D.C. to advocate for trails, public lands, and recreation. Although we didn’t travel to D.C. this year, virtual Hike the Hill brought the halls of Congress to us.

Although we build these relationships year-round, our voice is amplified during Hike the Hill. By joining forces with the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS), American Hiking Society (AHS), and American Trails, organizations like NCTA have the ability to share stories on a much broader stage. And our collective trail community stories speak for themselves.

Highlights of this year’s event include meetings with the leadership of the Department of Interior, National Park Service, and the U.S. Forest Service to advocate for policies that support our partnerships and sound trail management. The Biden Administration’s “30 by 30” initiative puts America on the path of protecting 30% of its land and 30% of its ocean areas by 2030. With the recent passing of the Great American Outdoors Act, the agencies are positioned to fully recognize the potential of the National Trails System with the full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which can be used to close gaps. We asked our Senators to support the reintroduction of the National Scenic Trails Parity Act, and our Representatives to sign a “Dear Colleague” letter supporting funding for the National Trails System.

During the pandemic, we saw the realization that our nation’s trails are critical parts of America’s infrastructure. Trails aren’t only nice to have - they are public assets that drive the health of our people and our economies. If we want our trails to meet the needs of millions of users that seek respite in nature, we as a nation need to invest in their future. Join us in the effort to advance climate resilience, equitable outdoor access, local economic growth, and public health through trails!

Contact your members of Congress. Ask that the National Trails System be a priority. Share why the North Country Trail matters to you. Ask that it be made priority in Congress and in our federal agencies. Ask that they support the forthcoming National Scenic Trails Parity Act, expected to be reintroduced to Congress later this session. More information can be found at [northcountrytrail.org/advocacy](http://northcountrytrail.org/advocacy). ✨



## Project Update: Butler County Bridges in PA State Gamelands 95

By Tom Moutsos



**Original bridge.**

Photo: Tom Moutsos

major rail lines. The hustle and bustle of that era is long gone. Today, not too far from the Trail, only one mine is still in use, and not for its intended purpose. The federal government's Office of Personnel Management uses one of U.S. Steel's old limestone mines to securely store a massive amount of records 200 feet below the surface. If you're a retired federal employee and find yourself hiking this section of the NCT, you may in fact be walking right over your employment records!

The leftover effects of Pennsylvania's rich industrial heritage, however, are not always so beneficial. Acid mine drainage (AMD) is still leaking from many of the mines that fueled Pennsylvania's industrial prowess, and the mines along the upper reaches of Slippery Rock Creek are no exception. The observant NCT hiker may notice the telltale tinge of orange (iron) in the water and sediment of streams and wetlands the Trail passes. But if the hiker is truly observant, they will notice that many of those wetlands are not natural. Man-made wetlands are a major tool used to clean AMD, and the wetlands in this area have been hard at work for the last couple of decades.

In a sleepy section of Western Pennsylvania, the North Country Trail passes through State Gamelands 95, a quiet landscape containing rolling hills, wetlands, and the headwaters of Slippery Rock Creek. One hundred years ago, this area was busy with the work of mineral extraction, serviced by

The time has come for those wetlands to be reset: Contaminated sediment dredged and hauled out, and cattails and other plants replanted, to assist in cleaning the contaminated water. As part of this large project, the NCTA Butler County Chapter was awarded \$25,000 to replace six bridges, many hundreds of feet of puncheon and boardwalk, and to armor with rock certain wet sections of the Trail. For those of you who like to geek out with maps, the work area stretches roughly from mile marker PA-171 to PA-178 on NCTA's map.

Normally, February in Western Pennsylvania is not the best time to begin a bridge project. However, along with being home to a part of Pennsylvania's mining heritage and our federal employee retirement records, this area is also home to the endangered Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. After an environmental review of the whole project, the Butler County Chapter was told that, in the southern end of their work area, major projects could only take place during the snake's hibernation period: Between November 1 and March 31. Fortunately, only one bridge is found in the snake habitat area.

As is the case with most of the bridges in this project, this first bridge was about 20 years old. Five years or so after it was first built, the meandering stream it crossed had widened the channel and undermined the bridge's northern foundation, causing it to fall into the creek. The good folks with the Chapter at the time hauled the bridge out of the creek and reset it. Though now, due to the widened channel, the bridge did not line up well with the Trail and was much higher. Steep ramps were built on either side, which made it hazardous for the Chapter to move their mower over it, and nearly impossible for our mobility-impaired comrades to cross.

The old bridge was well built and, despite its age, was



**During construction.**

Photo: Tom Moutsos



### New bridge.

Photo: Tom Moutsos

repurposed. It was removed from its foundation and was used as a temporary bridge and work platform while the new bridge was built. Once the new deck was installed, the old bridge was disassembled, and its long deck boards and stringers were used to build the approach ramp walls on either side of the new bridge. How is that for reduce, reuse, recycle?

The Chapter recently completed the work in this section, just in time for the rattlesnakes to awake from their winter slumber and enjoy sunning themselves on the newly improved Trail. Lessons learned from the first bridge rebuild will definitely come in handy for future projects. Challenges for the next bridges include longer hikes from the trailhead, bigger spans, locations on tight spots along old railroad grades or along the dikes of the wetlands, and crossing deeper streams. This summer, if you happen to find yourself in the area looking for the elusive Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, or your old federal employment records, why not check in with the Butler County Chapter and offer to lend a hand?



Learn more about the NCTA Butler County Chapter at [northcountrytrail.org/but](http://northcountrytrail.org/but) or reach out via email: [but@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:but@northcountrytrail.org).



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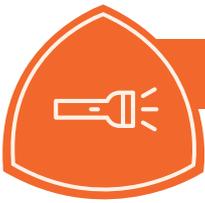


Photo: Ben Brosseau

## Project Spotlight: Adirondack Park, Jones Hill, Hoffman Notch Wilderness

By Mary Coffin

Within the “blue line” boundary of New York State’s Adirondack Park, the largest wilderness east of the Mississippi can be found. A patchwork of public and private land beset with evergreen-topped hills and sparkling lakes, the Adirondack Mountains are a crown jewel, not only for the state, but for the entire Northeast region. In 1885, pre-dating the concept of federal Wilderness by nearly 100 years, New York’s state constitution set in place substantial

protections for these cherished lands, ensuring, in perpetuity, a safeguard for the headwaters of New York City’s water supply.

These venerable laws that protect the Adirondack Park’s lands and waters are the very same regulations which can create difficulties for relatively newer projects, including routing the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) through the park’s southern



Photo: Mary Coffin

tier. Recent trail routing and building efforts in the Jones Hill area of the Hoffman Notch Wilderness showcase some of these challenges. Located at the eastern edge of the NCNST’s traverse of the park, Jones Hill is a small mountain not quite 2,000 feet in elevation with scenic views of the famed Adirondack High Peaks region.

I first joined Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) volunteers, Norm Kuchar and Walt Hayes, on a bushwhack summit climb of Jones Hill in 2010. By then, they had already been working to lay the groundwork for the NCNST’s future route through Jones Hill since 2008. Many years of hard work later, in 2015, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) compiled the data submitted by ADK’s and NCTA’s dedicated volunteers into a Final General Environmental Impact Statement and Final Plan for the Adirondack Route of the NCNST. Even with this huge undertaking in long-term planning completed, no work on the ground could commence until the information from the NCNST’s Environmental Impact Statement was incorporated into each respective management area’s Unit Management Plan (UMP). As frustrating as the slow wheels of bureaucracy may be, we had wonderful support from the DEC foresters and planners throughout the approval process.

In 2018, we finally received National Park Service (NPS) funding to contract with the Adirondack Mountain Club’s Professional Trail Crew, or Pro Crew as we call it, to bench four miles of new Trail to the Jones Hill summit from the west. In addition, NCTA and ADK volunteer groups provided in-kind labor to match NPS funds. This collaboration resulted in an out-and-back hike for trail users. While no further

*I have been impressed with the strong partnership work between the NCTA, the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to move forward the Jones Hill project in Hoffman Notch Wilderness. Importantly, this project has also provided opportunities to engage new volunteers and youth who have been critical to accomplishing this exciting new Trail segment with excellent views in the less-traveled Southern Adirondacks. With the completion of the Jones Hill traverse, we are one step closer to solidifying the NCNST's path through the Adirondacks to the eastern terminus in Vermont.*

By Stephanie Campbell  
NCTA Regional Trail  
Coordinator for New  
York and Vermont



Photos: (top) Ben Brosseau (bottom) Mary Coffin

funding materialized in the 2019 field season, volunteer efforts continued by establishing tread for three miles from Route 9 to a brook at the base of the ascent on the east side of Jones Hill. The momentum and interest produced by our 2019 efforts resulted in some new NCNST stewards and route scouters.

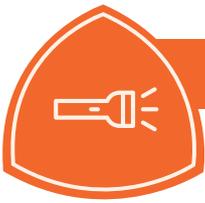
In 2020, with the pandemic-related issues we are by now all familiar with,

volunteers were not permitted to travel to this remote area or to camp in the backcountry. However, an NCTA Field Grant was approved for the ADK Pro Crew to build a required bridge over Rogers Brook on the west side of Jones Hill summit. Even with the incredible efforts volunteers have put forth over the last decade, due to DEC policy, the trail is still not allowed to be signed as official NCNST unless

it meets what is called a “road-to-road” requirement, where there is established trail from one access road to another.

The 2021 field season brings renewed hopes and energy for progress on the Jones Hill project. NCTA and NPS funding will support another ADK Pro Crew to build more bridging, water

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



bars, and new trail tread. In addition, ADK will run two Youth Volunteer Work Weeks. While the ADK youth opportunities for this project are already full, volunteers are still being recruited for an all-ages Volunteer Work Week to be held August 26-30, 2021. (See the You're Invited column on page 7 for details.)

We hope that by 2022 we will have met the DEC road-to-road requirement and will be marking the seven-mile section summiting Jones Hill. With the assistance of the new NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator for New York and Vermont, Stephanie Campbell, we have already applied for 2023 funding to continue rerouting the NCNST off-road in this uniquely scenic part of the Northeast. We look forward to the new opportunities for adventure and beauty trail users will be provided by our patience and perseverance in pursuit of closing this gap on the NCNST. ✨

*If you are interested in volunteering along the NCNST in the Adirondacks, please contact Mary Coffin at maryccoffin@gmail.com.*



**Chapter volunteer Ellie Williams blazes a tree in the Chequamegon Chapter's section of the NCNST in northern Wisconsin.**

Photo: Mary Stenberg

## Blazing a Trail

By Mary Stenberg

A properly blazed trail is critical. Hikers depend on blazing markers to follow their route and to locate side trails that lead to water, campsites, shelters, trailheads, and special points of interest. Blazes reassure hikers they are on the right path and prevent hikers from getting lost.

Along the North Country National Scenic Trail, blue blazes provide continuous marking of the Trail that runs from North Dakota into Vermont. The permanent, rectangular blazes are most often painted on trees or posts along the Trail. Blazes are the most numerous type of signage and the most important method of marking the Trail's route. Blazes that are neat, well-maintained, and properly located will leave the hiker with a positive impression of the Trail. White rectangular blazes are used on the connector trails that lead off the North Country National Scenic Trail to water sources, campsites, shelters, trailheads, and special points of interest.

The painted blue and white blazes will typically last about four years. After that, paint fades and trees sometimes fall. In the early spring of 2020, four new blazing kits were assembled for Trail Adopters of the NCTA Chequamegon Chapter to refresh the blazes. Necessary tools and equipment



**Recognize this photo from past NCTA materials? This was Kyle Visser (on the cover this issue) back in 2018 in the UP of Michigan, on the NCT to Canyon Falls.**

Photo: Loretta Visser



**A blazing kit that contains necessary and useful tools for volunteers.**

Photo: Chequamegon Chapter

were packed into gallon-sized plastic buckets that are easily carried during the blazing process. During the 2020 season, Trail Adopters made good progress on reblazing the Chapter's portion of the Trail.

The Chequamegon Chapter's section of NCNST begins at Copper Falls State Park and heads west, ending south of Iron River on County Highway A. Chequamegon Chapter members build and maintain this 70+ miles of Trail in partnership with the National Park Service and the Chequamegon-

Nicolet National Forest Service. It should be noted there are two designated Wilderness areas within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest: the Porcupine Lake Wilderness Area and the Rainbow Lake Wilderness Area. The North Country National Scenic Trail passes through both of them. Blazing is not permitted within the boundaries of the Wilderness areas. However, a minimal number of unobtrusive wooden signs are posted at intersections hikers may find confusing.

*Interested in volunteering with the Chequamegon Chapter?*

*Visit [northcountrytrail.org/che](http://northcountrytrail.org/che) to learn more or reach out via email at [che@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:che@northcountrytrail.org).*



**Wooden signs are used to mark confusing intersections within the two Wilderness areas where blazes are not permitted.**

Photo: Vickie Swank

## BLUE BLAZES 101

By Valerie Bader

Blazes on the North Country Trail (NCT) act as reassurance markers, letting the hiker know they are on the right path. The NCT is marked predominantly by blue blazes, 2 x 6-inch rectangles painted at eye level on trees or posts. (The official color is Nelson Paint Company "Boundary Blue.") Volunteers are careful to strike a balance and not "overblaze" or "under-blaze" the Trail. The intent is to provide hikers enough markings to comfortably follow the Trail, but to not cause sign pollution by blazing every tree in the woods.

Every year, NCTA volunteers paint thousands of new blazes on the North Country Trail and freshen thousands more. 2020 was no exception. With a limited number of group projects during the pandemic, we saw an increase in the number of individual and small group projects, including blazing efforts. For example, the NCTA Wampum Chapter reblazed **84 miles of Trail** through the woods and along the road walks between the Ohio-Pennsylvania state line and the eastern terminus of the Buckeye Trail in Zoar, OH.

All trail maintainers have tips and tricks to get the best and longest lasting blazes, from the right brush to the most efficient tools for scraping tree bark. More information can be found in the NCTA's *Adopter Handbook* or the *North Country Trail Handbook for Planning Design Construction and Maintenance* at [northcountrytrail.org/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center/trail-management](http://northcountrytrail.org/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center/trail-management).



"I was out scouting out a new section of Trail in eastern North Dakota in 2019, close to what is now mile 420.5, and my eye was immediately drawn to this bright blue fungal growth. My Picture This app identified it as Chlorociboriaceae. It was growing in the woods on a downed log following several rainy weeks. It's amazing what you see when you slow down and look!"

Photo: Rachel Brag



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## Come Visit Us!

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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.