



North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2022

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its largest gift in the
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On the cover: Courtney Schaff clears brush off the Trail in North Dakota after a major wind storm. Courtney is a volunteer and member of the NCTA Next Generation Coalition.

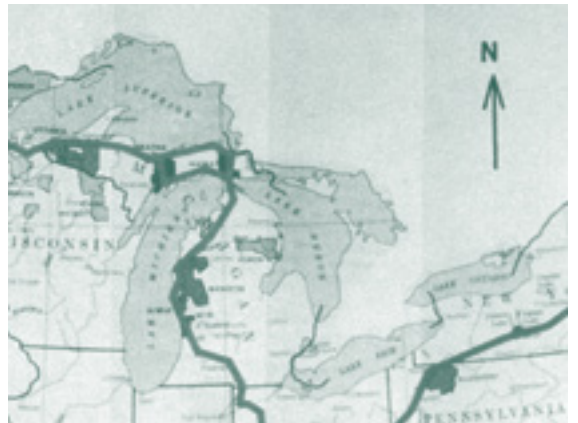
Photo by Tom Moberg

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Trailhead

JARON NYHOF, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Photo by Vicki Nyhof

It's trail season! I know, trail season is all year long for many of us, but we're in the peak period weather-wise for trail building and maintenance in the northern United States, so now is the time to get 'er done! I suspect the North Star readership is mostly folks who are doing just that, but for those who haven't experienced the satisfaction of a tired body, sore muscles, and a cold drink as they survey the work of their hands, I'm telling you it is something not to be missed.

If that description of trail work doesn't motivate you, let me try this: It's the difference between the satisfaction of being in the game versus watching the game. When you roll up your sleeves, grab a tool, work shoulder-to-shoulder with some fun and amazing people, then see with your own eyes and feel with your own feet what the group of you accomplished, it feels really good. It feels like you tamed the wild, and maybe taming the universe is next. You made space for someone to commune with nature, clear their mind, think deep thoughts, and restore their soul. You provided a safe place for a young Scouts troop to have an adventure that they'll remember for the rest of their lives. You made new friends or deepened the friendships you came with, and you made a place for others to do the same. You're part of a community, where anyone and everyone is welcome and can belong. You built something that will last - that grandchildren will walk on and appreciate someday. You're part of something bigger than yourself, a legacy. And all of that, my friends, is a good feeling.

Oh sure, you'll probably be sore, hot, sweaty, and a little dinged up. You might have mosquito bites and blisters to show for the effort. But those things will disappear quickly. What you built - both on the ground, in relationships, and in your own identity - will last. And it wouldn't feel nearly as satisfying if it were easy, right? That's just not how the human experience works.

So, if you've been on the sidelines, let me encourage you to get in the game. There are NCTA Chapter and Affiliate leaders who would love to hear from you and get you involved wherever your talents and interests would best fit - and not only for physical work like I described above. There are also many opportunities in administration, finance, writing, marketing, planning, relationship building, designing, teaching, training, fundraising, leadership, and more. Your combination of skills, talents, relationships, resources, experiences, and geography is unlike that of anyone else in our community. We need you to develop, maintain, protect, and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail. If you're not sure

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Trailhead

ANDREA KETCHMARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by
Andrea Ketchmark

Spring brings warmer weather and flowers, but also the air of new possibilities.

All across the North Country Trail, volunteers are headed out with their loppers and chainsaws, paint brushes and cans of blue paint. They are removing downed trees, pruning wild new growth, and refreshing blazes to get the Trail ready for millions of people to enjoy. As you hit the Trail this spring, remember the many people behind the scenes who work to prepare it for you and who keep it in

usable shape. Our miles spent on the Trail are all thanks to them.

At the NCTA Headquarters, we're also preparing for a new and exciting time. With 42 years behind us, there are now 3,200 miles of Trail off road and on the ground. Ahead of us there are 1,600 miles to be developed. Much of what has been built in the Association's history is on public land: the 160 different public land units along the route that share our vision. What lies ahead is navigating relationships with thousands of private landowners to complete a puzzle that will close our gaps and create a seamless trail from Vermont to North Dakota.

Although NCTA has worked on many projects across the Trail to secure access to private land, we've lacked the staff capacity and coordination to do this work consistently. Likewise, the National Park Service has only a handful of staff to oversee the NCNST across its eight states, and funding that is woefully insufficient to fill the needs. With the passage of full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, as well as the Biden Administration's 30x30 initiative*, we are witnessing the best opportunity this century to further the development of America's National Trails System. As managers of this resource in the public trust, we must be ready to seize the opportunity to act, to further the development and protection of the trail corridors, which creates recreation opportunities for millions of Americans and supports climate resiliency. Now is the time!

I'm excited to announce that in 2022, NCTA is adding staff capacity and funding for our Trail Protection program. This will be the first time in the Association's history we've had the dedicated staff to focus on easement and land acquisition projects, and building a sound program. This is thanks to a generous donation from the Larry and Shannon Bell Charitable Fund. It's a game-changer for us and I hope you are as excited as I am.

Just as the maintenance can't be taken for granted, our access to the Trail itself can't be presumed. As the main partner of the National Park Service in building, maintaining, protecting, and

promoting the North Country National Scenic Trail, there is no other organization that is better positioned to bring forward the needs, see projects through acquisition, and to steward them after. With 29 local Chapters and additional partnerships that range from national scope to regional and local, the NCTA is able to bring the right partners to the table to fulfill the needs. Our volunteers know the local landowners, and together, we can connect the grassroots effort to the tools and staff leadership needed to complete projects, and close those gaps.

There are new possibilities around every bend in the Trail. It's time to take the first step.

CHRIS LOUDENSLAGER, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
SUPERINTENDENT, NCNST



Photo by Mick Hawkins

Have you ever sat around a campfire with friends at the end of a long and gratifying workday or hike, and contemplated what is meant when we refer to the "nature" of a trail? Okay, me neither. But maybe we should. We often hear reference to the nature and purpose of the North Country National Scenic Trail, and the purpose is somewhat straightforward. But what is its nature?

Sadly, at the moment, I am substituting a campfire for my computer in my office, and it's been far too long since I've had the good fortune of enjoying a gratifying workday or long hike with friends. But I can still contemplate, so all is not lost.

For me, when I think deep thoughts about the nature of a trail, three things come to mind:

1. It is the trail setting and surroundings; the natural beauty and peaceful splendor that nature created for us to find, explore, and experience. It includes rolling hills, majestic forests, sprawling grasslands under the canopy of endless skies, stunning vistas, shimmering lakes, roaring waterfalls, and quiet, yet discreetly busy rivers and streams in perpetual motion, carrying water and life from one place to another. It is also all the smells and sounds associated with all these attributes.
2. It is the careful and ingenious planning and design that went into the creation of the trail that pays

*Protect at least 30% of our land and water by 2030.

tribute to natural processes, and blends with the surroundings to create the illusion that nature intended us to be there - fully knowing that nature has its own agenda in doing all it can to erase our presence. It goes one way but not another, in a manner that seems random and yet somehow makes sense.

3. It is our efforts to compromise with nature and accept it has imposed its own set of non-negotiable terms and conditions to allow our continued presence within its domain. For the Trail to persist, we must understand nature's will, work proactively to anticipate nature's agenda, and be steadfast in our effort to be responsive to the forces of nature that are always in motion with little regard for our desire for permanence. In less poetic terms, what I'm talking about is trail maintenance.

From my perspective, how a trail is maintained defines the difference between any old trail, a "nice" trail, and a world-class walking and hiking experience. In any setting, a trail can be a trail, or it can be a work of art and science. But even the most brilliant and artfully designed and constructed trail will become just a trail if it is not maintained. Each step of every hiker impacts the tread just a little bit, disturbing the surface in some places, compacting it in others, causing change to happen. Every moment, nature is growing, waters are flowing, and change is happening.

How we account for and respond to change and ensure that our visitors experience the nature and purpose of the Trail, rather than simply focusing their attention on navigating the route, is what makes the North Country National Scenic Trail a world-class walking and hiking experience. It is possessing a knowledge and understanding of how nature works, attention to details, and making the extra effort that makes the difference between the North Country Trail and any other trail. It is the understanding that change is constant and that our work is never done. It is the attitude that each time we go out to maintain the Trail, it is a new and rewarding opportunity to collaborate with nature and reestablish our relationship. But most importantly, it is the knowledge that someone, somewhere, was gifted a life-changing experience and a lasting memory because of your extra efforts. In the end, it is you that makes the difference.

JARON NYHOF (CONTINUED)

where to start, visit northcountrytrail.org/ways-to-volunteer and the rest will be history. You'll be glad you made the move.

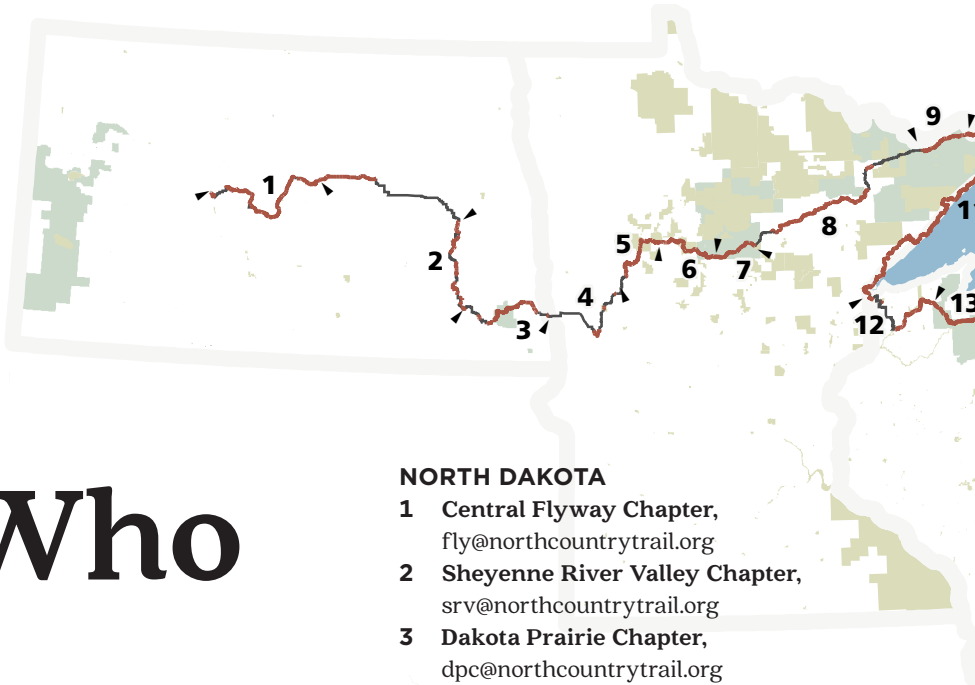
And while the satisfaction you'll feel will be rewarding enough, I also want to thank those of you who have already made that leap and are making such a difference. Thank you for being part of our community, for your hard work, and for leading by example. Thank you for using your skills, talents, relationships, resources, experiences, and geography to make positive change. We notice and appreciate it, the world is a better place for it, and we couldn't exist without you. May you be experiencing the satisfaction I've described above and more.



As the popularity of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) grows, it is vital that future generations of trail stewards are given the opportunity to experience, work on, and fall in love with the beauty of the Trail. The Next Generation Coalition (NGC) is a program aimed at increasing youth engagement along our eight trail states via networking and mentorship opportunities. As of April 30, applications for the 2022 cohort are being reviewed. Stay tuned to NGC and NCTA communications for program news:

@nctanextgen

**northcountrytrail.org/
next-generation-coalition**



Who's Who

ALONG THE NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) is built, maintained, and promoted by volunteer Chapters and independent Affiliate organizations. NCTA Chapters are established across the eight Trail states, offering membership and hosting group hikes, trail workdays, and many other events. Each Chapter and Affiliate is responsible for maintaining a segment of the NCNST, and promoting the Trail at a local or regional level. Those interested in getting involved are encouraged to connect directly with their local Chapter.

Guided by a Board of Directors, NCTA staff provide direct support to Chapter volunteers to be effective and safe as they accomplish their work. Strong partnership with Affiliate organizations' staff and volunteers is also crucial to the NCNST and the mission of the NCTA.

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the NCNST, providing management oversight to the entire Trail by working with the federal agencies, state and local governments, private organizations, landowners, and land users, and by providing guidance to the NCTA as a partner. The NPS provides funding for trail projects, planning and decisions on trail routing, trail tools, supplies and signage for volunteers, trail certification guidelines, and volunteer support through the Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) program.

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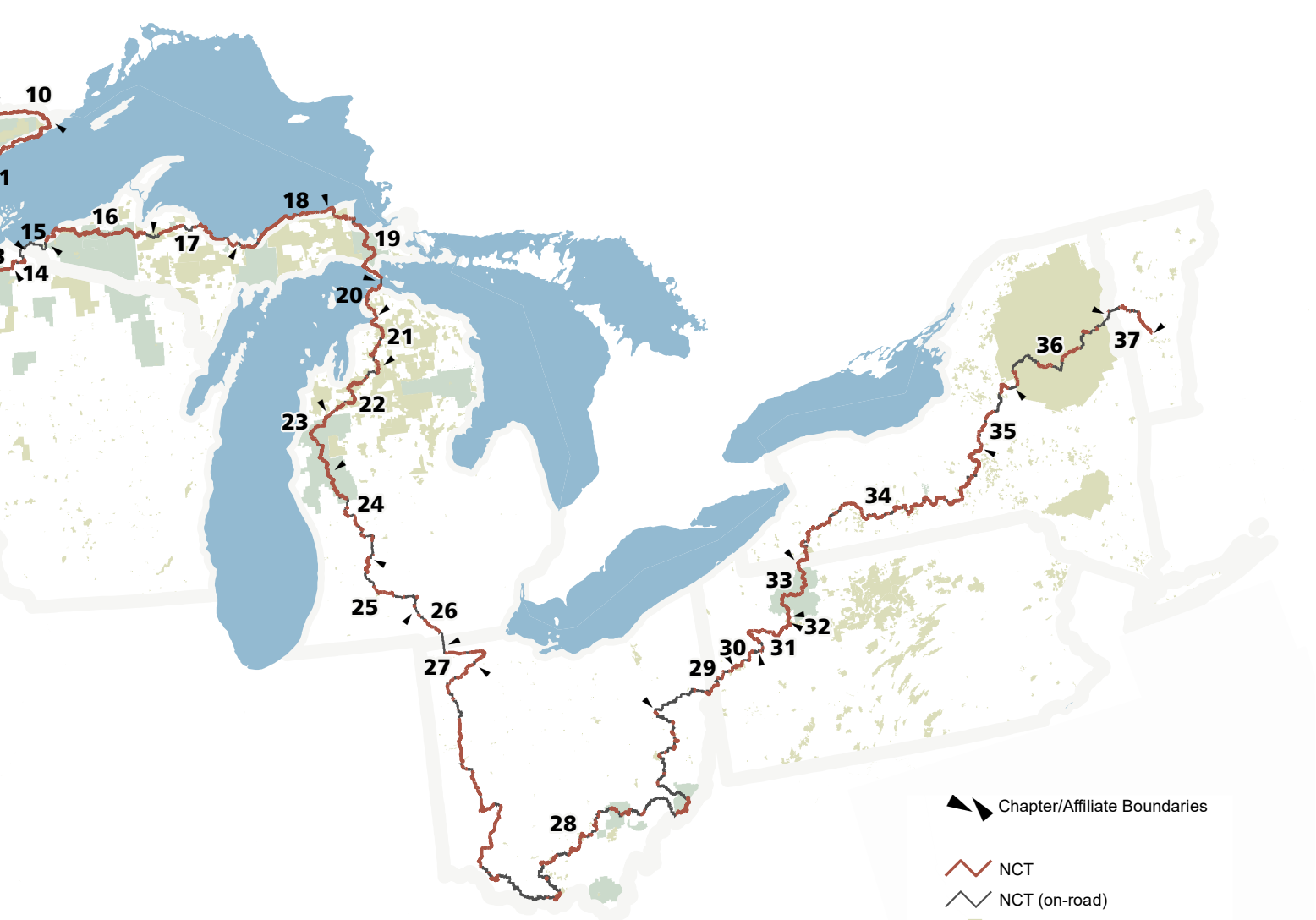
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NCT (on-road)

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EVENTS

You're Invited

National Trails Day

Trailwide
June 4, 2022

Led annually by the American Hiking Society, National Trails Day is the nation's largest celebration of trails. Each first Saturday in June, NCTA Chapters across the entire North Country National Scenic Trail host a variety of events. It is a great opportunity to meet old and new friends in your area, and to find adventures in your own backyard. Visit northcountrytrail.org/events and enter "National Trails Day" into the keyword search.

Lake Ashtabula Work Week



Baldhill Dam, N.D.
July 11-15, 2022

Join NCTA Sheyenne River Valley Chapter volunteers in maintaining the north end of the Lake Ashtabula NCNST segment. This work will involve trail mowing, installing signs, lopping, fixing fence stiles, and more. The group will be camping (for free!) in tent sites at the Mel Rieman Recreation Area near the dam. Crew food will be provided. Join for one day or the full week. Learn more at northcountrytrail.org/srv-071122.

Chequamegon Chapter Hike Series



Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Wisc.
June 15, 22, 29; July 13, 20, 27; August 3, 10, 17 (2022)

The NCTA Chequamegon Chapter welcomes you to participate in any or all hikes in their series of nine that will traverse the section of the NCNST the Chapter maintains. The hikes are weekly on Wednesdays from June 15 through August 17 (with no hike on July 6). Capacity is limited to approximately 18 participants. Please register for any hikes you plan to attend by sending the hike number(s), your name, and email address to che@northcountrytrail.org. For additional details on each hike, visit northcountrytrail.org/events and enter "Chequamegon Chapter Hike Series" into the keyword search, or select Chequamegon Chapter from the Chapter/Affiliate dropdown menu.

Visit northcountrytrail.org/events to search for opportunities near you to get on the Trail or to get involved, from hikes to trail projects to meetings and beyond! There are many options for a wide variety of interests and abilities. Search by date, location, Chapter name, event type, or keyword.

MDOT Adopt-A-Highway Litter Pickup Program



Battle Creek, Mich.
July 18 and September 26 (2022)

NCTA Chief Noonday Chapter volunteers will pick up litter on a two-mile stretch of road: the Chapter's portion for the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Adopt-A-Highway program. All equipment will be provided. Work will start around 9:00 a.m. (ET) and end at lunchtime each day. Contact Amy Seymour with questions at gma545@gmail.com. Learn more at northcountrytrail.org/cnd-071822.

Allegheny National Forest June Work Weekend



Henrys Mill Trailhead, Sheffield Township, Pa.
June 4-5, 2022

Join the NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter for a work weekend. Cut brush, mow, and clear trail in preparation for the Allegheny 100 Challenge. All tools provided and no special skills needed. Learn more at northcountrytrail.org/anf-060422 and [/anf-060522](http://northcountrytrail.org/anf-060522).

Five Notable Hikes of New York



May 14, June 11, July 9, August 13,
September 10 (2022)

The Five Notable Hikes of New York's portion of the NCNST showcase some of the most expansive and interesting scenery in the state. And, with this hike series, Trail users can explore all five locations in a group setting with experienced North Country Trail hike coordinators. Chronologically, the locations are Little Rock City, Mitchellsville Gorge, Tinker Falls, Stone Quarry Hill Art Park, and Puffer Pond. Earn miles toward your Hike 100 Challenge at all of them! Three are eligible for mileage toward the FLTC 60, too: Little Rock City, Mitchellsville Gorge, and Tinker Falls. Registration is required for each hike and capacity is limited; registration for each hike opens one month prior to the event. Visit northcountrytrail.org/events and enter "Five Notable Hikes" into the keyword search.

Adirondacks Volunteer Work Week



Jones Hill, Hoffman Notch Wilderness, N.Y.
August 18-22, 2022

This volunteer group will construct new NCNST in New York's Adirondack Mountains. No prior skills are needed; skills training and tools will be provided. Volunteers will provide their own food and lodging. Participate all five days, just the weekend, or a day or two. Space is limited. Covid-19 regulations may apply. For details and application information, contact Mary Coffin at maryccoffin@gmail.com. Learn more at northcountrytrail.org/adk-081822.

Larry and Shannon Bell Clear a Path for the NCTA

BY ANDREA KETCHMARK



Larry Bell, founder of Bell's Brewery, hiking the North Country National Scenic Trail in Michigan.

Photo by Larry Bell

I'm excited to share with you that the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) has received its largest donation in the Association's history from the Larry and Shannon Bell Charitable Fund. Larry founded Bell's Brewery in 1985 in Kalamazoo, Mich., and is an avid supporter of the Trail and the Association's work. It's been amazing to watch Larry's excitement for the Trail, and we're thrilled that he has the

belief in our work to justify such a large gift.

The Bells' donation marks a new day for the Association — one that will elevate the efforts to complete the route and protect the valuable resources of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) for the next generation.

Motivated by a life changing experience, Larry Bell challenged himself to hike the entire Michigan section of the NCNST: 1,150 miles. Mile after mile, he experienced firsthand how spending time outdoors changes lives, and he wanted to share that opportunity with others. His experience on the Trail and conversations with NCTA staff and volunteers also helped him realize just how much work goes into building, maintaining, and protecting a National Scenic Trail for all to enjoy.

On why he supports the NCTA's work, Larry shared, "The North Country Trail has been a welcome tool for my physical and mental health in my post-cancer life. I am happy to help facilitate this contribution to the [North Country] Trail Association so that others may find the joy, beauty, and wellbeing that I know from hiking this path, and so that the Trail may be built out to its full potential."

The Bells' gift allows us to build needed infrastructure and capacity to meet the ongoing demands of America's longest National Scenic Trail. Larry has shown his trust in the Association as the stewards of the Trail. His vote of confidence is a boost of thanks to the thousands of volunteers who make it possible for everyone to have access to quality outdoor recreation experiences near them.

Trail protection is top priority as we look forward to our future, and this donation will be able to go to great lengths

to prepare us for that work. We aren't just trail builders and maintainers — although we all know that would be enough! We are also advocates for public land. We are conservationists. We are supporters of local economies. We are creators of opportunity. We provide an essential service and an improved quality of life to the American people. I continue to be honored to lead the NCTA at a time when we are beginning to realize the dream of the North Country National Scenic Trail. This is just the beginning! Thank you for your part in this incredible organization.

Larry Bell was the recipient of the NCTA's Blue Blazes Benefactor Award in 2021, which recognizes individuals and families who demonstrate a vision and generosity for the Association and the Trail it serves.

Celebration 2022

Walker, Minn. | October 5-9

Celebration is an annual gathering for the North Country Trail Community. All are welcome to join this multiple-day event with ample opportunities to explore the North Country National Scenic Trail, attend skills workshops and inspiring presentations, and socialize.

A detailed schedule and lodging information are available at northcountrytrail.org/celebration.

Registration will open June 14.



TRAIL
WORK

Routing a National Scenic Trail

THE BEGINNINGS

BY TOM GILBERT,
FORMER NPS
SUPERINTENDENT OF
THE NORTH COUNTRY
NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) that walkers, hikers, backpackers, and skiers enjoy today was conceived in the mid-1960s. It was proposed by the U.S Forest Service (USFS) to connect the National Forests in our northern tier of states that lay between the Appalachian Trail in Vermont and the Lewis and Clark Trail in North Dakota. If there was an individual who originated the idea for the NCNST, that detail seems to have been lost to history.

The Trail today owes its existence to the many dedicated volunteers who have built and maintained it in cooperation with public land-managing agencies and generous private landowners. Who decides where each section is built? That is a complex question. This article is a first installment in answering it.

The study reports and planning documents that have been produced in connection with the Trail have shown variations in the overall route. The first known map of the Trail is in the 1965 USFS report, proposing what would eventually become three National Scenic Trails (NSTs): the Pacific Crest Trail, the Continental Divide Trail, and what the USFS then called the "Northern Country Trail."

The USFS report was that agency's contribution to the Nationwide Trails Study led by the former Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior. That effort resulted in the 1966 report, "Trails for America," and accompanying proposed federal legislation to foster the creation of a "nationwide system of trails," which today is known as the National Trails System. The North Country Trail was one of the potential long-distance trails described in the report. The map of the Trail, however, diverged in several areas from the map in the USFS report.

When the National Trails System Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Johnson in 1968, the North Country Trail was listed as one of 14 potential NSTs to be studied. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation conducted the feasibility study from 1971 to 1975 and recommended the Trail be established. The study report included an overall map of the route and more detailed, individual state maps. The report stated that the line on the maps represented the centerline of a 10-mile-wide corridor in which the Trail should be established.

Five years later, in 1980, Congress amended the National Trails System Act to authorize the development of the North Country National Scenic Trail under the administration of the Secretary of the Interior, which was delegated to the National Park Service (NPS). The language in the amendment described the route of the Trail as "following the approximate route" shown on the one-page "Vicinity Map" in the 1975 study report. That map was not very detailed, so the law provided a lot of latitude and flexibility.

The law directed the administering agency (NPS) to prepare a "Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use"

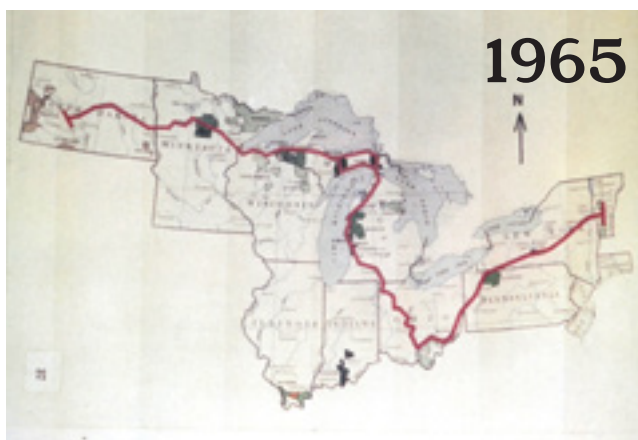
of the Trail. That plan provided the opportunity to add more specificity to the route of the Trail, like where it should be constructed. We did our best, but we were hampered by another detail of the amendment which authorized the Trail.

The National Trails System Act states that the “Secretary [of the Interior] shall select the rights-of-way” for the Trail and “shall publish notice thereof of the availability of appropriate maps ... in the Federal Register.” Right-of-way is a legal land description term, and implies the selection of the exact tracts of land that would be protected for the Trail and on which the Trail would be built. While the Act provides authority for the administering agency to acquire such lands, the amendment authorizing the North Country Trail prohibited the federal government from spending funds to acquire lands

for the Trail. Without the ability to acquire lands, it would have been futile to define rights-of-way for the Trail. So, the Comprehensive Plan included maps with as much specificity as seemed reasonable.

Consequently, many details of where the Trail should be built were left to the future and other decision-makers. The Comprehensive Plan contains guidance on how those decisions can be made in the context of the varying authorities, prerogatives, and autonomies of the many trail partners and stakeholders.

References: North Country Trail Handbook, 2019. Page 20 outlines objectives for where we locate the Trail. Page 23 explains the NPS Optimal Location Review (OLR). (northcountrytrail.org/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center/trail-management)



Notice the variations in the route in the accompanying maps from the 1965 USFS report, 1966 Trails for America, 1975 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation feasibility study report, and 1982 NPS Comprehensive Plan. In western Michigan, for instance, there is wide variation in the route of the Trail relative to the Lake Michigan shoreline.



TRAIL
WORK



Rerouting a National Scenic Trail

BY VALERIE BADER, NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL OPERATIONS,
AND NCTA REGIONAL TRAIL COORDINATORS

There are many present-day reasons for the route of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) to change. Oftentimes, volunteers, NCTA staff, and land managers have identified a more sustainable or permanently protected location for the Trail. The Trail may be moved for improved safety by relocating from the shoulder of a busy road. A reroute can prevent resource damage, where, say, the Trail was originally laid out too close to a stream bank. It might be moved to improve the hiker experience, routing the Trail closer to a feature of interest along the Trail. Land ownership is another major factor in rerouting the Trail. The NCTA is always on the lookout for key properties on the NCNST route to be listed for sale, so we can work with partners to secure a protected trail corridor. Additionally, hundreds of existing miles of the NCNST remain on private land without a permanent easement. That means those Trail segments are susceptible to change, should land ownership exchange hands or the current landowner wishes change.

Staff and volunteers strive to maintain the vision for the NCNST that was laid out in the Comprehensive Plan decades ago, while making necessary adjustments for the changing landscape and current use and management of the Trail.

Top right: NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Matt Davis (left), NCTA Arrowhead Chapter President Michael Carson (left), and volunteer Cavour Johnson (photographer) scout the Suomi Hills Trail in the Chippewa National Forest, north of Grand Rapids, Minn.

Photo by Cavour Johnson



Arrowhead Reroute, Minnesota

Matt Davis: Approximately 600 new NCNST miles will replace a 100-mile segment of the original [planned] route that was never built in northeastern Minnesota. About 400 of this new NCNST mileage is on existing trails: the Superior Hiking Trail, Border Route Trail, and Kekekabic Trail. Three NCTA Chapters are currently working on the 200 new miles. The new Trail will be built within the Chippewa and Superior National Forests, and on a mix of county, state, industrial forest owner (UPM-Blandin), and private lands.

In the 1980s, the NCTA first had to convince the National Park Service (NPS) that they should consider an alternative route, after the Superior Hiking Trail was conceived from Duluth up the North Shore of Lake Superior. The NPS North Country National Scenic Trail office (NPS-NOCO) staff then studied this large reroute - I'd say one of the largest in the history of the National Trails System - and published their Northeastern Minnesota Route Assessment and Environmental

Assessment in 2004. NPS leadership in Omaha decided that this significant change needed Congress' blessing. After that came the fun part of getting Congress to take action with legislation to enact the reroute. That was finally accomplished in March 2019.

Since then, NCTA staff and volunteers with the Star of the North, Arrowhead, and Kekekabic Trail Chapters have been working alongside local partners and NPS to develop projects (e.g. the 18-mile Tioga Beach to Highway 6 project, which is underway) and to identify potential route options elsewhere.

This giant project's partnership list includes, but is not necessarily limited to: Senators, Representatives, Chambers of Commerce, businesses and business groups, counties, cities, townships, and nonprofits. Now we're working with land management partners, regulators, and potential funders.



Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park and Ottawa National Forest Reroute, Michigan (Upper Peninsula)

Kenny Wawsczyk: The NCNST is currently located in the southern part of this iconic state park, where it is consistently wet and difficult to maintain. A new, nearly 4.5-mile route will take hikers through the heart of "the Porkies," passing various overlooks like Lake of the Clouds, and by waterfalls such as Trap Falls. Ultimately, it's where a National Scenic Trail should be! The official opening is slated for May-June 2022. The new route will tie into existing trails within the state park and ultimately become a 23.6-mile reroute.

This new route includes a 70-foot suspension bridge over the Little Iron River. This construction was contracted out. Various crews assisted the NCTA Ni-Miikanaake Chapter volunteers with construction of new Trail,

Above: A view of the iconic Lake of the Clouds in Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park.

Photo by Kenny Wawsczyk

including the Superior Watershed Partnership and Land Conservancy, SEEDS EcoCorps, YouthWorks, NCTA's Next Generation Coalition, and Ottawa National Forest staff.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources provided funding and oversight for the bridge. The NCTA also worked on the route with local state park and Ottawa National Forest staff. Patience, persistence, scouting, construction, signage, and now maintenance have been provided by the Ni-Miikanaake Chapter!



White Oak Road Reroute, Pennsylvania

Photo by
Tom Moutsos

Tom Moutsos: This particular reroute is from White Oak Road to Cherry Run, north-northeast of Clarion, Pa. The original Trail ran along a ridge, but the landowner requested we move it closer to the bottom of the hill along Toby Creek because he plans to build a cabin along the ridge. This will be about 1.5 miles of Trail rerouted.

To kick off this project, National Park Service staff - Steph Liguori in particular - performed a compliance review and approved the reroute. This took about six months. Dave Galbreath, NCTA Clarion County Chapter President, and I flagged the final route. Clarion County Chapter volunteers started trail building work in early September 2021. As of March 2022, most of the corridor for the route has been cleared, and about three-quarters of the trail tread has been roughed in. A few bridges will need to be installed and a few sections of the Trail need to be realigned.

Continued on page 14



TRAIL
WORK



Rome to Pixley Falls Reroute, New York

Stephanie Campbell: Eight miles of new Trail will be constructed from Rome, N.Y. to Clark Hill State Forest and Pixley Falls State Park, eventually eliminating around 18 miles of roadwalk on a busy highway.

NCTA Central New York Chapter volunteers and I worked with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) staff to scout and flag potential routes to gain land manager approvals.

As of March 2022, the route has mostly been scouted, flagged, and pre-approved. State and federal environmental compliance work is being done now, and necessary permits are being filed. After compliance and permitting, trail construction can begin - volunteers are needed!

Above: NCTA Central New York Chapter leader Steve Kinne (left), NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Stephanie Campbell (right), and NYS DEC staff member Scott Healy scout the Clark Hill State Forest in N.Y.

Photo by Stephanie Campbell

Clean Work for the Trail

BY KENNY WAWSCZYK, NCTA REGIONAL
TRAIL COORDINATOR FOR MICHIGAN

Working on the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST), there's an immediate vision of dirty clothes, sweat, and tools with names that only some people know - I'm talking about you, McLeod and Pulaski. Physical construction of the trail tread, clearing the corridor with chainsaws, handsaws, and loppers is hard work. It's fun for some, but tiring for everyone. Yet, there are so many more opportunities to give back to the Trail without ever picking up an actual tool.

There are 29 volunteer Chapters across the Trail, all with various leadership positions. Leadership primarily consists of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, but some Chapters offer more. All of those roles require a unique skillset that has nothing to do with building or maintaining trail.

There are also a variety of other volunteer roles, both at the national level and within Chapters, that may be completed by a single person or a small committee. Marketing is a great example, as we all know communication is key. Managing local level outreach through newsletters, media outlets, and the NCTA online Events Calendar is a major role. You've likely seen volunteers behind a booth at a community event, or holding their own event to promote all the great things they do for the Trail. All of this needs planning and participation.

If being in a leadership role doesn't appeal to you quite yet, there are plenty of other ways to be involved. Do you like to cook? At trail workdays, there is nothing better than a good lunch to refuel or a meal afterwards to socialize and replenish.

High-quality photos and videos are always in demand. They complete a story and highlight volunteers wonderfully. If photography is your thing, there's a job for you.

Perhaps our biggest task is ahead of us. We have nearly 3,200 miles of off-road Trail established, but the total length of the NCNST is around 4,800 miles. This means we have a lot to do in trying to get the remaining 1,600+ miles off the road. If you're comfortable with talking to neighbors or knowledgeable about land protection, then I'd dare to say that every Chapter would invite you to participate in their goal to "complete" the NCNST.

Passion in advocacy, inclusivity, history, mapping... What else am I missing? There's absolutely a role for you if you have interest in giving back to the Trail. Reach out to your local Chapter or the NCTA through a Volunteer Interest Form, or see what local events are available, such as monthly meetings or guided hikes. Start a conversation, find your niche. You don't have to actually get dirty to do work for the Trail.

Find Chapter contact information at northcountrytrail.org/chapters, the Volunteer Interest Form at northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-interest-form, and events at northcountrytrail.org/events.

NCNST Development in Vermont

The Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) is poised to begin construction of new North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) route in Vermont. A 0.3-mile segment will be located within a narrow strip of National Forest System (NFS) land just south of State Route 125 and just west of the Oak Ridge Trailhead. This will connect a planned route, located on private land from the west.

John Derick, volunteer for the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) and champion for the NCNST in Vermont, worked with private landowners to help secure access in this area.

"I enjoyed hearing the stories and learning the history of ownership of these parcels," said John.

Existing recreation trail corridors, which will be used for NCNST designation, are also slated for rehabilitation and reconstruction to provide sustainable trail during all seasons of use. This list includes the Horseshoe Trail, Goshen Dam Trail, Sucker Brook Historic Trail, and the Sucker Brook Trail - totaling approximately 4.4 miles. Within the National Forest, the NCNST will originate in the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area and end within the Joseph Battell Wilderness at the Long Trail. The NCNST will also utilize the Oak Ridge Trail from its trailhead adjacent to State Route 125 in Middlebury to the Mount Moosalamoo Trail. From that point, the Trail will continue into the campground.

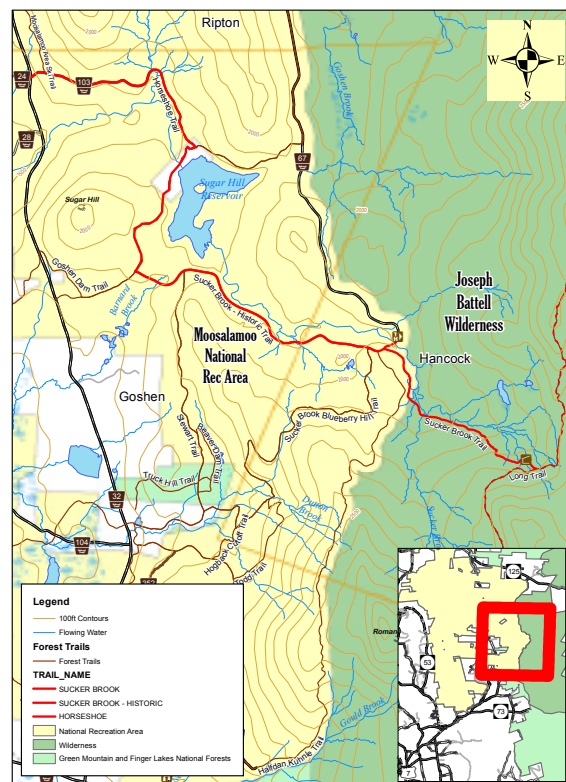
The Green Mountain Club (GMC) will be leading the physical trail building effort, via their cooperative agreement with the GMNF. The GMC manages over 250 miles of trail within the GMNF as part of the Long Trail System, including the Long Trail and its side trails, and the Appalachian Trail. The GMC will field its professional trail crews on new tread construction, and manage machinery-based restoration and reconstruction of existing trails.

"We are excited to welcome the NCNST into Vermont," said Keegan Tierney, Director of Field Programs for the Green Mountain Club. "As an organization that believes in collaborative trail management in an effort to engage the widest spectrum of trail users, we are excited for this new partnership with the NCTA and the NCNST."

The Oak Ridge trailhead, adjacent to State Route 125 in Middlebury, will also be reconstructed. The parking lot here

currently accommodates only a few vehicles and does not allow adequate space for turning vehicles around. The reconstruction will improve visitor experience and safety.

"Staff of the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes



National Forests are thrilled to expand our National Trails System network with a NCNST designation in Vermont," said Holly Knox, Recreation Program Manager for Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests. "We are grateful for the incredible partnership network it takes to manage and maintain our National Scenic Trails, and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the NCTA and the National Park Service in both New York and Vermont now. The trail junction of two National Scenic Trails and one National Recreation Trail will be a truly unique location that we hope to celebrate!"

This map does not encompass the entire area referenced in the article, but it provides a peek into the process.

Photo by U.S. Forest Service, Green Mountain National Forest



Photo by Stephanie Campbell

These updates were provided by the U.S. Forest Service (Eastern Region, Green Mountain National Forest), NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Stephanie Campbell, and other sources listed within the article. To get involved in NCNST development in Vermont, submit a Volunteer Interest Form today at northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-interest-form.



TRAIL
USE



On November 3, 2021, Ryan “Constantine” Bunting and Dana “Magpie” Burkett completed a thru-hike of the North Country National Scenic Trail. It took them just over 186 days to complete. Constantine has now thru-hiked all 11 National Scenic Trails in America - the North Country Trail was his last remaining. This is the second installment of their interview with the NCTA. The first was featured in the Winter 2022 issue of the North Star. Additional content will appear in following North Star issues and NCTA online communications.

Above: Best Friends Forever on the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Photo by Ryan Bunting

NCTA: Do you two typically hike together?

Constantine: Since we met in 2019, we’ve typically hiked together. We are both extremely passionate about hiking and generally, when either one of us suggests a trail that they are interested in, naturally the other gets excited as well. Hikers like hiking and we are no different. That being said, there are instances in which we do trails separately and with other partners, or trail family - sometimes because of time scheduling and sometimes because a certain trail might not appeal to the other. From 2016 to 2018, I hiked with different trail families and hiking partners until we [Magpie and I] met, and from 2016 to 2018, Magpie did the same.

Magpie: Constantine’s goal of doing all 11 National Scenic Trails didn’t necessarily appeal to me, so while we like to hike together, I decided to skip some of the

more obscure and less-developed trails. My work is less flexible than his too, so sometimes I have to miss out on trails I would like to do because of timing. There are some trails in the future that I’m interested in and he’s not - the Colorado Trail comes to mind. He had a rough go of it on the Continental Divide Trail, so I’ll most likely be hiking the San Juans* solo in the next year or two. I have a higher tolerance for cold and solitude than he does, and until we met, I’d mostly hiked alone. I enjoy it quite a bit, actually, so we’ll be sure to make time for short solo projects in addition to hiking together.

NCTA: What was your most used or most valued/important piece of gear? What was your comfort (non-necessity) item?

Constantine: My most valued piece of gear is always my balaclava: A face covering to keep me warm, keep the bugs out of my face, and shelter

*The San Juans are a rugged range in the Rocky Mountains in south-west Colorado and northwestern New Mexico.



my irritated nose and mouth when it's a dusty day. As far as my comfort item, it would probably be the rock I carried the entire way. It is painted like Patrick, the starfish from *SpongeBob SquarePants*. My friend found it back on the Continental Divide Trail and I have carried it ever since. It always makes me smile. I also carried Spam for all 4,800 miles. The amount of times it melted and reformed was constantly amusing.

Magpie: I'm a pretty practical person, so I don't really carry a comfort item. Maybe a comb? I've been known to pack out a travel-sized bottle of hair conditioner when I know I won't be able to buy it in the next town, but I consider that almost a necessity. My hair is very long, thick, and wavy, and it's painful to pick the mats out of it. If I don't take care of it in town, it can become impossible to braid, and then I'm stuck with a big, heavy ponytail smacking me in the face. The best piece of gear we carried on this hike was our double sleep system: a two-person sleeping quilt and double-sized pad. That made it so much warmer than sleeping alone, and we got to cuddle!

NCTA: What was your favorite section of the NCNST and why? Which was the most challenging, mentally and/or physically, and why?

Constantine: Okay, this is far too difficult of a question. To answer this would be like trying to answer why we love hiking. There are just too many reasons and answers, it's impossible to contain it into one. We loved Vermont because it was the beginning. We loved New York because it gave us the feeling that we were fully in the hike. We loved Pennsylvania for its beautiful forests. We loved Ohio for its continual effort to test us mentally. We loved Michigan for the people. We loved Wisconsin for the colors. We loved Minnesota for the wilderness. We loved North Dakota for the reflection. That being said, however, it is easy to say which area was the most mentally challenging:

Constantine's Patrick rock appeared for a photo op in Michigan.

Photo by Ryan Bunting

the area around Duluth (Minn.). Coming into that area, for a few days, we had not been hiking the mileage we wanted to. It was beginning to get cold and late in the hiking season, and we still had so many more miles to finish. We began to doubt not if we would finish, but how. It was mental gymnastics for days until we stopped, took an unplanned rest day, and reset our mentality. From there on, it was wonderful. But that period was very, very hard.

Magpie: "Loved" might be a strong word to describe Ohio. I respect Ohio. I fear Ohio. I kneel and tremble in the face of Ohio's mighty and impassive visage. Okay, I'm exaggerating a little bit, but Ohio was certainly the most challenging section for me. It's so long. It's smack-dab in the middle, so you're hitting it in the height of summer no matter which direction you go. And because you're following the Buckeye Trail for most of it, the Trail frequently takes you the "wrong" way for the NCNST. The Wilderness Loop in particular was a mental challenge, because you spend nearly 200 miles going east, then south, then due north, only to end up a mere (approximately) 10 miles west of where you started. It makes sense as a section of the Buckeye Trail, but it feels a little bit pointless and demoralizing when you're hiking as fast as you can to get west and end up going nowhere. I also despise being hot and sweaty, and southern Ohio in summer is the very definition of sweltering. Our sleeping pad revealed itself to be defective in that section, so I wasn't getting much sleep, which didn't help. Suffice it to say, I did not enjoy that part very much. The southern portion of the Buckeye Trail doesn't make much sense for the North Country Trail. You're basically in West Virginia, so it's not exactly "north," is it?

As for my favourite part though, it's a three-way tie between the Trap Hills / Porcupine Mountains of the UP [Mich.], the Superior Hiking Trail [Minn.], and North Dakota. Michigan's upper peninsula is just ridiculously beautiful, and after the challenge of finding legal campsites in lower Michigan and Ohio, the flexibility of camping here was wonderful. It provides a feeling of freedom I'm often seeking on trail, which is easier to find on more wilderness-focused hikes. The Superior Hiking Trail is great, and I'm sure I don't have to explain to the North Country Trail Community what makes it so fabulous. It's simply a world-class hiking trail in its own right, and we hit it right at the peak of the fall colours. North Dakota



TRAIL
USE



Peak fall colors
in Minnesota.

Photo by
Ryan Bunting

might be a bit surprising as a top pick, but the flat, empty landscape means you can just put your feet on autopilot and let your mind wander, and the skies at night are spectacular. There's no light pollution to speak of, so you can see the Milky Way Galaxy with its billions of stars. It's akin to being in a desert, and I love desert hiking most of all. Wisconsin was the real sleeper hit of the NCNST, and Pennsylvania was unexpectedly beautiful. And, and, and... I could go on. Almost every state has a place that was my favourite. Almost.

NCTA: What's something you saw or experienced that made you smile?

Constantine: Every day we smiled. Smiled with the joy of the wind. Smiled at the freedom. Smiled at the noises of the animals. Smiled through the pain in our shoulders and legs. If we stopped smiling, we would no longer be hiking - what would be the point? We smiled together, often, and because we could. We smiled when we were cold, wet, hungry, and tired - even on those days, there were an infinite amount of reasons to smile.

Magpie: I'll echo what he said, but add one specific anecdote: We were walking through Soudan, Minn. and came across a bunch of kids riding their bikes. I think they were about 10 years old. One came up to us and started asking questions. "Are you traveling? What trail is that?" We explained to him what the NCNST was, that it stretches 4,800 miles, and that we

had hiked all the way from Vermont. "On foot? You don't have a car? That's the MOST INSANE THING I'VE EVER HEARD!" Then he rode off to tell his mom. It gave us a good laugh! When we tell adults about our trip, I can tell they're thinking that too, but they won't say it out loud. Kids are honest - hilariously so.

Visit elevenskys.com to learn more about Constantine and Magpie's adventures and business, and to read their blog post of their NCNST thru-hike. Plan your next adventure today at northcountrytrail.org/plan-your-hike.

Buckeye Trail Wilderness Loop

The Wilderness Loop, consisting of the Buckeye Trail's Road Fork and Whipple sections, is one of the most remote and least densely populated sections of the Trail in Ohio. A large part of the loop passes through the Wayne National Forest's Marietta Unit, and crosses land that was untouched by the glaciers of the last ice age. The land here is dissected by numerous streams, and features numerous impressive rock formations and lush, wild forest. Any intrepid hiker should be prepared for many climbs and descents.

Our Trail Community also welcomes the Buckeye Trail Association's newest volunteer collective: the Wilderness Chapter. Connect with them via Facebook, email, or Meetup at buckeyetrail.org/chapters.php.

Learn more about this section of the Buckeye Trail/NCNST at buckeyetrail.org/maps.php.



Valerie Bader,
NCTA Director of Trail
Operations,
on the Archers
Fork Loop
(Buckeye
Trail/NCNST)
in the Marietta
Unit of the
Wayne
National
Forest.

Photo by
Andrew
Bashaw

One Step at a Time

BY RYAN BOWLES, NORTHWESTERN OHIO
RAILS-TO-TRAILS ASSOCIATION (NORTA)



Lorie and Tigger, after completing the 2021 Hike 100 Challenge.

Photo by
Deb Mattes

Lorie Shaw was unhealthy. She couldn't breathe without oxygen support. She was in and out of the hospital, sometimes twice in a single week. She couldn't walk to her mailbox. She knew something had to change.

Lorie's friendship with Deb Mattes has lasted over 20 years, beginning with their shared work in 4-H. Deb loves Lorie dearly. It was a struggle for her to watch Lorie try to make changes, as Lorie was unsure what was right for her. She didn't know how to sustain her choices. Deb once dragged Lorie on a 5K fundraiser for 4-H, but Lorie only made it about 150 feet before she had to rely on her power wheelchair.

Deb is passionate about the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). She is an active volunteer with both the NCTA Chief Baw Beese Chapter and the Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association (NORTA). She was determined to get Lorie active and healthy, and the NCNST offered a great opportunity to achieve that goal. Deb is a force; if she decided Lorie was going to start hiking the Trail to get healthy, then Lorie was not going to refuse.

They started on March 17, 2020, on a paved section of the NCNST in northwestern Ohio, along the Wabash Cannonball Trail in Oak Openings Metropark. Lorie would walk a little, sit a while, walk a little, sit a while. They wandered more than five miles

Lorie and Tigger, early in Lorie's NCNST journey.

Photo by
Deb Mattes



Lorie volunteers to blaze the NCNST in Maumee State Forest.

Photo by
Deb Mattes



Deb (left), Willow, Deb (seated), and Tigger on the NCNST.

Photo provided by
Deb Mattes

together. Lorie logged about a quarter of a mile. It was a start.

Lorie and Deb revisited this section about once a week. Sometimes the hardest part for Lorie was just staying motivated. But with Deb's encouragement, slowly but steadily, Lorie was able to walk more and get pushed less. When she was able to walk two half-mile stretches consecutively in one trip, Lorie realized she could do this.

It was hard. Lorie couldn't speak much while she focused on walking, so Deb did all the talking, teaching Lorie about the NCNST and the nature around them. Lorie listened and walked, and fell in love with the Trail. Hearing spring peepers was a highlight. She even loved when she got rained on (even though Deb promised it wasn't supposed to rain).

"Every time you hike, you experience something new," said Lorie. "Purple lupine blooming in Oak Openings. Gathering buckeyes. Fall colors. Stepping on a snake."

By October 15, seven months from when they started, Lorie had hiked 108.5 miles on the NCNST and earned her Hike 100 Challenge patch and certificate. She can now hike more than two miles on primitive (unpaved) trail without sitting. She's lost over 100 pounds and she attributes at least 50 of that purely to hiking on the NCNST. She was able to eliminate some medications and cut back others. She was able to get back into one of her favorite activities: Training dogs for dog shows. And walking to the mailbox? Easy.

Lorie celebrated all of this by giving back to the Trail. She and Deb spent a day blazing a section of new NCNST in Maumee State Forest, which she now calls "our section" of the Trail.

"The Trail has given me so much over the last year," said Lorie, "and I was so thrilled to give back something."

What healing have you found on the NCNST or through the Hike 100 Challenge? Share your story with us, when you submit your completion form at northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge, or on social media with @northcountrytrail and #hike100nct.



TRAIL
USE

Apple Pie's Ninth Helping

At the end of February 2022, Arlette "Apple Pie" Laan completed an end-to-end hike of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). This took her 298 days. She has now completed end-to-end hikes of nine National Scenic Trails. The following interview was conducted in January 2022, while she was still on-trail.

NCTA: Please introduce yourself!

Apple Pie: My trail name is Apple Pie, as I love desserts and pastries. My personal motto is: "Don't let life or the dessert tray pass you by!" I'm originally from the Netherlands but my current home base is Lowell, Massachusetts. When I'm not hiking or working as a guide in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, I make dolls out of socks that I sell online when I have a bunch in stock. They can be fun little mascots for hikers or just happy characters to cheer you up.

NCTA: What does your long distance hiking resume look like?

Apple Pie: I have hiked eight of the National Scenic Trails, missing only the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (Wisc.) and Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail (Tenn., Ala., and Miss.) after I complete this one. I've also hiked the Long Trail (Vt.), the Cohos Trail (N.H.), the Te Araroa Trail (New Zealand), the Hayduke Trail (Utah and Ariz.), and the Grand Enchantment Trail (Ariz. and N.M.). In Nepal, I've hiked the Annapurna Circuit and two-thirds of the Three Passes Trek. In Spain, we hiked the Gran Senda de Málaga, and in Patagonia (South America), we hiked the Q Circuit around Torres del Paine. We were working on the Pieterpad in the Netherlands but had to leave when the pandemic started (2020).

NCTA: When did you first learn of the North Country National Scenic Trail and why did you choose it?

Apple Pie: I first learned about the Trail when I started looking into all the National Scenic Trails, and I chose it because I've set out to complete all 11 of them. I set foot on the North Country Trail for the first time in April 2021, interested in exploring it.

NCTA: Can you summarize your journey?

Apple Pie: I started early April (2021) in Defiance, Ohio. I hiked to the Eastern Terminus in Vermont, then flew to North Dakota. I am currently hiking back to Defiance to complete my end-to-end hike. I hope to finish before March. Big celebrations along the hike have been every time I crossed a state boundary. I celebrated Thanksgiving with trail angels, and Christmas and the New Year on the Trail with my husband Rich or "Greenleaf," who joined me on this hike in Marquette, Mich.



Above: Apple Pie and Greenleaf were nothing but smiles as they walked into Defiance, Ohio, completing Apple Pie's NCNST end-to-end hike in February 2022.

Photo by
Arlette Laan

NCTA: Do you typically hike alone or with companions?

Apple Pie: Sometimes I hike solo, sometimes with partners. It depends on the trail and if I can get someone to go with me. This one (NCNST) has been mostly solo, with the exceptions of my friend Roberta “Little Bird” Smith who hiked the Superior Hiking Trail section with me, and my husband Rich has been hiking with me since Marquette, Mich. In Michigan’s upper peninsula (UP), wonderful people helped me through the McCormick Wilderness and a few day-hiked some sections with me, which was wonderful.

NCTA: What were the most challenging moments of preparation for this adventure?

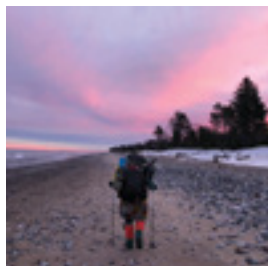
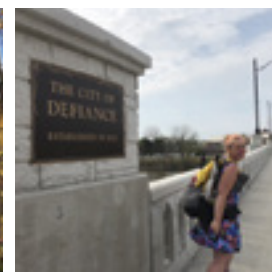
Apple Pie: The hardest part was figuring out resupply [logistics] and maps for some sections. Brian Tanzman, an NCNST end-to-ender, put together an excellent spreadsheet with town information for most of the Trail, which is linked in a Facebook group.

NCTA: Which NCNST sections have been your favorites so far and which have been the most challenging?

Apple Pie: I really enjoyed Wisconsin. The Trail was exceptionally well-maintained and lovely. I also had great weather there. The big sweeping vistas of North Dakota were amazing, and both Minnesota and Michigan have beautiful scenery. The most challenging sections were the Kekekabic Trail and Border Route Trail sections (Minn.). I was pretty emotionally depleted and feeling somewhat homesick, and I was having plantar fasciitis issues. I was also carrying more gear and food again so my body was adjusting to that weight, on top of these sections being tougher trail to hike. I experienced some winter storm challenges in Michigan’s UP, which made for slow going at times.

NCTA: What has made you smile?

Apple Pie: The friendliness and hospitality of the trail angels on the NCNST have been really amazing and filled me with happiness. The big, stormy skies of North Dakota, though sometimes scary, filled me with wonder. The bright fall colors in Minnesota definitely made me smile. The views from the Superior Hiking Trail and Border Route Trail were stellar. The beautiful, wintery landscape in the UP, particularly Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, also rank high on my list.



NCTA: What’s your favorite way to pass the time while on the Trail?

Apple Pie: When the scenery and weather are good, I like to take it all in and soak it up. When I’m on a roadwalk with less than desirable weather, I tend to listen to music and podcasts. The daily routine is simple: Wake up, eat breakfast, pack up, hike, and stop for lunch. (Though in the winter, it’s lunch on-the-go because I get too cold if we take a long break.) Then I hike some more, set up camp, eat, and sleep.

NCTA: What is your most used or most valued/important piece of gear? What’s your main comfort, non-necessity item?

Apple Pie: I loved my umbrella for the heat and rainy roadwalks. It saved my sanity many times. Otherwise, my tent is my safe haven; my little home away from home. The sock doll I carry is a comfort item. When you get really lonely, it’s nice to have something to cuddle with and to see a smile, even if it’s one I stitched on myself.



Photos by
Arlette Laan

Sock doll “Miss Red”
with Apple Pie.

Photo by
Arlette Laan



TRAIL
USE

Apple Pie and Little Bird on the Superior Hiking Trail.

Photo by
Arlette Laan



NCTA: Are there any special relationships you've built during your time on the Trail?

Apple Pie: Most of the trail angels who have helped me out are now real-life friends - from social media followers to NCTA Chapter volunteers. Sue and Bethany from the Ironwood (Mich.) area went above and beyond to help me, and Sue even hiked some not-so-fun sections with me. I love her for that! Nancy in Marquette (Mich.) let me cry on her shoulder at the end of a tough day, and put a blanket over me when I was snoozing on her couch. Odin Wallace and my buddy "Troll" offered some amazing car support and company in Minnesota and North Dakota, respectively. Just recently, Barbara and Pat, who hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2018, hosted us for a week and a half so we could rest and hike the Trail with daypacks on. Our gear was able to dry out and we were able to get our energy back. My good friend "Little Bird" joined me on the Superior Hiking Trail when I was really low and in need of company. She restored my spirits and I was able to carry on. Lastly, without my husband "Greenleaf," I wouldn't have been able to get this far and be so close to finishing. True winter camping isn't something I'm able to handle by myself. So many special moments and people. I will treasure those forever.

NCTA: Could you offer advice or encouragement for others considering a long distance hike on the North Country Trail?

Apple Pie: I definitely advise you to hike it in sections. To attempt a thru-hike, you have to be a pretty fast hiker or you end up hiking in winter like I did. I was always acutely aware of how many miles I was supposed to be doing to beat winter, and with the early heat and humidity, I struggled with that. I think if you hike it in sections, you'll get more enjoyment out of it and feel less stressed.

NCTA: Anything else you'd like to share that we didn't ask about?

Apple Pie: I'm just grateful I've been able to make it this far, to see the beauty of the changing seasons, and to experience the kindness in the people along the way.

Learn more about Apple Pie - trail journals, professional guiding, social media, and sock doll creations - at arlettelaan.com.

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When you buy gear from the North Country Trail Association Trail Shop, you are making a direct and positive impact on the development, maintenance, protection, and promotion of the North Country National Scenic Trail. Thank you!

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HIKE 100

"Before I retired in 2016, I needed two knee replacements, and basically couldn't walk much. In 2020, my husband and I made it our goal to hike through all the preserves in southwest Michigan. In 2021, we made it our goal to hike 100 miles on the NCNST, and what a joy! We began January 2 and on August 15, I completed my 100! I'll do this every year!" (Jennifer Stell) Learn more, sign up, and share your adventures at northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge.





JEDI Mini-Grant Success: Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee awarded a mini-grant to the Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching (BOAT) to attend the Michigan Ice Fest in the Upper Peninsula (UP) this February. BOAT partnered with Detroit Outdoors, who, alongside at least five additional Detroit organizations, recruited a diverse audience of Detroiters to attend the program. Of the 28 participants, 24 identified as people of color.

This group, who normally recreates in the Detroit area, was provided with an introductory experience to the UP, the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST), ice climbing, and other winter activities. They successfully navigated blizzards, sub-zero temperatures, and long days exposed to the elements.

"Trails connect us to the land and all the living things around it," said Garrett Dempsey, Detroit Outdoors Program Director. "They trace our relationship with a place through

the generations. NCTA support for the Ice Fest trip helped us introduce a wintery wonderland to an enthusiastic group of Detroiters. Included in that group was a family of six. Their four children, ages five to 12, tromped, rolled, and slid along the snow covered trails. Generations of users and stewards of the North Country National Scenic Trail and adjacent lands prepared that space for those youth. The NCTA helped these youth experience moments of awe that they will remember forever."

On Day 1, participants gathered in Detroit. To plan for the trip, they were oriented to activities such as ice climbing, dog sledding, and exploring the Trail. Most of the rest of the day was spent on the bus, en route to Munising. The next day, all participants spent a day ice climbing as a part of the Michigan Ice Fest. During breaks in the day, several participants ascended the wall to see the NCNST just above it.

Above: Participants were able to interact with ice climbers from around the country, sharing time at the walls just below the NCNST.

Photo by
Bus for Outdoor Access
and Teaching (BOAT)

Continued on page 24



TRAIL
USE



Top right: Kyle Chandler ice climbing below the NCNST.

Top left: Ice climbing observation at Munising Falls.

Bottom left: Participants on "Big Red," BOAT's bus that holds enough seating and camping gear for 35 people.

Bottom right: Candace and Cidney Calloway of Detroit enjoy their first ice climbing trip. Candace is the Detroit Leader for Outdoor Afro.

After a drive through Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore - which hosts over 40 miles of the NCNST - to a facility east of Munising, participants spent Day 3 dog sledding. That evening, an educational program focused on the NCNST. Day 4 was spent hiking various sections of the NCNST, including Valley Spur, Munising Falls, and Sand Point Marsh - all around the Munising area. Interpretation on local winter and aquatic ecology was also offered during this exploratory day.

Participants became educated on a number of topics, including differences between the National Park Service and other land management agencies, the National Trails System, and what makes the North Country National Scenic Trail unique. Using NCTA maps, they were encouraged to understand where and how the Trail can be accessed in areas of regions they frequent, specifically southern Michigan.

"It's so important to make sure that the programs we run are accessible, and help people see themselves in outdoor spaces with peers and mentors from their community," stated Micah Leinbach, BOAT Executive Director. "While our trips are one time, the relationships they spur endure - we're grateful to the NCTA for helping make this possible."

Learn more about BOAT at theboatbus.com and Detroit Outdoors at detroitoutdoors.org.

Photos by

Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching (BOAT)

JEDI Mini-Grants

As part of the North Country Trail Association's (NCTA) commitment to just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive (JEDI) trail access and experiences, the NCTA offers **JEDI Mini-Grants**. These mini-grants of up to \$1,000 are awarded on a rolling basis, and are intended to support JEDI-focused affinity groups or individuals leading experiences on the North Country Trail. Learn more at northcountrytrail.org/jedi or contact jedigrants@northcountrytrail.org.

Carrying It Forward on the North Country Trail



Joan Young and David Snoek pose with the sign from the original NCTA Headquarters at the Birch Grove Schoolhouse in White Cloud, Mich.

Photo provided by
Joan Young

BY JOAN YOUNG

Many of you are aware that I am attempting a North Country National Scenic Trail thru-hike, hoping to complete all the Trail within 12 months. I'm now 1,400 miles into this venture and have entered my third state. I'll probably be in state number four by the time this article is printed.

I like to think that I am carrying the "idea" of the Trail forward. I've been involved with the NCNST long enough that I have gained something of a reputation for being part of the institutional memory. I remember most of the founders of the North Country Trail Association (which was before I discovered the Trail). When people say, "But there is so much roadwalk," I can reply with certainty that there is much more off-road trail, and I can point out exactly where those changes are. When people comment on the use of paved trail, I can say, "Yes, but it's so much better than being on the road, and it's a good option until a better route can be found."

David Snoek of Hudsonville, Mich. hiked with me for two days early in this quest. He and I delivered (by car) the midpoint-of-the-Trail sign that used to be mounted on the

gable of the Birch Grove Schoolhouse in White Cloud, Mich. - the original NCTA headquarters - to the current NCTA headquarters in Lowell, Mich. for preservation and display.

One of the highlights of this hike occurred just 10 days into the adventure while still in Michigan. I encountered a young

woman named Lydia VanWormer, who was literally carrying forward the future of the Trail. We met at Seidman Park near Grand Rapids, a section of off-road Trail I'd never seen before. Some other ladies who hiked with me a few miles were enjoying the rosy-cheeked baby Lydia was carrying. Lydia said that Otto "LOVES the cold, trees, birds, watching the river, touching leaves, and tasting snow."

The ladies eventually mentioned what I was trying to do.

Lydia said, "My grandmother was involved in the North Country Trail. She's from White Cloud."

So, I figured I might at least know who this person is, and I asked.

Lydia replied, "Ginny Wunsch."

I practically jumped up and down! Ginny Wunsch, who died a couple years ago, is probably one of the 10 or 12 most important people in the early history of the North Country Trail Association. She is the person who acquired the Birch Grove Schoolhouse to be used as NCTA headquarters. She personally did a lot of the hard work of physically restoring it to be a functional building. Ginny was an early board member, too. She answered requests



Ginny Wunsch in 1998.

Photo by
Joan Young



Lydia and Otto VanWormer on the NCNST.

Photo by
Joan Young

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New Chapter Name in Michigan

As of March 2022, the North Country Trail Hikers Chapter, in the central Upper Peninsula of Michigan, has formally changed its name to the **Marquette Area Chapter**.

“We’ve quite a few reasons,” said Lynn Meister-Thomas, Chapter President. “Mostly because our name is confusing, and we’ve gotten a lot of feedback. People can’t figure out how to join our Chapter because we [were] the ‘North Country Trail Hikers,’ and then they think that’s Vermont to North Dakota.”

North Country Trail Association (NCTA) staff indicated that “nondescript Chapter names” was identified as an obstacle to newcomers understanding the organization.

This volunteer Chapter is responsible for maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail from Long Lake west of Craig Lake State Park to Rock River Road in Alger County. Considering this section covers all of Marquette County, this new Chapter name is much more geographically descriptive. This will also help raise awareness of the City of Marquette’s NCTA Trail Town status, and engage local businesses in offering support services to Trail users.

Learn more at northcountrytrail.org/mac and facebook.com/MarquetteAreaChapter. Visit northcountrytrail.org/events to find group hikes, workdays, and more.

Marquette, Mich.

Photo by
Duane Lawton



for information with handwritten letters! Ginny Wunsch is legendary, and this was her granddaughter and great-grandson!

Lydia is carrying the future of the Trail as Otto grows to learn more of the woods and his great-grandmother’s legacy. He just celebrated his first birthday, and is now walking through the woods on his own two feet. Lydia confirms that he still loves everything outdoors, and he will be certain to learn to love the NCNST.

I hope I am carrying forward the spirit of the North Country Trail as I hike. When I hiked it before, hardly anyone had heard of it. This time around, people are coming to search me out and are excited about the Trail. I won’t turn down a legacy like that!

Joan wrote this in March 2022. Follow her thru-hike via her blog at myqualityday.blogspot.com. Read a bit more about the history of the North Country Trail Association at northcountrytrail.org/history.

Above: Otto VanWormer showing off his new skill: Walking!

Photo by
Lydia VanWormer



North Country Trail Culture

BY GLEN VAN ANTWERP

What is hiking culture and how does it vary from trail to trail? What makes the Appalachian National Scenic Trail different from the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, or the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail? Does the North Country Trail National Scenic Trail even have a culture?

I've been thinking about this lately, especially since my wife and I hosted a couple of amazing hikers in early 2022. Arlette "Apple Pie" Laan and her husband Rich "Greenleaf" Gambale were hiking the NCNST in our area (northern Michigan) through bitter winter weather. We shuttled them between trailheads and provided them with a warm bed for a couple of nights.

This couple has walked nearly 11,000 trail miles together. Apple Pie has accomplished amazing things as a solo hiker, including some Fastest Known Times (FTKs). She is attempting to become the first woman to hike the entire length of all 11 National Scenic Trails.

Most of her NCNST hike was solo; her husband's work kept him elsewhere. The more popular National Scenic Trails likely provided her with more company: Both the Appalachian and Pacific Crest each see nearly 1,000 successful annual thru-hikers. Even the Continental Divide gets almost 100. Traditions develop on these popular trails. Hikers adopt trail names. Certain spots are favored for photographs. Everybody has favorite restaurants in favorite trail towns. Hikers may camp together at night, sharing food and shelter. Locals know why people wander by with backpacks. Businesses cater specifically to hikers. Trail angel systems develop. Hikers join other hikers sharing a similar pace to create trail families, or "tramilies."

But the NCNST is different. Its design is more appealing for the local day hiker or section hiker, rather than a thru-hiker. Perhaps a couple dozen people have finished the whole Trail in its 40+ years as a National Scenic Trail, and far fewer have completed



it in a calendar year. So while the NCNST may lack traditional thru-hiking culture, our Trail Community thrives on robust local- or regional-level culture. Our volunteer Chapters fulfill "tramily" roles. We maintain the Trail together, host group hikes, hold meetings and events, and coordinate trail angel services.

Apple Pie experienced true NCTA Chapter hospitality in Michigan's upper peninsula. Late November found her approaching the McCormick Wilderness: a stretch of the NCNST lacking blue blazes. Fearing a hard-to-follow, snow-covered trail, she asked for help on the North Country Trail Community Facebook group. She received a response from not one trail user, but a group of hikers who ended up joining her for a day. She described that day as, "So fun! The best trail magic is company! Without blazes, this section would have been challenging, but I was sad when we got to the Wilderness boundary and they left." Greenleaf joined Apple Pie shortly after that, but NCTA Chapters and fellow hikers kept assisting them as they made their way both east and south, including my own Spirit of the Woods Chapter through the Manistee National Forest. We felt privileged by the opportunity.

So, do we have a culture on the North Country Trail? I think we do, but it has a flavor all its own.

Glen Van Antwerp (center) poses with Greenleaf (left) and Apple Pie (right) on the NCNST in the Manistee National Forest (Mich.).

Photo by
Arlette Laan



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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.

Volunteer leader Mary Coffin joins Stephanie Campbell, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, to discuss the NCNST through Crown Point State Historic Site in New York. This is the former Eastern Terminus of the NCNST. The Trail's route within the Site has been approved by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation to be altered. The roadwalk will be removed to incorporate a gorgeous walk along the historic fort ramparts.

Photo by Stephanie Campbell