



# North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2022



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Joan Young was the first woman to complete the entire NCNST, end-to-end, and now, at age 74, she's doing it again. She started in northern Michigan on December 1, 2021, hiked to the Eastern Terminus in Vermont, then traveled to North Dakota to hike back to her starting point.

**Photo by** Kevin Russell

# Trailhead

**JARON NYHOF**, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Photo provided by**  
Jaron Nyhof

There is no season that is a bad season for hiking. If I take the time to be still, I find myself basking in the beauty of it all. That assumes, of course, that I'm out in nature to take it all in, and hopefully on the tread of one of the best kept secrets in the nation: Our very own North Country National Scenic Trail!

As you'll see in the pages that follow, the main theme of this issue is trail use. And isn't that ultimately the point

of it all? Why are we donors to and members of the North Country Trail Association? Why do we build and maintain trail or volunteer in other ways that advance our mission? Why do we support the NCTA with our time, talent, and treasure? So people can use and enjoy the Trail, of course! As we reflect on trail use in this issue, we're really reflecting on the legacy each donor, member, volunteer, and landowner has collectively built. We're reflecting on the work that you have done to make this all possible. Thank you!

As you'll read, and as I've personally experienced, the Trail is a journey, literally and figuratively, and it can and will change you if you let it. Trail users are at all different points on their journeys. Some are just beginning, experiencing the joy and excitement of a new adventure or a new community. Others are in the middle of a long stretch, and while it's been rewarding, it's been hard too - but they've overcome and are better for it, figured out more of who they are and who they want to be, and perhaps made friends, and definitely made memories along the way. While they're feeling some satisfaction, they also know they're not done and still have a long way to go. Still others are looking back or retreading prior ground, but now with memories and a sense of nostalgia from prior excursions. I would argue that each of them is in the perfect place. The Trail will meet you and welcome you wherever you join it; it will guide you and change you as you follow its path; and it will inspire you along the way. It won't rush you, and from time to time it may even entice you to linger. It will also challenge you and ultimately urge you onward.

As you read the stories in these pages, I'd encourage you to consider where you're at in your own journey, take a few moments to appreciate the places you've been and the relationships you've made, and look for inspiration as

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# Trailhead

**ANDREA KETCHMARK**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Photo by**  
Andrea Ketchmark

A **space** becomes a **place** when it has meaning.

The North Country National Scenic Trail is important not just because of the trail, that 18 to 24-inch tread that your boots follow. The surrounding environment is important for the habitat it can create, for climate resiliency, and for the economic support it can

bring to our communities. Most of all, it's important for what it gives back to us. The experiences we have are what make it special and those experiences are what make us come back hike after hike, work project after work project.

This June, NCTA staff and Board of Directors, and our partners at the National Park Service gathered at Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Mich. to examine how being intentional with our actions can create a better experience, one that fosters a deeper connection between people and the Trail, and can spur them to get more involved. From how we approach trail planning and design to the activities we hold in communities and even our online spaces, everything we do has the opportunity to help people connect with the outdoors in a way that touches their hearts and moves them to want to protect it into the future.

On the Trail, we strive to provide a quality experience from sustainable design when it's built, to working hard to keep up with maintenance, which is a never-ending job. We aim to provide good signage and wayfinding to give you the confidence you need to know where you are and where you are going. Online, we provide maps and trail information to help you plan your trip - and in coming months, you'll hear about our new partnership with FarOut: Putting the North Country National Scenic Trail on this popular mobile application, improving your options to navigate down the Trail.

We often hear that people come to us for the Trail, but they stay for the Community. Our online events calendar is searchable by date, location, and type of event, making it easier than ever to join a work project or a group hike, connecting you to our community of

trail stewards on the ground. We continue to connect our leaders with Zoom calls on important topics each month, and we're holding our second annual Leadership Summit this fall at our Annual Celebration, which returns to an in-person event after a two-year hiatus.

When you look closely, you'll see the intention behind these actions is to help you find your place on the North Country National Scenic Trail. Whether you hike alone or with friends and family, day hike or backpack, join a work project near you or make the trek to Walker, Minn. this October, I hope you find your place and it's something you celebrate.

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**CHRIS LOUDENSLAGER**, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SUPERINTENDENT, NCNST



**Photo by** Mick Hawkins

With the summer season upon us, I can't help but to think of the many years out on the Trail working away and doing all I could to provide the TLC the Trail deserves.

My first summer working on the North Country National Scenic Trail was spent in the Wayne National Forest (Ohio), where I led a small

Youth Conservation Corps crew doing maintenance, and working to improve blazing and signage. It was exceptionally hot and humid work, but the crew were hard workers and we managed to accomplish much. More importantly, the crew was able to discover that their work and efforts truly matter. Toward the end of one particularly long and hot day, morale and motivation was suffering so we took a break in the shade under the boughs of a large white pine along the Trail. While we rested, one of the crew lamented, "Why are we even doing this? There's nobody but us out here anyway." I assured him that our work is important, but it's hard to make a point to a hot and tired 15-year-old when you have, in fact, been out for a few days and haven't seen a single hiker. After finishing our break, we headed back to the truck to close out the day, with a plan to pick up where we left off tomorrow. The next day, we returned to the large white pine where we finished the day before. As we prepared for the day, the crew member

who had believed we were the only ones on the Trail happened to find a water bottle resting beside the tree, right where he had been sitting the day before. His bewildered discovery that we are not alone on the Trail made a stronger point than I could have made myself.

The point of my story isn't that our work matters and that all you do make a difference. What you do is incredibly important of course, but you don't need me to tell you that - though I cannot thank you enough for all you do. My point, rather, is that often, to create believers we need to get people out on the Trail to see things for themselves. We know our work is important, but sometimes words aren't enough to make our point. Seeing is believing. I'd encourage you all to keep up your great efforts to invite others to come explore the North Country Trail with you so that even more become believers. People who have never visited it need to see and experience what the Trail has to offer and all it can provide; they need to witness firsthand the amazing Trail you are creating for them; and they need to make their own discovery of how important our work is. The one "Ah ha!" moment you create can make a world of difference - not only for the person, but for the entire Trail.

Thank you so much for your hard work and dedication. Be safe, have fun, and have a fantastic summer.

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#### JARON NYHOF (CONTINUED)

to where you might go next. Nature is constantly changing as it regenerates itself, and the Trail changes with it. We, as individuals and as a community, are also constantly changing and regenerating ourselves. It's a dynamic process, and I invite you to take notice and actively engage in the growth.

Over the years, many people have been asked what their favorite part of the Trail is. One of my favorite answers is, "the part just around the next bend." My hope for you as you use the Trail is that you'll experience that same anticipation. I'm confident that if you follow the Trail long enough, you won't be disappointed in what you find next, either on the Trail, in our community, or in yourself, just around the next bend.

# My NCT 2022

It's almost time to renew your North Country Trail Association membership.

Renewing your annual membership is how you make a meaningful commitment, and show support for your local Chapter and the North Country National Scenic Trail 365 days a year. By joining or renewing, you amplify our shared mission and help to develop, maintain, protect, and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States.

The annual My NCT membership drive begins **September 1** and runs for the entire month. During this time, new and renewing members can select a unique, one-of-a-kind work of art or a limited edition NCTA piece of gear, as a "thank you" for your continued support. Stay tuned to NCTA communications for descriptions of these must-have items.

The growth of the Trail remains rooted in our Chapter membership. Every membership supports the Trail and your local community Chapter. Consider renewing this September and inviting others to join, too.

For decades NCTA members have been at the forefront of trail management, protection, and advocacy. Please consider renewing your support this September to see what membership can do for the Trail on a national, local, and personal level.

**[northcountrytrail.org/join-renew](https://northcountrytrail.org/join-renew)**



PARTNERSHIP

# A Big Project

BY HOWARD MEYERSON



Photo by Larry Bell

Larry Bell isn't worried about the 700 miles of hiking ahead. He is a self-avowed rainy day hiker and successful goal-setter who enjoys traveling at his own pace. The 64-year-old founder of Bell's Brewery in Kalamazoo, Mich. is retired. He spends his time these days pursuing his bliss. "All the low hanging fruit is done. I'm about 450 miles in," Bell said of his goal to walk the

Michigan portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail: 1,150 miles in all. "I'm hoping to complete it at the end of 2024."

Bell is section hiking. Which section depends on who he can get to spot a car or give him a ride. Friends and family have helped, as have members of the NCTA Chief Baw Beese Chapter and Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter. His quest began in September 2020 after a life-altering bout with cancer.

As of this writing, Bell has hiked from the Indiana-Michigan state line up to Newaygo County, and portions of Michigan's upper peninsula, including from the Mackinac Bridge to the mouth of the Tahquamenon River, and routes in and out of Marquette. Ever an itinerant hiker on a mission, Bell is looking forward to the challenges ahead.

"I like a big project," said Bell, an avid supporter of the North Country Trail Association (NCTA), known for his philanthropy. He donated \$500,000 to the NCTA this year to help grow its trail protection efforts.

"I had renal cancer at the beginning of the pandemic, and spent four nights in the hospital and lost my left kidney," Bell said. "Four nights gives you a lot of time to think. I'm not getting any younger and (thought) okay, what's on the Bucket List? What do you need to get done? I decided this is what I'm going to do. I told my wife, and my first hike was the first 11 miles of the Trail in Michigan down by the Ohio

border. I actually walked it south."

Bell lives in Kalamazoo with his wife, Shannon. He was introduced to hiking in the Boy Scouts as a lad growing up in the Chicago suburbs. His first hike was a 21-mile trail in central Illinois. He called it "long." The scariest parts were the cable bridges, with one cable for feet and one overhead for hands.

That might seem simple enough. "Except we boys weren't tall enough," Bell said humorously. "And the scout master said, 'Take your belt off. Throw your belt up over and buckle it.' And that's what you held onto." One of Bell's sixth-grade chums wasn't tall enough for that; he had to be carried across on an older hiker's back.

Bell grew to love the outdoors and hiking. He joined the Sierra Club while in high school and hiked with club members, eventually becoming a lifetime member. With family settled in Michigan's upper peninsula since 1911, he often traveled there to enjoy the region's natural splendors, including Isle Royale National Park, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, and other hiking destinations.

"I grew up in Illinois, but to me growing up, Michigan was the Upper Peninsula," Bell said. "I started going up to the UP and fishing, boating, and enjoying the outdoors, which I still do. I have a favorite hike in the UP: I love going up to the Chapel [Basin] / Mosquito area (of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore) and hiking on the Chapel trail, which is actually North Country Trail, and have lunch up on Grand Portal Point, then come back to Mosquito River. It's about 10 miles. I've done that a number of times."

Bell was honored by the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter earlier this year and named its Environmentalist of the Year for 2021 for his decade-long work fighting the Enbridge Inc. Line 5 oil pipeline that runs under the Mackinac Straits. He sits on the Michigan League of Conservation Voters board of advisors, and has sponsored efforts by the Alliance for the Great Lakes. Clean water, he asserts, is essential for

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**I think it's important for Michigan to be known as a state that has clean water. It's important to build a blue-green economy for Michigan. We have all this fresh water. It's our great asset. We need to protect it."**

— LARRY BELL



Photo by Larry Bell

business, the Michigan economy, and tourism.

“As a brewer, if I couldn’t advocate for water, who could,” Bell explained. “I think it’s important for Michigan to be known as a state that has clean water. It’s important to build a blue-green economy for Michigan. We have all this fresh water. It’s our great asset. We need to protect it.”

The North Country National Scenic Trail is another asset worthy of support, according to Bell, who first hiked on it in 2000. He called it important for Michigan - valuable because of the opportunities it provides for people to get outside, enjoy walking, and appreciate the state’s diverse landscapes and natural resources. Hiking it, he noted, has been good for his own “physical and mental wellbeing.”

“We’re growing up as a country and starting to value what we have as our land... It’s good for our population to have these sorts of resources available to us,” Bell said.

“I love seeing the towns along the way,” Bell added. “That’s always a lot of fun, and I love seeing fauna and taking pictures. Or what’s flowering. I was hiking earlier this year down in Hillsdale County and all the frogs were out. It was a symphony out there. Each time of year offers something special, whether it’s a frozen landscape that I can appreciate; it can be snakes on the trail, wild blueberries... or sandhill cranes flying.”

Bell intends to shift gears this hiking season, from carrying a daypack on shorter sections to carrying a full backpack and camping where needed, particularly in the Upper Peninsula. He plans to carry a First Aid kit, a whistle, and bear spray just in case. He packs for all weather conditions and has hiked the Trail in rain and snow. His 2022 summer itinerary

started in June with sections in the northern Lower Peninsula.

“I’ve got a good idea of what’s coming in the Western UP, but I haven’t backpacked in a long time,” he said. “So, we’ll start up with some simpler trail in the northern Lower Peninsula first. The McCormick Tract (Wilderness) might be one of those (places in the Western UP) where I call a Chapter and say, ‘Who do you got that wants to hike me through there?’”

Bell said he regularly reaches out to NCTA Chapters for information about trail conditions. He enjoys hiking with friends and meeting people on the Trail, but he also looks forward to hiking alone. He isn’t interested in setting records. Being alone on the Trail brings him solace.

“I am not the fastest hiker,” Bell said. “I’ve been diagnosed with stage four arthritis in my big toes. I’m old. And so, I don’t try (to go fast). Some people want to really race through the Trail. That is not me. And, I’m often with a lot of people. The Trail is my sanctuary to be alone.”

*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.*

## Bell’s Brewery Go Where the Trail Leads You Program Returns

**SEPTEMBER 1 - OCTOBER 31, 2022**

This fall, Bell’s Brewery of Kalamazoo, Mich. is bringing back *Go Where the Trail Leads You*. This is a fantastic opportunity to support the North Country National Scenic Trail and to celebrate National Public Lands Day on September 24. For every hour pledged to volunteer, Bell’s will make a donation to the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS). Last year, Bell’s also donated \$4,500 directly to the NCTA and will continue support this year. Bell’s is hiking a few steps further (pun intended) by providing local support to the NCTA across southwestern Michigan. The national program runs September 1 through October 31, but local support begins at Hopcat in August. Join local trail cleanup days this fall: [northcountrytrail.org/events](https://northcountrytrail.org/events). Stay tuned to [bellsbeer.com](https://bellsbeer.com) and NCTA social media channels for details!



# Celebration

## 2022 Walker, Minnesota

### October 5-9

Each year, the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) teams up with at least one Chapter to host this annual, multi-day event. Celebration offers participants opportunities to explore the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST), network with other trail enthusiasts, attend skills workshops and volunteer training, and engage in presentations provided by impressive keynote speakers.

The location of Celebration rotates annually across the Trail states. For example, in 2016, it was in North Dakota; the upper peninsula of Michigan in 2017, Ohio in 2018, and the lower peninsula of Michigan in 2019. The pandemic caused Celebration to be held virtually in both 2020 and 2021, but the Trail Community is invited to gather in-person this year in Walker, Minnesota. NCTA Itasca Moraine Chapter volunteers are leading the planning efforts.

## Location

Walker is a small town in north central Minnesota on Walker Bay, along the shore of Leech Lake - the third largest lake in the state. Walker is also an official NCTA Trail Town. The NCTA Itasca

Moraine Chapter maintains 75 miles of NCNST here. The Star of the North Chapter's section is to the east and the Laurentian Lakes Chapter's section is to the west.

Walker is a hub of outdoor recreation, featuring the Heartland State Trail, Paul Bunyan State Trail, and the Shingobee Connection Trail. The town is surrounded by Leech Lake Reservation land, Paul Bunyan State Forest, and Chippewa National Forest. A variety of other noteworthy land units are nearby, including Itasca State Park, White Earth State Forest, Tamarac Wildlife Refuge, Two Inlets State Forest, and Badoura State Forest.

Celebration activities and meals will be based at Chase on the Lake Resort and Spa, and the Northern Lights Casino, while organized hikes will be offered all around the area.



## Schedule

Please note schedule adjustments may occur between now and October. For the most up-to-date information, and for locations and specific details on hikes and workshops, please reference [northcountrytrail.org/celebration/schedule](https://northcountrytrail.org/celebration/schedule).

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5

|                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| 4:00 - 8:00 p.m. | Registration          |
| 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. | Volunteer Orientation |

### THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6

|                        |                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  | Registration                   |
| 7:00 - 8:00 a.m.       | Bagged Lunch Pickup            |
| 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  | Hikes                          |
| 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. | Leadership Summit              |
| 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.       | Happy Hour                     |
| 6:15 - 7:15 p.m.       | Buffet Dinner                  |
| 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.       | NPS + NCTA Award Presentations |

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Registration                               |
| 7:00 - 8:00 a.m.      | Bagged Lunch Pickup                        |
| 7:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. | Hikes                                      |
| 12:00 - 5:00 p.m.     | Workshops                                  |
| 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.      | Happy Hour                                 |
| 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.      | Founders Circle Reception, invitation only |
| 6:15 - 7:15 p.m.      | Buffet Dinner                              |
| 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.      | Keynote Speaker: Annie Humphrey            |

**Register by  
September 14!**

[northcountrytrail.org/  
celebration/registration](http://northcountrytrail.org/celebration/registration)

#### **SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8**

|                       |                                |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Registration                   |
| 7:00 - 8:00 a.m.      | Bagged Lunch Pickup            |
| 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. | Hikes                          |
| 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.      | Happy Hour                     |
| 6:15 - 7:15 p.m.      | Buffet Dinner                  |
| 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.      | Keynote Speaker:<br>Emily Ford |

There are no formal activities scheduled on **Sunday, October 9**. Celebration participants are encouraged to explore the NCNST and local attractions. A list of recommendations is available at [northcountrytrail.org/celebration](http://northcountrytrail.org/celebration).

## **Lodging**

A variety of lodging options are available in and around Walker. The cost of lodging is not included in the registration fee. Recommendations include:

### **Chase on the Lake Resort and Spa**

502 Cleveland Blvd. W., Walker, Minn., 888-242-7306  
*This is where a majority of the Celebration events will take place. Hotel rooms and two-bedroom condos are offered. A room block is available until September 5: #135155*

### **Moondance [Events]**

7050 Turtle Lake Township 46, Walker, Minn., 218-836-1055  
*This 300-acre, bike friendly camping area offers many sites for \$30/night, which includes electric. Prices are based per site, not per person. To book, call and state that you are with the North Country Trail Association.*

### **Northern Lights Casino**

6800 Y Frontage Rd. NW, Walker, Minn., 844-554-2646  
*Celebration events will be taking place here, as well. A hotel room block is available: North Country Trail Association, #3461.*

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I attended my first Celebration 15 years ago. I was in my early 20s and interested in exploring what the North Country Trail had to offer. For several days, I hiked in places I had never seen before and met people who became lifelong friends and even colleagues. I love the community of the North Country Trail Association, and I value the incredible experiences I have had at each Celebration I've attended. And this year, it's taking place during the most colorful month of the year for Minnesota.”

— JO SWANSON, MINNESOTA

## **Registration**

Register for the full event or single days at [northcountrytrail.org/celebration/registration](http://northcountrytrail.org/celebration/registration). NCTA members receive a 10% discount. Bagged lunches, buffet dinners, transportation to/from hikes, and a commemorative t-shirt are included in the price of your registration. Daily breakfast and lodging are not included. Shortly after this registration has been submitted to the NCTA and processed, you will be invited, via email, to sign up for specific hikes and workshops. **Registration closes September 14.**

An FAQ document is available at [northcountrytrail.org/celebration](http://northcountrytrail.org/celebration). Additional questions should be directed to Abby Whittington, NCTA Annual Events Coordinator, at [awhittington@northcountrytrail.org](mailto:awhittington@northcountrytrail.org).



# Celebration

## 2022 Walker, Minnesota

### October 5-9

## Keynote Speakers

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### Annie Humphrey

Annie Humphrey resides on the Leech Lake Reservation. She left for four years to serve in the United States Marine Corps and she lived in Wisconsin for a time, but the rice and the maples always called her home. Annie is a carpenter, yoga instructor, tattoo artist, dressmaker, moccasin maker, tree tapper, and fish netter. She writes songs and plays music in her in-between time. Annie doesn't push formal education on her kids or grandchildren, and she would rather they learn to live without Walmart or Amazon.

*Annie is presenting on October 7.*



### Emily Ford

Emily Ford is an aspiring winter adventurer and thru-hiker based in Duluth, Minnesota. She has completed many thru-hikes in the Midwest, including the 1,200-mile Ice Age National Scenic Trail, which traverses Wisconsin east to west from Potawatomi State Park to St. Croix State Park on the Minnesota border. Also, in the winter of 2022, she completed a solo 180-mile ski route across the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness with her Alaskan Husky, Diggins. With an understanding and drive to show that anyone can adventure and everyone deserves to discover the outdoors, regardless of race, gender identity, or upbringing, she continues to seek adventure and represent the underrepresented in outdoor spaces.

*Emily is presenting on October 8.*

## Leadership Summit: Principles of Sustainable Leadership

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Building strong leadership skills and practices within an NCTA Chapter is so important. Sustaining that leadership over time ensures we can accomplish the NCTA's mission long into the future.

At Celebration this year, consultant Amy Stork will offer practical skills and approaches for recruiting and supporting new leaders, including setting the stage, building effective structures, and building a welcoming and inclusive culture. This Leadership Summit is geared toward those that have a leadership role in NCTA Chapters and Affiliate organizations, but all are welcome.

Amy will also be offering eight 30- to 45-minute coaching sessions for representatives of individual Chapters or organizations. NCTA Chapter leadership and Affiliate representatives will be sent a special invitation to participate.

*Amy Stork is a consultant and coach who spends her career bringing real tools to help leaders, teams, and organizations develop even deeper and more effective ways to work. She specializes in working with conservation and recreation/trails organizations including NCTA and other National Scenic Trails. Learn more about Amy at [amystork.com](http://amystork.com).*



## StoryCorps

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world. Since 2003, StoryCorps has recorded and archived more than 70,000 conversations from more than 600,000 participants. The conversations are preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered.

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA), in collaboration with StoryCorps, is excited to announce the launch of a program to record and archive conversations about those who help develop, maintain, protect, promote, and use the Trail to build and sustain a welcoming Trail Community that offers safe, accessible, and comfortable outdoor experiences for everyone. In July, StoryCorps hosted two virtual recording days and this October, they will join NCTA for three onsite recording days at Celebration.

Through recording, sharing, and preserving these conversations, the NCTA and StoryCorps hope to recognize the dedicated volunteers and members who support, build, maintain, promote, and advocate for the Trail; elevate awareness of the Trail and preserve trail history; and grow community leadership and expand the NCTA volunteer base.

*Proceeds from the sale of the Birch Grove Schoolhouse - the building that housed the original NCTA headquarters in White Cloud, Mich. - have helped fund this project. Learn more about StoryCorps and listen to examples of their collaborative work at [storycorps.org](https://storycorps.org).*



# Hike It. Build It. Love It.



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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VOLUNTEERS



NGC members (left to right) Katie, Sara, and Felicia with 2022 NCNST thru-hiker Aaron "Soda" Landon (bearded, back row).

**Photo by** Felicia Hokenstad

## Next Generation Coalition Summit 2022

BY FELICIA HOKENSTAD

In early May, four members of the North Country Trail Association's (NCTA) **Next Generation Coalition** (NGC) met in northern Minnesota to assist in building a new, one-mile section of North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). This was the second NGC Summit: A gathering of NGC members from diverse backgrounds and regions of Trail, connecting in-person to gain trail work experience and training.

Felicia Hokenstad, Katie Cothran, Sara Dudzik, and Stephanie Sleda met with a trail crew from the American Hiking Society (AHS), and Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator for Minnesota. Their goal was to replace a roadwalk on the NCNST's Arrowhead Reroute between the Chippewa National Forest and Grand Rapids, Minn.

The anticipation leading up to the trip quickly dissipated when the group started arriving on a Thursday afternoon at Schoolcraft State Park (Deer River, Minn.).

For many, it was their first time meeting in-person - what a treat after a few years of virtual events during a global pandemic! After introductions and before gathering around the fire, the group did a walkthrough clean up of the trails around the campground to earn their keep.

Friday morning started with a pleasant surprise when NCNST thru-hiker, Aaron "Soda" Landon, arrived at the trailhead, ready to work.

Matt provided an introduction and demonstration of each tool. This was especially helpful to members with no trail building experience. One huge goal of the NGC program is to provide skill-building experiences like this for young volunteers across the Trail. This tool demonstration included a bow saw for cutting small trees and bushes, loppers for cutting small limbs or saplings, a pick mattock for digging and moving dirt and rock, and a McLeod for removing duff layers and loose

ground debris to create a level trail.

The AHS crew had been hard at work for a week already, so the corridor was cleared and trail tread was established. The group made quick work of the finishing touches, then joined NCTA Arrowhead Chapter members for trail maintenance on established Trail.

"It was a blast, to say the least," said Felicia. "Many of us had zero experience with trail building, but Matt did a spectacular job teaching us about how trails are built from scratch. It was also my first time using a hand saw to help trim small trees laying across the trail. Just super empowering stuff!"

"I was finally able to connect and bond with my peers in a way we had not been able to previously," wrote Sara Dudzik of Michigan. "Learning how to build trail with my cohort put me in a safe space to be vulnerable and learn, while also being an advocate and ambassador to the NCNST."

Following this successful day of trail work, the crew met at Klockow Brewing Company to enjoy beverages and barbeque. Between an impromptu performance from one of the AHS crew members (the \*Unicycling Unicorn) and an intense game of Farkle around the campfire, it was the perfect night for connecting with each other and admiring the night sky.

"The Summit was such an empowering and uplifting experience," wrote Stephanie Sleda of Michigan. "It was great having camaraderie with like-minded people while making a difference for the Trail and those who use it. I have always wanted to learn about proper trail maintenance and conservation, and it was so fun learning from experienced trail builders. I made lasting trail friends and I can't wait to continue to develop all the new skills I learned, including using a hand saw on felled trees!"

NGC members spent Saturday afternoon on an urban hike through Grand Rapids, Minn. with Arrowhead Chapter members and thru-hiker Soda. The urban hike wound past murals by local artists including Leah Yellowbird, who collaborated with the NCTA in 2021 for the My NCT program. Farewells were distributed with an air of excitement, about our next opportunity to hang out, in-person, at the NCTA Celebration in October.

"It was truly great to work alongside the NGC members as we built new trail," said Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator. "The opportunity to teach them trail building and maintenance techniques, and seeing them doing the work afterward was special. The NCNST and NCTA have a bright future with the Next Generation Coalition stepping up to take on a leadership role."

*Learn more about the NCTA Next Generation Coalition at [northcountrytrail.org/next-generation-coalition](https://northcountrytrail.org/next-generation-coalition).*

*\*The Unicycling Unicorn is a touring performance act based out of Minnesota.*



Top: Katie (left) and Sara with a Leah Yellowbird mural in Grand Rapids, Minn.

**Photo by** Felicia Hokenstad

Bottom: Matt Davis's tool demonstration.

**Photo by** Felicia Hokenstad



# NCTA Welcomes A New Next Generation Coalition Cohort

BY FELICIA HOKENSTAD

The North Country Trail Association's (NCTA) **Next Generation Coalition** (NGC) program was created in response to the need for succession planning and youth engagement across the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). This program has the potential to shape the minds of young adults through mentorship opportunities and networking along our eight NCNST states.

Many people, in all age groups, have a deep love and appreciation for trails. The NGC seeks to harness this passion and engage individuals to become a unique part of the NCNST's protection. The intention is that the NGC can inspire young people across not only the North Country but the U.S., to learn about trail stewardship and protection. The NGC's role in the NCTA's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) efforts is key. NGC members

commit to representing NCTA's core value of inclusion, ensuring all can connect to and care for the Trail in a way that is meaningful for them. Providing opportunities for NGC members to acquire new skills in areas like trail building and maintenance, marketing and outreach, and advocacy will help minimize feelings of intimidation when stepping into a volunteer role alongside members who have been involved with the Trail for many years.

Join us in welcoming seven new members to the Next Generation Coalition this summer: Individuals spanning from Wisconsin to Pennsylvania. It is so inspiring to see youth stepping up to leadership opportunities like this. We couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to work alongside them!



## Conor Dietrich

(he/him)

Conor is joining from Charlevoix, Mich. Conor has a deep love for the NCNST and is looking forward to learning more about the maintenance aspect of volunteering for the Trail for future generations to enjoy!



## Madeline Blyveis

(she/her)

Madeline is a member of the NCTA Western Michigan Chapter and is joining from Grand Rapids, Mich. She is excited to give back to the Trail that has given so much to her. She wants to provide opportunities for others to do the same that will, in turn, cultivate a stronger community of folks willing to advocate for, and work toward further success of the NCNST.



## Katelyn Hacker

(she/her)

Katelyn is a member of the NCTA Peter Wolfe Chapter in the upper peninsula of Michigan. Katelyn spends a lot of time hiking the NCNST alone and is optimistic about building community with other hikers. She wants to give back to the Trail by volunteering her time, effort, and by spreading community awareness.

*Learn more about the Next Generation Coalition and how to get involved at [northcountrytrail.org/next-generation-coalition](https://northcountrytrail.org/next-generation-coalition).*



## Peyton David

(they/them)

Peyton is joining from Madison, Wisc. They want to be a louder voice for conservation advocacy and loves to share their experience with nature, including education about flora and fauna, mushrooms, and rocks along the Trail.



## Sarah Waite

(she/her)

Sarah is joining from Ohio. She is hopeful to help create an environment on Trail where others feel safe to learn about volunteer opportunities like trail maintenance, and wants to meet other people in her age range with similar interests.



## Tessa Fenstermaker

(she/her)

Tessa lives in Ohio, but works seasonally in the Ottawa National Forest in Michigan and is a member of the NCTA Ni-Miikanaake Chapter. She has the unique opportunity of having the trail in both of her backyards and is familiar with sections in both Michigan and Ohio (the Buckeye Trail). Tessa wants to see the Trail become as talked about and used as other National Scenic Trails, and is willing to get her hands dirty to make that happen!



## Lauren Kennedy-Little

(she/her)

Lauren is a member of the NCTA Wampum Chapter and is joining from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She has been working in volunteer-related conservation for a few years, and enjoys connecting people with the outdoors while promoting safe and healthy recreation options, while also respecting the Land.

# HIKE 100



Share your adventures like Ruth!

**“Hiking is my time, my gift to myself. Its benefits in terms of physical and mental health are a bonus. Rascal, my faithful companion, knows the trails as well as I do.”**

Learn more, sign up, and share your adventures at [northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge](https://northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge).



# 2022 Allegheny 100 Challenge

BY TINA TOOLE

The 12th annual Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge (A-100) was a huge success this June. Hosted by the NCTA Allegheny National Forest (ANF) Chapter, the event challenges participants to complete a 25, 50, 75, or 100-mile section of North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) through the Allegheny National Forest in northwest Pennsylvania. Each hiker commits to a mileage choice then has 50 hours to complete it, starting on a Friday evening and ending on a Sunday evening. The A-100 is not a race, but a personal challenge of stamina and determination.

This year, participants departed from the north end of the National Forest at the Route

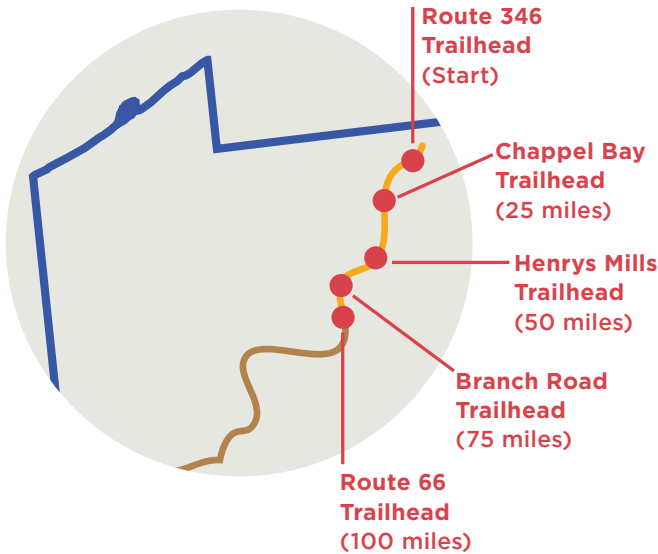
346 trailhead at Willow Bay. The 25-mile mark was the Chappel Bay trailhead. Those pursuing 50 miles aimed for the Henrys Mills trailhead, where the smell of grilling hamburgers tempted all to take a break. The Branch Road trailhead marked 75 miles and the 100-mile point was the Route 66 trailhead.

Many reached impressive milestones: Five more participants hiked at least 75 miles, 32 more went 50+ miles, and 25 more bagged 25+ miles. All seemed to enjoy the camaraderie and most learned new things about themselves during this test of endurance on the Trail.

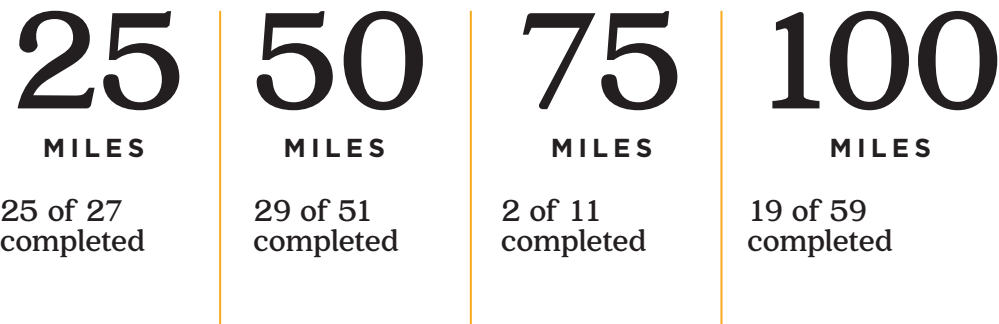
Participants traveled from near and far to take part in the A-100. While most were from the local region - New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio - many traveled from much farther, including Washington (state) and Florida. Two came from New England, seven from the East Coast, two from Ontario, and eight from the Midwest. Everyone expressed amazement at the beauty of the ANF and hoped to return.

The Chapter appreciates all the volunteers that helped plan and run the event. A big “thank you” also goes to the sponsors of the A-100. Money raised through this event will be put back into repairing and improving the 95.7 miles of the NCNST through the Allegheny National Forest.

Learn more about the A-100 at [northcountrytrail.org/a-100](http://northcountrytrail.org/a-100).



## 148 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS



## FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

**“This was such an incredible experience and I really appreciate the opportunity to push my limits!”**

— SMITTY D.

**“Truly is such an amazing event. Beautiful course, amazing weather, and outstanding volunteers! Thank you!”**

— BRIDGET W.

**“Great event. Great trail. Will hike more of it. Still eating!”**

— ERIC S.

**“I met so many great humans on [the] Trail and I can’t wait for next year!”**

— KRISTEN G.

**“This was an amazing experience for my son and me!”**

— MEGAN O.

**“The A-100 really is a unique and wonderful event. The enthusiasm shared by event organizers, volunteers, and participants is palpable. I look forward to revisiting some of the sections during daylight hours instead of the middle of the night!”**

— WALTER Z.



Rob, Katie, and Rachel Lawson are thrilled upon completion of their 25-mile challenge.

**Photo by**  
Linda White



Chris Coupal completed 100 miles in less than 50 hours.

**Photo by**  
Angelia Clarke



# Minnesota Tornado Damage Cleanup

Photo by  
Matt Davis

BY MATT DAVIS

On October 10, 2021, a tornado touched down near the Border Route Trail (BRT)/North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in northeast Minnesota. The damaged area was visible on satellite imagery. Superior National Forest staff determined the extent of damage was about 1.1 miles with varying levels of destruction.

Kerry Lane, employee of Clearwater Lodge and Outfitters, was called to rescue a hiker who couldn't continue past the blowdown with a boat shuttle. Kerry posted a couple videos online, providing the public with a visual of the tornado's aftermath. Upon watching it and seeing the utter destruction, I knew a vital link in the NCNST was broken.

Storms often cause blockages on the NCNST but when they happen in the BWCAW, easy detours are not available. Eastbound hikers could take a spur trail to Clearwater Lodge, where they could pay for a boat shuttle to a portage trail to continue their hike. Westbound hikers would have no option, unless they carried a pack raft.

Mid-November, Superior National Forest staff flagged the Trail where they could find it, but were unable to piece together the entire route. The Border Route Trail Association (BRTA) recruited volunteers for additional reconnaissance. Over the winter, the BRTA, NCTA, and Superior National Forest formed a partnership to develop a plan for tackling this clearing work. Rightly so, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) was concerned about volunteer safety because of the complexity and scale of the blowdown. They required that only experienced crosscut sawyers be given the task of working on the Trail, and suggested that a volunteer crew could work on opening up the Trail so the USFS crews could come in after to clear the largest and most complex blowdowns. It's important to note that blowdowns are considered complex if trees are stacked on top of each other, are very large in size, have defects like rot, or have lots of bind (tension from bending or twisting).

I led a trail clearing trip into the same area in the recent past, so I volunteered to do it again. One of the first people I asked to join the effort was Dan Dueweke of the NCTA Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.). Dan is a crosscut saw aficionado, and responded with interest. He also offered to include a crosscut saw certification component to the project for the volunteers.

"I've been a traditional tool fan for 25 years," Dan said. "While living in Virginia, I volunteered on many wilderness logouts, usually after some extreme weather event, and axes and crosscut saws were the only tools allowed. When I saw the Clearwater Lake video on YouTube, I knew there would be a need for an experienced sawyer and wanted to keep my skill set updated."

Because of lingering ice on the lakes and snow in the woods, it turned out that our crew only had three volunteers including me, Dan, and Tom Reichert of Minn. We were joined by Arc and Lilly, seasonal recreation staff members from the Superior National Forest. We owe a debt of gratitude to Tammy Cefalu and Cathy Quinn of the Superior National Forest, for their assistance and support in making the crew happen!

Our crew of five met at the Gunflint Lodge on May 23. We paddled in, set up camp, and began work that afternoon.



**Photo by**  
Dan  
Deweke

"[The toughest parts] were both regarding the trail and tread," Tom said. "First was finding the trail amidst the carnage. Second was not looking too far ahead and just focusing on what you could see and get to."

By May 26, we had rendered about 0.9 miles of Trail passable. The following week, a crew of USFS Wilderness Rangers cleared most of the rest of the blowdowns: nearly 100 trees.

"Afterwards, I felt we adapted to an act of nature," Tom said. "That part of the Trail will never be what it was prior to the storm, but it will be a new experience now. I gained an appreciation for the power left in the fallen trees: Some cracked like gunshots and popped several feet in the air after [being] cut. Some began to slide down the hillside. The biggest surprise was a multi-ton root ball and [tree] base that snapped upright in the blink of an eye."

"We demonstrated a good USFS/NCTA partnership," Dan said. "I learned how dedicated the crew members were to accomplishing the task. Nobody complained, everybody was ready to go each morning, all were eager to learn 'the way of the saw,' and the crosscut saw continues to be the 'gateway drug' to trail maintenance."

Appreciation poured in via social media soon after.

"Totally awesome how this came together so quickly and so well!" wrote Barb Gecas of Heston's Resort in Grand Marais, Minn. "Many thanks to the hardworking volunteers and Forest Service partners. You have made many hikers very happy!"

"Thank you volunteers for clearing the trail so we could hike the BRT along Clearwater Lake this week!" Rachel Jarvis wrote. "What a staggering amount of work!"

*Interested in this type of work in wilderness settings? Submit a Volunteer Interest Form today at [northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-interest-form](http://northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-interest-form).*

# Trout Brook Designated Campsite Completed

BY MARTY SWANK AND KEVIN SCHRAM

This June, the NCTA Chequamegon Chapter built their third designated campsite along the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (Wisc.).

It is located near Trout Brook and thus, has been named the Trout Brook Campsite. The actual site was a bit of a challenge because of its lack of flatness, but the crew produced three tent pads, a rock fire ring, and benches. When finished, Chapter President Kevin Schram compared this to the other two previous campsites by saying he liked this one the best! We had an impressive crew with 18 volunteers, who completed the campsite before noon.

"I became a North Country Trail [Association] volunteer because of my love for backpacking," said Kevin. "I started backpacking when I was 40. After years of car camping with children and lugging around a van full of equipment, it was surreal to look in the back seat and see nothing but one or two small packs, which contained everything Ellie and I needed for a multi-day excursion into nature with the family dog. Backpacking is an opportunity for kindred spirits to briefly come together. It is also a splendid opportunity for solitude. It is definitely something worth sharing and promoting."

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This sign was created by Rick Pomerleau and installed by Brad Gingras.

**Photo by**  
Julie Waggoner



TRAIL  
USE

"Five years ago," Kevin added, "we presented the U.S. Forest Service with a plan to construct eight backpacker campsites in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. We have completed three, and I hope to complete one more this year (2022) at Lake Three. Those campsites we have built, the potential campsite at Lake Three, the Marengo River shelter, and the user-made campsites at Porcupine Lake provide backcountry camping opportunities at five-mile intervals. This is perfect for youthful backpackers, senior backpackers, intermediate-level backpackers, and strong hikers. Congratulations to all the volunteers who have worked so hard on this project. You created almost 30 miles of new backpacking opportunities in the National Forest. Well done!"

*Learn more about the NCTA Chequamegon Chapter, including their free, downloadable, pocket-sized map and trail wiki (section-by-section description) at [northcountrytrail.org/che](https://northcountrytrail.org/che). View the NCTA Events Calendar to get involved: [northcountrytrail.org/events](https://northcountrytrail.org/events).*



The crew after completing their work. Front row, left to right: Marty Swank, Don Quick, Mel Baughman, Ellie Williams, Linda Hobbs, Mark Belknap, Kris Dahl, and Issy Peters. Back row, left to right: Jim Crandall, Bob Lind, Mary Jo Gingras, Mary Tonti, Kevin Schram, Mike Trieschmann, Allon Bostwick, and Don Christensen. Not pictured: Brad Gingras and Julia Waggoner.

**Photo by**  
Julie Waggoner

# More Snacks

*Lindsey Hafs shared her story in the North Country Trail Community Facebook group about backpacking with her husband, dog, and two young daughters. This is an interview with them, about their North Country National Scenic Trail experiences.*

**NCTA: Please introduce your family!**

**Lindsey:** We are the Hafs family from Bemidji, Minn. I'm Lindsey, my husband is Andy, our daughters are Rosalie (7) and Thea (3), and our doggo is Tango (1).

**NCTA: How did you come to know the North Country National Scenic Trail?**

**Lindsey:** There was a locally owned outdoors shop in Bemidji that has since gone out of business. Several years ago while shopping there, I purchased the book, *Guide to Hiking the North Country Trail in Minnesota*, which really introduced me to the Trail. I quickly became intrigued and did more research on the Trail, and realized I had already hiked a portion of it: Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Michigan. I now have a goal to hike all the NCNST Minnesota miles.

**NCTA: What are some of your favorite sections?**

**Lindsey:** I've hiked Pictured Rocks multiple times and absolutely love it. I mean, who wouldn't? It's so beautiful! In May 2021, I went on a trip to Upstate New York with some girlfriends. We hiked a six-mile section through Watkins Glen State Park along the Gorge Trail, and a very small section in Letchworth State Park. Wow! It was something we've never seen before. In August 2021, my sister-in-law and I hiked about a 40-mile section in Wisconsin through Copper Falls State Park (beautiful waterfalls), Mellen, and part of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. That trip was an adventure because she left her keys in my car, 40 miles behind us, so we had no way to shuttle back! We had to call the local sheriff's

office and enjoyed our first ride in a cop car.

I really like the section through the Chippewa National Forest here in Minnesota. I love that it's close to home - I can hit the Trail basically whenever I want, and there is such a diversity of beauty. On any given hike I will see lakes, streams, prairie grasses with wildflowers, huge hardwood and softwood trees, and an abundance of wildlife. On a section just south of Itasca State Park, the Trail literally runs over the top of a beaver dam, which is super cool.

**NCTA: How have you introduced your daughters to the outdoors and to trail use?**

**Lindsey:** Both my husband and I love the outdoors, and we knew that when we had children, we were going to expose them to the outdoors as much as possible. We just had to figure out a way to do it the best way for our family. We are fortunate to own a home that sits on 52 acres and is adjacent to state land, so we have access to the outdoors right out our back door - which is where we began. We began hiking and snowshoeing with [the girls] on our property when they were just infants. As seasons changed, we introduced them to different plants, bugs, and wildlife so that they wouldn't be afraid of them as they grew up. We started camping with them in state parks when they were a year old: Rosalie's first was Maplewood and Thea's was Itasca. We started with some amenities and easy hiking trails, but as they have grown older we aim for more primitive places like National Forest campgrounds. This year we felt as if they were ready to hike in to a campsite, so we gave it a go and they loved it!

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Thea leads the way, followed by her sister Rosalie and dog, Tango.

Photo by  
Lindsey Hafs



Top left: (Left to right) Lindsey, Tango, Rosalie, and Thea.

Top right: Rosalie puts her new woodcarving skills to work and creates a snake from a stick.

**Photos by**  
Lindsey Hafs



**NCTA: How did you prepare them for this backpacking trip?**

**Lindsey:** We talked a lot about how they were going to be responsible for carrying much of their own gear and because of that, we wouldn't be able to pack a lot of toys or as many snacks as we usually do. They were allowed to pick two toys each to bring along and they were okay with that.

**NCTA: Describe this experience in Maplewood State Park.**

**Lindsey:** We kept it super easy, being that it was the girls' first time [backpacking]. We reserved the Grass Lake campsite for two nights. On a Friday, we parked at the Maplewood Church and hiked about a mile or so to the campsite. On Saturday, we hiked out and drove to the swimming beach, though the ice had just completely melted about a week prior so very little swimming actually happened. On Sunday, we hung out around the campsite until around 10:00 [a.m.], hiked out and drove home.

**NCTA: Boredom is a daunting possibility for a lot of parents. How did you keep your kids engaged, or how did they entertain themselves?**

**Lindsey:** We actually did this trip with another family that has kids the same ages as our girls - and it was also their first backpacking experience with kids - so the kids entertained themselves. They gathered a lot of fallen sticks and made boundaries on the Trail nearby, and played a game where they had to ask the lawyer for permission to pass the boundary. They were constantly looking for snakes, cool bugs, and wildflowers. Our friends brought some kid-friendly games. Two of the kids learned how to carve wood on the trip, so Rosalie carved a snake. They loved gathering firewood. Our dog is obsessed with fetch, so they threw him the ball probably 5,000 times. They came up with lots of various games to play and never once complained of boredom. It was very successful.

**NCTA: What was the most challenging component or situation of this experience?**

**Lindsey:** If our friends had not come along, I think the lack of snacks (or hunger in general) would have been difficult for our kids. Luckily, our friends packed like they were car camping and hiked it all in (that took them three trips), and were willing to share. In the future, we need to find a way to carry more snacks. They spend all day exercising and playing hard, so the extra calories are really important for their little growing bodies. We did not pack accordingly. Lesson learned.

**NCTA: What was the most rewarding thing?**

**Lindsey:** When we told the girls it was time to start packing up camp to get ready to head home, they both replied with, "ugh, but we don't want to go home!" They had so much fun and immediately started asking about our next backpacking trip. Just knowing that a situation as simple as spending a couple of nights in the woods, sleeping on the ground, and having limited food options (but hanging with your friends and family) is enough to bring them so much joy was so rewarding! They don't need the hot new toy, or an iPad, or Disney+ on TV, or sports tournaments every weekend to give them a fulfilled life. They spent the weekend playing with friends, using their imagination, eating hotdogs with dirty hands, and it was more than enough to keep a smile on their sweet little faces all weekend long - and a memory that they will have forever.

*How do you and your family and friends engage with the NCNST? Sign up for the Hike 100 Challenge today for extra motivation: [northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge](https://northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge). Share your stories with us on Facebook or Instagram by using the tags @northcountrytrail, #northcountrytrail, and #hike100nct.*



# Bagging Wisconsin

BY LISA SZELA

***“That’s not my idea of a vacation, but...”***

***“Who’s going with you?”***

***“Where is that?”***

***“...Why?”***

Some of the questions I got from friends and family were tinged with bewilderment when I told them I wanted to backpack the entire Wisconsin portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). I intended to do the first week totally solo, but I didn’t want anyone to worry about me - I was already nervous enough as it was! As far as explaining where the Trail is, I’d launch into my usual summary and point it out on a map. The why was harder to answer.

I first heard about the North Country Trail as a kid, but it wasn’t until 2020 when I backpacked my first section. That fall weekend spent trekking through the Bayfield County Forest and Rainbow Lake Wilderness is still one of the best backpacking experiences I’ve had to date. In 2021, I joined the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) Next Generation Coalition. As the sole Wisconsin member [at the time], I wanted to be familiar with the portion of Trail in my state, so I planned to tackle it in sections.

One day, in the dark depths of grant writing, I decided I desperately needed some time off work. I had a ridiculous amount of vacation time built up and thought I might be able to convince my boss to let me have two weeks off. Why not just do it all at once? I’d have to average 15 miles a day. That wasn’t a concerning distance because I spend most weekends hiking anyway - except that I’d never been backpacking longer than four days in a row, nor had I ever taken a solo backpacking trip. But I figured it was time to go for it, and there’s no turning back once someone drops you off on the side of a road and drives your car a whole state away.

I’m a social person by nature so in that regard, the North Country Trail was trickier than I expected. If you’re looking for solitude and time away from crowds, you will most definitely find it on the Wisconsin NCNST. I only ran into one other backpacker and a handful of hikers over two weeks and 214

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**All photos provided by**  
Lisa Szela



“  
I’ve never met  
such a welcoming  
and generous  
community as I did  
on the NCNST, and  
I’m forever grateful.”

— LISA SZELA

miles on-trail. Luckily, the North Country Trail community has no shortage of folks who truly put the “angel” in trail angel. Prior to heading out for my hike, I’d reached out to volunteers for intel on conditions, and to have emergency contacts in the area should something go wrong. On my very first day, Bethany from the NCTA Heritage Chapter drove out to find me and offer me a dry bed for the night. I took her up on it a couple days later, worn down by nonstop rain and near-freezing overnight temps. She took me in and took care of me as if I was family. In Drummond, a librarian let me know I was welcome to come hang in the air conditioning and that the wifi was accessible even from the parking lot. Teresa from the NCTA Brule-St. Croix Chapter took us in during severe thunderstorms when we found our intended campsite for the night to be swampy and overgrown. I’ve never met such a welcoming and generous community as I did on the NCNST, and I’m forever grateful.

If not for the incredible volunteers or friends who joined me for parts of the second week, I don’t know if I would have finished.

Most of my struggles were mental. I made it through without any physical injuries, unless you count a couple blisters from rain and soggy shoes. I never realized how much my mood was dependent on sunshine, and I may have horrified my less outdoorsy friends by how excited I was about the abundance of pit toilets on this section of Trail. Wins came in the form of seeing a mama bear and her two cubs crossing the road ahead; knocking out the NCTA Hike 100 Challenge; a shelter that kept us safe in thunderstorms strong enough to snap trees at Pattison State Park; and exclamations of “this water doesn’t taste like dead leaves!” There was pizza at Erick Lake; a breeze that scattered away the gnats on a toasty road walk; and notes in logbooks addressed to Clammy Tammy (my unfortunate trail name) that kept me going on days I texted my partner things like, “I don’t think I’m a solo backpacker,” and “I’m never doing something like this again.”

Now, only a couple months later, the difficult feelings and experiences have faded away into short stories or fond memories of Type 2 fun. In fact, if you looked through my phone right now, you’d find the plans for a solo trip through Pictured Rocks [National Lakeshore] and a text asking a few buddies if they’d want to thru-hike the Superior Hiking Trail. So maybe I will do something like this again. There’s a lot of the North Country Trail left to see!

*Plan your time on the Trail using the wide variety of resources available at **northcountrytrail.org**, including hike planning guidance, free downloadable maps, and the Hike 100 Challenge for extra motivation.*



# The Remaining 4,800 Miles

## PART III

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 third and final installment of their interview with the NCTA. Read the first in the Winter 2022 issue of the North Star and the second in the Spring 2022 issue. Additional content may appear in NCTA online communications.

Above: 2021 Mackinac Bridge Walk

Photo by Ryan Bunting

**NCTA: What’s your favorite way to pass the time on-trail? Do you have any routines?**

**Constantine:** When you spend so much time on any trail, it begins to vary. There are some days all you want to do is distance yourself from the physical and mental exertion you have been grinding out for months straight, and you distract yourself with music or podcasts. Then there are some days you feel so connected to the land, every noise, every smell, that your senses are so full - you just wander through the land. There are days you are too tired to talk, and there are days you find a thought tangent together that you can’t stop talking for hours. One especially loving topic we also discussed was Magpie’s deep appreciation, respect, and love for Mickey Mouse.

**Magpie:** Oh, Mickey Mouse. Constantine does a lot of “bits” while we’re hiking, some are funnier than others. He also got a lot of joy from the weight limit signs on bridges, to the point that I would stop and wait for him when I saw one, just to give him the opportunity to yell, “Magpie! Weight limit! You’re going to break the bridge!” That one went from funny to annoying and all the way back to funny again. Other than that, I’m all in for podcasts, especially on a roadwalk. It helps make the days pass quicker when every day feels the same.

**Constantine:** As far as daily routines, we are very basic hikers. We wake up, set a goal, hike, and restructure the goal if necessary. Over-structuring a day is when trouble happens: You feel guilty if you don’t reach a goal and you can injure yourself physically if pushing too hard. We let the trail decide our days. We hoped to shower at least once a week - that sometimes worked, sometimes didn’t. Oh well.

Continued on page 26



TRAIL  
USE

**Magpie:** I tend to be a little bit more regimented in my schedule, timing lunch breaks to the minute and constantly calculating miles versus hours of daylight, so I had to learn to be more flexible on the NCNST. It's too long to be completely easygoing about the miles, but it's also too long to stick to a strict schedule without driving your partner insane.

**NCTA: Any cool experiences with Trail Magic?**

**Magpie:** I want to send a shout out to three trail angels in particular: Lisa, Dan, and Nick. Lisa hosted us near Kalkaska, Mich. She went out of her way on a 90-minute round trip to pick up some replacement gear, and took us to get excellent tacos. She was the most delightful and accommodating host.

Dan does trail magic in eastern Ohio, making the stretch between the Pennsylvania border and the Buckeye Trail feasible. (There are no motels or legal camping for an 80-mile section, so it would be impossible to thru-hike the NCNST if Dan wasn't giving rides and hosting hikers.) He also picked us up last-minute (on Father's Day, no less!) when I got food poisoning on a roadwalk near Zoar, Ohio.

Nick and his family helped us coordinate our \*Mackinac Bridge Walk. He picked us up at 8:00 p.m. in the Porcupine Mountains (in the western upper peninsula of

Michigan), drove us six hours to Mackinaw City, Mich. where we camped at 2:00 a.m. He picked us up in St. Ignace the next morning after the Bridge Walk and drove us back to the Porkies to continue hiking where we left off. Then he drove all the way back! I think he ended up driving for 24 hours out of 48. It was an incredibly generous thing to do, and we wouldn't have made the Bridge Walk without him.

**Constantine:** We couldn't accept much due to the Fastest Known Time (FKT) guidelines, but the time we did spend with trail angels was magnificent. The amount of love and support shown by the trail angel community that surrounds the NCNST is truly special, and unlike anything we had ever experienced. So passionate, helpful, and caring. So while we couldn't necessarily experience it physically to its full degree, we felt the emotional support and it was appreciated to a level we can never express. Truly beautiful.

**NCTA: Are there any special relationships you built during your time on the Trail? (e.g. NCTA volunteers or Chapter leaders, strangers who became friends, local business owners, etc.)**

**Constantine:** We built many relationships with trail angels that we never even met, and some that we did.



Making time for waterfall viewing.

**Photo by** Ryan Bunting

*\*The NCNST shares pathway with the Mackinac Bridge, the five-mile-long connection between the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan. It is passable on foot only one day a year: Labor Day, during the annual Bridge Walk.*

As I said earlier, the community around the NCNST was incredible, even if most of it was emotional support. To single out one or a few would not do justice to the amount of relationships we had created along the way. People we stepped off miles with, people we spent five to 10 minutes with, people that sent us messages, people that gave us a ride into a town, people that opened up their hearts and souls to us as we hopefully returned the same. No specific shoutouts, because everyone that has touched us along the way knows that this shoutout is for them. Thank you!

**Magpie:** Honestly, the whole NCNST community was awesome and very supportive. For such a long and decentralized trail system, it's really amazing that there's such a strong community of people who care about the Trail. I appreciate every single person who gives their time and energy to the NCNST, whether that's doing trail maintenance, hosting hikers, organizing maps and resources, or just going out and hiking their section of Trail. Great job, everyone!

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

**Magpie:** Good luck, have fun, and maybe reconsider doing it as an FKT. This trail would have been a different animal if we had allowed ourselves to coordinate help along the way. I also think that westbound is the way to do it, even though the majority of [thru-]hikers before us have gone east. The weather window is just better, and you'll get the most physically demanding part out of the way when you're still fresh, as opposed to hiking the steep hills of Vermont exhausted and in the snow. Reach out to those who have done it before, for trail data and town info. I, personally, am happy to talk to any prospective NCNST thru-hiker. (You can reach out to me via my website: [adventurousmagpie.com](http://adventurousmagpie.com)). And don't quit in Ohio! You will not be in Ohio forever, even though it feels like you will.

**Constantine:** The best advice we could offer for people planning a long-distance hike on the NCNST is to be prepared for your plans to not go completely right. Be flexible. It is such an incredibly long trail that if you overplan, you will just create stress. That's not to say don't do any planning, but be flexible with



your body and your mind. Let the Trail speak to you each day, and if you're feeling tired or down one day, that's okay, it's temporary. If you do not bend with this trail, you will break. As far as encouragement goes, there is no other trail or hike like the NCNST. It is one of a kind. You will find amazing depths of yourself that you could never have imagined previously. It is not a choice: You will have to go deep to go further. Yet, if you are planning the NCNST, and have looked into it, at this point you need no further encouragement - you know vaguely what you are getting into and you know yourself. Now go find yourself and adventure out there!

Visit [elevenskys.com](http://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](http://northcountrytrail.org/plan-your-hike).

Ice cream:  
An important morale boost.

**Photo provided by**  
Ryan Bunting



TRAIL  
USE

# Daredevil

BY KATE LEMON

Tom Ogden of Pinconning, Mich. has become a devoted North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) hiker. He first learned about it while hiking the Deadman's Hill Loop near the Jordan River Valley with some friends, but at the time, didn't have much free time to dedicate to hiking. Parenting his daughter and working as a diesel mechanic took priority.

Then, six years ago, he lost his vision.

"After my vision went," Tom explained, "I said, 'Well, I'm going hiking.'"

But when Tom began exploring with his altered senses, he quickly realized he had to retrain himself.

"I went to a trail: a small, couple-mile loop I knew really well," Tom said. "It was a good thing nobody was around because there was a lot of swearing and yelling going on. I couldn't follow the trail."

The term *legally blind* encompasses a broad spectrum of visual impairments. Tom can see shadows and "can see enough so I'm not going to walk into a tree - well, most of the time," but has no idea what anybody looks like. He cannot see faces or skin color. Tom attended a school for the blind and

has taught himself a lot, too.

"I feel a lot with my feet," Tom described. "I can feel where the trail is worn in, and I can usually tell when I get off-trail. Leaves get crunchy and you can tell nobody walked there. But sometimes I'm 10 feet off the trail and I'll spend hours trying to find where the trail is again. [In the fall] because the leaves fall on the trail, I can't tell where it is at all, so I've got to wait until people hike it and knock the leaves off from their walking. I once went about a quarter-mile [off-trail] and it took me two hours trying to find it."

"The hardest part for me is roadwalks," Tom continued. "I get out on the road and miss the trail where it goes into the woods. I've got a magnifier, and I've got to blow things up really big. I'll take a section map, and keep going over it and over it. I'll memorize it all in my head for a two-day, three-day hike. It's a lot of work. I'll spend 10 hours memorizing it all."

Tom noted that blue seems to stand out in the woods a little better for him. How fortunate that NCNST blazes are blue! He appreciates the use of two blazes, which indicates an upcoming turn in the

trail. Other trail users and passersby are often helpful, too.

"Sometimes I flag somebody down, tell them my vision is bad, show them the map, and ask them to tell me what to do," Tom said. "Once I was in the UP and turned the wrong direction. I asked a guy and he said, 'It's about four miles back that way! Jump on my tailgate, I'll give you a ride back.'"

Tom used to have a dog who would follow the trail and he has since gotten another one, albeit the newer one is still learning.

"She's been from St. Ignace to Tahquamenon," Tom said. "She's doing good. She's a mutt; I just picked her up from the pound. But sometimes [she] gets a little distracted. A normal guide dog that I could get, they're trained to do other things. I prefer to train the dog myself. I need them to follow trails, not to tell me where a doorway is, like a normal service dog would."

With a little help, Tom has accomplished so much. Last year, he and his girlfriend hiked the NCNST in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

"She was worried about me walking off a cliff, which was understandable," Tom laughed.

He enjoyed it, but felt it was overpopulated. Instead, he prefers all the streams along the Trail between St. Ignace and Tahquamenon Falls State

Park - a section he's backpacked four times, alone. He also hiked from Grand Marais to Tahquamenon last year.

"I've done [the Hike 100 Challenge] four years," Tom said. "One year I missed it because I was on the Appalachian Trail. I went from Georgia up to Virginia, about 700 miles. I like the North Country Trail way better, though. There are too many people on the Appalachian Trail. Too busy for me."

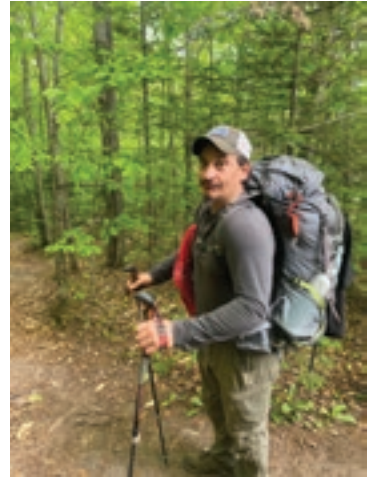
"Everybody was worried about me because of my vision," Tom continued. "So I picked the Appalachian Trail. I was interested in it, and once you're on the trail, it's so beaten down, you're going to know when you're off it. I was told you sit down and in five minutes, somebody's going to walk by. And that's how it was."

On the NCNST, Tom most appreciates silence and the slow pace.

"Everything is so busy nowadays," Tom said. "Everybody is in a hurry. [The Trail] brings you back to nature."

To help motivate and encourage others, visually impaired or not, Tom started a YouTube channel: Blind Tom's Adventures.

"Everybody told me to try to inspire people," Tom explained. "I can still do the things I do because I don't just sit there. I can't sit there and do nothing. I rebuilt a semi engine with my vision



All photos provided by  
Tom Ogden

“

**After my vision went, I said, 'Well, I'm going hiking.'"**

— TOM OGDEN

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like this. I push myself to do things all the time.”

Tom elaborated that when one sense fails, your other senses don’t necessarily improve, but you pay more attention to them because you need them more. He relies heavily on his hearing.

“I listen a lot,” Tom said. “One time, I was on a trail by my parents’ house. I do it all the time. I was coming back and thought for sure I saw a big old bear. I stood there yelling and making all kinds of noise, and for 20 minutes, it would not move. Finally, I went a little closer and it was a burned out stump.”

He laughed as he told that story, but had another experience with an actual bear in which his hearing was crucial.



“I was on the Trail from Grand Marais to Tahquamenon,” Tom said. “I turned a corner and saw a black, blurry object moving around. I must’ve been 15 feet away. I started making a bunch of noise and tried to make myself big, but it just sat there, huffing and rumbling. I thought, ‘Oh this time I need to get out of here.’”

Tom learns more about himself and the Trail with every hike. He proudly owns the trail name Daredevil, which he received on the Appalachian Trail.

He estimates he has about 400 miles to hike of Michigan’s 1,160. With a preferred backpacking pace of 20 to 25 miles per day, he intends to bag those remaining 400 miles within the next year.

“I don’t know what it is exactly,” Tom wondered aloud, “But ever since I was a kid, I’ve been drawn out to the woods. I’ve got to do my ‘woods therapy,’ as I call it.”

*Tom is active on the North Country Trail Community Facebook group ([facebook.com/groups/nctcommunity](https://facebook.com/groups/nctcommunity)), where he shares his experiences, and is occasionally in need of advice or a shuttle. Find him on YouTube by searching “Blind Tom’s Adventures.” Sign up for the Hike 100 Challenge, like Tom, to help keep yourself motivated: [northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge](https://northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge).*

## Fastest Known Time on the Finger Lakes Trail

Photo by Christopher Valites

Mark “Quadfather” Valites resides about 30 minutes south of Buffalo, N.Y. He has completed 15 marathons and 25 ultra-marathons (distances of over 26.2 miles), including the Boston Marathon, six 100+ mile races, and five 100+ kilometer races. He is a trail maintainer with the Finger Lakes Trail Association (FLTC) for a segment west of Little Rock City, a member of the mapping team, a Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) Ambassador, and the author of *Miles with Mark*, a trail running column for the *FLT News*.

In 2021, Mark achieved the Fastest Known Time (FKT) record on the FLT. This is a partial interview of his experience. Some of his answers here were also published in the *FLT News*.

### INSPIRATION

**Mark:** After having completed all of the branch trails of the FLT system, the main trail seemed like the next logical step. Doing so was a bit of a pipe dream though, as I’d been working year

after year to qualify for/enter the lottery for the Western States Endurance Run - the “SuperBowl” of 100-milers. (I still haven’t been drawn.) The pandemic pausing the race for a year opened up an opportunity to run the FLT. My friend Jeffrey Adams, who ran the Long Path (which I now jokingly refer to as “the Short Path”), provided some inspiration as well.

## PREPARATION

**Mark:** With the FLT being bigger than anything I’d done before, I decided some more formal guidance for such a large undertaking would be prudent and hired a coach. As training progressed, my weekly mileage never increased to more than what I’ve typically done each year to train for 100 miles races (about 75 miles/week maximum), but my coach accompanied it with core/leg strength training, flexibility work, a focus on mindfulness, and a good deal of time hiking with a big dead ash log stashed in my backpack - I distinctly remember several scary hikes with it while doing hill climb repeats in the dark and pouring rain while thunderstorms raged above. Weekend training almost always called for at least one day with 20-30 miles on trail, sometimes two. As the summer progressed and no issues arose, it became time for me to recruit crew members. Crew would meet me at access points along the way to refresh my supplies, provide some guidance on what was up next, and shuttle us to/from nightly accommodations. Asking others to crew was difficult for me, especially since I’d need them during the work week. I recruited eight crew members, but my pace ended up requiring only six.

Prior to the start of the run, we held a crew meeting on Zoom to review all of the information from the various FLTC sources I’d aggregated, and set expectations. While I’d asked each of the crew to preload all of the documentation on their phones ahead of time, they ended up depending heavily on one crew member’s spare phone, which we dubbed “the Adventure Phone.” It contained offline versions of all of the PDF maps, elevation profiles, GPX files, Google Docs, and the various apps we used.

I set a minimum goal of a conservative 50k day (31 miles). I eventually found a groove and averaged between 35-40 miles. I was happy with my preparation and execution, but if I were to do it again, the biggest changes I’d consider are renting a camper van to save on travel time to/from access points and potentially choosing a time of year with more daylight.



**Photo by**  
Mark Valites

## ATTEMPT

**Mark:** I ran the trail not only to see what I was capable of, but to see what was out there. While so much of the trail was incredible, I found a good deal of the beauty was matched with sections full of thorns, mud and wet feet.

I recorded running 595 miles with 97,000 feet of elevation gain. I averaged 37.2 miles and 6,070 feet of elevation gain per day, which added up to 15 days, 12 hours, and 10 minutes from when I started.

Times recorded include total time from start to finish, including all non-moving time. The time I recorded this fall is considered Supported, which per [fastestknowntime.com](https://www.fastestknowntime.com), “can have as much support as you can enlist, as long as you are entirely self-powered. This can range from one person handing you water once, to an entire team that accompanies you the whole distance giving you everything (except physical assistance).”

It was a full value adventure and reminded me of everything I love (and hate) about the FLT: Some surprisingly tough road climbs. Loose dogs. Navigation challenges. Corn field edge bushwhacks. Butterflies, dragon flies, damselflies, and plenty of deer flies. I really think that encapsulates what to expect on any given day out on the FLT.

For those looking to undertake something so large, be mindful of what it takes to prepare for, endure through, recover from. Study and plan as best as you can, but be prepared to adapt. For the FLT specifically, expect plenty of bad alongside the good and get a feel for the nature and nuances of the trail, and how to navigate it.

*Read the details of Mark’s FKT and see additional photos at [fastestknowntime.com/fkt/mark-valites-finger-lakes-trail-ny-2021-09-20](https://www.fastestknowntime.com/fkt/mark-valites-finger-lakes-trail-ny-2021-09-20).*



# North Star

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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.

Dan Dueweke traveled from Michigan to Minnesota to volunteer his saw expertise in Border Route Trail / NCNST cleanup efforts after a tornado caused tremendous damage.

**Photo by** Matt Davis