



North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

FALL 2022



2022 Volunteer Awards

Extraordinary NCTA volunteers, supporters, and partners are celebrated and honored.

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A recap of this year's event in Walker, Minn.

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Protecting the NCNST

Paul Gagnon and Andrea Ketchmark detail this new program

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the NCNST

On the Cover

Mary Coffin scouts potential routes for new NCNST route in northern New York State. Scouting is an important step in finding the most sustainable and optimal location for the Trail on a parcel of land.

Photo provided by Mary Coffin

Trailhead

MIKE CHAPPLE, PRESIDENT, NCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



A dark tent by the side of the trail is one of the world's best places to get some thinking done. After all, there's not much else to do once "hiker midnight" rolls around at 9:00 p.m. That's where I am as I write these words. This particular trip isn't on the North Country Trail, but it's nearby, in the high peaks of New York's Adirondack Mountains. I spent today with

good friends, punishing ourselves as we climbed one peak too many, with more of the same planned for tomorrow. Exhausted in my tent after a fantastic day on the trail is the ideal setting to reflect on how grateful I am to the many people who made this trip (and many others) possible. In this season of Thanksgiving, I would like to extend my thanks.

First and foremost, I thank all of you: the thousands of people who care enough about our trail to give back to it every day with both your time and your treasure. Our Association and our trail depend upon your support, and I am both grateful and humbled by the trust you place in us.

As I embark on a two-year journey serving as NCTA's next Board of Directors President, I would also like to thank those who came before me. I've had the privilege of serving on the Board for the past eight years and, during that time, I've worked with four different Presidents and learned from each of them. I'm humbled to follow the blazes left by Tom Moberg, Ruth Dorrough, Tim Mowbray, and Jaron Nyhof. I'm also grateful to the dozens of other volunteers I've served with over the years on the NCTA Board. When I survey that talent, I know that our Association is in good hands.

Finally, I'd like to thank the professional staff at NCTA for the work they do every day to build, maintain, and promote the Trail. Most of our members don't regularly interact with the talented team in Lowell and across the Trail, but we all benefit from their work. Whether it is developing route plans, securing easements, updating maps, or communicating with our membership, the staff is crucial to our success. Whether you're planning a trip, hiking on the Trail, or maintaining your section, the NCTA staff is there to provide the resources you need.

As you reflect on your own reasons for gratitude this Thanksgiving, I'd ask that you consider the role the North Country Trail plays in your life, and think about the ways that you can give back to your Trail Community. Whether you can provide financial support during #GivingTuesday, volunteer a few hours of time to help maintain the Trail, or simply bring out a few friends to discover the joy of hiking, I'm also grateful to you for everything you do to make the Trail better.

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Trailhead

ANDREA KETCHMARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by
Andrea Ketchmark

Coming off of our 2022 Annual Celebration, one thing is clear: the North Country National Scenic Trail exists only because of the incredible community that supports it. Your passion, your ideas, your work, your stories are what make the North Country Trail special.

In the following pages, you'll read about hikers

and the impact the Trail has had on their lives, like Christa Gerdtz in Michigan, and Mary Coffin and Ruth Dorrrough in New York. You'll also read about our 2022 award winners, and their commitment to the Trail and to the NCTA. Behind those few sentences are years - sometimes decades - of blood, sweat, and tears to make the Trail what it is today. Theirs are lives that transformed this Trail and were transformed by this Trail. Our community thanks you for all you have done and we are honored to tell your stories.

The Trail's story cannot be told without your input. Whether they are tales of triumph, of hikes, or of projects gone awry, there is something special about sitting together, preferably around a campfire sharing a meal, and recounting an experience with others. If you listen to National Public Radio (NPR), you may have heard a program called StoryCorps. This program has a goal to strengthen and build the connections between people, to teach the value of listening, and to weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that everyone's story matters. Over the past few months, NCTA has been working in partnership with StoryCorps staff to record and archive our own stories: Conversations between members of our community who have helped build this incredible legacy of the North Country National Scenic Trail. That includes all of you. Although we had limited spots for those recording sessions, NCTA plans to continue to work with our entire community to use the StoryCorps mobile app, which will allow us to record your conversations anytime, anywhere, to preserve them forever. I can't wait to hear yours.

You are what makes the North Country National Scenic Trail what it is. Thank you for sharing your lives, your energy, time, and talents, and thank you for sharing your stories.

CHRIS LOUDENSLAGER, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SUPERINTENDENT, NCSN



Photo by Mick Hawkins

Greetings! It was wonderful to reconnect with so many of you in person at this year's Celebration in Minnesota! If you were unable to attend this year, I do hope that my staff and I have the opportunity to meet up with you soon in the coming year.

Included in most Celebrations is a program I particularly enjoy: the National Park Service (NPS)

Roundtable. This serves as something of a listening session, where the volunteer community leads the conversation and shares thoughts, questions, and issues you may have directly with me in a comfortable, informal setting. I felt that this year's roundtable was especially productive, with a fantastic turnout and several important topics discussed in the limited time we had available. While I will not have the space to reflect on all the topics that were discussed during this year's Roundtable, I would like to share a couple with you:

One of the first topics presented to me was the need for greater access to chainsaw training. This is an area that my staff and I have been working very hard to improve, and we will continue to seek ways to make more training available to more of our volunteers. Over the last few years, we have succeeded in increasing the number of chainsaw training sessions the NPS provides, but this improvement is spread out across the entirety of the Trail. I recognize this does not necessarily equate to individual Chapters receiving training as frequently as they might need. My staff and I will continue to work on this issue cooperatively with NCTA and explore how we can do more.

Another topic that was raised related to a question of who does what within our NPS North Country Trail staff. This was a great question, especially considering the new positions and programs we have created over the last couple years. As an overview, the following is a breakdown of our current organization and programmatic responsibilities. If you have questions about who to contact regarding a particular issue, the best bet is to contact NPS Trail Manager, Ken Hendrickson, an NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, or NCTA Director of Trail Operations Valerie Bader.

Nic Loiseau, Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) Program Manager. Responsible for all matters regarding the NPS VIP program, including volunteer agreements, NPS volunteer training, Chapter equipment and supply requests, volunteer safety, and accident reports.

Steph Liguori, Compliance Program Manager. Reviews proposed projects to develop plans that ensure all the work we do is in compliance with the wide range of laws, regulations, and permit requirements that protect natural, cultural, and historic resources that may be affected by our actions. Also fields questions about how to protect historic resources, threatened and endangered species, and respecting Tribal interests.

Luke Jordan, Trail Planner. Provides trail planning assistance (both new trail and reroutes), management and administration of the Trail Certification program, and fields NCNST signage standards and questions.

Ken Hendrickson, Trail Manager. Responsible for cooperative agreements with partnering organizations and organizing a response plan for third-party project proposals that may affect the Trail (e.g. cell towers, pipelines, or timber management). Supervises NPS staff and works collaboratively with the NCTA Director of Trail Operations and Regional Trail Coordinators to support our volunteer community, provide for volunteer needs, and resolve any issues that might arise.

Chris Loudenslager, Trail Superintendent. Works in close partnership with NCTA, Affiliate leaders, and other partners to develop short-term and long-term strategic plans; identifies annual goals and objectives for NPS staff; and in cooperation with our trail partners, establishes processes and policies to meet the wide array of responsibilities and requirements associated with the management and administration of our National Scenic Trail. Chris is also currently responsible for making decisions regarding NPS land acquisitions, developing land management, resource protection, and stewardship plans and regulations for lands owned by the NPS, and is the Trail's chainsaw policy director.

GIVING TUESDAY

We are gearing up for the **#GivingTuesday Match Challenge on November 29**. On that day, your gift will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$26,500, thanks to the generosity of a few dedicated NCTA members.

Those who make an online gift of **\$40 or more before 5:00 p.m. (ET)** on **#GivingTuesday** will be entered to win a NCTA gear package valued at over \$250.

On this national day of giving, please make a meaningful gift to advance the future of the North Country National Scenic Trail - a future in which our Trail is fully protected, supported, and accessible to all.

#GivingTuesday2022
northcountrytrail.org/donate



EVENTS

Celebration 2022

“

Walker was my first in-person Celebration and it's very difficult to put into words how truly meaningful this event is. It is a time for true connection - with others, with nature, with the Trail's history, and with our mission. All of the qualities we embrace as a community came shining through: Welcoming, trusting, kind, and supportive. You are a group like none other and I cherish these memories.”

— NANCY BROZEK
NCTA DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
AND COMMUNICATIONS

Photo by Kate Lemon

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) works with one or a few volunteer Chapters or Affiliates to host Celebration in a different location each year. This is a multi-day event that offers opportunities to explore the Trail in unique locations. Celebration provides networking opportunities for trail enthusiasts, skills workshops and volunteer training, and engaging and inspiring presentations.

This year, in early October, over 200 people gathered in Walker, Minn. for the annual NCTA Celebration event. Thanks in large part to the planning efforts of NCTA Itasca Moraine Chapter members, as well as other volunteers across Minnesota, this first in-person Celebration since 2019 was invigorating. Crisp fall temperatures, abundant sunshine, and vibrant leaf colors made the Trail ever so enticing. More than 20 group hikes were offered over three days, ranging in length from about a quarter-mile up to 10 miles. There was a Leadership Summit led by Amy Stork, a consultant who helped participants focus on productive and thoughtful leadership succession planning. There were over a dozen workshops and presentations, including a hands-on Leave No Trace hike, a roundtable discussion with National Park Service staff, and a day trip to Grand Rapids, Minn. with the NCTA Next Generation Coalition members. Several Trail Community members participated in official StoryCorps recording sessions. Volunteers were commemorated for their generosity toward the Trail with a variety of awards. Keynote speakers Annie Humphrey and Emily Ford enchanted the crowd on Friday and Saturday evenings: Annie with impactful storytelling and song, and Emily with impressive tales of her winter North Country adventures.



Joan Young with members of the NCTA Next Generation Coalition. (Left to right) Tessa Fenstermaker, Stephanie Sleda, Joan Young, Felicia Hokenstad, and Madeline Blyveis.

Photo provided by Felicia Hokenstad



Top: Florence Hedeon of the NCTA Itasca Moraine Chapter (left) with keynote speaker Annie Humphrey (right).

Photo by Kate Lemon

Bottom:
Photo provided by
Mike Toole

“

Seeing people from all eight North Country Trail states in one room is a great representation of the vastness of the Trail and the national impact of our volunteers. I was particularly energized by the Leadership Summit, where Chapter and Affiliate leaders gathered to discuss leadership success and succession planning.”

— VALERIE BADER
NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL OPERATIONS

Reflections and Observations

BY ED RANSON, NCTA ITASCA MORAINES CHAPTER
PRESIDENT AND 2022 CELEBRATION COMMITTEE MEMBER

This was my first Celebration. I went into it not knowing exactly what to expect and not knowing exactly what NCTA visitors would expect from us. Fortunately, the combined efforts of the NCTA staff and our Chapter members made for a great event. I have a local bias but I thought that woodsy, touristy, scenic Walker worked well as a host city. Our Chapter members had our section of the Trail ready, in fine shape for the hikers. Our scheduling guess for the week of peak fall color was spot on. NCTA staff did a great job on the organizational end. Scheduling bus rides to trailheads way out in the woods on dirt roads isn't easy, but we didn't lose any hikers and everybody made it back in time for dinner. The workshops I attended were really interesting and useful. It was also educational to sit in on the more administrative and policy-oriented sessions, and to hear more about some of the big-picture issues that are key to the future of the Trail.

“

I left my first in-person NCTA celebration feeling like my cup was overflowing. I left feeling invigorated about volunteering for the Trail in new ways, and with so many new ideas and trail friends.”

— STEPHANIE SLEDA
NCTA NEXT GENERATION
COALITION MEMBER



(Clockwise from top left) Star volunteers Joe Kravetz, Jerry Fennell, Bethany Thomas, and Lorana Jinkerson.

Photo by Kate Lemon



EVENTS

Holly McKnight and Harlan Liljequist, NCTA Star of the North Chapter members and volunteers, participated in a StoryCorps recording session together.

Photo by
Kate Lemon



“

I felt a belonging like no other. I showed up and voila! These are my people. Connecting the physical trail to all the people behind it and on it, for me, was thoroughly inspirational and nothing short of profound.”

— HOLLY MCKNIGHT
NCTA STAR OF THE NORTH CHAPTER
MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER

The following are from anonymous participants, sharing their favorite memories from the event:

“A woman finished her [Hike] 100 [Challenge] miles while on a Celebration hike so we all celebrated her!”

“Getting on the bus and hearing my name called by someone who added, ‘We were wondering if we would see you here.’”

“My favorite memory was when Flo [Hedeen] chatted with me on the hike she was sweeping, and thanked me for being there and told me I was the future of the Trail. It meant so much to me! I have been nervous about stepping into leadership roles while also being so young/not knowing so much about the Trail and NCTA, and comments like these throughout the weekend really motivated and inspired me.”

“The awards celebration was such a nice way to honor volunteers and trail supporters for their services. It was fun to hear what everyone had done for the Trail to win awards and recognition.”

“Meeting members from other organizations and sensing the pride that each member takes in their organization. Took several names and numbers so when get to that section, I have a number to call.”

The North Country Trail Association thanks the 2023 Celebration sponsors for their generous support of the event: Sawyer, Scheels, AllQuest, 3M, Stone Harbor Wilderness Supply, and L&M Fleet Supply.

“

This was my first NCTA Celebration. A common love for the Trail and desire to see its progress flourish is infectious, and reminds me that I am a part of something big and incredibly special.”

— MADELINE BLYVEIS
NCTA NEXT GENERATION
COALITION MEMBER

“I have been told that when we walk the land, our breath falls to the earth and in that place, we are remembered always. Therefore, on a certain fragrant day, I considered all who had climbed these hills before me, stepped through fallen leaves, and walked beneath the pine. I thought of those who were coming, too. Surely they will remember that our living breath has fallen in this place and cannot be removed from our good and ancient land.”

— ANNE M. DUNN
OJIBWE STORYTELLER



Larry Pio receives a National Park Service award from Chris Loudenslager, NCNST Superintendent, for 10,000 hours of volunteering for the North Country National Scenic Trail.



Right: Jim and Eleanor Mitton receive a Blue Blazes Benefactor award from NCTA President Mike Chapple.

Photo by Matt Rowbotham

Bottom Left: Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, leads a hike.

Photo by Alison Sanchez



“

It meant a lot that people were excited to see the [NCTA] Next Generation Coalition folks there. I felt so welcomed and valued by the community. Hearing about what the Trail means to all of them is really moving, and each person has a different perspective and relationship to the Trail.”

— TESSA FENSTERMAKER
NCTA NEXT GENERATION
COALITION MEMBER

“

On a trail 4,800 miles long, there are so many people doing important work, and it’s hard, especially as a new employee, to keep track of who they are. Spending time with them, chatting about the Trail and trail protection, joking around, dining, and hiking together has made those relationships more personal and meaningful to me, and with them, the sections of Trail which they are connected to.”

— PAUL GAGNON
NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL PROTECTION





JEDI Partnership Successes in 2022

BY VALERIE BADER, NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL OPERATIONS

The NCTA's JEDI Mini-Grant program launched in 2021 as a means to further the Association's commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) on the North Country National Scenic Trail. The grant program is intended to provide funding to community programs that serve people experiencing barriers to outdoor experiences, and that are creating programming in connection with the NCNST. Grants are available for workshops, programs, day hikes,

overnight trips, and any other opportunities connecting people to the Trail.

As of Fall 2022, the grant program has supported six projects in Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, engaging over 110 participants. NCTA's JEDI Committee is hopeful that these projects will spark an interest in the Trail, and create an opportunity for long-term partnerships with individuals and organizations in the communities along the Trail.

"The JEDI Mini-Grant program has been an overwhelming success from the Committee's perspective," Josh Berlo shared, NCTA JEDI Committee Chair. "We could not be more pleased with the results of so many people being able to experience and enjoy the NCNST, while concurrently fulfilling our mission of inclusion and accessibility of the Trail. We look forward to future grant requests, and more applications."



Outdoor Afro Backpacking Trip

Outdoor Afro celebrates and inspires Black connections and leadership in nature, and has active networks in 60 cities in the United States. The Outdoor Afro Pittsburgh network planned and hosted an overnight backpacking trip on the NCNST near the Ohio and Pennsylvania state line. The group, including some first time backpackers, backpacked seven miles on the Trail. They camped overnight at one of the shelters maintained by the NCTA Wampum Chapter, where they enjoyed a campfire and s'mores. One participant shared that everyone had a positive attitude and appreciated getting to know the NCNST better. "It took us a long time because we're beginners, but it was the journey and not the end time that mattered." The Wampum Chapter and the Outdoor Afro Pittsburgh members have already connected for several other hikes and hope to continue to grow the relationship.



Hamtramck High School Outdoor Club Trip

Students from Hamtramck High School's Outdoor Club in Metro Detroit participated in a multi-day trip to the northern lower peninsula of Michigan, including backpacking on the NCNST along the Manistee River. The innovative group hopes to establish the Outdoor Club as a sports team at the school, as a strategy to raise interest, awareness, and funding. The Outdoor Club's focus areas are empowering young women to recreate in the outdoors, environmental awareness, and outdoor leadership. Students reported having a great experience on their trip. One of them shared (and many agreed), "I learned that I am much stronger than I knew." Another said, "This area helped me relax, sleep better, and make more friends."

Top:
Photo provided by
Outdoor Afro

Bottom:
Photo provided by
Hamtramck High School



Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching (BOAT) Ice Fest Trip

BOAT partners with community leaders to get their groups outside, and provides transportation and leadership for outdoor adventures. This February, BOAT partnered with Detroit Outdoors, who, alongside at least five additional Detroit organizations, recruited a diverse audience of Detroiters to attend the Michigan Ice Fest in the Upper Peninsula. Twenty-eight participants were provided with an introductory experience to the Upper Peninsula and the NCNST. "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 wintry wonderland to an enthusiastic group of Detroiters." *A full report on BOAT's trip can be found in the Spring 2022 issue of the North Star.*



Tiger Pause Youth Backpacking Trip

Tiger Pause, a youth ministry group in western Pennsylvania, sent six women on a backpacking trip on the NCNST. For five of them, it was their first time backpacking. Three Tiger Pause staff members and three program participants hiked nearly three miles and camped in a newly built shelter. Rain challenged the group but did not dampen spirits. "We had an awesome evening full of hotdogs, s'mores, and conversation," shared Brittany Mavrich, Tiger Pause Program Director. "The next morning, we woke up and hiked out. The hike out was a whole lot quicker than the hike in, and we were thankful for sunshine!"



Union Area High School Hike Squad Hike Series

In western Pennsylvania, Union Area High School (UHS) engaged 62 different students from the school's Hike Squad program in a series of hikes on the NCNST. Hike Squad members completed all the NCNST miles (no roadwalks!) between the Pennsylvania-Ohio state line and Moraine State Park (Pa.), in a combination of day hikes and overnight trips. Once school was out in June, students were able to hike from the Route 66 trailhead in Vowinckel to the Route 948 trailhead, covering just over 50 miles in four days. Program Leader Ryan Miles shared, "The kids did fantastic and we are looking forward to another great year on the NCNST this year. Because of the JEDI grant, we were able to procure necessary items and transportation to make this year's hikes a success."

Top:
Photo provided by
BOAT

Middle:
Photo provided by
Tiger Pause

Bottom:
Photo provided by
Union Area High School

Two 2022 grant recipients are still working through planning and scheduling their activities. Stay tuned to NCTA communications for updates. Applications for the JEDI Mini-Grant program are accepted on a rolling basis, and all are encouraged to apply. Learn more and apply at northcountrytrail.org/jedi.

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



PARTNERSHIP

Five Notable Hikes in New York

BY RUTH DORROUGH



Labrador Pond
Overlook, July

Photo provided by
Ruth Dorrough

Lesson learned: Our needs to travel, explore places, and accomplish goals could be met by adapting plans to fit our changing physical conditions. Incurable wanderlust has led us to adventure travel all over the globe, and to the completion of three National Scenic Trails. With the inexorable effects of the aging process catching up with us, we wondered how we would meet the need to enliven day-to-day existence. *The Five Notable Hikes on the North Country Trail in New York* provided the ideal answer.

A hike series was conceived by the Marketing and Promotion Subcommittee of the NCTA's New York State (NYS) Volunteer Council. Almost 90% of the Trail in New York is cared for by organizations that existed before the NCNST, as a whole, was created. The Council serves as a regional forum that brings together representatives from the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC), the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), the NCTA Central New York Chapter, and a variety of other individuals and agencies.

Given the richness, beauty, and accessibility of the NCNST in New York, it was no easy task for the group to select which hikes to offer. Once they were chosen, narratives, sketch maps, and photos were assembled in a booklet. This year, it was brought to life.

Deb Nero, FLTC Executive Director, led the first three hikes, enriching participants with her scientific knowledge. In May, we wandered through Little Rock

City, a magical labyrinth of pathways among towering rocks. We enjoyed staying in Ellicottville, and had a wonderful conversation with a doctor who had returned to her hometown to practice her dream of "old-fashioned medicine," complete with house calls.

In June, the Mitchellville Gorge hike began with a walk through one of the many vineyards that grace the region. We climbed along the creek through a lovely Eastern Hemlock forest. A combination dairy-car wash business met our need for the obligatory post-hike ice cream.

We spent a beautiful summer day in July exploring the Trail through the stunning scenery of Tinker Falls and the Labrador Pond Overlook. Afterwards we all had a good lunch in Fabius at a country store that supports the NCNST. We rented a hunting cabin with a living room decorated wall-to-wall with mounted deer heads. That Sunday we saw a sign for a pancake breakfast at a farm. Serendipity! It was delicious, and we learned all about June berries from the farmer.

“

I enjoy the first reactions from newcomers to upstate New York's NCNST segments, and I enjoy hiking with new people.”

— MARY COFFIN,
NCTA VOLUNTEER



Top left: Little Rock City, May



Top right: Puffer Pond, September

Bottom left: Tinker Falls, July

Bottom right: Stone Quarry Hill Art Park, August

Photos provided by
Ruth Dorrough



Scott Sellers of the Central New York Chapter led us on a hike in August that showcased the unique sculptures of Stone Quarry Hill Art Park. The hike included great views, and a wooded trail lovingly cared for by Chapter members. Reconnecting with old friends and making new ones in this beautiful setting lifted our spirits.

The final hike brought to mind the enormous scope of the NCNST, even in this one state, as we drove five hours from our home to the Adirondacks to enjoy Puffer Pond. This is an easily accessible taste of wilderness, and our cabin was only a mile or two from the trailhead. We took our time walking, resting often and drinking in the atmosphere of the woods. On the way home, we got off the thruway for lunch in a small town. After parking the van at a rather soggy campsite, we walked to a bar for a burger. I was a bit frightened by the clientele, but long

ago, the Trail taught me not to be put off by places in small towns that appear a bit seedy. This bar was filled with happy people. Around the pool table were balloons, folks were singing “Happy Birthday,” and the food was very good. It reminded me of another place off the Trail in southern Ohio. Within an hour, we were all singing along to Creedence Clearwater Revival on the jukebox.

We had hiked all these trail segments before, though at that time, our focus was picking up miles toward the goal of completion. The best thing about this year’s adventures was that the slow pace greatly increased our appreciation of the experience. Several times we commented, “It feels like we have gone much farther from home than we really have.”

Keep an eye on the NCTA Events Calendar for hikes like these: northcountrytrail.org/events.



VOLUNTEERS

In Memoriam

We thank the following for their dedication to our Trail Community.
Please consider taking a hike on the North Country Trail in their memory.

Joanne Dobbins
Ohio

John B. Edwards
Pennsylvania

Don Elzinga
Michigan

Lon Emerick
Michigan

Tom Garnett
Michigan + Wisconsin

Jerry Keeney
Michigan

Carol Kirkwood
Pennsylvania

Phyllis Lane
Pennsylvania

Shirley LaBonte
Michigan

**Jerome "Jerry"
Maynard**
Michigan

Larry Mosher
Michigan

Joe Smith
Pennsylvania

Bruce Schwenke
Michigan

Steven Trangsrud
North Dakota

John Tremore
Michigan

Jerry Trout
Minnesota

Werner Veit
Michigan

Wesley Wehner,
Michigan

Ronald Wiley
Michigan

Rolf Zerges
New York

*If the NCTA has inadvertently overlooked anyone, we apologize, and please let us know:
hq@northcountrytrail.org.*

Werner Veit Recollections

BY BOB PAPP



Werner was retired from his role as publisher and president of Booth Newspapers (Mich.) when he first took an interest in the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). Merging his newspaper roots with his love of the outdoors, he started a column in which

he would interview a person of interest while taking them on a hike. He called me back when NCTA's office was still in downtown Grand Rapids (Mich.) - probably in the fall of 1997 - to propose hiking a section of the NCNST in the Manistee National Forest. What a great ploy he had! The hike was enjoyable and conversation flowed so easily. Later that year, NCTA President Derek Blount agreed Werner would be a great addition to our Board of Directors, and soon he became a valuable member of the NCTA leadership team.

For several years, Werner kept his own workspace in the NCTA office. He was there most days of the week offering guidance, spinning ideas, making connections, and helping put the Association on a path to significant growth. Back in those days

we had only a handful of Chapters, a couple of Affiliates, and fewer than 1,000 members. By the time Werner left, there were a few dozen Chapters and Affiliates, and more than 3,000 members. I was always coming up with ideas to bounce off Werner over lunch. Still to this day, I can hear Werner saying to me, "The problem with that, Bob, is..." I always thought my ideas were great, but Werner's calm wisdom and rational thinking surely saved the NCTA from more than one boondoggle!

Werner loved being at the center of things. He loved being around people, mentoring them, enjoying their company, and facilitating their success. When he laughed, it didn't come from his throat. It rolled up from his belly; when that belly shook, you knew you hit paydirt.

At an annual conference (now called Celebration) in Minnesota one year, we flew to Minneapolis together, and Werner rented a nice car to drive us up to the site. I stole the car manual from the glove compartment when he wasn't looking and surprised him by pulling it out during the live auction. It cost him about \$100 to get it back. Though he'd already bought more than his share of things he didn't really need, he was a good sport about it because that's who he was. Werner cared deeply for the Trail and the people who support it. He was always a generous man with broad shoulders who was full of spirit and a deep-seated desire to see good ideas and good people thrive.

Remembering Jerry Trout



Jerry was a cofounder of the NCTA Itasca Moraine Chapter (Minn.) and in January 2022, he hiked on.

"After retiring, Jerry and his wife Beth moved to Minnesota, spending 20 years on Stony

Lake near Hackensack, where Jerry devoted his life to building and maintaining the North Country National Scenic Trail." (Newton Daily News obituary)

"One afternoon, back maybe 20 years, after doing the dirty work necessary to build new trail, we stopped to rest by sitting on the ground, leaning against a huge boulder," reflected Carter Hedeon, fellow Chapter member and volunteer. "With the October sun warming us, Jerry exclaimed, 'Carter, it just doesn't get any better than this!' He loved the outdoors, and he loved the North Country Trail."

Jerry McCarty, another fellow Chapter member and volunteer, shared a similar memory.

"One day when Jerry and I went to work on the Trail west of Highway 371, he stopped as soon as we were on the Trail and said, 'This is where I had on new hiking boots, stepped into the forest and had an epiphany. This is what I want to do.'"



HIKE 100 CHALLENGE

Share your adventures like Kel!

Kel Anderson, trail enthusiast and NCTA Star of the North Chapter member, hiked 165 miles in eight days. He trekked the entire stretch of NCNST in the Tamarack National Wildlife Refuge through Chippewa National Forest. "At 53 years old, was I adding more crazy to an already crazy concept? Oh well, game on."

Learn more, sign up, and share your adventures at northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge.



TRAIL
USE

Be Part of Something Bigger than Yourself

BY NANCY BROZEK, NCTA DIRECTOR OF
DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS, AND PAUL
KOGELSCHATZ, NCTA FUNDRAISING COORDINATOR

As the final months of 2022 approach, you will begin reading more about the importance of year-end giving. You will probably receive letters from a variety of organizations that are doing good work both in your local community and across the country. It makes sense, as statistically, Americans make the majority of their charitable donations at the end of the calendar year.

Your North Country Trail Association is no exception. Beginning with this article, you will be asked to reflect on the value the Association brings to the Trail. From our perspective, that value is our people. This Trail Community is an exceptional one. We believe this stems from the personal connection each of us has with the Trail. At a time when the world feels so divided, this Trail unites. It brings people together to rally around the mission: a mission that strives to build, maintain, and protect this National Scenic Trail so all can experience it.

And so, you will be asked to consider an end-of-year gift that supports what makes this Trail so special - our people - and the work being done each and every day. It cannot be understated how important this decision is. This end-of-year appeal raises one-fourth of the Association's general operating funds. It ensures budget needs are met and that the Association is able to start the new year on a positive note.

Together, we have accomplished so much for the Trail. We've expanded our Regional Trail Coordinator capacity to better represent the eight states. There is a growing membership that has kept maps free, strengthened the Field Grant program, and supported special programs that introduce new populations to the Trail. As we move into 2023, efforts continue with a strategic focus on protecting the Trail. We are still committed to guiding and celebrating our volunteers. We will expand resources for Chapters and do all we can to ensure a positive experience for Trail users. We will do this because of you. Our Association's value is found within our people - united to do good for the Trail and for those experiencing it. Your support is changing lives and these are some of their stories.



Christa's Story

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, in 2021, an estimated 31% of American adults have experienced an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. Finding a support system is an important first step in self care. The NCTA's 29 Chapters can provide this support for trail users.

She remembers a childhood where hiking was as natural as breathing. A special time when her parents would pack up the family and seek a trail for the day. How did this love of nature and hiking get buried so deep within her? That was the question haunting Christa Gerdt.

The challenges of the past few years would buckle and break many, and the cracks were beginning to show in Christa. She lost her brother to a massive heart attack in 2018; her sister passed away from Parkinson's disease in 2019; and in 2020, both of her aged dogs were put down. Christa, herself, was battling a myriad of debilitating diseases and surgeries, not least of which was lumpectomy surgery and radiation for breast cancer in April 2021.

By October 2021, the last thing on Christa's mind was hiking on the North Country National Scenic Trail. When she read that Randall Roberts, an Ohio hiker and champion for suicide prevention awareness, would be hiking the 119-mile section in her Michigan community, she was surprised by the spark it ignited in her. She needed something to focus on as a part of her healing journey, and this was it. She would join Randall for part of his hike.

Her mind was set but it had been decades since she navigated a trail. Finding the trailhead was confusing and the two miles she planned were a struggle. She wasn't discouraged, but knew she wasn't strong enough to set out during the winter months. And so, hiking was put on hold in her life once again.

This past April, determined to begin again, Christa stumbled on a Chapter hike. She had a rough time completing two miles, but this time, a whole Chapter was with her. She was not alone. She honors Arlene Steimle with the title of hiking champion and shares, "It doesn't take much to reach out and say 'Hi, would you like to take a hike with me?' It does take a bit more to set a date, time, and

place to go on that hike.” For the past six months, Arlene has done that for Christa.

Step by step, Christa and Arlene set their sights on seeing what can be accomplished when having a can-do attitude. It has been a slow process, two miles here and there, but as Christa’s confidence grows, so do her health and stamina. Since April, Christa has completed the NCNST segments across two of her Chapter’s counties, and is well on her way to finishing the third this year. Between this tri-county challenge, the NCTA Hike 100 Challenge, and considering where she was just a year ago, Christa feels motivated and inspired. She is now close to completing those same 119 miles Randall tread, and has become an inspiration herself.

Christa thanks the Trail and her Chapter, for revitalizing her life. The love of hiking her parents instilled in her many years ago has been rejuvenated.

“I want to shout it from the mountain tops!” Christa said. “God has blessed me with an amazing group of people, and a chance to be in nature and regenerate myself.”

She encourages others to take their own step toward getting involved because “you never know how much of a difference it can make in someone’s life, including your own.”



Brittany’s Story

There are many studies supporting the benefit nature and movement has in an individual’s life. Most recently (September 2022), a study published in JAMA Neurology breaks down how walking can have an impact in reducing a person’s risk of dementia. Is hiking a solution for a healthy lifestyle? For many it is, and programs like the Hike 100 Challenge can serve as extra motivation.

“I kept being sick a secret for so long. It felt like a dirty secret.”

Brittany Pazdan spent 32 years of her life trying to describe the pain she felt. Over and over, she would share

her symptoms with doctors only to be misunderstood. In an effort to convince herself that she was on top of her health, she immersed herself in sports.

A soccer player from the age of four and an avid half marathon runner, Brittany lived the life of an athlete. Fatigue, pain, and other symptoms crept in slowly and occasionally. But then they lingered. Brittany eventually reached a point where she was so sick and malnourished, her physical health was at risk. After years of seeking answers, she finally received what she dreaded but also longed for: a diagnosis. She learned she had been living with Hypermobility Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and gastroparesis, a gastrointestinal disease that can lead to, and in fact had resulted in, for her, a paralyzed stomach.

Time that once was spent training for the next endurance challenge was replaced with chronic pain, fatigue, a liquid diet, the decline of colon functions, and countless hours enduring treatments in a hospital bed. In addition to the physical implications came mental hardship. Many times it’s difficult simply to get out of bed and face the day. This half marathon runner wasn’t able to walk to the stop sign at the end of her city street. Her short-term memory was at a loss. Brittany soon realized she had become dependent on unhealthy ways to cover up her pain. Life was not going as planned.

However, knowing her disease was real became liberating. She turned her addictive personality into one focused on healing. She surrounded herself with the right medical team and added nature to the mix for a full, patient-centered care focus. Encouraged by her medical advisors, she set her sights on returning to a life filled with movement. Encouraged by her own determination, she now celebrates being more than 700 days alcohol-free. Encouraged by nature and the challenge a trail can bring, she is healing.

Brittany has always found her motivation lies within a challenge. Enter the North Country National Scenic Trail. Instead of pushing herself for a faster time or winning a goal, her inspiration would come from spending time surrounded by the quiet beauty found along the Trail. This summer, after she and her husband completed their first section thru-hike, they learned of the Hike 100 Challenge. A new goal is now in play.

Throughout her life, she believed she could overcome a situation by pushing herself harder, training longer, and punishing her body to do better. Now, she listens when her body says it’s time for rest or movement, for more nature and less screen time, for more deep breathing.

Brittany shares her story at the encouragement of her rheumatologist, whose holistic approach is based on (safe and reasonable) movement to heal. She also shares her thanks to all who have made the Trail possible. You are playing an important role in her healing journey.



TRAIL
USE



Jerry and Melinda's Story

The 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report, commissioned by the Outdoor Foundation, reveals that after running, hiking was the second-most popular activity nationally in 2021, with an increase of 889,000 participants from 2020.

There is no question that the Trail would be what it is today without the determination of our dedicated volunteers.

Jerry and Melinda McCarty, NCTA Itasca Moraine Chapter (Minn.) members, hope their years of service will inspire the next generation of volunteers to take advantage of the countless opportunities to get involved with the Trail.

Jerry and Melinda were motivated to become volunteers after they joined a NCTA Chapter-led hike. Since then, they've been steadfast in their volunteer support, participating in everything from mowing to coordinating Trail Adopters to chainsawing, and even supporting other Chapters' volunteer needs in the region.

"We see people enjoying the Trail, having a good time, and that lifts us," Jerry McCarty.

Working alongside Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, the McCartys have noticed an increase in Trail use over the last few years. This noticeable gain in trail users is reflected in an ever growing need for more volunteers.

"All the trails around the United States deal with this on different levels," Davis added.

After 12 years of devoted service, Jerry and Melinda have retired as volunteers, creating an opportunity for new volunteers to pick up where they left off. Thank you, Jerry and Melinda, for your service!

These stories reflect the heart of a community dedicated to the outdoors and giving the gift of nature to all. Thank you for your support and involvement in the North Country Trail Association. As you look toward the new year, please consider contributing to the end-of-year appeal. You are making a significant difference for many.

"Our connections may be different, but the common thread is a necessity to be outdoors. The people who worked to bring this trail about and the ones who utilize it have a spiritual, physical, and mental need to spend time outside, hiking, walking, listening, looking, smelling, and working their bodies."

**— Annie Humphrey,
NCTA Celebration 2022 Keynote Speaker**

The NCTA can help you find the right opportunity if you want to volunteer. Most Chapters host workdays, guided hikes, and monthly Chapter meetings, and the online Volunteer Interest Form (northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-interest-form) is an easy way to receive information on opportunities.

In addition to donating your time, you can also support your local Chapter and volunteers by making a charitable contribution. Your membership or donation provides valuable planning and resources for Chapter volunteers to build, maintain, protect, and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail. **You can double your impact by contributing to the 2022 #GivingTuesday Match Challenge: On November 29, your donation will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$26,500.** As an NCTA donor and volunteer, you stand at the forefront of trail management, protection, and advocacy.



Lisa Szela and Peyton David, members of the NCTA Next Generation Coalition, joined the NCTA Heritage Chapter in Wisconsin for trail work this August. The 2022-23 cohort has been impressively involved on the local level.

@nctanextgen

**[northcountrytrail.org/
next-generation-coalition](https://northcountrytrail.org/next-generation-coalition)**



Dennis receives the Hartzog Award from Chris Loudenslager, NCNST Superintendent (National Park Service).

Photo by
Val Bader

Dennis Garrett Receives NPS Hartzog Award

The George and Helen Hartzog Awards for Outstanding Volunteer Service recognize the exemplary contributions of National Park Service (NPS) volunteers. After his retirement, the seventh director of the NPS, George Hartzog, and his wife Helen remembered the Volunteer-In-Parks (VIP) program with a generous donation to the National Park Foundation. This fund has been used to support awards that honor the efforts of exceptional volunteers, groups, and park VIP programs. Each year, volunteers across the agency are nominated for this prestigious award. Dennis Garrett of the Wampum Chapter (Pa.) was awarded with the Regional George and Helen Hartzog Award for Enduring Service.

An active volunteer since 2008, Dennis Garrett has contributed more than 7,800 hours to the North Country National Scenic Trail. Dennis's volunteer efforts in support of the Trail span the spectrum of involvement, from leadership roles such as Chapter President, to trail maintenance, route planning, relationship building, and boosting public interest.

Most recently, through his vision and guidance, Dennis spearheaded the Wampum Chapter's efforts in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and providing a positive experience for youth to connect with the Trail. Within the Chapter leadership structure, Dennis created a Diversity Committee. Not only did Dennis and the committee craft and adopt a diversity statement, but they also reached out to multiple groups to begin the long process of relationship building. The Chapter also hosted activities along their section of the Trail to help these groups build affinity with the Trail and the National Park Service. These efforts were started and carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused great challenges in trying to build new relationships when in-person gatherings were limited. Through his management and determination, Dennis guided the Chapter through these challenges to not only build strong relationships, but to also set up a four-part diversity, equity, and inclusion training.

"Dennis has truly earned this award and is more than deserving of this recognition from the National Park Service leadership," stated Chris Loudenslager, NCNST Superintendent. "His efforts, initiatives, and leadership rank among the best across the entirety of the NPS volunteer program, and his dedication to the Trail, his Chapter, our organization, and the public we serve, is remarkable. Dennis's efforts have made an incredible impact, and his successes will endure. We are so fortunate and grateful to have him as part of our team."

"Dennis is involved in nearly every aspect of NCTA's work," explained Valerie Bader, NCTA Director of Trail Operations. "He is a volunteer, Chapter leader, Board member, landowner, and more. It's always a joy to work on a project with Dennis. His drive and dedication are an inspiration to everyone who works with him. He's very deserving of this award and much, much more!"



Left to right: Chris Loudenslager, NCNST Superintendent (NPS); Valerie Bader, NCTA Director of Trail Protection; Dennis Garrett, NCTA Wampum Chapter; Tom Moutsos, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator for Ohio and Pennsylvania; and Nic Loiseau, Volunteer Program Manager (NPS).

Photo by
Carol Wright



National Park Service Volunteer Recognition

BY NIC LOISEAU, NPS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MANAGER

Every year nearly 300,000 volunteers commit to ensuring that the National Park System represents America at its best. These men and women embody the spirit of America: Dedicated, creative, and hard-working people who care passionately about providing outstanding opportunities for recreation, education, inspiration, solitude, and enjoyment.

The staff at the North Country National Scenic Trail are proud of our volunteers, and their dedication and amazing diversity of skills and talents. It is our privilege to recognize and celebrate each one of you. Thank you for all that you do! We're pleased to highlight volunteers who have reached cumulative hour milestones this year.

10,000 HOURS

Larry Pio
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

4,000 HOURS

Rennae Gruchalla
Dakota Prairie Chapter (N.D.)

Jane Norton
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Tina Toole
Allegheny National Forest Chapter (Pa.)

2,500 HOURS

Dave Adams
Butler County Chapter (Pa.)

Bill Courtois
Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter (Mich.)

Steve Kinne
Central New York Chapter (N.Y.)

Bethany Thomas
Heritage Chapter (Wisc.)

1,000 HOURS

Bob Courtois
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Bruce Dziadzio
Chief Baw Beese Chapter (Mich.)

Robert Haack
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

David Kazmierczak
Allegheny National Forest Chapter (Pa.)

Doug Lawrence
Wampum Chapter (Pa.)

Glee Mayer
Central Flyway Chapter (N.D.)

Gail Rogne
Dakota Prairie Chapter (N.D.)

Michael Sekely
Marquette Area Chapter (Mich.)

Scott Sellers
Central New York Chapter (N.Y.)

400 HOURS

Larry Best
Arrowhead Chapter (Minn.)

Peter Bennett
Spirit of the Woods Chapter (Mich.)

Kathryn Brehm
Western Michigan Chapter (Mich.)

Tim Calloway
Harbor Springs Chapter (Mich.)

Brian Charleson
Wampum Chapter (Pa.)

Shelby Gangloff
Allegheny National Forest Chapter (Pa.)

Kenneth Holst
Wampum Chapter (Pa.)

Peggy Jones
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Nancy Kreft
Marquette Area Chapter (Mich.)

Larry Larson
Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter (Minn.)

Hank Ludtke
Laurentian Lakes Chapter (Minn.)

Lynn Meister Thomas
Marquette Area Chapter (Mich.)

Dennis Olson
Laurentian Lakes Chapter (Minn.)

Rita Oswald
Brule-St. Croix Chapter (Wisc.)

Connie Sherry
Peter Wolfe Chapter (Mich.)

William Smith
Wampum Chapter (Pa.)

Charlie Todd
Superior Shoreline Chapter (Mich.)

Robert Westphal
Border Route Trail Association (Minn.)

Andrew Zeek
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Mark Zimmerman
Central Flyway Chapter (N.D.)

200 HOURS

Steven Ashmead
Western Michigan Chapter (Mich.)

Sarah Collier
Western Michigan Chapter (Mich.)

Cindy Faust-Miller
Chief Baw Beese Chapter (Mich.)

Jerry Fennell
Heritage Chapter (Wisc.)

Daniel Geiger
Star of the North Chapter (Minn.)

Alisha Glasgow
Allegheny National Forest Chapter (Pa.)

Steve Hicks
Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew

James Howell
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Jonathan Hughlett
Brule-St. Croix Chapter (Wisc.)

Michelle Lackey Olsen
Minnesota Waters and Prairie
Chapter (Minn.)

Doug Mangold
Allegheny National Forest
Chapter (Pa.)

Eric Maturi
Arrowhead Chapter (Minn.)

Dave Matz
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Cheryl McGrath
Western Michigan Chapter
(Mich.)

Jeff Mellgren
Grand Traverse Hiking Club
Chapter (Mich.)

Keven Mueller
Dakota Prairie Chapter (N.D.)

Deb Murphy
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Matthew Patterson
Buckeye Trail Association (Ohio)

John Pitale
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Gary Rhoades
Clarion County Chapter (Pa.)

Rich Saccardi
Buckeye Trail Association (Ohio)

Jeanne Sekely
Marquette Area Chapter (Mich.)

David Snoek
Western Michigan Chapter
(Mich.)

Arlene Steimle
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Nathyn Thompson
Marquette Area Chapter (Mich.)

Shawn Weishaar
Allegheny National Forest
Chapter (Pa.)

Margaret Whaley
Central New York Chapter (N.Y.)

Dale Wical
Buckeye Trail Association (Ohio)

100 HOURS

Jean Adams
Butler County Chapter (Pa.)

Robert Becklund
Laurentian Lakes Chapter (Minn.)

Rick Burkart
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Paul Bush
Superior Shoreline Chapter
(Mich.)

Michael Carson
Arrowhead Chapter (Minn.)

Joe Carter
Buckeye Trail Association (Ohio)

Lynda Chudy (N.Y.)

Angelia Clarke
Allegheny National Forest
Chapter (Pa.)

Katarzyna Dec
Allegheny National Forest
Chapter (Pa.)

Dan Dueweke
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Elizabeth Foley
Grand Traverse Hiking Club
Chapter (Mich.)

Bob Harris
Border Route Trail Association
(Minn.)

Tom Harris
Superior Hiking Trail Association
(Minn.)

Cindy Hoard
Chief Baw Beese Chapter (Mich.)

Felicia Hokenstad
Marquette Area Chapter (Mich.)

Dorien Howe
Peter Wolfe Chapter (Mich.)

Yvette Jester
Wampum Chapter (Pa.)

Deb Mattes
Chief Baw Beese Chapter (Mich.)

Linda Mraovic
Wampum Chapter (Pa.)

David Olsen
Minnesota Waters and Prairie
Chapter (Minn.)

Ruth Perino
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Bruce Pierson
Peter Wolfe Chapter (Mich.)

Konstantin Pokrovski
Allegheny National Forest
Chapter (Pa.)

Wendie Preiss
Western Michigan Chapter (Mich.)

Ed Ranson
Itasca Moraine Chapter (Minn.)

Diana Sherry
Peter Wolfe Chapter (Mich.)

Julie Smith
Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.)

Stacy Strand
Itasca Moraine Chapter (Minn.)

Mike Sucik (Iowa)

Blair Sullivan (Kan.)

Richard Vehe
Brule-St. Croix Chapter (Wisc.)

Nancy VanWinkle
Western Michigan Chapter (Mich.)

Kevin Whitley
Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.)

Nelson Whitting
Clarion County Chapter (Pa.)

NON-VIP HOURS CONTRIBUTIONS

Marianne Duvendack (Ohio)

Kevin Smith (Wisc.)

Eric Dreier (Mich.)

Mark Haag (Wisc.)

Gary Kovach (Wisc.)

Lucie Biddinger (Ohio)

Chris Fothergill (Minn.)

Jeffrey Fetters (Mich.)

Joyce Fetters (Mich.)

Barb Taylor (Minn.)

John Taylor (Minn.)

Sandy Manca (N.Y.)

Richard Frio (N.Y.)

Deb Campbell (Minn.)

David Harper (N.Y.)

Bill Vitaniemi (Wisc.)

Patricia Urban (N.Y.)

Dottie Scurry (Pa.)

Bob Schrems (Mich.)

Norma Matteson (Mich.)

Richard Parks (Mich.)

Robert McNamara (Mich.)

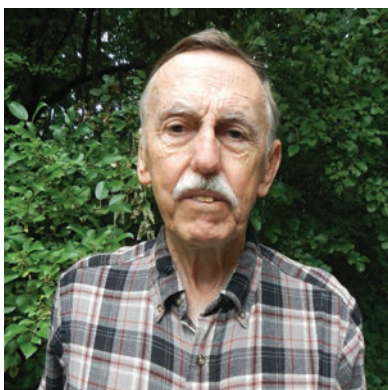


VOLUNTEERS

2022 North Country Trail Association Awards

Join us in congratulating these spectacular volunteers, members, and friends who contribute so much to the enhancement of the North Country National Scenic Trail and its Trail Community. The NCTA Awards Committee is pleased to recognize the following award recipients, as nominated by those who work alongside them.

THOMAS L. GILBERT LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT



John Elliott

John has been volunteering with the Minnesota Roving Crew and the Border Route Trail Association (BRTA) since the 1970s. He worked alongside Ed Solstad to plan and build the “first long-distance, wilderness backpacking and hiking trail in Minnesota, planned and constructed by volunteers.” He helped form the BRTA as a separate entity in 2004, allowing the group a greater focus on the trail itself, and more grant opportunities. Due in part to his incredible wealth of knowledge, John has been the Equipment Coordinator for many years. He maintains, repairs, and stores the various chainsaws and brushcutters used by the members. His meticulous attention to detail has kept much of the equipment running in tip-top shape for a very long time. He also dons a hard hat regularly to

put those tools to work - in every season, no less. Even after days of grueling physical work, he is consistently in the front of the group, maintaining a cheerful attitude. John has coordinated several volunteer trips, distributed trail guides and merchandise to retailers, and established relationships with the U.S. Forest Service and business owners on the Gunflint Trail. He was once even interviewed by Outside Online in 2019. While quite modest, he is an enthusiastic advocate for this segment of the NCNST.



Carter + Florence Hedeon

The Hedeons are among those responsible for founding the Itasca Moraine Chapter (Minn.) and at one time or another, they have held every Chapter Leadership position. On their living room floor, maps were studied and proposed trail route was penciled in. Since 2001, they have built Trail westward through Paul Bunyan State Forest. Thanks to their leadership and “full steam ahead” attitude, the Trail was built across Hubbard County in November 2009. They have led hikes, helped plan at least three Celebration events - including this year's - and commissioned Charlie Maguire to write the North Country Trail Ballad. Florence, as Chapter historian, has documented essentially everything, filling numerous photo albums. Carter and Florence have worked tirelessly building, maintaining,

improving, and promoting the North Country National Scenic Trail for well over 20 years.

THOMAS L. GILBERT LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Herb + Susie Hulls

The Hulls have spent 30 years being part of solutions. Herb is generous with his time, knowledge, financial support, and opinion. He was President of the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) Board of Trustees for 11 years, and has been a Crew Organizer, Trail Crew Leader, and Trail Crew volunteer for decades. He donated an easement for a backpacking shelter on his land. He organized volunteer trips to the Colorado Trail several times to bring new trail building skills and perspectives back to Ohio. Any welded pipe bridge on the Buckeye Trail (BT) was procured, delivered, and welded on-site by Herb and friends. He was critical in restoring the 1881 barn at the BTA Beall Farmstead, and a key leader and laborer in restoring the BTA office. Herb self-funded and handbuilt the Buckeye Trail Chuckwagon: A custom, mobile trailer with full kitchen functionality, solar power, and a water hauler. The Hulls funded and cooked meals for nearly every Trail Crew event for over a decade. When Herb saw conflict amongst trail user groups, he formed the Ohio Trails Partnership: A trail etiquette group that has shared volunteer opportunities over 20 years and has blossomed into a statewide trails advocacy collaboration. He was also instrumental in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources becoming a champion for the BT, specifically the acquisition of 40,000 acres now known as the Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Terry Bernhardt



Terry has dedicated more than 20 years to the NCNST in northern Minnesota. He was instrumental in reorganizing the Kekekabic Trail Club into a NCTA Chapter in 2014. He organized and hosted crew leader trainings in 2017 and 2018 that

were critical for the Chapter - new leaders and Chapter board members can be traced to these events. He has coordinated the updating, printing, marketing, and distribution of a Kekekabic Trail guidebook for the past five years. For hikers attempting this section of NCNST, this guidebook is an important resource and continues to receive high praise. Terry has ensured Chapter presence at the Outdoor Adventure Expo in Minneapolis for 15+ years. He also participates in trail clearing activities and provides transportation to volunteers. He is a part of a small volunteer group that kept the Chapter from folding during some very lean, difficult times. The Chapter is stronger in almost every way thanks in part to Terry's organization.

Betsy Duede

Betsy joined the Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter (Mich.) in 1999, early in its existence. She began maintaining trail right away, along with doing field research and robust brochure preparation. Betsy and her husband Steve completed all 100 miles of the Chapter's NCNST in 2012, becoming the 27th and 28th persons to accomplish this. (The list has grown to 91 as of March 2022.) She is a Trail Adopter and several years ago, became the Chapter's Adopt-a-Trail Coordinator. She remains in this role today, managing 35 adopters and keeping their positions filled. As the adopters work, Betsy compiles their progress into a report, which she uses to coordinate with sawyers for larger trail clearing projects. Despite recent health issues, she continues to admirably and impressively perform her duties.

Jaron Nyhof



Jaron joined the NCTA in 2008 and along with his membership renewal form in 2009, he sent a note offering legal assistance with easements. NCTA jumped at the chance to have a lawyer on the team to help protect the Trail.

In the years since, Jaron has consulted

on dozens of individual easements and agreements. He has worked with Kenny Wawsczyk, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator for Michigan, on at least six easements. Kenny shared, "Without him, I'm not sure who we would have turned to, as we haven't had the legal expertise or knowledge of what's needed for these types of landowner agreements." Along with trail protection, Jaron has a mind for sound nonprofit governance, including bylaws and Michigan nonprofit law. He assisted NCTA in several bylaws revisions and drafting of templates for Chapters. Jaron joined NCTA's Board of Directors in 2013 and immediately became Chair of the Trail Protection Committee. He served as the Vice President for four years and President for two. Jaron is genuinely interested in constructive conversations and offers a great sense of humor, putting everyone at ease. He shows endless respect and ensures the quiet voice in the room gets heard.



VOLUNTEERS

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Mike Schaeffer



Mike was one of the founding members of the Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter (Mich.). He has served in many leadership roles, including board member, Vice President, and President. Mike is a certified sawyer and has cleared countless trail obstructions. He is a

Trail Adopter for a section and cares for the Chapter's eight kiosks. He also maintains the Chapter's recorder boxes, where hikers can leave comments. He compiles these comments to help guide the Chapter's trail improvement work. Mike always helps coordinate and cook at Chapter events, and presents slideshows of his many adventures at monthly Chapter meetings. The Chapter is involved in the Adopt-A-Highway program and Mike rarely misses those meetings. An engineer by trade, Mike has helped build bridges - both literally and figuratively - that will last for many years.

Stephen Walker



Steve discovered the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) and NCTA when supporting his wife Karen on her hike of the entire Buckeye Trail (BT). He is now President of the BTA's Board of Trustees and an NCTA board member. Steve led the restoration of a

late-1800s house for BTA office space, primarily through volunteer labor and donated materials. He leads the BTA Beall Farmstead Committee, and volunteers to mow its acreage, repair plumbing, and prepare the barn for visitor use. He is a member of the BTA MorelFest team that hosts an annual gathering of 100+ mushroom enthusiasts. He leads and participates in trail maintenance with the BTA Muskingum Lakes Chapter. But Steve's most significant accomplishments are perhaps what he helps facilitate from idea to reality. He made the BTA Chapter Leadership Council a reality by organizing quarterly meetings of nine Chapters around Ohio, and fostering development of new Chapters. He created both a monthly e-newsletter for the BTA community, and a weekly, internal e-newsletter, in addition to his quarterly BTA Trailblazer magazine articles. He serves as the President of the Ohio Trails Partnership (OTP) and helped form the bipartisan Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus. Steve has truly brought grassroots advocacy to the BTA for the first time.

LEADERSHIP

Gerry Berg



Gerry has been a member of the NCTA for at least 20 years. He was among the first members in North Dakota, joining the Sheyenne River Valley Chapter when it was chartered in 2005. In that capacity, he helped with trail maintenance

between Lisbon and Valley City. When the Dakota Prairie Chapter formed in 2013, Chapter Trail segments realigned and Gerry transferred to this Chapter. He developed productive contacts with local landowners and facilitated meetings that led to several miles of trail easements. He has since helped build Trail in those areas, and continues to maintain and repair equipment and recruit new volunteers. Gerry provided significant leadership that resulted in Lisbon becoming an official NCTA Trail Town, then he helped design and build a high-quality kiosk. He helped plan the 2022 Three Chapters Festival: An effort to build collaboration across the NCNST in North Dakota. Gerry and his wife Deb live rurally along the Sheyenne River, adjacent to a roadwalk portion of the Trail. Over the years, Gerry has developed walking trails on his property that he hopes can become an off-road segment of the NCNST someday.

Eric Campbell



Eric has provided excellent leadership for the Kekekabic Trail Chapter (Minn.) for over three years, following its reorganization from the former Kekekabic Trail Club. He has brought new enthusiasm to the Chapter's efforts, and has a

strong desire to both maintain existing partnerships and build new ones. Most importantly, Eric has facilitated new volunteers making significant contributions, while simultaneously keeping long-time volunteers engaged in critical ways. Eric has tackled this challenge in a way that has grown the Chapter's cohesiveness. He leads with a calm, steady demeanor, and folks want to rally behind that. Eric facilitates regular Chapter board meetings, organizes volunteer work weekends, and coordinates outreach efforts to grow the Chapter. Eric is always willing to sit down for coffee with new volunteers to discuss the unique nature of volunteering on this wild section of NCNST. On his watch, the Chapter's membership has grown from less than 15 to over 40, and the treasury has grown enough to enable new projects to be started.

LEADERSHIP

Kevin Schram

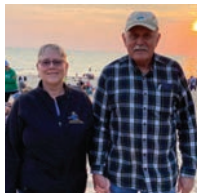


Kevin was a major contributor to the Chequamegon Chapter (Wisc.) before becoming its President in 2017, but since, his leadership has led to huge Chapter gains. He formed and chaired a Designated Campsite Committee in 2017, leading searches

and presenting locations to Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest staff for approval. His tenacity paid off when the Chapter's first two designated campsites were built in 2021, and two more in 2022. Kevin instigates numerous well attended, interpretive hikes, including a series that mimicked a thru-hike of the Chapter's section of NCNST. The Chapter has partnered with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Northland College to provide students and AmeriCorps workers with trail work experiences on the NCNST. The Chapter has achieved an all-time-high level for membership, higher meeting and trail work attendance, and recruited more trail adopters. Kevin coordinated all the Chapter's trail maintenance, tool, and material needs to obtain these gains. He started an annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic, and he often offers encouragement and appreciation in his communications. Under Kevin's leadership, the Chapter received a coveted USFS Enduring Service Award in May 2019. The right leadership expands a Chapter's abilities under adverse conditions, and Kevin has done just that.

BLUE BLAZES BENEFACTOR

Loren Bach + Dave Martus



Loren and Dave joined the NCTA in 2005. Their love and dedication to the NCNST and the Spirit of the Woods Chapter (Mich.) is impressive. From leading the Chapter to leading hikes, and with Loren in a mentorship role, they have done so much to

improve the Trail now and for the future. As a couple, they have logged a few thousand volunteer hours over the years. Loren and Dave were also trailblazers for NCTA's philanthropy. They generously make multiple gifts throughout the year and in 2019, they made the decision to serve as pioneers for the NCTA's monthly giving program, the Mile Makers Club. This once again shows their level of leadership and foresight. Their monthly gift establishes a consistent revenue stream that decreases expenses for the NCTA. Loren and Dave fully understand the importance of preparing and planning for the future, and generously practice it for the Trail Community.

BLUE BLAZES BENEFACTOR

Jim + Eleanor Mitton



Like many, the Mittons' relationship with the Trail began with hiking. At first Jim was the avid hiker, but it wasn't long before Eleanor developed a mutual appreciation for hiking. Eleanor shared that in the early days of the pandemic, they both would go crazy if they couldn't

walk outside every day. In 2013, the Mittons strengthened their commitment to the NCTA by becoming members Western Michigan Chapter. Since that first gift, they have remained faithful and dedicated contributors to this Trail Community. Each year their level of support for the mission grows, and they are now consistent members of the NCTA Founders Circle. The Mittons elect to leverage their IRA for making annual, unrestricted charitable contributions. For Jim and Eleanor, loving the Trail is as natural as taking breath. Jim has been known to tell everyone he meets about the Trail, and he always encourages hikers to stop at the Lowell office to see the NCTA from a new perspective. When asked what makes them so special, Andrea Ketchmark, NCTA Executive Director, shared, "Their kindness and the belief in what we do. Jim and Eleanor show their generosity in spirit in their donations, but also in every interaction."

OUTSTANDING PRIVATE LANDOWNER

Edwards Family



In 2005, as the Wampum Chapter (Pa.) was establishing Trail and relationships with landowners, they met John Edwards. John contacted the Chapter and granted permission to host the NCNST on his half of a farm property he owned with his brother

Keith. Since then, he has remained enthusiastic, generous, and supportive. He allowed the Chapter to designate his property as a campsite for thru-hikers, as its location is a great midpoint between two distant shelters. John walked his property often, and reported downed trees and other issues to the Chapter's Trail Coordinator. He graciously supported the Chapter, and attended many meetings and social functions. In 2018, he was awarded a famous Wampum Chapter carved hiking stick and a Certification of Appreciation. Keith passed away a few years ago and ownership of the full property has since been transferred to their sister Karen, but both John and Karen remain loyal supporters of the Wampum Chapter and the NCNST.



VOLUNTEERS

OUTSTANDING PRIVATE LANDOWNER

Heath-Kudelka Family



Five generations of this family have owned and operated a 240-acre farm on bluffs overlooking the Big Bend of the Sheyenne River in North Dakota. The Dakota Prairie Chapter was interested in this general area for NCNST route because of extensive

natural, cultural, historical, and scenic features. In 2017, during a long process of studying plat books, exploring farm roads, and developing contacts, the Chapter met with several members of the Heath-Kudelka Family. From the beginning, they were welcoming and interested in supporting the Trail. Throughout 2019 and 2020, 1.6 miles of Trail and five fence stiles were built across their farm, with help from several family members. In 2021, a large interpretive kiosk was placed at a trail access point on their farm, for which the family provided information, photos, and funds to cover its construction. In 2022, they signed a 99-year, renewable easement. They continue to help with trail maintenance and landowner relations. Thanks to their commitment and legacy, the NCNST will help showcase the features of this area for many years to come.

Nominations for
2023 awards are open
mid-January through
May 1, 2023 at

[northcountrytrail.org/
volunteer-awards](https://northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-awards)

VANGUARD

Mary Mertz, Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Mary Mertz, Director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), has arguably accomplished more for the Buckeye Trail (BT) and NCNST than any of her predecessors. She has been a champion for the trails at the highest levels, and works quickly and optimistically. Her accomplishments over just the past three years speak loudly, and it's impressive to see the joy she brings to her work. It's also amazing that she finds free time to explore trail segments all around Ohio. A few achievements due to her leadership include publishing the Ohio Trails Vision/Plan and convening the Trails Advisory Team to foster public-private partnerships for all Ohio trails; acquiring the 40,000-acres to create the Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area and permanently protecting 24 miles of BT; acquiring 1,500 acres as a corridor for new BT/NCNST adjacent to Shawnee State Forest; and supporting and administering several other trail projects and agreements. Mary also worked toward a \$2.3 million investment from an ODNR Division of Mineral Resource Management grant, to relocate 20 miles of BT/NCNST off-road, creating more than 100 miles across multiple counties - the largest backpacking destination in the state of Ohio.

FRIEND OF THE TRAIL

Tammy Cefalu, USFS, Superior National Forest



Tammy has provided excellent partner and project support for the Kekekabic Trail Chapter (Minn.), the Border Route Trail Association (BRTA), and the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) for over three years. She meets crews on

weekends to provide orientations and safety briefings, provides volunteer training, coordinates tool sharing and canoes for crews, and shuttles project materials. Despite the non-NCNST activity in the Superior National Forest and Boundary Waters, Tammy always finds time to ensure NCTA crews have supplies and permits. A recent U.S. Forest Service trail partner survey determined having an agency staff person that volunteers can rely upon is essential to making a trail volunteer program work. Tammy has gone above and beyond in easing the task of coordinating volunteer trail clearing trips.

FRIEND OF THE TRAIL

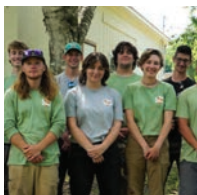
Aaron Gaither, USFS, Sheyenne Ranger District



In consultation and cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Dakota Prairie Chapter has maintained 31 miles of the NCNST in the Sheyenne National Grassland for over three years. Aaron has been the primary USFS contact, and is an

excellent partner and project support resource. He regularly provides training for volunteers, and coordinates the use and maintenance of tools and equipment. Aaron arranged to have a storage shed built at a campground near the Trail, for easy storage and access of volunteer maintenance equipment. He recently coordinated the purchase of a trail counter system to measure the number of trail users in the Sheyenne National Grassland. He is providing funding and working closely with the Chapter to create a system of water caches across the Grasslands that will be a significant recreational amenity, especially for long-distance hikers. He is an exceptional communicator, planner, and project coordinator. Aaron truly understands and supports collaborative management of this NCNST segment, and is committed to seeking federal funding for improvements to the Trail. He values our volunteers, strives to enable their work, and backfills with USFS staff resources.

Jennifer Flynn + SEEDS EcoCorps



SEEDS EcoCorps crews have often been utilized by the U.S. Forest Service in Michigan's Manistee National Forest for various projects, including work on the NCNST. Since 2019, thanks to the outreach of Program Director Jennifer Flynn, their work range along the Trail

has expanded. They have now assisted five NCTA Chapters in both peninsulas of Michigan. They have worked on new trail and reroutes, boardwalk and bridge construction, fencing projects, and more. Jennifer specifically spearheads these efforts to get young adults on the NCNST to provide them with hands-on work experience in a variety of settings. The physical work they provide lessens the burden on volunteers, and NCTA volunteers are always impressed with the crews' work ethic and quality of work. Volunteers are often pleasantly surprised to hear how much each crew member learned and enjoyed themselves. Jennifer submits grants so there are zero expenses for the NCTA, and communicates directly with Chapter leaders on project logistics. Her leadership and collaboration with the NCTA have made a significant impact on the improvement of the Trail.

TRAIL PROTECTOR

Tom Podlesny



Tom has been a member of the Heritage Chapter (Wisc.) for close to a decade, at least. He participates in many Chapter activities, but he truly shines on tasks that support others behind the scenes. For the last six years or so, he has generously supported the Wisconsin

Roving Trail Crew in a variety of ways, often rearranging his personal schedule for them. He located used power poles needed to construct puncheon, used his own vehicle and trailer to transport them 40 miles to get the hardware removed and have them cut to appropriate lengths, then transported them to the field site. He also uses his flatbed trailer and ATV to transport lumber and other supplies to work sites. Tom often assists NCTA staff on private land negotiations, as he is well known in his community and can provide important insight on effective communications.

TRAILBLAZER

Chad Petersen, Senior Project Engineer + Manager at KLJ Engineering



KLJ is an engineering firm with 24 locations in six states. The Valley City (N.D.) office has donated their time to review and engineer metal frames for 24- and 30-foot boardwalks across marshy segments of NCNST. Their design continues to be used today. KLJ

donated and assisted in the development of an easement template that has saved two NCTA Chapters thousands of dollars, by not having to have an engineering survey with a lengthy legal description completed for each Trail segment. Approximately 90 miles of the Sheyenne River Valley Chapter's NCNST have been mapped by KLJ, and KLJ has provided nearly 80 individual color maps identifying respective landowner segments. The maps are part of a comprehensive packet developed for potential landowner easements in the Chapter's region. KLJ has also assisted the Chapter in developing 93 easements - they and the Chapter obtained 23 of those for approximately 29 miles of NCNST in North Dakota. KLJ continues to provide engineering, signage, and trail advice to the Chapter, and informs Chapter leaders of forthcoming projects that may impact the Trail. Their assistance has a major, positive impact on the Chapter and NCTA in both trail protection and construction.



VOLUNTEERS

COMMUNICATOR OF THE YEAR

Marty Anderson



Over the past three years, Marty has produced eight highly professional videos for the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA), offering a valuable resource to the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) community. The videos range from a conversation with a writer and photographer about the history of the SHT, to safety and training videos for

our volunteers. The videos are regularly viewed on the SHTA YouTube channel, have increased promotion of the trail, and enhanced training capabilities of the Association. When Marty attended a prospective volunteer meeting, he thought he was going to be picking up a shovel. When he heard the need for a videographer, he jumped on it. He now regularly asks SHTA staff for new projects that he can take on. The SHTA is lucky to have Marty sharing his passion for video with the Trail Community.

James Falk



NCTA staff have long since relied on the expertise of graphic design contractors for producing a variety of materials. When the need arises for a refreshed Association brochure or a new fundraising mail piece, Jim is the first person staff call. He has worked in

graphic design for over four decades, and he has produced a multitude of items for the NCTA for many years, on both a volunteer and contract basis. His most impressive work includes multiple NCTA Annual Reports and (annual) Trail Progress Reports, and many direct mail pieces for appeals. Jim works blazingly fast. He is always respectful of tight schedules and deadlines, and communicates promptly. Despite the vast amount of materials Jim has produced for the NCTA over the years, he still manages to deliver fresh designs while maintaining the Association's branding. He is offered abundant creative flexibility and never seems intimidated by it. His productions are consistently professional, concise, and attractive, representing the NCTA and the Trail in the best way. Jim's support for the Trail and the NCTA goes beyond his eagerness to collaborate on design work: He has also been a member of the NCTA and Western Michigan Chapter for over a decade.

OUTREACH

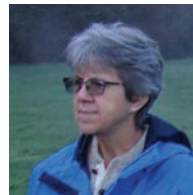
Arlene Steimle



Arlene is quite active within the Chief Noonday Chapter (Mich.). She is a Trail Adopter, assists at workdays, helps with Chapter hikes, and participates in other Chapter events. In the past year, Arlene has taken on the role of developing trail

angels within the Chapter, and has aided numerous long-distance hikers as they traverse the 119 miles of NCNST within the Chief Noonday Chapter segment. This is a new undertaking for the Chapter and is long overdue. Arlene does a wonderful job of managing this data and contacting volunteers when assistance is requested.

Sister Lyn Szymkiewicz



Sister Lyn is a woman of many talents. She is the Director of Grounds and Eco-Projects for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Baden, Pa. She works with farmers and community groups to foster environmental education,

conservation, and sustainability. She is a certified beekeeper, and helped create a grant program for local community gardens across two counties, addressing feeding local families with daily food access concerns. All this, yet she still finds time for the Wampum Chapter. She is Chapter's Diversity Chairman and is to be commended for her outstanding leadership in addressing and raising awareness about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, both on the Trail and in the community. She has worked closely with organizations including Outdoor Afro, Venture Outdoors, and Tiger Pause, to get more people outdoors. Sister Lyn also serves on the Community Events/Outreach Committee. She has spoken with counselors at local colleges to get students involved with Chapter trail projects, and is an advocate for mentoring. She participates in many events, helping with hiking stick carving, the information table, and occasionally hauling the Chapter trailer.

OUTREACH

Patty Warner



Patty and her husband Dave joined the Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter (Mich.) in 2011 and hit the ground running. They quickly became Trail Adopters and Patty, a Section Coordinator. They are often on the Trail, reporting any issues they can't handle,

and are trail angels assisting hikers with shuttles, lodging, meals, and resupply. Patty encouraged the citizens of Fife Lake to get involved during a major NCNST reroute project, and the Village became an NCTA Trail Town - she ensured a spur trail into the Village was included. Patty then turned to the Village of Kalkaska and got them re-interested in the Trail. It is now another very supportive Trail Town, hosting National Trails Day events and a reroute of the NCNST through town and along the scenic North Branch of the Boardman River. Patty connected the Chapter to TC Energy, a natural gas company, that has since provided funding for a second tool trailer and food (and cooking!) for events. Patty's planning work with the Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.) for the 2019 NCTA Celebration cannot go unnoticed, even though she knew another commitment would prevent her from attending. She steps into Chapter leadership roles during transitional times and gets work done.

BOOTS ON THE TRAIL

Nikki Sobell



Nikki has been the Group Hike Leader for the Chief Baw Beese Chapter (Mich.) since 2017. She plans and schedules all Chapter group hikes, and leads many. She is creative, offering experiences that include night hikes, brewery-to-brewery hikes, and holiday

themed hikes. She often coordinates with the neighboring Chief Noonday Chapter, too. Nikki's enthusiasm for hiking is obvious. She loves sharing her trail experiences with anyone she meets, offering her expertise, and she is always prepared for any situation. She has taken the lead in promoting the NCTA on social media, and posts notices for trail angels when long-distance hikers pass through the Chapter's area. Nikki is always ready to get involved with help or coordination, and is a wonderful resource for and promoter of the NCTA. She is a fantastic asset to the Chief Baw Beese Chapter.

BOOTS ON THE TRAIL

Yvette Jester



It's not often you meet someone who greets you with a big smile and enthusiasm and the desire to get involved. When you find someone like that, you do not want to pass up the opportunity. Yvette is that kind of person. This working mother of five

has been a member of the Wampum Chapter (Ohio) for over three years. Nothing makes her happier and energizes her spirit than being on the Trail. Since becoming the Wampum Chapter's Hiking Chairman, Yvette has made a large impact on the Chapter's visibility in the hiking community. Her friendly and welcome approach draws a large number of hikers, and she thanks them with a fun, impressionable experience. She also serves on the Chapter's Diversity Committee. Beyond this excellent outreach volunteerism, Yvette and her husband are Trail Adopters on two sections of NCNST in Ohio.

Jay Shutt



Since the early 2000s, the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) has been organizing circuit hikes, allowing hikers to join groups on weekends to pick up where they left off, eventually completing the 1,400-mile Buckeye Trail across Ohio, which includes 875 miles of the NCNST.

In 2020, Jay began leading these Circuit Hikes, sequentially working his way around the state. Since then he has scouted, scheduled, organized, and led more than 50 days and 600 miles of hikes. Each hike is approximately 10 miles and participants generally break into groups of varying speeds, allowing for wide participation. It doesn't take long for hikers to earn their Hike 100 Challenge patch from NCTA. Jay also scouts nearby camping options for those wishing to camp overnight between Saturday and Sunday hikes.



VOLUNTEERS

SWEEP

Ed Gruchalla



Ed has a natural way of being involved and present. He has been tirelessly working for the Trail and Dakota Prairie Chapter (N.D.) for years. Ed and his wife Rennae were part of the first conversations that energized the creation of the Chapter. He was on the Leadership Team when the Chapter's charter and by-laws were

formed, and continued in that role for six more years. He is a Trail Adopter and trail builder to this day. He has many contacts across the state, and has helped with fundraising and recruiting Chapter NCTA members and Trail Adopters. He can often be found tabling events and helping move equipment to worksites. He is the ultimate sweep on many, many hikes, always willing to wait for the slower hikers and ready with a funny story or helpful encouragement. Ed has also become the Chapter's interpreter of the Biesterfeldt Site: a National Historic Landmark that the NCNST is privileged to gently pass across. Ed has spent many hours building an outstanding model of the earth lodge, which now resides in a local museum.

Erik Morris



Erik Morris is a tax accountant for JC & Company in Columbus, Ohio. He was specifically recruited to serve as Treasurer for the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) - a position he has held since 2017. Unlike a new bridge, rerouted trail, colorful newsletter, or

well organized hike, most trail users won't see the fruit of his behind-the-scenes work. But his efforts provide tremendous benefits to the BTA Board of Trustees and staff. Erik provides timely and comprehensive financial reports to the Board and Finance Committee so key financial decisions may be made with the most up-to-date and accurate data. His detailed reports make the Board's job of monitoring the organization's expenses, budget, and future planning so much easier. On numerous occasions, Erik used his expertise to advise the Board on the appropriate level and frequency of audits required by law for a nonprofit organization, and made recommendations that led to direct savings. During the pandemic, Erik brought another level of value by providing insight and knowledge of government assistance programs available for employers in maintaining payroll during the shutdown, contributing to the BTA's ability to remain financially solvent. Erik is a cheerful young man and a valuable member of the Board, serving Ohio's hiking community well.

Mike Ward



Mike shows up for the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) in the most unexpected yet critical ways. When he joined the Board of Directors three years ago, he had already been volunteering and showing great

enthusiasm. He regularly attended trail building trainings and quickly began to lead one of SHTA's first Trail Stewardship Teams. During the pandemic, the SHTA relocated its office. Because local youth groups or sports teams couldn't be called upon for help, Mike stepped up with the enthusiasm of the Energizer Bunny: He and two staff managed to complete the move in one evening. His positive attitude and willingness to help was a true steward/leadership moment that really lifted staff morale. Mike also helped launch outreach and education webinars in 2020. He coordinated interviews, recorded and edited footage, and hosted some. Mike spends so much time ensuring trail users have the best possible information to help plan their time on the Trail. Currently, as Fund Development Chair for the SHTA Board, he has been helping staff research and launch a new social media membership initiative. He consistently encourages and helps SHTA pursue new ways of accomplishing goals.

TRAIL BUILDER

Jim Howell



Jim accepted the position of Vice President for the Jordan Valley 45° Chapter (Mich.) three years ago. He is so organized, and brings a lifetime of work and volunteering experience to the Chapter. He is always willing to step up when the

President is unavailable due to work obligations. Jim is a hard worker who pitches in at work days, and is willing to get dirty to get the job done. He frequently volunteers his equipment for use on trail building projects, including his truck, tractor, trailers, and hand tools. Jim participates in most monthly group hikes and always adds to the fun.

TRAIL MAINTAINER

Jim Antonson



Jim has served the Trail and the Brule-St. Croix Chapter (Wisc.) for more than 20 years. For over a dozen years, he was the Trail Maintainer for the Brule Bog Boardwalk, a very popular segment. At the same time, he was an active participant in Chapter

workdays, helping carry out projects both with Chapter leaders and with the Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew. Jim eventually became Chapter Vice President and served for more than eight years. When the Solon Springs School District began its annual student hiking program on the NCNST in 2015, Jim, a retired teacher, was among the first to be asked to lead hikes. He has done regularly for seven sessions, often leading multiple hikes a year with classes of students. Jim has also served as an active hike leader in the Chapter's hiking program, leading a group hike annually for more than five years. His quiet, steady service is a fine example of the ways volunteer efforts help the NCNST and NCTA grow. He is always ready to pitch in.

Preston Bartlett



Preston has been a maintainer for the St. Mary's section of the Buckeye Trail/ NCNST (Ohio) for over a decade. He takes great pride in working on his adopted portion. His section is always clearly marked and maintained, and he was the co-section supervisor for many

years. He is always eager and willing to help elsewhere, too.

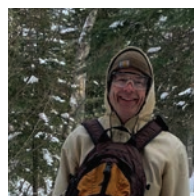
Chuck Hoard



Chuck has been the Trail Maintenance Manager for the Chief Baw Beese Chapter (Mich.) since 2016. He schedules and leads trail maintenance monthly, and responds to trail reports of issues needing immediate attention. He keeps the equipment organized,

secure, and in proper working condition. He spent many hours outfitting the Chapter trailer with storage features such as hooks and shelves. Chapter members enjoy working with Chuck. He organizes the projects, recruits help from members, shows up with the equipment trailer, and makes workdays fun. He is always encouraging and smiling, and is always seeking ways to improve our section of the Trail. He works well with others but can also spend many hours working alone. Chuck is a wonderful asset and many see him as the face of the Chapter.

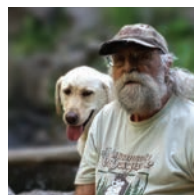
Dave Jansen



Dave is a section adopter on the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT), performing basic maintenance on a routine basis. His section is about 3.5 miles long, just outside of Grand Marais, Minn. It is a fairly popular and well-used section year round, due to its proximity to town.

Dave has adopted this section for about eight years, and has single handedly transformed it. It is a textbook example of care and attention to detail. He cuts back trees and brush to keep the trail corridor at the width standards of the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) and NCTA, which is a very rare thing on the SHT. He also keeps his section packed down with snowshoes in the winter, so users have an easier time and don't get lost. This past winter, when the person who had been plowing the trailhead quit without notifying the SHTA, Dave shoveled it out by hand. (And that winter saw record-breaking snowfall, even for northern Minnesota.) He never seems to hesitate when asked for help. Dave shows great dedication, has a high quality of work, and is a pleasure to work with.

Dan Proctor



Dan is a tireless volunteer on a very demanding section of the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) / NCNST. The Trail was virtually destroyed in this area by record flooding in 2012, suffering from massive erosion and blowdowns.

It was largely rebuilt by Dan's hands.

He is on the Trail almost daily. He works with the City of Duluth on larger maintenance tasks, but does much of it by hand in this steep area of rock and clay. He asks for nothing other than users enjoy this section of ups and downs, waterfalls and overlooks. Dan has also begun to use battery powered tools to preserve this wild section of Trail in an urban area, and to be as eco-friendly as possible. Maintaining this section has been a labor of love for Dan for decades.

Nominations for 2023 awards are open mid-January through May 1, 2023 at northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-awards



Protecting the NCNST

BY PAUL GAGNON, NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL PROTECTION, AND ANDREA KETCHMARK, NCTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This summer, NCTA hired Paul Gagnon as its first-ever Director of Trail Protection - a position that will help set the foundation for a strong program to secure long-term access for the Trail.

What is the NCTA's current trail protection situation?

Andrea: The North Country National Scenic Trail is currently routed on approximately 450 miles of private land, but only a fraction of those miles are protected with permanent easements. Further, to complete the route of the Trail, we need to not only protect what we've already built, but also to secure new agreements to close the nearly 1,600 miles of gaps in our route. This work isn't new to NCTA. Our volunteers and staff have long worked with private landowners on easements and partners to assist in land acquisition, including working with the National Park Service to identify parcels to include in Land and Water Conservation Fund requests. We do some great work, but what's in front of us is a monumental task if we are to protect the Trail for future generations.

How was the need for this program and designated staff determined?

Andrea: In the process of creating our current strategic plan, while we celebrated all that we have achieved in 40 years, we also recognized the need for skilled leadership to guide us as we grow this program. This staff position was made a priority to build a program that will elevate our volunteers' work and take advantage of opportunities we see before us. Thanks to funding from the Larry and Shannon Bell Charitable Trust, we've not only been able to fund the staff position, but we've also invested \$350,000 in our Trail Protection Fund that will fund some projects.

What are the next steps in building this program?

Andrea: To do it right, we can't just take on more projects, we have to guide the work. Over the next few years, we plan to develop



Paul Gagnon,
NCTA Director
of Trail
Protection

policies and procedures that will lay a strong program base. Exploring partnerships is also going to be critical in expanding our protection work. Local land trusts and our Affiliate partners can help us do more locally and regionally, and organizations like the Trust for Public Land, the National Park Trust, and the National Park Foundation can help us on a national level.

What are some of NCTA's main goals for this program?

Paul: I see an opportunity to use my educational background, well-rounded land conservation experience, and enthusiasm for trails to help the NCTA move from an opportunity-based response to trail protection to a strategic response. I'm looking forward to collaborating with NCTA's Regional Trail Coordinators, Chapter volunteers, Affiliates, and agency partners to expand our opportunities to identify key NCNST parcels. Together, we'll also proactively secure trail corridors and conserve land surrounding the Trail, and become more flexible and responsive to threats to the Trail's continuity and landscape.

My work plan for the next two years is robust. For instance, it includes working with Matt Rowbotham, NCTA GIS Program Manager, to build a layer into our GIS database that will help us identify what parts of the Trail are protected, by what means those sections are protected, where we have gaps, and where we need to upgrade the level of protection to sections of the Trail and the land surrounding it. This will go a long way in helping us head off problems, respond to opportunities expediently, and prioritize our trail protection needs. We'll be gathering GIS data that also shows the conservation priorities of our partners too, so we can more quickly identify where we share mutual goals.

Beyond information gathering, I'll be working with staff and volunteers to develop training and resources to empower our entire community. I'll help rebuild our Trail Protection Committee, who will be instrumental in developing sound policies and procedures, and in vetting future projects. It'll be the work of that committee to look at our capacity to develop new tools to protect the NCNST. One possibility we'll be exploring is our future capacity to temporarily receive and hold land or conservation easements on land that the Trail passes through, until a suitable trail friendly partner is ready to receive those land interests.

Are there any specific opportunities being pursued now or in the near future?

Paul: Currently we're gathering information and developing tools to prepare us to ramp up our portfolio of trail protection projects in 2023 and beyond. This stage is critical to our success and will be the foundation for our future efforts, but that doesn't mean that we won't be responding to opportunities that arise in the moment. Currently, the National Park Service (NPS) just closed on an addition to an existing piece of trail land in Michigan, and there are two projects in the works that our partner, the Trust for Public Land, and NPS are working on: one in New York and one in the upper peninsula of Michigan. Both are key parcels that will eliminate a lot of roadwalk, and permanently protect the experience of the hiker by conserving the land around the Trail. Moving forward, I'd like to see us develop a slate of potential projects, prioritized by need, that we can start chipping away at.

What does the future look like?

Andrea: As we take on more projects, we'll need to increase our ability to fund those projects. In addition to growing our Trail Protection Fund, we'll be seeking outside grants to fund acquisitions. We anticipate that new sources of funding for specific projects will be more readily available, but we can't forget the need to continue to support the capacity and infrastructure that makes the projects possible. Ensuring a strong staff and volunteer base will be necessary to maintain the growth we're achieving.

Paul: Stewardship of the lands we've protected will be a priority as we grow. The more Trail we protect, the more time and effort we'll be spending making sure that those sections remain protected. That can be easy to take for granted after an agreement or easement is signed. In reality, there's a lot of work involved in keeping those sections of Trail intact: Maintaining good relationships with landowners who host the Trail, and with neighborhoods and communities that the Trail passes through; and developing sound policies and building up funds that position us to respond proactively and effectively to challenges (legal, political, or social) to the integrity of the Trail. To do all that well and efficiently, it's important that we have a consistent and sound set of procedures and tools in place. This includes revamping how we design trail agreements, easements, and conservation easements. We'll also have to increase the professional knowledge and confidence of our staff and volunteers.

What is Trail Protection?

BY PAUL GAGNON, NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL PROTECTION

In a nutshell, if you want to build a hiking trail, you need land to build it on. Most ideally, you'll also want to make sure that once you build it, it'll be there forever. And you'll want to ensure that the land surrounding the trail, with its scenic character and unique hiking experience, is going to be a great place to hike today and in years to come.

Protecting the North Country National Scenic Trail means doing those things, but to do it across eight states and 4,800 miles is a big lift, in both sweat and dollars. Many segments of the NCNST pass through land managed by branches of trail friendly federal, state, and local governments (such as national, state, and county forests, parks, and wildlife management areas), and conservation land owned by nonprofit partners like land trusts. But there are many gaps that we have to try to fill in creative ways. Often, NCTA staff, volunteers, and partners

accomplish that by asking private landowners for help. This can be a landowner granting temporary permission to run the trail through their land, granting permanent permission (more desirable), or collaborating to figure out how to permanently protect both the Trail and the character of the land it passes through (most desirable).

We're always looking for ways to improve the trail experience to a higher level of protection, and provide hiker amenities like campsites and shelters. But even after the ink has dried on agreements and easements, and a section of Trail has been built, there will continue to be challenges to the integrity of the footpath that we need to be prepared to address. Protecting the NCNST is the work of a lifetime, but it's also a labor of love.



TRAIL
WORK



Rocking Alpha Pass

BY TOM MOUTSOS,
NCTA REGIONAL TRAIL COORDINATOR

During the last ice age, a terminal moraine broke in what is now McConnells Mill State Park (Pa.). This caused a massive flood that cut the Slippery Rock Gorge.

Late last year, Park Manager Dustin Drew asked me to take a look at the NCNST segment here. From the parking lot of the Alpha Pass trailhead, the Trail descends sharply into the gorge, until it eventually turns parallel with Slippery Rock Creek. There is a series of stairs and check steps in place to help hikers descend and ascend the gorge, but they were quite worn and many were improperly placed during initial construction. Alpha Pass is a popular hiking destination, so park staff was especially concerned about the hazardous state of this Trail segment.

After assessing the site together, park staff asked me and the NCTA Wampum Chapter volunteers to relocate the Trail, to have it parallel the creek sooner. This meant cutting a new segment of about 100 feet of Trail with a gentle grade across the steep slope, until connecting with the old segment.

Because the side of the gorge is so steep, one section of this new trail segment required a 30-foot retaining wall to support the downhill side of the Trail. The Park asked that we build that wall out of rock. Wampum Chapter volunteers cut the new trail in December, which is not an ideal time of year for rock work, so a 30-foot log was placed as a temporary retaining wall. The Park then submitted a request with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) for a Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew to replace the log with a rock retaining wall. In the spring of 2022, the request was granted.

In discussing the project with Ted Miller, Manager for the SCA Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps and an old friend of mine, I learned the crew didn't have much rock work and trail rigging experience. I agreed to work with them their first few days to

train them on the basics of moving rocks using rock bars and rigging.

When the project began, we were joined by Lauren Kennedy-Little. Lauren is a member of the NCTA Next Generation Coalition and has been working with the SCA since 2018. She chose to join us for this training and project in her downtime between other SCA jobs.

"This actually wasn't my first time working on the NCNST," Lauren explained. "I completed two prior projects via SCA. One was on Alpha Pass (McConnells Mill State Park) where we put in several water bars, did a realignment, and replaced old ladder stairs to improve access. We consulted with volunteers from the Wampum Chapter. The second project was at Jennings Environmental Education Center (also technically a Pennsylvania State Park), where we worked on a natural stone wall to help widen and retain the Trail. This was a really fun project for my crew; we learned many new techniques. We also met Tom here because he came to thank us and check in on our work."

Rock work involves using rocks to build walls, steps, and other structures that help support and protect a trail. In general, using rock is preferable to native timber or treated lumber because, when built correctly, rock structures will outlast most wooden structures. This makes the trail more durable, and cuts maintenance requirements and costs, thus making these sections of the trail sustainable. The trade-off is time. It takes longer to build with rock than with timber, especially because using big rocks is generally preferable to using small ones. If two people can lift a rock, it is probably too small. Finding a good rock, excavating it from the ground, moving it to the



“ Good rock work will last until the next ice age.”

trail, then setting it in a newly excavated hole can take a lot of time and is physically strenuous. But when built well, these structures will stand the test of time. One can still hike trails built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) 90 years ago and still see the original rock structures. An old trail saying is, “Good rock work will last until the next ice age.”

Trail rigging uses a griphoist device, metal cables, and pulleys to apply a great amount of force to move large rocks and other loads. The NCTA has a small cache of rigging gear in Pennsylvania, and I have about 20 years of experience with trail rigging.

Part of building sustainable trails is trying to avoid building structures. Structures require time and money to build and maintain. Timber or lumber structures require regular maintenance during their lifespan, and will always eventually have to be replaced. Treated lumber can last 25 to 30 years tops and native timber generally lasts 10 to 20 years, depending on the tree species and other factors. Rock structures, as previously noted, require little maintenance and may never need to be replaced in a trail worker's lifetime. They can also be cheaper to build. Native rock found near the trail is often used. However, there are many situations on the NCNST when structures are necessary.

The SCA has its own rigging curriculum, and I have been a rigging instructor for SCA for about 10 years. The training focuses on learning the use and limitations of each piece of equipment, the math and physics behind mechanical advantage related to griphoist systems, crew operation and communication while operating a rigging system, and safety, safety, safety. Because rock bars are often used in conjunction with rigging systems, we spent a couple of hours practicing moving large rocks with only rock bars. When it came to the actual setting of the rocks, other SCA staff were nearby to train the crew. After this *training, the crew was certified by the SCA to lead others in



ground-pull rigging systems.

“This training was a completely new world for me,” Lauren said. “I had heard of griphoist and rigging, and had even been on crews where it was used, but my understanding of how it is performed was surface-level. I was very excited when the opportunity presented itself.”

“Tom was a fantastic instructor,” she continued, “and he folded in multiple learning styles. We had quizzes, lectures, hands-on training, and the ability to watch and perform the new skills we were being taught. It was really fun getting to put everything together by the end of the training, and super empowering (and cool!) to see it actually work, to move a giant rock with little to no physical effort. I have gained so much experience as a leader and instructor over the years from observing others and their techniques, so having the privilege to work with Tom and learn from him was very impactful, as well.”

A majority of this project was completed over the summer of 2022. The Wampum Chapter recently finished installing some wooden box steps, and will work on rehabilitation and finishing touches this fall.

“Each program I accept presents a new set of members, project needs, partners, and choices to make,” Lauren said. “I think that is one of the things I love about my job the most: The flux and chance for adaptability. I get to use my skills and develop them to tackle new and interesting projects. I get a sense of connecting and working with people on a team and I get to do that outside in gorgeous places.”

Visit thesca.org/serve/program/pennsylvania-outdoor-corps to see what the SCA Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps accomplishes and offers its participants. Browse the NCTA Events Calendar at northcountrytrail.org/events to join workdays with volunteer groups like the Wampum Chapter.

*The complete training requires an additional day for aerial systems, which were not utilized for this project.



TRAIL
WORK

Adirondack Benching at Last

BY MARY COFFIN

A volunteer group, including myself, has been building a seven-mile trail segment in the mountains of Upstate New York since 2018. Here in Hoffman Notch Wilderness, the Trail goes up and over Jones Hill, a small mountain with a summit of 1,882 feet that offers wonderful views in several directions of the higher surrounding peaks. Since the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) is not permitted to go over the High Peaks Region, the least we can do is provide hikers with some spectacular views.

The NCNST, from the west side to the summit of Jones Hill, was completed in 2019 before a ban on benching was placed. Benching is construction of trail tread on the side of a hill to allow for stability and proper drainage. In 2019, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) suspended any trail work that could disturb tree seedlings, due to a lawsuit concerning the road-like construction of snowmobile trails in the three-million-acre NYS Forest Preserve. The courts ruled that the type of environmental destruction required

to construct snowmobile trails violated the NYS constitution and the spirit of the Forever Wild Clause, and required a constitutional amendment. All this being said, our foot trail construction was put on pause. This required a great deal of patience from energetic volunteers and trail stewards.

Fortunately, in 2022, it was decided foot trails could again be maintained and constructed without any violation. Hearty volunteers took charge this summer by removing blowdown, digging out a thick layer of organic duff, and benching a tread on the east side of Jones Hill, along a route that had been flagged by the DEC forester.

Thanks to NYS DEC staff, complimentary camping was provided for volunteers in a nearby DEC campground, so the group could commute to the project site daily. This commute included hiking through a tunnel under I-87, then uphill for about a mile. The next two miles were ours to improve. Finally, after three years on hold, we could heft the hazel hoe and Pulaski!

Each afternoon as we walked out over the new tread, we felt a sense of satisfaction from the work we had done. After supper back at the campsite, we continued to enjoy the camaraderie of working together. The Adirondack ambience around the campfire was magical, complete with the smell of pines and the sounds of loons on the lake.

So what is left? We look to the National Park Service for funding to hire the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) Procrew. They are better equipped to



Left: Bob Rosati digs into hillside while Joe Condon removes roots and organic matter.

Above: Jones Hill summit.

Photos by
Mary Coffin

handle technical benching work, rock removal, and drainage construction, and building a bridge across Platt Brook. We still welcome volunteers next year, as we touch up benching work, hopefully paint some blue blazes, and potentially start clearing the next segment to the east, as we progress toward Crown Point, New York: the former Eastern Terminus but now, the gateway to the NCNST in Vermont.

The 2023 NCTA Celebration will be held in the Adirondacks, near Chestertown, N.Y., in late September. Contact Mary Coffin if you're interested in volunteer work: maryccoffin@gmail.com.

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Our Why

BY MARY COFFIN

For several years, I have organized volunteer groups to assist in building and maintaining the NCNST from east to west across New York's Adirondacks, from blue line to blue line - the park's boundaries. I call these volunteers BLTS: Blue Line Trail Sweeps. Over the past four years, we've worked hard to develop a new, seven-mile Trail segment in Hoffman Notch Wilderness. It is very slow work in the mountains, but we hope to complete this project within the next year or two. The BLTS are enthused to be involved on the ground floor of new trail development, and are willing to work hard for it.

"In the East, particularly the Adirondacks, the woods sort of envelop you. The forest is so dense in areas that it effectively blocks out views and thoughts of the outside world. I lost my mom at too-early an age, and when I am deep in the Adirondacks, the woods provide a peaceful and beautiful comfort - that warm embrace that I still miss to this day. During the winter, even on the coldest of days, the Adirondacks provide solitude and a unique beauty. This is especially true when a heavy snow drapes the woodlands. All that said, trail work is never viewed as work, rather it is just one more excuse to be in the woods. I am fortunate to have hiked awesome Adirondack trails because of those that toiled creating them before I ever set foot upon them. I hope my stewardship and efforts will be enjoyed by many others in years to come."

— Bill Herman, volunteer

"Hiking is a true joy that lets me experience nature and experience myself. Trail work provides me with a link to all those people whose trails I have hiked, and makes me realize how hard the work is to build a trail."

— Anonymous volunteer

"When developing trails you use a creativity that you might not usually tap into."

— Anonymous volunteer

Those may seem like a simple string of quotes, but they are sincere feelings of hardworking volunteers. They make me realize, as a volunteer leader, that the planning, scouting, agency permissions, organization, and paperwork are all worthwhile.



TRAIL
WORK

Routing a National Scenic Trail

The Comprehensive Plan

Photo by
Gayle
Lacquement

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

This is a continuation of Routing a National Scenic Trail, The Beginnings, which was featured in the Spring 2022 issue.

While the National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, has the responsibility under the National Trails System Act to “select the rights-of-way” for the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST), this role was effectively nullified by the provision which prohibited federal agencies from spending funds to acquire lands or easements for the Trail (until 2009).

How would the NPS control or influence where the Trail is laid out and constructed? Another unusual provision of the ^{*}law authorizing the NCNST directed the NPS to prepare the Comprehensive Plan (CP) according to the guidance for National Historic Trails (NHTs), even though it was authorized as a National Scenic Trail (NST).

^{*}This is found in Sections 5(e) and (f) of the Act (16 USC 1244(e) and (f)).

The authorities for NHTs provide for the administering agency to “certify” trail segments and sites along a historic route as components of the NHT. In writing the 1982 CP for the NCNST, a “certification” process was incorporated so that the NPS would have a say in where the Trail is routed, even if that decision is rendered after a trail segment has been constructed. It also gives the NPS the ability to influence the quality of trail layout and construction, and ensure environmental compliance that may be needed.

During the drafting of the CP for the NCNST, the staff identified 673 miles of existing trails that could feasibly be incorporated into the official route of the Trail (with the permission of the managers of those trails). Those trail segments were depicted on the maps included in the final CP and were “certified” by subsequent publication of a notice in the Federal Register. The maps in the plan also depicted other existing trails that could potentially be incorporated into the official route in the future, as well as suggested general alignments for other future segments of Trail.

The process for creating and determining the route of future segments of Trail was effectively delegated to other agencies, landowners, land managers, and people - including volunteers. Working together with the NPS, these partners would make decisions about where the Trail would be routed and constructed. The CP contained the following language to guide those decisions.

- “Where there is no existing trail and the maps show only a high potential opportunity or general location for a future trail segment, the appropriate potential managing authority should take the lead in identifying a specific route for the trail and securing the necessary lands in close consultation with State trail agencies and the National Park Service. When searching out possible routes, managing authorities should be mindful of the protection that would be afforded the trail and associated resources and providing the user a high quality experience isolated whenever possible from external intrusions and

distractions. The requirements of Section 7(a) (2) of the Act, that the selected route minimize the adverse effects upon adjacent landowners and users and that the developed trail should harmonize with established multiple use plans, must also be born in mind.”

- “The extent of land area which needs to be protected and/or managed for the NCT is a matter to be determined by the local managing authority and should reflect the resource management objectives and the unique environmental characteristics and opportunities associated with each portion of the route as well as the type of experience which the managing authority desires to provide for the trail user. ... It is not the intent of this plan to completely isolate the user from land use practices surrounding the trail, but rather to allow the traveler to enjoy the mosaic of resources and land uses through which the trail passes while taking special advantage of the natural and scenic elements along the way.”
- “The availability of existing public recreation sites that provide needed support facilities (water, overnight camping, etc.) should be an important consideration in identifying a specific route for the trail.”
- “Generally, the official route of the NCT may not be located on roads or on the shoulder of roads open to motorized use by the general public. The trail may be located within the public right-of-way of a road if the right-of-way is wide enough to permit the trail to be established safely beyond the shoulder and/or drainage ditch of the road. Location of the trail within public road rights-of-way or immediately adjacent to the right-of-way should be kept to a reasonable limit so that the trail user is not continuously exposed to the sights and sounds of motor vehicle traffic. The one exception to this prohibition of locating the NCT on roads is when it is necessary to route short segments (usually less than one mile) on roads and bridges in order to cross rivers, lakes, interstate highways, dams, etc. Whenever roads and highways or their rights-of-way are to be used for the NCT or crossed by the NCT, those seeking to establish the segment should consult with the appropriate State and local highway officials.”

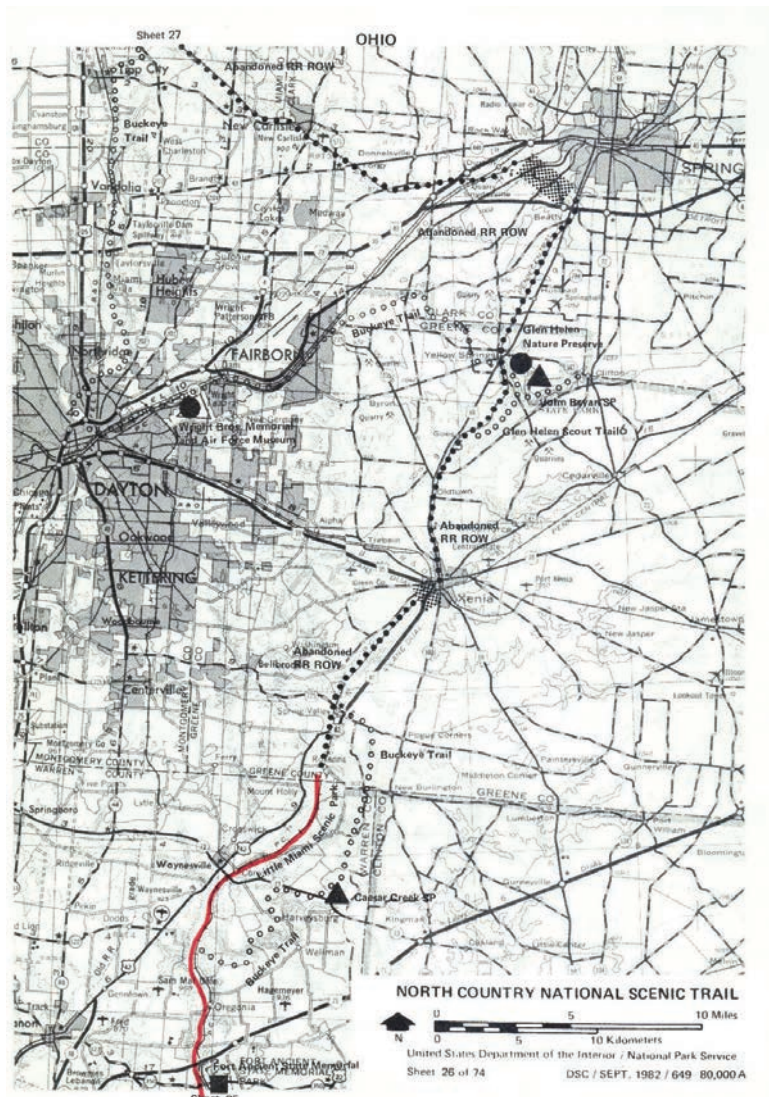


Photo provided by
Tom Gilbert

- “Because it will be many years before certifiable trails are established for some portions of the NCT route, and because it is desirable in the interim to identify other routes which link together certified NCT segments, the National Park Service will recognize as “North Country Trail Connectors” other marked routes and trails which do not qualify for certification as the official NCT route due to current motorized multiple recreational use or location on roads. “Connectors” should be marked but may not be signed with the official NCT marker. They should be brought to the attention of the National Park Service by those parties responsible for marking and maintaining them. Recognition will be in the form of including them on maps of the NCT and referring to them in written descriptions of the NCT route.”



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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.

In 2022, an eastern prickly pear cactus was discovered in the western upper peninsula of Michigan. Victoria Asmus stumbled upon it while hiking, and shared the information with Ryne Rutherford of Michigan Tech University. He confirmed it is a rare species in this area, though it's actually the second to be documented growing here. The first was discovered decades ago, north of this one's location.

Photo by Victoria Asmus