



North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2023



11th Annual Allegheny 100 Challenge

Celebrating over a decade
of this Pennsylvania hiking
challenge

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Hike Every Mile, North Dakota

Hundreds hike the entire
North Dakota NCNST in
one day

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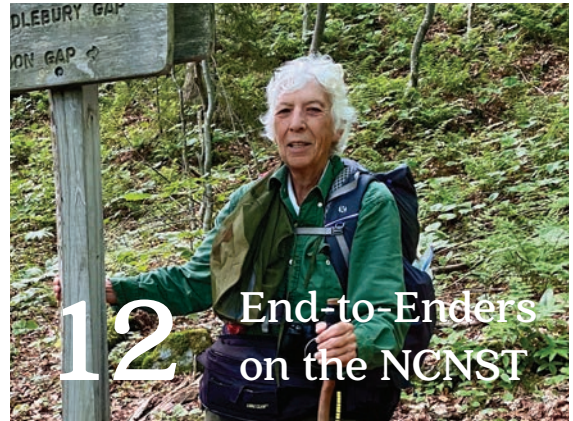
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Photo by Rennae Gruchalla

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MIKE CHAPPLE,

PRESIDENT, NCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Photo by
Mike Chapple

As the summer sun graces our landscapes and beckons us to the outdoors, I am filled with a sense of excitement and gratitude. It is a time of boundless possibilities on the North Country Trail, where adventure awaits and connections are forged. In this edition of the North Star, we celebrate the spirit of exploration, the vibrant diversity of trail users, and the

remarkable journeys that inspire us all.

Summer is a season of discovery, where the North Country Trail beckons hikers from far and wide. It is a time to lace up our boots, gather loved ones, and embark on unforgettable journeys along its scenic path. As we traverse the Trail, let us not only immerse ourselves in the breathtaking landscapes, but also revel in the stories of those who have left footprints before us.

Recently, we witnessed the triumphant completion of the Allegheny 100 Challenge, a true testament to the Trail's allure and the resilience of our hikers. This endeavor, which covers 100 miles through the rugged beauty of Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest, showcases the determination and love for adventure that thrives within our trail community. Congratulations to all who took on this remarkable challenge!

In the spirit of celebrating extraordinary journeys, let us also shine a spotlight on Joan Young, who recently completed her second end-to-end hike of our trail's 4,800 miles! Joan's unwavering dedication, passion for nature, and deep connection to the Trail serve as an inspiration to us all.

As we celebrate the diversity of trail users, we recognize that the North Country Trail holds a special place in the hearts of individuals from all walks of life. Some seek solace and rejuvenation in the tranquility of a solitary hike, finding peace and respite amidst nature's embrace. Others relish the joy of sharing the Trail with loved ones, bonding over shared experiences, and creating lasting memories. The Trail becomes a canvas for personal growth, where challenges are overcome, dreams are realized, and connections are forged.

Amidst the laughter, the quiet moments of reflection, and the sounds of nature's symphony, let us cherish the

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Trailhead

ANDREA KETCHMARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by
Andrea Ketchmark

From day hikes, to thru-hikes, birding or mushroom hunting, the ways people use the North Country National Trail are as varied as our landscape. The beauty of our Trail is in its diversity, but also its simplicity. Walk at your own speed, schedule, choice of location, and difficulty level. Do it with family, friends, or alone.

Whether your goal is to walk one mile, 100, or 5,000, we'll work hard to make sure the Trail is there for you. It's your job to go explore.

We have a tradition at the North Country Trail Association: presenting Board members with a plaque as they close out their years of service. I want to share with you the words that we engrave on the awards, because it speaks to what's waiting for you on the North Country Trail, and how your support is making the world a better place.

Because You Cared

By Bruce Matthews,
former NCTA Executive Director

Today on the North Country National Scenic Trail...

A little girl in Dayton asks about blue blazes on her neighborhood trees.

A Duluth hiker pauses to watch an out-bound freighter.

A grandmother takes her grandson wolf-howling in the Chequamegon.

A young couple pauses along the Manistee.

A great-grandfather walks an Ohio towpath singing the "Wabash Cannonball."

A pastor walks in the presence of the Valley of the Giants.

A family hiking on Lake Superior's beaches celebrates their first agate.

Someone ponders why stars are brighter in the Adirondacks.

An Allegheny class learns where water goes when it rains.

A Two-Hearted hiker adds a bald eagle to her life list.

Boy Scouts learn to use a Pulaski and moleskin.

Families spend time together.

Communities are connected.

A nation celebrates its northern landscapes and peoples.

A generation is joined in the legacy of hiking tradition and scenic grandeur.

Thank you for all you do as members, donors, and volunteers that make these experiences possible! Go for a hike yourself to see what lies ahead.

CHRIS LOUDENSLAGER, NATIONAL PARK
SERVICE SUPERINTENDENT, NCNST



Photo by Kate Lemon

Greetings to you all. It is my sincere hope that it has been an amazing season for each of you thus far with plenty of trail miles under your belts.

So often when we speak about the North Country National Scenic Trail to others, one of the primary topics, of course, is the incredible diversity of landscapes, historic and

cultural sites, communities, and experiences that are connected via the nation's longest National Scenic Trail. At its heart, what makes the North Country Trail truly unique is its diversity. But if it is said that the heart of the Trail is its diversity of experiences, then it is the diversity of trail users that is its soul.

Whether you are a hiker, volunteer, supporter, partner, or employee, we all share a common bond of a love for the North Country Trail and the nature, beauty, and peaceful adventures it provides. We are all one in this regard, but why we love the Trail, how we love the trail, what we bring to the Trail, and how we benefit from the Trail is an individual's story that is unique to each of us. While we are all different, through our collective unique stories and passions, we are made stronger both as a community and an organization. We are introduced to perspectives beyond our own experience and interests, and given the opportunity to appreciate what is important and valued by others. We are afforded the opportunity to receive insight and ideas from someone who has a different background from our own, which expands our horizons and opens the door to new possibilities. And perhaps most importantly, we are given the opportunity to leverage all these differences in perspectives, values, experiences, and ideas to help us improve and succeed. The more diverse we are, the less limited we will be.

As we go about building, maintaining, and hiking the North Country Trail and sharing our love of the Trail with others, I encourage you all to explore ideas for how you can contribute to increasing the diversity of our trail users and trail community. The more who feel welcome and included, the better. Whether it is building accessible trail and trail structures to eliminate barriers, and making the Trail more inclusive and equitable to the public we serve, reaching out to people or organizations that we haven't engaged in the past, or simply mentioning the Trail to someone you don't think would be all that interested, there are many ways we can close the gaps and extend our welcome to our next best friends, colleagues, and supporters.

Thank you all for all you do and for bringing your unique background and passion to the North Country National Scenic Trail - we are better for it, and the Trail wouldn't be what it is without you.

MIKE CHAPPLE (CONTINUED)

unity and camaraderie that the North Country Trail fosters. It is a place where strangers become friends, where stories are shared around campfires, and where the beauty of diversity intertwines us all. Together, we celebrate the human spirit and the resounding power of community.

Wishing you a summer filled with adventure, connection, and the transformative magic of the North Country Trail.

Annual Report 2022

North Country Trail Association



The annual report is an opportunity to reflect on the Association's milestones and Trail's evolution. It is a time to remind ourselves how far we have come and what can be accomplished. Finally, it is time to thank you for your role in our success story because it is just that - our shared success.

For 42 years, this community has shown what it can do when

united. We hear your stories and see your passion. You are up to the challenge. Together, we are poised to do amazing things.

View the full North Country Trail Association 2022 Annual Report online at northcountrytrail.org/transparency.

As a member
Your support goes a long

way



North Country National Scenic Trail
Hike it. Build it. Love it. Support it.

Join or renew today
northcountrytrail.org



TRAIL
USE

11th Annual Allegheny 100 Challenge

The Lagasse family of five starting their 25-mile hike.

Photo by
Linda White

BY NANCY BROZEK, NCTA DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Each June, dedicated volunteers with the NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter in Northern Pennsylvania plan, organize, and host the Allegheny 100 Challenge. The A-100 is an unsupported endurance hiking challenge with no timekeepers, no aid stations, and no finish line other than the one hikers set for themselves. Participants choose to traverse 25, 50, 75 or 100 miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) through Pennsylvania's rugged Allegheny National Forest (ANF) in 50 hours.

The Allegheny 100 Challenge (A-100) was one of the first events I learned about when I began my career with the North Country Trail Association, and was soon added to my trail bucket list. Not necessarily hiking 100 miles in 50 hours, but experiencing this endurance event firsthand. Finally, this year, the stars aligned and I had an opportunity to volunteer.

I could write a novella with the stories I heard from these hikers. A mother and her 13-year-old son set their sights on 25 miles of family time. Their faces expressed the perfect balance of nerves and confidence. There was a young man from Tennessee whose Google search led him to Pennsylvania. At the 50-mile mark, a good 18 hours

into the hike, I watched him exchange social media handles with a crew that had formed throughout the night. Their joint journey would end at this point, but he would continue after a brief rest and sharing a memory-making story of how he came upon a baby deer sleeping in the forest. A man from Austin, Texas shared he had never done anything like this before. When asked about his plan, he simply stated, "Just to walk." I felt the heartache of a young woman who had trained for this, but her body would not comply with her determination that day. I watched the realization of her dreams disappear as she told me she was officially scratching from the event. I was also beaming with pride for a woman named Maria - a seasoned hiker who took on this challenge alone. As she entered the 50-mile mark, I quietly walked over to share that she made it to the checkpoint before noon - she was one of only about 20 hikers to check in by this point. Her smile upon hearing this news is one of my favorite moments. She completed the 100-mile challenge and was one of only two women to do so this year.

There are so many more stories. For the hikers, this event is a rollercoaster of emotions. They are sleep deprived, their bodies are taxed, and the weather plays a huge factor in their mental game. This event is a competitive challenge against you and you alone.

And yet, like all who experience the Trail, they are not alone.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of this event. The NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter spent 1,000 hours readying their section of NCNST, as did many members of the neighboring Clarion County Chapter. Many serve behind-the-scenes to ensure registration runs smoothly, questions get answered, and



James Barbur is thrilled to complete 100 miles.

Photo by
Donna Bailey



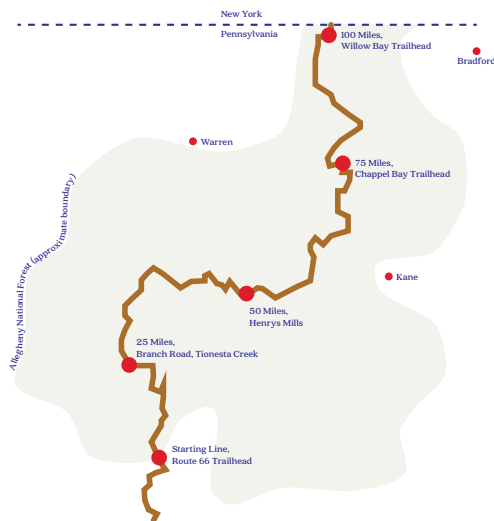
Happy 50-mile hikers Tina, Linda, and Lisa

Photo by
Mike Toole

checkpoints get monitored throughout the weekend for hikers' safety. Some volunteers load backpack coolers to haul refreshments out to hikers when the sun is at its highest point.

The day before the event, I hiked six miles with Tina Toole, former Allegheny National Forest Chapter President and current NCTA Board member. Without question, this forest is beautiful, and something I hope everyone will be able to experience in their lifetime. Tina's knowledge and insight enriched my experience, and it was her dedication to detail that left a lasting impression. We noticed two trees had fallen, and she marked the spots so she and her husband Mike could return the next day to clear them. They spent four hours doing that, and returned that evening full of smiles and hugs for friends, and ready to hike their 50-mile challenge.

Continued on page 8



The Allegheny National Forest covers over 500,000 acres of land in Northern Pennsylvania. The NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter maintains about 100 miles of the NCNST through the National Forest.

A-100 RESULTS

This year, hikers ventured out from the Route 66 Trailhead, on the south end of the National Forest, near Vowinckel, Pa. Cool temperatures, sunny skies, and dry trail were enjoyed and appreciated by all.

The first 100-milers finished at just after midnight on Sunday morning, which means they covered 100 miles of trail in a little more than 30 hours. Another pair of 100-mile finishers interrupted their hike to drive a sick participant back to their car, and they still finished in the allotted time of 50 hours. One family of five traveled from Connecticut to do the 25-mile hike together, and they all completed their challenge.

164 PARTICIPANTS
from New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Oregon, Florida, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the Eastern seaboard

24
HIKERS
COMPLETED
ALL 100 MILES

14
COMPLETED
75 MILES

88
COMPLETED
50 MILES

29
COMPLETED
25 MILES

"Truly an incredible event. Top-notch trails and awesome dedication from all the volunteers who make this event happen! I know we will all be back again next year!"

— BRIDGET WALKER, PARTICIPANT

"This was a great event. Very well run, and an enjoyable weekend. Thank you to all of the volunteers for everything that you do to care for the Trail and for taking great care of us, especially with the burgers and cold drinks at the end!"

— KATIE DIEBOLD-DUDZIC, PARTICIPANT

"It is the combination of beautiful trails, personal challenge and accomplishment, and fantastic camaraderie between hikers and volunteers that make so many of us come back for the next year."

— STACY MARKOVICH, PARTICIPANT



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Happy for
accomplishing
their goal of
50 miles!

Photo by
Tina Toole



At the 50-mile mark, there is a checkpoint. Regardless of the direction you're traveling, you will encounter a long and grueling switchback. Here, it is A-100 tradition for the hiker to ring a bell as she descends. Once she reaches the bottom, a freshly grilled hamburger awaits her. Randy spends the entire weekend making and cooking those burgers. There is a vast supply of additional food and beverage options, including baked goods made by Chapter members and others living in the area. The 50-mile mark is also where hikers find water sources, carried in and continually refilled by volunteers; a seat in some shade; and emotional support from their trail community.

For two friends from New York, first-time adventurers, arriving sleepless and doubting their confidence to keep going, the 50-mile mark was a make or break moment. One was covered in dirt from a fall he had taken. The other was surprisingly clean - so clean it was mentioned by many who met him. They were ready to scratch from the event and would have, if left to their own accord. After a brief rest, some hot food, and pep talks from the volunteers, they journeyed on to complete their goal of 100 miles.

A rugged trail, hikers, and the volunteers who support them. A beautiful blend of humanity and nature working together to create a unique experience for all who choose to explore. One might say the A-100 embodies the spirit of the Trail, and each of us carry a piece of it within us.

The Allegheny National Forest Chapter leadership thanks its volunteers for all their help preparing for and running the event. It also expresses gratitude to the event sponsors: United Refining Company, Betts Industries, Crescent Beer, Warren YMCA, Advanced Manufacturing Technology, Inc., and the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry. Funds raised by this event go back into upkeep of the Trail and trail structures like shelters and bridges. Learn more about the event at northcountrytrail.org/a-100 and about the Chapter at northcountrytrail.org/anf.

Lower Peninsula Ruminations

BY AMY ELVEY



Photos by
Amy Elvey

When the pandemic began, I was finishing a solo trip in Patagonia, at Torres del Paine, where I first fell head over heels in love with hiking. I'm passionate about travel, but have quite a complex health history, and felt (like much of the world) that my love of exploring new places had ground to a halt. That is, until I found the North Country Trail.

Avoiding crowds and gyms (again like many others), I took to the woods. First, I hiked with a few women I knew. Then I saw an event posted: a group of women would be hiking right near my house. Sorely missing new connections, I decided I'd show up for a 12-mile hike in midwinter, even though I love warm weather and loathe being cold. It took us almost all day. They had driven in from hours away and they would drive again for hours to return to their homes. Initially, I didn't understand that they were hiking the entire lower peninsula of Michigan. When I heard this I thought they were nuts. Who would do such a thing? And why? Seriously, why?

Over the course of the day in my hometown, I shared the trail with various women. I listened to the most interesting conversations I had heard in a very, very long time. They didn't talk about their lives as wives, mothers, daughters, or employees. They didn't bring up politics or religion. They discussed the woods, fields, flora, landscapes, architecture, photography, geography, hiking gear, tech tips, mapping, and more. I was hooked. I craved more time with them. I wanted to learn more from them. They were some seriously cool women who had done some wonderfully wild things, and I felt I had found my people.

As a retired Spanish teacher, I had felt that community of like-mindedness in some of my more off-the-grid travels, with others who had purposely selected destinations to learn about the languages, cultures, and histories of off-the-

beaten-path locales. In those travels, I never knew what adventure each day would bring, nor did I know the grit or fortitude I'd need to use to contend with whatever would come my way. In short, I love a good challenge. It dawned on me, during the hike that day, that I may have just stumbled upon my next one.

On the trail, I began to realize that I could have a somewhat similar feeling right here in my home state. What challenges will this trip provide? How will I deal with whatever comes my way? What will I learn? Who will I meet? And where will those blue blazes take me next?

Trekking across hundreds of miles - 600 or so - I got a much better understanding of our lower mitten and all that it contains. Dotted with little towns and villages, mostly flat terrain, and plenty of dirt roads in the south, I learned about foraging and tree biology. I saw peregrine falcons build a nest and spotted emus that I didn't know resided in Michigan. I was introduced to trail magic and trail angels, both of which can change a day more than most non-hikers comprehend.

In West Michigan, I learned the Trail is located on the non-motorized trail running through my parents' property. It also is only a half-mile from my house, running along the route I drove for decades on my way to work. It's part of my favorite running and biking route, and goes through the closest park where we walk our dog. Honestly, I was quite embarrassed that I previously didn't even know what the North Country Trail was, much less that it was right under my nose, for decades. As I drove all over my state, south of the Mackinac Bridge, I began to piece together where one county ends and another one begins. I saw the flat in the south give way to hills, valleys, and oh, so many rivers, as one hikes north.

I became more involved, and volunteered to build bridges, haul supplies to build sites, and report trail conditions. If you ever want to see the power of Mother Nature, go to the woods after a serious straight-line wind event and see how many trees have been uprooted! I found I peered more carefully at boardwalk and bridge construction. I appreciated benches, even though I think I've only sat on a couple through all my hikes.



“

I've now met my goal of hiking the Lower Peninsula, but my blue blaze fever has only been fanned, rather than extinguished.”

— AMY ELVEY

As I met more hikers, I enjoyed seeing them indicate mushrooms and spring flowers, berries, burls, and chaga. Then I found myself pointing out many of the same items

to newer hikers, once my journey had tallied hundreds more miles. Much like the awestruck classroom student who finally understands a lesson, I relished the wonder on my companions' faces when, at my prodding, they peered up and learned that the group of wood chips littering the forest floor was made by animals high in the trees. They morphed into detectives, seeking porcupine scratches at every next bend.

It's rare, on a hike, that I don't come across something that I need more information to comprehend. Be it geology or history, I find myself collecting images that I later feed through Google Lens or forestry identification sites. I still have plenty to learn about animal tracks, plant life, geographical elements, and so much more.

I became a huge fan of Avenza, and its mapping and technological capabilities. I morphed into a hike-planning nerd, and have a giant map binder with every Michigan NCNST segment printed out. Often the pages have been adorned with colorful Post-Its and highlights, sectioned off by binder clips, containing notes about things I've learned or want to share with others. I collect North Country Trail brochures, names, and contact information for people in each NCTA Chapter I visit. I constantly reassess how I approached previous hikes and Chapters, seeking to improve as I continue on my journey.

I've now met my goal of hiking the Lower Peninsula, but my blue blaze fever has only been fanned, rather than extinguished. Upper Peninsula, what will you teach me? What secret beauty will you reveal? What new friends will I meet along the way? Perhaps you may be one of them. I hope so.

This North Country Trail journey has taken me nearly three years, and it has changed me for the better in myriad ways. The simple, repetitive motion of putting one foot in front of the other for hours and hours is my meditation. My body relaxes. My muscles and joints loosen. My head rids itself of daily clutter, and my soul expands. I've had a handful of medical issues over this time, many of which took me off-trail for a while. But there's something extra special when you return to the trail and persevere beyond

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TRAIL
USE

what you think may be the limit of your body that day, when you push on through the discomfort and pain. You may take a moment to gather yourself, collect your thoughts, catch your breath, but you do not give in. You do not give up. You take that

next step, you climb that next hill, and your breath escapes you as you crest the ridge and see the view. You shake your head and think, "How did I not know this was here all this time?" You savor the beauty of your state, the beauty of our trail, the beauty that is our life.

So why do we hike? Seriously, why? Come walk beside me (and a group of any of the amazing people I met along the way). We'll ponder the mysteries of the woods, chat about the history of the locations we trek, and engage you in endless curiosity about the world in which we live. No matter the weather, no matter the difficulty, no matter the discomfort, I can guarantee this: The beauty of the people and the places you see will outweigh any negatives you may encounter. You will continually be surprised and delighted. And at the end of the hike, if you're anything like me, you'll already be planning your next one. Hike on, my friends. Hike on.

100 Miles for Margaret

BY JIM LAWSON



Jim Lawson was the first finisher of the 2023 Hike 100 Challenge.

On January 1, 2023, I was on my way to the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) in the Allegheny National Forest near my home in Warren, Pa. to begin my

Hike 100 Challenge when I received a call that my mother, Margaret, had passed away at age 94. When heaven opened the door for her that morning, I decided to continue my hike, as my mom would have wanted me to. Instantly, I knew I was going to dedicate this to her.

This hiking challenge took on a new meaning in only a few seconds. I would spend the next eight out of 11 days hiking 13 miles each day. My first two days on the Trail brought every emotion you typically experience after losing a loved one. I did not hike for the next three days as my family and I prepared for her funeral. I returned to the trail early Friday morning. This daily routine continued for

six days until I completed 100 miles on January 11.

My mom was a tenacious person and lived on her own independently until she was hospitalized a few days before her passing. Throughout her life, whatever challenge came her way, she always powered through it. She was not a hiker or an outdoors person, but she was always interested in my various outdoor activities and adventures. I believe that part of her life was lived through me when I would share countless pictures and stories with her. Although she faced an inevitable outcome once she entered the hospital, I continued to show her photos to help calm her mind and bring a smile to her face.

The Hike 100 Challenge presented a perfect way to honor her life well lived, and I knew it was the final thing I could do for her. She did not reach the age of 100, but I took her along on this 100-mile journey. There was no question that the Trail was the right place for me. It gave me time to reflect and provided some peace and comfort.

I have been asked several times, why do you hike? For me, it is a deep feeling of love, passion, reverence, and a true appreciation for nature. The joy and peace I feel on the trail is incredible. After each hike, it's a feeling of satisfaction and completeness. In each of those moments, I feel like a champion of nature, and I am grateful for each experience. The trail is also a spiritual place for me.

I encourage anyone looking to make a personal connection with nature to find a trail. You do not need to be a highly trained athlete to be successful. You set your own pace and goals. It only requires your time, effort, and motivation. It's not a running race or a contest! Hiking is for pleasure. Make sure you stop and take it all in. Snap a picture when you see the sunrise or sunset. Watch the snow, rain, and leaves fall as you soak in every color, scent, and sound possible. Capture what nature offers you.

Throughout my time on the trail, I was reminded of how much a person's life and hiking have in common. Both create lasting memories that time cannot erase. They are yesterday's treasures that move us forward each day. Nothing clears the mind and stress like a walk in the woods. As I reached the end of this 100-mile tribute to my mom, I looked to the sky as the sun broke through the dark winter clouds, and I knew at that moment this challenge was now complete.

The author includes a special thanks to Tina Roberts, who hiked five out of the eight days with him. He would also like to thank all the NCTA Chapters in Pennsylvania for their outstanding trail work. Learn more about the Pennsylvania NCNST at northcountrytrail.org/pennsylvania.

285 Miles in the Keystone State

BY TRACY “CABOOSE” HAGER



Photos by
Tracy Hager

I completed all of the Pennsylvania North Country National Scenic Trail this past August [2022].

I live in Northeast Ohio, and have been a volunteer for the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) since 2016, which is also the year I also started hiking the Trail. The first time I stepped foot on it

in Pennsylvania was on a full moon night hike led by the NCTA Wampum Chapter. It started at the Ohio-Pennsylvania state line, and we hiked a mile to Booth Hill, an open field in the State Game Lands 285. At the time, I had no intention or thoughts of section hiking the entire Trail. I had no prior overnight backpacking experience, and I had limited ability to do so anyways due to health concerns at the time. The more I hiked though, the more I wanted to see. In 2019, I decided to section hike the entire state.

I had most of the Wampum Chapter's section and Allegheny National Forest section done, being an active member and participating in several Allegheny 100 Challenges (A-100). By 2020, I had roughly 140 miles completed. Having already done pockets of sections across the state, I continued to fill in the gaps when time permitted. I drove to and from most hikes without having to stay overnight. I stayed overnight more once I hit Cook Forest State Park and the Allegheny National Forest. I finished on August 12, 2022 in the NCTA Clarion Chapter's section, after hiking 13 miles between Shippensburg and Van.

I had a lot of fun, and the further I went from home, the more epic it felt. Ultralight night hiking while dispersed camping the Allegheny National Forest was probably the craziest thing I've signed up for. So many bizarre things happened. My first attempt at the A-100 was in 2016 and I did not know what I got myself into. I made shelter with a tarp at 2:00 a.m. under a huge hemlock [tree] during a thunderstorm. My phone cord broke and I wasn't able to charge my phone - the only source to call or text in an emergency - and I had only

packed water and trail mix. I bailed out at the 25-mile mark but could not wait to do it again the next year! We encountered a bear near Route 6 while staging one of my section hikes. A car was stuck at the trailhead one time, and we helped dispatch AAA and watched them pull it out.

I also had many learning experiences while out there. A lot of excitement, close encounters with animals, some manic episodes, lost moments, deep thoughts, and of course, triumph every time I reached the end of a section.

While section hiking took more time than a thru-hike would, I felt that I learned a lot more about the Trail, local history, and nearby points of interest than I would have on a thru-hike. Driving to and from the trailheads gave me an opportunity to navigate scenic backroads rather than the highway, and try new restaurants along the way. I had a tremendous amount of supporters. Family, friends, and coworkers all spent time and effort worrying about me, and ensuring I was safe getting where I needed to be. I appreciate every ride that was offered, all the kind words that were spoken, all the generous hospitality shown by the locals, and all the hard work and help that was provided by NCTA volunteers across the state.

My husband Brian and I have already hiked over 40 NCNST miles in our lovely home state of Ohio, our next focus.

Tracy has a blog for her section hikes of Pennsylvania. As of April 2023, it is under construction, but it will eventually be public at thecabooseisloose.blogspot.com. In the meantime, follow her on Instagram: [@hikinghagers](https://www.instagram.com/hikinghagers)





End-to-Enders on the NCNST

A 2023 Update and Congratulations

The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) isn't usually the first choice of those pursuing a thru-hike, or seeking to complete a trail in its entirety. It's not for lack of beauty or accessibility, nor does the trail follow a daunting geographical feature like a mountain range. Rather, it's the 4,800-mile length.

For some comparison, the

Appalachian National Scenic Trail is 2,198 miles from end to end, and per the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, "most thru-hikes take between five and seven months." Similarly, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail is 2,650 miles, and according to the Pacific Crest Trail Association, "it generally takes the entire snow-free season to walk. That's about five

months." While five to seven months is still a tremendous commitment, it's a bit more palatable to consider accomplishing within a calendar year.

Despite the intimidating mileage and all its other challenges, there are many who have chosen the North Country National Scenic Trail for their end-to-end trek. This is a profile compilation of some recent finishers.

Patrick "Dosu Kinuta" French



Patrick has thru-hiked all 11 National Scenic Trails in America, as well as several other long-distance trails. He started off wanting to do an eastbound thru-hike of the NCNST, but decided to flip-flop instead. He left the Western Terminus in North Dakota on June

25, 2022 and hiked to the North Country Trail Association Headquarters in Lowell, Michigan. He then traveled to the Eastern Terminus and hiked back to Lowell, arriving in November.

He felt frustrated at times, regarding roadwalks and a lack of camping options. He acknowledged the NCNST was hard for him mentally because of this, as well as its length.

"Having the longest National Scenic Trail is a great accomplishment and attraction," Patrick wrote, "but it's also a lot of responsibility."

Despite this, he also recounted some pleasant memories, too.

"My favorite time on the North Country Trail was the section through the border lakes [area] in Minnesota," Patrick wrote. "It was overwhelmingly beautiful, and the wild animals were plentiful and amazing. Seeing moose, otters, bears - and it was the first time since leaving the Western Terminus that I didn't see cars for a whole day."

Now, Patrick is looking for his next hike. He noted that a top contender is the Colorado Trail, which crosses over 500 miles of the state between Denver and Durango.

Aaron "Soda" Landon



Aaron's first thru-hike was of the Florida National Scenic Trail in 2018, where he got his trail name from companions who mocked his accent from Rochester, "Minnesoda." He dreamed of hiking the NCNST since his late 20s, when he stumbled across a blue blaze near Ely, Minn., but

put it on hold for a family and business. While living in the United Kingdom for a decade, he prepared for a 4,800-mile hike by hiking extensively in France, Spain, and Portugal. He continued this training with section hiking on the Florida National Scenic Trail, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and Superior Hiking Trail, until thru-hiking the NCNST became a realistic dream.

Aaron set out from Lake Sakakawea State Park in North Dakota on March 24, 2022. Once he reached Defiance, Ohio, he traveled to Rutland, Vermont, then hiked back to Defiance. (This is known as a flip-flop hike.) He finished on December 5, 2022.

Near the NCNST's halfway point in Michigan, Aaron said he considered quitting because he wouldn't make the Adirondacks until wintertime. He then encountered six trail angels, six days in a row. They put him up, hiked with him, and boosted his morale. "They helped me get my mind right," Aaron said. (This is how his decision to flip-flop came about.)

During his traverse of the Superior Hiking Trail section of the NCNST, Aaron had so many friends and relatives who wanted to hike with him, that he hiked back and forth for four weeks. This stretch would normally have taken him less than two.

When hiking east of Ely, Minn. Aaron turned at a road crossing and hiked to an outfitter he had stayed at many years before, when he first noticed the NCNST. He met the proprietor, Adam, who was surprised to hear he had walked the 20 miles from Ely. He was even more impressed as he learned about Aaron's hike, and offered Aaron a job when he was ready. This is where he currently resides, working

and dreaming of his next adventure.

Listen to a Points North podcast interview with Aaron at pointsnorthpodcast.org or via this QR code.



Joan Young

The following was written entirely by Joan.



As soon as I finished hiking the entire NCNST in 2010, I knew I wanted to hike it again. Over the 20 years spent completing that first trek, hundreds of miles of the Trail changed.

I discovered the trail in 1988 and the estimated total was 3,200 miles.

In 1999, end-to-end Ed Talone suggested the Trail was actually going to be about 4,400 miles. By then I'd hiked 1,450 and might still have over 3,000 to go. Wait! Didn't my quest begin with just over 3,000 miles? I'd been hiking for 10 years and had seemingly made almost no progress.

At the end of 1999 there were only 1,600 miles of Trail that were off-road. The Association had created a slogan, "2,000 by 2000." The idea was to increase [NCTA] membership to 2,000 and have 2,000 certified miles. Bill Menke, National Park Service Trail Manager at the time, did some careful studies and thought it was possible to achieve 1,800 miles by the end of the year 2000, but not 2,000. (The NCTA did hit the membership goal.)

This is a lot of numbers, and what's my point? I tallied my first end-to-end hike, including Vermont, which I added in 2014: 4,455 miles. A rough estimate gleaned from an old NCTA progress report puts 2,500 miles off-road in 2010. I knew there were huge sections of trail I'd never seen because they were simply road connections when I hiked them.

By this time, I'd completely fallen in love with the North Country Trail, and I wanted to see what

the new miles had in store. Others wanted me to see them too. For example, where two friends and I bushwhacked across the Paul Bunyan State Forest in Minnesota, Jerry Trout now practically dragged me away from the 2007 Conference in Bemidji to see their beautifully built miles of trail. And those stories continued across the trail.

By 2020, the NCTA was reporting 3,160 miles of off-road trail and I still hadn't embarked on a second hike. But the plan was formulating in my brain. I wanted to do a thru-hike, mostly because it would be a different experience from my first time, to see the Trail as one continuous thread. But I knew I wasn't going to be able to hike 25 miles a day, so how could I avoid deep winter?

One night, I suddenly awoke, realizing that if I hiked through relatively balmy Ohio in the winter and could average 15 miles a day, I'd be back home in a year. This would keep me out of full winter in the Adirondacks, Vermont, North Dakota, Minnesota, and the Upper Peninsula, all of which can present serious problems to a hiker in snow. This isn't named the North Country Trail for nothing.

So, on December 1, 2021, I hiked away from the spot where the Trail is closest to my home, at the crossing of US-10 in Michigan, and returned there on July 18, 2023. In those 18 months and 18 days, there were 365 hiking days, and 4,815 miles of NCNST.

Seeing the Trail in one walk was eye-opening, even for me. I had never so clearly understood such things as the continuity of the geology and the interconnectedness of historic transportation routes. The North Country Trail has scenery, environmental diversity, history, and culture to showcase by the mile-ton, and I hope to continue to share this wonder with any who will listen. The wonders will only increase as more miles are built off-road. For the next little while,

though, I'm happily playing in my flower gardens.



Listen to a Points North podcast interview with Joan at pointsnorthpodcast.org or via this QR code.

The NCTA acknowledges there are others who have completed the NCNST recently. Some did not respond to inquiries and some, the NCTA may not have been aware of. If you or someone you know would like to share a story in a future North Star, please email northstar@northcountrytrail.org. See a comprehensive list of those who have reported completing the NCNST and/or significant portions of it at explorenct.info/NoCoLo/index.htm.



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Honorable Mention



Richard "Skittles" Larson did not walk the entire North Country National Scenic Trail, but he did recently complete over 2,000 miles of it. His time on the NCNST was actually part of a longer adventure, "the Snowbird Route," connecting the southernmost (Key West, Fla.) with the northernmost (Angle Inlet, Minn.) points of the contiguous U.S. This was a 5,000-mile hike that took him

10 months to complete.

Richard stepped on the NCNST at Suck Run in southern Ohio on April 26, 2022. He arrived in Tower, Minnesota on September 17.

"I've hiked a lot of other long distance trails," wrote Richard. "The NCNST is more of a mix of wild areas and hiking through Americana; experiencing small towns, farm areas, canals, and roads along with the gorgeous natural areas. It is less a long pathway than a true mix of different surfaces and area types."

"The people are always the best part of any trail, and I'm not even a people person," Richard added. "Maybe my favorite trail moment was hiking on a short road segment in the middle of the Manistee Forest. I had spied a restaurant on the map and was eagerly looking forward to breakfast there, when two voices called out from across the road and asked if I was an NCT hiker. Mike and Lori Dewey invited me in for breakfast. At first I demurred, but they insisted. I had a great homemade breakfast and conversation that just got my day off to an amazing start. Also, in Ohio, I met a guy out walking his dogs, who I chatted with a bit. He asked if I was stopping in the next town, and I told him I was probably going to the Subway in a gas station there. When I arrived, I found that Tony Smith had given them money to cover whatever I ordered. It brought a big smile to my face."

Richard is now working as a sports editor in Ketchikan, Alaska, and saving up for his next hiking adventure. "I think it is likely that at some point in my future I will hike the remainder of the NCNST."

Read Richard's trail journal from the start of his NCNST journey at trailjournals.com/journal/entry/649813.

Creating a Legacy to Build a Sustainable Future

"Hiking and soaking in the quiet of nature are two loves of ours and there's no better way of doing that than on the North Country National Scenic Trail. We feel that in order for us to continue enjoying the peacefulness of nature and for future generations to enjoy it like we do, the Trail needs to be maintained and completed. Through our estate plans, we hope to help keep people hiking the NCNST for years to come." (Roger and Becky Tuuk)

- Recommend the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) through your Donor Advised Fund;
- Name the NCTA as a beneficiary on a retirement or life insurance policy;
- Donate stock or give through your IRA; or
- Name the NCTA in your will or estate.

For more information, or if you've already included the NCTA in your planning and you'd like to be added to the Legacy Society, contact Nancy Brozek, NCTA Director of Development and Communications, at nbrozek@northcountrytrail.org or 231-685-0711.



Hike 4 Kidz 2023

BY DAVE BREWER, NCTA WAMPUM CHAPTER

Hike 4 Kidz is an annual, cooperative event in Western Pennsylvania, hosted by the NCTA Wampum Chapter and the Knights of Columbus Council 604. The Knights raise funds for three Catholic entities in the Pittsburgh diocese: McGuide Memorial, St. Anthony School Programs, and St. Monica Catholic Academy. Our Chapter organizes the benefit hike. Participants have the choice of spending 2.5, 5, 7.5, or 10 miles on our Chapter's section of North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) along Little Beaver Creek.

This year, to enhance the spirit of partnership, we invited Tiger Pause to participate. Tiger Pause is a youth ministry group in Beaver Falls, Pa., with whom we've collaborated in the past. The ministry, headed by Mr. Matt Nance, offers holistic programs to Beaver County's young people and their families. They seek to equip and empower individuals within our disadvantaged neighborhoods, developing lasting relationships, and through dedication and collaboration, creating a community where youth and their families thrive. Through St. Monica Catholic Church, Wampum Chapter President Dennis Garrett contacted Mr. Nance when a diversity committee was formed, and then worked with him to explore a connection to the Wampum Chapter. Subsequently, the Wampum Chapter Diversity Committee submitted an NCTA JEDI Mini-Grant application on their behalf and Tiger Pause was the first group to receive funding from the NCTA Diversity Committee in 2021, providing the resources for a group hike on the NCNST. The group received further NCTA funding the following year, enabling four youths and their advisors to take their first overnight backpacking trip on the NCNST near Wampum, Pa.

The Knights of Columbus Council 604 has a relationship with Tiger Pause too, through a building renovation project. They also encouraged Tiger Pause to participate in Hike 4 Kidz. When we came up short on

shuttle vans for the event, the Knights loaned us two of their own to use.

The rainy morning of April 29 found four Tiger Pause youth and two advisors at the west end of the Enon Valley, ready to hike 2.5 miles of the NCNST along the banks of the North Fork of Beaver Creek. For all of them, it was their first time on the Trail.

When they arrived at the eastern end, the kids took advantage of the campfire: they roasted hot dogs to replenish their energy for the hike back to the starting point. As expected of first-time attendees at a hot dog roast, debates ensued about whether to skewer the hot dog straight-on or sideways, and whether they should be lightly toasted or incinerated, black and crunchy. Despite some spirited discussion, no definitive conclusions were reached. Refueled and reenergized, the group returned to the starting point in great spirits, enthusiastic about future outdoor adventures on the North Country Trail.

Us volunteers of the Wampum Chapter look forward to continuing our relationship with Tiger Pause, introducing more young people to the woods of western Pennsylvania and opportunities to appreciate the positives in the natural world in their neighborhood.

Search for additional NCTA Wampum Chapter events at northcountrytrail.org/events. Learn about Tiger Pause tigerpause.net, and the NCTA JEDI Mini-Grants program at northcountrytrail.org/jedi.



Event participants from Tiger Pause Youth Ministry enjoy the NCNST

Photo provided by
Tiger Pause



Hike 4 Kidz event coordinators and volunteers

Photo provided by
Tiger Pause



Hike Every Mile, North Dakota

BY RENNAE GRUCHALLA



Left: Dick and Laura Wohl

Right: Brittany Denesha-Jackson (left) and Aspen Jackson

Photos by
Jack Norland

Bottom right: Mary Tastad (left) and Carol Enger

Photos by
Carol Enger



Watch this video on
YouTube at youtu.be/0utH9iZjGzw or
via this QR code



It all began in 2014. Our NCTA Dakota Prairie Chapter initiated an event called Hike Every Mile. We divided our 100 miles of North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) into several segments, and assigned willing trail users to each. The goal was to have many individuals or groups hiking simultaneously in a variety of locations, to cover that full 100 miles in one day.

We did it, and ended the day with a fun outdoor gathering that included conversation, food, and music. We continued this event for several years, excluding two years due to the pandemic. At a Chapter leadership meeting in early 2022, the idea of expansion was brought up: to include the entire 475 miles of the NCNST that traverses North Dakota. We decided to take on this challenge.

In the summer of 2022, we set out to talk to as many folks as possible about this event. "Do you enjoy hiking, the outdoors, nature? Would you like to participate in something that's never before been tried in our state? Something that's bigger than yourself?" If the answer was "yes" or "maybe," we collected their contact information. It was very enjoyable educating so many about this fantastic trail that passes through our state.

In January 2023, we began making phone calls to those yeses and maybes, as well as

members from our three North Dakota NCTA Chapters: Dakota Prairie, Sheyenne River Valley, and Central Flyway. After a quick informative spiel on the event, we invited them to commit to participating. By mid-February, 80 segments were filled with approximately 160 hikers. We had such momentum and didn't want to limit the number of hikers, so we aimed to fill a second grid with another 160 hikers. We filled two-thirds of that one.

Monthly motivational messages were then sent to participants, including topics like dealing with ticks and inclement weather, and how to report the completion of your hike. But our primary goal for this messaging was to remind hikers about their commitment. (Spoiler: It worked.)



May was spent making media appearances on radio and television, and placing newspaper advertisements. We added about 50 more hikers that month. Since all the segments were filled at this point, we told them to hike their choice, as long as they covered at least two miles. The North Dakota State Parks and Recreation Department also made a video* about the NCNST in North Dakota. Their staff hiked with us while asking questions about the Trail and the event.

June 3 - National Trails Day - was lovely and warm. The meandering Sheyenne River was nearly overflowing its banks. Meadowlarks trilled their lovely melodies and tall prairie grasses oscillated in the gentle breeze. Over 400 hikers, ages one to 80, walked on the NCNST on this awesome day. Some hiked in the early morning while watching the sun creep over the eastern horizon, and some hiked late in the afternoon as long, tall shadows began their dance toward the western horizon. All were heading toward their assigned destinations. Was there even one small gap in those 475 assigned miles? Absolutely not. These people believed in all seven of the goals set forth for completing this feat, and they were determined to reach their individual goals.

To bolster the spirit of camaraderie, we also organized gatherings at 5 o'clock that day in four locations along the Trail. At each, hikers were able to enjoy refreshments, share experiences, and watch the Trail turn from green to blaze blue as others completed their segments.

"To overcome the inability to [all] meet together," Chapter President Jack Norland explained, "it was decided to create an online map so all the hikers could see the progress of Hike Every Mile. The map numbered all the segments and to start, they were colored green. As a hiker completed their segment, they informed the planners and their segment was changed to blue. Because it was updated instantly, hikers could view the progress as the day went on."

By 4:30 p.m., we accomplished our goal to hike every mile of the NCNST in North Dakota. I am still in awe of these participants, some coming as far away as Montana, Cincinnati, and California.

We had such wonderful volunteers. Those who did not hike participated in many ways, such as shuttling hikers, hosting the gatherings, and organizing and distributing t-shirts. This event would not have gone so smoothly if we hadn't had these folks in the background. I'd also like to give a shout-out to the Flexible Trekkers. These hikers were on standby for the last few months leading up to the event, ready to claim segments in case someone had to bow out at

GOALS OF HIKE EVERY MILE

When the NCTA Dakota Prairie Chapter decided to expand the event statewide, a committee of five volunteers was formed and we came up with the following goals, which we've committed to ever since:

- 1 To educate North Dakotans on what an honor it is to have one of the 11 National Scenic Trails passing through our state, as well as housing the Western Terminus of this 4,800-mile trail.
- 2 To connect hundreds of hikers on the Trail in one day: National Trails Day.
- 3 To contribute to the health and wellbeing of our citizens by immersing them in nature and physical activity.
- 4 To accomplish a goal of hiking every mile of a trail across our beautiful state.
- 5 To learn the cultural and historical stories along the NCNST in North Dakota.
- 6 To introduce hikers to areas of North Dakota they may never have seen.
- 7 To have fun!



Top: Jin Li (center with sunglasses and hat) gathered this crew to help hike four separate segments: Helen Yang, Haihui Pei, Puying Zheng, Gongjun Shi, Xiachong Jiang, Yanlin Chen, and Yanlin Wei

Photo by Jing Li

Right: (Left to right) Katie, Louise, Gus, and Nathan Russart

Photo by Russart Family



Continued on page 18



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(Left to right) Aidry,
Brett, Vita, and Ashley
Johnson

Left: Tüni Carlson, 4 years
old

Photos by Terri Ferragut

the last minute. This did happen in a couple instances, and I'm positive we wouldn't have reached 100% if it weren't for them.

What an honor it is to have a National Scenic Trail in our backyard. I could write a book about this whole experience; it has been a true joy. There is nothing in this world like the enthusiastic, kind, positive, and friendly people who hike.

See what else the NCTA Dakota Prairie Chapter is up to at northcountrytrail.org/dpc and northcountrytrail.org/events.

Hike It. Build It. Love It.

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

[shop.
northcountrytrail.org](https://northcountrytrail.org/shop)



QR Codes in West Michigan

BY CHERYL MCGRATH, NCTA
WESTERN MICHIGAN CHAPTER



Photo provided by
the NCTA Western Michigan Chapter

In the fall of 2021, our Chapter's board investigated approaches to provide better on-the-trail information to those hiking the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) in our section. QR codes were decided upon, to be installed at 19 locations along the Trail: Seven in Kent County and 12 in Newaygo County.

Each QR code links to a document with information about that specific Trail section, including mileages, links to resources, highlights of flora and fauna, and items of interest. This offers an effective way to share current information with hikers, and it will be easy for our Chapter volunteers to update the information as needed.

The project team collaborated with Kent County Parks, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and Manistee National Forest staff - all key partners to our Chapter and the Trail itself. Kenny Wawczyk, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator for Michigan, also provided his support and suggestions. I thank all of these partners, as well as the following Chapter leaders and volunteers: Faune Benson-Schuitema, Jim Bradley, Steve Hatting, Nick Gonring, Sue Hatting, Dale Painter, and Sarah Pregitzer.

The informational documents can also be accessed via the NCTA Western Michigan Chapter webpage: northcountrytrail.org/wmi.

LONG DISTANCE HIKER Recognition



In 2012, an effort was started to officially recognize those who hike one or more complete North Country National Scenic Trail states, and/or 1,000 unique miles of the Trail. So far, over 60 people have been awarded patches via this program. The following trail users have recently been recognized, though not all of their accomplishments are necessarily recent. Read their full essays at northcountrytrail.org/blog.

WHAT IS THIS?

When you see this symbol on a recipient's photo, it means this is their first time being recognized. Congrats!

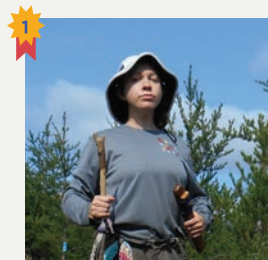


Photo by Laura Brandon

Laura Brandon, Michigan

MICHIGAN AND 1,000 MILES

"It was a commitment to myself to complete this epic adventure. And it was more than natural to do so — it was fated. This journey had already happened in my dreams and there at the border I stood realizing my dreams were reality."



Photo by Shari Sanderson

Judy Conrad, Michigan

MICHIGAN

"I made it through in '22! My long-time goal of the NCNST of Michigan was complete. Praise the Lord! At 73 years old I feel so blessed to be able to have done this!"

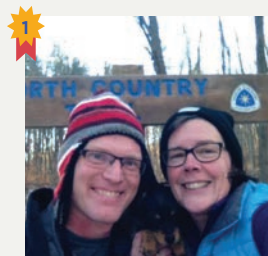


Photo by Jim Dornbush

Jim and Nancy Dornbush, Michigan

MICHIGAN, MACKINAC BRIDGE, AND 1,000 MILES

"Remembering and living the words 'hike your own hike' have become important to us. We don't hike as fast or as far each day as many do; usually not as far as what we wish we could do. But we are getting out and doing this, seeing so much of God's creation, and even in very hard sections, we are building wonderful memories as we continue on this adventure."



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See additional awardees, apply for recognition, and find additional information about this program at explorencnt.info/NoCoLo/index.htm.

1



Photo by Tracy Hager

Tracy Hager, Ohio
PENNSYLVANIA

"I hiked most of the Allegheny National Forest while participating in several Allegheny 100 Challenges. I hiked in sweltering hot temperatures and below freezing, too. Rain, snow, and everything else in between."

1



Photo by Nancy DeJong

Terri Lindberg, Michigan
1,000 MILES

"I've hiked a lot of places, but it's amazing to discover this extraordinary gem we have in our own backyard. This journey has taken me to so many new areas that I didn't know about in a state I have lived in all of my life."

1



Photo by Jane Norton

Jane Norton, Michigan
WISCONSIN, MACKINAC
BRIDGE, AND 1,000 MILES

"I had started to hike my Chapter's section each year to better understand where and what everyone was talking about at meetings. I loved this challenge; enjoying the different parts of the Trail: the woods, bike trails, towns, and even roadwalks."

1



Photo by Grant Seaman

Grant Seaman, New York
PENNSYLVANIA

"At some point, I noted that a portion of the Finger Lakes Trail was a part of the NCNST, and then thought it would be good to continue hiking along it to complete as much of the NCNST as I can while my body can still hike!"

1



Photo by
Nancy Shepherd

Nancy Shepherd, Ohio
OHIO AND MACKINAC
BRIDGE

"This hiking adventure gets more difficult as I have to travel ever farther from home, but if I complete 100 miles each year, I should be able to finish the North Country Trail by age 100! Hmm, this may require some more planning..."

1

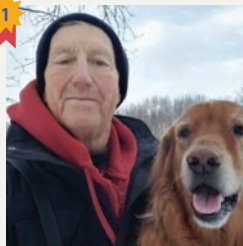


Photo by Bill Stone

Bill Stone, Minnesota
NORTH DAKOTA AND 1,000
MILES

"I truly enjoy being outdoors away from everyday life, even if for just a little while, and really look forward to the next adventure."

1



Photo by Angie

Andrew Turner, Michigan
WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN,
MACKINAC BRIDGE, OHIO,
PENNSYLVANIA, 1,000 MILES,
2,000 MILES, AND 3,000 MILES

"This is how I spend my vacation time, chipping off unique miles with the goal of full completion in the distant future. Maybe it has become an obsession at this point, but what an adventure it has been hiking along the North Country Trail!"

1



Photo by Wegener Family

**Tom, Cheryl, and Amanda
Wegener, and Kerry Mosko,
Michigan**
WISCONSIN AND MACKINAC
BRIDGE

"Every year, our two daughters Kerry and Amanda take one week off work to hike the North Country Trail with us. We completed Michigan years ago and have been working on both Ohio and Wisconsin."

Whatever the Problem, It's Probably Solved by Walking

BY ANDREW MCCARTHY

*From The New York Times. © 2023
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Walking is the worst-kept secret I know. Its rewards hide under every step.

Perhaps because we take walking so much for granted, many of us often ignore its ample gifts. In truth, I doubt I would walk often or very far if its sole benefit was physical, despite the abundant proof of its value in that regard. There's something else at play in walking that interests me more. And with the arrival of spring, attention must be paid.

I discovered the power of ambling more than a quarter century ago when I traipsed 500 miles across Spain on the Camino de Santiago, an ancient pilgrimage route. I stumbled upon the Camino by accident and then trudged across Spain with purpose. I've been a walker ever since. And I'm not the only one.

Hippocrates proclaimed that "walking is man's best medicine." The good doctor also knew that walking provided more than mere physical benefits when he suggested: "If you are in a bad mood, go for a walk. If you are still in a bad mood, go for another walk." He was alluding to what so many who came after would attest, that walking not only nourishes the body but also soothes the mind while it burns off tension and makes our troubles recede into a more manageable perspective.

Soren Kierkegaard agreed when he confessed, "I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away

from it." And Charles Dickens was even more direct. "If I could not walk far and fast," he wrote, "I think I should just explode and perish."

But walking does more than keep the devil from the door. The Welsh poet (and sometime vagabond) W.H. Davies wrote:

*Now shall I walk
Or shall I ride?
"Ride," Pleasure said.
"Walk," Joy replied.*

Walking buoys the spirits in a way that feels real and earned. It feels owned. And walking, like a generous partner, meets us more than halfway.

There's abundant testimony that a good ramble fuels creativity. William Wordsworth swore by walking, as did Virginia Woolf. So did William Blake. Thomas Mann assured us, "Thoughts come clearly while one walks." J.K. Rowling observed that there is "nothing like a nighttime stroll to give you ideas," while the turn-of-the-20th-century novelist Elizabeth von Arnim concluded that walking "is the perfect way of moving if you want to see into the life of things."

And ask any deep thinker about the benefits of what Bill Bryson calls the "tranquil tedium" walking elicits. Jean-Jacques Rousseau admitted, "There is something about walking that animates and activates my ideas." Even the resolutely pessimistic Friedrich Nietzsche had to give it up for a good saunter when he allowed, "All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking."

While my own ruminations may not approach the lofty heights to which Nietzsche referred, a good long walk, or even one not so long, begins to carve out space between my thoughts that allows clarity to rise up through my shoes in a way that no other mode of transport does. The travel writer and scholar Patrick Leigh Fermor put it succinctly when he said, "All horsepower corrupts."

Until I went to Spain with the sole mission of crossing the country on foot, I often considered walking a waste of my time. The Camino changed that. The

monthlong walk revealed me to myself in a way nothing else had - my looping pattern of thinking, my habitual emotion cycles, my fearful nature. The Camino wore down my resistance to seeing myself, and then step after step built me back up. It altered my place in the world.

Instead of viewing walking as simply the slowest way to get somewhere, I grew to see it not only as a means to an end, but as the event itself. And since I walked the Camino for a second time last year with my 19-year-old son, I've come to understand walking as among the most valuable things I can do.

The writer Rebecca Solnit pointed out that walking "is how the body measures itself against the earth." And through such physical communion, walking offers up its crowning gift by bringing us emotionally, even spiritually, home to ourselves. When on the last day of our walk my son turned to me and said, "Dad, that's the only '10 out of 10' thing I've ever done in my life," I knew he had arrived not only in Santiago de Compostela, but, more meaningfully, in himself.

The great naturalist John Muir keenly observed, "I only went out for a walk and ... going out, I found, was really going in." Has anyone ever emerged from ambling through nature for an hour and regretted their improved state of being? Perhaps this is what that dedicated walker Henry David Thoreau was referring to when he wrote, "I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees."

So the secret is out there. It's under the leaves on the trail. It's right there on the sidewalk. Spring has sprung. Lace up.



TRAIL
USE



A Cautionary Tale

BY BILL COURTOIS

Bill, “very wet, but not totally saturated.”

Photo by
Joan Young

On November 28, 2022, I met up with Joan Young to hike with her in Michigan’s upper peninsula for about two weeks. We began on a section of Trail that Joan chose not to complete the previous day. (With deep snow and rocky hills, she realized she’d never complete her planned 12 miles before dark, so she bailed out at a road crossing.)

Michael Sekely of the NCTA Marquette Area Chapter spotted Joan and I at the west end of the Silver Creek Basin, which has a great view of the Dead River Valley. Reaching this location required a 90-minute drive on remote, unplowed roads to the middle of nowhere. Michael requested that we get pictures of the log “bridge” over Cole Creek. (It’s a log covered with woven-wire mesh.) He said there were poles at the end of the bridge that hikers could use to help balance on the log during their crossing.

Heading east at sunrise, we conquered a lot of rocky hills and successfully got across Wildcat Canyon Creek on rocks. We took photos of Cole Creek as we approached the snow-covered log bridge, noting that the poles were on the far side of the creek. I tried crossing first.

My hiking stick is long, but too short to solidly reach the creek bottom. I lost my balance and found little traction. I fell backwards into the

creek. I leaped out of the icy water and attempted again to cross, following Joan. At the far end, I slipped and fell in again. I ended up falling a third time, getting very wet, but not totally saturated. Everything but my head and one shoulder had gone under the water.

Joan was concerned, and her first reaction was to recommend building a fire to dry out. With a very slight breeze and the temperature only a bit below freezing, I advocated that my best option would be to hustle out of the woods as fast as possible to generate body heat and to avoid a rescue situation. I began to hike on but noticed Joan was not walking as quickly. She was contemplating things we should have discussed, because once I took off, she knew she’d never catch me. “He hikes fast,” Joan wrote. “Even when he’s not feeling stressed.”

I ran back to Joan, and reiterated my plan to go ahead and hopefully not freeze. She still wasn’t sure that was the best option. It was 3.5 miles to a road, and 6.5 miles to a cabin that was likely to be occupied in the winter. But I was determined, and not wanting to stand around getting chilled, I took off again. We still did not discuss “what if” scenarios.



"I AM OK" was one of Bill's messages to Joan, written in the snow.

Photo by
Joan Young

Joan pondered what she could do to be helpful, wishing she'd given Bill the space blanket she carried. Cell service was non-existent, but she left the Trail to climb to the top of a rocky hill, and there found just enough signal to be able to contact both Sue Crawford, her support person, and Michael Sekely, to request that someone drive to the end of the road that was 3.5 hiking miles ahead. She didn't know which one might be able to get there sooner. She got a longer text through to Sue to bring blankets, a hot drink, and dry clothes if possible.

Once, I lost the blazes and was wandering around at the bottom of a valley. When Joan saw my tracks, she was concerned I might be getting cold and disoriented, but I found the Trail again. Whew! At least the snow made it easy to see exactly where I had gone. She figured that since she was following my tracks, and I was between her and whomever got to the pickup point, if something happened, she would find me. If that need arose, they could change the plan.

Periodically, I wrote messages in the snow to say, "I'm okay." Joan found the messages, and they were reassuring. I never became disoriented, but had to sometimes search for the Trail. Even though it was well-blazed, winter conditions make everything more difficult.

Meanwhile, Sue had actually been shopping at a Goodwill when she got the text, so she bought some generic clothes and a blanket, picked up a hot drink, and scooted for the end point. Michael was doing trail work and was a 20-minute walk from his truck. Then he would still need to drive to the pickup point, but he started heading there as fast as he could.

I stopped very briefly a few times to drink and eat, check the Avenza maps, and look for text messages from Joan. I got cold quickly when I stopped moving.

Joan received a text from Sue that she had reached the meeting point, though I had not yet arrived. She knew I would not stop if no one was there, that I would keep going until I got to a house. But the first one I could have reached was another three miles. She was also concerned that I would not recognize the turnoff to get to the car, so she was hoping and praying that either Sue or Michael would get there in time to catch me.

Eleven minutes later, I found Sue. She texted Joan, and Michael rolled in shortly after. Joan came bounding down the hill to the cars 20 minutes later.

Later the group contemplated what had happened. The temperature was below freezing, the weather was snowy, and the creek was icy. Cell service was weak. The winds were calm. Toward the end, before I reached Sue, I could feel ice crystals building up in my hiking boots. My body was comfortably chilly, but my feet were getting cold and even a little numb from the ice crystals. We considered many "what ifs," then considered ourselves fortunate. We continued our hiking in the McCormick Wilderness the following day.

I share this cautionary tale to remind us all how quickly things can change. Please always hike prepared and have a plan for emergencies. (I did have a space blanket on me, by the way.) Someone knowing where you are helps tremendously.

Visit northcountrytrail.org/plan-your-hike for some basic information on hike preparation, what to expect on the North Country National Scenic Trail, and for additional resources.



Save the date for the fourth annual My NCT Membership Drive: September 1-30.

The journey to build and maintain the country's longest National Scenic Trail begins with you.

When you support the North Country Trail Association during this limited-time event, all memberships and donations will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$27,500, thanks to an anonymous NCTA benefactor. All new, returning, and renewing members will also receive limited edition North Country Trail gear with your membership or donation between September 1 and 30, as supplies last.

Hike it. Build it. Love it. Support it.
northcountrytrail.org/join-renew

MY NCT

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

SEPT. 1-30



TRAIL
USE

Hike 100 Challenge

The Hike 100 Challenge is a program designed to help you meet your goals. Maybe you want to explore the outdoors more, spend time with your family, make new trail friends, find solitude, try backpacking, or see how far you can wander. Whatever your goals are, the Hike 100 Challenge is the motivation you need.

The program has evolved since its induction in 2016, but the main rule remains: Complete 100 miles on the North Country National Scenic Trail within the calendar year. Fortunately there are 4,800 miles to choose from. Visit the same

one mile 100 times over or explore 100 unique miles. Hike, walk, backpack, snowshoe, or cross-country ski. Make the journey yours.

The North Country Trail Association offers plenty of resources to help you succeed, including free maps, Chapter group hike experiences, mileage logs, and much more, including amazing support from fellow NCNST users through the NCT Community Facebook group (facebook.com/groups/nctcommunity).

northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge

2021 1,662 total finishers



“I started hiking the NCT with my friend Lianne, and made so many friends as we continued to hike! We’ve done organized group hikes, hikes with friends, backpacking trips, and solo hikes. The NCT has expanded my circle and brought so much comfort to my soul!”

— 2021 FINISHER ABBEY
WICK OF NORTH DAKOTA



“We visit family every summer in Michigan. Our goal this summer was to hike 100 miles before our summer was over. We did it, and loved every minute.”

— 2021 FINISHERS
MELISSA, JOSHUA,
AND NOAH COLUNGA
OF NORTH CAROLINA



“We’ve been working our way across the NCNST/Finger Lakes Trail since 2017. My husband William and our 14-year-old chocolate lab have completed 120 miles. We’ve learned about so many plants, animals, and places of New York we never knew were out there. Thank you!”

— 2021 FINISHERS TERRI
AND WILLIAM DEMPSKI
OF NEW YORK

2022 1,250 total finishers



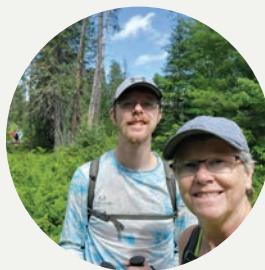
“I’ve been hiking with an amazing group of women on the North Country Trail since 2021 in Northwestern Wisconsin. Although we remained healthy, Covid had a huge impact on our lives. Hiking, and hiking with these women, truly got me through these difficult times.”

— 2022 FINISHER ROXANNE BARTSH OF WISCONSIN



“This year my Hike 100 Challenge was completed in 36 hours! I completed the Superior Fall Trail Race (100) on the Superior Hiking Trail!”

— 2022 FINISHER PETE BROMEN OF MINNESOTA



“My mom and I have been hiking the North Country Trail for the past few years. We have met a lot of nice people on the Trail. Also, a few have become friends. Hope to someday complete the whole North Country Trail.”

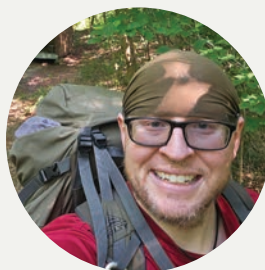
— 2022 FINISHERS CHRIS AND BARBARA COOK OF MICHIGAN

2023 1,662 total finishers as of June 30, 2023



“I completed most of my miles in the NCTA Jordan Valley 45° Chapter’s section, the rest in the Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter’s section. About half was on snowshoes. I have completed the Hike 100 Challenge every year since it started.”

— 2023 FINISHER BOB COURTOIS OF MICHIGAN



“Did my first A-100 and I’m already looking forward to trying to do it again next year!”

— 2023 FINISHER LEVI WILSON OF PENNSYLVANIA



“Lots of wind, many migrating birds, some post-holing through some snow drifts, but still a great 140-mile hike in North Dakota.”

— 2023 FINISHER LISA SNOOK OF OHIO



TRAIL
USE

Lisa and Barb while hiking in Michigan.

Photo provided by Lisa Snook



The Desire to Walk

BY LISA SNOOK

My hiking partner Barb Whittington and I have now become 2,000-mile, long distance hikers. We have completed the entire state of Michigan and now, nearly all of Minnesota, save for the Border Route and Kekekabic Trail sections. God willing and the creek don't rise, we will have completed those by the end of the 2023 hiking season. We have had experiences too numerous for one article, so today I will focus on a beautiful section in Minnesota that brought us great joy and helped heal my spirit.

We planned a fall hike, but at the end of August 2022, my mother became ill and within three weeks' time, she passed away. Although she lived a very long, healthy life and had only a three-week period of discomfort, it was still a very emotional time for our family. After the services, Barb and I left for our central Minnesota hike.

It began a bit northeast of the Detroit Lakes area with a warm and dewy 18 miles near Hubbel Pond [Wildlife Management Area]. We continued the next day through the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge and Chippewa National Forest. Thankfully, I had purchased the Guide to Hiking the North Country Trail in Minnesota before our trip. Not only did we get to experience firsthand the beautiful prairie and forests with a variety of flora and fauna, but we had a resource to read before and after the hikes each day.

After exiting the Refuge, we found a great place to camp 20 miles from the nearest town. We heard wolves so close that night that their howling sounded as loud as tornado sirens. There was an impassable section of the Trail closed to hikers where there had been a blowdown, so we took a little detour and drove to Itasca State Park. What an enormous, one-of-a-kind place! It is somewhere I plan to return.

Back on the Trail, as has been our experience throughout our 2,000+ miles, we encountered very few people - but those we did meet epitomized Minnesota

"Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Everyday, I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. But by sitting still, and the more one sits still, the closer one comes to feeling ill. Thus if one just keeps on walking, everything will be alright."

— SØREN KIERKEGAARD

Nice. We came upon some volunteers whose work on the Trail was much appreciated. They were patient with our questions and confirmed that we had been walking through a lot of chokecherries. At the end of the day we drove into Lake George where we got to meet the proprietors of one of those wonderful all-in-one locations where you can buy all the necessities. If you are in the area, this town is worth a stop.

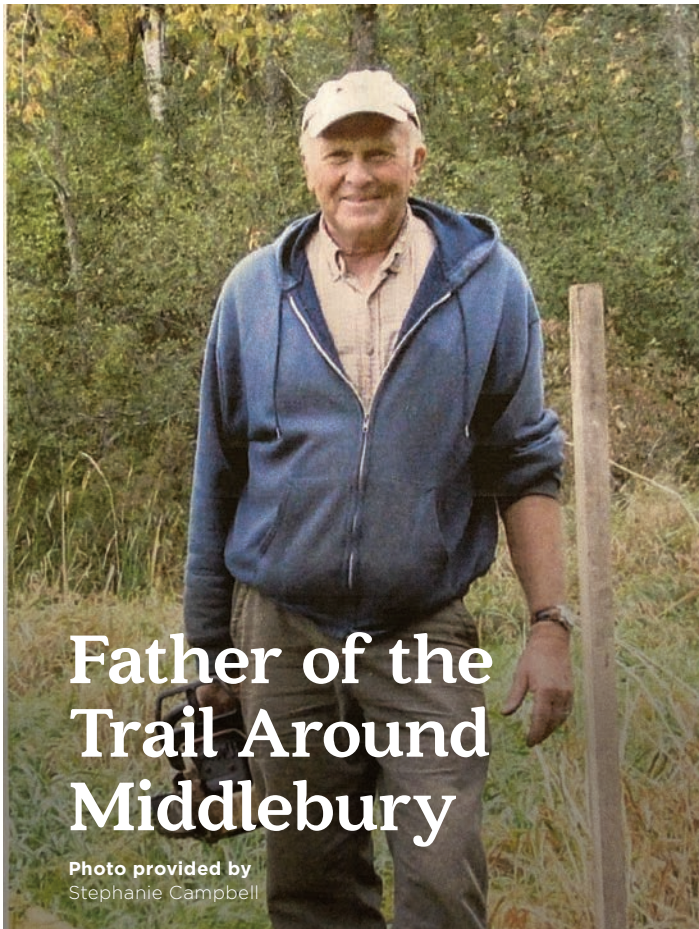
After a few days on the Trail, I was ready for a campground with a shower. Barb had a low tire on her car, so we found a great spot in Akeley where we could get air and camp at the city park. We had a fire, a beautiful sunset beside the lake, and a hot shower before getting back on the Trail. I admit I wasn't the best trail buddy thus far into the trip. But with the beauty of the Northwoods, the hot shower, the solitude, and a friend to listen and talk me through my recent loss, the Trail once again came to my rescue.

We were hiking during grouse hunting season but only heard the occasional distant gunshot. However, we did come across a grisly sight of a bird that had been, what seemed to us, ripped apart and hung up in a sapling. We had just seen a fisher* before that and wondered if that was the culprit. In a quarter-mile, we saw another mangled up bird. Barb snapped a photo. At the end of the day we went into Remer and noticed many Bigfoot references. Barb joked that maybe it was Bigfoot eating the birds. While having a sandwich in a local establishment, Barb showed her photo to some locals, but no one had seen that behavior before. We eventually heard that some hunters prefer to take the best of the grouse and leave the rest for the animals.

This hike challenged us, taught us, and renewed us. We are always tired at the end, but we relish the experiences that the Trail has brought us. I encourage others to enjoy the North Country Trail, and to walk yourselves into a state of well-being.

Learn more about the NCNST in Minnesota at northcountrytrail.org/minnesota.

*A fisher is a small, carnivorous mammal native to North America. It is of the weasel family and comparable in size to a domestic cat.



Father of the Trail Around Middlebury

Photo provided by
Stephanie Campbell

BY STEPHANIE CAMPBELL, NCTA REGIONAL TRAIL COORDINATOR FOR NEW YORK AND VERMONT

In a fast-paced world of short attention spans and 24-hour news cycles, dedication and commitment to a singular path stands out amidst the fragmented existence of modern life. John Derick is a paragon of devotion and perseverance, acting generously over several decades to build a unique, 19-mile trail system for his Vermont community: the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM). Not only did he build this trail from the ground up, but his passion for trails was critical in bringing the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) into Vermont, by supporting a 2013 Department of the Interior feasibility study process proposing the NCNST to be co-aligned with sections of the TAM. When the story of the NCNST is told many years hence, John Derick will no doubt be listed among the most pivotal figures in crafting the Trail's current route and existence in Vermont.

John has been called the "Father of the Trail Around Middlebury," or the TAM as it's colloquially known. The TAM is located in Middlebury, Vermont: home of Middlebury College, where the lush Champlain Valley folds up in ever greater heights to form this brave little state's namesake, the Green Mountains. The TAM is managed by the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT), an Affiliate of the North Country Trail Association, for whom John is also a stalwart volunteer.

Over the course of 30 years, John has spent countless hours working with landowners, drawing up legal documents for trail protection, building and maintaining trail by hand and hard work, and building relationships with local schools and nonprofits to ensure funds and volunteers are helping to sustain the TAM for those who love it and use it daily.

From the beginning, John leveraged his strong local connections, knowledge of working with landowners, and experience creating easements from his career as a telecommunications utility business owner. He also has an impressive ability to work with his hands. These skills and experiences make him such a crucial partner for the North Country Trail Association (NCTA). He is the primary caretaker of the NCNST in the Middlebury area, though he is actively working to secure legacy protection for the Trail beyond his tenure with his associated organization and NCTA Affiliate, the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT).

Although a former MALT board member, John now serves as a very active volunteer, spending most of his days on the Trail. As you read this, John is probably on the TAM, mowing the trail or applying linseed oil to boardwalks with a group of high school students, or any one of 10,000 tasks he's taken on over the years. If not for this unrelenting work ethic of John's, it is uncertain the NCNST would have been extended into Vermont at all. And, if it were, it would likely have to be on-road from where it enters Vermont to where it reaches public land at the Green Mountain National Forest. The existence of the TAM itself is what allows the NCNST to enjoy its leisurely winding around Middlebury on its way to the National Forest.

To assist the NCNST achieving the original intention of extending eastward into Vermont from



John Derick and Paul Gagnon, NCTA Director of Trail Protection, chat on a suspension bridge in Vermont.

Photo by Stephanie Campbell



its former eastern terminus at Crown Point, N.Y., John worked with a team from MALT and the National Park Service (NPS) to implement a feasibility study. This was key to gaining public support, and connecting the NCNST with

the Appalachian Trail and Long Trail at Maine Junction - a nationally significant location that hikers can now visit to stand on three long-distance trails simultaneously. On top of these impressive achievements, he always finds time to mentor young volunteers, helping to imbue them with the spirit of selfless service he himself so effortlessly embodies. With some NCTA Celebration activities in Vermont this year, John has also stepped up to assist in planning hikes to showcase the beautiful trail he has so meticulously constructed and cared for all these years.

The fruits of John's labors are many, living on in each step taken on the TAM. Take a walk with John on the TAM, and it won't be long before you run into a local who John has known for years. He'll say hello and gesture a greeting with his hand as they pass, then lean over and tell you their name and relevant history: how long they've been using the trail, what they love about it, their connection to this place. John overflows with palpable joy at giving others a place to find solace, health, and enjoyment. For all this work, his true payment is families taking a Sunday afternoon walk together; someone taking a leisurely stroll on their lunch break; and children squealing with delight at the cool bug they found. He'll be the first to tell you this is a trail for the community, not a vanity project. The community is what makes it come alive. The TAM and MALT are a testament to the spirit of community and of giving back selflessly.

Now in his 70s, John Derick still donates hundreds of hours each year, serving the same as he's done for decades: helping to build and protect this trail in perpetuity. He participates in MALT Trail Committee meetings. He mentors youth with an interest in volunteering for trail work. He actively participates in NCTA committees and initiatives, including Celebration planning, trail protection planning and implementation, and orchestrating trail improvements with me.

"John Derick is an invaluable, and irreplaceable member of the MALT trails team," wrote Liam Hickey, MALT Trails and Volunteer Coordinator. "It is rare to find someone with as much care and dedication to their local trails as John has for the TAM and NCNST through Middlebury. If not for the diligent work and advocacy from John, the TAM and NCNST would not be the valuable community gems that they are today."

John has been regionally recognized for his accomplishments in a variety of ways. In his honor, MALT has created the John Derick Endowment Fund



Photo provided by Stephanie Campbell

for the Future of the TAM, to ensure the trail will be cared for in perpetuity. It has already raised funds in the six-figure range. In 2021, Middlebury College awarded him an honorary degree for his work building and maintaining the TAM. Despite these extensive accolades, John remains a humble man who loves a day's honest work, akin to so

many of the NCTA's inspiring volunteers.

John embodies the spirit of volunteerism and dedication we all aspire to as lovers of trails and of the outdoors. We are grateful for the work he has done to pave the way for the NCNST to exist and thrive in Vermont. For those attending Celebration this year, you might have the opportunity to take a hike or dairy farm tour with John, and maybe even hear about some of his adventures firsthand!

Learn more about the NCNST in Vermont at northcountrytrail.org/vermont, and about the Middlebury Area Land Trust and the Trail Around Middlebury at maltvt.org.

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.

Roland Akre, Michigan

Dave Allen, Michigan

Deanna Ensley, Minnesota

Joni Jeffrey, Michigan

Neil Rinne, Michigan

Martyn Smith, Michigan

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

A Hat for Tom

BY ERIC LONGMAN



Tom Garnett

Photos
provided by the
Chief Noonday
Chapter

From 2002 to 2004, Tom Garnett served as President of the NCTA Chief Noonday Chapter in Southwestern Michigan. As the second President of our fledgling Chapter, he was instrumental in recruiting volunteers, building trail that never existed, and improving the trail that did exist. When his term ended, Tom continued to be very active in Chapter activities, including planning and organizing the 2012 NCTA Celebration that was held near Augusta, Michigan.

In 2017, Tom and his wife Judy moved to their retirement home in Wisconsin. In the fall of 2022, we were saddened to hear that he passed away. But this is where this story begins!

This February, Judy reached out to our Chapter: Tom's family wanted to display a table of hats at his "celebration of life" event, to literally represent the many hats Tom wore over the years. Judy hoped to include a North Country National Scenic Trail hat to show the important role the Trail played in Tom's life, and to be symbolic of his love of the Trail. Could the Chief Noonday Chapter come up with a hat?

An email went out to some of our senior members, and one of our members reached out to other NCTA Chapter Presidents. Brace yourself for this serendipitous timing!

The initial email was sent at 10:30 a.m. to Connie Julien of the NCTA Peter Wolfe Chapter. It was forwarded a few times, and at 12:03 p.m. Nancy Kreft of the NCTA Marquette Area Chapter responded: "I would be honored to send along a hat, if you're not able to come up with a more worn version."

We thanked Nancy, and added that we were floored by the response that eventually came from some of our old timers down here in the Battle Creek (Mich.) area. Three members had hats that fit the bill, as well as a few pictures of Tom Garnett building a kiosk, wearing a hat similar to one of the offered donations.

What a wonderful example of the close-knit ties that exist within the North Country National Scenic Trail community!



All photos by
Robin Lemmerz

Trails Training in the White Mountains

BY STEPHANIE CAMPBELL, NCTA
REGIONAL TRAIL COORDINATOR FOR
NEW YORK AND VERMONT

Nestled in the heart of New Hampshire's White Mountains, at the foot of the infamously mercurial Mount Washington, the Camp Dodge Trails Training Center hosts the Northeast's own Trail Skills College. Put on by the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), the event is an opportunity to share industry best practices through trail skills trainings and workshops at a reasonable price for volunteers, and professional trail builders and maintainers from across the country.

Camp Dodge was built in 1935 by the Civilian Conservation Corps as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's *New Deal*. Later on, the site served as housing for public service workers who were conscientious objectors of

Continued on page 30



World War II, and even later for the local Youth Conservation Corps. Since the early 1980s AMC has leased Camp Dodge from the U.S. Forest Service through a special-use permit to house its crews and volunteers, including participants in the local trail adopter program and other outside volunteer groups. The facility closed for renovations in 2017, opening again in 2020 to once again host volunteers and crews who care for the region's most stunning natural areas.

I arrived at Camp Dodge in the late afternoon after driving through a delightful late-season snowstorm. The golden sun streamed through breaks in enormous dark blue clouds. It illuminated the bright green flush of spring color making its way up the mountain flanks, and sparkled off the delicate white snowflakes as they burst from the heavens. Smartly situated on the east side of Mount Washington Valley, Camp Dodge enjoys catching the last rays of sunlight in the evenings, before the incredible view of the Presidential Range, still laced with snow at the highest elevations this time of year, is cast in shadow by the sinking sun. On the grounds of the White Mountain National Forest, the modest camp is laid out in a grid with rows of bunkhouses at its center. The rugged, historic nature of the camp is apparent from the uniformly gray buildings set on concrete slabs with thin, weathered boards for walls that see light spilling through. There is electricity, but no insulation or heat. Communal meals are taken in the mess hall whose windows are still closed against the cold nights and sudden spring storms. Here, volunteers and professional trail builders gather for a five-day-long event filled with learning and sharing. As we all trickled in, I began to meet my fellow classmates. Most were from nearby New England communities, but some hailed from as far away as Tennessee and Texas. Debates on which part of the country has the best cuisine were commonplace dinner conversation. The mornings were less loquacious, especially when the coffee spigot runs dry before 9:00 a.m., as it frequently does.

After a chilly night's rest in the bunkhouse, the sun was bright and cheery as I set off on my first day of training: an ax workshop. Learning to care for and wield an ax, once a staple of human existence, is now almost solely the purview of more "outdoorsy" folk, save for the occasional trip to the now-popular ax throwing establishments. It's a particularly important skill for those who work in Wilderness areas where mechanized tools are not allowed. In Wilderness, crosscut saws are the preferred tool for felling and bucking trees. Axes are key components of this work, due to the propensity of saws to be bound up in the tree when compression forces pin

the head. Axes are super handy for helping to free the saw, along with some well-placed wedges along the cut.

All of this knowledge and more was covered in the morning, as we learned some basic ax history, and how to hang and sharpen an ax. Watching my fellow classmates labor over their gleaming ax heads, I was reminded of how long it really takes to sufficiently sharpen an ax. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I'll spend the first four sharpening the ax."

After lunch, we spent the afternoon swinging away into fallen timber. Once you start chopping, you quickly realize how critical a sharp ax truly is. The sharpness of the ax's beveled edge, yes, makes it easier to cut into the wood. But it also has huge implications for the integrity of the entire chopping system: primarily the tool and your body. In using an ax, it becomes an extension of your own body. The strong timber fibers of the handle meld with the sinewy fibers of your own arm, so you can't tell where your arm ends and the ax begins. The weight of the head and sharpness of the blade does most of the work, which is quite helpful when you're chopping for hours on end or are not used to swinging an ax all day, like myself.

If you've never tried it, I highly recommend learning how to use an ax. Being so in tune with your instrument and your surroundings to ensure you are safe and efficient helps to ground you in the present moment in a way that is immensely pleasant. When you chop, you can't do anything else but chop. You think about



“

I highly recommend learning how to use an ax. Being so in tune with your instrument and your surroundings to ensure you are safe and efficient helps to ground you in the present moment in a way that is immensely pleasant.”

— STEPHANIE CAMPBELL

how you hold the handle, how your body twists through space, how your gaze impacts your accuracy when you strike, and how you're standing steady, firmly planted on the earth. You can't think about all the distractions in your daily life, which is a deeply welcome reprieve, though you may think about how you wish someone would take a picture of you looking confident and outdoorsy swinging that beautifully shiny ax.

My second day of training was rock work. Rock work as it's known in the trail world is the same trade as masonry, only using natural stone, often quarried locally. This particular training was actually multiple days long, but I only attended one day for practical purposes. The multi-day length speaks to

the complexity of the work. Several crew members can spend hours finding the perfect position for a single stone. In many ways, it's more of an art than a science - though the science of rock work is fascinating if you're a geology nerd like me. Knowing the types of rocks you'll find in a given area and where they might be can be invaluable on-the-job knowledge. Different types of stones possess different properties including how strong they are, what types of angles they break into, and how they wear over time. Knowing which stone is which informs how the task will be accomplished.

Our task for the day was to build a couple stone steps down to a tiny stream

crossing. The plan was laid out by our instructor when we arrived at the site. We were then broken up into teams and delegated a portion of the task, then we rotated stations to ensure we learned all the many aspects of this work and so our muscles didn't get too tired because rock work is incredibly exhausting.

One station was quarrying the rocks from as nearby as possible. Although there were rocks in the nearby stream, we didn't quarry those, so as to not disturb the natural habitat of our aquatic friends. We searched for small boulders - the largest we could carry didn't end up being large at all, due to how surprisingly heavy rocks are. Something the size of a small watermelon is best, and even then it took four women holding netted webbing underneath the stone to support its weight all the way to the worksite.

Another station was crushing small rocks into even smaller rocks, which are to be poured into the cracks and crevices between and under each step to help stabilize them. With rock work, stability is key. These structures are not easy to create, so we want them to stick around as long as possible without wobbling and creating a safety hazard to trail users. We all took turns at the worksite helping to place the larger stones, which takes more effort than you might think at first. You might have a certain plan for a rock but due to how heavy they are, it's quite difficult to place them exactly like you want. And once the rock is there it might wobble, even with carefully placed crush, and then you're in for likely another few (or many) tries to place the stone soundly in just the right place.



TRAIL
WORK



It's immensely satisfying work, and the challenge is part of the beauty of the experience and ultimately the finished product.

My third and fourth days of training were on sustainable trail design by the enigmatic Peter Jensen. A renowned professional trail builder with decades of experience in the field, Peter was selected by The Nature Conservancy to build their recent pilot *All Persons Trail* in Manchester, New Hampshire. The idea of an all-persons trail is that there are a multitude of physical, social, and cultural obstacles that prevent certain communities from accessing nature via trails, but these obstacles can be overcome to a large degree when strategic efforts are made. Additionally, we were lucky enough to be joined by Janet Zeller on the first day of training. Janet has been the U.S. Forest Service's National Accessibility Program Manager since the early 1990s. After an accident rendered her wheelchair-bound many years ago, Janet has not let her disability keep her out of her beloved natural spaces. Instead, she has been using her firsthand knowledge of accessibility constraints to teach others. This includes creating the Federal Trail Accessibility Standards and Guidelines that are now utilized nationally to help others with disabilities, particularly those relating to mobility challenges, spend time outdoors.

This training consisted of reviewing the standards and guidelines set forth by Janet's venerable work, as well as the basics of trail planning, design, and layout with an eye toward sustainability. Sustainability has lost much of its meaning in the last few decades as it has become a virtue-signaling buzzword for companies and people trying to win over the environmentally-conscious demographic. For trails, sustainability has a deeper meaning. A sustainable trail does mean that it is good for the environment by reducing sedimentation and convenient for the trail

managers by reducing maintenance needs. But it also refers to trails being laid out and built so the impacts to natural and cultural resources are minimized while access and user experiences are maximized. Trail tread structures should be minimal. Where they are necessary, they are installed to protect the resource as well as the user experience. The incredible amount of foresight and planning required to create these types of experiences is notable. The 1.2-mile *All Persons Trail* took The Nature Conservancy four years to create from beginning to end. But creating something lasting for folks of all walks of life is worth the wait whenever we can spare the resources to bring it to life.

At the end of the final day of training, I sat down to dinner with a group of trail friends as the sun started to dip behind the mountain peaks. Soaking in the last rays and sweet moments with kindred spirits, I reflected on how lucky we are to get to spend this time together as a trail community; how our love of nature and a hard day's work creates a one-of-a-kind magic that keeps us coming back for more. So rest assured there will be more trainings, more community, and more magic ahead for us at NCTA. I look forward to seeing you out there.

Visit [outdoors.org](https://www.outdoors.org) to learn more about the Appalachian Mountain Club and the resources they provide. A few upcoming trainings include *One-Day Axe Training* on September 8, a *Three-Day Rigging for Trailwork Training* from September 15 to 17, and a *Chainsaw A or B Bucking and Limbing Training* from October 3 to 4. See details at activities.outdoors.org. Read a full article about the *All Persons Trail* at nature.org/en-us/newsroom/nh-all-persons-trail-opens-manchester.



Is the Third Time a Charm?

BY MICHAEL SEKELY, NCTA MARQUETTE AREA CHAPTER

Deciding to build a new pedestrian bridge on the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) was not easy. Actually building it was harder. Yet, we did both.

This bridge is our Chapter's third attempt in the same location since 1990. The original lasted about 12 years, but was washed downstream by winter ice flows and high water levels. The first replacement came in 2002. According to locals, it was knocked off its foundation and repositioned a number of times, but ultimately it endured for 20 years. As of the summer of 2023, a new structure is in place.

Updating this bridge has been on our Chapter's radar for many years, but the biggest obstacle has been the bridge's extremely remote location. It spans the West Branch Peshekee River, some 47 miles from Marquette, Mich. Getting there includes seven miles on two-track roads that eventually become so rough, they're impassible with passenger vehicles. With Lyme Timber Company's temporary permission, we were able to haul supplies with a four-wheeler about 800 yards beyond that. Then, due to the rugged, sloped terrain, use of any mechanized machinery abruptly ends 100 yards from the bridge, so everything is manually hauled from that point. And when I write "everything," I mean two 30-foot utility poles, 40 bags of concrete mix and a concrete mixer, generators, a tremendous amount of treated lumber, hand tools, and other supplies.

In 2020, we finally got the courage to put this goal on paper and submit it to our [NCTA] Regional Trail Coordinator, Kenny Wawsczyk. He agreed it was

time, and we began logistics planning. I volunteered as project leader and as we began talking to Chapter volunteers, miracles began occurring. Trail magic!

Our Chapter has divided the 112 miles of NCNST we're responsible for maintaining into segments, to better organize our maintenance priorities. This bridge happens to be the dividing line between two segments. The Trail Adopters of these segments are Kristine and Greg Olender, and Jeannette and Jim Patterson. All agreed to help. In fact, the Pattersons are both engineers by trade. Other key volunteers and resources include Mike Kreft, husband to our Chapter Treasurer, Nancy, and a retired civil engineer, and Mike Mattson, who is responsible for maintaining nearly seven miles of the NCNST through the Upper Peninsula's remote McCormick Wilderness. Once our design was finalized, permissions were granted, and funding was secured, off we went into construction mode in the fall of 2022.

To transport 30-foot utility poles two miles to the bridge, we approached Bruce, who is not involved with our Chapter but has a camp nearby with some useful equipment. His response was, "Where do you want them?" Bruce, his son, and his grandson hauled the

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This bridge is our Chapter's third attempt in the same location since 1990.

— MICHAEL SEKELY



TRAIL
WORK



poles as close as they could for no charge. Thanks to Mike Mattson's ingenious ability to visualize success, he created a system of moving the poles the rest of the way. Also involved in this effort (and deeply appreciated for it) were the Olenders, and Chapter Trail Crew Leaders Nate Thompson and Brad Slagle.

We installed the poles in their brackets then were immobilized by winter weather. That seven miles of two-track is closed by snowfall from December through mid-May. Fortunately, this gave us plenty of time to plan the rest of the construction. With the help of my wife Jeanne, another dedicated trail angel, much of the handrail bracing was purchased, cut, and manufactured in our garage.

When the snow finally receded, Jeanne and I made several trips between our home and the bridge to haul the materials in. My truck took us to that 800-yard mark, and a four-wheeled hand cart helped us complete the delivery. In less than three weeks, we installed the handrail supports, decking, and top rails, and built two sets of stairs. We removed the old deck boards as we went. We called the project complete on June 11, 2023. Today, all that is left is to remove the former bridge frame across the river, which we will cut up and haul out. And, as promised to Lyme Timber, we will shrink the 200 yards of two-track we made down to single trail tread, to keep the motorized vehicles from easily accessing the bridge.

In addition to those mentioned by name here, there were many others who worked directly on this project. **Thank you.** We are humbled by and thankful for the outpouring of support, including words of encouragement and offers to help. We are also so grateful for Closner Construction and the Lowe's in Marquette.

So will the third time be a charm? Stay tuned. Only mother nature can answer that.

Read more about the NCTA Marquette Area Chapter and connect with them at northcountrytrail.org/mac.





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—Mary Coffin, volunteer, New York State

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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.

A luna moth was spotted this spring by NCTA staff on the stretch of NCNST through Oak Openings Preserve Metropark in Toledo, Ohio. Luna moths are found only in North America, mainly east of the Mississippi River.

Photo by Kate Lemon