



North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2024



Long-Distance Hiker Recognition

Celebrating bagging big segments of the NCT.

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Find inspiration from your neighbors.

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Learn about the types of campsites on the NCT.

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The four youngest members of the Will Family on the trail at Straits State Park (Mich.).

Photo by Lisa Will

Trailhead

MIKE CHAPPLE, PRESIDENT, NCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



As I write this final column as your Board President, I am filled with profound gratitude and a deep sense of honor for having served this incredible community over the past two years. The North Country Trail is more than just a trail - it is a testament to the dedication, passion, and hard work of countless individuals who contribute in so many ways.

Reflecting on this journey, I am reminded of the many faces and stories that make our trail truly special.

Over these past two years, I have witnessed firsthand the tireless efforts of our volunteers who build and maintain the trail, ensuring it remains safe and accessible. Their dedication ensures that each mile of the trail remains a welcoming place for all who seek solace and adventure in nature. Our Chapter leaders, communicators, advocates, board and committee members, and generous donors also play crucial roles in our success. Your combined efforts keep our trail thriving and vibrant.

As I step down from this role, I am excited to share that we are embarking on a significant strategic planning effort that will shape the future of the Association. Your board and staff recently had met for an in-person retreat to kick off that effort. We heard from our friends at the National Park Service and across the trail community. Together, we decided that the primary focus of our strategic work moving forward will be **trail protection**, with a key initiative being the definition of the “forever route” for the North Country Trail. This effort will ensure that the trail not only endures, but continues to provide a pristine and inspiring pathway for future generations.

Defining the “forever route” means identifying and securing the best possible route for the trail, ensuring its protection and accessibility for years to come. This is a monumental task that will involve extensive planning, collaboration with landowners and government agencies, and the support of our dedicated community. It is an exciting time for the NCTA, as we lay the groundwork for a sustainable and enduring trail that will continue to connect people with nature and with each other.

The focus on trail protection is not just about preserving the physical path; it is about safeguarding the experiences, memories, and natural beauty that define the North Country Trail. It is about ensuring that the trail remains a place where individuals can find peace, challenge themselves, and build lasting connections with the natural world.

As we embark on this strategic planning journey, I

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The content theme of each Summer issue is **Trail Use**. You'll be treated to stories about day hikes and long-distance treks, backpacking and car camping experiences, and much more.

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Trailhead

ANDREA KETCHMARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by
Andrea Ketchmark

As we delve into the heart of summer, I find myself reflecting on the profound benefits of hiking, walking, and simply spending time outside. These activities offer far more than physical exercise: They nourish our minds, refresh our spirits, and strengthen the bonds with each other. It's undeniable. Hiking is good for you. Research

consistently shows that spending time in nature reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and boosts mood. A study from Stanford University found that walking in natural environments decreases anxiety and negative thinking by 29%. Additionally, it's been shown that regular hikers often have lower risks of heart disease, improved bone density, and enhanced cardiovascular health. For those of us caught in the whirlwind of daily life, these benefits are invaluable.

Equally significant are the benefits to strengthening communities, both social and economic. Having accessible trails not only enhances property values by up to 10%, but it promotes tourism and supports the local economy. In fact, the Outdoor Industry Association reports that outdoor recreation generates \$887 billion in consumer spending annually, creating 7.6 million American jobs. Trails become gathering places where families bond, friends connect, and individuals find solace amidst nature's beauty.

None of this would be possible without the dedicated volunteers who maintain every mile of these trails, often unseen and unrecognized. Their commitment, alongside the crucial support of memberships, donations, and partnerships, ensures that the North Country National Scenic Trail will remain safe and accessible for all. It truly takes a community to make the North Country National Scenic Trail a reality.

As Executive Director, I am continually inspired by the passion and dedication of everyone involved - from our staff to our partners to the volunteers who give their time selflessly. Together, we create pathways for exploration and discovery, preserving our natural heritage for future generations.

So, as you lace up your hiking boots and head into the North Country, I urge you to not only enjoy the beauty around you, but to also consider what it took to bring that adventure to you and how you can help pass it on to others. Whether through volunteering, becoming a member, or making a donation, your contributions are needed to sustain this National Scenic Trail, which in turn enriches the lives of so many who travel its path.

Let us embrace this season of exploration with open hearts and a shared commitment to preserving and enhancing our outdoor spaces. Together, we can ensure that the North Country Trail remains a beacon of health, happiness, and community spirit for years to come. Happy trails!

CHRIS LOUDENSLAGER, NCNST
SUPERINTENDENT, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Photo by Kate Lemon

A warm hello to all of you, and my sincere thanks that you are here with us and part of our trail community. Regardless of your role or your personal level of involvement with the North Country National Scenic Trail, your support and interest is incredibly important to our collective success. I'm so very grateful for your generous commitment to the trail.

As we explore and highlight this issue's theme of trail use, I'm struck by how incredibly broad and diverse this topic truly is when you start to think of all the ways a person might enjoy the North Country Trail. While it is widely known and certainly true that the trail is managed and maintained to provide a premier hiking and backpacking experience, what the trail user hopes to gain from the experience is unique and personal. Whether they are seeking recreation, adventure, history, nature, or solitude, no day is ever quite the same. Every section of trail is different, and the beauty and glory of nature is dynamic and unpredictable. It will change in an instant. Each visit is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Protecting the promise of such an experience is as much of the North Country National Scenic Trail as the trail itself.

As the trail continues to grow and become even more known and loved, we have many opportunities when it comes to protecting user experiences. With the recent addition of our new, full-time National Park Service Trail Planner, we will be far better positioned to

explore how best to achieve the nature and purpose of the trail through more proactive and coordinated project planning and route selections. Similarly, through land protection and expanded resource studies and stewardship, we can assure that the natural beauty and function of our surroundings are maintained, protected, and even improved over time.

As we continue to grow, we also have new opportunities to make the trail more inclusive and equitable to a wider range of the public, by planning and building trail that incorporates accessibility and removes barriers to access through the design process. While this cannot be achieved across the entirety of the trail, it can absolutely be possible in a great many areas without extensive engineering or costs, or compromising what the trail is meant to be or the experience it is intended to provide.

By expanding our presence, access, and inclusivity, we invest in new opportunities to not only grow the trail further toward completion, but to also grow our organization - and this is a critical need to keep up with progress. At the same time, however, we must also be true to our nature and purpose, and protect the experience this trail is intended to provide. As stated in our North Country National Scenic Trail foundation document: "The North Country Trail provides an opportunity to explore a slice of America at a slower pace and enjoy a place of retreat from the hectic routine of everyday life." The importance of this guiding principle has not diminished over time, and will continue to be at the heart for all we should aspire to be.

MIKE CHAPPLE (CONTINUED)

encourage each of you to stay engaged and involved. Your passion, support, and dedication will be crucial as we work together to protect the trail. The exciting times ahead will bring new opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and community building, and I am confident that, together, we will achieve great things.

To every member of this trail community: thank you. Your contributions, in all their forms, have made my tenure as President an unforgettable experience. The friendships, experiences, and memories I have gained will remain with me always. It has been my privilege to serve this remarkable community, and I look forward to continuing my journey on the trail as a fellow hiker and advocate.

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.

Bob Doty,
Ohio

Don Lee,
Minnesota

Dale Nelson,
North Dakota

Betsy Duede,
Michigan

David LeRoy,
Pennsylvania

Dennis Peronto,
Michigan

Larry Larson,
Minnesota

Arlene Matson,
Michigan

Don Strohpaal,
Michigan

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





TRAIL
USE

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, nearly 100 hikers have received recognition since this program's inception. 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!



Marit Janse, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"I started hiking the North Country Trail because I wanted to walk 600 miles for my 60th birthday. I set out with three friends: two walked, and one drove and was our support during the day. Once we got to the [Mackinac] Bridge, I was addicted."



Doug Seaney, Michigan

COMPLETED WISCONSIN; PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED MICHIGAN, 1000 MILES, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"On May 28, 2022, I completed the remaining 211 miles of North Country Trail in Wisconsin. Fifteen days of hiking, five nights in a tent, and the remaining nights were in the camper. Working on plans to hike Minnesota next!"



Matt Bromley, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"I'm still amazed at the way the trail offers something new every time I'm on it. I have so many great memories from the trail, and these adventures have been more important to me than I can express in words during some difficult times. The trail is an incredible resource for the public and I am so appreciative of all the volunteers who work to maintain it and construct new trail. Thank you to everyone who contributes in any way!"



Paul Jager, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"My first hike on the NCT was in my early 50s, and I had thought my backpacking days were over because I had no one to hike with. Through my son I met Mark Tangen, who was in the process of hiking the NCT in Michigan. He had completed most of the Lower Peninsula and was looking for someone to hike the Upper Peninsula with him. My next goal is to hike with and support Mark as he finishes the 1,175 miles. Not sure what will happen after that. Wisconsin and Minnesota are looking good."

Photo by Mark Tangen



David and Zoe Sheatz, Pennsylvania

COMPLETED PENNSYLVANIA

“The challenge of completing the Pennsylvania portion kept us going, and along the way I was sharing pictures on social media. Many people commented about how they enjoyed traveling along with us by viewing the photos. Others said that we were doing retirement right.”

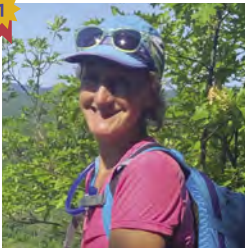


Arlette Laan, New Hampshire

END-TO-END HIKER; COMPLETED 1000 MILES, 2000 MILES, 3000 MILES, 4000 MILES, NORTH DAKOTA, MINNESOTA, WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN, OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, NEW YORK, AND VERMONT

“I started my hike on April 8, 2021 in Defiance, Ohio, and finished my hike on February 21, 2022 back in Defiance. From Defiance, I went Eastbound toward Vermont and then flipped to North Dakota to walk eastbound back to Defiance. Miles stopped making sense at some point, but I think I ended up with 4,700 to 4,800 miles. The trail angels along the hike made the hike special and worthwhile. I'm very grateful for the help and support I received along the way.”

Photo by Bill McCarty



Tami Stagman, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“The NCT is a wonderful trail with many adventures to be had. I have seen so much of Michigan that I never would have seen had I not been on a quest to hike all the NCT miles. The woods are a wonderful place to explore, and especially the Western Upper Peninsula where I finished up my trek. Happy trails to all and just get out and hike - even if it's just a mile or two, you are beating everyone sitting on the couch.”

Photo by Nancy Briggs



Cynthia Clemens, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, OHIO, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“I am not sure where my NCT journey will take me, and I do not currently have goals to do any more of the NCT, but somehow I have faith that it will call, as it has before. I am so grateful to those who have and still maintain this magical secret place that connects geography, people and nature! I have learned so much, and my life has become richer through the people and places along the trail.”

Photo by Elizabeth Root



Duane Lawton, Michigan

COMPLETED MICHIGAN; PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED 1000 MILES AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“All of Michigan was a 13-year effort, doing it a piece at a time, usually with friends and relatives, and thoroughly documented. The trail is an obsession, something that I can support and enjoy.”

Photo by John and Dove Day



LONG-DISTANCE HIKER RECOGNITION CONTINUED

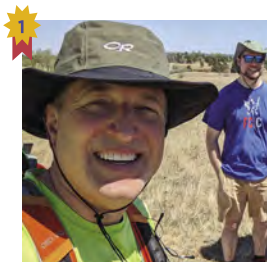


Tom Funke, Michigan / United Arab Emirates

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, 2000 MILES, WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN,
AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"I chose to hike across Michigan's Upper Peninsula as a 30th birthday present to myself. That is how I discovered the North Country Trail. I have written two books... I also have a podcast, blog, and YouTube channel highlighting many of my hikes. Finishing the entire trail has been a quest of mine since my hike in 1998."

Photo by Michael Otis



Matt Patterson, Ohio

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, 2000 MILES, OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA,
AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

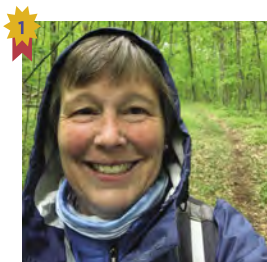
"My hike is almost always a day hike, and almost never an out-and-back. I love to plan and organize hikes. I keep asking myself if I am really going to hike this entire trail. And every time I come home from a hiking trip; I cannot help but start planning the next one."



Beau Swanson, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"Three years ago I found myself overweight, unhappy, and just starting my road of sobriety. (I'm three years clean now.) I wanted more out of life and was looking for purpose, something bigger than myself. What an amazing trail and community around it. I can't get enough of it. Glad to play my small part in such an overwhelming effort."



Elizabeth Root, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, PENNSYLVANIA, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"Stepping cautiously across the grated portion of the the Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day 2016, I wondered why my daughter would drag me up here to walk the five miles across the Straits. As I was handed my certificate of completion for the Bridge Walk, I flipped the colorful paper over: "You just walked five miles of the NCNST." The picture of a very long trail running through many states met my eye. Hmm. Never heard of it."



Nancy DeJong, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"I realized that people and resources had gone into keeping the trail in good shape, so I joined the NCTA. I have done some volunteering, including picking up trash and clearing limbs from the trail, leading Chapter hikes, serving on our Chapter board, and shuttling hikers. I'm thankful for God's beautiful creation, the health and ability to do the hiking, and the 50+ hiking buddies who have hiked with me along the way."

Photo by Terry Lindberg



Photo by Cathy Lloyd Langley

Merri Carol Wozniak, Michigan

COMPLETED MICHIGAN; PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED WISCONSIN, 1000 MILES, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“In 2017, I decided to hike all of my [Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore] Chapter’s 138 miles of North Country Trail, from the south end of the Mackinac Bridge to the Two Hearted River mouth on Lake Superior. My Chapter even rallied to help me by scheduling monthly hikes to cover the sections I had not traveled. They are a family of trail angels to me, to be certain. They exhibit patience, kindness, and encouragement, teaching me all kinds of skills for hiking and maintaining the trail. Thank you, each and every one of you.”



Photo by Barb Gecas

Michelle Olsen, Minnesota

COMPLETED MINNESOTA; PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED NORTH DAKOTA, 1000 MILES, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“The highlight of Minnesota, for me, was backpacking the wilderness portion of the Border Route Trail. It combined two of my outdoor loves: hiking and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Dave and I aren’t enthusiastic backpackers anymore, but we dug out some old equipment and bought a few new pieces. We unceremoniously dumped our 20-year-old backpacking tent as soon as we got home. It served us well for many years.”



Suzanne Klein, Pennsylvania

COMPLETED OHIO, 2000 MILES, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE; PREVIOUSLY COMPLETED PENNSYLVANIA AND 1000 MILES

“I moved to Pennsylvania from California at the end of 2013. At the end of December 2014, I was handed a North Country Trail brochure and it changed my East Coast experience tremendously. I have met such amazing people on the trail and made lifelong friends. I cannot thank the NCTA enough for the love and support each community and trail system has provided.”



Photo by Ronda Peter

Amy Elvey, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES, MICHIGAN, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“I have absolutely relished seeing all kinds of things that I didn’t know existed. I’ve also loved learning about geography, fauna, flora, history, and culture throughout our state. I’ve truly enjoyed pushing myself to add more miles and get out in conditions from which I would normally shy away. Getting outside so often has improved my mental and physical health. Though I’ve participated in many sports over the years, hiking is the one that has truly impacted my body in the most positive way.”



Beth McIntyre, Michigan

COMPLETED 1000 MILES AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

“Although I had hiked parts of the trail in Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties over the years, my ‘real’ North Country Trail hiking began after I joined the NCTA Chief Noonday Chapter in the fall of 2020. The next year, I participated in their Hike the County Challenge for the first time. I finished hiking the Chapter’s three counties in June 2021. Driving home from my last hike, I remember thinking, ‘Well, now what am I going to do?’ I decided to hike Hillsdale County too, which would take me to the Ohio border. I was sure I would feel complete at that point. Nope!”



TRAIL
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LONG-DISTANCE HIKER RECOGNITION CONTINUED



Mary "Denali" McKinley, Florida

END-TO-END HIKER; COMPLETED 1000 MILES, 2000 MILES, 3000 MILES, 4000 MILES, THE MACKINAC BRIDGE, NORTH DAKOTA, MINNESOTA, WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN, OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, NEW YORK, AND VERMONT

"I intended to do it over at least a four-year period, but once I got started, it really took hold of me and I completed it in 24 months. When I added up my weeks on trail, I had exactly 52 weeks! Backpacking the North Country Trail took me to parts of the country I've never seen and never would have gone to otherwise. I had never been to the Great Lakes or North Dakota. Hiking the length of Michigan is the same distance as the Florida National Scenic Trail. I think there is something special about people who live in the North Country, and am grateful for all who became a part of my journey."

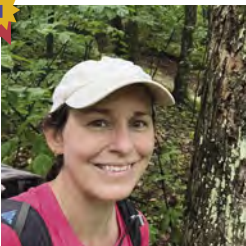


Jay Shutt, Ohio

COMPLETED OHIO, 1000 MILES, AND THE MACKINAC BRIDGE

"I continue to enjoy many things about hiking on the North Country Trail, including the people I have met and now count as friends; seeing and learning about areas the trail passes through; the beauty of nature observed at a walking pace; the sense of accomplishment that comes from a successful hike; and the sense of wellbeing that comes from a physical workout. I have hiked on beautiful spring and fall days, in the sunshine and in the rain, in the heat of summer and in the snowy cold of winter. I have found that they are all enjoyable in their own ways."

Photo by Jeri Getts



Liz "Swisscake" Seger, Michigan

COMPLETED MICHIGAN AND 1000 MILES

"As I prepare to hike the 3,100-mile Continental Divide Trail as a continuous thru-hike, I'm grateful for the practical lessons I learned on the North Country Trail about how to keep myself safe, uninjured, and properly fueled and hydrated while pursuing long-mile days on a tight schedule. While I had previously spent plenty of time in remote Canadian wilderness, it was on the North Country Trail that I dialed in my kit and routines."

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

FIRST LOOK AT A NEW SAMPLER PATCH



This is a sneak peek of a new sampler patch, for hiking some of the North Country Trail in each of its eight states. It will be available later this year and there will be a minimal cost to cover production.

NCTA Legacy Society

Your annual membership is so important. Did you know that you can leave an estate gift of any size to the North Country Trail Association? Consider leaving an estate plan that ensures your support in perpetuity.

For 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.

Trail Troll

BY KAREN STENBERG, NCTA LAURENTIAN LAKES CHAPTER



Top left: NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Matt Davis poses with his son Teddy at the troll.

Photo by
Matt Davis

Top right: Karen Stenberg's five-year-old grandson examines the troll.

Photo by
Karen Stenberg

I'm a trail maintainer for my Chapter in Minnesota, and while on a routine walkthrough in early May, I noticed building materials and a picnic table right next to the trail in Frazee's Wannigan Regional Park. I wondered who was disturbing this newly built section of the North Country Trail. The NCTA helped the Frazee Community Development Corporation purchase this property by providing it with a Trail Protection Grant in exchange for a permanent easement for the trail, which was recently formally recorded.

I called a long-time Chapter member Hank Ludtke, but he explained he couldn't divulge. But I guessed the answer: This must be one of the locations of the latest Project 412 initiative.

Project 412 was created with the dream of making Detroit Lakes and the surrounding 412 Lakes Area* an even better community by making waves and thinking outside the box with amazing ideas.

Thomas Dambo, a world-renowned artist from Denmark, and his team of 17 artists (plus many local volunteers) had been commissioned to design and build five giant trolls from recycled materials, as well as one golden rabbit, for a treasure hunt in the Detroit

Lakes area. But while being built, the locations were to remain secret.

A month after my May walkthrough, I returned to Wannigan Park and met the troll: Jacob Everear. I think he is posing like he is relaxing from a long hike.

"It was such a beautiful hike on the North Country Trail," said Teddy Davis, 12-year-old son of NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator Matthew Davis. "Pure peace while looking for the troll."

Our Chapter volunteers recently installed North Country Trail signs near where the troll visitors access the trail. This attraction will bring so many new people in - where I hope they'll not only become well-acquainted with Jacob Everear, but the trail, too. (It was reported more than 1,200 people used the North Country Trail to visit Jacob Everear the first week it was opened!)



Read more about the Trolls in D.L. by Thomas Dambo at project412mn.org/trolls-dl and learn more about Wannigan Park at wanniganpark.com.

*There are 412 lakes within 25 miles of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.



TRAIL
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Hiking with Four Under 10



The Will Family consists of Matt and Lisa, and their four children Bernadette (8), Jonah (6), Rosalind (3), and Imogen (2). They live in a small, country village in West Michigan.

BY LISA WILL

When we discovered the North Country Trail in 2020, I was pregnant with Imogen, Rosalind was under one, Jonah was four, and Bernadette was six. I always tell people that we quite literally stumbled upon the trail. We were camping at Muskallonge Lake State Park in Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP), and went for an evening hike. At one point I asked my husband, "Aren't these the same trail markers we see at Yankee Springs?"

Back at the campsite, I spent a good portion of the evening on Google, discovering that we had hiked a portion of the North Country Trail multiple times and never knew! That evening, Matt and I added hiking the UP segment to our empty-nester bucket list.

It wasn't until we went for a geocaching hike on the Paul B. Henry Trail west of Lansing that we discovered the Hike 100 Challenge, thanks to a sign posted on a kiosk by the NCTA Chief Noonday Chapter. Bernadette saw a picture of the patch and immediately wanted to earn it. It was already late fall, so we told her it'd be a great goal for next year.

Via Facebook, we heard about the Chapter's New Year's Day hike in one of our favorite places: near Hall Lake in the Yankee Springs Recreation Area. We arrived late (which will surprise no one who has tried to hustle four young children out the door in the morning) and missed the group, but we still put in three miles

that day! The remaining 97 miles took us until December 27 to complete.

At the start of 2023, Jonah was in preschool and Bernadette, first grade. School calendars aligned to allow a family vacation the week of Memorial Day. When we proposed the idea to the kids, Bernadette requested that we travel to a part of the trail she hadn't seen before. We decided on the Porcupine Mountains in the Western UP. We reserved a yurt in the state park for two nights; planned one short hike in Wisconsin; and scheduled a night in Munising to hike Pictured Rocks [National Lakeshore].

What luck we had to arrive the very day the mosquitoes and black flies emerged for the summer. I don't use the word *insufferable* lightly, but it's the best I can think of to describe being outside those first few days. Instead of the long, scenic hikes we had planned, we had to settle for shorter ones. Pictured Rocks greeted us with heat indexes in the triple digits, so again we pivoted our plans. All said and done, our hiking vacation with 30 planned miles concluded with less than three.

But over the summer, we planned other camping trips around the trail. Wilderness State Park was by far our favorite, with Lake Michigan 10 yards from our campsite in one direction and the trail 10 yards in the opposite. Bernadette said her favorite hike was our final one, when we were blessed with a cheering section and trail magic at the end because "we made them so happy by reaching our goal." She also loved discovering all the things along the trail that "you wouldn't even know they were there if you just kept driving in your car." Among these include the Museum of Ojibwa Culture in St. Ignace and hiking under a gorgeously graffitied retired train trestle in Lowell.

The beauty of our older kids attending a school with a balanced calendar is that we could give the UP another chance during their fall break week. Bernadette again collaborated heavily with us to plan an itinerary, this time requesting we camp in Tahquamenon Falls State Park. (There were no bugs to speak of in October!) We visited the Upper and Lower Falls a few times, made a trip to the mouth of the Two Hearted River, hiked in the Rivermouth area of the park, and even stopped in Petoskey for a one-mile hike on the way home. This ended up being

Above: A hike powered by donut holes.

Photo by
Lisa Will



one of my favorite family trips, and we never would have ended up there or maybe even traveling that week if not for the North Country Trail.

Our kids are nature lovers and adventure seekers, but like anybody else, they benefit from some external motivation at times. Thirteen of our 100 miles were the entirety of the North Country Trail miles in Kalamazoo County in pursuit of the Chief Noonday Chapter's Hike the County patch. (They love participating in monthly Chapter hikes!) Having a special snack for the trek, such as our homemade trail mix, would get them excited at times. Also - I get told I'm a nerd for this and I'll own it - the kids are at an age where a theme makes everything fun. We had a *Hole-y Hike*, on which they got two donut holes for every half-mile; they opened Halloween-themed eggs every half-mile on our *Trick or Treat Hike*; and they utilized the new travel mugs they got for Christmas during our *Hot Cocoa Hike*. And there were simple "let's hike from this landmark to that one and back then get ice cream" hikes.

We're on a better pace this year with nearly 30 miles completed (as of early July). We have three trips planned around the trail before the end of the year, and are hoping to squeeze some more in yet this summer. Bernadette has her sights set on earning a long-distance patch before her 13th birthday, so we'll be exploring new stretches of the trail as much as possible to help her reach that goal. As Jonah likes to remind us when he tells people about the trail, "the North Country Trail goes over 4,000 miles in eight different states, so there's always something new to see!"

If you have kids or a big crew like we do, we strongly encourage you to give this hiking thing a try! Matt and I aren't specially trained in anything; we don't own any fancy gear. We're your average, exhausted, hot-mess parents of young children, so much of this adventure was made up as we went along. Some things worked out well and some things were total disasters. We logged 0.02 miles on one

Far left:
Tahquamenon Falls,
Mich.

Above: Rockford,
Mich.

Mouth of the Two
Hearted River, Mich.

Photos by
Lisa Will

hike because a toddler laid on the ground and refused to move further. This 100-mile adventure was a happy little accident that ended up working out in the best possible way. We spent countless hours in the great outdoors with our children. We watched a love of nature blossom and flourish. We had quality time and conversations for which we normally wouldn't have been granted the opportunity. And the only thing required was a pair of shoes— though if I'm being honest, we didn't always have those.



2023 Mackinac Bridge Walk

Photo provided by
Lisa Will



TRAIL
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Hike 100 Challenge Showcase

Are you trying to find ways to spend a little more time outside? In search of opportunities to spend more time with your friends and family? (Or the opposite - in solitude?) Are you seeking new activities or friendships or routines? Whatever your goals are, the Hike 100 Challenge is the motivation you need.

The program is now in its ninth year and its one main rule remains constant: Complete 100 miles on the North Country National Scenic Trail within the calendar year. And how lucky are you? The North Country Trail is the longest National Scenic Trail in the country. You have 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 resources to help you enjoy your adventures: Free maps, Chapter group hikes, mileage logs, and more.

[northcountrytrail.org/
hike-100-challenge](https://northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge)



2024 Participant Spotlights

As of June 30, there are 2,643 participants signed up and 215 finishers.



Travis Garritilo

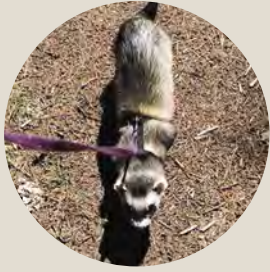
I'm a section hiker; trying to hit the trail hard this year and attempting to finish the New York section. I know a lot of hikers don't enjoy road walking, but I think it plays a huge part of the story of the trail - all of the little towns and sights you would never see. I have finally made it to the Adirondacks after a long, exciting journey. This year, I've logged a whopping 177.98 miles in seven hikes.



Bill Courtois

I completed the Hike 100 so quickly (January 6) mainly because the weather conditions were ideal. I had a scare on Day 2 with some intense knee pain, but fortunately an elastic knee brace provided instant relief.

My day hikes were all within about an hour's drive from home in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Six were out-and-back on terrain with mild elevation changes. Four were roadwalks between Marshall and Litchfield, Michigan. I also hiked in Ohio's Oak Openings Preserve Metropark near Toledo, and towpaths between Waterville and Grand Rapids, Ohio with my daughters. The Michigan hikes were small-town and farmland roadwalks with light traffic. These stretches are special and often underrated. The Ohio hikes were on impressive towpaths and through some lovely woods. I look forward to further exploration! I've got nearly 400 NCT miles accumulated this year so far.



Miki Slawinski + Eamon

Ferrets are naturally intelligent, playful, curious, and social creatures. Most people have more than one, as they need enrichment and socialization. Though our lifestyle is better suited to having one, I work from home so Eamon spends a lot of time with us.

In the past, our ferrets have enjoyed walking and being outdoors. They also liked to frequently stop and sniff to check out whatever attracted their attention. Eamon, however, seems happy to follow right along behind me, so I thought I'd let him try hiking longer distances on the North Country Trail.

It's been a good fit for him. He lets me know he's bored and ready for an adventure by lovingly biting my ankles and calves. He can typically walk at least a mile, even two, before needing a short rest. I've made a pouch for him to ride in during those. He can cover four to five miles before he wants a longer break - then he prefers to curl up inside my clothing, usually at my waist.

We have had nothing but positive interactions with others on the trail so far. I do sometimes worry we might encounter larger, unleashed animals, but I plan to protect us both to the best of my ability. I try not to fret too much as we enjoy the trails.



Julie Osborn

My Hike 100 experience started in 2023 when I attempted to hike all the trails in Hocking Hills, Ohio. To do so meant I had to hike the Buckeye Trail / North Country Trail / American Discovery Trail through this area. I had hiked on the North Country Trail before, but avoided the roadwalks and opted for highlights in established parks. Some of my friends from the Central Ohio Hikerbabes group were interested in doing the Old Man's Cave (OMC) section with me, so we set it up as a series of six to 10-mile day hikes. We enjoyed ourselves so much that we expanded our goal to do 100 miles to earn the patch!

As we drew toward the close of 2023, we all were saddened that our journey was complete. But as most addictive things go, we started planning for another 100 miles in 2024. I've met so many wonderful people along the trail that I set out to complete some miles on my own. In addition to monthly Hikerbabes hikes, I have completed 496 unique miles in Ohio, closing in on half of the 1,072 North Country Trail miles in Ohio. I plan to get my first non-Ohio miles on Labor Day during the Mackinac Bridge Walk.



Melanie Radzicki McManus

After thru-hiking Wisconsin's Ice Age Trail twice (2013 and 2015), I was hooked on long-distance hiking but I needed a new challenge. When a work conference was scheduled on Michigan's Mackinac Island in 2017, I arrived a week early to start a section hike of the North Country Trail in nearby Grand Marais. Over the ensuing years, I hiked both eastbound and westbound from Grand Marais. I was making progress, sure, but after seven years I had yet to reach a terminus. So this spring, I decided to hike from my 2023 ending spot in western Minnesota to the trail's western terminus at North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea State Park.

The weather was largely perfect during my month-long trek, with warm, sunny days and cool nights. The only drawback was that I'd hit the trail before it had been mowed for the season. After wading through waist-high grasses filled with ticks, I opted for the roads. Still, the scenery was gorgeous: flowing, emerald grasses; beautiful, blue sloughs; winding canals; and lots and lots of birds, including many swans. I was able to check out the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile Site near Cooperstown, North Dakota. It was quite interesting, and I enjoyed chatting with the many kind folks who helped with car shuttles.

During this hike I passed the 3,000 mile mark, which was heartening. But best of all was reaching the Western Terminus!

Check out Melanie's North Country Trail journal on her website thethousandmiler.com.



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2024 Allegheny 100 Challenge



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.

BY TINA TOOLE, NCTA ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST CHAPTER

Nearly 200 experienced hikers, trail runners, and beginner backpackers bounced eagerly at the Willow Bay trailhead near the Pennsylvania-New York state line. Despite the wide variety of trail experiences and personal goals within this group, everyone was poised to take on the same challenge: the North Country Trail in the Allegheny National Forest.

Lori Tillman set out alone to attempt 25 miles - something she had never done before. She learned so much and made lasting friendships along the way. Afterward, Lori debated whether she might challenge herself to 50 miles next year or stick with 25 again.

"I'm leaning toward 25," Lori said. "I found the trail so beautiful and peaceful that I don't think that I would enjoy rushing through it. I had breakfast Saturday morning on the banks of the Allegheny Reservoir. That memory is priceless."

Prior rain created a muddy challenge along Tracy Ridge, but cool, dry weather during the event itself helped a record number of participants complete their challenges successfully. Hikers enjoyed talking and learning from their peers, and sharing time on the trail. Many vowed to return next year.

One hiker, Brian Smith, has participated in all but the inaugural A-100, making this year his thirteenth attempt at completing

100 miles. He has now completed it eight times. He has a philosophy of hiking this challenge unsupported, carrying all that he needs. This year, he hiked the first 20 miles with his son-in-law Donnie, who was hiking 50 miles. Brian and Donnie enjoyed that time together; Brian then moved on at a faster pace to bag his remaining miles.

What keeps Brian coming back? He explains: "If you are fortunate, you find something in life that just fits squarely in your wheelhouse. I am drawn [to the A-100] because of the energy leading up to and during the event that I just can't put into words. Great people, forest air, sweat, and inadequate sleep makes it so unique. The challenge and accomplishment is there every single time. I tell everybody this is the hardest, most fun thing I've ever done."

We send heartfelt congratulations to all the participants for taking on this challenge. A trail angel, Carolyn Newhouse, said it best: "Our hiking



Lori Tillman, Amylynn Delgato, and Cecelia Peterson enjoy their 25-mile backpack and are excited to return next year.

Photo by
Tina Toole

Above: Eager hikers at the start.

Photo by
Bethann Raleigh



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.



Jody English completes 100 miles on her first attempt.

Photo by
Donna Bailey

community here in the Pennsylvania wilds is so happy to see so many people come and enjoy our backyard! Congratulations to all who hiked. You are amazing people!”

The Allegheny National Forest Chapter leadership thanks all its volunteers and event sponsors: United Refining, Kwik Fill, Betts Industries, Superior Tire, and Crescent Beer. Funds raised through the A-100 entry fees and sponsorships go back into upkeep of the trail and structures like shelters and bridges. Learn more about the event at northcountrytrail.org/a-100.



Peggy completes 25 miles on her way to leading her companion, Bob Klasen, to the 50-mile finish.

Photo by
Tina Toole



Brian Smith completes his eighth 100-mile challenge.

Photo by
Donna Bailey

A-100 RESULTS

This June 7-9, participants trekked south from the Willow Bay trailhead at the north end of the National Forest.

199

PARTICIPANTS

from Colorado, Florida, Texas, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

36

**COMPLETED
ALL 100 MILES**
(A RECORD NUMBER!)

8

**COMPLETED
75 MILES**

90

**COMPLETED
50 MILES**

51

**COMPLETED
25 MILES**

“A huge thank you to everyone! From all the organizers to volunteers to supporters, and folks completing the event - I learned so much. This was my first year. I dove right into the 100 and finished with an hour to spare. I’m already looking forward to next year!”

— JODY ENGLISH, PARTICIPANT

“Thank you for a great event! This was my second year participating in the 50 and I had a wonderful time. The event is so well organized and draws in a supportive community of hikers from all over. Huge thanks to all the volunteers who maintain the trail and take care of us hikers.”

— KATIE DIEBOLD-DUDZID, PARTICIPANT

“The trails were so well maintained. It’s a testament to all the hard work that the team puts in throughout the year.”

— WILL COLE, PARTICIPANT



TRAIL
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How Do You Camp on the NCT?

With more than 160 land managers and hundreds of miles of trail on private land, camping rules and regulations vary considerably across the North Country National Scenic Trail's 4,800 miles. The following is an excerpt from Joan's latest book, [How to Hike the North Country Trail: Not Quite a Guide](#). Following that are North Country Trail user testimonials of their camping experiences.

As you traverse the trail, your personal choices can have a lasting effect on its future route. Planning ahead can help you choose legal campsites. Simply walking until you are ready to drop, only to discover that you are four or five miles from any legal place to stay, is an invitation to disaster. Many hikers who do this end up camping wherever they want because they are too tired to go on, with no thought as to the consequences.

But how many times must a farmer find a stranger sleeping in his woodlot? How much trash will the owner of a private nature preserve tolerate before withdrawing permission for the trail to cross? Although the NCTA and National Park Service are continually striving to permanently protect the trail, there are still many handshake agreements that depend on the good will of all parties.

Please be respectful of landowners and adhere to their rules. It can be challenging at times in certain locations, but your consideration and thoughtfulness are so important. The future of the trail depends on you.



Bin Walkin

Owned and maintained by Kevin “Buck” Hough

BY BUCK HOUGH



As a North Country Trail hiker, I found it hard to find camping in Lower Michigan. Wanting to give back and help solve this problem, I asked my

wife if she would mind having hikers stay in the backyard during their hikes through our area. She said it was a good idea. I started by offering an outhouse and space for tent camping.

We had such a great experience that we decided to expand to a shelter of some kind. Down the road, a farm was being dismantled so I asked if I could have the grain bin to transform

into a shelter. Jane, the farm owner, knew of the trail and was excited to donate the bin to me. I spent a couple months insulating it and installing bunks for hikers to sleep on. Next came a solar shower, then an old washing machine for their clothes.

Over the past three years we have helped 36 hikers with the Bin Walkin. There is no cost to them, though we do like to know when they're arriving. We love what we do and have met so many lifetime friends. If you find yourself hiking between Lowell and Middleville (Michigan), look us up on Facebook. The NCTA maps (and apps) even feature us!

Superior Hiking Trail (SHT)

Maintained by the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA)

BY JO SWANSON



I first camped on the SHT in 2004.

I later set a goal to camp at each of the 94 SHT campsites, which I achieved in 2018. I've now spent

about 130 nights on the SHT, camping at many sites multiple times, checking in on them like an old friend.

The majority of these sites are on public land and maintained by the SHTA. They each have an assigned adopter to perform maintenance, and I am grateful for each of them. The sites offer rustic benches, a latrine, a small fire pit, and some mostly-level places to put up tents. There is often an assumption that these sites are for long-distance hikers. They are, but they're also for people who just want to get out in the woods for one night, and connect to a piece of trail in a new and deeper way.

There is something fulfilling about spending a night in a remote location. Trail campsites allow hikers to truly immerse themselves in their location. I enjoy looking at nature when I hike, but I always have a sense that I need to push on; miles to go and my day isn't done. But when I camp along a trail, I have nowhere to go; I have arrived. Then I have time to watch the shadows of the pines or discover which flowers the bees prefer. I'm not in a hurry to filter water. I can wait to see if a moose pokes her head out of the forest across the pond. I can try to get the illusive perfect picture of a dragonfly, or I could simply sit and let thoughts settle in my brain. Maybe most importantly, when I camp along a trail, I experience the night: the Milky Way, far-off coyotes yipping, and waking up with the sun to start the next day.

Photos provided by
Buck Hough



TRAIL
USE

North Country Camping

BY JOAN YOUNG

These definitions are references for the [How Do You Camp on the NCT?](#) article. They are borrowed from Joan's latest book, [How to Hike the North Country Trail: Not a Guide](#). This terminology is not necessarily universal within the trails system or community, so it's important to familiarize yourself with the definitions to better understand and explain your needs and options. It's also notable that many of these sites — regardless of what type — require reservations. Visit [Int.org](#) for resources on Leave No Trace camping.

COMMERCIAL CAMPGROUND:

A campground, usually with multiple sites and amenities, owned by an individual or a corporation for profit. There will be a fee.

PUBLIC CAMPGROUND:

A campground, usually with multiple sites and amenities, owned by a governmental agency or a nonprofit organization. These may or may not have a fee attached.

PUBLIC CAMPSITE:

An established and sanctioned site with room for only one or a few tents, hammocks, etc. It may or may not have amenities such as a picnic table, fire ring, or latrine. These are usually created by agencies or organizations, due to the need for a site along the trail, such as a backpacker site that might be located along the trail in a state park where camping is not otherwise allowed. It is also possible one might exist by a commercial enterprise.

DISPERSED CAMPING:

Setting up temporary (one or two nights) camp in a spot not necessarily designated as a campsite or even regularly used. Different managers have different rules about dispersed camping, including but not limited to setting up specific distances from roads, trails, and water sources. Leave No Trace practices are always expected.

PRIVATE/HOSTED CAMPSITE:

A campsite on private property where the owner allows only hikers to camp. These are usually free, or may have a minimal fee.

SOCIAL CAMPSITE:

A campsite established solely by popular use, rather than intentionally constructed. It may be impossible to discern if the managing agency knows about the site or is allowing it to exist. This can often be true at flat, open areas near waterways. Some people refer to these as dispersed campsites. However, that term can be misleading, as one may think *dispersed camping* means you have to find and use one of these social campsites.

STEALTH CAMPING:

Stealth camping essentially means sleeping anywhere on public or private property where camping is not explicitly allowed. Some equate dispersed camping with stealth camping, but here, it is specifically defined as spending the night in a place where overnight camping is not specifically allowed. Where the trail crosses private property, landowners often place stipulations on use, such as no overnight camping, no fires, or no straying from the trail. Stealth camping can adversely affect the future of the trail. For example, along the Finger Lakes Trail and Superior Hiking Trail, the trail has lost all rights to cross certain properties because of stealth campers. Inevitably, this forces the trail back onto roads until an alternate route can be identified and procured.



Jorgen's Hollow Campground, North Dakota

Photo by
U.S. Forest Service

Sheyenne National Grassland

Maintained by the U.S. Forest Service

BY AARON GAITHER, USFS RECREATION MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST



If you're walking west on the North Country Trail in North Dakota, you will travel 31 miles

on gravel and naturally surfaced trail through the Sheyenne National Grassland. After the first three miles, you will pass through Jorgen's Hollow Campground with its developed, designated campsites, vault toilets, and hand pumps for potable water. Hike westward for dispersed camping opportunities, which is allowed in all areas of the Sheyenne that are designated as public land.

There are no reservation or check-in requirements for dispersed camping here; you may simply find a location suitable for you and set up camp. You may find sites others have used recently, but these are not identified or designated on any maps. There are many desirable locations within a quarter-mile from the trail that provide flat open ground, good

tree cover, and proximity to a water source.

Some dispersed camping regulations include a 14-day stay limit, after which you are required to move off the Grassland for 24 hours. You may not use public lands as a temporary residence. Firewood collection is allowed from dead and down material only, and a permit is not required. Burn restrictions follow the State of North Dakota fire restrictions designated by Ransom and Richland Counties. If you're not with a vehicle, there is no policy limiting the distance off-trail you are allowed to camp. If you are traveling with a vehicle, you may drive up to 300 feet off designated Forest Roads for dispersed camping. Pay attention to the hunting seasons in North Dakota, as white-tailed deer hunting is very popular in this area. All recreation opportunities here follow pack-in, pack-out and Leave No Trace practices.



Little Rock City, New York

Photo by
Randall Roberts

Rock City and McCarty Hill State Forests

Maintained by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

BY RANDALL ROBERTS



North of Salamanca, the North Country Trail passes through Rock City and McCarty Hill State Forests, which

collectively span more than 6,000 acres. The New York DEC manages these lands and allows "at-large primitive camping" (i.e. dispersed camping) here. There is also one lean-to in Rock City State Forest that is maintained by the Finger Lakes Trail Conference.

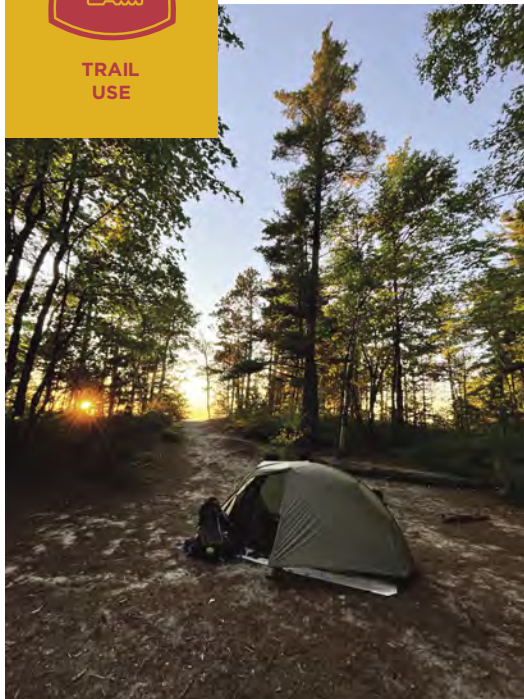
Per the DEC, campsites must be 150 feet away from the nearest road, trail, or body of water. Camping for more than three nights and/or in groups of 10 or more requires a permit from a forest ranger. Some

sites on DEC lands are designated with yellow "camp here" markers.

Little Rock City and Camp Seneca day use areas also offer designated campsites that each have an individual, covered picnic table. Camping in these day use areas is allowed only at the designated sites, and there is no water supply here. It's also important to note that the Little Rock City Forest Road is not plowed or maintained during the winter. The road is closed and gated for public safety until April, though the sites are open and available year-round on a first come, first served basis. The DEC provides information and tips on primitive camping, as well as maps, at dec.ny.gov.



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Pattison State Park

Maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

BY FELICIA HOKENSTAD



Many of my camping experiences along the North Country Trail in Wisconsin were at sites that I backpacked into. I've always been grateful for a pit toilet in the backcountry. I would consider a trip very successful if I never had to dig a cat hole.

The sites on the trail in Wisconsin, particularly around Pattison State Park, have always been in excellent condition - kudos to them! All of them had half-picnic tables; I

loved being able to cook and enjoy my meals off the ground.

I am extremely thankful for the numerous camping opportunities I can access from the trail. Most of my trips range from 20 to 40 miles, and I love being able to spend as much time in the woods as possible. These backcountry sites allow me to do just that.



Culhane Lake State Forest Campground

Maintained by the Michigan DNR

BY JEFF VAN WINKLE



My first experiences on the North Country Trail were overnight backpacking trips with my sons. Today, it's mostly trailer camping and day hikes with my wife. We like state forest campgrounds because they are often located on the trail. They often have no more than 20 sites, but there is plenty of space. They offer rustic settings with pump water, vault toilets, and no electrical service. Many can be accessed only off gravel or dirt roads. In most locations though, no reservations are possible, so there is a risk of arriving and finding no space. Planning is necessary, but sometimes you get a bit of good fortune.

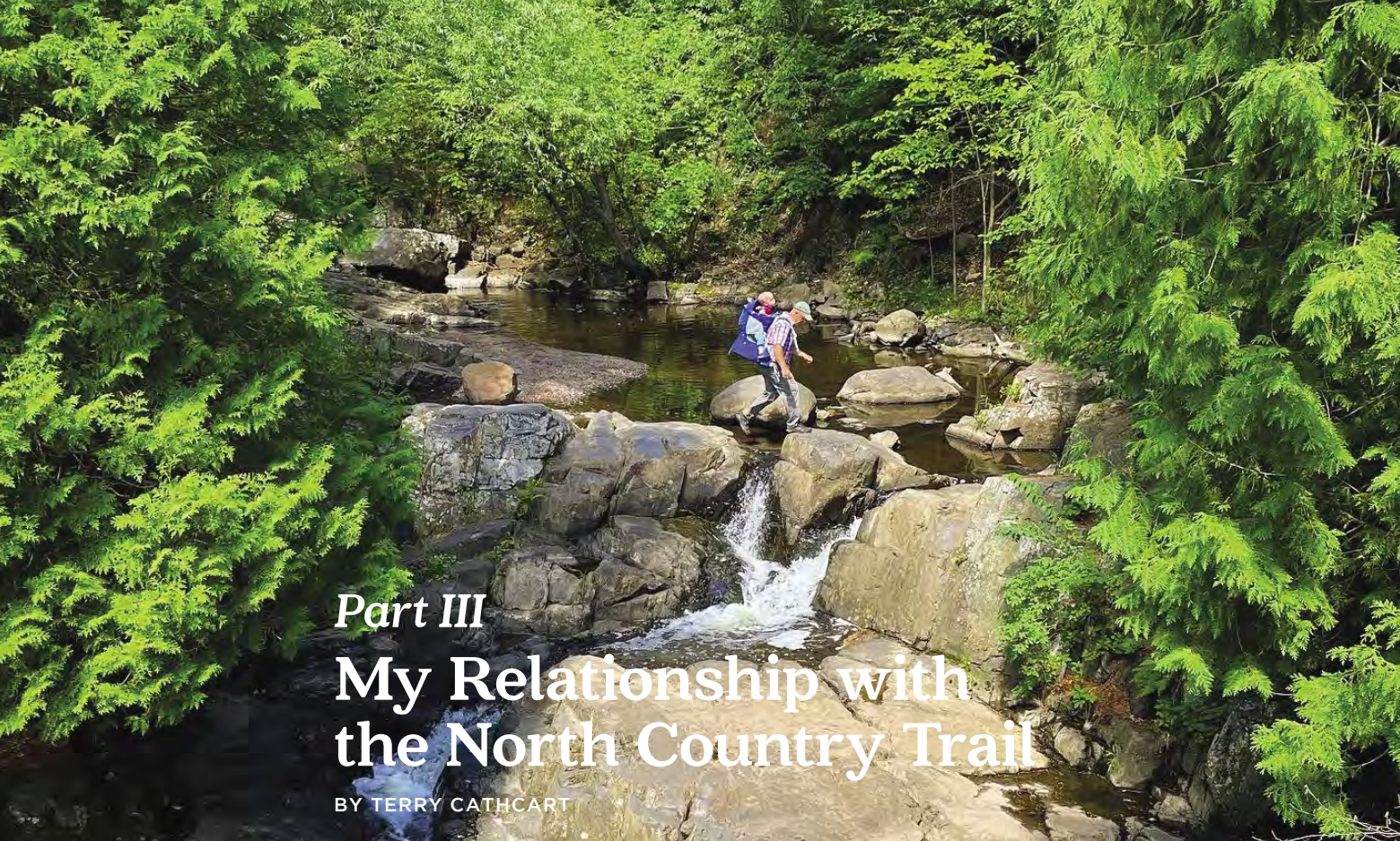
Last summer, my wife Nancy and I planned to camp in several national forest campgrounds in the Upper Peninsula, in coordination with a number of day hikes. Unexpectedly, our site reservations were canceled

so we had to pivot. We planned to hike south of Tahquamenon Falls, but we found Culhane Lake State Forest Campground near the mouth of the Two Hearted River. This campground is directly on the trail, overlooks a motor-restricted lake, and offers large sites. It also is eight miles down a washboard gravel road, so travelers need to be resilient. But Culhane Lake offered us a true North Country experience. The first morning, I drank my morning coffee while watching a loon fishing near shore.

Some state forest campgrounds we have visited are 20 sites in the middle of the woods - but if that means I'm on the trail when I wake up in the morning, I'm good! If you intend to use one, I highly recommend contacting the local NCTA Chapter or the local DNR office to gather as much information as possible. And go with an adventuring spirit!

Culhane Lake, Michigan

Photo by
Jeff Van Winkle



Part III My Relationship with the North Country Trail

BY TERRY CATHCART

This is the third and final installment of a longer piece that was first featured in the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 issues of the North Star. Read those at northcountrytrail.org/north-star.



I hiked a Minnesota portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail for two summers - a section also known as the Superior Hiking Trail. It runs from the Pigeon River (which flows into Lake Superior and marks the border between Minnesota and Canada) along the North Shore of Lake Superior to Duluth.

I've been making a case for nations, states, and communities hanging on to wilderness sanctuaries. I've tried to say a bit about what wilderness has meant to me, but here, I'll reference others.

Zen teacher Joan Halifax wrote: "Some of us are drawn to mountains the way the moon draws the tide. Both the great forests and the mountains live in my bones. They have taught me, humbled me, purified me, changed me."

American novelist and environmentalist Wallace Stegner wrote: "Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed. We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to the edge and look in."

The Bible is another excellent witness to the value of wilderness places. In the Genesis creation story, the first two jobs God gives to Adam are to tend and care for the garden, and to give names to the animals. The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness in preparation for their entrance into the Land of Promise. Elijah spoke a prophetic message that led to him fleeing for his life to the wilderness east of the Jordan River, where God instructed ravens to feed him. On another occasion where his prophetic messages got him into trouble, Elijah fled to the Sinai

wilderness, Mount Horeb. Here, he wondered if his life had been a waste, but God spoke to him and said he would be anointing kings. When Job was trying to figure out why such terrible things were happening to him, he challenged his accusers to ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds of the air and they will tell you; or speak to the earth and it will teach you, and let the fish of the sea inform you. John the Baptizer described himself as a voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord. And Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to spend 40 days in the wilderness, where he experienced temptations that helped him to hone how he would live out his calling.

Lastly, here's one you know for sure - the profound lyrics performed by The Troggs in 1966: "Wild thing, you make my heart sing. Wild thing, You make everything groovy. Wild thing."

All this being said, you can have a relationship with a trail and the wilderness if you get out and walk it. Find what it means to you.

Photo by
Nick Meekhof



TRAIL
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Walking on Purpose

BY LISA SNOOK

Barb (left) and Lisa at the Western Terminus of the NCNST in North Dakota.

Photo by
Lisa Snook and Barb
Whittington



“The sum of the whole is this: Walk and be happy; walk and be healthy. The best way to lengthen out our days is... to walk steadily and with a purpose.”
(Charles Dickens)

As I reflect on the last year of hiking, I am so thankful for the opportunity to have experienced wonderful, remote sections of the North Country Trail. My long-distance hiking buddy Barb Whittington and I completed the Border Route Trail (Minnesota) in August 2023; the Kekekabic Trail (Minnesota) in September 2023; and all of North Dakota’s North Country Trail over three separate trips in April and September 2023, and May 2024. This brought our total unique North Country Trail miles to nearly 3,000.

Our friends are supportive of our efforts to be sure, but I also see a questioning, “But why?” look cross their faces. “Why would you travel so far? Why didn’t you start this endeavor at a younger age? Why, why, why?”

For the Kekekabic and Border Route hikes, our “why” included the challenges of the terrain, weather, and remoteness. We backpacked both trails, and navigated with maps and compasses. We negotiated beaver dams, blowdowns, and reroutes. We carefully hung our food to avoid bear activity. We filtered our water, packed out what we packed in, and managed in a thunderstorm. But it also included the experience of the Boundary Waters: their solitude, beauty, flora, and fauna. A beaver ran right between us. We encountered a moose. We were entertained by a weasel playing in a rock field. (Side note: I now fully understand the meaning of the kids’ song *Pop Goes the Weasel*.) There was a constant presence of loons, and a plethora of interesting plants and gorgeous views.

Right: Lisa on the trail in Minnesota’s Border Region.

Photo by
Lisa Snook and Barb
Whittington

After completing the Kekekabic, we headed to New Rockford, North Dakota, where we had ended our last North Dakota hike. It was a pleasant drive and welcome time off our feet.

At first, our goal was to connect the dots toward completing the entire North Country Trail via section hikes. But now, back in North Dakota, my “why” had somewhat changed. I’m from Ohio’s farm country, but nothing compares to agriculture in North Dakota. We got to see it in both spring and fall; growing crops, and raising cattle and sheep. I found it all fascinating. I was amazed how far we could see; so often we could turn 360 degrees on a roadwalk and see no houses or barns. I was also very impressed at the size of the farm equipment and technology involved.

The people we met were sincere and genuine, often asking if we were okay or needed anything. One farmer asked us, “Are you walking on purpose?” which I thought was indicative of the hard-working culture in which your work offered the exercise that you needed.

While hiking the trail through Valley City, we walked through Medicine Wheel Park. There were beautiful displays and kiosks explaining the Indigenous concept of the medicine wheel. Among what it can represent is the alignment and interaction of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of our lives. Hiking helps us combine those aspects toward a renewed appreciation of our own lives, of who we are, and the lives and cultures of others.



To end our North Dakota hike, we had the pleasure of hiking through the Sheyenne National Grassland. The trail was a lovely gravel path through grassy fields where cattle and sheep



Far left: Barb at a gate on the trail in North Dakota.

Left: Lisa at a trail register box in North Dakota.

Photos by
Lisa Snook and Barb
Whittington

grazed. We saw many cattle and their calves, and herds of sheep with their guard dogs at work.

At the Berg Property, our last section, we lucked out and hiked right after most of the path had been mowed. We were able to meet and thank the lovely couple who had been doing that trail maintenance. It was a very relaxing way to finish, and it helped us enjoy our last North Dakota hike with our heads up.

Earlier in this trip, one of the North Dakota farmers

who had been checking his fields passed us on a roadwalk section, and asked if we were alright or if we needed anything. We explained we were walking the North Country Trail. Barb told him how much we liked his state and how much we enjoyed the trail. He answered with, “Well, take your time but hurry back.” I thought that that was sage advice for when your hike is ending, and I extend it to other North Country Trail hikers: Take your time to enjoy the hike, but hurry back to the trail.



Sponsor Spotlight: Sawyer

BY KATIE OATS HOUSTON, COMMUNITY
MANAGER, SAWYER

At first glance, it might be hard to see what the North Country Trail and a family-owned business based in Safety Harbor, Florida have in common. But you don't have to look far to see where Sawyer shares motivations and values with the North Country Trail Association (NCTA).

Since 1984, Sawyer has empowered folks to enjoy the outdoors comfortably and confidently by providing effective protection from water-borne and vector-borne illnesses with their industry-leading water filters and insect repellents. In the same decade, the NCTA was founded and has advocated for the North Country National Scenic Trail and its community ever since.

At Sawyer, we're proud to support the trail organization charged with preserving and making this incredible 4,800-mile footpath available for future generations. To some people, the NCNST is a local stroll through the woods; to others, it is a monumental undertaking. One thing the majority have in common is the fond memories they're creating in the great outdoors.

But a lack of preparation or planning results in an unenjoyable adventure. If you've ever hit the trail just to discover you didn't bring enough snacks or forgot your sunscreen at home, you're familiar with just how quickly the outdoors can become an uncomfortable place. Thankfully, with proper planning and preparation, you can reasonably manage risks, make informed decisions, and keep yourself feeling confident and comfortable in the outdoors.

Permethrin, Sawyer's gear and fabric treatment, lasts up to six weeks or six washes in a washing machine and has been shown to reduce the chances of being bitten by a tick 73.6 times by just treating socks and shoes. *Picaridin*, Sawyer's topical insect repellent, is safe for the whole family, more effective than DEET, and provides all-day protection—even for you, thru-hikers!

In addition to empowering individuals to enjoy the outdoors, Sawyer prioritizes supporting the outdoor community in unique and diverse ways – and we're proud to continue this mission through our partnership with the NCTA. Thank you to the dedicated volunteers and staff for their incredible efforts to help others enjoy the outdoors, both in their own communities along the North Country Trail and for future generations. May all your water sources be flowing and trails be tick-free!

– Team Sawyer

Photo provided by
Sawyer



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Lessons from the Trail

BY LIZ “SWISSCAKE” SEGER

In September 2022, after two years of section hiking, Liz completed the entire Michigan segment of the North Country National Scenic Trail. You will also see her name in the Long-Distance Hiker Recognition article in this issue.

Have you ever hiked with a frog riding on your compass? Have you ever been in a stretch of woods so infested with lunaria caterpillars that the ground is slick with their poop and the leaves are turned to lace? Have you stood in a ravine during a thunderstorm alongside a friendly doe, getting to know each other while you wait for the lightning to stop? Have you startled a sleeping fawn in a privy? Have you come face-to-face with an equally surprised black bear on the other side of the berry hedge, or startled a blue racer into shaking her fake rattle at you? Have you seen red and purple mushrooms that look like they're from a video game, or iridescent purple fungus that looks like coral, or the mysterious devil's tooth fungus, hard as bone, oozing red gel at the base of a conifer? Have you stood atop a high rollway where the lumber that built (and rebuilt, and rebuilt) Chicago was dropped to the muddy, winding Manistee River and carried away? Have you walked by North America's only ski-flying hill? Have you walked along Lake Superior, on rocks the size of grapefruits, while an elk comes thundering by?

All of this can be yours without leaving the state of Michigan, and the only thing it will cost you is the price of the gear and food on your back.

Over two years, I walked more than 1,100 miles across Michigan on the North Country Trail, covering every mile from Ohio to Wisconsin, all without quitting my day job. I hiked the trail in 17 sections over 76 days. My hikes ranged from 15-mile days on dusty, rural roads to weeklong tromps through the Manistee National Forest to 18-day treks across rugged stretches of the Upper Peninsula. At the start, I had no plan to hike the whole thing or I might have started at one state line and

proceeded more systematically, thinking to save more of the gems for later. But I'm glad I didn't, because it turns out Michigan has plenty of breathtaking miles in the most unexpected places.

My first hike on the North Country Trail was, I confess, a pandemic-driven Plan B. My 23-year-old son and I had been planning a big hike out west since the summer before. Our goal to hike a 150-mile stretch of the Continental Divide Trail in Montana was foiled when Covid infection rates spiked around Jackson Hole and Yellowstone, hitting tribal communities especially hard. We decided to explore options closer to home.

Where could we hike that would be fun and challenging, reachable by car from Ann Arbor, and wouldn't have too many people, even when in towns

for resupply?

While most state and federal campgrounds were closed, dispersed camping in national forests was still permitted. Was there a trail in driving distance



Top photo by
Jody Weatherston

Right photo by
Karen TenBroeke

with enough continuous passage through public land to make this work? I opened a hiking app and the North Country Trail caught my eye, reminding me of a hike in the Porcupine Mountains years before when I'd first seen a blue blaze. I remembered wondering aloud where and how far the trail went, and wishing I could follow it instead of wrapping up our hike through the Porkies the next day to make the nine-hour drive home. (Michigan is big!) I also realized the trail had some remote-looking sections a lot closer to my Ann Arbor home than the far Western UP. Suddenly this Plan B felt more like a long-deferred Plan A.

Wanting solitude and as much wilderness as we could manage, and having about a week to spend, we chose the 130-mile section maintained by the NCTA Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter, from the north end of Mackinac Bridge to the mouth of the Two Hearted River on Lake Superior. This section has very little roadwalk and very little chance for resupply, which meant we headed out with a seven-day supply of food on our backs. When you leave St. Ignace going north, it's 80 miles to the first restaurant and 25 miles after that to a store. (In the end, we didn't stop anywhere at all on the way, unless you count the ice cream cones we bought in St. Ignace.)

As we wound our way through ferns and over oak savannah, picking apples from trees growing wild along the snowmobile trails, encountering elk, turkeys, grouse, snakes, and countless migratory birds, we marveled at how remote the trail felt, and at the abundance of clear water from sandy-bottomed creeks. (Did you know that most of Michigan was underwater until 50,000 years ago and is largely a defunct dune?)



Liz in the Western Upper Peninsula.

Photo by
Liz Seger

When we met up with my husband at the mouth of the Two Hearted, we were pleasantly exhausted, nearly out of food, and ready for a weekend of rest and relaxation in Grand Marais. But nevertheless, I yearned to keep walking. I had caught the North Country Trail bug.

The following spring, as soon as the weather would allow, I set out again, this time for a long weekend hike beginning at the southern end of the Manistee National Forest. By the end of that summer, I knew I would need to hike the whole state. I started crafting an itinerary that would let me do it all by the end of the following year, 2022, by patching together day hikes, long weekends, and single weeks.

I walked through welcoming towns like Middleville, where even though the locals



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

shop.northcountrytrail.org



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Right photo by
Eric Moll

Far right photo by
Loren Bach



didn't know the trail went right through their town, they were welcoming and curious, inviting me to join their cookouts and camp in their yards. I walked through towns I won't name, where skeptical locals pulled their kids close as my smelly hiker self perused the beverage coolers at the gas station. For every jerk who pretended he would hit me with his truck on the edge of a depressed town (which unfortunately happened more than once), I met five times as many amazing, helpful, good-hearted people. A land surveyor gave me a ride around an uncrossable sluice that wasn't supposed to be full of water this time of year. A friendly landlord in Rockland not only rented us a room for \$40, but picked me up on the edge of town when my feet were failing. One couple shared their water when none was available at the east end of the Porkies. An intrepid crew of bridge-building NCTA volunteers (all women!) invited me to take a break in the shade of their vehicle and share stories. Some very generous fellow hikers drove me to a ranger station when I got my car high-centered on sand after taking an ill-advised route to a UP trailhead. Not once did someone ask about my political affiliation before offering help or wishing me well. On the ground, most people want to get along and help their neighbor, which may have been the best lesson the trail could teach.

As I prepare to hike the 3,100-mile Continental Divide Trail as a continuous thru-hike, I'm grateful for the practical lessons I learned on the North Country Trail about how to keep myself safe, uninjured, and properly fueled and hydrated while pursuing long-mile days on a tight schedule. While I had previously spent plenty of time in remote Canadian wilderness, it was on the North Country Trail that I dialed in my kit and routines.

I completed a 10-day hike with three extra dinners and I've come in over the finish line on fumes - I hiked my final 20 miles of the Lower Peninsula with nothing but a half-bag of jelly beans and a Taco Bell sauce packet. I've stubbornly continued in bad shoes, eventually having to hitch off-trail to hobble into a discount store for gel insoles just to get through. I learned that when you find yourself off-trail or down the wrong one, it's almost always the right choice to backtrack rather than bushwhack. I learned I don't thrive on a hiking diet of too much sugar, no matter how many calories I'm burning. (Though the promise of a sweet treat can make me hike faster. My trail name is Swisscake for a reason.) I learned the power of potassium and magnesium to keep a body

going in heat and humidity. I learned I'd rather be cold than hot, would rather carry too little than too much, and that I'm cool under pressure. I learned that - to a comical degree - my mood is tied to whether I'm walking uphill or downhill. And I learned that no matter what, you don't quit on a bad day, the toughest climb will eventually be over, the coldest night will have an end, and that every day is its own opportunity to take delight in the world around me as it is, in the body that I have, always moving forward.

Whatever bit of Michigan's North Country Trail you're up for, whether a day hike by a waterfall or a mega trek from Kalkaska to the Mackinac Bridge, I hope you give it a shot. Your brain and your soul will thank you. Even if you've lived in Michigan all your life, I promise that you too will be surprised in a thousand ways.



Right photo by
Shane Hawkins

Peril at Pictured Rocks

BY JEREMY KIRBY



Our most recent hike through the Allegan State Game Area in West Michigan spanned a challenging 14 miles. It left my son Gabe and I feeling confident that we were ready

to take on the moderately difficult Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore section of the North Country Trail.

We rose before sunrise and broke camp in the pitch-dark morning of the Upper Peninsula. Starting toward Sable Falls, we had pep in our steps and song in our hearts. The foliage was wet with morning dew. There were four days and 42 wonderful miles ahead of us. We were in the wilderness and it would be amazing.

Upon arriving at the visitor center we were already wiping the sweat from our brows. The sun had risen and was becoming uncomfortable. It was unseasonably hot. It was a slow walk through a wet field of chest-high grass. I couldn't help but think about bears and how easily one could hide in that field. We hiked around a crystal clear lake, entered the forest, and started uphill. Our shirts were wet with sweat. We indulged in delectable trail mix then descended the hill behind Grand Sable Dunes.

The scenery was breathtaking. White sands and the teal-blue waters of Lake Superior stretched for miles into the distance. There were cliffs and dunes to our right and deep forest to our left. We found a spot to eat lunch and enjoyed "Ramen Bombs," a hiker delicacy according to YouTube. Little did I know this noodle and instant potato mixture would be the last thing I ate on the trip.

My head began to pound and the trail became less fun, less captivating. Gabe was fatigued, too. But we marched on, trying to stay hydrated. We struggled our way to our campsite at Sevenmile. Heat exhaustion was overtaking me. Setting up my tent was too confusing; Gabe needed to help me. We were both too nauseous to eat

dinner. We dared do nothing that may make us lose more water, like vomiting. My skin burned as I lay shivering in the tent.

The next morning found us in better spirits. My body temperature returned to normal and I enjoyed a cup of coffee. We packed up camp and gathered more water. A small, clear stream serenely meandered across the beach and into the big lake. "Nothing like going Up North," I thought.

We sucked on chocolate for energy and drank water with electrolytes. Our packs felt heavy but we headed out with vigor. We had fewer miles to hike that day and thought we could make it to camp early for more recovery time. That was short-lived; our energy quickly evaporated.

The temperature rose to nearly 90 degrees. Again, we couldn't eat and could barely lift our feet. We cautiously navigated the root-bound trail, climbed over rock formations and up sandy inclines. My body began to spasm. Painful charley horses wracked my legs and sides.

We completed 11.6 miles only to find our campsite taken. Gabe found an alternative, but setting up was tough. The wind was strong and Gabe nearly lost his tent. It had been more than 24 hours since we had eaten. Our nausea persisted. Other campers warned us of an incoming storm.

I curled up in my sleeping bag and said goodnight to Gabe. I laid there thinking of what awaited us if we continued. Would we be fine in the morning or would our bodies suffer something catastrophic? This was supposed to be the time of our lives, but we were both sick and in pain.

Gabe rose a little while later and (with what strength, I do not know) began waving his arms and hollering at a passing ship. It vanished in the distance. He tried again, this time with a headlamp. With the flashing light, he made contact. Using a loudspeaker, they asked if he needed help, to which he replied with a thumbs up. The tour boat announced they would notify the Park Service. It seemed that our perch, to which fate or God had delivered us to, was the only overlook from which we could have found rescue. Gabe spoke softly into my tent, "Dad, do you want to go home?"

"Yeah Gabe, I think I do."

I was so saddened by our defeat but knew this was divine intervention. We were shivering, cold and wet, starving and dehydrated. An hour later,

Continued on page 31

Top left: Gabe resting at a cliff's edge.

Left: Jeremy and Gabe.

Photos by
Jeremy Kirby





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Hikerbabes Unite on the Buckeye



BY ANN FURSTE, BUCKEYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION SECTION SUPERVISOR, AND LAUREN KENNEDY-LITTLE, NCTA REGIONAL TRAIL COORDINATOR



Several women met up in south-central Ohio this April to revel in nature, companionship, and empowerment. It was an all-women trail work event, co-hosted by the Buckeye Trail Association and Hikerbabes.

“This particular women’s trail maintenance event was in conjunction with the Central and Southeast Ohio chapters of Hikerbabes,” explained Julie Osborn, Hikerbabes Ambassador. “These chapters have been day hiking the Buckeye Trail and have completed over 190 continuous trail miles between the Scioto Trails, Old Man’s Cave, New Straitsville, and Stockport sections of the Buckeye Trail, North Country National Scenic Trail, and American Discovery Trail.”

Ann Furste, New Straitsville Section Supervisor of the Buckeye Trail Association, led the maintenance crew. Ann has been organizing trail work events for a long time. She had previously hiked with these ladies through the News Straitsville section to collect their input from a hiking group’s perspective.

“We lopped, blazed, and dug out multiflora for 2.5 miles of trail,” said Ann. “Plus, we enjoyed some spectacular wildflowers.”

“It was an amazing opportunity for these women to give back to the trail we all love so much,” added Julie. “We learned so much and had a great day with lots of hard work! We look forward to upcoming opportunities to volunteer in other capacities.”



Photos by
Ann Furste

The Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) is an Affiliate partner of the NCTA. BTA volunteers protect, promote, and maintain over 1,000 miles of Ohio’s official state trail, the Buckeye Trail. Approximately 900 miles are concurrent with the NCNST. Learn more at buckeyetrail.org. Hikerbabes is an international

community of like-minded, diverse women who share a passion for the outdoors. There are six Hikerbabes chapters in Ohio. Learn more at hikerbabescommunity.com.



National Public Lands Day

Established in 1994 and held annually on the fourth Saturday in September, National Public Lands Day is traditionally the nation’s largest single-day volunteer effort. Per the National Park Service, this year’s theme is **30 Years of Care and Community**.

What an ideal opportunity to celebrate one of the newest units of the National Park System: the North Country National Scenic Trail. Check out the NCTA Events Calendar to find a hike or volunteer opportunity near you on September 28. There are already some events scheduled and there are definitely more in the works.

If you are unable to visit the NCT or are interested in a more traditional park unit, all national parks that normally charge an entrance fee will offer free admission to everyone on September 28.

[northcountrytrail.org/
events](http://northcountrytrail.org/events)



Meet Marlena



The National Park Service is pleased to announce a new Trail Planner for the North Country National Scenic Trail at the office in Lowell.

Marlena O'Connell is new to the National Park Service, but comes with an excellent planning and design background in the private sector. She is a licensed landscape architect with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture and a master's degree in environmental design from Michigan State University.

Marlena grew up in Michigan with a passion for camping, hunting, and fishing. In her spare time, she loves to be working on a home project with her husband, tending to her flower garden, and spending time with family and friends. She looks forward to making a positive impact in outdoor recreation.

PERIL AT PICTURED ROCKS CONTINUED

we saw a spotlight. A crew of brave young men loaded our gear and helped us onto their vessel. They were Yoopers through and through, hardened by the elements and unafraid to dance with Lady Superior. For an hour we bounced over massive waves, crashing over one and into the next. Lightning flashed in the distance as I pondered which direction to swim if we sank.

An ambulance was waiting for us at the dock in Munising. We declined, but took a ride back to our car from a kind police officer. I thank my son for his heroism, rescuing us from a potentially fatal situation. I also thank the National Park Service, Pictured Rocks Cruises, the Munising Police Department, and the volunteers who pulled us out of there.

We will attempt this hike again but rest assured I will be better prepared. We'll take our time to enjoy the trail for all the beauty it holds.

Annual My NCT Membership Drive

SEPTEMBER 1-30

Last September alone, more than 1,100 donors and members took action. That's 32% of the Association's entire membership. **Membership matters.**



All gifts and memberships during My NCT will be matched up to \$47,500*

*\$10k of this is a match specifically for former members who return in Septem

How can you help achieve the goal of exceeding 1,100 My NCT participants?



If you're scheduled to renew your membership this fall, choose September.



If your membership is current, make a gift in September.

Why? More members means:



More resources to support the NCTA mission, programs, and volunteers



More future Chapter leaders and volunteers



More publicity for the trail

northcountrytrail.org/join-renew



While supplies last, receive a limited edition koozie, hat, and/or portable picnic blanket based on your level of support.



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Reach Out!

The NCTA headquarters office and Trail Shop are located at **229 E. Main St. in Lowell, Mich.** Find more information at northcountrytrail.org/contact. (866) HikeNCT • (616) 897-5987

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.

This porcupine did not sign in at the Deadman's Hill register box in the Jordan Valley (Mich.) but she did leave her mark.

Photo by Susan Miller